



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Annual Report

2023/24

Achieving More Together



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Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru
Adoption
Mid & West Wales



Vale, Valleys
and Cardiff
Adoption
Mabwysiadu
yn y Fro, y Cymoedd
a Chaerdydd



Newid Plentynod.
Newid Bywydau.
Changing childhoods.
Changing lives.



**Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu** | North Wales
Gogledd Cymru | **Adoption
Service**



GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
Bae'r Gorllewin
Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE



Cymdeithas ar gyfer Maethu,
Gofal Perthynas a Mabwysiadu
AFKA CYMRU
Association for Fostering,
Kinship and Adoption



South East Wales Adoption Service
Achieving More Together
Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Deddwyrain Cymru
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd I



Teulu gyda'n gilydd
Together we're family



**Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu** | **St David's
Adoption
Service**
Dewi Sant

Chairs' foreword

We are pleased to present the Annual Report for the National Adoption Service (NAS) for Wales for 2023/2024

As we enter our tenth year, the progress made by NAS and its partners is clear. Everyone involved should be proud of the progress made to create services which support children, young people, and the families around them as they navigate their journeys through the lifelong implications of adoption.

Despite the challenging environment that faced us all during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and, more recently, the cost-of-living pressures, significant success and improvements have been delivered in adoption across Wales in the last few years. Like all public services, NAS has needed to respond to a changing understanding of need, with increasing demand in some parts of the service, and the important requirement of a consistent workforce with appropriate skills.

Adoption is for a relatively small number of children: those who cannot be provided with a safe home within their birth family or community, or, less common, where a parent chooses to relinquish their child for adoption. We know that adoption is a hugely positive option for children in both situations.

Services continue to strive to modernise. There is a strong emphasis on supporting children moving into new adoptive families, working with birth parents and creating a more 'open' style of adoption where relationships and connections are seen as key to ensuring children develop a much better understanding of their identity and early life experiences. NAS continues to work closely with the Welsh Government to maintain support and investment in reforming adoption services for Wales.

This report is a true representation of the collaboration and coproduction that characterises how NAS works. It details how the priorities of NAS, as set out in the **AdoptCymru2025....and beyond** Strategic Plan, are being addressed and further developed to ensure adoption services in Wales continue to improve and meet the needs of all those affected by adoption.

Co-Chairs, National Adoption Service Combined Governance Board



Dr Carolyn Sampeys
Independent Co-chair



Cllr Jane Tremlett
WLGA appointed Co-Chair

About us

The National Adoption Service (NAS) was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales. It was launched in November 2014 as a unique and innovative way to provide adoption services.

It brought together Welsh local authority adoption services into a three-tier structure, which includes partnerships at all levels with voluntary adoption agencies based in Wales, health, education services, and others.

All 22 Welsh local authorities continue to provide services to children who are looked after, whilst identifying and working with those children for whom an adoption plan is appropriate.

Nationally, NAS's director and small central team provide leadership, coordination, strategic support and enabling whilst also commissioning some Wales-wide services.

Regionally, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives to provide a range of adoption services. Each regional collaborative has links with the voluntary adoption agencies, health, and education and provides:

- An adoption agency function for children
- Recruitment and assessment of adopters
- Counselling and support to birth parents
- Advice and support to adopted adults
- Adoption support services. In some regions, this is shared with local authorities.

To find out more about adoption in Wales, visit the National Adoption Service website (adoptcymru.com).

Abbreviations used in this report:

MWWAS	Mid and West Wales Adoption Service
NWAS	North Wales Adoption Service
SEWAS	South East Wales Adoption Service
VVC	Vale Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service
WBAS	Western Bay Adoption Service
St David's	St David's Adoption Service
AUK	Adoption UK
AFKA Cymru	Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption
LAs	Local Authorities
WLGA	Welsh Local Government Association
ADSS Cymru	Association of Directors of Social Services



Highlights from 2023/2024

APRIL

We welcomed the **apology** made in the Senedd, by the Deputy Minister, Julie Morgan, for **historical adoption practices** during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

MAY

We welcomed the **fifth Adoption UK 'Adoption Barometer' report**. This gave an overview of the impact of adoption policy, practice, and legislation in the five years of Barometer findings.

The Barometer once again identified that policies and services in Wales compare very well with the rest of the UK.



JUNE

For **PRIDE Cymru 2023**, we hosted a stand and sponsored an event on the main stage.

Over the course of the weekend, adults and young people were drawn in by our colourful flags and stayed to discuss adoption and share their own experiences with our volunteers from WBAS and SEWAS.



JULY

We launched the All-Wales Adoption Policies and Procedures, for use by everyone working in adoption across Wales. These have been made available to all services and placed in the [NAS App](#) for ease of availability.

AUGUST

We launched our [NAS Employer Toolkit](#), so businesses across Wales could better understand adoption and how to support employees who have adopted or wish to adopt.

The toolkit was launched at the National Eisteddfod with a panel discussion that included the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan, LA members, Menter a Busnes, and members of the adoption community. The toolkit has been integrated by local authorities, Welsh Government, and many Welsh businesses.



Highlights from 2023/2024

SEPTEMBER

We celebrated the success of our second **'Truth be Told' podcast** series, which won a Silver Award at the **British Podcast Awards**.

The award was collected by a young person who is a member of Connect Voices (Adoption Youth Council), which 'took over' the final podcast of the series.



OCTOBER

We had a particularly successful **National Adoption Week 2023**, which focused on relaunching the iconic **'Choose Family'** campaign and trebled the coverage in local and national publications.

Also, during this week, we held a conference for staff and stakeholders attended by over 140 people.



NOVEMBER

We held our 'Big Adoption Conversation', the annual online event for adoptees, adopters and professionals, managed jointly by staff from Adoption UK Cymru and members of the NAS C team.

