

## Foreword from Suzanne

I am delighted to share this year's newsletter with you, featuring news, information, and highlights from 2024, as well as a look ahead to 2025. I hope you find the content interesting, informative, and useful for the year ahead, wherever you are based in and around Wales.

This year has been particularly busy for us, with notable events such as hosting the first NAS stand at the Hay Festival, welcoming a panel of our Welsh speaking adopters to the National Eisteddfod, and launching our new website.

In addition, 2024 was an exciting year for everyone at the National Adoption Service (NAS) as we celebrated our 10-year anniversary. Reflecting on the past decade, I am proud of the progress we've made in supporting our adoption community. Our Children and Young People service, 'Connected,' developed with the help of AUK Cymru, now supports almost 400 adopted children and young people each year. Our Life Journey Framework provides essential support for adopters and professionals, and our Adoption Support Commitment ensures that anyone involved in adoption in Wales knows who to contact for support.

It was a privilege to attend the wonderful events held across Wales during National Adoption Week, culminating in our national event on November 6th. Hosted by regional adoption services, these local events offered a unique opportunity for adopters and adopted children and young people to celebrate together and create artwork representing what adoption means to them. Seeing everyone, including our Ministers, artists and our VAA's, come together in Cardiff for the national event was truly special. The exhibition of artwork and other exhibits was a brilliant highlight, showcasing the dedication of everyone involved with the service and our wider adoption community.

In addition to our celebrations, NAS delivered on several important commitments in 2024:

- A new Qualities and Skills framework to assist practitioners in assessing new adopters
- The development and launch of a new contact planning toolkit and,
- Continued use of the Welsh Early Permanence framework, which is already making a significant difference for some children and families in Wales.

As we move into 2025, we remain aware of the many challenges faced by families in Wales. Please do not hesitate to contact your local region or VAA if you need support or advice regarding adoption. They are there to help you.

Finally, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to all our adopters, foster carers, and everyone who is part of NAS in Wales. Your commitment to caring for and supporting children in loving homes is incredible. I also want to express my gratitude to the staff of the National Adoption Service for Wales and our partner services. Your dedication does not go unnoticed.

Wishing you a very Happy New Year!

Director of the National Adoption Service for Wales



## Highlights of 2024

#### January - March

#### **April - June**

- Dr Carolyn Sampeys becomes Independent Co-Chair of the NAS Combined Governance Board
- Celebrated LGBTQ+ Adoption and Fostering week
- Shared adoption stories from single adopter Abbey, and adopters Martin and Josh

- Hosted the first NAS stand at the 2024 Hay Festival and partnered with Dr Aamir Khan for his event
- Hosted an Adoption Champions takeover on socials, sharing James' story and advice
- Shared Adoption Register Manager, Hannah's, advice and explanations around adoption
- Shared research by Adoption UK that revealed that amongst the UK nations, adopters and adoptees in Wales are generally more positive about the service they receive.

