



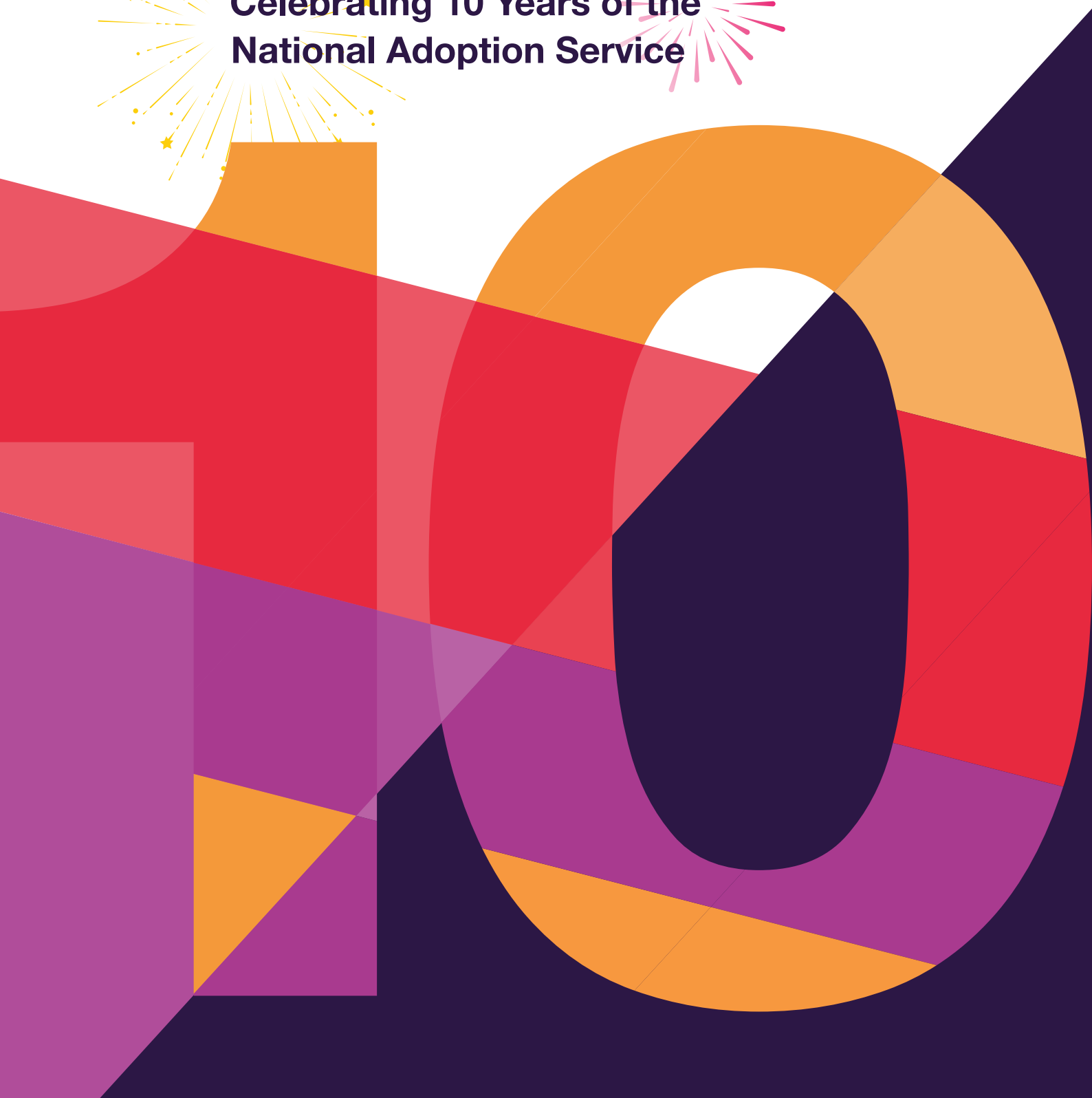
Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Annual Report

2024/25

**Celebrating 10 Years of the
National Adoption Service**



Contents

03	Director's foreword
04	About us
06	Our journey
08	What has changed over the last 10 years?
14	Creating a solid foundation
22	Overview 2024/25
23	Highlights from the past year
28	Celebrating good practice
30	Finance update
30	Final comments
31	A decade in pictures



Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Goglewin 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 Goglewin
Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE



Cymdeithas ar gyfer Maethu,
Gofal Perthynas a Mabwysiadu
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

Director's foreword

I am proud to present to you the National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS) Annual Report for 2024/25. This year, we celebrated 10 years of NAS, so we have produced a special '10-year Anniversary' report to commemorate this.

Since its inception, NAS has led a transformative journey, one that has redefined how adoption services are delivered across the nation. Through a collaborative, multi-agency approach, the service has built a modern and inclusive adoption system that places the needs of children and families at the forefront.

This milestone marks not only 10 years of progress but also a celebration of the thousands of lives changed. We extend our deepest gratitude to the adopters who have opened their hearts and homes, the dedicated professionals who work tirelessly, and the communities that have supported our vision to provide children with improved adoption services.

While we reflect on the achievements, we also acknowledge the ongoing challenges. Misconceptions about who can adopt persist; some children, particularly sibling groups, those with complex needs, and older children, continue to wait longer for their adoptive families. There are also changes to the policy and service landscape that we still want to make.

NAS remains committed to breaking down barriers, championing inclusivity, and ensuring that every child can thrive. With continued support, innovation, and compassion, we look forward to the next chapter in this vital work: building a future where every child finds the family they deserve.



Suzanne Griffiths

Suzanne Griffiths
Director of the National
Adoption Service
for Wales



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 and education services.

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.

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:

- The 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 their local authorities.

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

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

Abbreviations used in this report:

AMWW	Adoption Mid and West Wales
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
B's	Barnardo's
AUK	Adoption UK Cymru
AFKA	AFKA Cymru
LAs	Local Authorities

Our journey

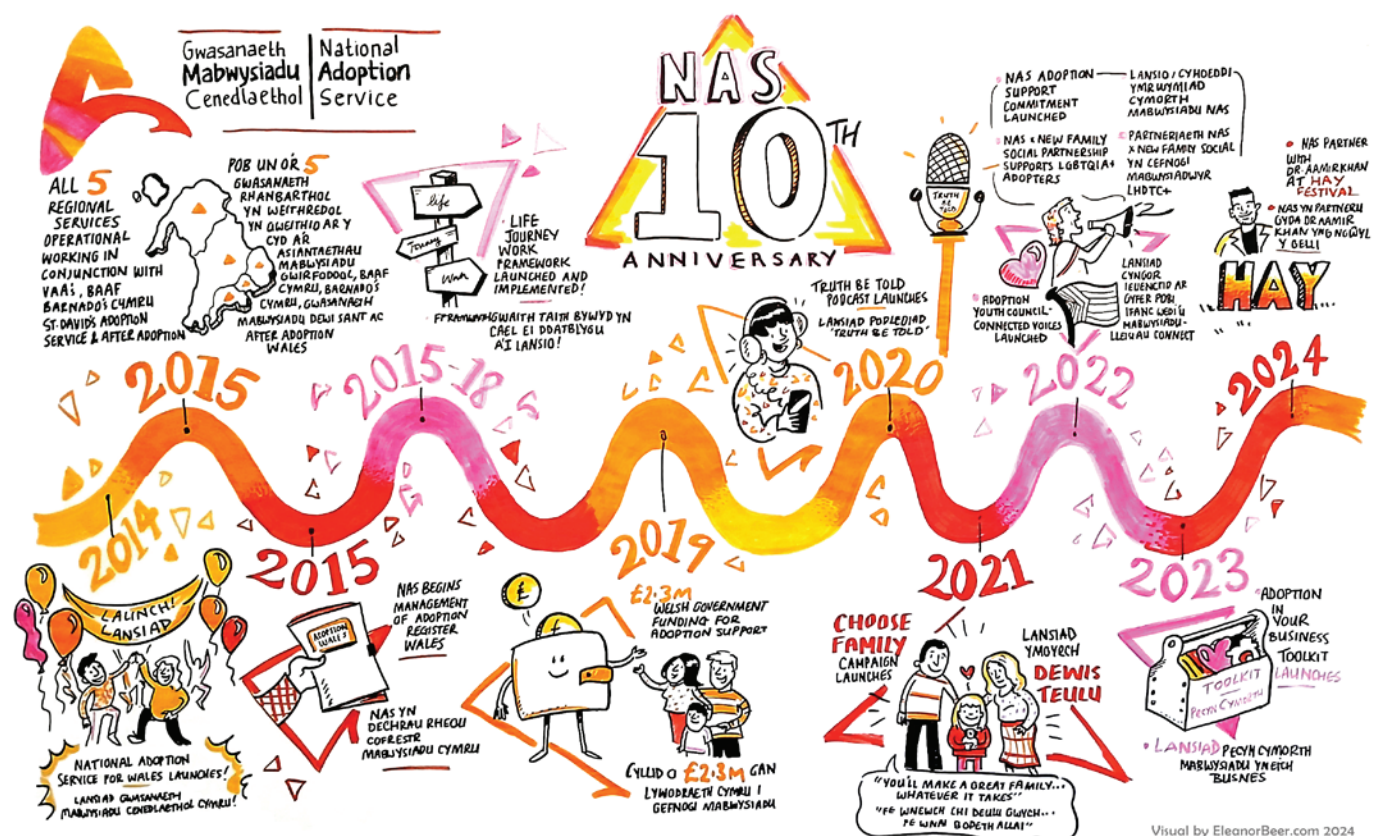
NAS has significantly reshaped the adoption landscape since its formation in 2014. During this time, it has placed over 3,100 children with 2,500 families and provided ongoing support to thousands of individuals affected by adoption.