DECEMBER

JANUARY

Quieter months where we sent 'season's greetings' to all our service users and stakeholders.

FEBRUARY

We issued our annual newsletter, featuring national and regional highlights of interest to adopters in Wales.



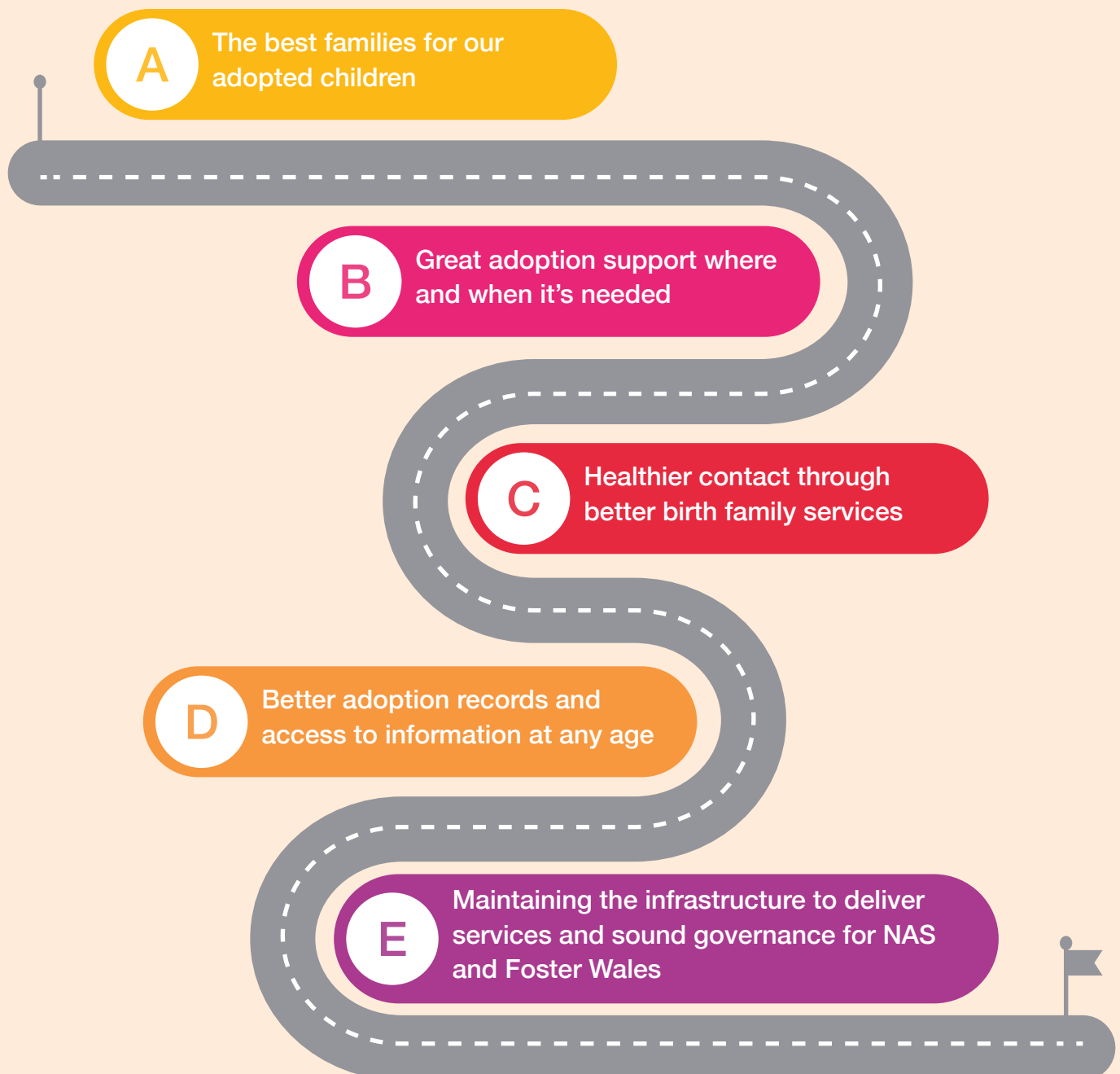
MARCH

We said a fond and grateful farewell to our long-standing Independent Chair, Mr Phil Hodgson MBE and welcomed our new Independent Chair, Dr Carolyn Sampeys.

NAS strategic priorities

Modern adoption in Wales needs a sustained focus on the priorities in the 'AdoptCymru 2025....and beyond' Strategic Plan, as well as change in other areas of policy and practice linked to care planning for all children.

The priorities build on the successful work by NAS and our partners over many years, aiming to create sustainable services that will support children, young people, and the families around them to deal with the lifelong implications of adoption.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY A

The best families for our adopted children

NAS is committed to improving the recruitment, preparation, and training for adopters to ensure every child is placed in a timely way with adopters who can, with early support, provide them with the best opportunities for family life.





What was achieved during 2023/24?

The context nationally across the UK is that there are fewer children in the adoption system due to: improved services to keep families together; the growth in use of other options to provide a level of permanence for some children and adoption being a less popular option for decision makers. The number of children being considered for adoption in Wales has stabilised over the last two years.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant increase in interest in adoption, leading to higher levels of enquiries, applications, and approvals. Interest has since returned to pre-pandemic levels, and we believe this has been impacted by external factors such as the cost-of-living crisis. Both applications to adopt and approvals currently remain lower than usual, which is a concern.

Our role is to make adoption services in Wales as good as they possibly can be. A significant amount of work is being undertaken to implement agreed policies and practice, with the aim of modernising the service in Wales.

There have been positive strides forward in **marketing and recruitment** activities, which have been informed by market research, an 'Omnibus' survey and report, and more recently, insights from focus groups. This has led to a better understanding of who might wish to adopt and what is needed to improve public perception and awareness of adoption.