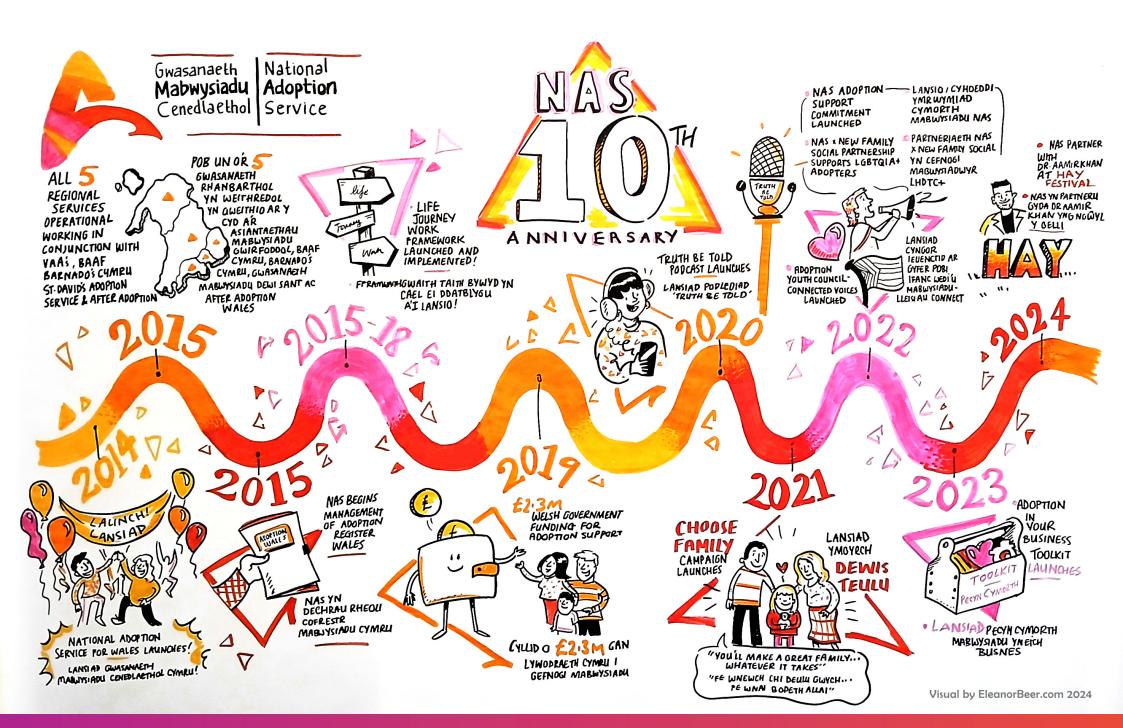
#### October – December

## July - September



- Celebrated NAS' 10th anniversary with local events across Wales and a national showcase
- Updated and launched the new NAS website
- Launched our new Qualities & Skills framework

- Hosted a panel with our Welsh speaking adopters at the National Eisteddfod
- Celebrated International Day of Sign Languages





ORDINARY PEOPLE MAKE EXTRAORDINARY ADOPTERS

Visual by Eleanor Beer 24



## **Adoption Mid and West Wales**



2024 has been a busy year for us in Adoption Mid & West Wales. We've been actively working to modernise adoption practices within the region. Through a series of roadshow events, we've engaged with local authority childcare teams, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), fostering teams, and foster carers – focusing on key topics: contact, name changes and enriched life journey work.

#### Activity days for our families

In February, we immersed ourselves in a Forest School session. To celebrate National Adoption Week and our 10th anniversary, we held a festive event at Cardigan Castle in October. The day was packed with Halloween-themed activities, arts and crafts, and opportunities for families to connect with one another.

#### Commemorating our 10-year milestone

Here in Mid and West Wales, we collaborated with 'Lloyd the Graffiti' artist to engage our younger people in producing a collaborative artwork, which was showcased at the Norwegian Church in Cardiff during the National Adoption Service's 10thanniversary celebration event in November.

#### Birth Records Counselling Peer Support Group 2024

This key initiative provides a supportive space for adult adoptees seeking access to their birth records. This group offers mutual emotional support, shares experience, explores queries/dilemmas and asks adoptees for feedback to help us improve our services to adopted adults. The group will continue to meet every other month, ongoing.

#### The BUSS® LEAPlets model

This model helps children who missed out on critical early movement experiences to develop core motor skills and body control. A 10-week group workshop is currently in its seventh week, with adopters reporting noticeable progress in their children's development. In 2025, we plan to explore funding opportunities to extend this work, including the possibility of securing a Level 2 qualification, enabling us to offer one-to-one sessions for families in need.

#### Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) specialist training

In 2025, we plan to develop this initiative, with the appointment of a WEP champion to progress the programme.

Our commitment to enhancing adoption support across Mid & West Wales remains strong, and we look forward to continuing to work alongside our partners and families in 2025.

- adoptionmwwales.org.uk/
- mabwysiaducgcymru.org.uk/
- facebook.com/adoptmwwales
- x twitter.com/adoptmw\_wales
- instagram.com/adoptmwwales

## **North Wales Adoption Service**



#### North Wales Adoption Service 7th annual family fun day

We welcomed over 90 families and 150 children to our annual family fun day event. There were many activities to meet all children's age ranges, and this year, we welcomed Mr Phormula, whose bilingual beatboxing engaged the children throughout the day to produce our very own 'adoption rap'.

This is what one family had to say:

"The fun day is something that we as a family come to rely on - our child looks forward to it each year and has made friends with other children. He looks around the room for them and then spends the day. He says the other children are just like him!

"The value of this day is immense and gives us parents a chance to talk with other families, but more importantly, our children can play in a safe place, and I don't worry about how his behaviour may be seen by others."

#### Recruitment

We are actively recruiting and assessing interested and suitable adopters to offer loving and nurturing family experiences to children who are waiting to be adopted. Our experienced staff members continue to support and offer guidance throughout the adoption journey.

