



GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
Bae'r Gorllewin
Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE



Quality of Service Review

1 October 2023 - 31 March 2024





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National
Adoption
Service



Index



Subjects

- 1. Introduction.....
- 2. Current Position.....
- 3. Staffing.....
- 4. Adoption Panel.....
- 5. Children.....
- 6. Adopters.....
- 7. Advertising and Marketing.....
- 8. Development of Adoption Support.....
- 9. Policies and Procedures.....
- 10. CSSIW.....
- 11. Local Governance and Monitoring Arrangement.....
- 12. Consultation and Engagement.....
- 13. Quality Assurance, Compliments, Comments, Complaints, Safeguarding issues, Whistle blowing and representation
- 14. Agenda for Change and Future Challenges
- 15. Conclusion.....



1. Introduction

The requirement to provide six monthly reviews of the Adoption Service is set out in Regulation 39 of The Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019. The aim of this report is to bring into one document a presentation and analysis of the activity of each of the local authority adoption agencies, operating as a regional service. In addition, Section 15 (c) of The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 sets out the responsibilities of regional collaborative to report to the Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service on a quarterly and annual basis.

The report and information within it will be used for:

- The Review of Service (Regulation 39 report).
- Given the broad content of this report it will be used for informing senior managers, cabinets, scrutiny committees and corporate parenting Boards.
- Quarterly and annual reports to NAS.

This report is in respect of the period is 1st October 2023 to 31st March 2024. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information presented is an accurate record of the activity and quality of the Adoption Service and consider targets for the forthcoming year.

2. Current Position

The service has continued to develop its practise in relation to contact and birth parent support facilitating a second regional conference in March, we were fortunate enough to be able to be joined by three birth parents, a birth sister and two adopters to talk about their experiences of contact, the workshop was inspiring. We were also joined in the morning's presentation by one of our adopted young people talking about his experiences of the youth group and one to one work.





Performance in relation to family finding activity and placements continues to be lower than historically which is likely due to the Local Authorities Born in to care projects and in the development of preventative/edge of care support services, although performance over the last three year appears fairly consistent perhaps representing a new norm. Enquires and adopter approvals is in line with the national position although a huge presence in the community over the last few months has seen an increased interest being made.

Adoption support continues to see a consistent number of referrals in the number of families needing to access support services and an increase in the complexity of older young people. There is also an increase in the number of Birth Records Counselling referrals and access to adoption information requests. The additional staff employed as a result of using the income generated from external placements has been hugely beneficial in being able to expand the support available to birth families and adoptive families in the area of contact and the check-ins continue to hugely beneficial.

3. Staffing



Staffing has remained fairly stable throughout the last two quarters with low absence rates, two members of staff have been on long term sickness during this period. One business support member of staff is on maternity leave. This post is being backfilled with a temporary arrangement. The additional temporary support workers are contracted until the end of July 2024.





4. Adoption Panel

Membership

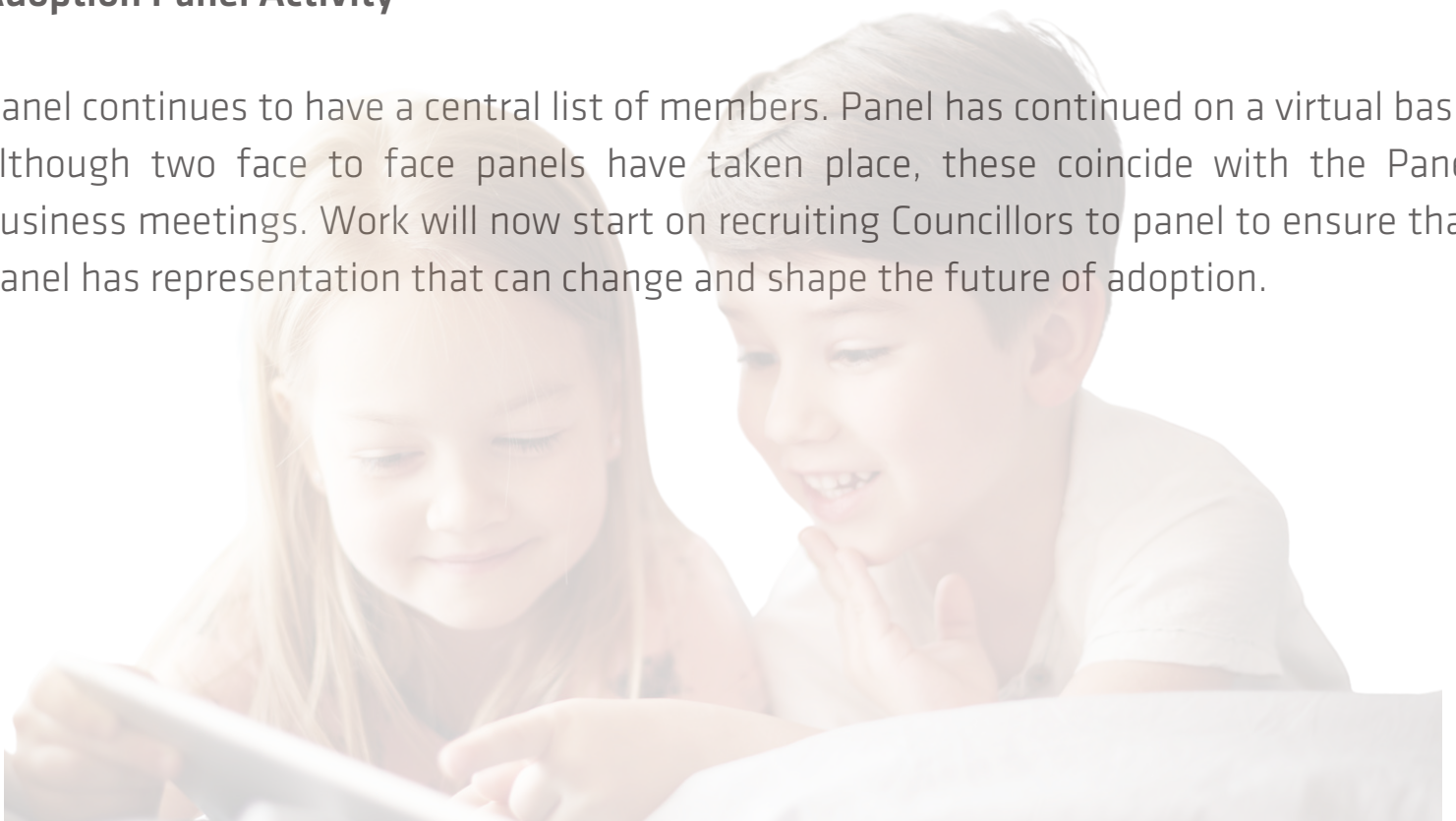
The support of both Medical Advisors Dr Peter Barnes and Dr Emily Payne continues with both joining the service in regular interface meetings aimed at improving quality and timeliness of documentation used for panel. This has been an effective venture, utilising the expertise of the Medical Advisors to shape practice in the service. WBAS recognises that the support and service both provide to the service is considerable and the service is fortunate in the flexibility that the MA's provide.

Panel Training and Development

All Panel members have had an appraisal and the themes from these appraisals were shared at one of the quarterly Business meetings held with panel members. Panel members have been offered training on safeguarding.

Adoption Panel Activity

Panel continues to have a central list of members. Panel has continued on a virtual basis although two face to face panels have taken place, these coincide with the Panel business meetings. Work will now start on recruiting Councillors to panel to ensure that panel has representation that can change and shape the future of adoption.