During **National Adoption Week 2023**, we focused on relaunching our iconic '**Choose Family**' campaign, alongside sharing a new suite of case study stories from around Wales. This included trialling a new targeted digital approach, which used the platforms TikTok and Spotify for the first time.

The coordinated national and regional approach, led regionally by our Regional Marketing and Recruitment Officers (MROs), placed a focus on one region each day on national media channels. This achieved widespread coverage in local and national publications during the week (29 pieces compared to 9 the previous year), which led to a subsequent increase in enquiries during the second half of the year.

During 2023/24:

More than 500 children were referred to regions, of which just over 240 had a 'best interest' (should be placed for adoption) decision made.



Services commenced the assessment of 223 prospective adoptive families.

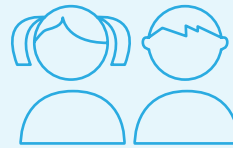
The Courts made 230 Placement Orders.



Estimates indicate that circa 250 Adoption Orders were granted.

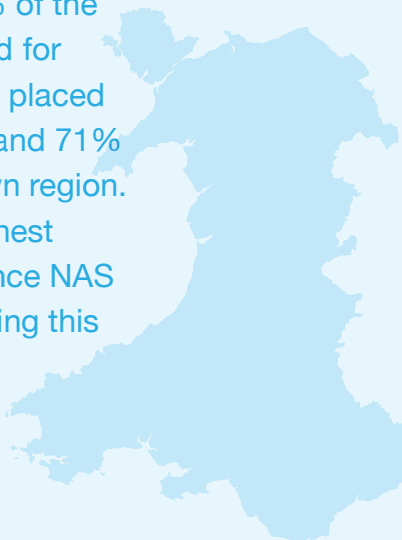


155 new adoptive families were approved. On average, it took 5.3 months to complete the assessment process.



Services placed 219 children with their adoptive families.

This year, 84% of the children placed for adoption were placed within Wales, and 71% within their own region. This is the highest percentage since NAS started recording this data in 2016.

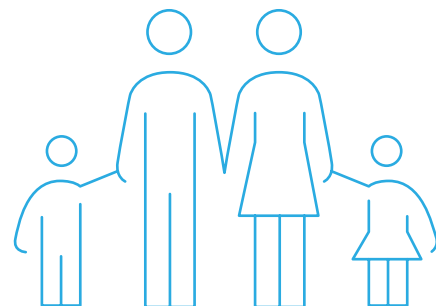


The number of children waiting at the end of the year rose slightly to 222.

- Services were actively family finding for 70% of these children, while another 19% had placements waiting to be formally agreed.
- Of the remaining 11%, two thirds were on hold awaiting assessments or court decisions to progress, while the remainder were waiting to have their plan for adoption changed.
- 24 children had their placement orders discharged in 2023/24. This was a slight increase on 2022/23 figures (n22); however, we are still seeing a decrease over time, with an almost 50% decrease this year compared to 2019/20.

Children placed were, on average, placed within ten months of the placement order being granted, maintaining the improvement seen last year.

Overall, there were fewer sibling groups placed this year: 41 children were placed together in sibling groups of two and three.



Contribution Spotlight

Each region / VAA is working to implement the **Good Practice Guide for Transition and Early Support**

New practices developed due to the Good Practice Guide for Transitions and Early Support mean that there is a much more proactive approach to early support. The guide was in place for all children placed this year.

The guide introduces 'Understanding the Child' (UTC) days and the development of 'Trauma Nurture Timelines' (TNT) as specific ways to ensure that adoptive families have maximum information and advice about the child. We are working to introduce these consistently across Wales: some regions are currently using them for all children whereas others can only currently use them for children with the most complex needs or those who are part of a sibling group.



Good Practice – North Wales

The skill set and experience of the social workers and adoption support team recently supported a young visually impaired child to move into her adoptive placement. Visual aids and braille life story work provided by professionals supported this child to manage the transition safely and securely to her forever family, and she is now well established with them.



Cofrestr Fabwysiadu Cymru
Wales Adoption Register

The **Adoption Register for Wales (ARW)** continues to play a key role in identifying placements for children. It is used where there is not an immediate link or match available within one month of authorisation to place a child for adoption, or within one month of approval for adopters.

37 children were matched through the ARW this year. This is 17% of all matches made.

A customer satisfaction survey was undertaken to gain the views of adopters and practitioners who use the ARW and its Link Maker software. The survey was completed by 68 people, 60% of whom were adopters and 40% staff. The majority (69%) felt that the ARW/Link Maker was 'very useful' or 'quite useful' in identifying links.

This year, more children were referred, and at the end of the year there were 203 children on the register at the various stages of the process, with 99 waiting for a potential link. This number has been increasing steadily, partly due to a decrease in the number of adopters available, and to children having additional complex needs or being part of a large sibling group.

Fewer adoptive families were referred, with 129 adoptive families on the register at various stages of the process by the end of the year, and 69 waiting for a potential link. This decrease is consistent with fewer families coming through the assessment process during the year. It is also consistent with what is happening in England and Scotland.

The ARW team held two online profiling events and one Adoption Activity Day in 2023/24. Adopters from across Wales were invited to attend these events. Seven successful links were made from these events and a further seven expressions of interest are being explored.

Welsh Early Permanence (WEP)

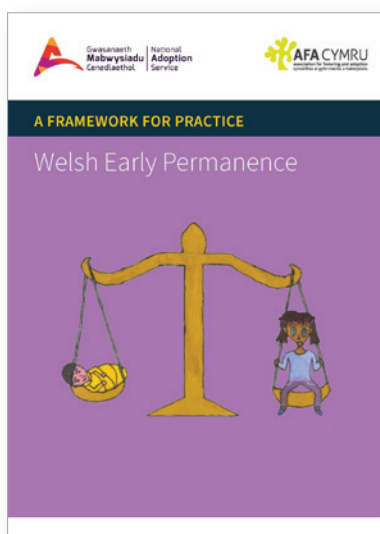
Although it has been under a year since the launch of WEP in June 2023, there has been significant progress made across Wales.

