

# NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

## QUALITY OF SERVICE REVIEW

For Period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021



**GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU**  
**Bae'r Gorllewin**  
**Western Bay**  
**ADOPTION SERVICE**



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# Western Bay Adoption Service

## Quality of Service Review

Date 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020-30<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

### 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 collaboratives 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 and scrutiny committees.
- Quarterly and annual reports to NAS.

This report is in respect of the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. 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. The performance information provided is for the full year.

### 2. Current Position

2020 has been a very challenging year and saw the service having to consider how it could continue to operate during the Global COVID pandemic. Staff within the service have worked tirelessly to ensure that it has very much continued as business as normal and have adapted all the work that is needed to be completed via Virtual means. All staff are now fully agile and have lap-tops that enable them to work at home. Panel, Assessments, family finding and adoption



support tasks have continued via virtual means with risk assessments in place for limited face to face work when it has been needed. The work that this report highlights is testament to the commitment and drive of the staff group. The service initially adapted well to the ever changing situation and managed to maintain this throughout the year. Despite the challenges that this has brought the service has continued to deliver on both local and national objectives and maintain many aspects of performance.

### **3. Staffing**

Staffing has remained fairly stable throughout the year and vacancies have been filled without difficulty. A new recruitment and Assessment Team manager has now commenced in post. Staff are now enjoying working in small cross function working groups to consider revising the existing processes and how the good practise guides will be implemented across the service.

For future development the service is currently looking at the potential to use the apprenticeships scheme this year running locally to support business support this would be utilising maternity savings within business support. The development of practise and performance measures and panel activity has taken the current experienced staff away from basic business support tasks such as managing the mail, admin tasks associated with the letterbox and supporting the duty system. These are very much roles that could be undertaken by an apprentice.

There was also a large underspend on staff this year due to maternity and short term periods when vacancy filling was in process. Regional manager will be meeting with the finance officer to maximise the staffing budget.

### **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.

#### **Panel Training and Development**

Panel were offered a training session on the implementation of the Good practise Guides. The panel chair and Vice chairs were also invited to attend the GPG AFA Cymru workshops.

For the first time all panel members have been offered an appraisal this year. It has been hugely beneficial to hear from members their experience of panel and feedback in respect of how panel can be improved. A number of changes are being implemented in panel arrangements following these appraisals.

## Adoption Panel Activity

Panel continues to have a central list of members. Panel has now moved across to use Microsoft Teams as a virtual platform. To Panel's credit no panels were disrupted or cancelled due to COVID or lockdown. The service are grateful to panel members for their flexibility in adapting to the new arrangements. As part of the implementation of the virtual boardroom to share panel documents panel members have been provided with tablets which is far more efficient and safe in terms of document sharing.

Quarterly business meetings have now been arranged for 2021-22 in order that panel members can consider quality assurance issues, performance and learning from disruptions.

### *Number of Panels held*

	Period 2020/21
Number of Planned Panels held	50
Number of extra, replacement or emergency panels	2 1 panel was for a termination of approval the first WBAS has undertaken
Number of Panels cancelled due to lack of quoracy	0
Number of Panels cancelled for other reasons*	4 – No cases And on two of these sessions panel appraisals were undertaken.

Table 1 – Number of Panels held 2020/21

The service has referred one set of adopters back to panel who recommended that the couple's approval was terminated. This case highlighted a number of learning points for the service and as a result the following has been undertaken:

- Implementation of the annual review of adopters process
- Strengthening of the interface between the service and the three LA front door teams (this work had started just prior to Lockdown)

