



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



# QUALITY OF SERVICE REVIEW



*For Period 1st October 2022 to 31st  
March 2023*



**Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu** | **National Adoption Service**  
Cenedlaethol



**Cyngor Abertawe**  
**Swansea Council**

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol



**BRIDGEND**  
County Borough Council





# 1. Introduction

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

This report is in respect of the period 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023. 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

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The service has had a busy year focusing on business as usual alongside the development of areas of work such as birth parent support and post adoption contact. Performance data still highlights some stark differences compared to previous years, although business appears to be returning to the performance seen in pre COVID



years. The service has benefitted greatly from being able to recruit some adoption support staff from some generated income, they have made a huge impact in embedding areas of the good practise guide. The income generated enables the service to maintain these additional pots for a further 12 month period, however the financial pressures on the Local Authorities will mean that the use of such income may not be possible in future years. The service were also asked to present a workshop on Post adoption contact at the recent CVAA conference in Cardiff which was attended by the VAA's from across the UK.

### 3. Staffing

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Staffing has remained fairly stable throughout the last two quarters with low absence rates, only two member of staff remains on long term sickness. Two business support staff are on maternity leave, which have some temporary cover arrangements.

### 4. Adoption Panel

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#### 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 continue to attend quarterly business and have had to opportunity to attend the AUK workshop.

## Adoption Panel Activity

Panel continues to have a central list of members and two new panel members have been recruited to further increase the diversity of panel members. Panel has continued on a virtual basis.

Quarterly business meetings have continued to take place, these have been held on a face to face basis and these have been hugely successful. Panel members have been able to understand the performance of the service and have an over-arching understanding of what the service is doing. Panel have also had the opportunity to review the cases that didn't go to plan during the introductions phase.

	Period 1st October-31st March 23
Number of Planned Panels held	18
Number of Panels cancelled due to lack of quoracy	0
Number of Panels cancelled for other reasons*	7 - No cases



## 5. Children

### Overall Summary of Children's Information

	2019/20	2020/21 COVID	2021/22	2022/23
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
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
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
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



## Overall Summary of Children's Information Continued

	2019/20	2020/21 COVID	2021/22	2022/23
Of these children number of children placed with WBAS adopters	44	55	32	21
Of these children number placed via the Market Share Project			3	3
Of these children number of children placed with non regional adopters	35	14	14	11
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