All our regional collaboratives have been actively recruiting and assessing WEP carers and identifying children who might benefit. 44 households have attended WEP training and six WEP placements have been made.

Through our national practice lead, and by commissioning our expert colleagues in AFKA Cymru, much training and support has been provided across Wales. In addition to working with social workers planning for children, this has included sessions for CAFCASS staff of independent reviewing officers, which were attended by over 90 people. More sessions, including for panel members, are in development.

The work has been aided by close links with our regional managers and contact with early permanence colleagues in England. More information is available in our newsletters, linked below:

- [National Adoption Service – Welsh Early Permanence](#)
- [WEP Spring 2024 Newsletter.pptx](#)



Good Practice Examples

In SEWAS, preparation training for adopters has been updated to include WEP, as have the website and leaflets for adopters. Prospective adopters have attended WEP training and the first WEP approval has been made.



VVC has successfully placed another child using the WEP framework and they have several more families progressing through this route.



WBAS have recruited two WEP carers, which has led to two successful placements.



Adopting Together Service

Our specialist service for children who wait the longest for placements, the Adopting Together Service (ATS), has continued to provide placements.

ATS was developed by the Welsh VAAs for the most difficult to place children as part of the NAS national recruitment approach.

ATS provides specialist transition and ongoing support, with psychology consultation and support, for children who have been waiting for a match for more than nine months, or where a match will not be found through other means. The ARW team and ATS work closely together, and 31 children have been placed since this service commenced.

Furthermore, 'early alert notifications' and referrals increased this year, and new assets were developed to appeal to prospective LGBTQ+ adopters.

In 2023/24, five recruitment campaigns were delivered, and three children were placed with their adoptive families.



Learning and Development

Working with our regions and VAAs, **AFKA Cymru** are in the process of developing a new qualities and skills framework. This will be used alongside the current Prospective Adopter Report template in assessing prospective adopters' suitability to parent the varied and complex needs of the children who are to be adopted. This will be finalised and implemented in 2024/25.

To ensure the relevant professionals are fully aware of the role that adoption should play in planning for children, and of the changes that have been made to Welsh adoption services in recent years, a series of webinars were developed for staff and other professionals across Wales.

108 people attended these webinars in 2023/24 and more sessions are being developed for other professional groups. The sessions were entitled:

- Modern adoption in Wales – Parts One and Two
- The place of adoption in care planning
- Practice implications for CAFCASS Cymru

These webinars have been turned into e-learning modules, which are available on the NAS website: [National Adoption Service – Modern Adoption In Wales.](#)

STRATEGIC PRIORITY B

Great adoption support – when and where it's needed

NAS aims to continue the development of adoption support services across Wales, with a focus on prevention and de-escalating needs. We also aim to shift perception about the support needs of children and young people, with a long-term focus on the impact of early childhood experiences and early trauma.



What was achieved during 2023/24?



The **Adoption Support framework** underpins this priority. It informs the long-term strategic development plan for adoption support in Wales: the Good Practice Guide, as well as the Wales Adoption Support Commitment, which was launched in June 2022, the first in the UK.

This year, we developed performance data to focus on the scale and demand for adoption support services across Wales. As of the end of the year there were:

- Over **1,000 children** and their families receiving adoption support services through a formal plan
- An additional **591 children** and their families being supported by the Pathways or Connected services that are available without a formal assessment
- **93 children** waiting for a formal assessment of their adoption support needs. Just under a third had been waiting over four months.



Some regions have been able to develop more proactive approaches to responding to emerging needs for support, embracing the concept of our strategic approach to early intervention and de-escalating needs set out in the Good Practice Guides.

In **WB**, a virtual hub arrangement operates as a successful early intervention system, offering consultations and access to support where needed. This will now be extended to focus on families where contact/life-journey may be the main issue. With the development of the BUSS^{®1} Leaplets Playgroup, and the commencement of the individual BUSS assessments and interventions, there is a good range of adoption support on offer.

In **NWAS**, Stay and Play groups for adopters have been established in two LAs. They provide new adoptive parents and their children with the opportunity to meet other adoptive families to build a support network. The families also have the chance to access advice and support regarding therapeutic parenting and engage in Theraplay activities to increase attachment opportunities.

SEWAS have introduced workshops for adoptive parents on life story work, reintroduced coffee mornings for preschool children and organized more events for adopted children (water sports, and an introduction to sailing).

VVC have created social care officer posts to enhance adoption support services with new ways of working with families. The service to birth parents has also been enhanced, with the development of a support group.

Barnardo's have initiated a three-tiered post-adoption support response, which ensures a timely and appropriate response to families meeting the needs of children.

AUK provide training courses for adoptive parents and an information and advice line, which is open to anyone affected by adoption and those who support them.

¹ Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems (BUSS[®]) in children who have experienced developmental trauma

Our nationally commissioned universal services continue to support large numbers of families, children and young people.



LLWYBRAU:PATHWAY

Adoption UK leads this collaborative service, providing peer support partners and psychology support from the AUK 'PATH' team. This comprises of an assessment and reflective parenting course where needed. Each region has a designated Pathway worker who manages the referral of families to the service and the ongoing support, if needed, when the intervention is completed.

313 families received a service during 2023/24; 119 were new referrals.

In 2023/24, 100% of families accepted the peer support partner and 58% the reflective parenting course.

100% of families showed an improvement in outcomes.

The service was a Highly Commended Finalist in the Social Care Accolades in April 2023.

