

Thank you for telling us what you think through Adopter Voice and the Adoption Barometer Wales



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu** | National  
Cenedlaethol | Adoption  
Service

Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

# Listening to you

This is a brief overview of the feedback adopters have given from across Wales plus, and possibly as importantly, what we are doing about it.

NAS works with Adoption UK Cymru (AUK) to gather views from adopters to inform how we can improve services.

This year, AUK have consulted on 5 key priorities as well as producing a Wales only report.

## RECRUITMENT & ASSESSMENT – Approvals and Matching Process

### What you said

Overall adopters were positive about this process but there was continuing concern about delays. Just under half felt at some point that the process was so difficult they wondered if they would continue. However, those families who had more recently adopted were more positive and:

- 99% stated that pre-approval training was considered to be informative and useful
- 86% felt that information about the process was thorough
- 83% of Adopters said they felt understood and supported.

### What we're doing

The lobbying of Welsh Government mentioned last year has been successful. Work has been completed to put in place a two stage approval process for recruitment and assessment. This will clarify expectations and timeframes and is ready to be rolled out once the regulations have been changed in April 2020.

## CONTACT

### What you said

Contact arrangements were reported to often become unworkable over time. Adopters thought that increased support was needed to both adopters and birth parents as well as research to better understand what would work best for children.

### What we're doing

This area is also benefitting from additional social work and support posts to help provide different approaches to contact that will work better. We have commissioned AFA Cymru to develop good practice guidance and this will be supported by additional training for all staff in the regional adoption services and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. It has been recognised that the timing for the agreement of contact arrangements often while court proceedings are ongoing does not work well. Alternative ways of working with birth families and adopters are being developed. Adoption UK is offering post approval training courses on Contact across all regions of Wales starting in January 2020. This will be free for the majority of families.

## ADOPTION SUPPORT – Life Journey Work

Adopters were asked about Life Journey work; Contact and Post Adoption Support.

Adoption Support has received a huge boost from the Welsh Government's investment package of £2.3m to be rolled out in 2019/20. There was already a framework in place which identified priorities for development, and your views have continued to be vital in shaping the services as they come online.

### What you said

While there was some improvement noted with receiving life journey materials in a more timely way, particularly from more recent adopters, further work is needed to improve this as well as the quality and accuracy of the information. More joint training and collaboration between adopters and professionals would be welcomed.

### What we're doing

There has now been investment in developing training and resources to improve Life Journey Work. Life journey co-coordinators are being appointed in all regional adoption services and some local authorities have appointed champions. Data bases are being developed to improve access to a child's information. Enhanced training for social workers, and foster carers will be delivered by March 2020.

More collaborative work is being encouraged between foster carers; adoptive parents and social workers to use the tools and materials together to help ensure children's life stories can be better understood and valued. Courses on Life Journey work have been held for adoptive parents in each adoption service region over the last 12 months. These were free for new adopters and low cost for others.

Things are improving, recently we were able to report that life journey materials were in place for 53% of children at their 2nd review and for 69% of children matched. We aim to improve this further.

## CAMHS and emotional well-being services

### What you said

Overall adopters were feeling very dissatisfied with mental health services for children and young people, needing more information about the services available, how to access them and information/practical advice about how to support and help children with mental health issues. Those who had accessed service found long waiting lists for assessment and after that a lack of follow up support following a diagnosis.

### What we're doing

We are working in a number of ways to provide therapeutic services for adopted children and young people and support for their families.

Joint funding from Welsh Government and the Big Lottery Communities Fund means that Adoption UK will be able to deliver TESSA (Therapeutic Education Support service in Adoption).

Based on delivery through paid parent-partners (experienced and trained adopters) TESSA also incorporates an expert psychology assessment and a 6 week course (based on a successful service provided by one Health Board in Wales), plus access to other recommended support services.

Alongside this each regional service is developing additional psychologist and therapeutic posts to provide a range of targeted and specialist support.

Adoption UK provide a helpline for adopters which is available 5 days a week.

We are also expanding direct services for adopted children and young people.

The 'Connected' service has been launched which will:

- Provide opportunities for adopted children and young people to access group support
- Improve the availability of advice and information for adopted children and young people
- Develop a young ambassador scheme

We've also developed an information booklet and posters for all health professionals, including those who work in CAMHS services to help them understand adoption issues better. This will help to provide a network of information and appropriate support for adopted children and young people in their day to day lives.

## POST ADOPTION SUPPORT

### What you said

Some aspects on what you told us in 2017/18 had improved particularly for more recent adopters but there are still differences in what is available, access and funding across Wales. A lack of timely therapeutic services remains a concern and the provision of adoption allowances was also inconsistent. Over half of respondents reported experiencing stress, anxiety or post-adoption depression symptoms.

### What we're doing

As well as the things mentioned above the additional funding from Welsh Government is being focussed on the following:

- Increased adoption awareness training across all health, education and social care settings.
- Better early support for a child's move from foster carers to adoptive placement and early support.
- Increased training in direct work and therapy for those working with adopted children.
- Development of TESSA – a Wales wide support network for adopters delivered by Adoption UK, which includes clinical psychologist input, courses plus individual and peer group support.
- A new Children and Young People's service (known as Connected) for adoptees.
- Implementation of a 'core offer' of pre and post adoption training and support.

We've also put in place a common policy on Adoption Allowances which should begin to improve consistency in this.

## EDUCATION

### What you said

While Welsh adopters were generally more positive about their experiences of education than those from other parts of the UK, there was still inconsistency between what schools were providing. The majority of adopters would welcome better training and understanding among education professionals and more funding to support adopted children in schools. Most families would support confidential tagging of academic records in schools to monitor attainment and inclusion.

### What we're doing

Adoption UK are working with adopters and adopted children and young people to improve understanding of the challenges of transitioning from primary to secondary school. A new video aimed at teachers will be released in March 2020 and a training package for all school staff involved in transitions is being developed for use across Wales.

The booklets in the 'Getting it right for every child' series, one for parents and one for education staff are still being well used.

**We recognise there's lots more to do and we have an ongoing plan that is trying to change the legal framework and secure the right resources**