



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

**Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd**

# **Annual Report** **2017-2018**





# FOREWORD

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We are pleased as the chairpersons of the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Governance Board respectively to have the opportunity to provide this foreword.



*Phil T. Hodgson*

**Phil Hodgson**

Chair of the Advisory Group



*Geraint Hopkins*

**Cllr Geraint Hopkins**

Chair of Governance Board

The local government elections of 2017 provided NAS with a new chairperson for the Governance Board as well as new councillors to represent each of the five national adoption service regions. This, alongside the consistency in the Independent Chairperson and membership of the Advisory Group, has created an excellent and renewed partnership in the professional and political stewardship of Wales' National Adoption Service.

It is almost four years since the National Adoption Service was launched in November 2014 and since that time we have seen progress and improvement in meeting the needs of children, young people and adopters. This report shows what has been done to extend that during 2017/18 and reflects the hard work and contribution made by adopters, adopted children and young people, as well as professional staff across Wales.

We can see performance improving in many areas as well as important initiatives such as the new Life Journey Work Framework, the NAS Adoption Champions and the Adopting Together scheme which show much promise for the future continuation of this.

We were pleased during this year to be invited to write an article for 'Adoption & Fostering' the quarterly journal now published by the Coram Baaf Adoption and Fostering Academy. We extend our thanks to Dr Alyson Rees of Cardiff University for her support and challenge in co-writing that with Phil. This provided an important 'pause and reflect' opportunity to take stock of where we were. This was complemented in February of this year by an Advisory Group workshop where we began to think about where we want to be and in particular how we move to developing a contemporary and forward thinking adoption services for Wales.

This is not without its challenges, some of which are also outlined in the report, but we realise that in part our role is to challenge ourselves and those that deliver and resource adoption services in Wales, as well as the policy makers of government.

Adoption has lifelong implications for all those it touches; recognising this provides a new 'mindset' for services and different challenges in terms of how we attract prospective adopters, place children and provide adoption support in the future. It also provides challenges to the legal and policy context, resourcing and practice.

However, this is informing the work we have been doing and the plans for the future in terms of the need for dynamic and flexible recruitment and adoption support services. The need to change how we do this in Wales remains significant and will continue to be the focus of attention during the next twelve months.

# INTRODUCTION

The National Adoption Service for Wales is a collaboration for the provision of adoption services across Wales.

Since November 2014, it has brought together all local authority adoption services into five regional collaboratives, with co-ordination and leadership provided by a small central team and Director of Operations. Voluntary adoption agencies operating in Wales are important partners in the collaborative, as are other agencies such as health and education.

## CENTRAL TEAM



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

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## THE NORTH

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Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Gogledd Cymru

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**Adoption**  
Service

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## MID & WEST WALES

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## WESTERN BAY

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Bridgend



Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE  
GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU  
Bae'r Gorllewin

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## VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF

Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf,  
Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan



Vale, Valleys  
and Cardiff  
Adoption

**Mabwysiadu**  
yn y Ffio, y Cymoedd  
a Cheerdydd

### Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Adoption

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## SOUTH EAST WALES

Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent,  
Torfaen, Caerphilly, Newport



South East Wales Adoption Service  
Achieving More Together  
Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Deddfwyrain Cymru  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd!

### South East Wales Adoption Service

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adoption@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk  
www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/3122.asp