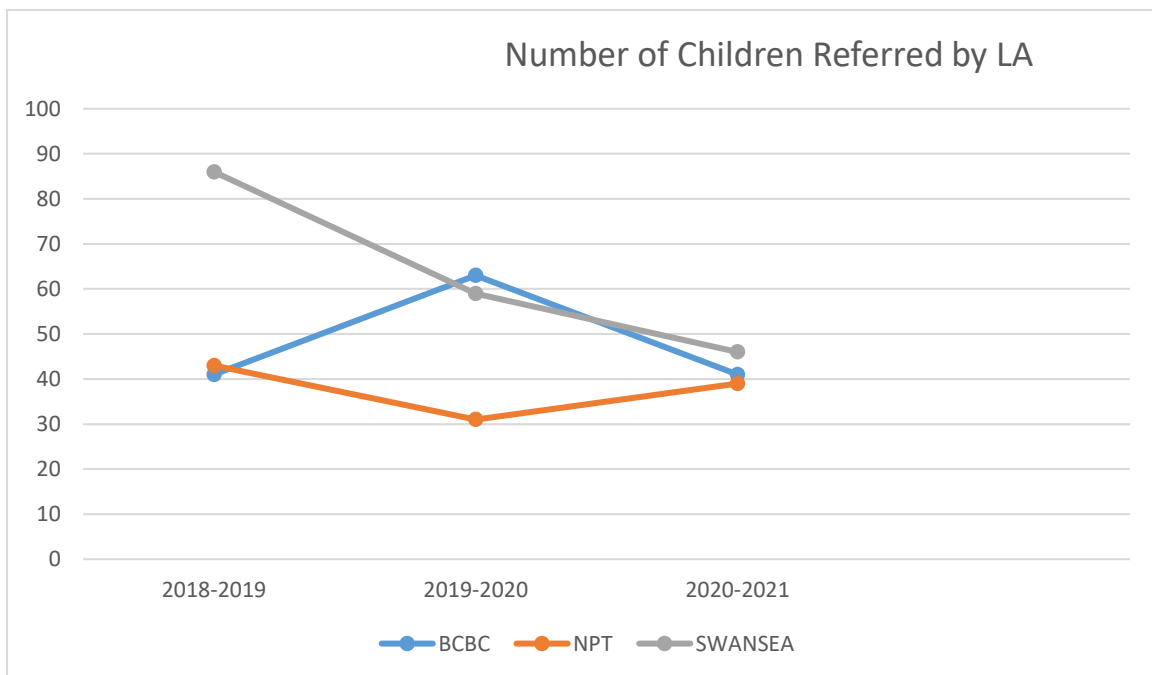
## 5. Children

### Performance in relation to Twintracking/matching and Placement

The service performance in the first two quarters has been maintained despite the significant challenges of COVID in the majority of performance indicators.

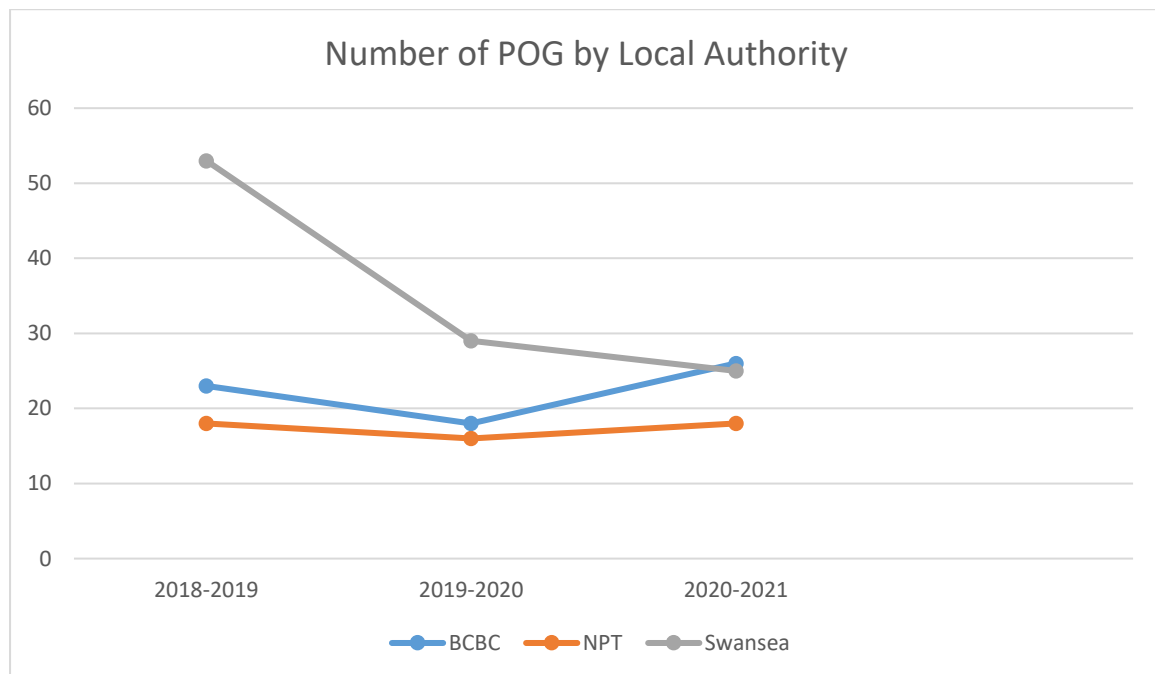
### Number of Children Referred for Twin Tracking

