

Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service



NAS 2024 Newsletter

Foreword from Suzanne

I am pleased to be sharing this year's newsletter with you, featuring news, information and highlights from 2023, in addition to looking ahead to 2024. I hope you will find the content interesting, informative, and useful for the year ahead wherever you are based.

2023 was once again a very busy but exciting year for everyone in the National Adoption Service. All the Local Authorities, Regional Adoption Services and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) aimed to ensure that quality information and support was provided for everyone – from initial adoption enquiries through to our adopters using post-adoption services.

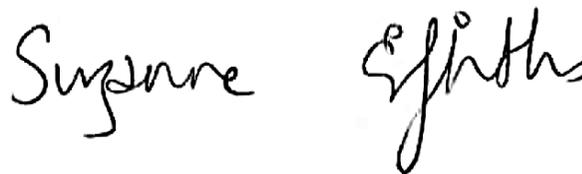
In 2023, NAS delivered on many important commitments:

- Launched the All-Wales adoption policies and procedures and rebranded the NAS App
- Held two Big Adoption Conversation events (engaging with staff and service users from across the country)
- Responded to the Public Law Working Group's interim report on adoption
- Responded to the Deputy Minister's apology to those affected by adoption in the past with launching a pilot project to offer support
- Released the 'award-winning' Truth Be Told: Adoption Stories podcast featuring an episode produced by young, adopted people
- Re-launched our 'Choose Family' recruitment campaign

As we move into 2024, we are still very much aware of the challenges faced by all families in Wales, due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and we want to reassure everyone that support is still available. Please do contact your local region, or VAA, if you are experiencing difficulties relating to adoption.

I would like to finish by saying a massive thank you to all our adopters, foster carers and others who are part of the 'team' in Wales. You all show incredible commitment and support in helping to place and support children in loving homes. Additionally, I must express my gratitude to the staff for all the services that are part of, or linked to, the National Adoption Service for Wales – your commitment to your work does not go unnoticed.

Wishing you a very Happy New Year!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suzanne Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Director of the National Adoption Service for Wales



Highlights of 2023

Timeline

January - March

- Held the first of two 'Big Adoption Conversation' events
- Celebrated LGBTQ+ Adoption & Fostering Week
- Launched The Takeover episode (with CONNECT and Connected) of the Truth Be Told podcast

April - June

- Awarded highly commended in the 'Building Brighter Futures for Children and Families' category at the Social Care Accolades 2023 for TESSA (LLWYBRAU: PATHWAYS)
- Research by Adoption UK revealed that amongst the UK nations, Wales provides the best support for adopted children in understanding their life stories
- Shared the topic of adoption during PRIDE Cymru

October - December

- Celebrated National Adoption Week 2023
- Re-launched the #ChooseFamily campaign
- Launched the All Wales adoption Policies and Procedures and updated the NAS app
- Shared adopters, Tasha and Faith's stories

July - September

- Hosted children's readings and a panel with Foster Wales at the Eisteddfod
- Launched the 'Adoption in Your Business' toolkit to support employers with adoption policies
- Won a British Podcast Award for Truth Be Told: Adoption Stories (contributor Ellie-Rose attended for NAS)



Highlights from your local services across Wales

Adoption Mid and West Wales



Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru
Adoption
Mid & West Wales

Our focus in 2023 was to increase our offering of support available to families.

During May half term, we attended the URDD Eisteddfod in Llandovery where we ran lots of fun activities for children and chatted with parents and prospective parents about adoption.

We reintroduced our popular fun days, which offer families the opportunity to find out more about the support available and link up with other families in the region. In August, families enjoyed a beach day at Poppit Sands. Our Powys adopters also enjoyed a day at the farm. In October half term, we organised a picnic and play event at Pembrey Country Park. Our Powys adopters had a 'spooktacular' time with Halloween-themed activities.

For National Adoption Week, our focus was on recruiting prospective adopters for sibling groups in the region. Throughout the week, we looked at the benefits of adopting two or more children, and the skills required, and we also talked about the support that's available after adopting.

This year, we've increased the availability of our support groups, including restarting our pre-school group, which runs twice a month during term time, in Llanelli. We've also introduced a new group called Heart-to-heart; which uses the latest attachment research to support families in building and strengthening relationships through enjoyable, interactive and gentle play activities.

We've strengthened our robust training programme with relevant themes and topics for pre- and post-approval, working jointly with North Wales on many courses. We also saw a big increase in enquiries for Welsh Early Permanence – which is being received well by prospective adopters.