**ALL WALES VOLUNTARY  
ADOPTION AGENCIES SERVICES**

**adoptionuk**

or gyfer pob teulu sy'n mabwysiadu  
for every adoptive family

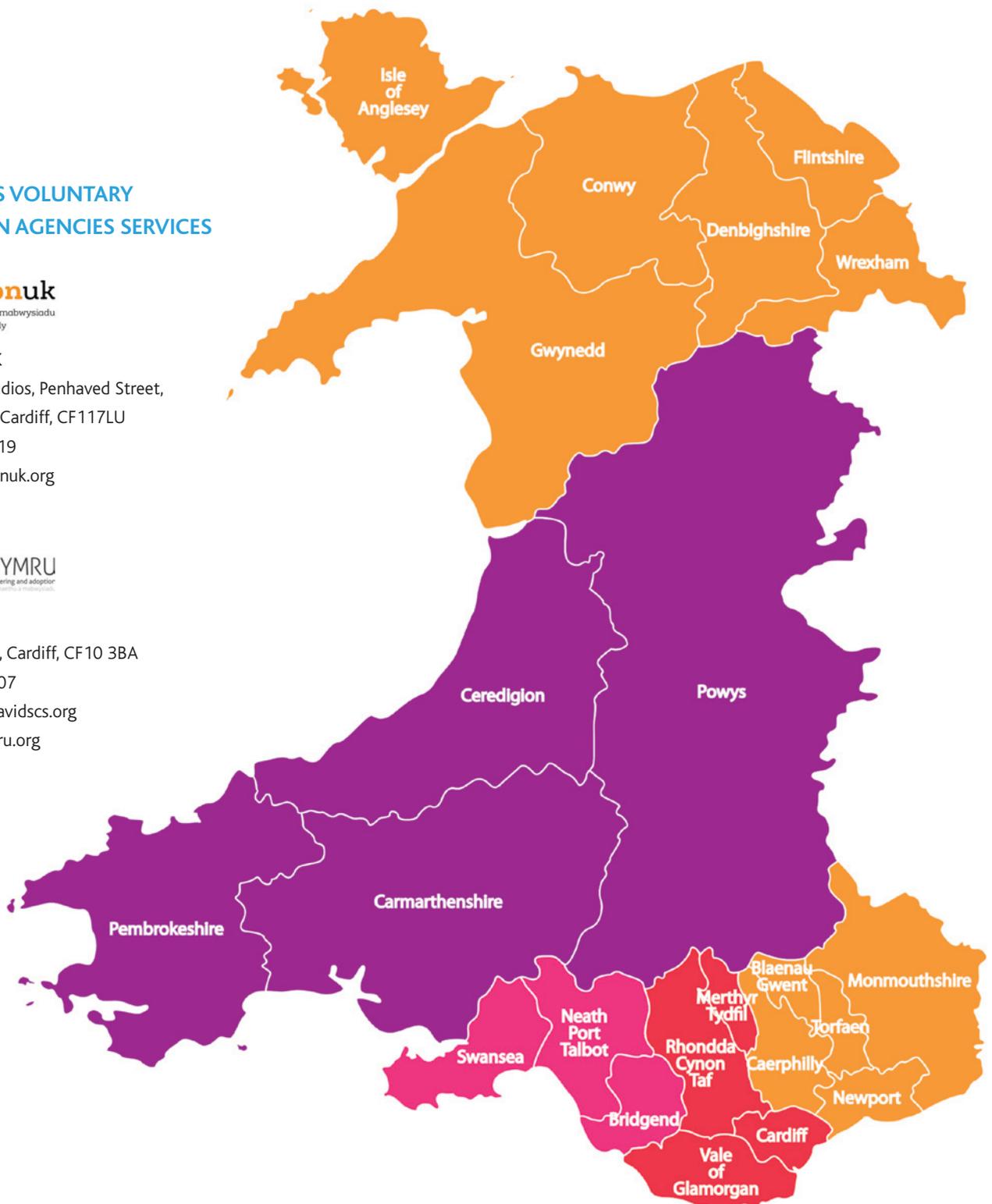
**Adoption UK**

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**AFA Cymru**

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**After Adoption**

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**Barnardo's Cymru**

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**St David's Children Society**

28 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BA  
029 2066 7007  
info@stdavidscs.org  
www.adoptionwales.org



For looked after children in Wales who cannot remain with their birth family, and for whom an adoptive home is the agreed plan, adoption services play an important role in securing a permanent family.

During the 2017/18 business year:

- more than 300 children were placed in their new adoptive home;
- approximately 300 children had their adoption orders granted<sup>1</sup>;
- a further 350 children, with the legal authority to be placed, were waiting to be matched or placed with their new family at the end of the year.

The service worked with about 16% of the children who were looked after in Wales last year, a similar figure to the year before. According to Welsh Government data, on average over the last eight years, 13% of all the children who ceased to be looked after were adopted.

The adoption agencies that make up the National Adoption Service for Wales provide a range of services to support these children and their families, as well as others affected by adoption. In addition to working with the children above, adoption services across Wales also:

- supported more than 500 children with adoption support services;
- facilitated more than 3,370 active letterbox contact arrangements;
- provided a service to more than 320 birth parents;
- received more than 200 requests for access to birth records and more than 150 for help in making contact with birth family;
- received more than 60 requests for support from birth siblings and other relatives.

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<sup>1</sup> This data is collected by the Welsh Government and will be published later in 2018

## ADOPTION SUPPORT

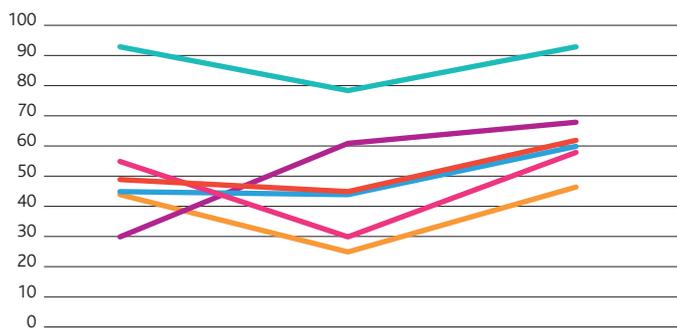
Since NAS was formed, we have made improvements to the adoption support services we provide, and we are currently implementing our Framework for Adoption Support.

This framework recognises that all adopted children and their parents may want or need support at some stage, and that this needs to be easily accessible and available within 'adoption informed' services. It also recognises that we should better equip adoptive families in the early days, as well as ensuring families get effective information, advice or support whenever they need it. These changes are part of recognising that adoption has 'lifelong implications' for children, their adoptive parents, and others affected by adoption – particularly birth parents and adopted people.

