



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Life Journey Work Newsletter

Issue 5

National Adoption Service Life Journey Work Newsletter 2025

Welcome to 'Baby Steps', which is our fourth Life Journey Work newsletter. This newsletter is for anyone who might find these ideas related to Life Journey Work useful, but parents of children at a development age of 0 to 6 may find it particularly helpful.

The overall message of the newsletter is that it is never too early to start a child's life journey work. The newsletter will share ideas, resources and developmental information, which we hope will support you in your Life Journey work with your child or children. This is not a prescriptive or finite list of resources; what we hope 'Baby Steps' will achieve is to spark your curiosity to find resources that work well for your own family.



The Adoption Barometer continues to show the importance of life journey information for adopted children and young people:

“Adopted young people and adults were asked to consider what protective and supportive factors they believed were most important to give adopted children (aged under 16) a stable foundation on which to prepare for the transition to adulthood. When considering what was important during childhood, this older group was more likely to focus on factors relating to their life history and identity. Adopted young people and adults were united in considering the willingness of their adoptive parents to talk with them about all aspects of adoption as being of high importance during their childhood years. This preference was even stronger among older adopted people and highlights the crucial importance of supporting openness about everything that adoption entails within safe and nurturing family relationships”

(Quote from Adoption Barometer June 2021)

We recognise that Life Journey work can feel huge and daunting to families. But your children want to hear their story from you. Parents are the very best people to be the ones who deliver their child's narrative and help them to make sense of their story. We hope that this newsletter will help you on your way.



National Updates

South East Wales Adoption Service



South East Wales Adoption Service
Achieving More Together



Raluca Miklovits

I am Raluca and I am the Life Journey Work Coordinator in the South East Wales region, also known as SEWAS.

There are great things happening in our region in terms of Life Journey Work: there is a lot of enthusiasm for good quality life journey books and later life letters, with most of these materials being quality assured by myself before being shared with adopters.

I have recently come across '**The Blanket Bears**' book, by adoptive dad, Samuel Langley-Swain. It is a wonderful story about "two scared little bears" and their adoption journey.

I think the book allows space for exploration and imagination, creating a gentle path towards more difficult conversations with young readers.



Mid and West Wales Adoption

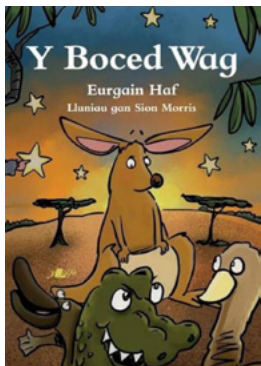


Sian Gibbon

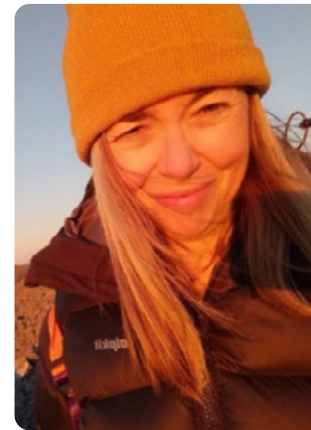
I am Siân Gibbon, and I am the Life Journey Work Coordinator for Adoption Mid & West Wales.

We have been focusing on life storytelling through play, using toys and puppetry. We use a lot of Todd Parr's books to help young children to learn about different topics related to adoption. The bold colours and vivid illustrations help children to digest information and messages that are presented in a visually appealing and child friendly way. 'Delly Duck' by Holly Marlow has proven to be popular amongst our families to help younger children to understand the adoption process.

One of my favourite books is by Eurgain Haf. It is the first Welsh language book that introduces the idea of adoption to younger children.



North Wales Adoption Service



Sarah Ryan

I am Sarah Ryan Life Journey social worker for North Wales Adoption Service. For families in North Wales we have our very popular Stay and Play group for preschool children in North Wales. This promotes the use of Theraplay within the group. In March 2025 we are also going to be launching a Life Journey group for parents of children aged between 0 to 6 years old. To find out more email adoption@wrexham.gov.uk.



One of my favourite resources is the **Tummy Ache game** by Orchard Toys. This is a great game for this age group. The game has simple rules. And you don't even have to play the game but just play around with the cards and be led by the child to make your worst meal and your best meal.

Vale, Valleys, and Cardiff Adoption



Tina James and Sara Jones

We are Sara Jones and Tina James, Life Journey social workers for VVC. We continue to work hard to improve the quality of life journey materials in our region. Our life journey workshops for prospective & approved adopters have been very successful in raising awareness of the importance of engaging children in life journey work from a young age but also supporting adopters with any worries that they may have. We are currently developing our life journey website, which will include a range of tools and resources to support parents and practitioners with life journey work.