CONNECT SERVICE

Adoption UK has delivered the CONNECT Services for NAS since 2019. This comprises of:



- 'Connected', provided in partnership with the regions across Wales to deliver group-based activities and support to children and young people
- A website developed and populated by adopted young people, for adopted young people, plus periodic publications such as newsletters
- Connect Voices (Adoption Youth Council), which has a charter and engagement plan and has previously met with Ministers

Each regional team has a designated member of staff who supports the delivery of the Connected groups in their region.

389 children and young people are registered with the connected service.

Activity this year included:

- Artwork completed by children from the Western Bay Connected group was featured at the Cascade Exchange conference in April
- Two young people presented at the NAS Conference in October
- Lead youth workers attended Family Days over the summer with families from SEWAS, VVC and MWW
- Young people wrote blogs for the NAS website and recruitment activity, including one on Dr Who!
- Young people were involved in focus groups to inform the NAS adopter recruitment campaign
- The Youth Council was involved in the recruitment of the new Independent Chair of the NAS Governance Board and the new AUK Director and Service Manager for Wales

In addition, one young person attended the British Podcast Awards in London to receive an award for the NAS Podcast series, which featured a 'takeover' episode by the young people.

103 group sessions were delivered.

31 young people are part of Connect Voices – the Adoption Youth Council.

Life Journey Work

Wales continues to perform well in relation to life journey work, as services embed our approach to this important aspect of support for adopted children and young people. Progress is stabilising, however, due to reported pressures in services. There is a need to continue to focus on this work so that every child placed for adoption has all the information they need to make sense of their identity and journey.

- 80% of children had received their life journey materials by the time they had their matching panel
- 71% of children/families received the life journey materials by the time they had their second adoption review

Staff across Wales are involved in supporting children's social workers to ensure this work is completed, comprising of individual input for specific children as well as the provision of training and information.

The network of life journey work coordinators produces an annual newsletter, the theme of which this year was, 'It takes a village...'. It included an update from each region and a focus on the contribution that a wide range of people can make to life journey work.

[Life journey work \(LJW\) newsletter](#)

Good Practice – SEWAS

Life journey work is a huge part of the work with birth parents. Often, social workers don't have the time to sit through sessions to gather soft information on birth families because it is such a huge piece of work, which needs to be handled tactfully. The independent support worker created an 'all about you and me' document, whereby information shared by birth parents during visits is collated in one document. By referring to the LJW template, they ensure that as much relevant information as possible is included. In one case, this was passed on to adopters during a birth parent/adopters meeting and they were very grateful, commenting on how important it was to them to have information that they hadn't known to share with the child as he grows up. This work is invaluable and lots of the information could potentially be missed if there wasn't an independent worker involved.

Good Practice – VVC

VVC launched a new life journey work workshop, which forms part of their core training offer to adoptive parents. This aims to upskill adopters so that they can complete this much-needed work with adopted children.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY C

Healthier contact through better birth family services

NAS aims to develop a realistic approach to contact across Wales that will ensure all adopted children are able to have contact with their birth families post adoption, and that flexes to meet their needs throughout their childhood.





We've developed a Contact Toolkit to support staff to assess and manage contact differently, and increasingly, this is being used by practitioners across the regions.

What was achieved during 2023/24?

The analysis of contact undertaken last year, alongside new performance measures, provides a more detailed breakdown of the types of contact taking place.

Of the 214 children placed during the year:

- 96% (206) had arrangements for contact, and of these:
 - 69% had both direct and indirect arrangements in place with different people
 - Of those children who had direct contact arrangements in place, the majority had arrangements with 'significant others' – most likely former foster carers
- All regions and VAAs are considering how to increase numbers of birth parent and adopter meetings. There were 37 last year and 67 this year, an increase of 80%. Previously known as 'one off' meetings, these are now known as 'initial meetings'. This is positively changing the way in which contact is considered, framing meetings as the start of a relationship between adopters and significant people from the child's birth network.

In addition:

- 100% of adopters were involved in agreeing contact plans for new placements
- 100% of birth parents referred were offered support in line with new guidance

We also funded training on the **'Together or Apart'**² guidance for childcare staff across LAs, designed to support a better understanding of the needs of adopted siblings. 28 members of staff received this training.

Discussions began with adopted children and young people involved in the Connected service, to discuss some proposed changes to the terminology involved in contact. The group will be working on this during 2024/25.

² *Beyond together or apart – Planning for, assessing and placing sibling groups: Shelagh Beckett 2021*

Good Practice – VVC

A is a young adult sibling who made a referral for letterbox support. A's birth mother has longstanding issues with substance misuse, leading to her children being removed. Before this happened, A undertook the parenting role, trying to ensure her siblings had their basic needs met.

A has maintained direct contact with all her siblings, except the youngest who was adopted. The loss of this connection has impacted on her already fragile mental health.

With one-to-one support from the Post Adoption Contact Team, A has been able to share with the adopters what is important for them to know in their letter exchange. This work has resulted in a positive working relationship and as a result, the adopters have changed their indirect contact arrangement from once a year to twice a year and Christmas and birthday cards. It is hoped that this can continue to be built upon.

A has also taken the step of being part of our Birth Parent Group. She is helping the group to improve the information shared with siblings and adopters.

Good Practice – Barnardo's

Through 1:1 work, the service aims to foster a culture where increased levels of contact and connections with birth families are celebrated, and we are working hard to support families to embrace and think creatively about contact with birth family. Families are being supported to consider safe ways to share additional information, such as images.

Good Practice – WBAS

The establishment of a post adoption contact team, which focuses on supporting all areas of contact, including letterbox, has been instrumental in the support of more flexible contact arrangements, particularly those involving siblings.

The birth parent support team has also supported many birth parents to re-establish and maintain their letterbox contact. This is an area of development that has had a significant impact on birth families.

Good Practice – St David's

The positive profile of contact has been raised during preparation training by having an adopter talk about their experience of direct contact.