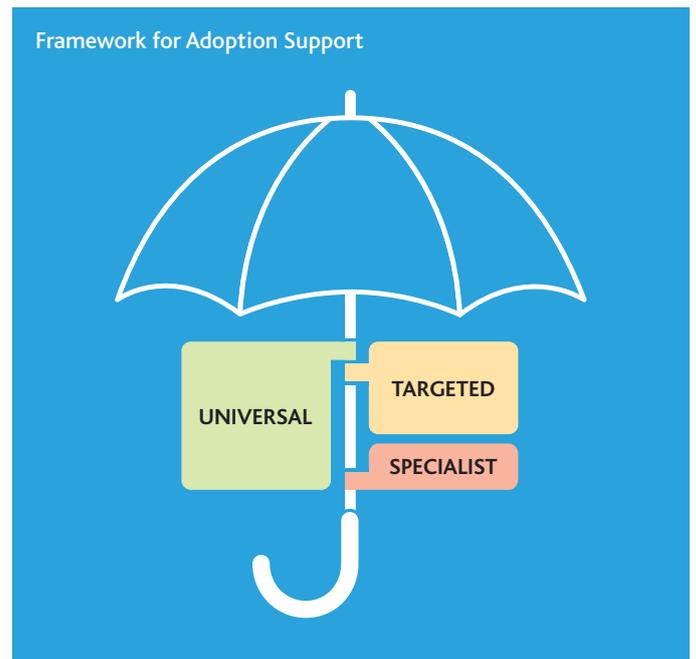
Out of the many positive changes being made, we are particularly pleased with the impact of our life journey work for children and families. 62% of children now have this in place by their second adoption review.

All of the regions have shown further improvement this year, with Mid and West Wales consistently performing well.

Percentage of children at second adoption review with Life Journey materials in place



	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Mid & West Wales	92%	79%	92%
North Wales	44%	25%	46%
South East Wales	45%	43%	60%
Vale, Valleys & Cardiff	30%	61%	68%
Western Bay	55%	30%	58%
WALES	49%	45%	62%



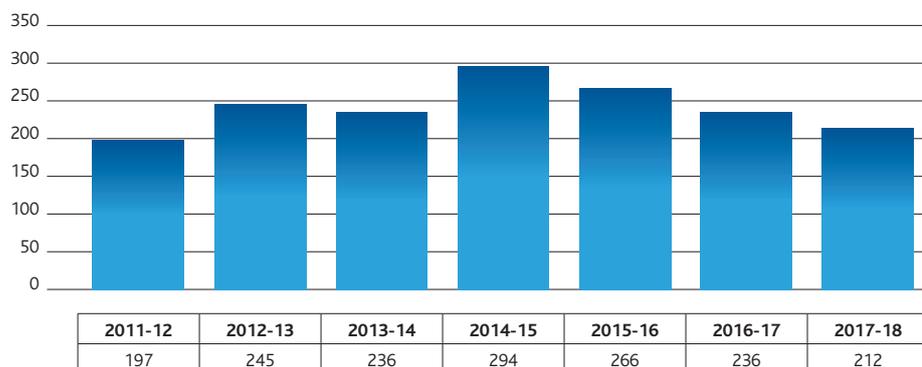
Once again this year nearly all the children placed had their need for adoption support services assessed, and 36% had ongoing services at the point of placement, a higher proportion than last year (25%).

There has been an increase in post adoption support being sought and provided. At 167, 32% more new requests for post adoption support were assessed during 2017/18, with a further 81 in progress at the end of the year. The vast majority of these assessments, more than 124 or 74%, resulted in a non-financial support service being provided mainly for therapeutic or practical support.

We have asked the Welsh Government to revise the legal framework for adoption support services. This would make adoption support plans become part of the child's Looked After Children plan, remaining active and reviewed under the new Social Services and Well-being Legislation until support is no longer needed. Families would still be able to come back for further support should they need it later on.

We believe this will help us improve the accessibility of services, alongside making changes that improve how adoptive families are supported from the start. Initiatives such as the new Life Journey Materials Framework, and the flexible post approval training package for adopters, should provide this. We also plan to consider how contact is supported in 2018/19.

### Measure 34: Number of prospective adopters approved



## PLACING CHILDREN

Section 2 of the report outlines the work we are doing to improve recruitment, meaning we can place all children in a timely way. We have been improving marketing and recruitment because we now understand our business needs in much more detail.

In 2017/18, 212 adopters were approved, fewer than in previous years, but 12% more new assessments (277) were commenced. The level of adopters approved has returned to pre-NAS levels; this may be the 'norm' for Wales, but this needs to change because recruitment activity at this level will not meet our needs.

Despite this, there are some positive things to report in terms of placing children:

- the children we place are, on average, being placed more quickly;
- 56% of children placed joined their new family within the Welsh Government guideline of 13 months from the time they became 'looked after' and 49% within the 6 months guideline from the time of the placement order;
- nearly one third of the placements we made were for children in sibling groups – similar to last year;
- the level of matches that do not proceed or breakdown before the adoption order remains very low at 1%;
- enquiries from adopters have increased by 20% this year; and
- the average time for an adopter to be approved has reduced again – on average 6 months from formal application to approval, 9.5 months from the adopters first enquiry.

We recognise that we need increase the level of assessments commenced and completed to reach a new level of adopter sufficiency, meaning we can reduce the number of children waiting and the time they wait. We believe in the short term that Wales needs to almost double the number of adopters it recruits.

## UNDERPINNING WORK

There are many other activities that the National Adoption Service is engaged in. In section 3, we report on the work we are doing to engage with adopters, adopted children and young people, and our co-produced development work with them. It also outlines the significant amount of work we are doing in legal and policy arrangements, which ensure that the context for adoption services works well for the people receiving services.