Number of children referred to adoption for twin tracking	Regional Total
2020/2021	129
2019/2020	153
2018/2019	170



**Number of POG in the Region**

Number of children made subject to a Placement order	Regional Total
2020/2021	69
2019/2020	63
2018/2019	94



It is hard to predict the number of referrals and placement orders that are likely to be achieved this forthcoming year. The impact of COVID, the extended periods of lockdown and closure of schools for significant periods is not yet known. It could be likely that there is an increase in referrals during this recovery year.

**Number of Children Matched for Adoption**

Number of children placed for adoption	BCBC	NPT	Swansea	Regional Total
2020/2021	23	19	37	79

2019/2020	22	22	36	80
2018/2019	26	13	31	71

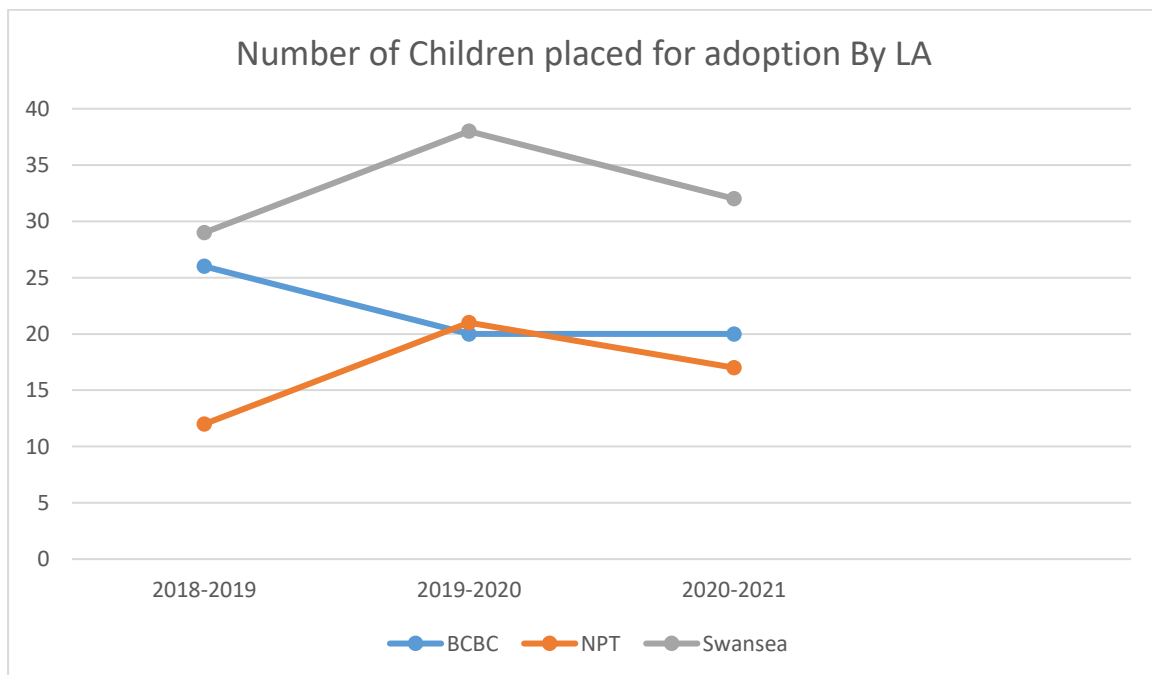
**Table 3 - Number of Children matched for Adoption**