## The first family of Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) Adopters - approved in 2024

We had our first family approved as WEP carers and look forward to placing a child with them in due course.

#### **Training**

The Pre-approval training and the Post Adoption Support Training Programme are delivered regularly and continue to offer a variety of courses

tailored to the needs of adoptive families. The programme accommodates the often-busy nature of being parents. It offers short webinars that are recorded and can be watched back (up to 7 days), in-person but online/virtual workshops and E-Learning modules.

Our prospective adopters and approved adopters support groups and Buddy Scheme continue to be successful and are considered great support opportunities by our families.

#### Stay and Play Group

This continues to be a success with specific themes for every session and Thera-play informed activities. Families can receive therapeutic parenting advice, guidance and support if required.

#### **Advertising Campaign**

With support from the NAS Central Team, we secured funding to cover a bus-rear advertising campaign. Fifteen buses travelled for six weeks between August and September across all six North Wales Local Authorities.

#### 2025

Next year, our goal is to increase our visibility within the community, share more information about our service activities, support our adoptive families, and recruit more dedicated parents for children awaiting adoption.

#### Find us at:



facebook.com/mabwysiadugogleddcymru



## **South East Wales Adoption Service**



#### Summer 2024

This summer, we established a Stay and Play group for adoptive families with preschool children. This fun and safe space provides opportunities for children to play, learn and socialise while their parents connect with fellow adoptive families. Stay and Play empowers adoptive parents to build their support networks with other people on the same journey as them. The sessions also promote play and curiosity for children and young people to nurture their social skills.

This is what a parent and facilitator had to say:

"This is new to us – it can be difficult in other play groups when people ask us about our recently adopted child... It's hard because we don't know some things, and then that leads to us having to think about how much we want to share with others – we don't have that here – we are all in similar situations."

"We [Staff] felt there was a gap in support once an adoption is finalised—there is a lot of stepping back formally. We want this group to help parents with any of their queries and new experiences, but also to build networks beyond the group."

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) visited the group as part of a small-scale engagement initiative, and they identified the strengths of the group including...

"Empowering parents to have a voice, choice, and control. These groups are organically structured and led by the participants, allowing them to influence and shape the development of the service. This aligns with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014's emphasis on voice and control and co-production, ensuring that support services are designed and delivered in partnership with those who use them"

#### **Sensory Needs and Attachment Group**

This year, we partnered with the NHS Occupational Therapy and Psychology services to launch our first group dedicated to supporting adoptive parents in understanding sensory needs and attachment. This pilot programme aims to develop tailored interventions for children who have experienced trauma and exhibit challenges in sensory processing and integration.

Parents who participated in the group found it enlightening, informative and practical. They reported gaining valuable insights and new strategies to support their children. The success of the pilot has paved the way for future group offerings in 2025.

#### A milestone achieved: Welsh Early Permanence (WEP)

This year, we made our first WEP placement, marking a promising beginning. With more WEP assessments currently underway, we anticipate further positive outcomes in the future.

#### Celebrating a decade of adoption

This year, we celebrated NAS' 10th anniversary with a regional event held in Blaenau Gwent. The event was a wonderful celebration of adoption, sharing stories and information with professionals and a session of fun activities with children and families. It also recognised our decade of service as a regional provider.

#### Find us at:



facebook.com/SEWASAdoption

instagram.com/sewasadoption

## Vale, Valleys, and Cardiff Adoption



#### Strengthening our support for adoptive families

2024 has been another busy year for us. We've continued to welcome new families eager to adopt and have been impressed by their commitment and dedication – it never fails to amaze us. To better support these families, we've focused on enhancing our training programmes.

#### **Training and support**

Partnership with Western Bay: We've continued our successful partnership to deliver comprehensive Preparation and Post Approval training.

Life Journey Work: Based on valuable feedback from families, we've expanded our training offer to include additional sessions on life journey work. Our bi-monthly workshops, led by experienced coordinators, have been well-received and empower parents to have meaningful conversations with their children.

Family Hubs: Our monthly family hubs continue to thrive and provide space for parents and children to connect and support one another. Our summer family fun day was a huge success, with over **80 families** enjoying a day of fun and games.

We will build upon these areas of work in 2025.

#### Celebrating milestones and looking to the future

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the National Adoption Service, we hosted a special event featuring spoken word artists who are also adoptive parents. The event inspired participants to reflect on their own adoption journeys and express themselves creatively.