Plans are already underway for our 2024 fun days and for expanding our pre-school support groups into other parts of the region. We will also look to increase understanding around life journey work, contact with birth families, and we will work closely with schools on our attachment-aware school's award.

Find us at:

adoptionmwwales.org.uk/

mabwysiaducgymru.org.uk/

facebook.com/adoptmwwales

 twitter.com/adoptmw_wales

 instagram.com/adoptmwwales



We continued to be busy with our core activity of assessing potential adopters for our children who are waiting to be adopted.

We had a busy year in the community, attending events including, Conwy's Prom Xtra, the National Eisteddfod in Pwllheli, the Anglesey Show, Flintshire and Denbighshire Show, the British Cycling 'Tour of Britain' in Wrexham and Wrexham AFC.

We had excellent coverage on ITV Wales News for National Adoption Week, including a visit to Wrexham AFC and an adopter interview, which resulted in a great increase of web traffic. We had a spike of page views on 18th October 2023, when we concluded our awareness-raising walk along the North Wales Coastal Path, with a high number of these being new visitors.

Our biggest event was the annual Fun Day, which was attended by nearly 300 people. The event prioritises a "safe space" for children to explore and enjoy activities – including crafts and cake decorating, fairground games, giant inflatables, face painting, a magician, and a disco.

One adoptive parent said:

"It was heart-warming to see my child, who is usually overwhelmed with the baggage of previous trauma, being able to shake it off and run around without a care in the world - just having great fun, feeling safe and being themselves. These moments are rare and absolutely priceless!"

This year, we continued to hold Stay and Play group sessions, with lots of families attending. It was great to see so many people make friends, share information, and support each other in a relaxed atmosphere.

We also continued to hold groups for birth parents and have had several reunions between adopted adults and birth parents. We have also had more adopters and birth families making contact this year through letterbox contact, with more birth parents asking for help writing letters. More positively we have also had a couple of direct contacts commence between siblings, which was a joy to see.

In 2024, we'll continue to support our adoptive families, be out in the community to disseminate information about adoption, and recruit more committed parents for our children waiting.

Find us at:

northwalesadoption.co.uk

facebook.com/mabwysiadugogleddcymru

 twitter.com/nw_adoption

South East Wales Adoption Service



South East Wales Adoption Service
Achieving More Together

During 2023, we have been successful in achieving our first Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) approval, with several enquiries about WEP also being made by prospective adopters.

We have also continued to raise awareness of SEWAS as a service and to start the rewarding, yet sometimes difficult, conversations around adoption so we can attract adopters who meet the needs of children waiting for adoption.

A great example of our awareness raising happened during National Adoption Week 2023. We designed a large, branded banner which we presented to the local community and generated photo opportunities with small businesses, community sports teams, schools, and our public sector services. Our aim was for residents to recognise the SEWAS banner and start conversations around adoption!

This year, our adoption support team has also run events for children, parents, and birth families, including the successful Water-themed Sports Day.

Nearly 30 adopted young people attended this event, as well as SEWAS staff, the Connected group, colleagues from the NAS Central Team, and Julie Morgan, the Deputy Minister for Social Services. For many of the young people, it was a successful sensory afternoon.

A 2023 media highlight for SEWAS was our Service Manager, Becky Jones, and SEWAS Adopter Abbey, appearing on BBC Radio Wales during National Adoption Week. It was great to listen to their real experiences, recognising positive times but also highlighting the challenges adopters can face. We found it insightful to hear an adopter's story first hand, and listeners agreed.

Our adoption support team are currently planning exciting and new events for 2024.

In the new year, we plan to attend more local events to continue to increase visibility for the service. Alongside this, plans are in place to grow our list of adoption ambassadors, so in future we can work with more adoptive parents on new and exciting projects.

Find us at:

southeastwalesadoption.co.uk

facebook.com/SEWASAdoption

 instagram.com/sewasadoption

Vale, Valleys, and Cardiff Adoption



In 2023, we continued to grow and expand our service. We have had a steady flow of applications and assessments, both within our Recruitment and Adoption Support Teams.

We're currently trialling a programme of Family Hubs across the region to engage with a broader group of children and adoptive parents. This is hosted by our two Social Care Officers, Nicola and Chris, with the support of our PATHways Coordinator, Lisa. Many families from across the region attend frequently, and it's great seeing them make friends, have fun, and gain support from other families on the same journey. One family commented:

"We really look forward to coming to the Hub! I have found other toddler groups hard, so it's good for me to meet and chat to other adoptive parents. It's been great to share experiences and feel support from people who just 'get it'."