Adoption touches a substantial portion of the Welsh population. While adopted individuals make up about 4%, when including birth families and adopters, the figure rises to an estimated 18%. There are currently around 4,200 adopted children under 18 in Wales, with approximately 3,300 of them being of school age, and an estimated 7,500 adopted adults.

Each year the service works with about 1,000 children where a plan for adoption is being considered or is agreed. In addition, there are circa 1,650 arrangements for adoption support in place for children who are newly placed or adopted, with a small number waiting to be assessed. Letterbox (aka indirect) contact is currently being supported for just over 4,000 children, alongside more direct contact arrangements, which are being supported for more children over recent years.

Circa 310¹ Welsh children leave the looked after service through adoption each year. In recent years, this is an average of 14% of all children who leave care each year.

NAS has not only improved the quality and accessibility of adoption services but also raised public awareness, modernised services, and fostered strong partnerships across a range of sectors.



¹ Average Adoption Orders granted each year since 2014/15 (317) rounded down to nearest hundred



Since its inception, NAS has:

- **Improved placement outcomes**, reducing the number of children waiting to be adopted, increased sibling placements, increased diversity and improved timeframes for both child placements and adopter approvals.
- **Improved adoption support** through our Adoption Support Framework and the Adoption Support Commitment, which has led to a more consistent range of services being made available across Wales, including more direct contact.
- **Raised awareness of adoption** through several award-winning campaigns, including See the Whole Child, Be the Parent..., and Choose Family, and influenced policy and practice within Wales and beyond.
- **Increased service user involvement** within all services, whilst working with third sector partners to create national engagement mechanisms, Adopter Voices, the Big Adoption Conversation and Connect Voices, to ensure that adopters and adopted young people can influence service development.
- **Digitalised services** such as the Adoption Register Wales (ARW) and the NAS website, which continues to evolve as a comprehensive resource for families and professionals.
- **Secured funding** via Welsh Government grants and supported third-sector partners in raising charitable funds.

We've done this by implementing a unique collaborative model involving local government, third sector and other partners and focusing on:

- **Engagement with services, staff and service users** at all levels within organisations that provide or support adoption services, including through national and regional governance arrangements and robust performance measurement.
- **Supporting and developing the workforce and prospective adopters** by encouraging and directly providing a range of training, including therapeutic techniques, Life Journey Work, whilst having close links with Social Care Wales. Collaborations with AFKA and Adoption UK Cymru led to the creation of post-approval training modules for adopters, tailored to diverse learning styles. These have been further developed by some services. In 2023, NAS launched the Employer Toolkit to help businesses support adoptive employees, with Admiral, Welsh Government and the Principality as key partners.
- We've supported some **specific initiatives for health and education staff** through our training and development services, including accessing additional funding for this to be expanded. In 2016, NAS supported the development of Getting it Right for Every Child, a guide for schools by AUK, followed by a version for parents, both based on consultations with adopters, children, and teachers. These continue to be well used and are currently being updated. In 2018, NAS partnered with Health colleagues and Practice Solutions to publish Care about Adoption – A Guide for Healthcare Professionals, launched in 2019/20.



*Above: Mark Drakeford
the then Minister for Health and
Social Services at the official NAS launch*

- **Promoting equality and diversity** by joining the Zero Racism Wales campaign in 2020 and in 2022. When a research project by Cardiff University highlighted disparities in adoption timelines for racially minoritised children, NAS was prompted to develop policy responses.
- **Facilitating research and UK-wide collaboration** by engaging with research bodies and commissioning our own research. NAS has supported the Wales Adoption Cohort Study led by the School of Psychology at Cardiff University, as well as working with CASCADE on numerous initiatives, including the 2023 Adoption Conference Series. We were also part of the Advisory Group for the Wellbeing in Schools & Colleges (WISC) research, focusing on care-experienced children. Our links with the Institute of Public Care have supported the development of our governance arrangements as well as our adoption support offer, including a [published research study](#). We've developed ties with Adopt England, the Scottish and English governments and the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA). NAS also played a role in the Public Law Working Group Adoption Subgroup, which [produced its report in 2024](#).
- **Developing and maintaining links with organisations that represent children and young people**, such as Voices from Care Cymru, Children in Wales and the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. In 2019, we partnered with the Children's Legal Centre to produce a leaflet for care experienced children about contact with their adopted siblings, entitled [Contact and what it means for you](#).
- **Promoting consistency** through a collaborative approach to the development of good practice frameworks and guidance plus the All-Wales Adoption Policies and Procedures.

What has changed over the 10 years?

The current NAS priorities are reflective of the themes and priorities that have underpinned the strategy. They are a useful way of demonstrating the change that has occurred.



The best families for our children

Since 2014, the NAS has worked to transform adoption in Wales, ensuring children with adoption plans find safe, loving families without delay. At the start of our story, a national review led to a unified recruitment strategy and the integration of what is now the new bilingual Adoption Register Wales (ARW), into the service. This enabled us to streamline the matching process through the Link Maker platform. It also introduced managed adopter access and different ways of supporting the matching process.

In 2015, NAS introduced the Best Practice Guide for Family Finding, promoting early, tailored planning for each child. Digital tools and events like Adoption Activity Days and Exchange Days gave prospective adopters meaningful opportunities to connect with children, especially those who had waited the longest.

By 2017, NAS launched the Adopting Together Service (ATS), a groundbreaking and award-winning collaboration between voluntary and statutory agencies. ATS focused on children 'hardest to place' – older children, sibling groups, and those with complex needs – offering not just matching but therapeutic and psychological support for families. Since its launch, 32 children have been matched with 21 families, significantly improving their life chances and preventing long-term care arrangements.

Through innovation, collaboration, and compassion, NAS continues to ensure that every child finds not just a home, but the best possible family.

Campaigns that changed minds: marketing has played a crucial role in reshaping public perceptions and has become increasingly sophisticated as the years have progressed.