The rest of the report outlines how we did in meeting our priorities for 2017/18.

# OUR FOCUS



## The National Adoption Service vision for 2017/18 was to:

- Increase the range of adoptive homes available to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the agreed plan
- Reduce the time all children wait for an adoptive placement, including children with additional needs, and ensure sibling groups are placed together
- Ensure prospective and approved adopters receive good quality, timely assessment and support
- Implement our Framework for Adoption Support to provide everyone affected by adoption with improved access to advice, information and certain services, as well as more targeted and specialist support for those who need ongoing support following assessment
- Achieve improvements in the performance of adoption services across Wales

## Key Improvement Priorities for 2017/18 were:

- Continuing to improve adoption support
- Placing children effectively
- Underpinning work – which included informing the legal and policy context, consulting with and using co-production to engage our service users, improving professional understanding and skills in permanence and adoption related work, and ensuring our Governance arrangements work well





PRIORITY

## Continuing to improve adoption support

### Progressing the Adoption Support Framework and Business Case

The National Adoption Services Framework for Adoption Support outlines our ambitions for the support and services that adopted children, adoptive parents and others affected by adoption can expect over time. It is the adoption support improvement plan for Wales, based on our engagement with the people who use services. Over time, we want these services to be easily accessible and widely available everywhere, meeting needs in a timely way.



#### Where are we at March 2018?

- The Framework has been developed and agreed by all partners and stakeholders.
- Most regions have developed their local arrangements to provide adoption support, including providing new or additional services and developing their staff to deliver specific therapeutic adoption support interventions.
- An Adoption Support Development Manager post has been created – funded by £50k Welsh Government (WG) investment which is secured to 31st March 2019.
- Engagement with adopters is ongoing via an embryonic 'Adopter Voice' scheme for Wales, and with children and young people via expansion of 'Talk Adoption'.
- Welsh Government/National Assembly agreed implementation of Section 8 and 9 of the English Children and Social Work Act in Wales.
- Adoption UK (AUK) launched '**The First 1000 Days**' project in October 2017. Its aim is to provide a package of support to adoptive families during the first three years, starting when the child is placed. It offers free access to a helpline; local peer support, training workshops and courses; factsheets and resources on a wide range of adoption related issues. In the first 6 months, 53 families have formally registered to the project and a further 25 people have contacted the helpline about it. AUK have provided 10 workshops across Wales dealing with issues with Education, Sleep and Therapeutic services and more are planned to focus on health and development issues, and Life Journey Work.
- Local government is implementing a national policy on financial allowances in adoption; regions are working with their local authorities to implement this from 1st April 2018.
- We are implementing the new framework for **Life Journey Work** in adoption, which has been co-produced with children, young people and adopters. A new 'Toolkit' has been developed, which together with the Framework and Good Practice Guide, are on the [www.adoptcymru.com](http://www.adoptcymru.com) website. This work has been supported by AFA Cymru; all staff have received support and training from AFA Cymru and this is to continue. Recurring investment of £75k has been made available from the Welsh Government to create capacity for improvement and is available to regions to embed the changes going forward.
- We have continued to work with Welsh Government and Adoption UK to make education services more 'adoption aware'. Lots of adopters express concerns about the way their child's needs are understood in school settings; AUK provides awareness raising work for education professionals across Wales. This year, with funding from Welsh Government, 'Master Classes' have been held across Wales. Adoptive parents, teachers and adoption social workers have come together to hear about the latest theories in brain development and the impact of early trauma, as well as sharing strategies on supporting adopted children in school. A comprehensive bank of resources has been gathered and is available for teachers on the Hwb Education Intranet and from Adoption UK. This complements the two guides produced in previous years.

*A guide for teachers* <https://www.adoptionuk.org/nations/cymruwales#GettingItRight>

*A guide for parents* <https://www.adoptionuk.org/nations/cymruwales#GettingItRightParents>

- We have produced and made a **Legal Guide for Adopters** available. Developed by AFA Cymru for NAS it is available on [www.adoptcymru.com/publications](http://www.adoptcymru.com/publications) and on the AFA Cymru website.
- We have continued to work on improving access to CAMHS and other health services that support emotional well-being. A productive meeting was held between clinical leads for CAMHS services in Wales and managers from the National Adoption Service for Wales in May 2017. The current CAMHS development plans include a commitment to improve the offer to vulnerable children, of which looked after children (such as adopted children) are a key group. Initial links have been made in four of the five regions, although there is still room to improve what is available to families. NAS has been invited to join the re-formed Early Intervention and Resilience workstream of the 'Together for Children and Young People' programme, and in early 2018 gave evidence at the National Assembly for Wales CAMHS inquiry building on the written evidence that NAS submitted.

The business case estimates the cost of implementing the Adoption Support Framework to be in the region of £1.4m – not including individual targeted and specialist services, some of which would be provided by others e.g. health. On the next page are some other priorities in the business case that are being considered currently.



