



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service



Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

# Life Journey Work Good Practice Guide



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## List of Abbreviations

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NAS	National Adoption Service
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AFA Cymru	Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru
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LJW	Life Journey Work
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IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
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# Introduction

All children in Wales, who are unable to be cared for by their birth families, need to have an understanding of their family history and of their unique journey.

Performance Indicator Measure 20 records the number of children placed for adoption for whom life journey material has been provided (to their adopters) by the time of the second adoption review.

Life Journey Work (LJW) is designed to help a child make sense of their past and understand their current situation in order to help them to move into the future.

LJW should support the child's identity, promote self-esteem, help give the child a sense of belonging, wellbeing and support good mental health.

LJW provides an account of a child's life in words, pictures, memorabilia, anecdotes and documents. It provides an opportunity and a structure for the child to explore their emotions and talk about painful issues. It provides children with important factual information. It provides a narrative/explanations for the Child. It preserves memories.

LJW should be a priority in the care of all children separated from their birth family. Life Journey Work never ends.

## **Life Journey Work is comprised of the following three components:**

### **Preparation work**

This is in the form of direct work with children, aiding them to understand the reasons why they cannot live with their birth family, supporting them to process loss and prepare them for placement with an adoptive family.

### **Direct Life Journey Work**

Even very young children can be supported in creating Life Journey materials, such as a memory box and items for their Life Journey book, when supported in an age-appropriate way. Direct Life Journey Work builds on the important work that was done in the preparation stage.

### **Life Journey materials**

Every child should have information about their birth family, the reasons why he/she was Looked After and the reasons why she /he was placed for adoption. These materials will be given to Prospective Adopter/s at the time of placement, and it is expected that they will share them with their Child. Every child should also have a Later Life Letter, written by their Social Worker, providing further detail for when she/he reaches adolescence.

# Basic principles of LJW

Preparation and planning is vital with all LJW with children and should involve collaboration with people that know the Child well. In the toolkit there is a checklist you should consider before embarking on direct LJW with children.

Adults who undertake direct LJW should be known to and trusted by the Child and must be reliable.

The Child should be given choice in the way in which she/he can explore and engage in LJW. It should always be done at the Child's pace. It is essential that children are afforded a safe space, to opt in and out of LJW during each discussion.

LJW should be tailored to the age and developmental needs of the Child, LJW should be honest, but never brutally so. There are kind, age appropriate ways to tell even the most difficult information.

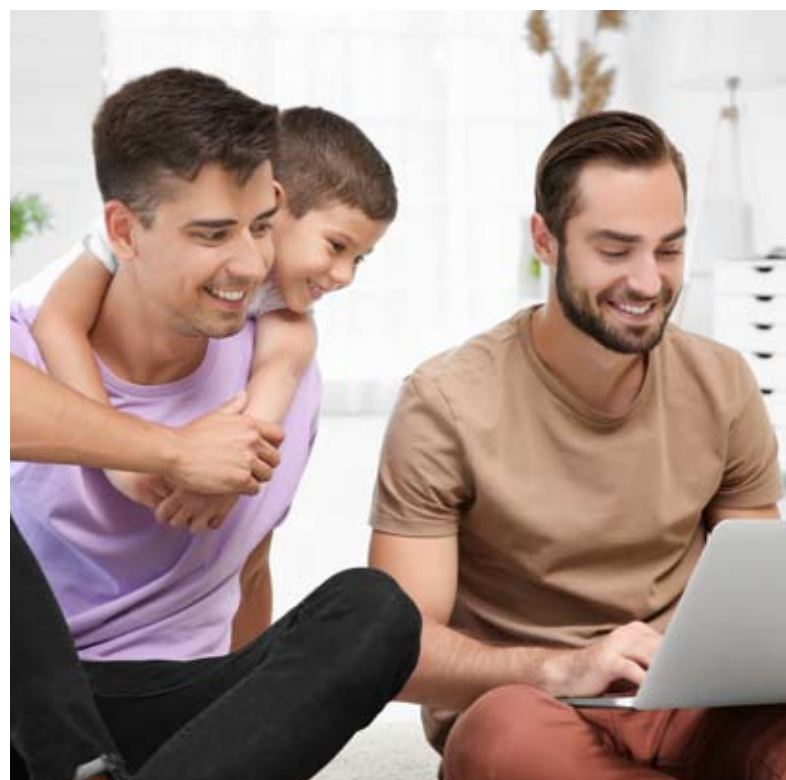
Life Journey conversations should be part of everyday life for the Child. Information is best provided incrementally, as age appropriate and according to the needs of the Child at that time. It is essential that the Foster Carer/s, Prospective Adopters, Adopters and Social Workers for the Child are trained and actively engaged in LJW with the Child.