One area which has been impacted by COVID is the placement of children, this is due to so few children achieving placement in the first months of the quarter. Once the risk assessment process was established the children waiting were placed and there has been no repeat of these early months although COVID did pose additional challenges in terms of timescale. 12 children were matched but not placed at the end of the year, these children were three sibling groups and 5 single children.

***Number of Children Placed for Adoption in the Region.***

Number of children placed for adoption	Regional Total
2020/2021	69
2019/2020	80
2018/2019	67

**Table 3 - Number of Children Placed for Adoption in the region**





**Location of children Placed for Adoption**

	BCBC	NPT	Swansea	Regional Total
Placed in Western Bay Region 2018/19	19	10	20	49
Placed in Western Bay Region 2019/20	11	15	18	44
Placed in Western Bay Region 2020/21	17	12	26	55
Placed outside of Western Bay region in 2018/19	7	2	9	18
Placed outside of Western Bay Region in 2019/20	9	6	21	36
Placed outside of Western Bay Region in 2020/21	3	5	6	14

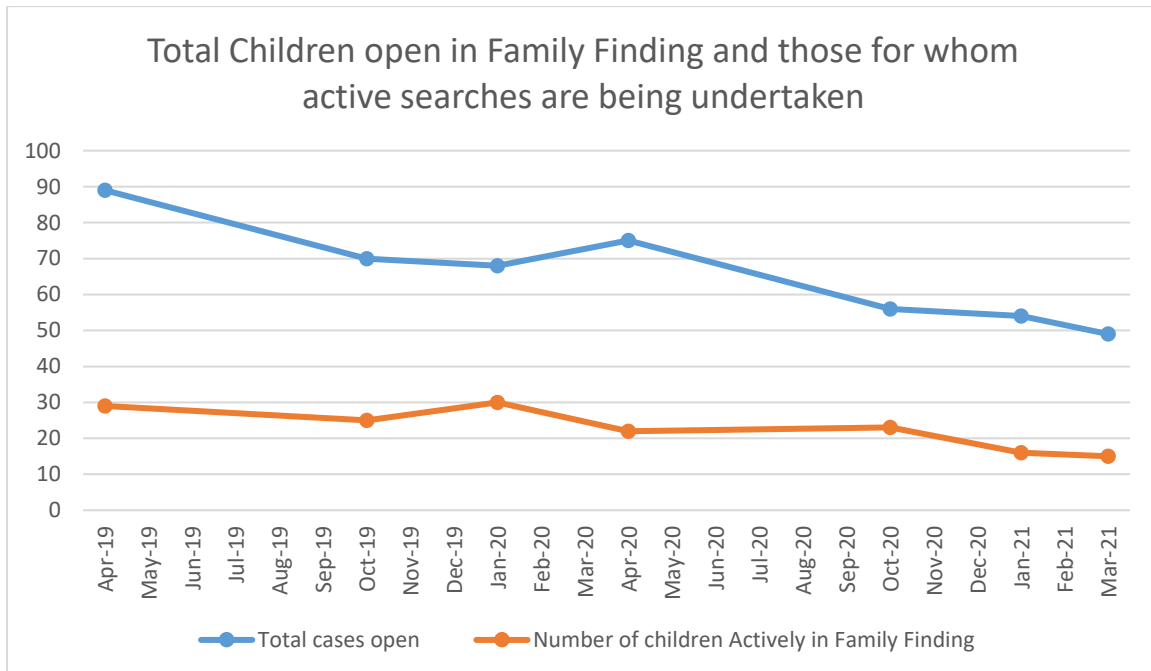
A move away from the reliance on out of county placements has been seen in this year, there has been a steady flow of adopters approved each month and the service intends to build on placing children with regional adopters where at all possible. Monthly linking meetings have been reintroduced and strengthened to ensure that children can be matched where appropriate with Western Bay adopters. Interagency fees are only considered for children with complex needs where there are no potential links with WB adopters. Two virtual profiling events have taken place this year which have been successful in linking children.