This year, our team began a weekly term time 'Games Group' for teenagers, which has been a huge success. Open to all four regions, it gives our young people the opportunity to connect with others, build friendships, and grow in confidence. In the summer, the group trekked Sugar Loaf Mountain in Abergavenny which was an incredible achievement. In October, the group attended the Cardiff Pumpkin Picking Festival. Looking into 2024, we're looking to expand the 'Games Group' for 7-11-year-olds.

This year, we hosted two family fun days. The summer event - supported by the Glamorgan Play Team and the Connected group - included face painting, slime making, a bouncy castle, soft play, and badge making. The Christmas fun day was our biggest event yet, with 76 families attending. The event included: Christmas crafts, biscuit decorating, glitter slime making, soft play, a bouncy castle, a graffiti workshop by the Connected Group, and even a visit from Santa! Plans for the 2024 events are already underway!

During National Adoption Week, we promoted opportunities to engage with further learning about adoption. This resulted in an increase of followers, and we look forward to building on this going forward. Some of our adoptive families also took part in the broader NAS campaigns throughout the year.

2023 has been a busy, productive, and fun year and as a team, we're really looking forward to seeing what 2024 brings!

Find us at:

adopt4vvc.org

 [instagram.com/vvcadoption](https://www.instagram.com/vvcadoption)

 [instagram.com/mabwysiadufcc](https://www.instagram.com/mabwysiadufcc)

[facebook.com/vvcadoption](https://www.facebook.com/vvcadoption)

[facebook.com/mabwysiadufcc](https://www.facebook.com/mabwysiadufcc)

Western Bay Adoption



This year, we've increased our community outreach to help people better understand the adoption process and the needs of children waiting.

On the marketing and outreach front, the Wales Airshow was a highlight. We had a great response to new merchandise and branding, and following the event, we received 10 adoption enquiries. Another highlight was the RNLI Mumbles Raft Race, where we built a branded raft to raise awareness of the service. This was a cross-service activity with NPT Council Lighting Services, helping us to build local partnerships. Following these outreach efforts and new out-of-home advertising, during the summer, we doubled our enquiry numbers from the previous year.

In July, we came to the end of our very first LEAPlets group in a local Gymnastics Centre. We recognise that some of our children struggle with aspects of movement and their sensory systems. We, therefore, teamed up with Sarah Lloyd, founder of the BUSS Model, which is designed to help to rebuild children's sensory-motor systems. We have been thrilled with the progress made during the relatively short period and have plans in place for future programmes.

Another highlight of the year has been the engagement groups for birth mums affected by adoption. The groups have helped the mums learn new skills and make friends. We were particularly pleased that some members of the group joined us during National Adoption Week on our cross authority walk - helping us showcase the breadth of the support WBAS can offer everyone affected by adoption.

Finally, our Adoption Celebration Court Hearing Days returned. They were wonderfully emotive events where we created a court hearing environment for children who missed out on the process due to COVID-19!

Looking ahead to the New Year, our sponsorship of the Wales Air Ambulance 'Castles in the Sky' Art Trail in Swansea promises to bring an explosion of colour and interactive fun over the summer.

We are also looking forward to expanding some of our community sports partnerships by getting involved with Neath RFC, in addition to our involvement with the Bridgend Ravens and Pen y Bont FC Academy and to creating some new visual content where adopters, social workers, and adopted young people will share their knowledge and experience around a range of pertinent topics.

Find us at:

westernbayadoption.org/

facebook.com/westernbayadoption

 twitter.com/bayadoption

 instagram.com/western_bay_adoption

Over 2023 we have enjoyed increasing our in-person time with families, and each other. We were particularly pleased to have our Assistant Head of Business, Sarah, and Head of Business, Brenda, join us for our summer celebration. Here our staff and families came together at Heatherton World of Activities, with the children successfully challenging Sarah and Brenda to several fun activities and games.

In North Wales, our families and staff enjoyed a sun-filled August day together at Greenwood eco-friendly adventure park in Caernarfon. It was wonderful to see new friendships blossoming between the children and adults. Firm favourites with children and adults alike were the people-powered roller coaster and the solar-powered water slide!

