



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

Mid-Year Review 2020/21



adoptionuk
ar gyfer pob teulu sy'n mabwysiadu
for every adoptive family



**Credwch
mewn plant
Believe in
children**



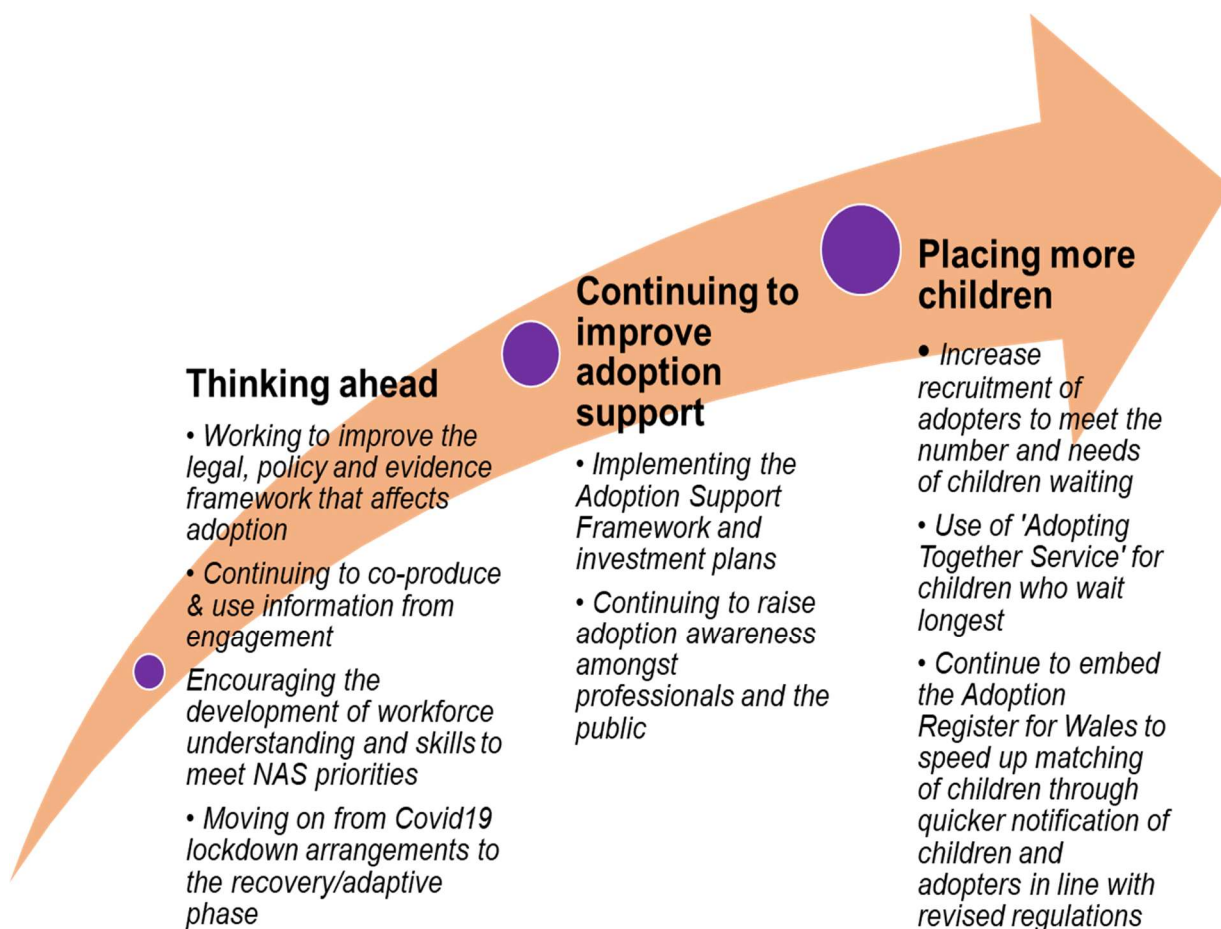
**Barnardo's
Cymru**



Introduction

The National Adoption Service (NAS) is the Wales wide collaborative for the provision of adoption services; its role is to improve adoption services for the benefit of all those affected by adoption in Wales.

