



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

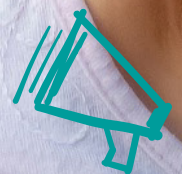
Annual Report

2022/23

An
easy read
summary for
all ages



Easy
read is a way of
making information
easier to understand
for people.



Achieving More Together



HELLO



What is the National Adoption Service?

We are an organisation that brings together the local adoption services from across Wales. We are passionate about making the service the best it can be for adoptive families.

Adoptive families include the children and young people who are adopted, and the adopters – people who want to become parents of those children and young people.

There is a small national team who lead the work of:

22 Welsh **local authorities** who care for children who are 'looked after' – a legal term for children in care

5 **Regional Adoption Services** that support the local authorities in finding permanent homes for children

4 Voluntary Adoption Agencies

Our **Governance Board** also helps make sure everything is run properly.

They are a group of people from various organisations in Wales who:

- Make sure we meet our priorities (the most important things we want to do).
- Fulfil our responsibilities and commitments to children and adopters.

Groups of **adoption professionals** also help us to improve the lives of children living with their adoptive families.



Local Authorities are responsible for a range of vital services for people and businesses, such as housing, social services, roads, and waste, in specific areas e.g. Bridgend or Caerphilly. Another name for them is local or county councils, and they're a bit like a small government.

Regions cover larger areas, providing support and guidance to help all the different Local Authorities and other agencies, like health and education, work together.

The National Adoption Service is divided into five Regions. Each Region provides all the adoption services needed, such as finding adopters and homes for children, and support services.



Adoption Professionals are people who help to find, assess and match adopters to children in need of a new family, as well as providing adoption support. They know lots about adoption. They have lots of different skills and qualifications to do this work.



Good work, everybody!

2022-23 has been another amazing year for NAS and adopted families. We've been working very hard to make sure adoption is a positive experience for everyone.

Sometimes it's been a challenge – we're just getting over the Covid pandemic and the cost of living is increasing – but we still want to make every year better than the last.

As always, we're focused on:

- Finding adopters
- Placing children with their new families
- Reducing the number of children waiting for placement
- Supporting our new and long-standing families



So we want to give a big

THANK YOU!

to all the superheroes out there who are hard-working, committed, kind and helpful.

We really appreciate you!

Priority #1

Finding the best families for adopted children



- Reaching the right people to give a family life to children who need to be adopted
- Making sure families have the right training and preparation

How did we do?



223
children were placed with families

An average wait of
10.1 MONTHS
for adopted children to be placed.
This is quicker than last year!

144
children waiting to be placed with a family

227
Adoption Orders were granted in Wales this year

35%
less initial adopter enquiries than last year. We think this is because Covid caused a lot more people to enquire and levels have returned to normal.

328 NEW
adopter assessments started.
This is 25% more than last year! We think this shows that the people who enquire about adoption are now more prepared than ever.



34%
of children placed were part of a sibling group. We're working hard to place brothers and sisters together.

82%
of adopted children were placed in Wales, and only 18% placed outside, which is the lowest number we've seen



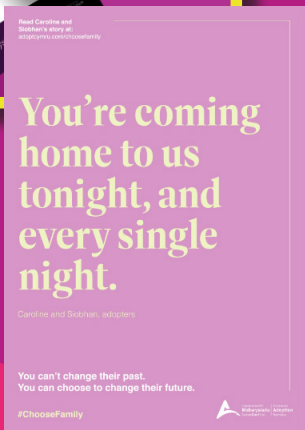
What did we do?

1

We're winners!

We've been working hard to find the best families for adopted children and young people. One way we did this was our Choose Family advertising campaign with Cowshed PR and Marketing. You might have seen it!

Last year, we won two awards for the campaign. Take a look at the visuals below - aren't they beautiful?



2

Getting out and about

We've also been finding new families at some brilliant events. We had stands at the 2022 Eisteddfod and Pride 2022, showing off our Choose Family campaign. We had a great time telling people about adoption and talking about the importance of family.





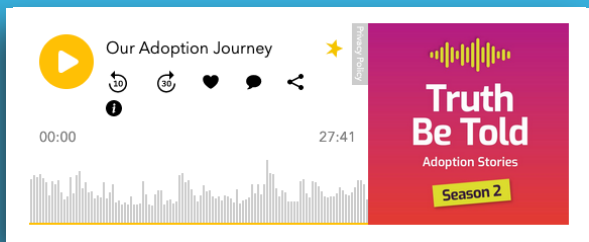
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Loud and clear

We also launched our second series of the Truth Be Told: Adoption Stories podcast.

People can listen to what it's like being in an adopted family. We even had a takeover episode, where young people from our Connected group presented and produced the final episode.

So far, our podcast has had nearly 7,000 downloads – that's a lot of ears!