The, See the Whole Child, campaign in 2016 and the, Become the Parent, campaign in 2019 used real stories and multimedia platforms to highlight the joys and realities of adoption. In 2021, the award winning, Choose Family, campaign focused on encouraging the adoption of older children, boys, and sibling groups. It reached over a million viewers and led to a noticeable spike in enquiries. The campaign was relaunched in 2023, using platforms such as TikTok and Spotify to maximise reach.

In 2020, NAS launched the 'Truth Be Told' Podcast, a bilingual Podcast featuring adopters from across Wales. Produced by Cowshed, the service's PR and Marketing Company, it won a Gold award at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Pride Cymru awards in 2021. The second series delved deeper into some of the more difficult topics around adoption



such as the needs of older children, sibling groups and those with complex needs. This went on to win a Silver Award at the British Podcast Awards in 2023. The award was collected by a member of Connect Voices (Adoption Youth Council), seen here with TV personality, Sam Thompson.

In recent years, the assessment process for adopters has become more streamlined, with the introduction of a two-stage assessment process, while maintaining rigorous standards.

The years of the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges, but services adapted swiftly. Virtual assessments, remote GP consultations, and digital resources ensured continuity.

In the following years, the [Good Practice Guide for Transition and Early Support](#) introduced structured approaches like Understanding the Child Days and Trauma Nurture Timelines, ensuring families were well-prepared and supported from the outset through models that are similar but less intense than the Adopting Together Service. By 2023, these practices were being implemented across all regions in Wales.



The introduction of the Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) process now offers children the chance to move into their permanent homes more quickly, reducing the number of transitions and promoting stability in placements. The service is growing, with dozens of households having already been trained and several placements successfully made.

Our adoption support journey

In 2014, adoption support in Wales was fragmented and under-resourced. Recognising this, NAS began a national effort to build a coordinated, responsive system. With guidance from the Institute of Public Care, the Adoption Support Framework was developed, offering a clear vision for the support that adoptive families and their children should have throughout their journey.

By 2015, the framework was structured into three tiers – universal, targeted, and specialist – allowing tailored support. New adopters gained access to Adoption UK memberships and parenting training. In 2016, the framework was formally adopted, and the Adopter's Guide was launched to provide clear, accessible information.

In 2017, NAS advocated for legal reforms to embed support plans into care planning. Adoption UK's First 1000 Days project offered vital early support, including helplines, peer networks, and training. Between 2018 and 2019, training modules and therapeutic services like TESSA (now PATHway) were developed, backed by Welsh Government investment.

An independent evaluation in 2020 confirmed progress, with families reporting improved access and confidence. In 2021, NAS published its Adoption Support Commitment, promoting community-based, collaborative support. The 2022 launch reaffirmed this promise.

By 2023, NAS focused on refining systems through data and performance metrics, ensuring future planning is evidence-based and responsive to evolving needs.

The NAS Adoption Support Commitment now serves as a model of inclusive, informed, and accessible support for all those affected by adoption. This is complemented by a [Good Practice Guide for Adoption Support](#).

With a strong foundation now in place, Wales is well-positioned to continue leading the way in adoption support across the UK.



Life Journey Work

In 2017, a new [Framework](#) for Life Journey Work (LJW) was introduced. This framework, co-produced with children, young people, and adopters, marked a change in practice, aiming to improve the availability of Life Journey Work to families, and allowing adoptive families to take more ownership and control of their child's story.

The introduction of a comprehensive toolkit, and Good Practice Guide, provided structured guidance and resources, all made accessible through the NAS website and supported by AFKA, who provided training and ongoing support to staff across Wales.

The Framework was formally launched in January 2019 at a conference that was held in Wales

shortly after the Welsh Government investment enabled the creation of a champion coordinator role in each of the five NAS regions.

The development and implementation of Life Journey Work in adoption services has seen significant progress since 2014. Before NAS, fewer than 25% of children had life journey materials prepared before their second adoption review. By the end of 2024/25, the proportion of children with life journey materials in place by their second adoption review rose to 65%. A more recent focus on ensuring the availability of specific elements of the LJW at an earlier stage, by the time of the matching panel, has also improved, with 75% or more available over the last five years.

Contact

Historically, adoption was seen as a complete severance from a child's past, with identity being redefined from the point of adoption. This began to change with the Adoption Act 1976, which allowed adult adoptees access to their original birth certificates. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 marked a further shift by emphasising children's rights and requiring consideration of contact with birth families, including siblings, alongside various court judgements which set the conditions for this in practice.

Despite these legislative advancements, contact arrangements had often remained limited, primarily indirect through letterbox contact, and inadequately resourced. Research published in 2020² showed that Wales was significantly different to the other UK nations in its reliance on letterbox arrangements in adoption.

NAS has taken a lead role in modernising contact practices. In 2018, NAS provided an issues paper for a scoping event with Welsh Government and other stakeholders, while Adoption UK Cymru and the former After Adoption were commissioned to undertake consultation with adopters and adopted children and young people.

The subsequent development of the NAS [Good Practice Guide for Contact](#) marked a growing recognition of the importance of both direct and indirect contact, where safe for the child, with an emphasis on initial meetings and regular reviews of contact arrangements. The guiding principles of the document advocate for a child-centred approach, where contact should be seen as beneficial and in the child's best interests, with decisions tailored to each child's unique needs and circumstances. It advocates that arrangements should be flexible, reviewed regularly, and include early and timely support for all parties involved.

By 2022, improvements to contact arrangements had become a strategic priority for NAS. All regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) in Wales began working to increase meetings between birth parents and adopters. These are currently taking place for at least a third of all placements.

In 2023, further steps were taken to improve practice, including funding training on the Together or Apart guidance for local authority staff, aimed at enhancing understanding of adopted siblings' needs. A [Contact Toolkit](#) was issued alongside this, which complements the Good Practice Guide by providing practical approaches aimed at supporting professionals. This was rolled out across Wales.

The number of indirect letterbox contact arrangements in place has averaged at around 3,700 per year since NAS started collecting the data and stood at over 4,000 at the end of 2024/25.

² Post-adoption contact and adoptive parents' receptiveness to direct contact in the four nations of the UK ' Jones, C., MacDonald, M., & Brooks, R. (2020, Jul 17). University of Strathclyde.

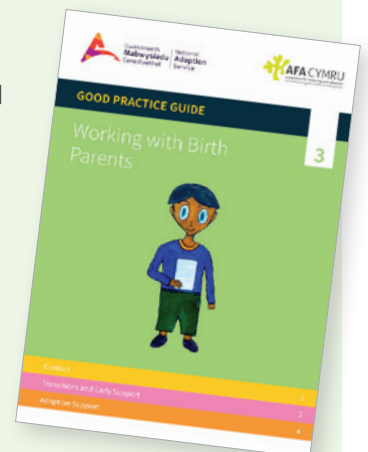


Work with birth parents

Changing how services engage with and support birth parents was a key part of the changes to Life Journey Work and Contact outlined above. Both required a supportive and responsive approach that works sensitively and in an individualised way with birth parents, meeting their needs as well as those of the child.

A high proportion of birth parents, generally those who are in touch with services, are consistently contacted and offered a service. Over time, we've seen 20–30% of these birth parents take up the offer of a service shortly after it is offered, although a bigger number tend to do so at a later stage. On average, more than 300 birth parents are supported in any given year, and at its highest, this reached around 500.

Some services had pre-existing individual and group-based services offering support, but the Welsh Government investment in 2019 enabled all services to focus on improving this aspect of support. The Good Practice Guide for Working with Birth Parents brought together existing good practice and research to provide a framework for better services and support.



Opening the door to the past: access to adoption records

For many adopted adults, birth parents, and relatives, accessing adoption records is more than a legal right – it's a deeply personal journey to understand their identity and history. However, this vital service has been under-prioritised, under-resourced, and is often frustratingly slow.