Through its national / regional / local structure for Local Authority adoption services and its partnership with Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Health, Education and others, NAS has been improving services since 2014. Our current priorities are set out below.



Written with an input from services and stakeholders across Wales, this report provides an update on our work and this year's priorities.

We hope the report will be informative for those who use our services, professionals as well as Welsh Government and Ministers.

Foreword

As we reflect on the first half of this year, it is with much admiration for everyone who has worked with us to keep services operating in such challenging times. It also gives us confidence that this stands us in good stead to continue to do so for the remainder of the year.

The admiration is most certainly for Welsh adopters, and also others such as foster carers, who have gone to extraordinary lengths to make things happen for their children while juggling working from home, home schooling and many other things beside.

It is most certainly also for the detailed and skilled work being done by staff and managers who work in adoption and other linked services who, in a hugely challenging environment, have shown huge commitment and ingenuity in doing things differently while also juggling similar things.

Finally thank you to the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association for their support enabling us to continue to provide adoption services.

We started the year with exciting plans to continue our improvement of adoption services across Wales and found ourselves having to make significant changes, at pace and in a way that we could not have previously imagined.

However, adapted we have; and through the hard work of everyone we have been able to support even more families as they begin, and continue, their adoption journeys as well as continue to improve the service.

So a huge thank you to all adopters, staff in our regions, local authorities and VAA's as well as our partners across Wales.



Governance Board
Co- Chair



Governance Board Co-
Chair



Director

Covid-19

We started the 2020/21 business year in the midst of a national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Regional and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) services plus the Central Team have been commended for the way they have adapted and kept the service going through the pandemic. Inevitably there has been an impact on volume and timeframes of some elements of service provision but this is less than might have been anticipated so far; service delivery has continued and performance has been good. In some areas of service e.g. adoption support, services have been able to be more proactive which has been appreciated by families.

Many initiatives developed to support adoption services to operate.

Recruitment

- Welsh Government agreed to relax implementation of the new two stage process for assessing and approving adopters from April 1st and have subsequently consulted on changing the Regulations to continue this for the foreseeable future.
- Guidance for services on working within these arrangements was developed and issued.
- A 'Resource Pack' of exercises and reading for prospective adopters to use was developed and issued.
- The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) region developed a process for part on line / part in person assessments which has been shared across Wales.
- A process for 'virtual' GP assessments was agreed and implemented which is enabling the medical side of assessments to continue.
- Marketing has continued in a way that is sensitive to the situation including more recently a repeat of the national campaign.

Placing children

- A Framework to assist decision making about movement of children into their new adoptive homes was developed and issued. This is supporting all regions and VAA's to move children into their adoptive homes.

Adoption Support

- National and Regional /VAA website pages were regularly updated with useful information.
- Services were proactive in contacting families and offered additional digital / on line advice and activities including access to those developed by others e.g. South East Wales (SEWAS) region psychology service.
- Our new commissioned support services TESSA and Connected have continued to operate virtually and have increased the number of families / children and young people supported.
- Placing the series of 'Post Approval Training for Adopters' modules on the website was brought forward so that they are available for use.
- Advice and support was made available for families as children returned to school this included a lovely bilingual book 'Sammy the Sloth returns to school' written by a member of staff in the Mid & West Wales service and Webinar discussions provided by Adoption UK (AUK).

Communication

- The National website was amended to provide relevant information about Covid-19 on the Homepage, signposting through to regularly updated detail on service availability, adoption support etc. Most Regions and VAA's also did likewise to their websites.
- Regular operational meetings were established for Regions and VAA's and regular e-mail updates have been provided to Governance Board members and others.
- Working with Cowshed there has been regular positive public relations and news stories about adoption.
- Three learning and development webinars were commissioned from AFA Cymru and are on their website. Focusing on the legal context, part remote assessment of adopters and planning to move children on, these are to support staff who are working in different ways.