For the tenth year running, Help Wales to buy homes, have kindly donated Christmas gifts for all our children, and some of our families are currently enjoying Christmas pantomimes across Wales.

We recognise the importance and impact on long-term outcomes for children when utilising therapeutic approaches. To support this, we will continue to work in partnership with our Play Therapist, Laura, to provide training to our adopters, alongside consultation with our social workers. Erica will be working alongside Laura to broaden our package of support. One of our social workers, Ellie, has also started a diploma in therapeutic life story work. She is excited to start embedding this into her practice in 2024.

We have had some excellent speakers at our adopter's support groups, including Mencap speaking to us about Global Delay, Chiva sharing information about how to support children born with HIV and members of the National Adoption Service Central Team sharing their knowledge about keeping in touch with a birth family. We hope that adopters will continue to take advantage of the bi-monthly workshops which offer support and information around relevant themes and topics, and family social events.

Find us at:

barnardos.org.uk/wales

facebook.com/barnardoscymrufosteradopt/



In April, our three-year strategic plan was published, setting out our values and objectives for the period 2023-2026. The objectives were finalised following wide consultation with key stakeholders, including adoptive families and young people from the Adoption UK (AUK) Connected group.

We have continued to refine the evaluations sent to adoptive families receiving adoption support to measure impact and further improve our adoption support offer.

The first part of our 'Conversation Series' videos were launched during the year to encourage more people to come forward to adopt brothers and sisters. We are grateful to those who gave their time so generously in sharing their own experiences of growing up as part of a sibling group and in parenting brothers and sisters.

We have been busy raising funds for post-adoption support activities and were very grateful to receive monies from the National Lottery Community Fund. We also did some fundraising ourselves with a team challenge during National Adoption Week. A huge shoutout must also go to a remarkable Mum and Dad who ran in the Cardiff half marathon, and a young man who ran 2k to raise money for our adoption support services.

We had a great turnout at our summer events held in South and West Wales and have just celebrated an early Christmas with families at our annual Christmas party!

Onto 2024 and early in the New Year we will be sending a survey out to all families to check how they are and find out what is important to them in respect of the delivery and development of our services.

In partnership with AUK, we will be delivering the pilot access to records services for those adopted people and birth parents affected by historical adoption practices.

Find us at:

www.stdavidsadoptionsservice.org

 twitter.com/adoptionwales

facebook.com/stdavidschildrensociety

 instagram.com/stdavidsadoptionsservice

In 2023, AFA Cymru had a name change to AFKA Cymru. We are now the Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption which better represents the breadth and depth of work we undertake in the permanency sector in Wales.

Throughout the last year, AFKA Cymru has continued to support NAS with the Framework for Welsh Early Permanence (WEP). We have been very proud to see the impact this framework is having and excited to talk to some WEP carers at the start of their journey. We will continue to support all carers and practitioners with implementation across Wales.

AFKA Cymru has been pleased to be working alongside NAS with the creation of training for childcare practitioners and managers on Modern Adoption as a Positive Permanence Option for Children. Our training is designed to inform and inspire the workforce to consider all options for permanence for the children they are planning for. We have also been creating eLearning for our colleagues in Health and Education to help them become a more adoption aware workforce.

We have also been supporting NAS with their focus on ensuring that sibling relationships are considered and prioritised when care planning is taking place. We are currently delivering training on this across Wales.

AFKA Cymru was also privileged to have facilitated the NAS Annual Adoption Conference this year which brought together over 140 colleagues from across Wales to share best practice examples. The day gave everyone the opportunity to consider how they could implement this practice in their own service. It was a great day, and it was so lovely to see so many of you with us at the conference.

Looking to the year ahead we are looking forward to continuing our work with NAS and the sector. One of our focus points will be on strengthening practice around family finding and matching. We look forward to consulting and working with you in 2024!

Find us at:

afkacymru.org.uk

 twitter.com/AFKACymru

In January 2023, Adoption UK Cymru delivered the first 'Big Adoption Conversation' of the year on behalf of the National Adoption Service. At the event, Julie Morgan, the Deputy Minister for Social Services, delivered a historic apology for the harm done by adoption in the past. This event led to funding being made available for a pilot project to help people who were adopted before 1976 to access their birth records more easily and with emotional support from clinicians and peers.

A second 'Big Adoption Conversation' was held in November 2023, and professionals and those with lived experience of adoption discussed the lifelong implications of adoption.

Over the summer, family events for members of Adoption UK were held in parks across Wales bringing together adoptive families and giving their children play with other adopted children and young people.