We're looking forward to celebrating our 10th anniversary in 2025.

- adopt4vvc.org
- instagram.com/vvcadoption
- instagram.com/mabwysiadufcc
- facebook.com/vvcadoption
- facebook.com/mabwysiadufcc

## **Western Bay Adoption**



#### Our 2024 highlights

July was a busy month filled with large-scale events. The Wales Airshow returned to Swansea Bay, where our custom foam planes were very popular with families. We also participated in the Wales Air Ambulance Castles in the Sky Art Trail, transforming one of the castles into a captivating attraction. Our team visits, youth club BBQ and baby and toddler session at the castle were a great success. We were thrilled to be voted the most popular castle.

We continued our active engagement in the community with events like the Mumbles Raft Race, the Gower Show, the Margam Food Festival, and the NPT Family Event.

Our adoptive families have been able to enjoy social events at Halloween and Christmas, and our adopters' playgroup remains popular for families connecting every fortnight.

#### Spreading the word

On top of this outreach and event work, we made efforts to ensure other areas are functioning well. This includes regular literature distribution to key sites such as GP surgeries and hospitals - and outdoor advertising like banners and signs in key high footfall and traffic areas. We've also been making efforts to engage local employers to not only advertise adoption but ensure they are 'Adoption Friendly' and supportive of their employees going through the process.

Moving into the next quarter, we will aim to provide more variety and revisit more educational campaigns surrounding adoption support and the issues our children face.

#### 2025

Our Life-journey and contact hub will launch in January 2025. Adoptive families will be able to book a slot to discuss any issues they may have with supporting their child's life journey story or in supporting post-adoption contact arrangements.

- westernbayadoption.org/
- facebook.com/westernbayadoption
- witter.com/bayadoption
- instagram.com/western\_bay\_adoption

## Barnardo's Cymru



#### **Engaging with families**

This year, our team has enjoyed spending time connecting with families – in particular, the opportunity to work with them to create artwork for NAS's 10th anniversary celebrations.

#### Prioritising children's needs

We've seen an increase in the development of creative transition plans that prioritise the needs of each child.

#### Trauma-informed care

We continue to develop and deliver trauma-informed training across our service and are working with our wider Barnardo's team to enhance our offerings.

#### Successful placements and recruitment

We're thrilled to have found excellent links and matches for some of our families who have been waiting. Our focused recruitment efforts have attracted prospective adopters who are well-suited to support children with complex needs and histories. It has resulted in some excellent prospective adopters coming through assessment.

#### New services in 2024

We started running our bi-monthly therapeutic parenting training programme for adopters. This training enables adopters to join at any point in the year and complete the cyclical programme.

We have also had a great uptake on our Christmas pantomime tickets and are looking forward to seeing families at theatres across Wales.

#### Plans for 2025

We are working hard to develop our adoption community by connecting back in with previous adopters. This community support provides excellent first-hand guidance and advice to our prospective adopters from experienced families alongside invaluable peer support.

Watch this space.

#### Find us at:



facebook.com/barnardoscymrufosteradopt/

## **St David's Adoption Service**



As we reflect on 2024, we celebrate our families, our team, and our role in transforming lives. As a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA), we improve the life chances of 'priority' children who often wait the longest for a family — siblings who might otherwise be separated, older children, and those with medical or genetic uncertainties.

At St David's, we know that adoption doesn't end when a child is placed. It's a lifelong journey. By using our charitable status to fundraise, we provide guidance, care, and resources every step of the way. This year, we have focussed on the following:

#### Guides, Newsletters, and Community Engagement

We engaged with our community to develop several guides and newsletters. They are central to sharing information, inspiring action, and building stronger connections with our families and supporters. Our guides around LGBTQ+ adoption, solo adoption, and adopting for a second time have proven valuable to communities considering adoption.

#### **Celebrating Our Team**

We bid a heartfelt farewell to Wendy Keidan as CEO, whose leadership and dedication have been instrumental in shaping the charity. We were delighted to announce Jason Baker as the new CEO, alongside Martina McCrossan's promotion to Deputy Director. Together, we're ushering in a new chapter for our agency, one that includes the establishment of a dedicated Stage 1 team. This team is committed to guiding families through the early stages of their adoption journey, ensuring they feel supported.

#### Partnership with AUK

Our continued collaboration with Adoption UK (AUK) remains a cornerstone of our work. Together, we address the complex, often emotional needs

of children and families in the adoption process. One area of particular importance is the Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Service, which aims to improve the professional support and services available to those affected by historic adoption practices.