What	Update	Future needs
Improved access to consistent, 'adoption informed' specialist advice and information about adoptive parenting and being adopted – preferably provided by Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) in a 'triage' type service – preventing statutory involvement for many.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NAS website developed to include Adoption Support pages</li> <li>Adoption UK (AUK) membership for all new adopters – grant funded by Welsh Government (WG) to 31st March 2019</li> <li>AUK and Association for Fostering &amp; Adoption (AFA) advice lines – grant funded by WG to 31st March 2019</li> <li>NAS adopter database to be part of new WAR</li> <li>Business case identifies triage service development costs as £50k minimum</li> </ul>	<p>Develop the triage concept and service offer including links with regions and, where appropriate, Local Authority (LA) and Information &amp; Advice (IAA) services</p> <p>Funding to be identified</p>
Update pre-approval training for adopters and develop a post approval/placement program for all adopters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post approval training for adopters developed (grant – one off)</li> <li>Scoping of pre-approval training content included in above</li> <li>Some regions have invested in staff and adopter training in specific therapeutic and behaviour management techniques</li> </ul>	<p>Funding for ongoing delivery to be identified</p> <p>Project to review and update pre-approval training to be scoped and funding identified</p> <p>Other opportunities to add to the range of options available to be explored</p>
Arrangements for adopters, children and young people to access new post adoption support assessments through the regional services as well as enhancing oversight of existing support plans for adopters/ children who live in each regional area,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four of five regional adoption services now offer post adoption assessments</li> <li>The South East Wales regional collaborative has developed a service delivery model for this has been made available to all regions to consider implementing</li> </ul>	<p>Fifth region to develop its plan</p> <p>Scope what is needed for regional services to have improved oversight of adoption support plans and develop a plan</p>
Integrating adoption support plans into children's care and support plans (Part 6 plans) and keeping these plans and services live and active for as long as they need to be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires legislative change – advice including independent legal advice provided to Welsh Government. Formal requests for the changes to be made.</li> </ul>	<p>Continue to request and work with WG to achieve this</p>
Help other agencies/services become 'adoption aware'.	<p>NAS education plan mirrors and works with WG plan for the education of looked after children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health services</li> <li>Other services</li> </ul>	<p>Priorities for 18/19 to be followed up including recent agreement by WG to track educational outcomes of adopted children</p> <p>Consider similar approach for other partner services</p>
Letterbox and Contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children's commissioner annual report on siblings views on contact/separation</li> <li>WG response includes working with NAS</li> <li>Recognition of growing area of work</li> </ul>	<p>Share good practice and develop an improvement plan</p>



PRIORITY

# Placing Children Effectively

The key to being able to place children in a timely way is having sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children with an adoption plan.

We are placing children more quickly and having success in placing siblings groups and more complex children. Despite this however, the number of children waiting has begun to increase again and at 31st March 2018 there were 350 children in Wales subject to a placement order waiting to be matched. Although we know that at least 20% of these children had matches being considered, we also know that we need to recruit more adopters so that we reduce the number of children waiting overall and the time that any child waits.

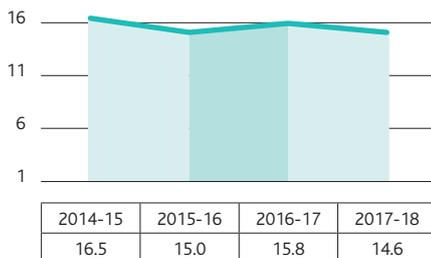


We have done a lot of work this year on our recruitment strategy, as well as developing better information and data to help us try to predict demand for placements. This is making good progress but we know that services will need to increase recruitment by a good margin to be able to place the children currently waiting, as well as the children likely to have placement orders made in 2018/19 and beyond.

## WHAT HAVE WE DONE

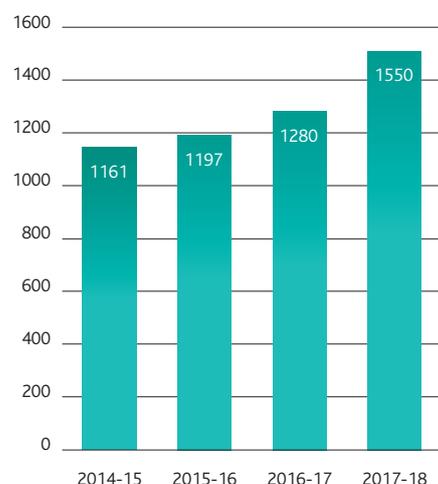
- All regions and VAAs now have marketing and recruitment plans in place, and in the second half of this year we started to develop recruitment goals based on the analysis of likely need
- Our Welsh Government development grant was used to support the regions in developing marketing plans, encouraging greater collaboration where there was opportunity for this. It also supported national and regional recruitment campaigns including by the VAA's
- Nationally, our social media presence continues to grow, and we have made improvements to the national website and how we use it following a review
- We ran a successful radio campaign at the end of the year that had a positive impact on enquiries
- We have worked with our 'Adoption Champions' to inform the content of our marketing and a number of champions have provided feature stories for this
- Our VAAs partners have worked together to develop a specialist recruitment project 'Adopting Together' for the children who wait longest
- We will continue to use web analysis and digital marketing to further improve our marketing nationally and regionally

Average in months it has taken from the date of the most recently looked after to date of placement for adoption



Benchmark: 13 months or less

## Number of Initial Enquiries



## Average time (months) for Adopters to progress from initial enquiry to agency decision to approve



Benchmark: 8 months or less

## CHALLENGES

There are many challenges facing us, not least ensuring marketing skills and resources are available across what is essentially a social work service, and using data to predict demand in an environment where many factors (e.g. numbers of placement orders made) are beyond the control of the service. Adopter sufficiency planning is new for NAS regions and agencies, and we are developing the data set alongside addressing the re-emerging gap.

