



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

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

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20**

*An easy to read summary for all ages*





# HELLO

**The National Adoption Service was set up in 2014 to make services better for everyone involved in adoption in Wales.**

We do this by talking to and listening to children, young people and adopters and using their experience to make improvements.

We work together with lots of organisations to make a positive difference and we want to thank everyone, especially the children, young people and adopters and staff for their hard work and dedication.

This short report tells you how we have been doing over the year.

There is also a full report. Just ask for a copy, or download it from [www.adoptcymru.com](http://www.adoptcymru.com)

# WHAT IS THE NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE?

**We are an organisation that brings together the local adoption services from across Wales. We are here to ensure that services are the best they can be for adoptive families.**

We have a small Central Team that supports the work of:

- 22** Welsh local authorities who care for children who are looked after and who have a plan for adoption
- 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. The Governance Board is a group of people from various organisations in Wales who oversee our work to ensure it meets agreed priorities and its obligations to children and adopters.

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



# PRIORITY #1

## PLACING MORE CHILDREN

- Finding more adopters
- Using our new 'Adopting Together' plan

### How did we do?

**309**

children placed  
with families  
(similar to last  
3 years)

**1/2** of the approvals were within  
**6 months** (quicker than the average  
of 6.5 months)

**270**

children were  
legally adopted

**18%**

more families  
were approved  
for adoption

**3%**

more adopter  
assessments were  
carried out

Children were waiting to be placed  
with an adoptive family for **10  
months** (our target is 8 months)

**5%**

more people  
asked us about  
adopting children

**179**

children waiting  
for families  
(26% less than  
last year)

There were **fewer children** with  
an adoption plan agreed by the  
court or their local authority

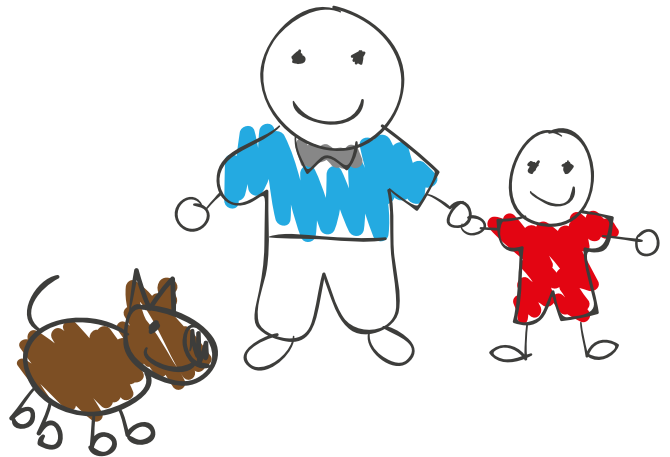




## Adopting Together

We are a Service that helps find and support families for children who have been waiting longer

We helped 14 children find their adoptive family since June 2018 – 8 this year.



## Adoption Register for Wales

Adoption Register for Wales (ARW) is a service that helps match children and families who are not matched by their local authority. ARW improved in June 2019.

- We helped 308 children and 193 adopters (62% more than last year)
- 285 children were matched with families in total and 60 came from ARW (double last year)
  - 70% of these children had extra needs
  - 80% were over 2 years of age

We held a special event called the **Adoption Activity Day** which helps to bring children and adopters together.

- 17 possible links came from the March event
- Our **Exchange Days** in Cardiff and Colwyn Bay supported 27 families and 136 children
  - Most of the children were part of brother and sister groups, with complex needs and we made 4 successful matches (one more than last year)

## How we found more adopters:

- By advertising on TV, buses, supermarkets and at events across Wales like the National Eisteddfod Wales and Pride
- Our “*become the parent only you could be*” campaign used real adopters
- We created new marketing roles in services across Wales, to help find new families
- We made new leaflets telling people about adoption
- We changed the ‘bust myths’ about adoption page on the website to make it more useful.



# PRIORITY #2

## MAKING ADOPTING BETTER

- Using the Adoption Support Framework
- Spending money wisely

We support adopted children and young people and their parents, and anyone else involved in adoption, by giving families the skills and help they need all the way through their adoption journey and making sure families have the right information to stop problems from happening.