Access is currently available only to adopted individuals over 18, birth parents, siblings, and certain other relatives. The process is far from straightforward, with different rules for adopted people depending on whether the adoption took place before or after the 2002 Adoption and Children Act. Delays in retrieving archived records are common, with occasions where they are not available at all. There's also a shortage of social workers with the specialist skills needed to support people through this sensitive process, and very few alternative services available.



NAS has made improving access to records a key priority in its latest strategic plan. This includes:

- Raising awareness of the emotional and practical importance of birth records.
- Collaborating with the English IASA³ project, which is enabling the development of new guidance tailored for Wales.
- Training more staff and sharing best practices to build a stronger, more knowledgeable staff group.

NAS is also preparing for the growing number of young adults adopted after 2002, supported through the post commencement arrangements, who often have more complex emotional needs and require more intensive support.

It's not just adoptees seeking answers – birth parents, adult birth siblings and some other relatives can also access support to contact their adopted relative. The number of requests from adopted adults wishing to access their birth records or be supported to make contact with their birth relatives has fallen, as has the number of birth parents, or other relatives, asking for support. There has, however, been an increase in adult birth siblings seeking support to trace or contact their siblings. Some of this reduction will be linked to the inability to access a service, but increasingly, the role that social media plays and advances in DNA testing play a part.

³ *Improving Adoption Services for Adults: [Maintaining Relationships for adopted people](#) | Adoption England*

Adoption: A lifelong journey, not a one-time event

NAS has become an advocate for recognising adoption as a lifelong experience – one that shapes the lives of adoptees, birth families, and adoptive parents well beyond the legal process.

Since 2016, NAS has worked to embed this understanding into law, policy, and everyday practice. The opportunity to influence Welsh Government has come via the former Ministerial Advisory Group, the current Transformation Delivery Group, Corporate Parenting Implementation Group and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) legislation. Our influence also extends beyond Wales.

A major milestone came with the Adoption and Social Work Act 2017, which included a small number of clauses that applied to Wales. For the first time, courts were required to consider the lifelong needs of adopted children and to treat adoptive parents as central figures in contested hearings. This was a landmark shift – recognising that emotional security and attachment to prospective adoptive parents was important and deserved parity in court proceedings.

NAS has created safe spaces for honest conversations, such as the Big Adoption Conversation events, where people can share the emotional realities of adoption, including the pain of being part of a “lost generation” with unmet needs and the need for ongoing support.

Historical adoption practices

In 2022, a UK Parliament Joint Human Rights Committee report exposed the devastating impact of forced adoptions between 1949 and 1976. NAS responded with compassion and leadership, supporting a public apology from the Welsh Government in April 2023, following a personal apology by the then Deputy Minister Julie Morgan MS at a Big Adoption Conversation event.

In partnership with St David's Adoption Service and Adoption UK, NAS has piloted the UK's first Access to Records Service, giving those affected by historical adoptions before 1976 the chance to reclaim their stories. Crucially, this service was co-designed with the people who lived through those experiences.

Empowering Voices in Adoption across Wales

Over the past decade, Wales has transformed how adopted children, young people, and adopters are heard and supported. From the very beginning, the National Adoption Service (NAS) made it a priority to listen, launching consultations with adopters and adopted youth to shape a more inclusive adoption experience.

In 2016, a groundbreaking engagement strategy was born, co-created with a wide range of voices: adopters, social workers, regional staff, and most importantly, young people themselves, through the Talk Adoption initiative.

By 2017, the spotlight widened to include adoptive parents, with the launch of Adopter Voice, a dynamic platform developed by Adoption UK (AUK) for NAS. Through support groups, surveys, and events, it captured real-life experiences and sparked meaningful conversations, leading to the creation of the Adoption Voices Wales website and the annual Big Adoption Conversation.

When After Adoption closed in 2019, NAS and AUK stepped up, launching Connect – a Welsh Government-backed service for adopted children and young people. This was built on three powerful pillars:

- **Connected Groups:** Safe, supportive spaces for adopted children and young people to meet and receive support.
- **Accessible Information:** Content on the Connect website designed by children and young people.
- **Youth Voice:** A structured platform for children and young people to shape policy, culminating in the 2021 launch of Connect Voices, Wales's very own adoption Youth Council.

Throughout, NAS has remained committed to listening, regularly engaging service users in reviews and new developments within services, and nationally, ensuring their voices continue to shape the future of adoption in Wales.



Creating a solid foundation: governance, finance and improvement

Governance

A solid structure is critical to every successful service and NAS has spent the last decade building a structure that enables it, and latterly Foster Wales, to function effectively.

Originally, in line with the legal basis, NAS managed this through an Advisory Group and Governance Board. By 2019, these merged into a single, streamlined Combined Governance Board, shaped with input from stakeholders and expert advice from the Institute for Public Care (IPC). This was closely followed by a new Partnership Agreement, signed by all 22 Welsh local authorities. This committed to a way of working, characterised by accountability and shared ownership, integration between national and regional teams, collaboration and smarter resource sharing, and a business-minded approach to maximise sector impact.

Alongside this, NAS also played a key role in supporting the National Fostering Framework (NFF), part of the Welsh Government's drive to improve outcomes for children. This led to the creation of Foster Wales in 2021 – a national network of local authority fostering services working together, though with a different model to NAS.

To bring it all together, the WLGA Executive Board approved the formation of a Joint Committee in October 2021, officially launched in early 2024. This committee, made up of Council Members, meets twice a year to:

- Approve budgets and work programmes
- Review progress and annual reports
- Oversee the agreement for the host authority support of the Director's office

By 2022, NAS had expanded its central team, blending some roles across adoption and fostering, and formalised its hosting agreement with Cardiff Council, securing a strong, sustainable base for the future.

Funding the future of adoption in Wales

NAS has worked hard to build a strong financial foundation, although there is more work to do in this area.

Since its launch in 2014, NAS has been funded through a dedicated portion of the Revenue Support Grant, with additional grant aid made available from the Welsh Government. This includes a game-changing £2.3 million annual investment (since 2019) to expand adoption support services across both local authorities and voluntary agencies. In 2022/23, NAS secured further funding to bring its *Adopt Cymru and Beyond strategy to life* – raising public awareness through bold campaigns on TV, radio, and even buses and trains. In total, the Welsh Government commitment in grant aid for adoption over the last 10 years, via NAS, has been circa £16 million, a significant sum which is highly valued, albeit inherently insecure.

A significant proportion of the national budget is passported to regions and third sector partners (the VAAs): 91% (circa £2.72m), was made available to local authorities and VAAs in 2024/25, ensuring support reaches the people and places that need it most.



NAS has also helped third-sector partners unlock £8 million in additional funding, including £5 million from the Big Lottery Fund. This has powered innovative services like: PATHway (formerly TESSA), Adopting Together and Connect (for children and young people).

In 2023, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) commissioned a review of NAS and Foster Wales's funding model. It identified that national coordination is delivering real value by helping local authorities improve outcomes for children and attract more resources. The review also called for clearer visibility of future costs and stronger medium-term financial planning.

In 2024, the NAS Governance Board commissioned a review of the operational finances that are available to the regions, VAA's and health services.

Driving excellence: how NAS measures and improves adoption services

At the heart of NAS and its success is a commitment to learning, improving, and delivering the best possible outcomes for children and families across Wales.

To make that happen, NAS has built a strong foundation in performance and practice. It all starts with the Performance Measurement Framework (PMF), originally developed by the Welsh Government and now operated by NAS. This framework gives a clear picture of how adoption services are performing, helping NAS services stay focused on what matters most.

Since 2018, NAS has partnered with Data Cymru to collect and analyse its performance data, informing quarterly and annual reports to meet statutory requirements and provide valuable insights into services for children, adopters, and everyone affected by adoption.

However, the approach is about more than just data.

To focus on practice and service standards, NAS has introduced various Frameworks and Good Practice Guides and, in 2023, launched the All-Wales Adoption Policies and Procedures – a unified compendium for professionals, now easily accessible via the NAS App.