5. Children

Performance in relation to Twin-tracking/matching and Placement

Referrals and Placement Orders

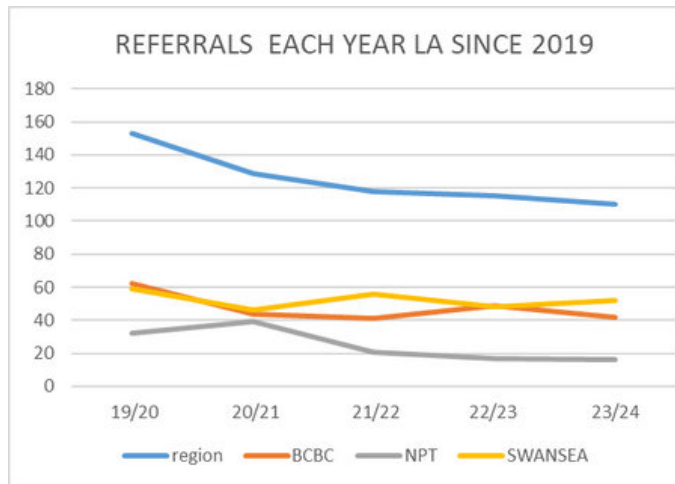
Downward trend for twin-tracking referrals and Parental Order Granted comparing Q1 over the three previous years.

	2019-20	2020-21 COVID	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Number of Referrals	153 BCBC 62 NPT 32 SC 59	129 BCBC 44 NPT 39 SC 46	118 BCBC 41 NPT 21 SC 56	115 BCBC 49 NPT 17 SC 48	110 BCBC 42 NPT 16 SC 52
Number of POG	63 BCBC 18 NPT 16 SC 29	69 BCBC 26 NPT 18 SC 25	34 BCBC 9 NPT 11 SC 14	51 BCBC 18 NPT 7 SC 26	45 BCBC 15 NPT 5 SC 25

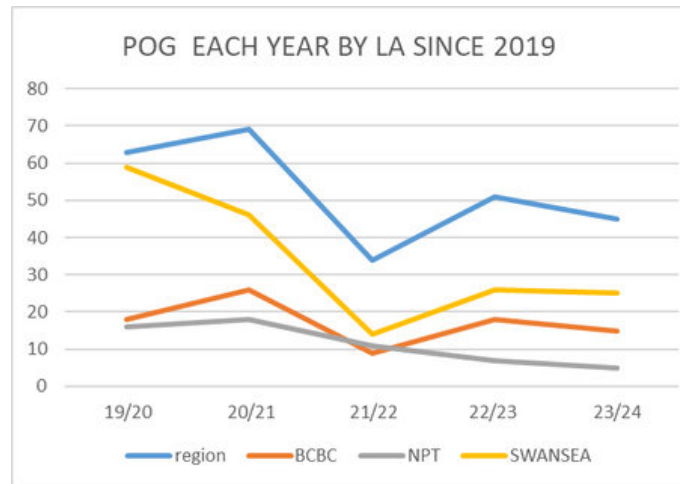




Referral Trend



Parental Orders Granted Trend



The reduction in referrals and Parental Orders Granted has had a follow on effect in relation to the number of children placed for adoption during this period. The children being referred are increasingly presenting with more complex health, genetic and developmental issues.

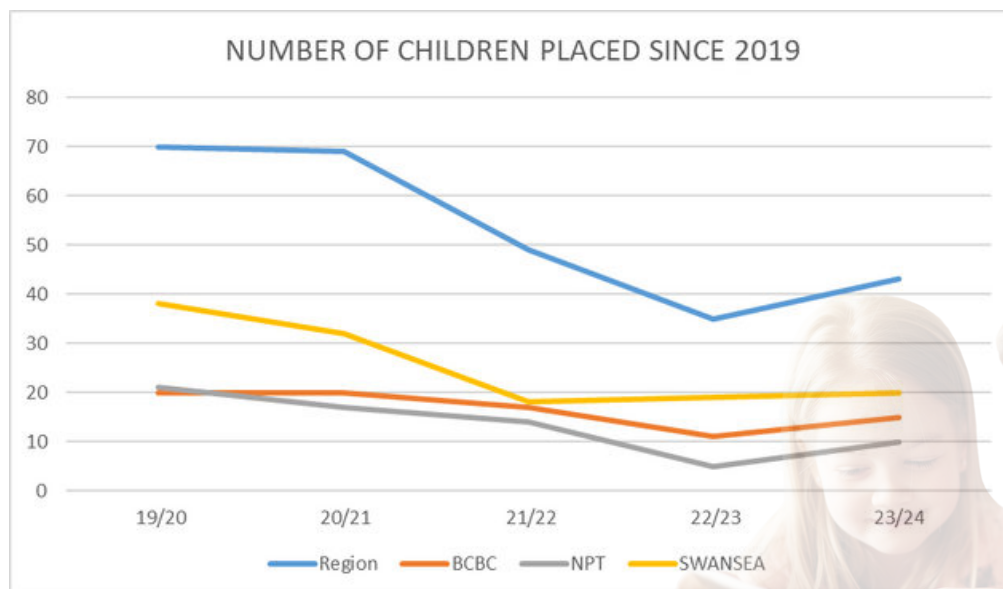
Number of children matched	80 BCBC 22 NPT 22 SC 36	79 BCBC 23 NPT 19 SC 37	51 BCBC 15 NPT 14 SC 18	38 BCBC 8 NPT 7 SC 23	43 BCBC 15 NPT 9 SC 19
No of children placed	79 BCBC 20 NPT 21 SC 38	69 BCBC 20 NPT 17 SC 32	49 BCBC 17 NPT 14 SC 18	35 BCBC 11 NPT 5 SC 19	43 BCBC 15 NPT 10 SC 18





Of these children number of children placed with WBAS adopters	44	55	32	21	37
Of these children number placed via the Market Share Project			3	3	2
Of these children number of children placed with non regional adopters	35	14	14	11	4
Number of AOG	62 BCBC 17 NPT 14 SC 31	63 BCBC 20 NPT 13 SC 29	61 BCBC 16 NPT 15 SC 30	46 BCBC 17 NPT 10 SC 19	36 BCBC 10 NPT 7 SC 19

Children Placed Trend





Average Length of Time from Placement Order to Placed for Adoption - Q1/Q2 comparison with 2022-23.

The average length of time to place children from point of Placement order granted in 2023/24 is 11 months an increase on last years time scale, 9.6 months. This year we have successfully placed 5 children who had been subject to a Placement Order for over 12 months which is hugely positive but impacts on the average length of time figure. The longest time to place a child was 18 months an improvement on the timeframe last year which was 24 months.

Marketshare Project

2 children has been placed via the Marketshare arrangements. A third match is booked into panel for Q1 2024-25. Regular quarterly meetings are held to discuss the projects progress and there has been positive outcomes noted to the early alert system.

Children Waiting

At the end of the year 23 children were in the active family finding process without a strong link or matching panel booked.

For 9 of these children the Placement Order was only granted in March. The Average length of time for the other children have been waiting is 5 months, the longest time is 20 months.

13 of the children have complex medical conditions and/or potential presenting Autism Spectrum Disorder behaviours which makes family finding hugely challenging.





Disruptions & Breakdowns of Placement

Within Western Bay in the reporting period there has been one placement disruption post formal placement of a sibling group of two children. The independent review report was commissioned and the report is available and had been shared with professionals involved with the case, adoption panel members and was shared with regional staff in October.

Name change

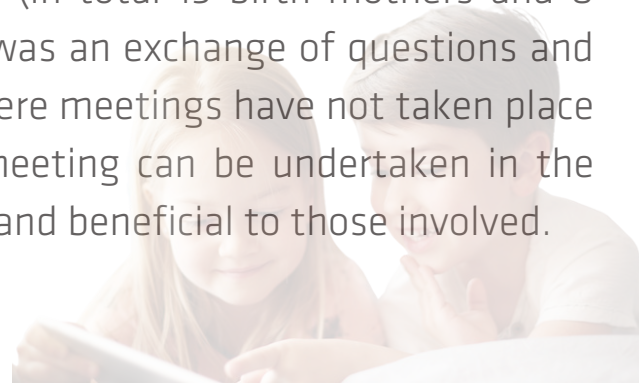
In the last year a name change policy was implemented to try and address the number of children whose first name was changed at point of Adoption Order Granted. Of the children placed in 2022-23 only 60% retained their first name.