In relation to the 14 children placed out of the region, 12 were placed in England, the location/provider of these placements were as follows:

Sibling group of three children	Adoption East Midlands
Single child	Croydon Local Authority

Single child –Birth mother significantly drank alcohol in pregnancy	Adoption Focus - Leicester
Single child, genetic condition and had undergone heart surgery at birth	Barnardos South west
Single child placed with siblings	St Davids- South Wales
Sibling group of two –unable to be – placed in south Wales due to birth father	Adopters for Adoption -Kent
Single older child – significant attachment behaviours	St Davids Cardiff
Single older child	Adopt south west -Devon
Single older child	Barnardos south west - Somerset
Single older child	Adoption for Adopters - Surrey
Single older child	Adoption Focus - Midlands

The number of children open to family finding has also reduced considerably over the last two years which is shown below:



As of the 1<sup>st</sup> April there are 49 children within the family finding function, these can be broken down into the following categories

	Strong link	Matched booked into panel	Change of plan (awaiting final court outcome)	No links –active family finding
BCBC	5	0	5	9
NPT	4	2	0	5
SWANSEA	6	6	5	2
Total				16

The service is currently looking actively for placements for 16 children (this was 29 in March 2020 and 33 in March 2019).

Of these 16 children there is one sibling group of three children all who have significant developmental delay and are undergoing genetic testing, three sibling groups of two children and 7 single children. One of the single children requires a placement out of South Wales due to birth parents involvement with the forced adoption groups. Four of the other single children have complex medical issues. Referrals to the Adopting Together Service have been made for these children at a very early stage to maximise their potential for a placement to be identified.

### ***Number of Adoption Order's granted***

Number of AOG	BCBC	NPT	Swansea	Regional Total
2020/2021	20	14	29	63
2019/2020	17	14	31	62
2018/2019	24	18	30	72

**Table 3 - Number of Adoption Orders granted**

Despite lockdown the Court have continued to manage the Adoption Hearings without any impact in performance.

49 children were placed in their adoption placement with no AOG (BCBC 16, NPT 12 and Swansea 24) as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021

Number of applications before the court or in process	26
Number of children placed in Q4 (not eligible for the application to be made)	21
Children eligible for application but application not yet made	2 – two older children adopters not yet ready to make application

### **Disruptions & Breakdowns of Placement**

Within Western Bay in the reporting period there has been no placement disruptions post formal placement. There has however been one disruption during the introductions phase prior to formal placement. Regional manager who had not been involved in the matching process has met all involved staff and undertaken a review of what happened. This will be made available to Management Board and panel.

### ***Priorities for improvement in respect of Children during 2021-22***

The forthcoming year will see the launch of the Marketshare project. The purpose of this pilot is to test the impact of implementing an upfront agreement on placement numbers between the Regional Collaborative and the VAAs. It is hoped that by establishing closer partnership relationships between the two sectors (statutory and voluntary) this will make a positive difference to the length of time children wait for an adoption placement, reduce the number of children remaining in foster care or having their Placement Order revoked and see more Welsh children placed within Wales.

Development of the understanding the child day as part of the transition service is a key priority, developing a small team to lead on the implementation (using core budget and maternity savings creatively) will support this being embedded across the service.

In this recovery year coming out of Lockdown the service will aim to place as many children as this year.