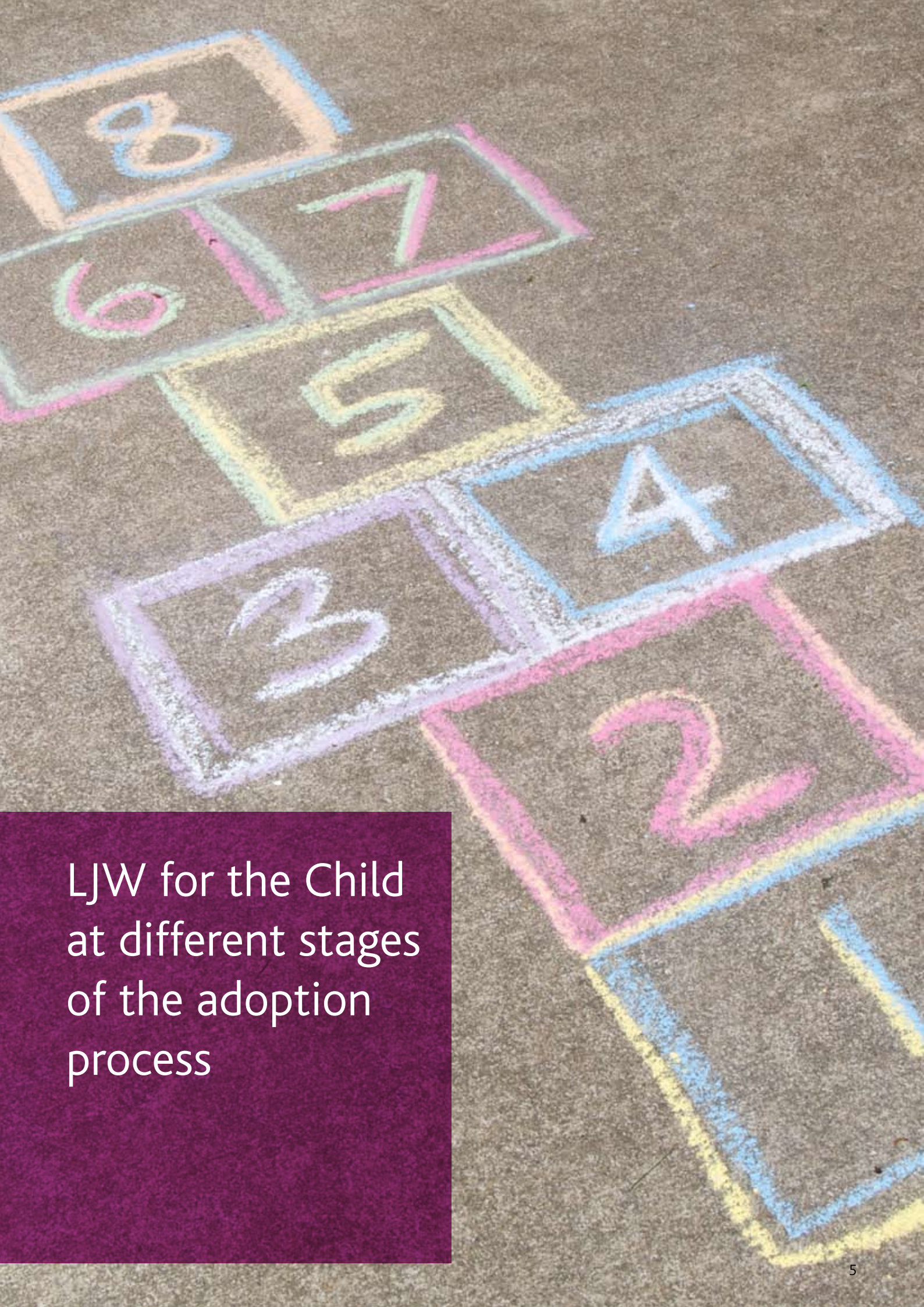
LJW should be recorded and stored securely in a centralised system. It should be possible for another worker with a trusted relationship with the Child to pick up the LJW, if this becomes necessary. The storage facility should enable duplicates of Life Journey materials to be available for the child, if lost or destroyed.