This year of the 34 children made subject of an Adoption order 28 retained their first name at the point of Adoption Order Granted (80%). In addition another 4 children were given another first name and their first name moved to become their middle name. Only two children did not retain any of their birth names.

Birth parent adopter meetings

Of the 42 children placed this year, 35 birth parents were offered meetings with the adopters. 7 children have plans for direct contact a for a further 4 children the adopters met the siblings and direct contact is planned for the future.

The parents of 21 children attended these meetings (in total 19 birth mothers and 8 birth family attended), for a further 2 children there was an exchange of questions and information between Birth parents and Adopters. Where meetings have not taken place some exploration is still ongoing as to whether a meeting can be undertaken in the future. All the meetings were seen as hugely positive and beneficial to those involved.





In addition there have been meetings in respect of three further children who were placed in previous years. For two of the children (siblings) a second birth parent adopter meeting was held and there are plans that this will now happen on an annual basis.

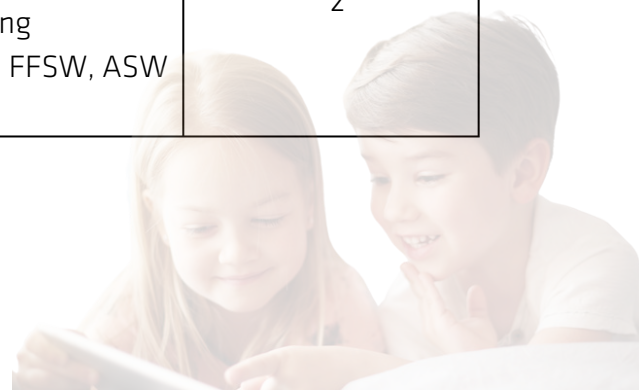
Of significance for 13 children of the 42 children placed adopters met extended family members, grandparents. Aunts and most importantly siblings and their carers. It is hoped that the forming of these initial relationships will serve to strengthen the opportunity for siblings to maintain a more significant level of contact. A number of children have plans for direct sibling contact.





Understanding the Child Day Process

Title	Description	Number Completed
Understanding the Child Day consultations	FF brings every case to consultation to discuss our understanding of the child and to plan what needs to take place as next steps	32
Number of families discussed at UtC consultation	Some children have been discussed at UtC consultation more than once	28
Number of sibling groups		6
Trauma Nurture time line/Circle of Understanding meeting	Map out trauma/nurture timeline and CoU with CSW, SSW, FFSW. Consider what would be looking for in adopters	5
Understanding the Child Day	Prospective adopters attend along with those that know the child and birth family, including foster parent, school, CSW, SSW, FFSW, ASW	2





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Evaluation of Trauma Nurture Timeline/Circle of Understanding Meetings

Evaluations continue to be overwhelmingly positive with all participants scoring 10 on a 10 point Likert scales for how useful has the session been. Participants report having a better understanding about how the child, or children's early experiences could impact on their presentation after the morning's session.

Comments from children's social workers have included:

“This was really useful mapping everything out and understanding their basic needs now as a result of the trauma

I found this amazing and really useful in understanding why the children behave in their certain ways

I was confident that I understood how the children's early experiences could impact on their presentation, however, this presentation deepened my understanding and how to look at the children's early experiences in different ways

I am confident now that I understand the children's early experiences and how this is useful to be able to match them with adopters who will meet their needs

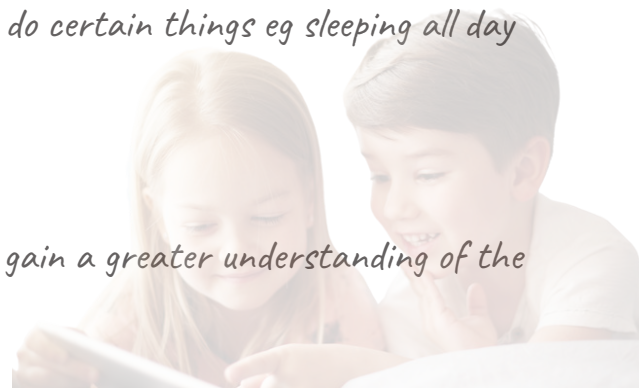
Support workers:

“Really useful to roadmap their life in understanding how things shape their lived experience/ways of surviving now

Mapping things out has really helped me to understand why they do certain things eg sleeping all day

Supervising Social Worker:

“Especially useful putting all the separate information together to gain a greater understanding of the children's presentation and why





In March the Understanding the Child Team met with the Family Finding team for a Trauma Nurture Timeline/Circle of Understanding workshop, bringing together all of our ideas and expertise. The Family Finder Social workers could see the benefit of completing a Trauma Nurture Timeline/Circle of Understanding when reading all the documents about the children they are family finding for. They are incorporating this in to their working practice so all of our WBAS children will have a Trauma Nurture Timeline.

Understanding the Child Days

There have been two understanding the child days within the last 6 months. The days were both well attended with prospective adopters, foster carers, school representative along with social workers, support workers and supervising social workers. Both days were evaluated very positively. One match is proceeding following the day. Prospective adopters from the other match decided that they were not the right parents for the children. They contributed well during the day and went away and thought about what they had heard and spent some time reflecting on the information shared as we asked of them.

We have also facilitated an Understanding the Child day for a young person who has been with his adopters for about 10 years. The Day was prioritised as the parents did not have the same level of understanding of their son's needs which was leading to conflict. The evaluation of this day was also positive with comments such as:

Excellent! So good to all sit together and talk in a really powerful way about H

Very useful and feeling much better after the meeting



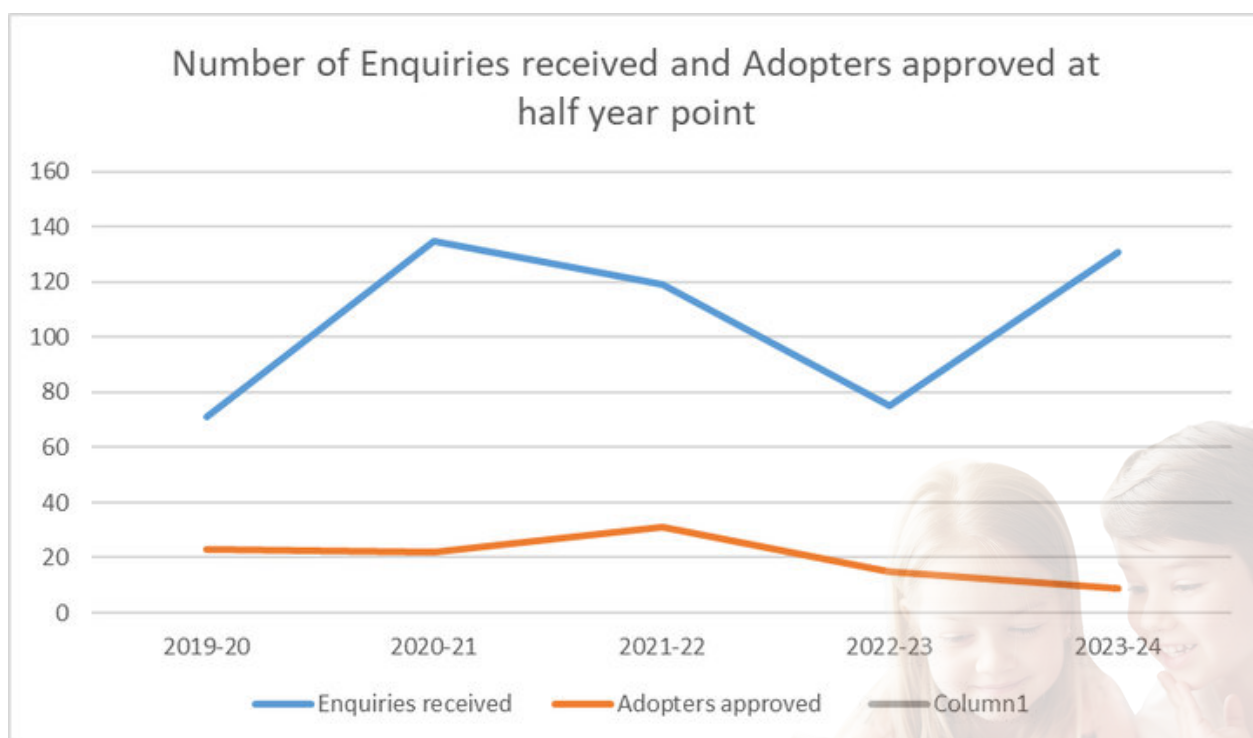


6. Adopters

Enquiries and Adopter Approval

Enquiries are higher than the last two years but conversion of these enquiries to approval remain low, a piece of work is being undertaken nationally to look at this area in 2024/25.