General

- A NAS 'Framework for the Continuation of Services' was developed to support services to move between different levels of restrictions while incorporating learning.
- Central Team prioritised provision of advice to Welsh Government involving Regions and VAA's as appropriate.
- A shortened performance collection was put in place for the first half of the 2020/21 business year.
- We have, where possible, supported the VAA's endeavours to maintain business continuity and cash flow both directly and by advocating with others.

At time of writing there are some ongoing challenges e.g. the availability of GP input to medicals, which is still being worked on in some parts of Wales. More recently local lockdowns have led to a re-tightening of practices in parts of Wales and the impact of this through the coming months alongside any additional restrictions remains to be seen. Services are, however, well placed to continue with their adapted service delivery for the foreseeable future.

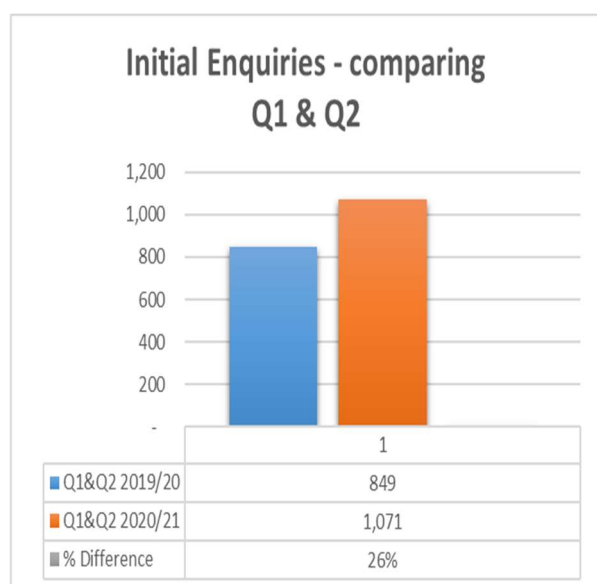
The remainder of this report updates on progress against our plans and current performance.

Priority 1 - Placing more children

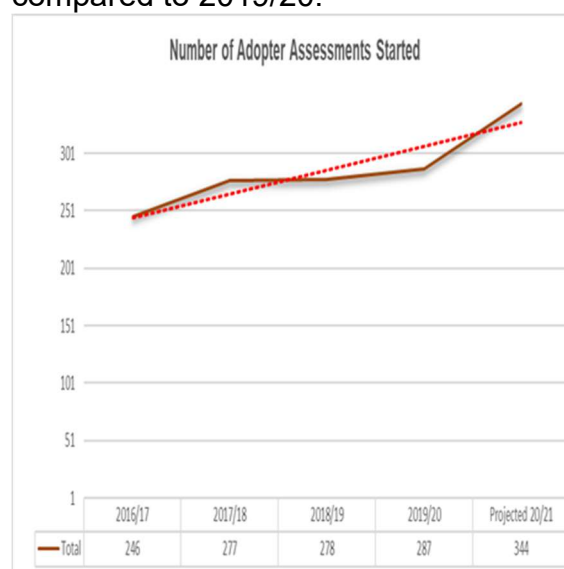
- a. Increase recruitment of adopters to meet the number and needs of children waiting

The impact of Covid has had less impact than expected at the mid-year point. As anticipated performance dropped significantly during quarter 1 whilst the service adjusted to different ways of working, but it picked up during quarter 2. The conservative full year projections, assuming that delivery can continue at a similar level for the remainder of the year, suggest that we may come close to achieving a similar level of performance as in 2019/20.