Welsh Early Permanence

Early Permanence is when a child is placed with a foster carer who might go on to adopt them.

Research says it's better for the child or young person because it means moving house and family less.

We've been working with AFKA Cymru to help everyone know about Early Permanence. We want everyone to decide whether it's right for them.

5



Black Lives Matter

Last year, we worked with Sian Palmer from Cardiff University to help us understand how adoption is different for people from different backgrounds.

The research found that it usually takes longer to find an adoption placement for a child who's black, Asian or from a minority ethnic background.

4



Adoption Register for Wales (ARW)

One thing we use to find adoptive families is the Adoption Register for Wales (ARW). This service helps to match children and families when we can't find a match in the local area.

6

In 2022-23, there was:

- 208 children and 160 families referred to the register
- Three online events featuring children from across Wales
- Two Adoption Activity Days, which led to four successful matches
- 28% of children placed were through the register



Priority #2

Making sure everyone has the support they need



- Giving everyone access to support
- Developing our support services

What did we do?

There are more people in Wales than ever using our adoption support services! That's great news. But we want to make sure that our support is the best it can be.

Here's what we've been doing and improving.

Wales 'Adoption Support Commitment'

This is a special document that we launched in June 2023. It tells adoptive families about all the support they can get at every stage of their adoption journey. It's the first document of its kind in the UK!

We launched The Commitment at an event in the Norwegian Church in Cardiff Bay. It was a great chance to say thank you to adopters across Wales, including our Adoption Champions.

Support from the start

We've developed something called the Good Practice Guide for Transitions and Early Support. This is to make sure we're helping young people from the very start of their adoption journey.

We now have a transition plan for every single child placed for adoption this year. This means they will always know what support is there and what's coming next.

Life Journey Work

Life Journey Work (LJW) is really important – it helps adopted children and young people know who they are and about their history.

We have people across Wales working as Life Journey Work coordinators. They raise awareness and held more than 40 training events. South East Wales also made three podcasts!



In Wales, 78% of children matched have their LJW materials in place. In two regions, every single child had LJW materials!





LLWYBRAU:PATHWAY

LLWYBRAU:PATHWAY used to be called TESSA. They help children and families with support – things like parenting classes and advice from experienced adopters.

Here's what they did in 2022-23:

263

families supported



123

new families supported

100% of families

were accepted and matched with a parent partner

60% of new families

accepted a reflective parenting course

100% of families

moved towards a positive outcome

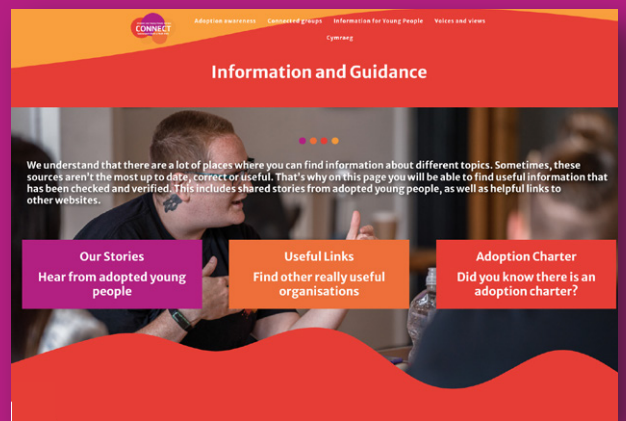


CONNECT SERVICE

These are regular monthly groups for adopted children and young people across Wales. There is also a Youth Council which gives young people a voice in adoption services.

Here's what they did in 2022-23:

- 18 monthly groups across Wales
- 325 adopted children and young people attended
- New Connect website and Youth Council was launched on 4th April 2022
- An Adoption Charter was created to tell every adopted child about their rights
- The Youth Council met with ministers from the Welsh Government to talk about what's important for adopted children and young people



Looking to the future

Adoption UK Cymru

Adoption UK Cymru trialled a new counselling service for eight adopted people aged between 13 and 30. The 13:30 LLWYBR PATH offered free counselling, which means talking to a therapist about things that might help.

Everyone who took part said:

- They felt **supported**
- Their therapist was **easy to talk to**
- They would **recommend the service**



Adoption UK Cymru are now looking at the results of this trial to see if the service could be rolled out for more adopted people.

Adoption UK also asked Cardiff University to make a report called 'Children Returning to Care from Adoption in Wales'. This looked at why small numbers of adopted children go back into care.

It showed that if we give adoptive families the right support, it's more likely that the children stay with the family.





Priority #3

Helping adopted children to have good contact with their birth parents

- Making sure, where it is safe, children can have contact with birth parents
- Support birth parents to meet adoptive families if they want

How did we do?

82 meetings

took place between birth parents and adopters

1/3 of all placements

had a meeting

100% of adopters

were involved in agreeing contact plans

100% of birth parents

were offered support

What did we do?