Services to birth parents have improved over the life of NAS: all birth parents are referred to adoption services and 90+% are offered a service, with around 30% accepting a service.

- 700+ birth parents were offered a service in 2023/24
- 29% (217) accepted a service
- In addition, parents who were offered a service in previous years are sometimes ready to take up that offer at a later stage: in 2023/24, 337 birth parents did this.
- In total, therefore, the service worked with just over 550 birth parents during 2023/24. Some of this work involved individualised support, alongside which most regions now offer birth parents the option of being involved in group-based support.

Assessments of support needs and services are also provided to siblings and other birth relatives, with support needs and services for the former currently increasing and the latter falling.

Good Practice – WBAS

A social worker first started working with a family a few years ago when she did therapeutic life story work with H, an older sibling, as H was asking to meet the birth mum. As part of the work, the SW created a relationship with the birth mum, who has a significant learning disability. A contact assessment was undertaken, and it was clear that direct contact would not be something that the birth mum could do at that time, due to her own needs and her continued chaotic lifestyle. The work undertaken focused around improving the nature of the contact that was in place. Contact between H and the birth mum is now more meaningful, happens much more regularly and includes gifts they make for each other.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY D

Better adoption records and access to information

NAS aims to develop an access to records service and materials, which recognise the importance of the keeping and sharing of quality information. This would also ensure that children and adults have support when accessing their records, and that information is provided for them in a timely way.



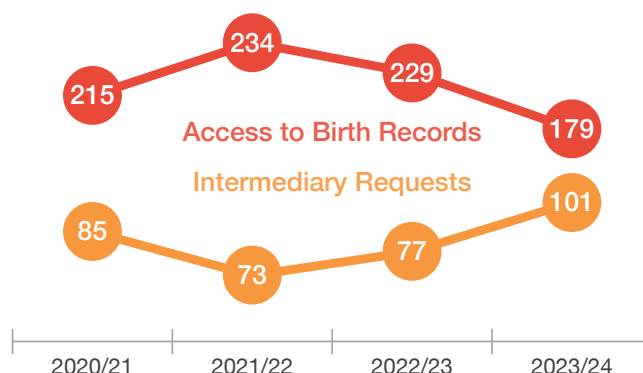
What was achieved during 2023/24?

A national Birth Records and Intermediary Services Subgroup has been established to oversee this priority, including the current pilot of the Pre-1976 'Access to Records' service.

The number of requests from adopted adults to access their birth records has averaged at around 224 per year over the last seven years but was lower, at 179, in 2023/24. There were 101 requests for intermediary services, 24% more than last year.

The growing issue of support for post commencement adoptions (those adopted after 2002) will require further consideration as we move forward. Due to the complex needs of this cohort of young people, a higher level of intervention and support is required and numbers seeking support will increase each year. In anticipation of this, additional support and training of staff across the regions and VAAs has taken place to maximise the impact that a very limited resource base can have.

In addition, ongoing links have been made with the Improving Adoption Services for Adults (IASA) project being run in England through the University of East Anglia. This work is currently focussing on updates to the guidance in relation to access to records. Once complete, it will be available for us to adapt for use in Wales.



Pre-1976 service pilot

In April 2023, Welsh Government made a formal apology in response to the Joint Human Rights Committee Report³ into historic adoption practices. Prior to this, the Deputy Minister for Social Services and Welsh Government had asked NAS to work with them to set up an Access to Records service to support adopted adults and birth parents (pre-1976) across Wales.

An initial pilot service was commissioned by NAS from St David's and Adoption UK and has been operating since the second half of 2023/24. So far, 16 referrals have been received from adopted adults for both access to records and intermediary work. 18 memberships have been provided by AUK, plus individual counselling sessions and an online support group.

Initial evaluations of the service have proved positive, and capacity will be greater for 2024/25. The service remains relatively small due to resourcing, but it could reach a wider group of people if further funding were available.

Good Practice – NWAS

The service provides clear information on how to access adoption records and has a clear referral process on their website.

³ *The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949-1976: House of Commons House of Lords Joint Committee on Human Rights, published 15th July 2022*

STRATEGIC PRIORITY E

Maintaining the infrastructure to deliver services and sound governance for NAS and Foster Wales



NAS aims to continue the successful delivery of its services and Foster Wales through effective infrastructure and governance arrangements.

What was achieved during 2023/24?

In the latter part of the year, a National Adoption Service and Foster Wales Joint Committee was established on behalf of the 22 Welsh LAs. This will enable LAs to exercise their joint powers for the provision of the national and coordinating functions of both NAS and FW.

It will provide the mechanism for all Welsh LAs to discharge an executive and oversight role for NAS and FW, and receive and approve:

- The Mid-Year and Annual Reports of NAS
- The Annual Report of Foster Wales
- The annual programmes of work for NAS and Foster Wales
- The budget for the office of the director and national work for NAS and for FW
- The agreement, and any changes to the agreement, for the host authority (Cardiff Council) support of the office of the director and national work for NAS and FW.



New Independent Co-Chair of the NAS Combined Governance Board

In March 2024, the Independent Co-Chair of the NAS Combined Governance Board, Mr Phil Hodgson, retired from his role after almost a decade of dedication and commitment to NAS. The service extends heartfelt thanks to Phil for his stewardship over this time.

We were delighted to appoint our new co-chair, Dr Carolyn Sampeys, shortly afterwards. Carolyn will co-chair the NAS Combined Governance Board, alongside Councillor Jane Tremlett, our existing Co-Chair.

Formerly the lead NHS professional adviser for children looked after, fostering and adoption in Wales, Carolyn has worked with children and adoptive parents in Wales both as a paediatrician and medical adviser, alongside undertaking research, development, and advisory work across the UK, including with the former BAAF and Coram BAAF.

We look forward to working with Carolyn in her new role.