	2019/20	2020/21 Lockdown	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Enquiries	166	260	224	174	223
Number of adopters approved	54	53	52	31	27





Profile of Adopters

An audit of the 27 approved adopters at end of year March 2024 has been undertaken and the following identified:

	Number of families approved 2020-21 (53)	Number of adoptive families approved 2021-22 (52)	Number of adoptive families Approved 2022-23 (31)	Number of adoptive families approved 2023-24 (27)
Bridgend	9	10	14	8
Swansea	25	22	7	9
Neath Port Talbot	8	11	4	7
Cardiff Area	7	5	2	1
Carmarthenshire and Tenby	3	5	3	2
England	1	1	1	0





Of the 27 approved adopters this year, they can further be broken down into approvals of 2 single adopters, 8 adopters from same sex relationships and 17 heterosexual couples. Currently there are 10 adopters waiting without a link or match.

Placement Sufficiency

The average number of placement orders over the last 3 years is 42
The region purchases 11 placements via the Marketshare project and has a placement target of 30 placements each year. The LA budget also enables the purchase of additional placements.

Information in respect of the Adoption Assessment process

In Q3 October to December 2023

- We received 44 enquiries
- 11 attended our introduction to adoption event
- This led to 5 initial visits
- We received 5 ROI's (Registration of Interests)
- All of the assessments proceeded (1 assessment did not proceed to approval panel due to dishonesty following receipt of checks and references)
- 6 adopters were approved in this quarter from previous quarters
- We received 41 enquiries in Q3 last year 2022
- We have undertaken 5 initial visits in comparison to 7 last year
- All initial visits undertaken progressed to an assessment proceeding
- Introduction to adoption training has saved social work hours due to initial visits only progressing with potential applications that have been well considered and meet regulations. However, feedback from adopters at their stage one review was the information provided at the introduction to adoption training sessions were hard hitting. There was a theme that information needed to be drip fed throughout the process, not to deter applicants at such an early stage, as many aspects of adoption and its challenges were incredibly new to people.



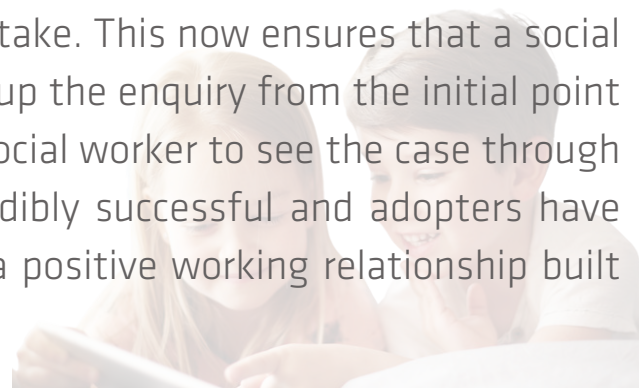


- We have 'softened' the training and started to develop new homework books and workshops in stage one to grow knowledge and understanding of pertinent adoption matters in a more graduated format. This allows more time for self-learning and self-reflection.

In Q4 January to March 2024

- We received 39 enquiries (up to the 19th March 2024 – writing this report)
- 19 attended our introduction to adoption event
- This led to 18 initial visits
- We received 9 ROI's (Registration of Interests)
- We are awaiting at least another 6 ROIs following positive initial visits being undertaken, some initial visits have just been scheduled having only just received enquiry forms following the most recent introduction to adoption training
- All of the assessments proceeded
- 13 adopters were approved in this quarter from previous quarters
- We received 39 enquiries this quarter in comparison to 56 enquiries in Q4 2023
- 19 attended our introduction event, this mirrors Q4 in 2023
- This led to only 10 initial visits last year in comparison to 18 this year!
- We only received 6 ROIs in Q4 2023 in comparison to potentially 15 this year! This is a remarkable difference!

Further changes to our process, given the feedback received from our adopters is how we manage enquiries. Up until November 2023, all enquiries were managed by our marketing manager. In November 2023, we created a duty rota within the recruitment and assessment team for all social work colleagues to partake. This now ensures that a social worker, experienced in the field of assessment, picks up the enquiry from the initial point of contact with the service. The aim is for the same social worker to see the case through from initial visit to assessment. This has been incredibly successful and adopters have shared how this helps to secure the foundations of a positive working relationship built on longevity.

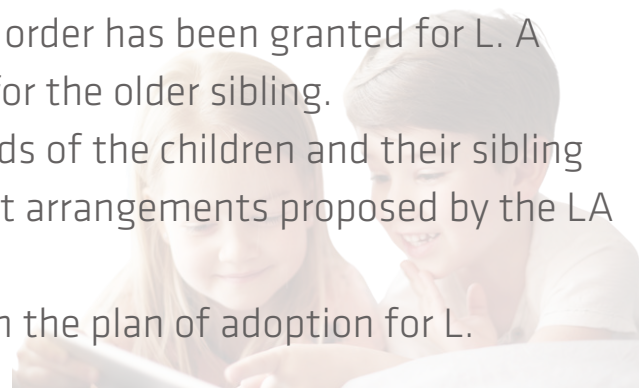




Enquiries are responded to on the same day. They are sent the enquiry form, information pack and provided with the details of the next introduction to adoption event. They are provided the link to enrol on the training should the applicants still not wish to speak with anyone at this stage. The sessions are held on a rotating basis, during the week and on weekends. They are scheduled within a lunchbreak and also of an evening to ensure we are targeting as many prospective adopters as possible.

Wales Early Permanence (WEP)

- We currently have two approved WEP carers within the service
- We have successfully matched both approved WEP carers with their prospective children.
- A child from Bridgend was placed with Swansea WEP carers on Wednesday the 6th March. The carers are supporting direct contact with birth family. This is a traditional WEP placement. The baby was removed from birth mothers care following a negative assessment whilst residing in a mother and baby placement. The baby was moved to the WEP placement and is thriving in the applicants care. Court, on the 22nd March 2024, will determine if an assessment of grandfather will be agreed, in order for the child to be returned to his care. The LA and guardian are not in support of this plan. Should court conclude, in favour or a Placement Order being granted, the carers would wish to proceed with the adoption of the child.
- Our Bridgend WEP carer has been matched with a Swansea child. The child is three years of age and currently in a foster placement with her older brother. The siblings are currently undergoing direct work to be separated and they cannot remain in their current foster placement.
- A planned and gradual to the WEP carer has commenced.
- Court, in this case has concluded and a placement order has been granted for L. A longer term foster care arrangement is proposed for the older sibling.
- The WEP carer is incredibly insightful into the needs of the children and their sibling relationship and will support the necessary contact arrangements proposed by the LA and deemed to be in the child's best interests.
- Once settled, the WEP carer hopes to proceed with the plan of adoption for L.





- We have no other adopters considering WEP at this time. Nor have we had adopters express an interest. VVC, WBAS and the WEP lead, Laura Betts (NAS) plan to meet in early April to look at targeted recruitment for WEP. It has not been streamlined across the other adoption collaboratives, as it is felt, VVC and WBAS are further along in the implementation of WEP.

A monthly WEP meeting is held with Swansea fostering as well as monthly meetings with a legal representative from each Local Authority. The meetings with legal have tapered off, given there are no recent WEP enquirers, however it is hoped these will pick back up by next quarter.