### How did we do?



We provided a service to more children who developed **extra support needs** – more than 237 this year (from 170 last year)

- 2/3 of these had extra help, like therapy support; but
- the number of families needing financial support went down

More **brothers and sisters**, where one was adopted, asked for help

**330**

**birth parents**  
(biological parents who have a child placed for adoption) were given help

**3,819**

children got **information about their birth families**, through 'letterbox contact', to help them understand their history

A child's **Life Journey materials** help them understand where they came from so they can be happier and healthier. We did more work on this by:

- Making a new guide book for children
- Updating our website with Life Journey guides for birth parents and foster carers
- Creating 5 new roles to help us support 'Life Journey' work, making 14 people in total across Wales helping with this
- 59% of children had access to their 'Life Journey' work earlier than before.



**The NAS Adoption Support Development Programme has worked well with lots of our partners in its first year.**

## TESSA Programme

The TESSA programme (Therapeutic Education Support Service for Adoptive families) helps parents and children by giving them extra specialist help:

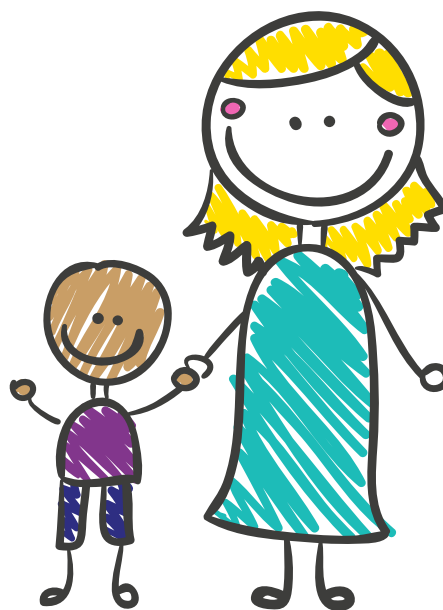
- 42 families were helped
- there were 16 special help sessions
- 1 group of 5 families met over some weeks
- there was a training course held on child to parent violence

Adoption UK are the project partners of the TESSA Programme and we created 5 new roles to help run it across Wales.

- We ran a great Psychology event for more than 97 people like psychologists, other experts and adoptive parents
- It helped people like Mary and her partner, who adopted their son when he was 9 months old

*"We started to explore how we could approach things through his eyes..."*

*We now look forward to working towards finding the right placement for our son to achieve his potential in September, when he starts school."*





## Connected

The new **Connected** project runs across Wales and helps young people involved in adoption.

- Connected makes sure that what young people have to say is heard by the people making decisions related to adoption
- It has helped 84 children and young people with regular meetings

*"I like being with other adopted kids because I don't feel like I am the only one."* – young person

Charlotte, a **young ambassador** for Connect, told us about her experience:

*"One of the greatest things to have been created... because it's helped shape me as a person."*

- Charlotte's parents were supportive and she has always known she was adopted
- But, she went through lots of emotions like, denial, anger, bargaining, sadness and guilt

*"There are so many positives associated with adoption, but there are also some negative experiences as well."*

- Charlotte worried about meeting her biological parents
- She didn't have a Life Story book so felt like lots of people were telling her little bits of her life
- At first she was scared to talk about how she felt, but art, drama, and talking with other young people helped
- She thinks Connected helped the voice of people who are adopted get heard
- Now she doesn't think *'why did this happen?'* but, *'how can I help others through their struggles?'*



## How we are making Adoption better for the future?

AfA Cymru are helping us to make adoption better and they have made useful guides on; placing and supporting children, arranging Contact (which is when a child contacts their birth family), helping birth parents, and improving how we plan adoption support help – all to be launched in 2020/21.

Voices from Care (VfC), Children in Wales and other partners (AUK, AfA Cymru, Children in Wales, Cardiff University, the Fostering Network) are all helping us improve contact for brothers and sisters after adoption.

- This is called the **Sibling Alliance** (something recommended by the government)
- They wrote a pledge (promise) that everyone will do more to help children and their siblings.
- The Children's Legal Centre for Wales helped us make an advice leaflet on arranging Contact

We are making links with **Reflect**, which is a service that helps women and their partners who have had a child placed into care

- In South East Wales, Reflect gave extra help to birth parents around their final Contact, helping with their life story work and making the process easier.





We created 12 post-adoption courses with AfA Cymru and AUK, which are now on our website, to help adopters and children get along.

- Adoption UK Cymru (AUK) used these to run 15 different training events, which helped 160 people
- 75% of the people were adoptive parents or new adopters and the rest worked in adoption

'This course was amazing, wish we had had it years ago, it might have made a big difference to our family' – Adopter who attended course

- Mid and West Wales ran training for:
  - 150 adopters
  - 40+ foster carers
  - online training for 21 adopters and lots of staff





We made over 6 new roles to help with special therapeutic support and training.