Marketing is not something that all services have invested in to date and the central team is losing its part time marketing support at end of June.

The work we have done on marketing to date has however resulted in increased enquiries. These are responded to in a timely way, and there have also been improvements in the average timeframe for approval of adopters, as well as more assessments were commenced last year than in the previous.

We therefore have good foundations for the plans to address this nationally and regionally over the coming year, where we are aiming to maintain a good level of enquiries and begin to increase recruitment again.

Our plan is to commission expert marketing support, and monitor the implementation of marketing plans including improved use of analytics, better co-ordinating our digital and social media marketing, as well as working with our Adoption Champions to further develop our #SeeTheWholeChild campaign.



Alongside this we will see the roll out of Adopting Together, a collaborative project supported by the National Adoption Service, in partnership with the statutory sector and delivered by the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales. The project has emerged from a common and clearly defined purpose of securing permanence for children who wait longest for a family; it has been developed during 2017/18.

Led by St David's Children Society, Adopting Together brings together theoretical knowledge and best practice models that have been developed across the UK into one distinct model with four interlinking components for Wales:

- effective transitions using structured therapeutic play;
- an early interventions approach that supports the main carer – child relationship;
- Team for Child meetings pre-matching which brings together information from those who know the child best;
- specific recruitment, assessment and training of adopters by St. David's Children Society and Barnardo's, including child specific recruitment in partnership with Local Authority and Regional family finding teams.

## EXCHANGE AND ACTIVITY DAYS

The Wales Adoption Register continues to work creatively in finding adoptive families for children who are waiting. In 2017/18, we have held an Adoption Activity Day (AAD) and Exchange Days in South and North Wales respectively.

Adoption Activity Days are an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet a range of children waiting to be adopted. In that sense, AADs are child and adopter-led, and enable them to be active participants in family-finding. Unlike more traditional family-finding mechanisms, AADs give children and adopters the chance to emotionally connect and respond directly to each other through fun and enjoyable activities in a safe and supportive setting. Most importantly this is an opportunity for children to be seen as children first.

- Our first AAD in March 2017 was an overwhelming success with very positive feedback from the adopters, social workers, children and foster carers who attended. 6 children were matched with families as a result – 1 in 4 children who attended. One little boy who has since been placed said he feels he chose his family on the day, and it is very much part of his life journey story!
- Our second AAD in March 2018 was an even greater success and matched 40% of children who attended – 14 children out of the 35 and we expect at least 4 further matches. The majority of these placements are for children who have been on the Wales Adoption Register for more than 6 months and include 5 sibling groups.
- We held an Exchange Day in September 2017 in North Wales. 10 children were matched through this event including a sibling group of 3.

In feedback to the Register, most adopters express the importance of adopter-led opportunities and how much they learn about the children waiting by attending such events. Many expressed an interest, and have subsequently been matched with children they would not otherwise have considered or been linked with, including older children and large sibling groups.

These events, along with practitioner meetings and VAA meetings to the Register, make up the majority of the matches made by the Register in 2017/18 (28 out of 38). The matches from the AAD in March 2018 will be accounted for in 2018/19 once they have been progressed.

## MATCHING AND PLACING CHILDREN

We are doing other work to improve the arrangements for placing children.

- We know that adopters really value the input of Medical Advisors before their child is placed with them. However, Medical Advisors were aware of poor notification pathways when children are placed for adoption with their adoptive families and when adoption orders are granted. They undertook a review to gain a better understanding of improvements that could be made. There were different issues across Wales that are being considered through the regional management boards.
- We have been working with the Welsh Government to upgrade the database that supports the Wales Adoption Register and facilitate an adopter database. This had been delayed but in February a decision was made to proceed. Cardiff Council, as the host authority for the NAS central team, will be procuring the new database. It is anticipated the register will go live during 2018, a project plan is in place and a Steering Group established to inform and implement the changes in practice required.



# UNDERPINNING WORK

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## DEVELOPING OUR PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

The National Adoption Service Performance Management Framework (PMF) is detailed, but it now provides essential context and understanding to the delivery of adoption services across Wales. The work we have done on data to support the recruitment strategy this year exemplifies the value of this and we are beginning to develop additional data and intelligence to meet our needs.

NAS is continuously working to improve systems for data collection and verification on a regional and national basis. To this end we completed a review of the PMF this year, including an examination of any inconsistencies in the quality of data, with an eye to the future. We had hoped that Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) would be sufficiently implemented as a potential replacement and have been working with WCCIS to develop the relevant modules, but realistically this is looking unlikely. Our review identified that reliance on local authorities for accurate and timely data was a factor, as was the quality of regional data systems and infrastructure; ownership of performance culture is still not universally embedded across NAS.

Practice Solutions were commissioned to provide an initial assessment of the National Adoption Services' use, processing, storage and dissemination of information. We want to use the opportunity of renewing our system to improve and consolidate our knowledge management, increasing analytical capability in the short term and inform the longer-term position. We also want to integrate the data capabilities of the new Wales Adoption Register so we reduce duplication and unnecessary burden.