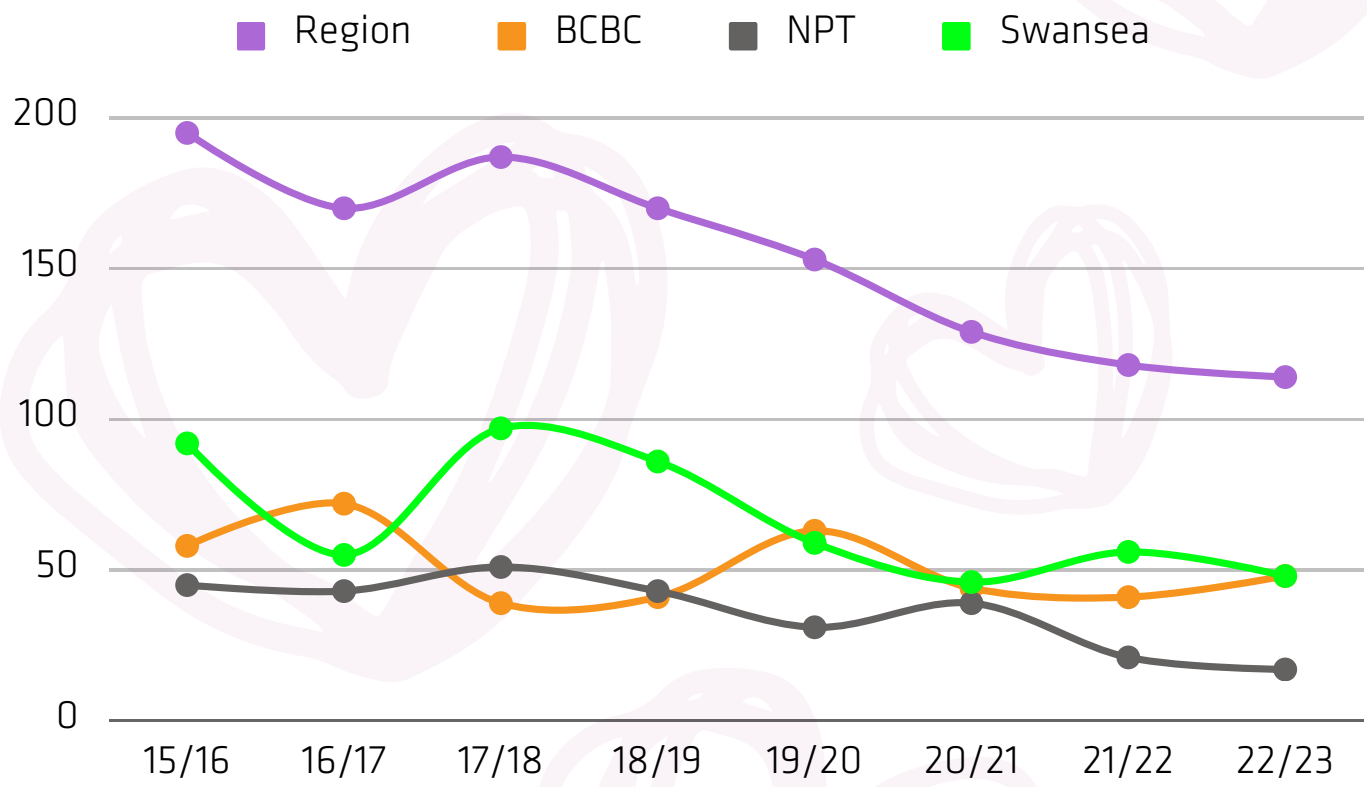
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## Referrals and Placement Orders

There is a marked downward trend for twin-tracking referrals and POG. When comparing the trend over the last 5 year it shows an interesting pattern of the work that the service receives. The reason for the pattern and recent reduction is work this is hard to determine but factors are likely to be recovery from COVID, the LA's development of preventative and edge of care services. The trend over the last 8 years is as follows for each LA.