NAS also works closely with AFKA to support specialist practice development and regularly collaborates with research bodies to stay at the cutting edge of adoption knowledge. One specific example is the Wales Adoption Cohort Study, led by Professor Katherine Shelton at Cardiff University. This pioneering research tracks the neurocognitive and emotional development of a cohort of children adopted from care in Wales. It's revealing powerful insights into the lasting impact of early trauma and helping shape better support at home and in school.

WHAT HAS ALL THIS MEANT FOR SERVICE DELIVERY?

2015-2025

Adoptive Placements



The last ten years has seen the numbers of children being considered for adoption, and subsequently adopted, fall. Related to changes in how it is viewed within the legal system and improvements in services that support children to remain within their birth families or communities, Placement Orders have fallen by circa 20% and the numbers of children being adopted by a third.

All Wales Placement Orders

15/16	307	20/21	261
16/17	375	21/22	230
17/18	358	22/23	249
18/19	338	23/24	230
19/20	275	24/25	273

Adoption orders granted Welsh Government data

14/15	385	19/20	300
15/16	341	20/21	270
16/17	314	21/22	285
17/18	305	22/23	250
18/19	310	23/24	255



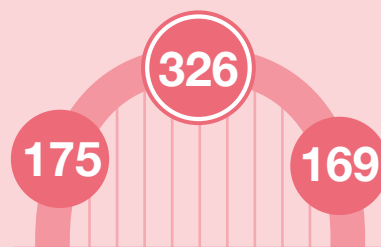
All Wales average time, in months, from CLA to PFA



All Wales average time, in months, from Placement Order to Child PFA

The average time between a child becoming looked after (**CLA** – Child Looked After) and being placed in their adoptive home (**PFA** – Placed for Adoption) increased during Covid and remains at a slightly higher level of circa 18 months.

Within this, it takes an average of 10 months between the Placement Order being granted and the move happening which has remained stable over the last six years. Timeframes for children are increasingly affected by legal challenges and more individualised methods of preparing and supporting moving a child into their adopted home.



All Wales Children Waiting

The number of children waiting to be adopted had fallen following a peak in 2017/18, but this has risen a little again in the last year.

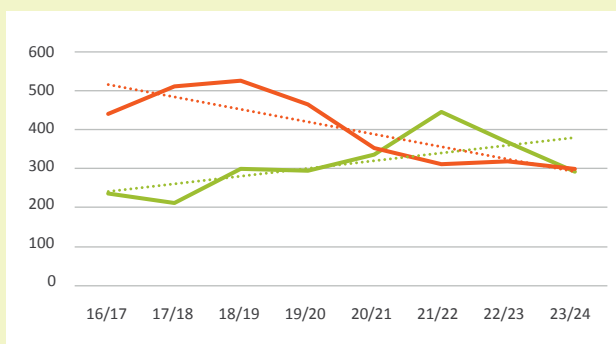
15/16	175	17/18	326	24/25	169
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14/15
294
19/20
250
24/25
170



All Wales Approved Adopters

Over time, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of people coming forward to adopt. The number of adopter approvals increased during the COVID pandemic but has dropped since then, coinciding with the introduction of the new 2-stage approval process. Our marketing activities continue to focus on the recruitment of suitable adopters to meet the needs of the children.



Placements Needed compared with Adopters Available

For the last few years NAS has been recruiting sufficient numbers of adopters but this has changed in the last year.

Adopters available

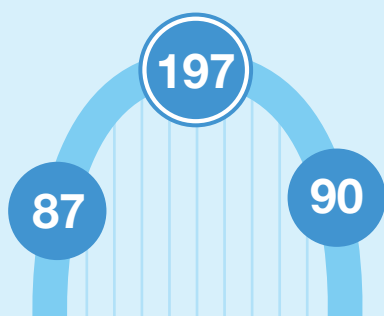
Placements needed



Diversity of Approved Adopters

There have been encouraging changes in the diversity of adopters approved. Adoption by same sex couples have risen to 22% and by single people to 10%, the proportion of adopters from BAME or mixed ethnicity backgrounds has increased to 17%.

17/18
87
21/22
197
24/25
90



All Wales Adopters Waiting

The number of adopters waiting for a match peaked in 2021/22, following the increase in approvals during the Covid pandemic. This has been gradually falling since and at the end of March 2025, there were less than 100 adopters waiting. The reasons for this vary but most are actively waiting for a match.

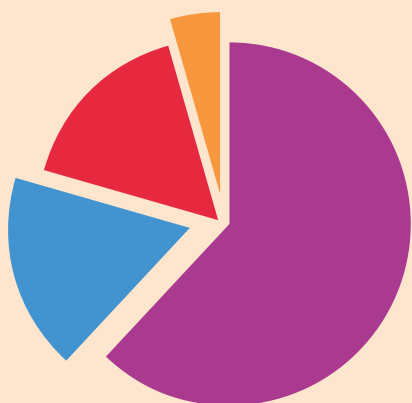
Adoption Support

What trends characterise adoption support services over the last 10 years?

Demand for formal adoption support assessments has dropped over time, however, some of the change is linked to the changing pattern of services which means that some services are accessed without a formal assessment and some regions have developed different ways of responding to initial demand. There are also waiting lists for assessments in some regions currently.

Adoption Support Activity as of Q4 2024/25

As at the end of 2024/25, there were over 1,650 active adoption support cases, including those families receiving support via the Pathways and Connected services. There were also 72 children across Wales waiting for an assessment.



- 1048** Number of active adoption support cases (receiving a service)
- 297** Number of active Pathways arrangements
- 273** Number of active Connected arrangements
- 72** Number of children awaiting an adoption support assessment

↑ **17%**

The number of letterbox arrangements for contact has also increased over time.

All Wales Number of Letterbox Contacts

18/19	3281	22/23	3777
19/20	3891	23/24	4039
20/21	3507	24/25	4091

↑ **11%**

All Wales New Assessments starting in respect of children not currently receiving an adoption support service