## CONTINUING TO USE CO-PRODUCTION TO ENGAGE USERS AND INTEGRATING SERVICE USER VIEWS INTO OUR GOVERNANCE

We have continued to use co-production to engage with adopters, adopted children and young people. Events have been held across Wales by regions and VAA's through support groups and focus groups, as well as for National Adoption Week last October.

During National Adoption Week 2017, a family event was held in Techniquest, which the former Cabinet Secretary the late Carl Sargeant attended.

This was a fun event for the families that came from every part of Wales and also launched the **National Adoption Service Adopter Champion initiative**.

We appealed to current adopters across Wales to become champions of adoption and have received an excellent response.

NAS believes that the story of adoption is best told by the people who have experienced it and whose reality it is. People who may not have thought about adoption, or may be considering it but feeling unsure, should hear these stories to feel that, with support, they could complete their family too.

The Adoption Champions have an important role in promoting a positive and realistic view of adoption by sharing how it positively changes their lives, the difference it made to the lives of children they adopted, and encouraging and empowering others to consider adoption with an open mind.

The initiative was launched during National Adoption Week 2017, and we look forward to developing it further by involving the Champions in future campaigns and linking them with regional services so that they can support local groups and activities.

During 2017/18, we also began to embed more structured and systematic ongoing ways of engaging with adopters, children and young people, as well as continuing to co-produce projects such as the development of the Life Journey Work framework.

'**Adopter Voice**' is an initiative developed by Adoption UK in Wales and supported by NAS. It mirrors a similar English scheme and began in Wales in the second half of 2017/18, continuing this year. Information was gathered across Wales by Adoption UK via attendance at support group meetings and a short online survey. 8 support groups, at least 1 in each region, were visited, where a set of standard questions were used to create a discussion about the strengths and challenges in the adoption system in Wales currently. Generally there was a feeling that the recruitment and assessment stages of the adoption journey are mainly effective, but the post adoption order experience is more variable. Adoption support, including specialist services, was highlighted as the main area of concern, alongside the need for improvements in communication about the support available locally.

'**Talk Adoption**' is a national (UK-wide) support service for adopted children and young people run by After Adoption. It encourages adopted children and young people to build relationships and learn new skills, boosting their confidence.

Talk Adoption Wales provides monthly groups for children and young people aged 7-10 years old and 11-25 years old. The service currently runs 2 groups (1 for each age group) in Cardiff and Swansea, and bi-annual family days for all family members. The groups offer a safe and supportive space to meet, have fun and explore issues which are important to adopted children and young people. The groups are very much led by the children and young people, their ideas, their thoughts, their voice.

Talk Adoption Wales promotes the voice of adopted children and young people by encouraging group members to attend/speak at adoption events, such as those run by National Adoption Service in Wales, Local Authority adoption teams and other adoption agencies.



Indeed, in Wales, young people from Talk Adoption spoke at the launch of the National Adoption Service at the Senedd in November 2014 and at the same time produced a DVD to highlight some of the issues important to them. This provides an important opportunity for adopted people to have their voices heard by the wider community, by professionals involved in adoption, their peers, and others e.g. teachers, politicians and senior officers. It is open to all who wish to take part, but is not part of the monthly sessions.

Maintaining the link with Talk Adoption Wales has been a priority for NAS and a core element of the NAS plan for engaging with those who use adoption services.

The **support groups** to children and young people in Cardiff and Swansea have continued, with both groups being oversubscribed. Exploratory discussions about the expansion of the service in Wales, including a group in North Wales, have been ongoing but hampered by lack of resources. After Adoption has been considering re-shaping its service in Wales to focus on support groups to children and young people.

Talk Adoption have been engaged in the **Life Journey Work** project, sessions to develop a training DVD as well as a sample 'Life Journey' book outlining what they think it needs to contain and how this work should be undertaken.

A **draft newsletter** has been also developed. The groups discussed further possible webpage/App content (for Talk Adoption and The National Adoption Service), which would have the same type of content as the newsletter, but with additional video interviews, audio interviews, links to other websites, and links to relevant social media platforms.



## INFORMING THE LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT, ADVOCATING CHANGE WHERE NECESSARY

NAS has continued to advocate for improved services on behalf of those using adoption services to the Welsh Government, National Assembly for Wales and others.

NAS is a member of the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group, where the improvements in adoption support are being monitored as part of a wider work stream on Permanency Planning and Building Stable Placements. During this year, NAS has kept the group updated on the development and implementation of the Framework for Adoption Support, and delivered a presentation on the improvement programme 'Life Journey Materials' for children who are or will be adopted.

NAS provided written evidence to the National Assembly for Wales inquiry into the Emotional and Mental Health of Children and Young People, and subsequently the Director gave evidence in person with colleagues from the All Wales Heads of Children's Services group and the Welsh Local Government Association. The subsequent report 'Mind over Matter' has recently been published and makes specific reference to issues and recommendations for the future of services to support the emotional wellbeing of adopted children.

NAS also collaborated with the All Wales Heads of Children's Services group and the Welsh Local Government Association to provide written evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee inquiry, which looks at public services for care experienced children and young people. The Independent Chair of the NAS Advisory group also wrote to the committee chair.