### Referral for TwinTracking to WBAS each year:

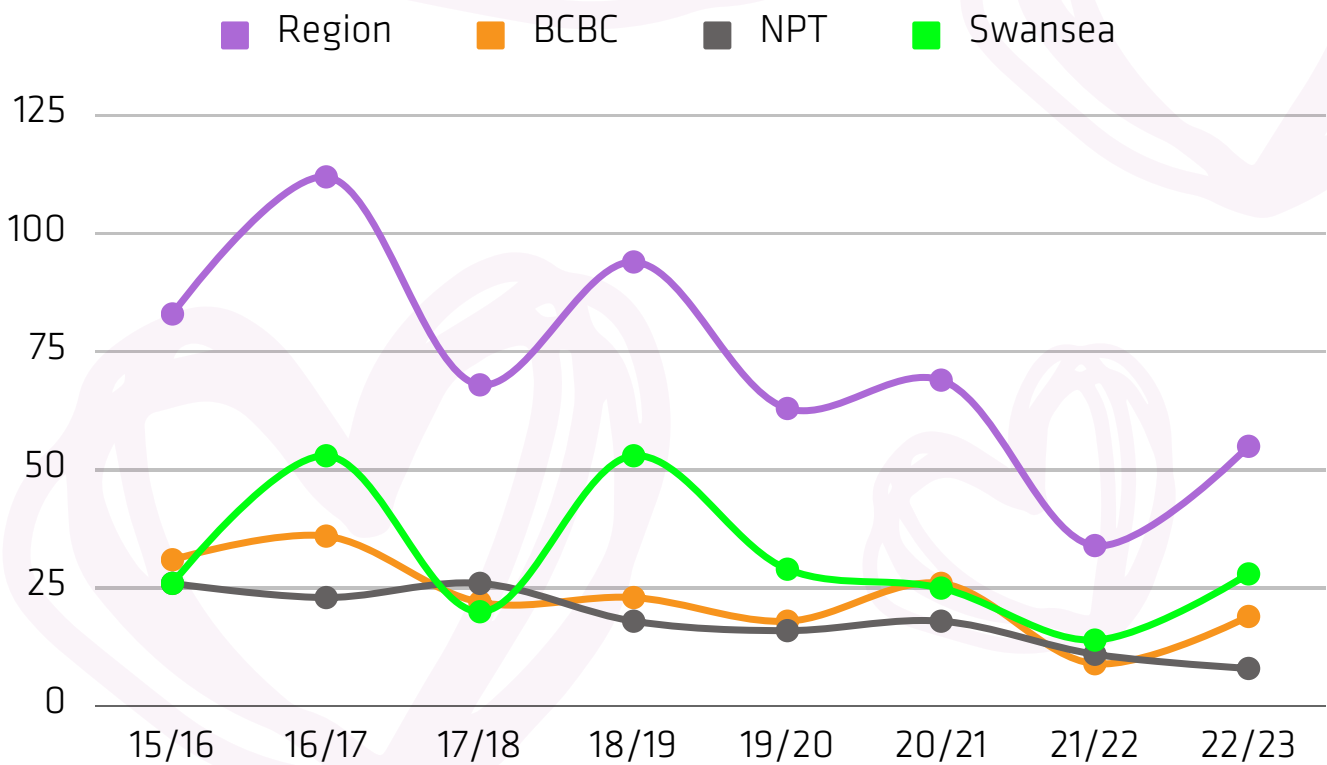




## POG

After two years in which the service has seen a marked reduction in placement orders being granted this year has seen numbers rise again particularly in the latter two quarters. When looking at the trend line there appears an overall downward trend and it is likely that the service will probably settle around the 55-60 POG each year as the new norm.