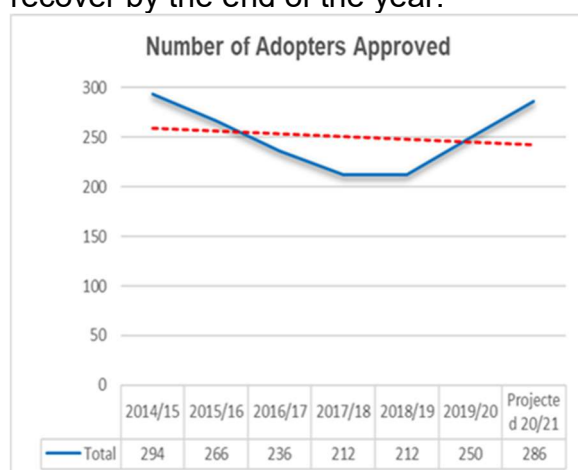
The level of enquiries to services has increased by 26%



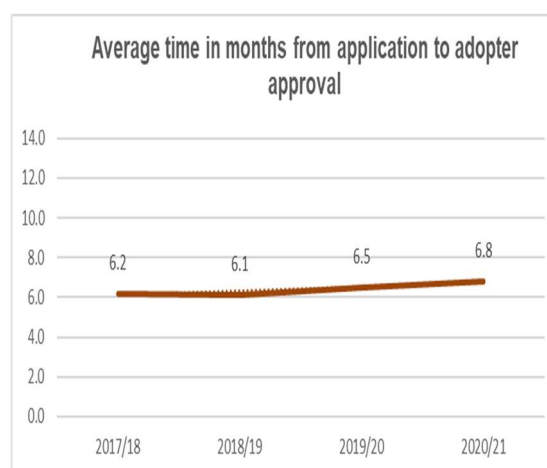
The number of adopter assessments starting is very promising and is projected to increase by 20% compared to 2019/20.



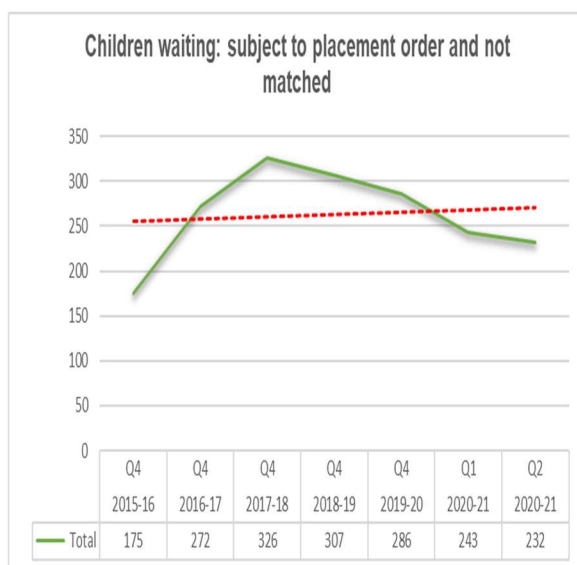
Projected number of adopter approvals decreased compared to the same period in 2019/20 but is currently projected to recover by the end of the year.



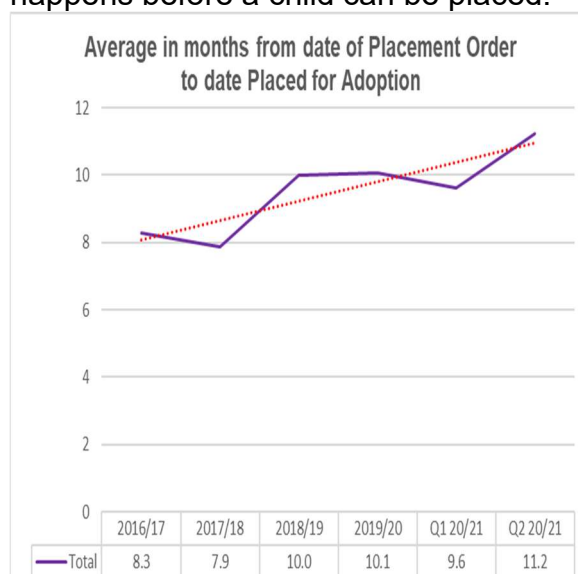
Timeframes from application to adopter approval thus far are relatively unaffected.