## **6. Adopters**

### **Performance/Enquiries/Stage Two Model**

Western Bay Adoption Service has been in the fortunate position to continue to attract a number of prospective adopters who have enquired from both word of mouth and through accessing the Website. Despite the challenges posed by COVID there is real evidence that both the advertising on radio and our improved website are having an impact as referenced by enquirers.



### ***Number of adopter enquiries and approvals***

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Number of adopter enquiries	134	166	257
Number of adopter approvals	42	54	53
Number of Placements Generated	44	62	64

The service is starting to address the issue of ensuring that adopters for siblings are approved with a continued increase in the number of placements that are generated by the approvals.

It is also pleasing to see the increase in enquiries to the service as a result of the focused marketing activity, enhanced website, social media campaigns and radio advertising.

An audit of the 53 approved adopters has been undertaken and the following identified:

Locality	Total Number of Adopters
Bridgend	9
Swansea	25
Neath Port Talbot	8
Cardiff and Valley areas	7
Carmarthenshire and Tenby	3
England (adopters originally from Wales)	1

The location of the adopters does prove problematic as a larger number of children come through Swansea as the larger LA which does make it difficult to place children in Swansea who are also the larger producer of adopters and this is an area that will need to be addressed by the marketing officer this year.

Of the 53 approved adopters 10 were in a same sex relationship and 4 were single adopters. Three of the approved adopters were the child's foster carers.

## **Priorities for improvement during 2021-22**

In relation to the forthcoming year the service aims to build on the number of approved adopters achieving at least the same amount as the last two years. Identifying placements which will be a match to the children we have referred to the service will be the focus of work. The target set for adopter approvals this forthcoming year is 55, maintaining the performance of the previous two years whilst coming out of COVID 19.

## **7. Advertising and Marketing**

Marketing activity continued to be focused on digital activity and radio advertising into the final months of 2021 - peaking with National Adoption Week (12 – 18 October) and the launch of Western Bay's video series, the national podcast and our new advert on Nation FM.



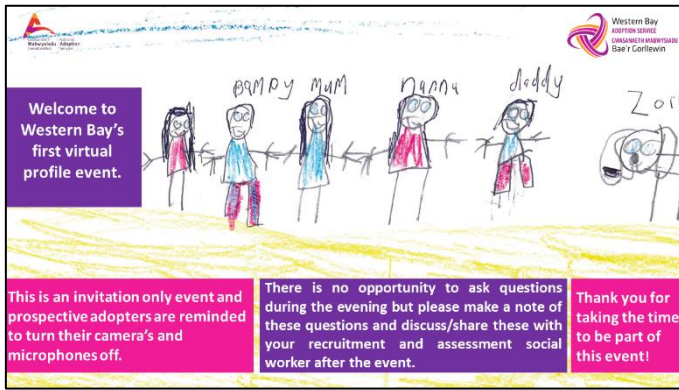
National activity during National Adoption Week (NAW) consisted of a series of webinars under the 'Lets Talk Adoption' campaign title covering a range of subjects - such as LGBTQ+ adoption using a variety of welsh adopters and workers.

The podcast 'Let the truth be told' was also launched during NAW featuring one of Western Bay's couples. The podcast has

been received successfully by our audiences, available on all the major streaming sites and has actually been entered and shortlisted into the British Podcasting Awards 2021, where the national team are hopeful of some recognition in the welsh spoken category



Western Bay experienced some positive results on the back of the national activity and regional activity with 400 visitors to our website and almost 30 new followers to our Facebook page. More on this can be seen in the digital marketing performance page.



During October we launched our first ever virtual profiling event which again in line with the above digital activity was received well and was a success.

A number of matches were made as a result of the event and it is a practice we are currently continuing and developing.

Expanding on the theme of #LetsTalkAdoption recently approved

Western Bay adopters talked about their experience of the profiling event – they have actually recently been placed with a little boy as a result of the event! They are very active on social media and keen to work with as advocates for adoption.