One of Tina's favourite resources is **The Invisible String** by Patrice Karst. *'What I love about this book is it can be used as a tool to talk about many challenging topics (not just adoption) that parents and professionals face when discussing big emotions with children.'*

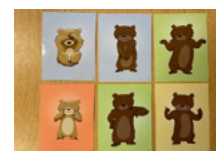
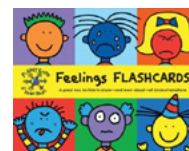


Western Bay Adoption



Sarah Vaughan

I'm Sarah Vaughan, the Life Journey Co-Ordinator, for the Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS). We have presented a number of online life journey workshops over the last year for adoptive parents for children of ages 0-6 years & 6 plus years. Our workshops are based on a child's stages of development. Similarly to this newsletter, the 0-6 years workshop focuses on how to introduce adoption themes to a young child in order to lay the foundations of telling them their own unique adoption story. We will continue to offer these in 2025 as well as 1 to 1 consultations for adoptive parents via our Life Journey & Contact Hub.



One of our favourite resources to use during life journey work are **feelings cards**. We really like the Bear Cards and Todd Parr's Feeling Cards.

Children will feel many different things when hearing their adoption story. Using resources like these cards help children understand, process & express their emotions in a non-threatening way. Both parents and professionals can use them with the children.



The Importance Of Stories

The Importance Of Stories

Stories, Storytelling and Life journey Work.

People have shared stories around the fire since prehistoric times. Stories are still enjoyed today through watching 'box sets', films and theatre shows. Or reading books and catching up with friends' lives.

Following a story line has the power to draw us in and to keep us "hooked". But are stories having any other impact on child development? Over the last decades we have seen an increase in the use of stories within therapeutic settings to encourage the development of attachments, processing trauma and understanding feelings. These are social, therapeutic, parallel and metaphorical stories and they can work like magic.

Steve Killick (2014), Clinical Psychologist says: *"A child learns about who they are through the stories the adults in their lives tell about them, they learn about their families and heritage through the family stories they may (or may not) hear. They learn about their culture through the myths, fairy tales and (hi)stories they are exposed to. These stories all contribute to the development of an identity, that in itself is no more than a story".*

One of the main benefits of stories and storytelling, as Margot Sunderland (2000) states is: *"stories are the natural way children learn about their feelings, and they don't learn about this half as well through explanation and reasoning."* The metaphors and symbols contained in stories give them a wide range of uses as every listener can apply the story to their own inner and outer world, making sense of their own realities by likening these with the symbols from the story.

The stories written by Kim Golding in her book **"Using Stories to Build Bridges with Traumatized Children"**, are meant to support the forming of positive attachments. This function relies on the understanding that, as the care giver creates narratives about the child's experiences, they also provide the child with a language for their thoughts and feelings, whilst directly influencing the way in which the child sees themselves, as a loveable and competent human being.

However, could stories increase a child's anxiety and instability by touching on quite powerful themes and by putting into words some complex feelings? We all remember the stories of the "The Three Little Pigs" and "Little Red Riding Hood". Within those, although we do come across *"brutality within certain fairytales, the context in which fairytales are told is a teaching, commenting and learning one"* (Estes, 1997).



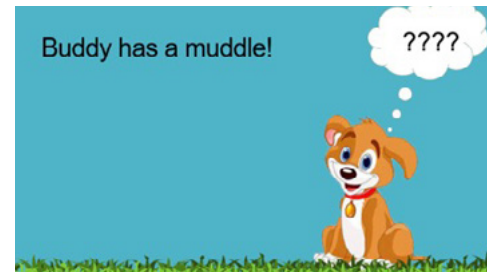
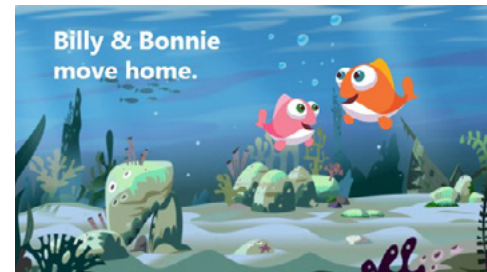
The Importance Of Stories

Stories, Storytelling and Life journey Work.

Throughout Wales the regional adoption services have been creating stories, which are to support children to make sense of their narrative. This is done by using a third person character such as animals, birds or fish. These characters are created to reflect a child's birth family/ adoptive family and a child's experience. These types of stories are called metaphorical or parallel stories. They give a child space to process and understand their story.

Stories are a tool that can be easily accessible from a very young age but can also grow with the child.

Examples of metaphorical or parallel stories:





Baby Steps 0-6

Baby Steps 0-6

This gives a child development perspective of Life Journey Work for children aged 0-6 years & relevant resources to use.