Contact is important

We did some research into contact across Wales. It told us that contact is extremely important to everyone, including adopted children, birth parents, adoptive families and professionals.

From this research, we're developing new plans for direct and indirect contact, including initial meetings between birth parents and adopters.

Good work is being done everywhere

Every region and VAA is making sure contact is an important part of their service.

In Mid Wales and North Wales, the Reflect service offers support to birth mothers before and after adoption. Mid Wales has supported 113 birth parents and relatives.

In South East Wales, there is a birth parent worker who promotes meetings with adoptive parents. One birth mother said after a meeting **"The word I'd use to describe meeting with adopters is 'reassuring'. I honestly feel like I could tell how they will treat my kids, even just from one meeting."**

In the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service, they've supported 124 birth parents with services like counselling, letterbox contact and meetings with adoptive parents.

Western Bay has a small contact and a small birth parent team. The service has supported 43 birth parents with support groups and drop-in events. Out of 35 placements, 23 birth parents were offered meetings and 12 attended. Everyone involved said the experience was very positive.

Barnardo's has introduced new work, which means all adopters commit to a form of contact with birth relatives.

St David's has new adopter preparation courses which focus on direct contact with birth families. These help adopters to understand how positive contact can be for everyone.

Priority #4

Making sure adopted children have access to their records when they grow up

- Making sure we keep and share important records of adopted children
- Help adopted children and adults to access their records

How did we do?

We have four services that help people get access to their records. These are only available to adopted people over the age of 18, siblings, and other specified people.

The services are:

- Access to birth records
- Intermediary services – which means finding birth families and supporting contact
- Requests from birth siblings
- Requests from other relatives or specified persons

During 2022-23, the services received:

- **222 requests** for access to birth records
- **77 requests** for intermediary services
- **85 requests** from birth siblings
- **11 requests** from other relatives

These numbers are lower than in the past. Some people have to wait a long time to get answers. We haven't had enough money and staff to deliver the services as everyone would like. Covid also meant it was difficult to access records.

An apology

You may have heard that adoption was in the news a lot recently. A report came out about how unmarried mothers were forced to put their children up for adoption between 1949-1976.

This caused a lot of emotional harm to children and families. The Welsh Government has made an apology to all the victims involved.

A lot of the children lost contact with their birth families, meaning many of the adopted adults don't know their personal history. This is why it's so important that we improve access to records.

We have been working with Welsh Government, Adoption UK and St. David's Adoption Service to make a plan for this service for those affected by the report. The adopted adults and mothers have been involved with plans to make sure it provides what they need.

We hope this service can help people access their birth records and trace their birth families.

We're making plans to improve these services.

What else have we been doing?



Listening to you!

Every year, we support the Adoption UK Barometer report. This finds out how adoption affects prospective adopters, adoptive parents and adopted adults across the UK.

The 2023 report showed that adoption services in Wales are in a good place. We've been rated 'as good as' or 'better' than other nations in several areas.

This year's report included:

- Replies from 138 people from Wales
- People in Wales were more likely to have accessed support and found it made a positive difference to their family (82%)
- 71% received support within three months of asking
- 79% of people said their Life Journey Materials were 'good' or 'adequate', compared to 68% across the UK
- Improvement in support in education, with 97% telling their child's school that they were adopted

What you've been saying

Our regional services have had some lovely compliments during 2022-23. Here's what people have been saying:

An adoptive parent

"I wanted to compliment the hard work that your team has put in for my family. I had a very positive experience right from the start"

An adopted young person

"Thank you for all the walks, chats and picking me up from school and talking about the hard stuff with a hot chocolate. I really appreciate you, thank you"

A birth parent

"It was such a beautiful meeting. Moving and emotional but so valuable. She really showed how she wants the boys to be loved and care for and put them above her"

There were also a very small number of complaints which services use to do better.





About us

The National Adoption Service was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales. The National Adoption Service (NAS) 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 three-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 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.

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;
- Offer advice to adopted adults;
- Adoption support services, in some this is shared with local authorities.

Nationally, the Director and small central team provide leadership, co-ordination, strategic support and enabling.



Positive Feedback



"This was an extremely positive first review. Thank you to everyone involved."

From someone thinking about becoming an adopter

"A big thank you for the hard work your team has put in for my family. A very positive experience right from the start."

From an adopter

"I wanted to express my gratitude to N for the help he has given me in the last few weeks... I am grateful for his help, promptness and professionalism."

From an adult who was adopted as a child

"The Adoption Groups have been invaluable for us and lots of fun. Meeting other families who have come together through adoption is so special. Everyone understands each other and are there to support and cheer you on, no matter what stage of the journey you are at. It's been lovely seeing my children meeting others who have adoption in common and realising all families come together in different ways but have love in common."

Adopter, Cardiff





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Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd**



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