#### A Moment for Celebration - Lost Boys and Fairies

The recent success of Lost Boys and Fairies on the BBC reminds us of the transformative power of storytelling. Daf James' work not only entertains but also brings awareness to the experiences and emotions tied to adoption, encouraging empathy and understanding in wider society. Daf and his partner adopted their children through St David's.

#### **Looking Ahead**

As we move forward, we celebrate the progress we've made and the lives we've touched. Now, we're gearing up for 2025. Plans for the 'Big Adoption Day', 'World Book Day' and 'Pride Cymru' are just a few of the activities and community events we will be participating in next year. With your support, we will continue to innovate, advocate for and support the children and families who need us most.

- www.stdavidsadoptionservice.org
- x twitter.com/adoptionwales
- facebook.com/stdavidschildrensociety
- instagram.com/stdavidsadoptionservice

## **AFKA Cymru**



#### Adoption Quality & Skills Framework

Throughout 2024, AFKA Cymru has supported NAS with the creation of the Adoption Quality & Skills Framework. This framework serves as an overarching reference tool for practitioners, establishing a clear set of qualities and skills essential for successful adoptive parenting. We were thrilled to welcome over 80 people to our online launch event in November and can't wait to roll out training in the new year, which will focus on how to use this framework in practice.

#### **Family Finding Guidance**

AFKA Cymru has also been working alongside NAS to review the current CAR/B forms, which are currently being revised by Coram BAAF. We consulted with the sector to ensure that the revised forms are fit for use in Wales. Thank you also to everyone involved with beginning the work to review and update the NAS Family Finding Good Practice Guidance, your contribution is crucial. We look forward to sharing this work with you all next year.

#### **Events and workshops**

During 2024, we facilitated workshops and training events for adopters and practitioners, and we have many more areas to explore over the coming year. We hope to see you at our training and conference events.

It was lovely to see so many of our colleagues across Wales at NAS' 10th anniversary celebration event and we look forward to consulting and working with you all in 2025.

#### Find us at:



afkacymru.org.uk



twitter.com/AFKACymru

## **Adoption UK Cymru**



#### Saying goodbye and welcoming new leadership

We said a sad farewell to our director, Ann Bell, who has a well-earned retirement after 16 years in post. Bek Burns, newly appointed director, joins us from a long history of managing charities, especially children and traumarelated services.

#### Supporting families

We completed our 1KD programme, engaging with families in their first 1000 days. Families from all areas of Wales accessed support through this programme and made connections with other adopted families.

#### Breaking down barriers in education

We launched our Breaking the Barriers campaign to remove the barriers to learning for adopted and kinship children. This part of the campaign focuses on teacher training. Learn more here: <a href="https://www.adoptionuk.org/listing/category/breaking-the-barriers">https://www.adoptionuk.org/listing/category/breaking-the-barriers</a>

We also launched our Welsh Government funded, free training for educational staff, on supporting adopted learners within the classroom. You can book directly onto a course here: <a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/challenging-behaviour-in-care-experienced-learners-3790163">https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/challenging-behaviour-in-care-experienced-learners-3790163</a>

#### Connected service: making connections and building skills

Our Connected service supported over 350 children and young people in groups across Wales. This included therapy animal experiences, canoeing, and behind-the-scenes tours of the BBC studios. Our Connect Voices work involved young people being trained in interview skills – they were integral to our recruitment and selection of our new director.

One of our Connected Voices young people and our trustee, Ans, gave a heartfelt speech at the NAS 10th anniversary event, and there was not a dry eye in the house. Happy tears, of course.

#### Parent Pathways service

Our Parent Pathways service worked with over 250 families, providing peer support and clinical consultations for adoptive parents.

#### 2025

The Big Adoption Conversation 2025: Emotional wellbeing through the eyes of Adoption. This free online event will be held on the 17th January 2025 from 10am-1pm and is for adopted people, adoptive parents, social workers, representatives from the Welsh Government, senior managers, strategic planners and practitioners in the adoption community. Four workshops are being organised for the event: Emotional wellbeing through the eyes of adopted adults, adopted children and young people, adoptive parents, and birth parents.

The workshops will explore the latest survey results from Adoption UK's barometer report plus research and best practice. To book to join us, please visit the Adoption Voices website.