### POG Per Quarter Per Year

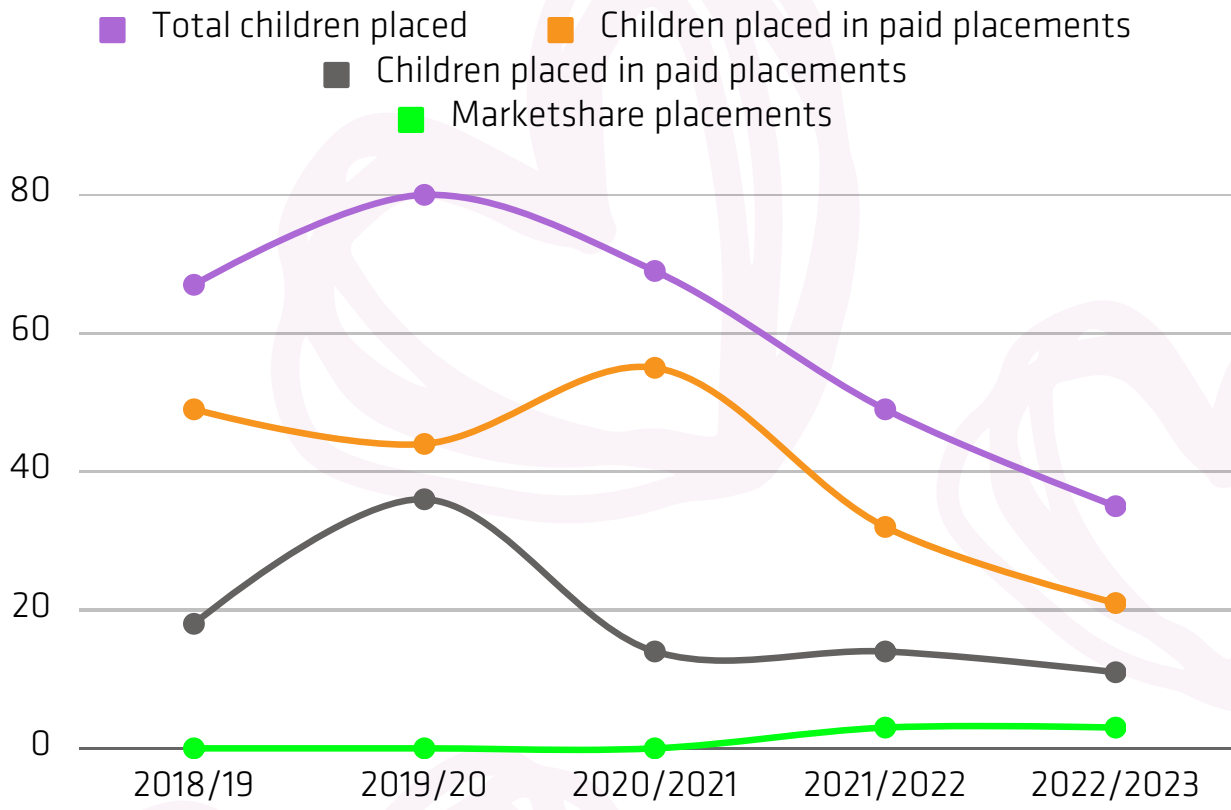


The reduction in referrals and POG has had a follow on effect in relation to the number of children placed for adoption. The children being referred are increasingly presenting with more complex health, genetic and developmental issues.

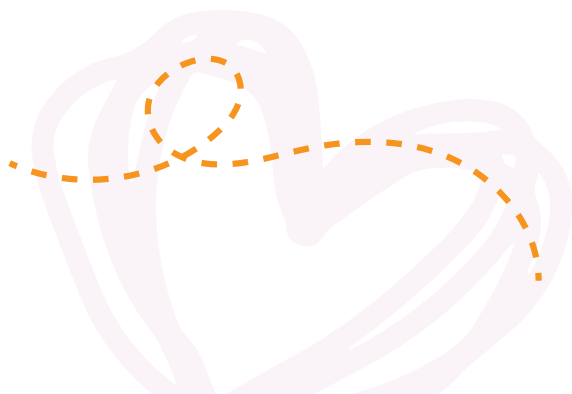




## Children placed for adoption



Of the 35 children placed this year, 21 were placed with regional adopters, 1 child was placed in New Zealand which was heavily supported by the region, 3 children were placed via the market share project (Barnardo's). 11 children were placed out of the region - 1 of these children remained in Wales, 10 of these outside Wales, 1 in Scotland and 9 in England. Below is a breakdown of the placements that were made out of Wales.





<p>Single child age 3 Diagnosis of a genetic condition of 15q13.3 microdeletion. Global Developmental delay, Mobility issues, needing surgery to correct defect of the skull,</p>	<p>One Adoption Yorkshire</p>
<p>Sibling group of two children 5 and 4 years Extensive history of Neglect</p>	<p>CS Adoption, Gloucester</p>
<p>Single child - 2 years Extremely premature, surgery on Bowel when 8 months old. Investigations regarding possible seizure activity</p>	<p>Scottish Adoption</p>
<p>Sibling group of two aged 5 and 3 Challenging behaviour.</p>	<p>Jigsaw Berkshire</p>
<p>Single child no additional needs - placed with adopted siblings</p>	<p>One Adoption York</p>



<p>Sibling group of two aged 7 and 4</p>	<p>PACT Buckinghamshire</p>
<p>Single child 7 years old Early trauma and attachment difficulties</p>	<p>Adopt South Hampshire</p>

## Marketshare Project



Three potential placements have been achieved through the Marketshare project all three matches have been with Barnardo's. The reduction in number of children has been a challenge to the project along with the complexity of the sibling groups who have been referred. It is positive to note that there are already two Marketshare placements in the early linking process for the forthcoming year.

## Children Waiting



At the end of the year 22 children were waiting without a strong link or matching panel booked. The average age of the children waiting was 4 years old. The average length of time waiting 5 months with the longest time waiting being 15 months. 9 of the 11 children have complex medical or genetic diagnosis.



The number of children open to family finding has also reduced considerably as can be seen in the table below there has been a slight increase in the last two months due to potential matches for 3 sibling groups of two not proceeding. There have also been POG for 7 children in March who are all at the early stages of the family finding/linking process.