Life Journey books should provide the Child with a coherent narrative. The story of the Child's journey should be clear. Jargon and abbreviations should not be used. Care should be taken when referring to social work documents. Photographs should be chosen with care, to assist in helping the child make sense of their Life Journey.

In writing the Life Journey Book and Later Life Letter it is helpful to refer to the Child by their name and as he or she, rather than 'you'. This is likely to aid in creating some emotional distance for the Child when processing potentially difficult information. Information should be carefully checked and sources of information should be referenced.

LJW should be sensitive to and address the individual needs of the Child and his/her family, in respect to language, gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability.





LJW for the Child  
at different stages  
of the adoption  
process

## STAGE 1

# Child becomes Looked After

# 01

- 1.1 LJW should begin as soon as a Child becomes Looked After. Information, photograph and memento gathering should begin immediately.
- 1.2 Everyone with a role in the Child's life has a responsibility for this. A sensitive and inclusive approach is required to gather life journey materials, such as photographs and anecdotes from the Child's Birth Family members.
- 1.3 LJW is complex and should be guided, supported by and planned by the Child's Social Worker using the LJW planning checklist. In some cases specialist therapeutic support may be required. It is important to identify for each piece of LJW, who's the most appropriate person to undertake direct work with the Child.
- 1.4 The Child's Foster Carer is likely to be the Child's secure base and will be an appropriate partner in LJW work with the child.
- 1.5 All LJW should be carefully recorded and securely stored. Recordings should detail the content of direct work, together with be scanned or photographed evidence of activities.
- 1.6 The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will be responsible for monitoring the LJW for the Child.
- 1.7 Birth Family 'counselling' and independent support should be offered to birth parents and other close Birth Family members. The Birth Family should be actively encouraged to contribute LJW for the Child. This could include a book, labelled life journey mementos, hand written letters, audio and video footage.
- 1.8 Any gaps in Birth Family information and in materials for the Child's Life Journey book should be filled, such as labelled photographs. This should be completed, where possible, prior to the final hearing.



## STAGE 2

# Placement Order granted

# 02

- 2.1 Once a Placement Order is granted the Child Care Social Worker, together with the Foster Carer/s and other professionals (as appropriate) should build upon the narrative to explain the plan for adoption to the Child. The Child Care Social Worker is responsible for telling the Child. It is likely that the plan will lead to reduced contact arrangements with the Child's Birth Family; this will need to be sensitively discussed with the Child. A range of resources should be available to the Child's Foster Carer/s and Social Worker, in order to assist in talking about moving on, in age appropriate ways and talking about adoption.
- 2.2 When family finding is protracted, the uncertainty can be difficult for the Child. The Child Care Social Worker, together with the Foster Carer/s and other professionals (as appropriate) should regularly review the plan for LJW, to ensure that it sensitively meets the Child's current needs.
- 2.3 The Life Journey Work planning checklist should be referred to and consideration should be given to what other information should be gathered, such as information about birth siblings.
- 2.4 Photographs form an important part of LJW materials. Written consents should be obtained from the Foster Carers and any other third parties as appropriate, to include photographs, or any information that does not pertain too directly to the Child.
- 2.5 The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will continue to be responsible for monitoring the LJW for the Child.



## STAGE 3

# Linking and matching

# 03

- 3.1 Prospective adopter/s will have been prepared and had training, formally and/or through the assessment process, on the importance of LJW.
- 3.2 Collaboration between the prospective adopter/s and the key person involved in the production of Life Journey Materials should occur before matching Panel. When Prospective Adopters actively engage in the LJW with the Child, they are likely to be more able and practised to use it and answer a Child's questions consistently and honestly.
- 3.3 Life Journey materials should be quality assured in readiness for Matching Panel. They should provide a coherent narrative for the Child and include a draft Later Life Letter.
- 3.4 A plan for LJW post placement should be prepared. This will form part of the Adoption Support Plan.
- 3.5 Consideration should be given to holding a Life Appreciation Day for the Child. Information about what this entails, together with how to plan and hold a Life Appreciation Day are in the NAS toolkit.
- 3.6 The timing of final contact, between Birth Family and the Child, should be thoughtfully planned in order to allow the Child time to begin to process the loss, prior to beginning introductions with his/her adoptive family. Photographs and details of final contact should be carefully recorded, to form part of the Child's Life Journey record.
- 3.7 The Prospective Adopters should prepare introductory materials for the Child, such as a photo book with pictures of themselves and their home, a DVD introducing them. They should be supported in this task by their Adoption Social Worker. The Child Care Social Worker and Foster Carer should be consulted, to ensure the materials reflect the personality and current preferences of the Child.
- 3.8 The Adoption Panel should check that Life Journey Materials are complete, have been quality assured and have been shared with the Prospective Adopters, this should be recorded in the minutes.
- 3.9 The Agency Decision Maker should check that the Adoption Panel has discussed the Life Journey Materials and record this within their minutes.
- 3.10 Contact with Birth Family members and the Child forms an important part of LJW. Contact agreements should be prepared by the Adoption Social Worker in consultation with the Birth Family and Prospective Adopters, according to the Adoption Support Plan.
- 3.11 It is usually beneficial to promote contact between the Child and his /her previous Foster Carer/s. This should be supported by the Supporting Social Workers for both the Foster Carer/s and the Prospective Adopters until established.