The 2025 barometer survey is available to complete now: <a href="https://www.adoptionuk.org/the-adoption-barometer">https://www.adoptionuk.org/the-adoption-barometer</a>.

This is the largest national, annual survey on the experiences of adopted families. This year's survey now allows 16-17 year olds to be able to complete it.

#### Find us at:





facebook.com/aukcymru

## Adoption Register Wales (ARW)



#### Working together

Our team continue to work closely with practitioners and managers from across Wales to ensure that Register data is accurate and up to date. Refresher training has been offered to staff on using the Register/Link Maker in May, June, September & December. Further dates will be offered next year.

#### A year of events

We held an Adoption Activity Day commissioned via Coram BAAF on the 29th of June in Cardiff. 27 children waiting from across Wales were featured at the event, with 23 children attending on the day. Many of the children who attended were part of a sibling group and/or had additional complex needs. The theme was 'When I Grow Up' and was a fun-filled day. A total of 15 expressions of interest were made with 3 successful links.

We held two online profiling events this year, one in March and one in October. A total of 35 children waiting from across Wales were featured at these events, many of whom have additional complex needs and are waiting to find a home. 11 expressions of interest were made following the events, although these did not result in any successful matches. Planning is now underway for the next ARW family finding event which will be an Exchange Day on the 26th March 2025. The last of these was held pre- the Covid pandemic so we are excited to be relaunching these events and look forward to their success in matching children with families. If you are an approved adopter and interested in attending please speak to your adoption agency and they will refer you to us.



## The Adoption Barometer 2024

## This year there were 4,000 responses UK-wide, with 316 of those in Wales.

Wales was also the only UK region to score 'good' for all elements of the assessment of current national policies in the early stages. Overall, adopters and adoptees in Wales are generally more positive than in other nations.

Whilst the overall findings were positive, there is still work to do to support adult adoptees, with only 50% feeling confident that suitable support is available when obtaining historical records and only 15% feeling confident that they can access suitable therapeutic services.

# Take a look at the key statistics on the next page -

## **Key statistics in Wales**



**77%** of new adopters agree their training prepared them well.



**37%** of families are facing severe challenges



**85%** of families who accessed core support said it had a positive impact



**63%** of adopters are satisfied with the quality of enhanced adoption support

### **Leavers and New starters**

From SEWAS, Adele Gough left the service in September 2024, to take up a new role in NAS as Adoption Support Development Manager and Sam Morgan, business support assistant left in August this year.

Claire Hereward is retiring from the Recruitment and Assessment Team within WBAS. However, we are fortunate to keep Claire as a social work member on adoption panel and as an independent assessor. Karyn Badger from the Recruitment and Assessment Team is also moving on having secured a post with CAFCASS as a guardian.

Adoption UK have said a sad farewell to Ann Bell, retiring after 16 years at Adoption UK. As both an adoptee and an adoptive parent, her knowledge and experience were invaluable to the development of adoption support services in Wales.

Also, within Adoption UK, Bek Burns joins as the new Director for Wales, bringing years of experience managing charities and working within trauma recovery services. Connected welcomes Becky Soundy as lead youth worker for Western Bay, Mid and West Wales. Pamela Leigh as lead youth worker, and Tami Robertson as support worker for North Wales.

NWAS are pleased to welcome Nia Hardaker who has recently joined the Service as Team Manager covering the middle region (Denbighshire & Conwy) and will also have lead responsibility for the Intermediary service.

MWW welcomed Neil Webb (Adoption Social Worker), who joined the team in October 2024. Emma Buckley (Marketing and Recruitment Officer) started in post in September 2024. Clara Lloyd (Adoption Social Worker Powys) joined the Powys team in September 2024.



WBAS are pleased to welcome Ffion Griffiths to the recruitment and assessment team

Within the NAS central team, we said a fond farewell to Chris Holmquist who retired in June following a lengthy career in both social work and teaching. We wish Chris well with his new ventures. We were pleased to welcome Adele Gough as the new Adoption Support Development Manager in October. Adele was previously an Adoption Support Social Worker with SEWAS so comes to us with a wealth of experience

## **Coming in 2025...**

As we enter 2025, the National Adoption Service will be continuing to support adopters, adopted young people and the adoption community across Wales; continuing to better inform prospective adopters on the needs of the children waiting and raise enquiries for the children currently waiting to be adopted.



To find out more on what's coming up in 2025, follow us and the local services across Wales on social media for the latest updates and news.











# Need more help? No problem.

#### Get in touch

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