Non Agency – Step Parent/ Non Relative Applications

	2022 Q1/Q2	2022/23 Q3/Q4	2023 Q1/Q2	2023/24 Q3/Q4
Number of Referrals	25 BCBC 2 NPT 8 SWN 11	27 BCBC 11 NPT 9 SWN 7	15 BCBC 3 NPT 7 SWN 5	11 BCBC 6 NPT 4 SWN 1

From April 2021 – March 2022

- We had a backlog of 92 enquiries and assessments waiting to be processed
- We progressed 40 assessments and closed the other enquiries that could not proceed





From April 2022 – March 2023

- We had 52 enquiries
- We progressed 19 assessments
- We had no waiting list for enquiry or assessment

From April 2023 – March 2024

- We had 26 enquiries
- We progressed 5 assessments
- We continue to have no waiting list for enquiry or assessment

These referrals are dealt with immediately and passed through a triage type system which has been effective in considering early on whether they are appropriate referrals. There are no non agency cases awaiting allocation.

As the teams knowledge and understanding grow in these cases, we are more confident in the advice and guidance we offer. We have updated our information pack and screening tool as the years have past. The R&A team manager has also worked closely with the other adoption regions and local judges, for WBAS to embed a robust process which appears to be lessening the number of non-agency applications that are made.

We are redirecting applicants to lesser orders, such as parental responsibility orders and child arrangement orders, through support of their own legal advice.





6. Advertising and Marketing



We kicked off the autumn season by helping Bridgend College Rugby unveil their new season kit with special appearances by regional rugby Ospreys stars and some Welsh rugby legends. Our sponsorship of the Rugby Pathway and college team resulting in our logo being prominently displayed on the new jerseys and on new signage pitch side. This activity builds on and develops from our ongoing partnerships with the Bridgend Ravens RFC and Pen y Bont FC – keeping adoption front of mind throughout the county.



Next up we supported National Adoption Week 2023 as enthusiastically as ever, launching the week with a cross-county walk across the WBAS region with the help of Councillors, Heads of Services and Principal Officers.



A major success of the walk was engaging our birth mums to take part and support.



During the week we had a number of other successes including generating our own PR story about a staff member and adopter which was published in local press, to creating lots of digital engagement on not only our social media but also our local authorities' and partner organisations.

Moving into November we teamed up with our friends in Foster NPT at the Richard Burton 10k and Children's Mini Miler in Cwmavon.



We then attended the LGBT+ South Wales Police Staff Network Conference at the Bridgend HQ which resulted in further working with the Forces' HR department on adoption policies.





Still in November to help celebrate the 1 year anniversary of WBAS Youth Club we asked the children to come up with designs for t shirts which we then had printed and presented to the young people. The children love the t shirts and the sense of belonging they help to embody.

We then started Christmas early at Margam Park by taking part in the Annual Christmas Tree Festival in the castle with our friends again from Foster NPT. WBAS Youth Club was involved again by designing handmade baubles for the tree. Still in November we 'dipped deep' for Children in Need and raised a few hundred pounds for the charity with a cold water team dip down Caswell Bay.

Deep into December and we saw the return of our much loved Christmas Party for adopters at Wiggley's Fun Farm in Bridgend. We packed the very large venue with families with lots of activities on offer and a special visit from Santa (and of course festive Teulu the Bear) for the children

Sticking with the festivities in December Teulu the Bear helped to make WBAS Christmas Play Group a special occasion for some little ones. In the New Year we visited leisure centres across the region to raise awareness of adoption amongst the increased footfall that this time of year brings.

The start of February we then attended the Swansea Council Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Marketplace Event at the Village Hotel – making some great connections and leads for adoption awareness sessions in schools.

Building on this theme we supported Children's Mental Health Week 2024 online with social media series of guidance and wellness tips from our Therapists.





Building on this theme we supported Children's Mental Health Week 2024 online with social media series of guidance and wellness tips from our Therapists. Offline we then finished the week at the National Waterfront Museum at the NHS CAHMS Event networking and offering guidance and activities.



Finally into March we supported Fostering and Adoption Week 2024 with lots of social media activity and blogs featuring our adopters. We were also present again at the National Waterfront Museum, this time at Swansea Council's One Stop Shop offering adoption

March also saw the return of the WBAS Conference for Professionals at the Towers Hotel in Neath. The conference featured impactful videos from adopters and birth families in addition to hard-hitting workshops on subjects such as Contact. Feedback has been excellent with delegates reporting on how they've been deeply impacted by the videos and the powerful talks given by birth parents.



Continuing a busy month our community work in Bridgend returned at the 'WBAS local derby' at the Brewery Field with the Ravens facing Neath RFC. We also ran for WBAS and the NPT County Mayors Charity at the Margam Park 10k in a tough but beautiful course!



Digitally our channels have performed well over the last 6 months with some strong increases across the range on Facebook and Instagram compared to the previous 6 month period as can be seen below:





Performance



A main driver in such big increases was the reactivation of our paid for adverts in late August on the platforms.

Looking ahead to the next 6 month period we have a new marketing plan in place which highlights our commitment to our communities and determination to utilise every aspect of the marketing mix in an integrated way from print and PR to events and radio.





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7. Adoption Support Performance and Development work

Virtual Hub Summary

36 Virtual Hubs consultations were provided during the year with feedback being very positive:



I'm feeling better. It's helpful saying it out loud.

'It's nice to be able to 'blah' and get it all out

It has really helped to talk things through, we feel reassured and feel that we have made a start' in terms of getting support

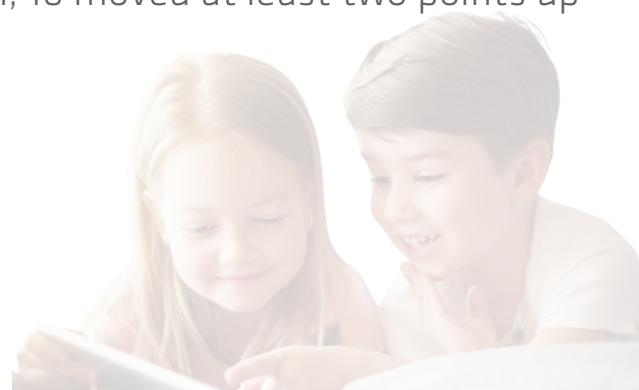
Just from today, we've got a different way of dealing with things

I feel more reassured that what we are doing is the right approach

We have valued talking things through and felt reassured and more confident in managing

Talking through his early experiences again really made me think about how much he has had to overcome and the challenges he faces

20 of the 35 families scored prior and after the session, 16 moved at least two points up on the confidence scale following their consultation



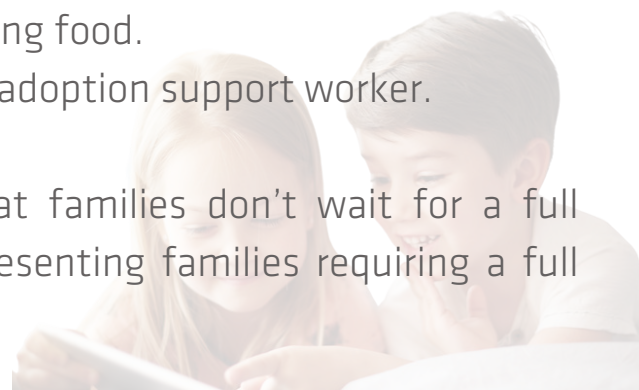


Signposting from Virtual Hub

Provision	Families Referred
PATHways	14
Buss Group	7 plus 1 for 1:1 work from April
Schools awareness work	8
Therapeutic parenting programme	8
Life journey work	5
Therapy	6
NVR	2

8 families identified ADHD/ASD presenting behaviours and assessments commencing
3 families identified issues with their children controlling food.
Seven of the 36 families had required allocation to an adoption support worker.

We are finding it an effective way of ensuring that families don't wait for a full adoption support assessment, with only 7 of the presenting families requiring a full assessment.