NAS meets twice a year with the relevant Welsh Minister for Children to discuss the NAS Annual and Mid Year reports.

NAS has been engaged with the Welsh Government review of the adoption regulations prompted by the implementation of the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care Act 2017. Alongside this, NAS has made a formal request to the Welsh Government to make changes to the regulations for the assessment of adopters, and for the provision of adoption support services. These changes are being requested to facilitate the improvements that NAS wishes to see implemented.

NAS has also engaged with the Welsh Government's development of new arrangements for Additional Learning Needs by attending workshops and meeting with officials.

NAS has worked with the Care Inspectorate Wales in their development of a revised methodology for adoption services in Wales. One of the regions, Western Bay, was inspected as a pilot, alongside an inspection of the national functions between January and March 2017. Early feedback for both is positive and the publication of both reports is awaited. The remainder of the regions will be inspected during 2018/20 with the VAA's towards the end of the programme.

### ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMPROVED PROFESSIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND SKILLS IN PERMANENCE AND ADOPTION RELATED TASKS ACROSS THE WORKFORCE

A number of our initiatives are impacting on the workforce within regional services and local authorities. Examples of this include our marketing and recruitment work, the new life journey materials for children who are or will be adopted, and training in specific therapeutic techniques, which are available to staff and adopters within regions.

Our Welsh Government grant aid has enabled NAS to contract with AFA Cymru and Adoption UK, allowing us to develop post approval training modules for adopters based on feedback. We aim to make these available during 2018/19 in a variety of ways to suit different learning styles.

Intelligence nationally and regionally, backed up by research, consistently indicates that support in the first year of placement and beyond is particularly needed. Our vision is that adopters will have access to more detailed and specific training/development at any stage after the child is placed or formally adopted. This forms a key part of the Framework for Adoption Support that we have developed, and is in recognition that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved.



### ENSURING OUR GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS WORK WELL

NAS has been in existence for three years and a review has been commissioned, using Institute of Public Care, to ensure the governance, management and operational arrangements of NAS are 'fit for purpose', enabling successful delivery of its stated role and purpose. The review commenced in the final quarter of 2017/18 and will be completed during 2018/19.

Reviews of the collaborative arrangements for North Wales and the Vale, Valleys & Cardiff also took place during 2017/18.

## YOUR FEEDBACK

Regional adoption services record compliments and complaints received at the service. There may be some under-reporting of both, particularly where these are received and dealt with by individual local authorities.

Across Wales during 2017/18, there were 14 complaints and 17 compliments specifically recorded. There are no national themes arising from these complaints or compliments; two regions have noted receipt of more than one complaint about a similar element of service and have taken appropriate action.

# FINANCE

The local government elements of the National Adoption Service are funded in the same way as all other local authority services in Wales.

The central team receives an allocation from the rate support grant which was £311,000 for 2017/18 and is used for the small team, governance and development/improvement. The Wales Adoption Register, managed by the central team, is funded by grant aid from the Welsh Government.

The Voluntary Adoption Agencies are independent charities but also receive funding from the Welsh Government Third Sector grant. This funding provides a little over £300,000 additional funding for adoption services.

## Welsh Government Adoption Support Development Grant and Additional Resources

Welsh Government provided a development grant of £90,000 and recurring additional annual resources of £125,000 available up to 31st March 2019, against a business case focused on the continuing implementation of the 'Adoption Support Framework' and supporting recruitment.

Adoption Support	Life Journey materials framework	Adopter Training	Recruitment
<p>Recruitment to Adoption Support Development Manager post including capital costs of post creation</p> <p>Continued support to the development of the Adoption Support Framework.</p>	<p>Continued development and implementation of the Life Story Toolkit and Good Practice Guide</p> <p>Allocation to each region for cost of additional capacity for this work to be undertaken with children placed for adoption</p> <p>Development of members section on <a href="http://www.adoptcymru.com">www.adoptcymru.com</a></p> <p>Development of additional toolkits for other stakeholders</p> <p>Co-production with adopters and adopted children and young people</p>	<p>Post approval training modules developed</p> <p>Project expanded to include a review of the current pre-approval package</p>	<p>A national radio campaign ran for one month</p> <p>National and regional expert public relations and media services including development of marketing plans and recruitment campaigns</p> <p>Review of <a href="http://www.adoptcymru.com">www.adoptcymru.com</a> website</p> <p>Family day and promotional activity during National Adoption Week</p>

# PRIORITIES FOR 2018/19



## PLACING CHILDREN EFFECTIVELY

This will include:

- Keeping recruitment focused on the needs of children likely to be adopted
- Implementing the new Wales Adoption Register and adopter database

## CONTINUING TO IMPROVE ADOPTION SUPPORT

This will include:

- Agreeing the next priorities and identifying funding
- Continuing things that are already helping e.g. improving life journey work, improving 'adoption awareness' in schools, trying to change the law for adoption support, improving training and development for adopters, consistent approaches across Wales



## FUNDAMENTAL TO ACHIEVING THESE WILL BE THINKING AHEAD

- Continuing co-production and engagement with those who use adoption services
- Thinking ahead about the sort of adoption service we want for the future
- Working to improve the legal, policy & evidence framework that affects adoption
- Encouraging the development of improved professional understanding and skills



**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 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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