The number of children waiting continues to reduce



There has been an increase in child timeframes but is due to the very detailed risk assessment work that now happens before a child can be placed.



b. Use of 'Adopting Together Service' for children who wait longest



The Adopting Together service has been developed by the Welsh VAA's for the sector in order to place the children who wait longest. There are 4 components to this specialist service:

Training and Recruitment

- Specific recruitment of adopters (child-specific and targeted recruitment)
- Adopter-led profiling events
- Enhanced therapeutic training for adopters and foster carers;

Team for the Child Meeting

- Team for the Child meeting prior to formal matching – led by a Clinical Psychologist
- Adopting Together Buddy;

Therapeutic Transitions

- Therapeutic transition sessions through structured play – pre, during and post move to adoptive family, supervised by a clinical psychologist throughout; and

Psychological Consultation Meetings

- Three consultation meetings post placement for adopters with the same Clinical Psychologist.

The Adopting Together Service worked with 36 children during the first half of the year including:

- 2 children being placed with their forever families;
- 4 child specific recruitment campaigns which has generated 38 enquiries; and
- 5 children being matched as a result of an online profiling session.

The adopter support psychology group has had overwhelming positive feedback and supported adopters during initial months of lockdown.

- c. Continue to embed the Adoption Register for Wales to speed up matching of children through quicker notification of children and adopters in line with revised regulations



Cofrestr Fabwysiadu **Cymru**
Adoption Register **Wales**

The fully bilingual Adoption Register Wales (ARW) continues to be used to support family finding for children. All children and adopters are required to be added to the ARW one month after their Placement Order is made and one month after approval, respectively, or sooner if appropriate. . During this reporting period 135 children were added to the ARW, 39% of which were in sibling groups. 88 adoptive families were also added which is an increase in performance compared to the same period in 2019/20.

Priority 2 - Continuing to improve adoption support

In 2016 NAS developed its strategic plan for the development of adoption support services in Wales.

With its distinctive umbrella symbol, the vision over time was to guarantee a 'Core Offer' of support for all Welsh adopted children and young people and their parents as well as to others affected by adoption.



It was intended that this 'Core Offer' would:

- equip adoptive families at the start and support their early days to encourage healthy and confident families;
- provide effective information, advice or support as and when families need it and in a timely way so any issues that arise are less likely to escalate into more serious issues; and
- provide ongoing support or easy re-entry to services where it is needed.

Realising this vision was given a huge boost when Welsh Government announced a £2.3m investment package from April 2019. This section details how the investment has been allocated showing the improvement in service provision.

[a. Implementing the Adoption Support Framework and investment plans](#)

We are now in the second year of funding and the increase in service provision has been extraordinary. Covid-19 has impacted on services that are usually delivered in person. However, this has had less impact than first anticipated due to amazing staff who have developed innovative and on line services which have been very successful. Some elements will continue post Covid-19 as it allows more events to take place especially in regions that are geographically diverse.

[Evaluation of the Adoption Support Framework](#)

The academic institution, The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University, have been commissioned to undertake the evaluation which is underway. The rapid review undertaken during May 2020 brought together key findings from existing UK research on:

- the needs and characteristics of adopted children and their adoptive families;
- how best to engage these families effectively in a range of support; and
- the evidence base for specific adoption support services and interventions.

This review will inform activity during the second half of the year including the evaluation activity which will comprise an online survey of Welsh adoptive families and of professionals as well as 'in person' detailed follow-up with a smaller sample to provide additional qualitative information. This will be followed by formal reporting of findings which we will publish.