## STAGE 4

# Transition

# 04

- 4.1 There should be a clear plan for transition for the Child.
- 4.2 Prior to the expected ratification/approval of the match by the Agency Decision Maker, the key people involved in the Child's life, including the Foster Carers, Fostering Social Worker, Child's Social Worker and Adoption Social Worker should discuss and agree the plan for how best to share information about the new family with the Child.
- 4.3 Once the Agency Decision Maker has approved the match, the Child Care Social Worker and Foster Carer will sensitively tell the Child and share the materials provided by the Prospective Adopters.
- 4.4 The Child's emotional needs should be central to the planning, in order to minimise the trauma of the move. Introductions should be thoughtfully planned and carefully managed to allow time for the Child to reflect on their emotions with their Foster Carer/s and Child Care Social Worker.
- 4.5 One professional should be identified to take the lead in coordinating the introductions process; this is usually the family finding Adoption Social Worker.
- 4.6 In the lead up to, during and following introductions the Child's Foster Carers and Prospective Adopters should be well supported by their respective supporting Social Workers.
- 4.7 Where appropriate, the opportunity should be made available for the birth parents (and other significant birth family members) to meet the Prospective Adopters. Preparation is vital to ensure everyone is well prepared. The confidentiality and security of the adoptive placement should not be compromised. Permission should be sought from the Birth and Prospective Adopters to take photographs for the Child's Life Journey record. Where it is decided it is inappropriate to facilitate this meeting, the reasons should be recorded. Consideration should also be made as to the appropriateness of reviewing this decision in the future.



## STAGE 5

# Placement and ongoing (Post Adoption Order)

# 05

- 5.1 Support should be available for the Prospective Adopters and Child to continue to build a secure base. This will include support in continuing LJW with the Child.

LJW support may include:

- Informal discussions
- Direct work
- Building the Life Journey narrative of the adoptive family
- Therapeutic LJW
- Further information gathering from Birth Family
- Training

- 5.2 Support in establishing and maintaining contact between the Child and her/his Prospective Adopters/ Adopters and her/his Birth Family should be offered.

- 5.3 Contact agreements should reflect the terminology used in the LJW, such as when referring to Birth Family members.

- 5.4 The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will continue to be responsible for monitoring the LJW for the Child at reviews until the Adoption Order is granted.

- 5.5 If the local authority/adoption agency receives information about a change or development in the birth family's circumstances it should:

- a) decide if it is in the adopted child's interests for the family to have this information;
- b) decide whether this is the child's information or birth parent's information (e.g. the birth of a sibling is the child's information, a miscarriage or abortion is the parent's information);
- c) if it is the child's information, then it can be shared with the adoptive family;
- d) if it is the parent's information then permission to share the information is needed. This permission may have been granted (see the details of consent to share in the CAR/B form or see elsewhere on the file);
- e) if there is no current permission to share then consent will be required from birth the parent.

- 5.6 **Life Journey Work does not end.**



**The National Adoption Service was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales.**

The National Adoption Service for Wales, launched in November 2014, is an innovative collaborative for the provision of adoption services. It brought together Welsh local authority adoption services into a 3 tier structure which includes partnerships at all levels with Voluntary Adoption Agencies based in Wales, Health and Education Services as well as others.

At local authority level all 22 Welsh councils continue to provide services to all looked after children whilst identifying and working with those children for whom a plan for adoption 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. The services provided differ in each collaborative but all provide the adoption agency functions for children, recruit and assess adopters, offer counselling to birth parents and advice to adopted adults. Some currently directly provide adoption support services whereas in others this remains with their local authorities.



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