The Connected service continued to deliver monthly groups for over 300 children and young people across Wales and young people from the youth council spoke at the National Adoption Service Annual conference in October about the difference that Connected had made to their lives. The first meeting of a UK-wide Adoption Youth Council was held in December 2023.

In December 2023, the first referrals were received for the newly launched Access to Records project which is the first of its kind in the UK and delivered jointly with St.David's Adoption Service.

We also took part in the Social Care Accolade Awards and received the Highly Commended runner-up position for the PATHWAY (formally TESSA) project which is delivered through a collaboration between Adoption UK and the Regional Adoption Services.

Find us at:

adoptionuk.org/wales

 twitter.com/aukcymru

facebook.com/aukcymru

Adoption Register Wales (ARW)



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

We have been working closely with practitioners and managers to ensure that the Register is accurate and up to date. Refresher training was offered to staff on using the Register/Link Maker. Further dates will be offered next year.

A customer satisfaction survey on using ARW/Link Maker was held throughout September. The survey was open to adopters and practitioners. Most of the feedback was positive with respondents stating that ARW/Link Maker was helpful in the family-finding process. The feedback will contribute to ongoing service development & improvement.

We held two online profiling events this year, one in March and one in October. A total of 35 children waiting from across Wales were featured at these events, many of whom have additional complex needs and have been waiting the longest. The next online profiling event is planned for Tuesday 12 March 2024.

We also held an Adoption Activity Day commissioned via Coram BAAF on the 15 July in Cardiff. 28 children waiting from across Wales were featured at the event with 23 children attending on the day. Many of the children who attended were part of a sibling group and/or had additional complex needs. The theme was pirates and mermaids and was a fun-filled day.

There was a total of 32 expressions of interest made with 5 successful links, which is the highest number to date. The next Adoption Activity Day has been arranged for Saturday 29 June 2024.



The Adoption Barometer 2023

This year there were 16,700 responses UK-wide, with 138 of those in Wales.

2023's report shows that respondents from Wales were more likely than those from any other nation to have access to core support during 2022 and overall, more likely to agree that the core support they had accessed was of a good quality and made a positive difference to their family.

Take a look at the key statistics on the next page →

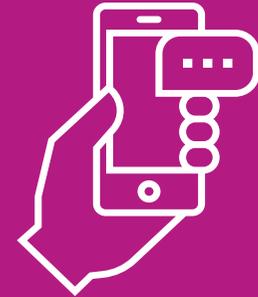
Key statistics in Wales



23% say their family is 'mostly doing well'.



78% say it feels like a continual struggle to get support.



70% contacted adoption support services in 2022.



76% of respondents from Wales would encourage others to consider adoption.



77% feel optimistic about their family's future



2024 will be the sixth year of Adoption UK's annual Adoption Barometer.

Leavers and New starters

Barnardo's are thrilled to have a fully staffed adoption team, with 2023 seeing them welcome four new members of staff. **Hannah (Business Administrator)** joined the team in October who has previously worked in the voluntary sector - she has been a huge asset to their team. **Steph (Social Worker)** joined the team in October, she has a wealth of childcare experience and knowledge. **Erica (Practice Manager)** joined the team in November, from Action for Children's Adoption service. Erica has delivered packages of support through NVR, sensory processing and DDP - they are looking forward to incorporating her knowledge and skills within their service. **Eszter (Marketing Officer)** joined in October, she has already made a big impact on their social media. She has completed a strategy to implement increased community engagement which we will be rolling out in 2024. Eszter will work across both their fostering and adoption services, with a particular focus on the recruitment of prospective adopters who can care for sibling groups.

With new members joining the team, they are confident and excited about exploring new and innovative ways to meet the needs of children.

In April 2024, **Wendy Keidan, CEO of St Davids Adoption Service**, will be retiring after a long career in social care. She states "It has been the privilege of my career to lead an organisation that has children as at the core of everything it does, and I am immensely grateful to colleagues across the National Adoption Service for their support of the work of St David's."



Coming in 2024...

Into 2024, the National Adoption Service will be continuing with our Choose Family recruitment campaign, continuing to better inform prospective adopters on the needs of the children waiting and raise enquiries for the children currently waiting to be adopted.



To find out more on what's coming up in 2024, follow us and the local services across Wales on social media for the latest updates and news.





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National
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Service

Need more help?
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Get in touch

Tel: +44 (0) 29 2087 3927

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