Check-ins

Annual Check in Reviews 2023-24

Using the additional staff resource the service was able to undertake Check- in Reviews for adopters and birth parents whose child had an AOG 12 months ago (children who had an Adoption Order Granted during the year of 2022-23) and 3 years ago (children who has an AOG during the year 2020-21).

12 months Check-in Review – adopters

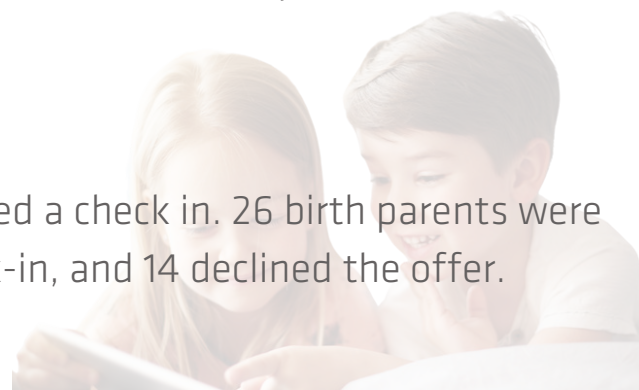
45 children had an AOG during this period of these 34 families were engaged with in some form, 14 were open as adoption support cases already and 18 agreed to participate and 4 declined the offer.

From the reviews undertaken the following was identified:

- Significant increase in the number of families who were open within the service for a virtual hub consultation or for a Pathway referral.
- All families were engaging in letterbox contact and one adopter reported that her child has begun to write her own letter.
- All families who had engaged confirmed their child had at the very least a basic understanding that they were adopted. Many discussed that their child regularly looked at their memory box.
- Five children were having direct contact with their siblings.
- One adopter had asked about a birth parent meeting that wasn't possible at the time of placement
- One adopter stated that her child got a lot from attending the annual support events as her child loved seeing other children who had been adopted like him.

12 month Check-in Review – Birth Parents

The birth parents of the same 45 children were offered a check in. 26 birth parents were engaged with in some form, 12 took part in the check-in, and 14 declined the offer.





From the reviews undertaken the following was identified:

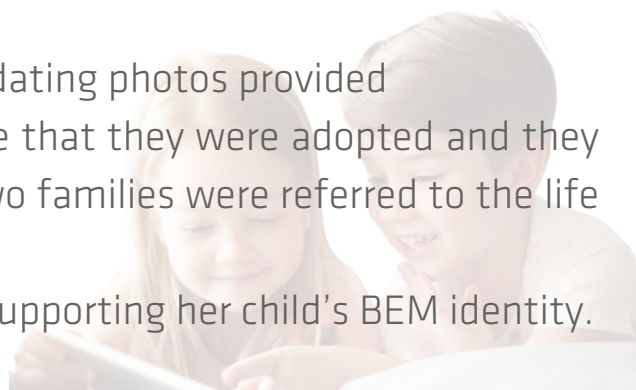
- Harder to engage birth parents in this cohort, for many there was no up to date contact details.
- 1 birth mother wanted to share that she had made positive changes and had a baby of 7 months living with her.
- 1 birth father was able to reflect on how he wasn't in a good place at the time his son was born and he knew that he could look after him. He is now on a college course and regularly goes to the gym.
- More birth parents were now receiving support from the post adoption contact team in respect of engaging in letterbox contact.
- Birth parents still talked about still feeling unable to talk about the adoption and although receiving the annual letter feel unable to reply, even when support is offered.
- 2 birth fathers were interested in finding out more about and attending the birth parent support group.
- 14 birth parents were actively engaged in letterbox.

3 year Check-in Review – adopters

63 children had an Adoption Order Granted during this period of these 35 families were engaged with in some form, 6 were already open in adoption support, 19 successfully engaged and 10 didn't wish to take the offer up.

From the reviews undertaken the following was identified:

- Two adopters were refusing to provide annual reports for birth parents- birth parents seeking legal advice.
- Some lovely examples of annual letters with up dating photos provided
- All 19 families advised that their child was aware that they were adopted and they had begun to use their life-journey materials. Two families were referred to the life journey workshop for additional support.
- One adopter requested additional support with supporting her child's BEM identity.





- One child had significant additional needs and was open within the LA CDT team.
- Two families had been offered Pathway provision.
- Four adopters were being reassessed for a second time.

3 year Check-in Review – Birth Parents

The birth parents of the same 63 children were offered a check in. 21 birth parents were engaged with in some form, 8 successfully engaged, 8 were offered but declined and the service didn't have contact details for 5.

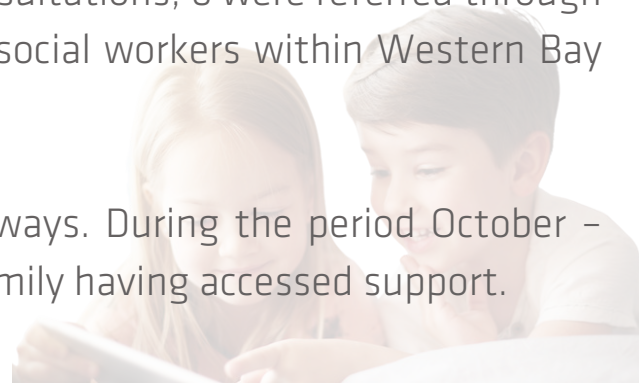
From the reviews undertaken the following was identified:

- Some Birth parents had some really positive feedback and stories to share.
- 2 birth parents were now receiving external therapeutic provision
- 1 birth mother was now married in a supportive relationship and was safely caring for her two year old child.
- 3 birth mothers were attending the BP support group on a regular basis.
- 4 birth fathers and 4 birth mothers were interested in finding out more about and attending the birth parent support group.
- A number of parents were seeking support each year from the service to respond to their annual letter.

PATHways October 2023 – March 2024

There are currently 45 AUK PATHways cases open to WBAS. Between October 2023 and March 2024 there were 17 new referrals made to Pathways. Of the new referrals, 8 were referred to Pathways following Virtual Hub Consultations, 6 were referred through the duty system, 3 were known to and referred by social workers within Western Bay Adoption Service.

Of the 17 new referrals, 1 was a re-referral to Pathways. During the period October – March, no cases were closed by PATH without the family having accessed support.





All referred adopters accessed the consultation with the psychologist/therapist, however engagement with Parents Support Partners and the Pathways Reflective Group is more variable. It has been identified that those who take up all three aspects of Pathways (psychological consultation, parents support partner and reflective group) appear to achieve the most benefit and adopters being referred to Pathways are encouraged to access all three areas. Many parents are attracted to Pathways by the prospect of having a consultation with a psychologist, however attending the Reflective Group and meeting with the Parent Support Partners provides the opportunity for adopters to consolidate and extend the learning and insight they develop during the Psychological Consultation.

As previously reported, feedback from adopters who access the PATHways programme remains positive. Many adoptive parents report that the Pathways programme has helped them to understand their child's difficulties in the context of early developmental trauma. It continues to be a common theme that adoptive parents are concerned that their child may also have a Neurodevelopmental disorder and they are often seeking diagnosis via the school, GP or CAMHS with limited success. Frequently parents report frustration that other agencies (such as health or education) do not fully appreciate the impact of developmental trauma as their children do not have a recognised diagnosis of their difficulties and having the Pathways Psychological report has helped them to discuss their child's needs with the schools or health.

Children and Young Person's Work

During the period October 2023 – March 2024 we have delivered 22 youth clwb sessions with our Western Bay youth group. Our young people are aged between 10-16 years old and are from all across the Western Bay Region. Our members are steadily increasing and on average around 13 young people now regularly attend youth club each week with 4 regular members of staff.