TESSA (Therapeutic and Educational Support Services for Adoption) is a 5 year, National Lottery funded programme led by Adoption UK, taking place in Wales, England and Scotland. In Wales additional investment from Welsh Government and NAS has made it possible to roll the programme out across the whole country and by September 2020 it was working at peak capacity taking an average of 18 referrals each month.

The programme aims to develop and test out an early intervention service for adoptive families. The intervention is at the point where the parents feel that things are not going smoothly but before the situation escalates to crisis point. The model is based on the understanding that the relationship between a child and their parents or carers is the main key to their future development. It is based on the principle of empowering families rather than fixing children. TESSA brings together a unique combination of peer support (each family is linked to a parent partner who is an experienced adopter) and access to a clinical psychologist much earlier than would normally happen. The psychologist uses their specialist knowledge of early trauma and its impact on child development to help the parents make sense of the child's behaviour in the light of their past experiences. Parents are then encouraged to reconsider their own responses to that behaviour. The belief is that by providing this intervention early it will be possible to reduce the need for much more expensive and long term psychological input later.

The anticipated outcomes for the families are that at least 80% of parents will report increased knowledge and understanding of therapeutic interventions appropriate for their children and that at least 80% of schools will report improved knowledge and feel more confident when implementing support plans for children following consultations.

Anticipated outcomes for adoption regions are that families will become more skilled and more resilient with the knowledge and information they need to support their children going forward. This would reduce the reliance on expensive and long lasting packages of support later in the adoption journey. Where other intervention is needed the family will be better resourced to seek the right support from health or education.

All Regions have a TESSA co-ordinator in place and have enabled more than 90 families to receive input from TESSA.

Families receiving TESSA services				
Mid & West Wales	North Wales	South East Wales	Vale, Valleys & Cardiff	Western Bay
8	5	29	23	25

With the support of the All Wales post the following services have been provided:

All Wales Service:	Who Benefitted?
1 to 1 NVR direct support	2 parents
Enhanced well-being sessions	17 families
Pyjama drama sessions	48 families
Circus skills sessions	4 families



The **Connect Service** is a Wales wide service for children and young people who have been adopted. It is led by Adoption UK and delivered through a partnership between Adoption UK and the regional adoption services. It includes 4 elements:

1) **Connected Groups**

Children and young people age between 7 and 25 meet online and face to face (when Covid allows) where they can have fun, build their confidence and know that they are not alone in their adopted experiences.

- 2) **Connecting** – a programme of awareness raising about adoption amongst main stream youth services.
- 3) **Connection** – improved information services for adopted children and young people.
- 4) **Connect Ambassadors** – supporting children and young people to have their voices heard in policy and planning.

The investment funds a number of youth workers and regional posts to support local connected groups.

All Wales Service	
On line sessions with individuals and groups of children	Developed information materials for young people
Developed group for 18-25 year olds	Developed a welcome pack for families
58 children have attended Connected sessions via 58 online and 3 face to face	119 children are on the Connected register

The investment has funded a wide range of adoption support services within the regional collaborative services.

Life Journey Materials

The Life Journey Materials content on the NAS website <https://adoptcymru.com/life-journey> have been re-organised based on feedback from users. Regions have invested in posts to co-ordinate life journey work as well as direct provision.

Performance continues to improve.

- 78% of children having a draft later life letter and draft life story book in place by their matching panel
- 74% of children by their 2nd adoption review have received direct work in relation to family trees, timelines, story books and ecomaps and a later life letter, as well as their life story book or direct life story work to help the child to understand their past.