18/19	216	21/22	267
19/20	314	22/23	235
20/21	312	23/24	214
		24/25	247

↑ **16%**

All Wales Children who had their Life Journey materials at 2nd adoption review

17/18	62%	21/22	70%
18/19	56%	22/23	61%
19/20	57%	23/24	71%
20/21	68%	24/25	65%

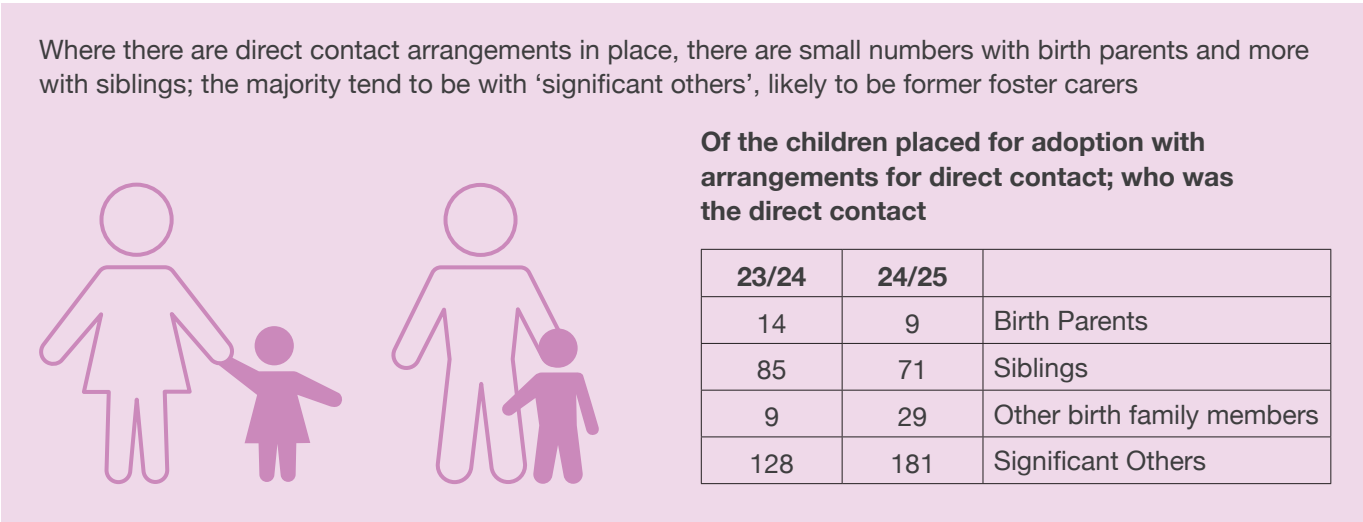
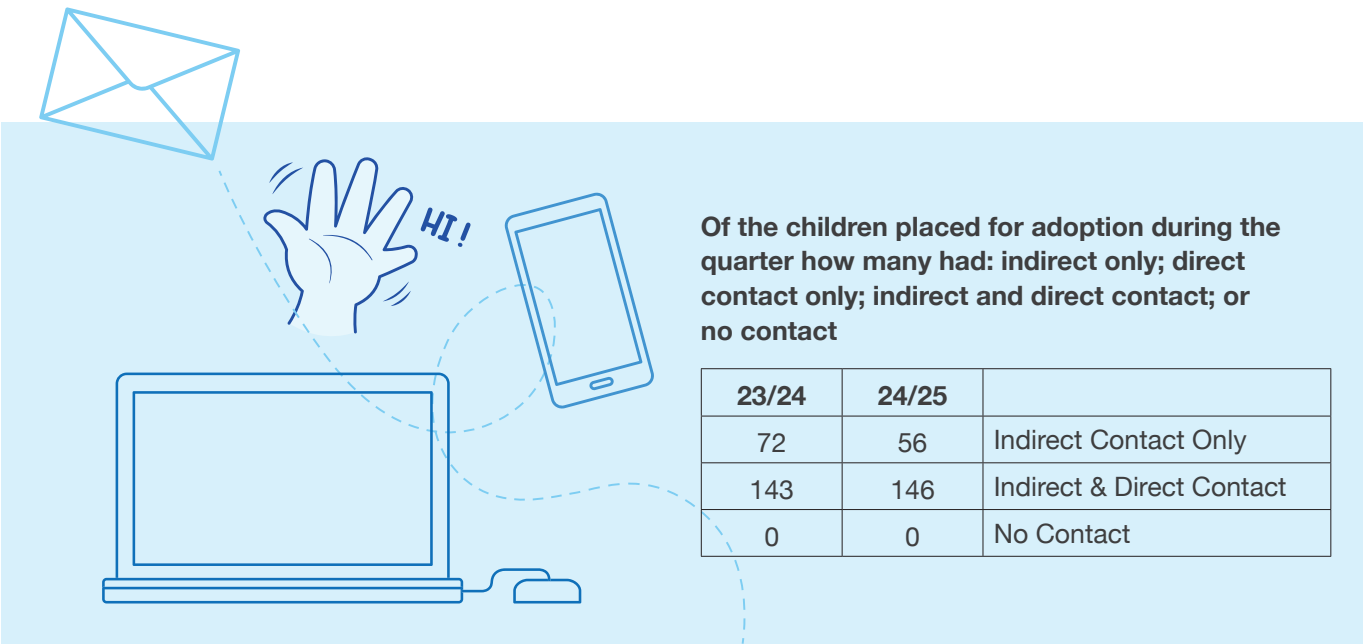
↑ **45%**

All Wales Children who had their Life Journey materials by matching panel

18/19	30%	21/22	76%
19/20	58%	22/23	77%
20/21	82%	23/24	80%
		24/25	75%

Contact

We have been reporting on contact arrangements for 2 years and all children placed for adoption have contact arrangements in place. The majority have both direct and indirect arrangements in place.



Other requests for Support



Number of Birth Parents supported

The number of birth parents receiving support increased in 2016 and has remained at an average rate of circa 360 per year since then.

16/17	383	21/22	377
17/18	324	22/23	497
18/19	268	23/24	374
19/20	336	24/25	358



Number of requests for access to birth records

The number of requests from adopted adults to access their birth records has reduced over time and was circa 150 in 2024/25.

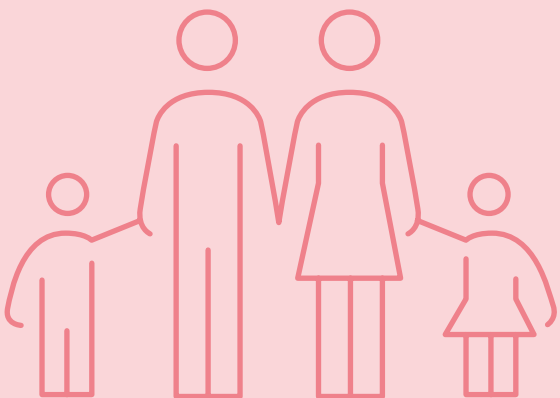
16/17	280	21/22	234
17/18	205	22/23	229
18/19	226	23/24	179
19/20	215	24/25	150



All Wales Request for intermediary services

The number of requests for intermediary services has also reduced but has remained steady at an average of 89 per year over the last 5 years.

16/17	114	21/22	73
17/18	156	22/23	103
18/19	124	23/24	101
19/20	85	24/25	82



All Wales Work with Birth Siblings

The number of adult birth siblings receiving support to contact an adopted relative has remained relatively low; however, the numbers have increased significantly since 2019.

16/17	34	21/22	72
17/18	27	22/23	85
18/19	18	23/24	54
19/20	54	24/25	66



All Wales Work with Other Relatives

Conversely, work carried out with other relatives receiving support to contact an adopted relative has reduced over time.

16/17	42	21/22	35
17/18	35	22/23	11
18/19	20	23/24	20
19/20	30	24/25	18



Families
illies
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aw teuluoedd o bob
lliw a llun.
Families come in all
shapes and sizes.

Achieving more together

Overview 2024/25

A message from the Co-chairs of the National Adoption Service Combined Governance Board

Our focus for 2024/25 continued to be on the delivery of the **Adopt Cymru 2025 and Beyond...** strategic plan, which we have been working towards since the start of 2022/23. It was developed following extensive engagement with children, young people and families, professionals, and service leaders, including via the annual Big Adoption Conversation

The plan continues to support the vision of NAS: to build a modern, responsive, and forward-thinking adoption service, one that meets the needs of children, families and others touched by adoption. This means increasing the number and diversity of adoptive homes, ensuring timely assessments, and delivering support that is accessible.

This section of the report shows how the service has continued to strive to find the right families for children with complex needs, for sibling groups, and for those who have waited too long. We have also continued to improve contact with birth families and to support birth parents as part of the adoption journey.

We are committed to improving access to adoption records and life story work. Every adopted person deserves to understand their past, and we must ensure that the services we offer, whether for children, young adults, or those affected by historical practices, are compassionate, inclusive, and empowering.

However, we cannot ignore the challenges. Public sector funding constraints, rising complexity in children's needs, and societal misconceptions about adoption all demand our attention. We must remain steadfast in our belief that adoption, when done well, changes lives for the better. The service has continued to work on these issues with government and partners to ensure that adoption is not only understood but valued as a legitimate, loving, and lasting option for children who cannot remain with their birth families or communities, while continuing to challenge policies and perceptions that create inequality or disadvantage for adoptive families.

As we are still making progress against the priorities in the current strategic plan, and these remain highly relevant, we have developed an extension to carry us forward to 2026. We are currently working collaboratively to develop a new, longer term strategic plan, which will continue to support the vision for NAS and ensure adoption services in Wales are truly able to meet the needs of children, families and others touched by adoption.