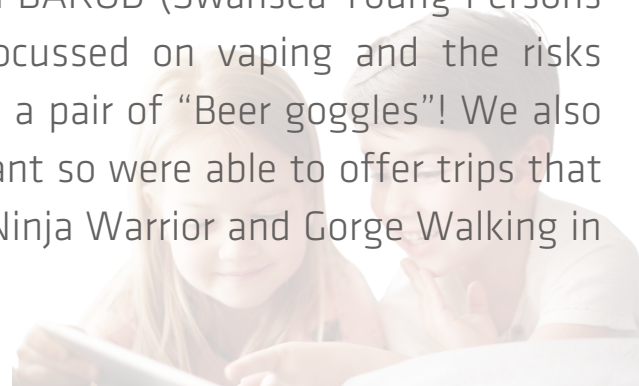


We have 10 young people on our waiting list (we can only invite new members to join us each term as we have found this to be a big change for the group which needs to be managed very carefully). For some of the WBAS young people on our waiting list, youth clwb is too far away for them to travel to each week but if we are holding trips we try and give them the opportunity to attend.

Our youth group continues to keep to the same structure each week which includes activities such as cooking, arts and crafts and games. Over the last 6 months and thanks to the COAST grant, our young people designed their own youth clwb t-shirts which they all continue to wear with pride. They also made Christmas baubles to hang on a WBAS Christmas tree at Margam park. Recently the group have been involved in Wales Air Ambulance “Castle in the Sky” project.

They have graffitied and stencilled their own mini castle – please look out for it in a public space in Swansea this summer as well as our WBAS larger Castle at Black Pill!! All of these activities provide the perfect opportunity for the group to learn new skills, make new friends and build trusting relationships with the youth workers. Lots of our discussions with our young people have been around relationships with their family, friends and school. We have also discussed managing conflict, racism, homophobia, being adopted, birth family, letterbox, transitions, anger, suicide, self-harm, therapy, alcohol, drugs, vaping, aerosol use, keeping safe, respect for each other, personal space and triggers.

Through December 2023 we had more visits from Circus Eruption which was great fun. We could really see how the group have bonded and how they will support each other with new experiences. We also invited in Beth from BAROD (Swansea Young Persons substance misuse worker) to deliver a session focussed on vaping and the risks associated with vapes. The group also got to try on a pair of “Beer goggles”! We also benefitted from funding from the winter COAST grant so were able to offer trips that the young people chose, to BUZZ trampoline park, Ninja Warrior and Gorge Walking in Glynneath.





A particular big achievement for one young person from Youth Clwb was when he recently spoke at our WBAS conference about himself and youth clwb. He was supported by his youth worker Gareth and his social worker Claire in preparing what he wanted to tell the conference about how youth clwb had helped him. Needless to say he was brilliant and we were so proud of him! His dad was also spotted shedding a tear or two!! The message that he really conveyed was “Youth Clwb is one place where we can all be ourselves”

The majority of our youth group also access therapy and support from Adoption Support Social workers due to their childhood trauma and current complex needs. Therefore, Youth Clwb has also created an opportunity for the parents and siblings of our young people to have a much needed weekly break. A single adoptive parent told me last night “this is the only thing Z will go to! I don’t know what I’d do without it!”





Birth Parent Support

October – the month we made pumpkins out of jumpers, scarves, dresses that were donated by staff – NPT group we had a birth mum attend after 10 months of offering her to attend (we supported her to attend the food bank and access her GP for her prescription (hugely vulnerable and staying in a hotel)

November – we made stunning winter wreaths using winter foliage and material from our summer event – new member attended the Bridgend group.

December – our winter wellbeing event – we made candles, personalised keyrings engraving loved ones/children`s initials, decorated star biscuits. We held a raffle this year with all the donations we received throughout the year and made goody bags so they felt more like a gift rather than hand me downs. Everyone enjoyed a buffet lunch and everyone received a snack hamper to take home. We also hand delivered some hampers for those who could not attend. A few new mums attended the event. Around 23 attended.

January – we made the personalised keyrings as many wanted to do more than one at the winter wellbeing event. We found everyone was feeling fragile and in need of our nurture after a difficult Christmas this month. One mum returned after months.

February – we made heart shaped soaps and heart shaped chocolate wrapped up like gifts for valentines.

March – we made Easter cheesecake pots – we supported a birth mum with her mental health during one group and managed to successfully bring her mental health appointment forward.

Since October we have supported at least 7 birth mums who attend our group with letterbox.





We have had around 5 birth mums over the last few months querying if they can bring toddlers in their care

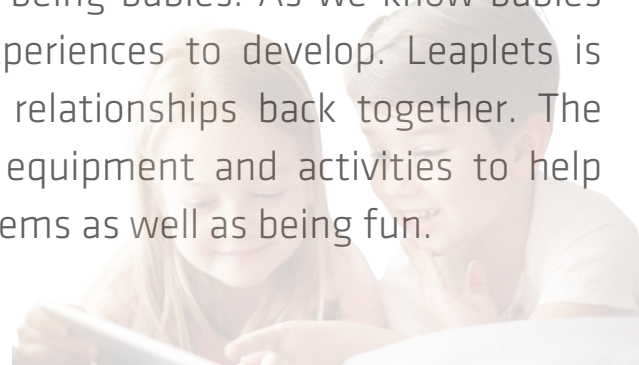
BUSS model of sensory processing

In April 2023 we launched our very first LEAPlets play group in Neath Afan Gymnastics centre. LEAPlets is a 10 week programme based on the Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor System (Model developed by Sarah Lloyd, Specialist Occupational Therapist and Play Therapist). The first group was a great success, it was amazing to see the progress the children made within a relatively short space of time.

Following the success of our very first Leaplets group last April 2023, we started with 2 groups on a Tuesday morning from September 2023. Since then, 16 families have attended the programme (some repeatedly) and we have another 10 new referrals for our next group starting in April 2024. Our group runs from Neath Afon gymnastics centre which is a perfect central location for our families who travel in from across the Western Bay region.

LEAPlets is a 10 week programme based on the Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor System Model. This was developed by Sarah Lloyd, Specialist Occupational Therapist and Play therapist. Sarah continues to provide supervisory input into each of our groups to ensure we are absolutely meeting all the sensorimotor needs of the children and their families as best we can.

The Leaplets programme is for children aged 2-5 years old. It is a specific intervention for children who we know have experienced some disruption in their development from in utero. Our Leaplets group takes children back to being babies. As we know babies need consistent nurture, touch and movement experiences to develop. Leaplets is about bringing the importance of movement and relationships back together. The group runs using specific songs, movement, gym equipment and activities to help children develop their Foundation Sensorimotor Systems as well as being fun.





GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
Bae'r Gorllewin
Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE



At Leaplets, the parents and carers of the children are of paramount importance to the intervention being successful. The adults are strongly encouraged to continue the activities at home or whenever they can with the children, to help continue their sensory development as well as strengthening the bond between them.

Here are some of the comments made by parents and carers who have attended Leaplets

[My child] is noticeably more confident, family and friends have been commenting on the confidence she has in her own ability to do tasks such as walking, running, climbing and jumping

I think the team did an amazing job of meeting everyone's needs, keeping everyone safe and making it an enjoyable experience for the children.

I'm very pleased at how he's adapted to strengthening core muscles ie crawling and pulling himself by arms

By week 5 of the LEAPlets group, I could see a massive improvement in [my child's] ability to regulate her own emotions. She was looking really confident in her body and was less likely to erupt over small things. She was using her words to express how she felt.

Thirteen members of staff across the service attended Level 2 BUSS training in September, which enables them to assess and identify underdeveloped sensorimotor systems in our children. Three members of staff are currently working towards Level 3 and beginning individual programmes with children and families. This allows us to carry out detailed BUSS assessments and interventions with older children and teenagers with underdeveloped sensorimotor systems. We are working towards becoming self-sufficient in BUSS programmes within the service.





Therapy team

The Psychology and Therapy team continue to integrate their practice throughout the Service. Our therapy offer to families includes music, play, filial therapy, psychology and systemic family therapy. Our interventions with children, young people and families are always complex, are often very lengthy and are reported to be life changing for the families involved. A parent of a child who recently finished play therapy wrote:

It would not be an exaggeration to say that it [play therapy] was a lifeline, and I don't think we would have made it through as a family without it. We believe that play therapy should be regarded (and guarded) for what it is: a lifeline and a vital means of support to children and families like ours who are navigating the complexities of emotional and psychological struggles beyond their comprehension

The therapists often co work cases with the therapeutic social workers or support workers within the Adoption support team, this multidisciplinary approach is an essential part of our service, drawing on each other's specialist strengths to benefit the family.