Baby Steps

A child development perspective of Life Journey Work for children aged 0-6.

- Brodzinsky, D (2011)

Important:

Every child's age and development is different. This is a broad guide.

Age: 0 to 4 years

During this period a child has no comprehension of terminology such as adoption, fostering or kinship care. A child's understanding is that family is the people who you live with.

An adoptive parent, foster or kinship carer's role is critical during this period by introducing the language of adoption or fostering. It allows the adoptive parent/carer to familiarise themselves with using terms such as adoption, fostering and birth parents etc. Perhaps more importantly it promotes an atmosphere of open communication within the home, so a child knows that they can ask questions and they will be answered. This is something to promote as early as possible. The key is repetition and continuing these conversations.

Age: 4 to 6 years

A child is in their ego centric stage of development which means that their understanding of the world revolves around them and their needs. This is a survival mechanism and an essential developmental phase. As a child approaches preschool age, he or she develops magical thinking. This is a natural phase in child play and magical thinking enables a child to play and have imagination. However, for children who have experienced a developmental trauma, the world of fantasy can be used to explain things, which the child cannot comprehend. This can lead to a child blaming themselves or making up incredible stories to fill in the gaps of their understanding.

At this age a child can be curious about where children come from. A child will not understand the word and concept of adoption until they understand that they were born the same as other children and grown in a woman's uterus. A child is beginning to get a concept of time and space. At 4 or 5 years old the child begins to grasp the context of the past. And that people and places exist outside of their direct environment.

Baby Steps 0-6

Baby Steps

Aged 0-6 years

Useful websites and YouTube resources

- [National Adoption Service](#)
- [Beacon House | Resources](#)
- [Safe Hands Thinking Minds | About Us](#)
- [Richard Rose | Therapeutic Life Story Work - Sharing Lives/Sharing Stories](#)
- [Dr Karen Treisman – YouTube](#)
- [Karen Treisman | TEDxWarwickSalon | Good Relationships Are The Key To Healing Trauma](#)
- [Oprah Winfrey & Dr. Bruce Perry in Conversation | SXSW EDU 2021](#)

Resources for adoptive carers, foster carers and social care workers.

- *A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting* | Sarah Naish
- *Attaching through Love Hugs, and Play* | Deborah D Gray
- *Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption* | Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek.
- *Bruised Before Birth* | Joan McNamara
- *Bubble Wrapped Children* | Helen Oakwater
- *Building the Bonds of Attachment* | Daniel Hughes
- *Nurturing Attachments - Supporting children who are fostered & Adopted* | Kim S Golding
- *Parenting with Theraplay* | Vivien Norris/Helen Rodwell
- *Oprah Winfrey & Dr. Bruce Perry in Conversation* | SXSW EDU 2021 - YouTube

Resources for children aged: 0 to 6 years

- *Blanket Bears* by Samuel Langley-Swain and Ashlee Spink.
- *Y Boded Wag* by Eurgain Haf.
- *We Belong Together* by Todd Parr
- *Delly Duck – Why a little duck couldn't stay with his birth mother* by Holly Marlow and Suzy Garland.
- *Love Makes A Family* by Sophie Beer.
- *The Most Precious Present In The World* by Becky Edwards.
- *Nutmeg Gets Adopted* by Judith Foxon.
- *Elfa and a Box of Memories* by Michelle Bell.
- *The Teazle's Baby Bunny* by Susan Bagnall.
- *Finding a Family for Tommy* by Rebecca Daniel.



Play Suggestions

Play Suggestions

In terms of activities with children at this age these are the ones that are most effective on top of reading stories:

1. **Role play** – using props to help children to learn about what babies & children need from their parents to grow into happy, healthy and safe boys and girls. This doesn't have to be role play. This can be done using dolls in a doll's house to help children to learn about living in a safe environment which should be the family home and what that constitutes e.g. having a warm home, food in the cupboards and fridge, age-appropriate toys etc.
2. **Storytelling through the use of puppetry** – Using puppets (including hand and finger puppets) to tell stories or reenact certain scenarios that are relatable to the child's life story but from a character's perspective. Puppetry is a great tool to communicate with children older than 5 who find it difficult to talk directly about their early life experiences.
3. **Storytelling through the use of toys** – Same concept as the puppetry but instead using toys of any kind (figurines, dolls, stuffed toys etc). Use animal figurines and ask the child to pick an animal that represent their mum, dad, brother, sister, foster carer etc. This works well when talking to children about different families and it helps to follow the child's interest. For example, using different types of dinosaurs with a little one who is dinosaur obsessed.
4. **Roadmap** – great during transitions process and helping children to understand (to some degree) the concept of moving from one home to another or moving schools etc. A child's mat with a road on it could be used - children love to use the car along the road. Can work well with a train set as well. Drawing, colouring, painting, using playdough – something so simple but children at this age enjoy and love seeing examples put into their life story books. Ask little ones to draw their family, their house, their pet etc.
5. **Building strong walls** – using blocks to help children to think about all the different things that parents need to do to look after their children. Generally suitable for 5 year olds and over.
6. **Hand and footprints** – focus on identity and can be added into the children's life story books.