	TOTAL CASES OPEN	NUMBER ACTIVELY IN FAMILY FINDING
April 2019	89	29
October 2019	70	25
January 2020	68	30
April 2020	75	22
October 2020	56	23
January 2021	54	16



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	TOTAL CASES OPEN	NUMBER ACTIVELY IN FAMILY FINDING
March 21	49	15
October 21	33	11
January 22	27	7
March 22	32	16
December 22	38	12 (6 on hold due to further assessments)
March 2023	39	22



## Birth parent adopter meetings

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These meetings have been a focus for the service as when they have taken place the quality of the post adoption contact is vastly improved. Of the 35 children placed this year, 23 birth parents were offered meetings with the adopters. The parents of 12 children attended these meetings which were seen as hugely positive and beneficial to those involved, parents of 4 further children have agreed they would like to meet but have requested these meetings take place after the child is placed so these are in the pipeline. The parents of 7 children did not engage, however in one of these cases the adopters were able to meet the child's older sibling who is long term looked after.

Three of the children placed have been adopted by their foster carer and the CSW assessment was that holding a meeting would be a risk to the stability of the placement.

In addition there have been an additional meeting between birth parents and adopters for a child who was placed in the previous year. There was also a further child where the meeting took place prior to the placement and the placement didn't continue.

## Number of Adoption Order's granted

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The number of adoption orders granted has remained consistent and the Court deal with applications in a timely manner. Currently there are 23 children placed in adoption placements where the AOG has not yet been granted, of these 9 are not yet eligible to make the application, the longest placement was made in April 2022, that application is currently before the court.



## Disruptions & Breakdowns of Placement

Within Western Bay during 2022-23 there has been two placement disruptions post formal placement, a sibling group of two and a single child. The independent review report has been received in respect of both disruptions and actions considered. Staff in the service will consider the outcomes of both in a service learning event in April.

## 6. Adopters

Enquiries and adopters interested in attending the intro to adoption course have been extremely slow in Q3 and Q4 which has been noted by all regions. The impact of the cost of living crisis is likely to be having an impact on families who may have considered adoption as an option.

### Enquiries and Adopter Approval

Enquiries are reduced on the previous 2 years (Covid years) and have returned to the levels that we saw pre covid. The service approved 32 adopters which is short of the target set but in line with the number of children that we saw with an agreed plan of adoption.

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of Enquiries	166	260	224	164
Number of Approved Adopters	54	53	52	31



The reduction in children waiting and the steady flow of adopters being approved throughout the year has seen a high number of children waiting without a link. The number now stands at 25. The table below shows the length of time adopters have been waiting.

Recently de-registered - awaiting IRM decision	0
Only approved in Q4	11
Adopters seeking a cultural match	1
Adopters on hold	5
Adopters on hold reactivated in the last month	0
No appropriate match identified	25

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.

An audit of the 31 approved adopters at end of year March 2023 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)
Bridgend	9	10	14
Swansea	25	22	7
Neath Port Talbot	8	11	4
Cardiff Area	7	5	2
Carmarthenshire and Tenby	3	5	3
England	1	1	1



Of the 31 approved adopters this year, they can further be broken down into approvals of 4 single adopters, 5 adopters from same sex relationships and 22 heterosexual couples.

This year has seen an increase in the interest and number of adopters from Bridgend which is a positive outcome. The number of adopters coming from the Swansea area has reduced considerably so the marketing activity will need to refocus in the area.

### **Pre Adopter training**

The newly created 'introduction to adoption' event, pre enquiry, now runs monthly. This enable prospective adopters to informally engage with the service to ask questions about adoption to determine whether this is the right route for them in achieving a family. This also reduced social work hours given that we were not undertaking initial visits to families and later discovering they were not proceedable. 64 potential adoptive families have attended the intro course over the last 12 months.

The 'three day preparation training course' is now run with the Vale Valley Cardiff (VVC). The training has been significantly revamped and modernised. 73 individuals attended the Preparation training from WBAS.

We have re-introduced 'day four of the preparation training course' which includes the medical advisor talk and a question and answer session with experienced adopters. It is following this training that our adopters enter stage one of the assessment phase. 35 prospective adopter placements attended this day.



This training programme continues to develop beyond approval, with the creation of our 'post approval training', day 5 of the preparation training course, to provide continuity for adopters.