Other development work

ExChange Wales 'Reframing Adoption' conference series 2023

The ExChange Wales research dissemination programme, based in CASCADE Research Centre, provides an online conference series and research resources for social care practitioners in Wales and beyond. We worked with them to develop an ExChange conference series, which was held in May-June 2023 and entitled [Reframing Adoption](#).

Reframing Adoption provided an opportunity to share changes and improvements in adoption practice and celebrate how modern adoption can provide positive outcomes for children, adoptive families and birth families in Wales and across the UK. It was one of ExChange Wales' most successful conference series to date, with a range of webinars, videos, blogs and creative activities over a six-week period. It was launched by our director, Suzanne Griffiths, in a [video address](#), and contributions to the conference were made by Chris Holmquist (NAS) and Sarah Johal (Adoption England).

The audience reach was (and continues to be) wide. There were 458 registrants for the four live webinars from all corners of the UK, as well as India, the USA and Scandinavia. As of February 2024, there were 1466 views of the conference webinar and video recordings (YouTube), and 2261 views of the conference webpage and blogs.

The content included a powerful and touching [interview recording](#) featuring birth and adoptive mothers, and blogs on [keeping connected](#), [contact](#) and [early permanence](#). The conference also facilitated a fantastic creative project with the Adoption UK MWW group, enabling 14 young adoptees to explore and express their views and perceptions of adoption through [art and photography](#). All webinars, video recordings, blogs and creative works remain available as an online resource on the [ExChange Wales](#) website.

Staff Conference

During National Adoption Week, we held a conference for staff working in adoption across Wales, the occasion providing an ideal opportunity to showcase and celebrate achievements over the past few years. This included new approaches to contact, working with birth parents and life journey work.

Over 140 staff from LAs, regional adoption services and voluntary adoption agencies across Wales attended, as did members of our governance board, Welsh Government officials and the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan, who gave the keynote speech.

This was the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic that we were able to come together in this way, and it provided a great opportunity for staff to network and share ideas.



Listening to our service users

Adoption UK Adoption Barometer

We support the [Adoption UK Annual Barometer](#) and use it as key mechanism to understand how Welsh adoption services are experienced.

The Adoption Barometer is the only UK-wide comprehensive stock take of adoption, based on the findings of a large annual survey of adopters and adoptees, and an assessment of government adoption policies. The Adoption Barometer provides powerful evidence of the realities of adopting and being adopted.

Fewer Welsh adopters responded this year: 138 plus a proportion of the adult adoptees' responses were from Wales.

Once again, the report was positive, showing that Wales compared very well to the other three UK nations in terms of policy and practice.

In relation to **Adoption Support**:

- Respondents from Wales were more likely to have accessed core support (e.g. training, support groups) during 2022 (63%) and overall, they were more likely to agree that the support they had accessed was of a good quality (75%) and had made a positive difference to their family (82%).
- Respondents from Wales were more likely to agree that the person who dealt with their request for support was knowledgeable and understood their situation (80%) and less likely to be told the support they needed was not available (24%) or that there would be a long wait (30%).

In relation to waiting times for adoption support, 71% received support within three months of asking for it, an increase from 64% in 2021. 40% received support within one month. However, 15% said they had waited more than six months for support, with some reporting a long wait for an allocated social worker, lack of local therapeutic services, and delays caused by staff absence or turnover.



There were a range of recommendations for all the UK nations. Where work on these was not already planned, we are looking at how these recommendations can be taken forward.

The report recommends free, accessible, high-quality support for adoptees of all ages, whenever they need it. This means:

- Quality standards for preparation, approvals and matching to ensure prospective adopters are well equipped to meet the needs of the children who are placed with them, wherever they live in the UK.
- Ringfenced, multi-year government funding for adoption support in all nations of the UK
- Free, expert support to establish and maintain relationships with birth relatives for adoptees of all ages
- Standalone multi-disciplinary support plans for every child to be placed for adoption, with a duty to deliver the support required
- Education and health professionals trained in early childhood trauma
- Free, professional, adoption-informed therapeutic support for adult adoptees

The Big Adoption Conversation, November 2023

The Big Adoption Conversation is a national annual consultation event held to consider the findings of the Adoption Barometer and how services should respond. Created for adoptees, adopters and professionals, the event is planned jointly by staff from Adoption UK Cymru and members of the NAS central team. The total number of attendees this year was 74, of which the majority were professionals, with some adoptive parents and adopted adults.

In addition to considering all the findings of the Adoption Barometer, the theme of the event was, **'The lifelong implications of adoption'**. Four workshops were held, focussing on health, education, identity and maintaining family relationships.

The discussions identified that support continues to be needed throughout every stage of a child/young person's journey. It acknowledged that there

has already been considerable progress made in some of the areas during the lifetime of NAS, including: life journey work; availability of adoption support services; implementing Trauma Informed Frameworks in schools. Alongside this, it was agreed that services should continue to build on the progress made. For some areas, e.g. access to records, there remains much work to be done.

Welsh Government's Chief Social Care Officer for Wales, Albert Heaney, attended the event and said:

'It was a pleasure to attend such an important event, focussing on the lifelong implications of adoption. I appreciated the opportunity to join the Maintaining Family Relationships workshop and contribute to the discussion. Congratulations on a wonderful event'.

Response to the Public Law Working Group on adoption



We have made a significant contribution to the current Public Law Working Group – Adoption subgroup over the last two years. This group has been looking at adoption practice across the following areas: process and procedures in court; contact; intercountry adoptions; relinquished children; and access to records.

The draft report⁴ with its recommendations was published for consultation in September 2023. The final version will be published in 2024 and will contain a range of recommendations for the courts, adoption services and Governments.