Our regular advertising campaign with Nation FM resumed first week of November following NAW ensuring that Western Bay was kept in the front of our audiences mind's following all the discussion during October.

Ensuring that we had integrated marketing activity to really get the most mileage out of such a busy month in October, Western Bay's 'Our Family' video series was launched on our social media and website. Engagement and reception was exceptional with the choice of featured adopters resonating with staff and potential adopters alike.



None of the featured adopters have had what could be called a smooth experience/journey, so their stories of joy and success carried even more weight. The videos will used more heavily on our website and YouTube going forward - providing Western Bay with valuable marketing content for our adopters, with a focus on each of the key adoption stages.

December has historically seen a large decrease in enquiries over the last few years as people's minds are occupied with the festivities. Desiring to address we started a Christmas social media campaign early, at the end of November called #FirstFamilyChristmas.





Using a variety of media releases via the local authority communications teams and colourful, emotional social media the aim was to really tap into the spirit of the season and use that emotion as a vehicle for driving enquiries.

We ended up with almost 20 enquiries for December and our most ever in January at almost 40.

As we've entered into 2021 increased marketing cross working with the various WBAS teams has fostered a development of our

marketing messages, adding more adoption support elements and sensitivity to the wider picture of adoption with regards to birth parents. This will continue to develop.

As restrictions loosen, businesses become more flexible and foot fall increases Western Bay will increase its visibility in key public areas and presence with local employers, this coupled with our strong digital capabilities should hopefully keep our high rates of enquiries consistent.

Recruitment of adopters in NPT and Bridgend remains lower in comparison to Swansea, which whilst to be expected, is something that marketing attempts to address with extra paid for advertising on Facebook and local publications targeting these areas



### ***Priorities for improvement during 2021-22***

The Marketing Officer will have a focus of activity in NPT and BCBC areas to bring the number of adopters recruited from these areas up. The use of social media and online advertising will continue as it has been positive however with Lockdown easing the Marketing officer will also look for other events or face to face opportunities.





## 8. Development of Adoption Support

Embedding adoption support within the service has remained a key priority. Lockdown posed additional challenges for some families who were already struggling, for others the pressure of school being taken away from them alleviated some stress and anxiety within their home. Those families open to adoption support continued to receive weekly intervention during lockdown via virtual means.

Key highlights from adoption support:

- No waiting list for initial assessment of adoption support needs, all cases are responded to, signposted or allocated within the week of being received,

- 25 families have been referred to the TESSA project between October 1<sup>st</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Three families have since been withdrawn or not engaged with the programme.
- 11 families have had a psychological consultation during the reporting period. Three families have been able to access the group work. Following their initial meeting 22 families referred have been offered parent partner support. The TESSA coordinator has maintained intensive support to 4 referred families supporting with education issues. One family is also receiving support from the in house therapy team (NVR) in conjunction with the TESSA intervention due to the young person displaying high levels of aggression.
- From September until Lockdown in December the CYP worker provided an afterschool youth club to 5 adopted children who were really struggling at home. This was received extremely positively. The plan is for this group to restart now that lockdown arrangements are easing. Contact was maintained with the young people via virtual means during lockdown. A Halloween themed workshop was held in half term at the wellbeing centre and attended by 5 young people aged 7-11 years old. This included mindful crafts, mindful meditation and fun building activities.  
The CYP worker continued to offer one to one intensive support to 6 young people who were struggling with school and their wellbeing. As part of that work she was beginning to talk to them about becoming young ambassadors which is something we are seeking to develop this year. The CYP worker has supported 10 schools during the reporting period on training and support in trauma, attachment and relationship based play. This work was integrated with the work undertaken with the school and young person so as to ensure a consistent approach to the young person.
- The service has in excess of 900+ open letterbox cases and approximately 57 contact investigations ongoing and there are 5 cases which have direct face to face contact supported by the team. Parents are now able to be referred for support by the family finding social worker to ensure that they receive support to maintain contact with their adopted children. Despite the challenge of lockdown staff have maintained the running of the letterbox system.
- The LJW project continues to support the timely completion of Life journey materials at matching and second review

### ***Priorities for improvement during 2021-22***

- Embedding the adoption support Core offer
- Implement drop in sessions and workshops in respect of LJ work
- Provide training to CSW's in undertaking direct work with Looked after children
- Develop adopter champions and Young ambassadors
- Work with reflect to develop birth parent support and co-produce birth parent support sessions
- Offer holiday and afterschool activities to adopted young people.