**Independent
Co-Chairs,
National Adoption
Service Combined
Governance Board**



**Dr Carolyn
Sampeys**



**Councillor
Jane Tremlett**

Highlights from the past year

10-year anniversary events



On Wednesday 6 November, a national celebration was held at the Norwegian Church, Cardiff Bay, bringing together the adoption community from across Wales. Sponsored by Julie Morgan MS, the event was near capacity and celebrated the diversity and creativity of adoption in Wales.

Highlights included performances by poets Rhian Edwards and Faith Buckley, and a Q&A with Daf James, creator of Lost Boys and Fairies. A professional panel featured Albert Heaney (Welsh Government) and Jason Baker (St David's), with a keynote speech from the Minister for Children and Social Care, Dawn Bowden MS.

Displays from regional and VAA events held during National Adoption Week were showcased, and the event received strong media coverage, including live radio interviews with the Director.

Hay Festival and National Eisteddfod 2024

In 2024, NAS expanded its outreach by participating in two major cultural events in Wales: The Hay Festival and the National Eisteddfod.

For the first time, NAS attended the Hay Festival of Literature & Arts in Hay-on-Wye. Located in the new Family Garden space, the NAS stand offered child-friendly activities such as tote bag colouring, garden games, and a mini library of adoption-themed books. The space also facilitated over 100 meaningful conversations about adoption throughout the week, supported by volunteers from across NAS regions. On Saturday 1 June, NAS sponsored a talk by Dr Amir Khan on his book, *How Families are Made*, providing further opportunities for engagement, both in-person and online, and promoting adoption awareness among Welsh-speaking audiences.

On Saturday 3 August, a group of Welsh-speaking adopters took to the stage at the National Eisteddfod in Pontypridd to share their personal adoption stories. Hosted by Welsh presenter and actor Luke Davies, the session featured adopters Catrin, Guto, and Hedd, and aimed to challenge misconceptions and encourage more Welsh speakers to consider adoption.



Dr Amir Khan presenting at this year's Hay Festival



Website

In November 2024, NAS proudly unveiled a vibrant and contemporary refresh of its website – a transformation shaped through meaningful collaboration with staff, professionals, and adoptive families from across Wales. This dynamic new platform not only reflects the voices and experiences of the adoption community but also offers a more engaging, user-friendly experience, designed to better support and connect those on the adoption journey. Some pages are still being modified with new features coming shortly.

Big Adoption Conversation

The Big Adoption Conversation, held annually, is NAS's leading event for bringing together families, professionals, and stakeholders from across Wales to focus on what truly matters to our adoption communities. In 2024, the event drew an inspiring number of attendees, all united by a shared commitment to improving adoption experiences. Centred around the powerful theme of 'emotional wellbeing', the day sparked heartfelt discussions, valuable insights, and a renewed sense of connection. The outcomes and reflections from this impactful gathering can be explored in full [here](#).

Quality and Skills Framework

As part of NAS's strategic goal to improve adopter recruitment, matching, and training (Strategic Priority A – AC2025 and Beyond), the new [Adopter Qualities & Skills Framework](#) has been launched. Developed by AFKA in collaboration with all Welsh adoption regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies, this skills-based model strengthens the assessment process with a focus on robust, insightful analysis.

Building on NAS's previous frameworks such as Life Journey Work, Adoption Support, and Welsh Early Permanence, this new model enhances current practice across the sector. While it doesn't replace the Prospective Adopter Report, it complements it by offering clear criteria to assess the qualities and skills linked to successful adoptive parenting, especially in complex or nuanced cases.

National Adoption Week

Over the past decade, NAS has embraced National Adoption Week as a powerful platform to promote adoption in Wales – sparking interest, sharing stories, and welcoming new enquirers. This year was especially meaningful as we used the week to celebrate our 10-year anniversary, highlighting the unique and collaborative approach that defines our service. It was a moment to reflect, connect, and look ahead with pride and purpose.

Update to CAR B (Child Adoption Report)

For some time, regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) across Wales have voiced concerns that the current CAR B form no longer meets the needs of modern adoption practice. With England updating its Child Permanence Report (CPR), it was the perfect moment to reimagine the CAR B for Wales. AFKA has been working closely with Coram BAAF to develop a new, Welsh-adapted version based on England's updated CPR. A draft was unveiled at a national workshop on 19 September 2024, where practitioners and managers from across Wales offered valuable feedback to tailor it to our unique context. With those insights now being incorporated, we're aiming to pilot the new version in 2025.

NAS finance review

To build on the previous review of national finances, in May 2024, NAS commissioned an independent review of the local authority / regional VAAs and health resources supporting adoption in Wales.

The report was finalised in March 2025 and will be the subject of an action plan, to be implemented in 2025/26. The initial key findings include the need to have a better focus on the financial resources for adoption services across Wales, manage the different financial arrangements across adoption agencies differently and to address the growing funding gaps in the delivery of services.



Public Law Working Group final report – key developments

Published on 7 November, the final report from the Public Law Working Group (PLWG) sets out a series of significant recommendations to modernise adoption practice and policy, including:

- A reframed approach to contact between adopted children and birth families, supported by improved training for adopters and enhanced support for birth parents.
- A national protocol to standardise access to adoption records.
- Simplified legal frameworks for both domestic and international adoptions.
- A national strategy for adoption by consent.

While many recommendations are aimed at UK and devolved governments, several will directly impact adoption services and practitioners. Wales was well-represented on the PLWG subgroup, and many of the proposals align with progressive work already underway, particularly around contact and birth parent engagement, as reflected in our Good Practice Guides.

NAS is well-positioned to respond to these developments, though further clarity is needed on how both the UK and Welsh Governments will implement the recommendations. Initial meetings with Welsh Government officials have taken place, and discussions will continue across relevant forums and subgroups.

The Joint Committee began to meet

The new national Joint Committee for NAS and Foster Wales held its inaugural meeting in April 2024 and met again in November 2024.

Regional and VAA highlights: a year of progress and innovation

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) ended the year with stronger-than-expected adopter recruitment and increased approvals. While enquiry levels remain steady, converting interest into formal registrations is still a challenge. To tackle this, targeted marketing, such as Council Tax inserts, is being used to reach underrepresented communities.

The Family Finding Team placed 50 children this year, and despite ongoing resource pressures, Adoption Support is evolving, with creative solutions and a more structured post-order 'check-in' process. The birth parent support group has grown, and direct contact arrangements are actively encouraged. Life Journey Work continues to thrive thanks to Welsh Government funding. Rising requests for access to birth records and intermediary services are being carefully prioritised, and staff have deepened their understanding of post-commencement regulations to stay compliant.

The **South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS)** remains focused on finding the right families for children, actively engaging in events and championing Welsh Early Permanence (WEP), with two placements completed this year. A new fourth day of preparation training is in development, spotlighting health and psychology.

SEWAS pioneered [Understanding the Child Days and Trauma Nurture Timelines](#), helping adopters prepare for their child. Adoption support has improved, with reduced assessment wait times and earlier referrals to PATHway. This year, 56 families received post-adoption check-ins, and 16 Stay and Play sessions supported early-stage adopters. Contact services have expanded, with 31 birth parents supported and new systems enabling digital storage of contact agreements. SEWAS also plays a key role in national efforts to standardise post-commencement processes and supports pre-1976 adoptees in accessing records and counselling through the St David's and AUK service.

The **Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS)** continues to promote a strong community presence and a proactive marketing strategy. With three [Welsh Early Permanence](#) arrangements in assessment, the team is committed to early intervention, offering Therapeutic Parenting programmes, Virtual Hub consultations, Life Journey and Contact Hubs, and regular check-ins.

Innovative initiatives include [Trauma Nurture Timelines](#) for schools, support groups for parents of adopted teenagers, and Theraplay groups. A dedicated post-adoption contact team has improved flexibility, especially for sibling contact, and supports early engagement with both adopters and birth families. A new streamlined process has also significantly reduced wait times for accessing adoption records.