Birth Families

New posts have been established to provide:

- Direct support to birth parents in all stages of the adoption process;
- Enabling birth parents to contribute to adopter preparation training;
- Links with the Reflect service;
- Enhanced support to birth parents using the letterbox contact service

Therapeutic Services

Posts have been established to provide:

- Training and support (remotely and face to face) in: Theraplay, therapeutic life story work, relationship based play, parenting programme, dyadic developmental psychotherapy, transition support, parallel stories, therapeutic parenting, letter box with birth families, sensory training, emotional literacy, emotional coaching, self-esteem building techniques, emotion regulation techniques through games etc., therapeutic play, baby bonding, parent & child attachment play, activity days, support groups, newsletters;
- Clinical psychologist services; and
- 66 referrals for therapeutic support have been received.

Contact

Posts have been established to:

- Review contact arrangements;
- Improve links with birth parents sometimes through co-working;
- Promotion and facilitation of adopter and birth family meetings; and
- Improve the letterbox contact service which is currently supporting over 3,800 letterbox arrangements.

Recruitment

Marketing and Recruitment Officer posts have been established in two regions which makes this post a consistent feature across all regional services. The posts contribute to improving the recruitment process and the success are reflected in the data showing improved enquiry and assessments commenced.

Training

Much has been done to support staff and adoptive families' training and development needs, some of which has been specifically re-focused due to Covid 19.

At a national level the 12 NAS post approval training modules have been published on the national website. Based on feedback from adoptive parents and covering a wide range of topics, they provide additional knowledge and insight on the topics and areas of family life that adopters said would be helpful. They were put onto our website in April so that adopters could access them directly if they wished and where there is guidance on how they should be used.

[National Adoption Service - Adopter Training Modules \(adoptcymru.com\)](https://adoptcymru.com)

Across regions and VAA's a wide range of online workshops, e-learning, webinars, specialist training and briefing sessions have been publicised and provided across a variety of topics. In some areas further consultation has led to tailored training programmes for the year being developed as well as individual training logs and adopters contributing to the delivery of training.

Good Practice Guides

Work has continued, through the contract with AFA Cymru, to finalise and launch four good practice guides. These focus on changing practice in four key areas using evidence and research led models of trauma informed practice:

- Contact,
- Working with Birth Parents,
- Transition and Early Support, and
- Adoption Support.

Understanding the Child

The 'Understanding the Child' model was developed by one of our South East Wales region and is used to support the introduction, placement and the early support of a child into their new family. The approach is being recommended through the good practice guides referred to above.

It is rooted in research based practice of developmental trauma, child development and attachment in order to help parents and professionals understand what may have been happening for the child during their early life and the impact this may have had on their understanding of the world and their behaviours in order to develop therapeutic parenting approaches.

This region has used investment to expand their understanding the child (UTC) service which has enabled them to use the approach with more children and their families. The approach has been used with circa 25 new placements so far this year as well as for follow up work with children already in placement. The service has also

produced guidance on direct work for staff and foster carers. The additional psychology support from Aneurin Bevan Health Board has also supported group based training and support for staff and shared on line advice and guidance via Webinars to services across wales.

b. Continuing to raise adoption awareness amongst professionals and the public

The recruitment campaign 'Become the Parent' was relaunched and ran from July to October 2020 and continues to be successful.

Total results

Here are some of the top highlights from the duration of this campaign.



We continue to be eternally grateful to our Adopter Champions from across Wales, including some additional adopters who joined for this re-run of the campaign, for once again supporting us to show adoption in such a realistic and positive light.

Initial enquiries to the service continue to grow as well as the number of adopter assessments starting.

'Pride' occurred during the campaign period. We were able to continue our support of this event by participating in the 'on- line' activities.

Pride

We organised sponsorship for this year's virtual Pride event and updated the campaign materials for an LGBTQ+ audience which was shared across both ours and Pride's channels.

Our post about same sex adoption was one of the top performing posts this year.

NationalAdoptionServ @inas_cymru · Aug 29
Did you know 1 in 7 adopters in Wales are same sex parents? 🏳️💖👨👩👧👦

We're thrilled to be supporting this year's #PrideCymruBigWeek and want to encourage more LGBTQ+ people to get in touch with us to start their #adoption journeys.