⁴ [*Public Law Working Group interim report: Recommendations for Best Practice in Respect of Adoption – Courts and Tribunals Judiciary*](#)

Compliments and complaints

Positive feedback

We have received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback from the people who we work with and support. Here are some examples of what we've heard:

From adopters following direct work and understanding the child day:

'Thanks so much for all your support to the family... He is settling beautifully. R is convinced it's because of the preparation sessions, so thank you. He's a clever little thing with a fantastic memory. It's obvious it all went in. He showed me his bottle of love and it meant so much for him to have one too.'

From a judge in relation to birth parent work:

'Judge X extended his thanks to all involved and working on this case. He read the letters that J did with birth parents offering their views and felt they were very emotive and heartfelt and was appreciative of the good work that has been going on. He said courts are quick to criticise when work isn't done well and so wanted to ensure that work is praised when it is done well.'

Birth parent group

'The groups are good and positive; there are people who are there who you can talk to about what you have been through.'

Birth parent who met adopters

'I can't believe that I was able to meet the adopters. I never wanted to do it; I was so scared but knowing I had J to do it with me made the difference. I knew exactly what was expected of me and felt like I had someone on my side.'

Adoption panel

'We really felt at ease during the panel and [the chair] contributed greatly to that, with the contact the night before, the text in the morning and the meeting we had before the panel started. It all felt natural and relaxed in the room, and we were so pleased by the engagement during the panel and the way everyone seemed to be interested in what we had to say.'

Adopters receiving support

'Thank you very much for your kind words and for your readiness to support. It's good to be able to co-work with you and to be reassured that I am doing everything ok.'

Feedback from the Connected Groups

'Excellent service. Fantastic to have events in our local area and the opportunity to meet other adoptive families, something I have been wanting to do since we adopted our daughter six years ago and my son nearly three years ago. Very supportive and friendly.'

Feedback from adopted young people

'I'd like to thank you massively and anyone else that helped me as a child and moved me to my adoptive parents and family. Being adopted and going through all of that has made me the strong person I am today. I have had such an amazing childhood and still do; I can't be more thankful.'

Complaints

In most cases, feedback and concerns are resolved promptly as they arise. During the year, the regions received a total of five formal complaints, and the central team received one. Three of these were resolved at Stage 1 of the process and another at Stage 2, while the other two are in the final stages of the investigation process. Any learning and improvement actions from complaints go on to inform our practice. In the case of the national complaint, a new leaflet about information sharing has been developed and put into use.

Financial arrangements

We rely on both grant funding from Welsh Government and a ‘top-slice’ of the Revenue Support Grant, received via the WLGA, which funds the central elements of the service.

The income received in relation to the central coordination for 2023/24 is set out in the table below:

Income Stream	Amount
WLGA Central Team Revenue (RSG allocation)	£538,200
Foster Wales Contribution to shared posts and hosting costs (WG grant)	£210,992
Adoption Register Wales Management Charge (WG grant)	£31,669
WG grant co-ordination and Life journey work	£9,909
Total Income	£790,770
NAS Contingency brought forward	£253,749
Total Spend (end of year 2023/24)	£621,659
Balance (Contingency for 2024/25)	£422,860

The tables below outline the various grants that NAS manages, much of which is allocated to local government and third sector adoption services for service delivery, with some for national projects. The allocations for 2023/24 were fully spent.

Adoption support investment £2,300,000 (currently secured to 31.3.25)	2023/24
NWAS	£378,656
SEWAS	£395,957
VVC	£537,241
WBAS	£328,687
MWW	£259,550
St Davids (Adopting Together Service)	£100,000
AFKA (Policy and Practice Development)	£85,000
AUK (Pathways and Connect services)	£205,000
Central Team coordination	£9,909
	£2,300,000

Adoption Register for Wales, £219,000 (on behalf of Welsh Government)	2023/24
Service delivery costs (salaries, family finding & other costs)	£90,059
Management Charge	£31,669
Link Maker Licence	£96,806
	£218,534

Adopt Cymru and Beyond Grant £638,639 (currently secured to 31.3.25)	2023/24
Pathways Programme Adoption UK Cymru (picks up former Big Lottery funding)	£246,935
Advertising and PR Campaign	£164,873
Develop Capacity in Regions and VAAs 1. AUK (Access to records pilot) 2. St Davids (Access to records pilot) 3. Other Projects	£153,014
Wales Early Permanence Scheme	£30,318
Wales Access to Records Service – scoping and set up 1. AUK 2. St Davids	£36,500
AFKA – Adoption Aware Workforce training module	£7,000
	£638,640

Concluding comments

Concluding comments from the Director of the National Adoption Service, Suzanne Griffiths

“Like all public services, NAS is challenged by a changing understanding of need with increasing demand in some parts of the service, the availability of a consistent workforce with appropriate skills, and by public and professional views.”



As we enter our tenth year, the achievements of NAS in delivering and improving services are clear. This is credit to all adoption professionals across Wales who have worked and continue to work tirelessly to achieve positive outcomes for children, their families and others affected by adoption.

I am, however, very much aware of the ongoing challenges that we are facing and must continue to navigate, not least, the financial constraints, which are affecting adoption alongside all other public services. This is in addition to changes in patterns of demand for adoption services, some of which are on the increase.

One of the other key challenges is increasing complexity on several levels: in the needs of the children that we want to place; in the experiences of prospective adopters; in the societal and demographic context within which they live; and in the policy and legal context in which we work. This has an impact on the detailed, quality work that staff need to do, on timeframes, some of which are increasing, and on the stability of placements.

These complexities have also led to increasing and more diverse support needs, including for young adults accessing their birth records. Our approach to support is to respond positively at the earliest stage to prevent needs escalating, and we know that this strategy is benefitting those who use our services. Maintaining this support is arguably the greatest of the challenges for the next few years.

We will continue to collaborate across Wales to address these issues, alongside celebrating the many successes and the good services provided to so many children and their families across Wales.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads 'Suzanne Griffiths'.

Suzanne Griffiths Director



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

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