In addition to direct therapy, our therapists are also involved in the following;

- Virtual Hub- working alongside therapeutic adoption support social workers to support parents, widening parents' access to the therapy team.
- Setting up and facilitating a group for parents of teenage children. One parent fed back 'I love coming to this group, I've met some lovely people. Everyone gets on so well. There's a mixture of serious discussion and advice but there's also a lot of laughter. I feel I have somewhere to come to about anything. A very supportive group.'
- Assisting with differential diagnosis- it can be difficult to tease out symptoms that are associated with developmental trauma from those that could be suggestive of an underlying neurodevelopmental difficulty. Our psychologist has supported parents and schools to think about potential roots of behaviour and has acted as a 'professional friend' to schools when diagnostic assessment is needed.



- Implementation of BUSS throughout the service- our psychology and therapy team have joined forces across the service in their commitment to BUSS being involved in the LEAPlets group and with one therapist embarking on her Level 3 assessment/intervention training along with two adoption support social workers

The team will continue to develop their skills and be responsive to the needs of the service and the families WBAS support. For example, there are plans to offer a summer workshop for adopted teens with the focus on identity. Consideration is also being given to therapists embarking on EMDR training as there is a strong evidence base for this intervention for children, young people and adults who have experienced trauma.

Western Bay Regional Conference

83 professionals from across the region and other areas such as CAFCASS, Health, Education and other Regional services attended the second conference that the service held. Feedback has been hugely positive:

I found all aspects of the morning very relevant to my role. I work with YP who have been adopted and also who have children in adoption/fostering, so found all the information helpful.

Hearing the real life stories from birth parents, siblings and adopters was particularly powerful

I would like every team to hear these powerful stories about contact

By far the best conference I have ever attended. Congratulations all!

Really well managed and hosted by Nichola and the team, lots of visibility and knowledge and people genuinely seemed to be enjoying themselves



8. Policies and Procedures

The Service is pleased to report that the NAS have published the National Adoption Policies and Procedures which have been a collaborative piece of work involving all the regions and VAA's. These were formally launched in National Adoption Week on the 18th October 2023.

9. CSSIW

The service was last inspected during 2018-19 and an appropriate subsequent plan drawn up which has been reviewed at the Management Board with actions completed. WBAS were the only region to be inspected. CSSIW have confirmed that all Regional services will face an inspection of their service in the next 24 months.

10. Local Monitoring and Governance

Monitoring and governance of the service is the responsibility of the Management Board, which now meets on a quarterly basis. The Board members interrogate data provided on a quarterly and annual basis. Strategic decisions are shared with the board for approval whereas, in the main, operational decisions are overseen by the Regional Manager who is supervised by the 'Host' authority Head of Service.

The service is measured on both the service plan and the national performance indicators through regular reports, presenting the achievements of the service compared to previous years and where data is available, with other regions across Wales. The formation of a Regional Joint committee has now happened and these meetings take place twice a year.





A six monthly report is available to Scrutiny Committees in all three local authorities. Periodically, reports are submitted and shared with Cabinet, Scrutiny Panels and Corporate Parenting Cabinets/Committees. Performance indicators are reported to the National Adoption Central team on a quarterly basis, this information is provided to the Advisory Group and the Governance Board of the National Adoption Service.

During this reporting period the Regional manager has presented information to two of the LA's corporate parenting forums.

11. Consultations and engagement of those who use the Service

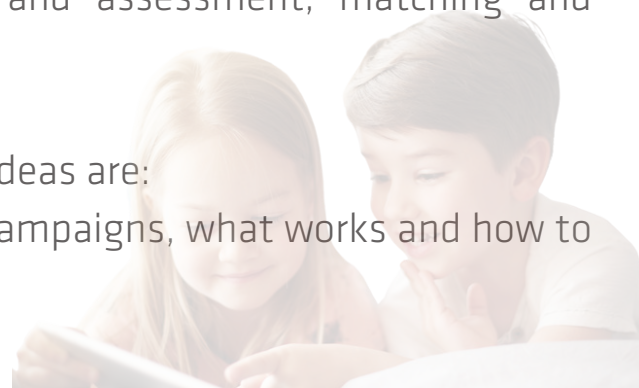


The use of survey's and qualitative data continues to be used to receive feedback from families and professionals that have experienced the service. We are in regular contact with our adopters through our closed Facebook page where they are able to also provide feedback about their experience of the service and the events that are run. A working group attended by adopters from various stages of the adoption journey started in October and is held quarterly in order that they can feed into all areas of service developments. There are 14 members, all who are approved adopters from those waiting to be matched to adopters who have had their children/siblings for some years, they include second time adopters of related and non-related children, adopters with children with complex needs, LGBTQ+ adopters, solo adopters and foster carers who have adopted and continue to foster.

The aim of the group is to listen to adopters views and thoughts on WBAS service development plans, from marketing, recruitment and assessment, matching and support post placement of children and siblings.

Key areas that the group have discussed and shared ideas are:

- Gained feedback on marketing and recruitment campaigns, what works and how to strengthen



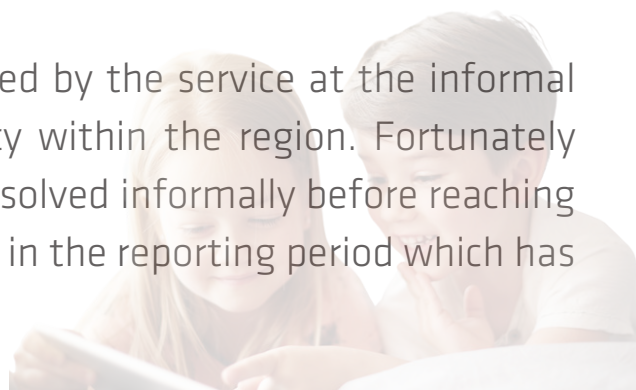


- Gaining views about the 'buddy bank' and how to help the adoption community to grow
- Reviewed how WBAS communicates with adopters and ways to strengthen communication
- Adopters to support WBAS at community events and at the Information Sessions so that perspective adopters can hear first hand about what life is like as an adoptive family
- To develop a yearly calendar of training and events
- Support schools to celebrate and talk positively about adoption, eg during 'adoption week' and give school suggested story books that could be used to celebrate all families
- Could WBAS training courses to be recorded and accessed via a secure portal, eg if child is unwell and adopter can't attend, they work shifts or it is during bedtime routine for solo adopters
- Guidance for new teachers or the WBAS education session to be recorded so that adopters can share information at the end of the school year, to support the new teacher to have a good understanding of how early developmental trauma can impact on children and how to best support them
- Adopters would love to be part of planning meetings for adoption family events, to ensure that what is being set up is meeting the needs of adoptive families

The service is also looking at introducing a wellbeing scale to ensure that the work that is undertaken is positively impacting on individuals wellbeing.

11. Quality Assurance, Compliments, comments, complaints, safeguarding issues, whistleblowing and representation.

Attempts are made to address any complaints received by the service at the informal stage but registered with the relevant local authority within the region. Fortunately complaints remain very low with many issues being resolved informally before reaching the formal process. The service has had one complaint in the reporting period which has been moved to stage two at the complaints' request.





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Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE



11. Overall assessment of the Service

The overall assessment of the service during this reporting period is excellent and the priorities identified within the good practice guide and the Adopt Cymru plan continue to be developed creatively within the service. The service has been able to allocate all adoption support assessments in a timely way with no waiting list for these assessments due to the additional capacity that the temporary posts have provided. A second Regional conference was held which was well received.

We have recently moved office to a new base in Neath Town Centre from Tregelles Court. The new office space offers a much more modern and open setting, initial feedback from staff is fantastic, with a sense of excitement at rising to the challenges ahead during the year in the space.

Nichola Rogers

Regional Adoption Manager

April 2024