More info here: bit.ly/2lxts1F



Pride Cymru and 5 others
23 56

Pride Cymru's
Online Markets and
Community Area
#pridecymru #welshpride

Donate

Home Markets and Community Area Support and Services

National Adoption Service

1 in 7 adoptions in Wales are to same sex parents.

It doesn't matter how old you are, your sexual orientation, whether you own your own home or if you're single, almost anyone is able to adopt.

The National Adoption Service is looking for people who can give children the safety, security and love they need and wants to hear from you.

Contact your local adoption agency to find out more about adoption and take the first steps to a family adoption.wales.gov.uk

Mae 1 o bob 7 mabwysiad yng Nghymru i rieni o'r un rhyw.

Nid oes oŵa po mor hen ydych chi, eich cyflwr iechyd, eich planio ydych chi'n berchen ar eich cartref eich hun neu os ydych chi'n singl, mae bron unrhyw un yn gallu mabwysiadu.

Darganfyddw'r rhiant sydd ynot ti.

Cysyllta â'r Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol heddiw.

Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol | **National Adoption Service**

Priority 3 - Thinking Ahead

a. Working to improve the legal, policy and evidence framework that affects adoption

A significant focus since April 2020 has been working with the Welsh Government to enable services to continue during the pandemic. We provided them with a range of advice on adoption matters including:

- Welsh Government agreed to relax how the new two stage process for assessing and approving adopters was implemented from April 1st. This enabled us to continue to assess new applicants and Welsh Government have subsequently consulted on changing the Regulations to continue this for the foreseeable future.
- A process for 'virtual' GP assessments was agreed and implemented which is enabling the medical side of assessments to continue.
- Informing the guidance to the sector on the operation of services through Covid.

b. Continuing to co-produce and use information engagement

NAS is very proud of the podcasts 'Truth Be Told'. A group of adopters agreed to from across Wales share their experiences with each other - from the first steps to post-adoption support. No one knew each other before the recording but within moments it is like listening to old friends talk. They laugh together, they cry together.

[National Adoption Service - Truth be Told adoption podcast series \(adoptcymru.com\)](https://adoptcymru.com)



Thank you to our adopters for taking the time to create such helpful reference points for future adopters. We know that they are already helping others.

c. Encouraging the development of workforce understanding and skills to meet NAS priorities



NAS commissioned Afa Cymru to develop the 4 good practice guides: contact; transitions and early support; working with birth parents; and adoption support. Thank you to Afa Cymru and staff in the Regions for developing these high quality guides and a special thank you to Jess Coldrick for designing the covers.

They will be launched in November 2020 and will be followed by an implementation programme. They can be found on the NAS website www.adoptcymru.com/good-practice-guides

NAS also commissioned AFA Cymru to produce three Webinars to support staff who were working in different ways. These focus on:

- the legal context
- part remote assessment of adopters and
- planning to move children on

They are available on the AFA Cymru website

<https://www.afacymru.org.uk/adoption-during-covid-19/>

d. Moving on from Covid-19 lockdown arrangements to the recovery/adaptive phase.

NAS has a framework for 'Continuation of Services during and post Covid19'. Incorporating principles developed by Welsh Government, it has been designed to:

- provide a realistic and consistent roadmap for the continuation of adoption services, adapting to, and embracing new ways of working and learning from the positive experiences the new environment has brought about; and
- to provide principles of working which regional adoption agencies, local authorities and partners can adopt or amend/tailor for their organisation.

It provides a helpful template for staff/services should there be a further increase in Covid-19 and should further national or local restrictions be imposed. WE know that services have found it useful and that it has been adapted for use by other children's social care services.



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Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

National Adoption Service Central Team
c/o Cardiff Council,
County Hall, Atlantic Wharf
Cardiff, CF10 4UW

T: 029 2087 3927

E: contact@adoptcymru.com

www.adoptcymru.com