- South East Wales got:
  - extra psychological help for 40 children and families
  - made up of 130 extra therapy sessions and 7 staff training sessions
- One region created a special way of measuring adoption awareness (a Kite Mark), which could be used to let more people know about adoption across Wales
- 2 regions created marketing jobs to help recruit new potential adopters

We made special leaflets for people working in health, like the NHS, to help them to understand adoption better.

- We want everyone working in Wales to have a better awareness of adoption
- We spoke to lots of Government officials to make sure the rules help us do this

# PRIORITY #3

## THINKING AHEAD

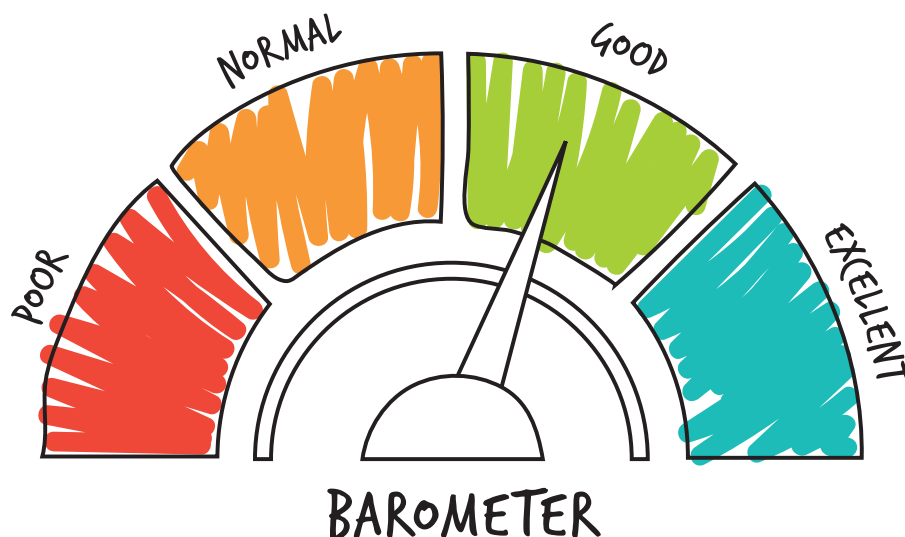
- We improve things by listening to what adopted young people and families have to say

### Making a Plan

We want children to have a good plan about what support they need. We also want to make sure everyone has the right advice on important things like; how friends and families can support new adopters, and about meeting birth parents.

We spoke to lots of people involved in adoption to help us get better. This helped us make an **Adoption Barometer** with Adoption UK, which tells us:

- That more people in Wales get their 'Life Journey materials' and other family information
- That twice as many young families don't want to meet their birth family
- 71% of adopted families knew how to get help
- 77% were getting lots of support
- 26% needed extra support (compared to 5% of children in Wales generally)
- Schools need more help and training





We use **events** like Family Activity days to help and train people.

- We are proud to have trained more than 300 staff in more than 30 topics; including one that helps children to learn trust
- Adoption UK provided training on:
  - 26 courses, like Adopting for the Second Time, and a Therapy Maze
  - INSET training to 278 staff in schools
- We use **data and research**, like with the **Wales Adoption Cohort Study** to help us improve
- Experts like Professor Katherine Shelton, looked at how adopted children act at home and school

## Working Together

We worked with:

- Institute of Public Care, WLGA, ADSS Cymru and the Children's Commissioner for Wales to help us do things better
- All Wales Head of Children's Services Group (AWHOCS) and WLGA to inform the Senedd Committee on help support young people's mental health needs.
- The government to improve adoption rules like:
  - creating a 2-step method for checking new adopters, improving how we help and looking after vulnerable children
  - the important new Children Wales Bill, which looks at stopping parents from physically chastising (smacking) their children
  - making sure adoption agencies are matching children quickly and safely
  - making sure that the people responsible for services 'Corporate Parents' have good guidelines.

# WHAT'S IMPORTANT FOR 2020/21 ONWARDS

## Placing more children

- Finding more adopters for children who are waiting
- Using our 'Adopting Together' service for children who wait the longest
- Using our 'Adoption Register for Wales' to speed up matching children



## Continuing to improve adoption support

- Helping more people through our 'Adoption Support Framework' (plans) and spending money sensibly
- Telling people in work and the public about adoption



## Thinking ahead

- Improving the rules about adoption
- Listening to young people's voices
- Training people in work to meet our priorities
- Learning from Covid-19 so we can do our work better



**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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