At the end of 2024/25, the **North Wales Adoption Services (NWAS)** is preparing for its first Welsh Early Permanence placement and remains dedicated to recruiting adopters who can offer the best outcomes for children. All support plans are reviewed within 12 months of placement, with early intervention at the heart of their approach.

The team integrates NAS Contact Good Practice guides into training, promoting openness to direct contact with birth families. NWAS also ensures transparency, with clear guidance on accessing adoption records and a simple online referral process.





Like the other regions and VAAs, **Adoption Mid & West Wales (AMWW)** has strengthened its recruitment and selection processes, supported by a multidisciplinary team that tailors support to each family's needs. Comprehensive assessments guide interventions, and the team works closely with birth families throughout the adoption journey, from legal proceedings to transitions and ongoing contact.

Thanks to grant funding and collaboration with St David's, AMWW has significantly reduced the number of waiting children, improving both timeliness and access to support.

Barnardo's has adopted the AAR (Adoption Assessment Report) format, supported by a robust toolkit to enhance adopter preparation and learning. A new support group helps families navigate difficult conversations, while the Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Service (CAFIS) has rolled out Safe Interventions Training (SIT) across the organisation.

A SIT working group is developing practical tools and training materials to deepen connections between adoptive and birth families. A new audit form has also improved the consistency and accessibility of recorded information.

St David's Adoption Service had a productive year, approving 18 families for adoption. Looking ahead, 12 families are in Stage One and 14 in Stage Two of the assessment process. The Adopting Together programme remains popular, with 14 referrals for 19 children.

A new calendar of family support events is helping families connect, maintain sibling relationships, and build resilience through peer support. St David's also continues its partnership with Adoption UK Cymru to support pre-1976 adoptees through the Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Service.

Adoption UK Cymru (AUK) has made great strides in supporting adoptive families and individuals affected by adoption. Over 100 families and professionals participated in the Difficult Conversations About Adoption initiative, with continued interest.

AUK offers school training on challenging behaviour and nonviolent resistance, and in partnership with St David's, delivers the pre-1976 Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Service. The PATHway service supports adoptive parents through clinical consultations, reflective groups, and peer support, enhancing understanding of trauma and therapeutic parenting. AUK's Connect Service offers activities and peer engagement for adopted children and young people, while community groups led by volunteers provide vital support and shared experiences.

Celebrating good practice

The regions and VAAs have shared some of their positive stories from the last 12 months, exemplifying how the plan's strategic aims impact on services:

Best families for our children

VVC

The Family Finding Social Worker assessed a couple as prospective adopters who had historical financial challenges and had expressed anxiety that they did not 'fit' what was needed to be an adoptive parent due to their income level and accommodation. The Social Worker, however, identified several strengths in their situation and by utilising a competence-based approach, enabled the couple to recognise what they had to offer – childcare experience, a supportive network and a child centred, realistic approach. The couple were proactive in using a learning opportunity about personal finance. By focusing upon the positives, their confidence grew during the assessment process, and they have gone on to successfully adopt a child with complex developmental needs.

SEWAS

A WEP couple with a birth son were matched with a newborn baby who spent the first six weeks in hospital due to substance withdrawal. The WEP carers visited daily, forming an early bond and providing consistent care. Upon discharge, the baby moved in with them and has since thrived becoming well-settled within the family. Meaningful contact has been established with the baby's three older siblings, who live with a relative. This sibling contact is progressing positively and will continue independently. The baby's uninterrupted attachment to the WEP carers from an early stage, with no placement changes, has provided stability. A formal adoption plan is expected within six months of birth, marking a successful and nurturing outcome for the child.



NWAS

A large sibling group affected by domestic abuse, substance misuse, and instability had a close bond and needed to be kept together which meant an initial placement in foster care far from home. Finding an adoptive family in Wales was challenging, but a suitable match was eventually found through collaborative efforts. The adoption process involved detailed planning, including consultations and therapeutic support which supported the eventual move into their new home; the adoption has now been finalised. The foster carer played a key role in the transition and the family continues to receive support. The value of early intervention, sibling unity, professional collaboration and long-term support, plus the importance of maintaining a child's identity through local placements is highlighted the success of this plan.

Great adoption support – when and where it's needed

AUK

At the first PATHway service meeting, parents expressed concerns about their child's aggressive and emotionally volatile behaviour, particularly towards one parent. The child, who was supported with at school for additional learning struggled with sensory sensitivities, anxiety, and control issues. Initially unfamiliar with therapeutic parenting, this parent engaged in support meetings that explored the child's emotional and behavioural challenges, came to understand trauma-informed care and was helped by an expert report that clarified the child's emotional processing difficulties. This changed their parenting approach which became more empathetic and reflective by understanding the child's behaviour as expressions of unmet needs rather than defiance. The ability to manage the child's behaviour improved and changes in educational provisions and support were sought. This led to positive changes in behaviour, a more stable home environment and increased parental and child confidence.

Barnardo's

We have been working with birth children in families to help them create their own life story books. This supports their understanding and adjustment to becoming a sibling and helping them to feel comfortable and confident in welcoming a new child into the family and understanding their needs.

Healthier contact through better birth family services

WBAS

A five-year-old child was thriving in a supportive adoptive home where his parents have consistently valued his connection to his birth family, especially his birth father, and have maintained regular, thoughtful updates. They initiated discussions about establishing direct contact, indicating that they would have welcomed it earlier. Acknowledging the birth father's own needs, the adoption service provided tailored support and gradually increased indirect contact. When the child expressed a desire to reconnect, a risk assessment confirmed direct contact could be safely managed, initially through Facetime calls. These were positive, with the child engaging warmly which led on to a successful in-person meeting and continued direct contact with support. The adopters hope to eventually manage this independently, fostering a safe, meaningful relationship between the child and his birth father, highlighting the importance of openness, support, and child-led contact in adoption.

St David's

Families have given feedback on the value of the support events we provide, including a family who use the event for sibling contact.

"Just wanted to say a big thanks to all for this morning. It was great to have a safe space for X and her sister Y to meet up and for me to catch up with Y's Mum about our girls and their development."

Better adoption records and access to information

AMWW

An adopted adult contacted the adoption team in March 2024 seeking records related to his 1960s step-parent adoption. His goal was to understand the circumstances surrounding his adoption.

The service was able to respond promptly and provide support while searching for the records. The relevant documentation was well maintained and accessed with the co-operation of a number of agencies.

Feedback was provided, expressing gratitude and appreciation for the social worker's patience, kindness, and clarity alongside praise for the social worker and the quality of information.

Annual finance update

In 2024/25, NAS made good use of the grants received from Welsh Government to enhance the delivery of adoption services across Wales. The WLGA top slice allocation continues to support the central functions of NAS. This carries a contingency amount, which is used to offset any unexpected financial pressures and to fund any development work, for which there is no provision in other budgets.

INCOME STREAM	BUDGET (2024/25)	ACTUAL SPEND (2024/25)	CONTINGENCY (carried forward)
WLGA Top Slice (£509,250) plus investment management costs and contributions to shared posts	£721,608	£740,320	£404,171
Adoption Support Grant (WG)	£2,300,000	£2,300,000	0
Adopt Cymru and Beyond Grant (WG)	£669,492	£669,492	0
Adoption Register for Wales (WG)	£220,296	£220,296	0

Complaints

In 2024/25, 11 complaints were received in total across all agencies. The nature of these varied and included concerns about life journey materials, contact arrangements and service delays.

Seven of the complaints were resolved at Stage 1, three are still ongoing and one is at Stage 2.

Final comments

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



Over the past decade, we have seen services evolve, support systems strengthen, and voices – once unheard – rise to shape the future of adoption. But as we all know, progress is not a destination; it is a journey. And our journey is far from over.

We will continue to listen, to learn, and to lead. Because every child deserves a safe, stable, and loving home, and together, we can make that a reality.

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





Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service



Celebrating 10 Years of the National Adoption Service

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