My Story

My Story

The voice of a nearly 16-year old

I was adopted as a young baby, I don't remember ever being told I am adopted; I've just always known that I am. Mum told me that initially they called me their special adopted beautiful girl. Then when I was about 3 years of age I learnt about my 'tummy family'. Apparently, I didn't take this news very well and I didn't want to believe that I didn't grow in mum's belly but I don't remember this; I've just always known I have another family. Now I'm older I think of it as I have 'my family' but I also have connections to two other families, my birth family and my foster family who we still have contact with.

I didn't have a life journey book; I did have a book from my foster carer about my life with them, which my parent's told me I looked at a lot because I liked looking at pictures of me; I still look through it occasionally. I guess it wasn't until I was about 6 years of age that I started to put the puzzle together. At this age, me and dad made our own life journey book, it was full of glitter and stickers! I don't have any photos of my birth family, so sometimes we would draw a picture of what we thought they looked like. Sometimes I wanted to spend ages on the book and other times I didn't. Dad said this was when I really started to ask questions but sometimes, I didn't want to talk at all, I don't know why because I did have questions. Apparently, I always liked to talk when we were in

the car. Another time I always asked questions was bedtime, I still do this. We had lots of books about different types of family and adoption books that changed as I grew older, I found learning through stories good, it worked for me. I had my favourites, but it took some time to find them.

I learnt about my birth siblings when I was about 7 years of age and mum said I talked about this for some time afterwards. When I was a teenager, I was surprised that I had forgotten some of the information about them. It was like my brain just couldn't retain all the details. Mum said this was normal, so we would always go over what I knew. I knew most of my story by the time I was 12 years of age. For a number of reasons, mum and dad didn't tell me one of the trickier parts of my story until I was 14 years of age. To be honest, I had guessed the final part of it anyway. I don't want to read my later life letter yet, I don't feel ready, but I know it's there for me. I didn't want to talk much as a teenager about this stuff, mum and dad had to keep checking in with me. I don't know why, sometimes it was just too much.

I do think it's positive that I am adopted but I don't think people including school fully understand how being adopted can affect you. I know I am loved a lot by my family and this helps. Over the years



I have felt lots of different feelings about being adopted, as a young child, I was confused and curious. As I grew older I've felt lots of different things like resentment, confusion, disconnected, rejection, abandoned, alone, angry and sad. Some feelings I just can't explain, maybe because they've been a mixture of them all at the same time. I do think about my birth family a lot. It is what it is! I just have to get on with it. Do I want to search for my birth family, probably, but not everyone does. Now I'm older, if I do this, I definitely want mum and dad with me. We talk about all the possible different outcomes if I do this, to be honest, it feels a bit scary and a lot to think about. I'm glad I can talk about it though, it helps.



Difficult Stories About Adoption

Difficult Stories About Adoption

An online support group

Difficult Stories About Adoption is a support group for adopters.

On the 24th October 2024 Adoption UK Cymru and the Life Journey Work Co-ordinators from across Wales launched a support group for parents to talk all things “Life Journey”. This is an online ‘Zoom’ group which takes place in the evening between 7.30 pm and 9 pm.

If you are an adoptive parent and would like to attend this group please email Philippa Williams. Her email is **philippa.williams@adoptionuk.org.uk**



Useful Contacts

Below is a list of the Life Journey Work co-ordinators who are in post across Wales currently. It would be useful to know who to contact in your area if you need guidance, advice or have access to any training opportunities.

Mid and West Wales Adoption Service

Sian E Gibbon | SEGibbon@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

North Wales Adoption Service

Sarah Ryan | Sarah.Ryan@wrexham.gov.uk

South East Wales Adoption Service

Raluca Miklovits | Raluca.Miklovits@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Vale Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service

Tina James | tjames@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Sara Jones | sarajones@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Western Bay Adoption Service

Sarah Vaughan | s.vaughan1@westernbayadoption.org

If you have developed anything new to help with good practice or know of any information on delivering life journey work please contact your adoption service representative above or the National Adoption Service Central Team on contact@adoptcymru.com

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg.





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Need more help? No problem.

Get in touch with NAS Central Team

Tel: +44(0) 29 2087 3927

E-mail: contact@adoptcymru.com

Website: www.adoptcymru.com