## **9. Policies and Procedures**

The Service will be working with NAS to review of all policies and procedures across the Welsh regions and VAA's.

## **10. 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.

## **11. Local Monitoring and Governance**

The Management Board is fully compliant with the Directions Powers Regulations, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) 2015 - with health and education representatives having now joined the Board. There are terms of reference in place.

Monitoring and governance of the service is the responsibility of the Management Board, which initially met every two months and during the latter part of the year moved to quarterly meetings. The Board members interrogate data provided on a monthly, 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.

An annual report is presented to Scrutiny Committees in all three local authorities. Periodically, reports are submitted and shared with Cabinet, Scrutiny Panels and Corporate Parenting Cabinets/Committees.

In addition the regional adoption service has a management by exception route to the Western Bay Programme Team/Leadership Group if there is ever a need to resolve issues at a regional strategic level. 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.

## **12. Consultations and engagement of those who use the Service**

The use of survey's and qualitative data has been developed during this period with survey's being used to collect feedback with the following pertinent points:

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## Closure

At the point of closure following the granting of an AO adopters are sent a closing survey about their experience of working with the service. 18 responses have been received in this time frame. All 18 respondents rated the service either good or excellent. They used words such as reliable, empathetic, knowledgeable and timely. All those who completed the survey advised that they would recommend WBAS to others considering adoption.

## Therapeutic Parenting Support

Following adopters attending this group they are asked to complete a survey, 9 responses were received from the cohort who attended the training which ran into the new year. All those who attended found the sessions useful and really benefitted from meeting and hearing from other adopters in similar situations.

## Future Developments 2021-22

The therapeutic parenting course has now been split into two different course, the adoption support service are now running a course for adoptive parents who have had their child placed for under 12 months (early identification and support before issues become established) and a course for adoptive parents whose children have been placed longer than 12 months.

## 13. 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. Five complaints have been received in this reporting period, two in relation to requests for exceptional adoption allowances being denied, one in relation to the provision and timeliness of adoption support being provided to a child placed in England, one in relation to a second time adoption assessment and finally one from a birth parent who was not in agreement to the service sharing any information about him with prospective adopters. All of these were resolved informally.

Audits were undertaken in Q1 and Q2 in line with the Quality Assurance Framework which was developed in the early part of the year. A audit of staff supervision was undertaken in Q4. This indicated that staff were well supervised on case issues but there was less of a focus on staff development and training. The use of the supervision template was not widely used and measures are in place to address this.

A selection of some of the recent compliments received by Western Bay from service users and stakeholders is below.



## 14. Overall assessment of the Service

The overall assessment of the service during these difficult times is good, new ways of working have been identified for all aspects of the work of the service and performance has very much remained on target in the majority of areas. The service has continued to develop significant

areas of the service and a growing number of adopters have agreed to support marketing activity. The use of virtual media necessitated by COVID has also supported new ways of training and learning which will be continued after COVID is over.

## 15. Future recommendation

The service are very aware that this year has been a very different due to the Pandemic and the forthcoming year will be very much recovery. Areas and priorities for future development for the forthcoming year have been considered within the body of the report, however the key priorities for the service are:

- Embedding the Good practise Guides within current practise
- Learning from cases that have not gone as well as we would have liked, these will be considered at whole service events, panel business meetings and a summary provided to the interface meetings and management Board.
- Supporting the development of the WCCIS adoption module
- Development of adopter champions across the LA's and young people's ambassadors to support service development.

June 2021



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