This is an important part of the adoption process as it provides a lot more detail surrounding the stages that are now most relevant post their approval. 34 Prospective adopters attended day 5.

**Our 'Family and Friends' training is now fully embedded and has been well received. It runs quarterly, with friends and family of prospective adopters being invited. Significant and key individuals within an adopters support network will be identified by the adopter.**

The training will include an overview of the assessment process and legal framework, but focus on the needs of our adopted children and the impact trauma has on their development. We will also look at what support adopters have identified as helpful from their network. We will be taking our family and friends on a journey with a case study of a sibling group and their journey from their birth family to their adoptive family and how they may feel at each stage. We will be exploring the behaviours they might be exhibiting at each stage and what support and parenting style the child will require. We will be looking at PACE parenting and directing them onto further study and reading to broaden this understanding.

Family members from 26 prospective or newly approved adopters attended the training. Some of the feedback received following their attendance was:



## What part of the course did you find most useful?

- All aspects of the course was informative
- All of it. I found the course very useful and was good to hear about how to help our families during the adoption process and also how important it is for us to think of the child's needs over our own when it comes to discussing their adoption and past
- It was all useful and informative
- Discussion around therapeutic parenting
- Good range of info
- Case studies, video on therapeutic parenting, Q&A opportunities, seeing things through the children's eyes
- Understanding therapeutic parenting
- Talking about therapeutic parenting
- Contact section and the background of adopted children

## Any other comments?

- I enjoyed taking part today, keep up the amazing work you are doing
- It's made me more excited for the time ahead and prepared
- I thought the course was very helpful and answered all my questions and addressed my concerns
- Very good
- The course was enthusiastically delivered by Jodie and Claire who made everything clear and were able to answer all questions in depth
- Very informative day
- Information on therapeutic parenting and ways to support our family members during the adoption process



- As an adoptive parent myself, this course is invaluable for family members

### Non Agency referrals

The number of non-agency referrals has fallen back to pre covid levels.

	LA AREA	TOTAL
2019-20	BCBC 9 NPT 13 SC 21	48
2020-21	BCBC 3 NPT 15 SC 7	34
2021-22	BCBC 16 NPT 21 SC 23	70
2022-23	BCBC 15 NPT 19 SC 18	55

Of particular note there are no cases waiting allocation and the triage system in places allows inappropriate referrals to be screened out straight away.



## 7. Marketing

We kicked off the autumn season at the beginning of October with a trade stand at The Welsh Business Show at the Swansea.com Stadium. We engaged with members of the local business community included some who had adopted and featured heavily in the organiser's event media.



Continuing with the in-person theme our October Adoption Information Session was held at Blancos Hotel in Port Talbot with around 10 people attending and learning more about the adoption process.

The middle of October saw the return of the annual National Adoption Week (NAW) and with it some key media releases and activity. As a region Team WBAS launched NAW with a service-wide charity walk up Pen y Fan Mountain. We had a great turn out for the walk internally and were also joined from colleagues from VVC Adoption.



Some staff members conquered personal fears and challenges during the walk whilst we also addressed some of the preconceptions about the children the longest for adoption. Importantly we also raised over £1,000 for Macmillan Cancer Research!

Nationally we released Season 2 of the 'Truth Be Told' podcast which featured heavily a WBAS adopter talking candidly about the additional learning needs of adopted children amongst other pertinent topics. The podcast has performed well on reflection (in late March 2023) racking up 1000's of listens between the two seasons.



Our local authorities of Swansea, Neath and Bridgend supported us strongly as ever during the week with some lighting up their civic buildings to mark the start and end of the week. During the month to celebrate adoption week we also had a radio advert with Nation Radio which featured spoken word poetry and a advert using the new digital billboard in Aberavon Shopping Centre to further drive awareness of adoption.





Maintaining our strong community presence in Bridgend into the winter and November we attended home games at the Dunraven Brewery Field Stadium between Bridgend Ravens and Aberavon RFC.



Continuing with the in-person theme our October Adoption Information Session was held at Blancos Hotel in Port Talbot with around 10 people attending and learning more about the adoption process.

This theme continued in early November with our presence at the TATA Steel Richard Burton 10K and Kevin Webber Mini Miller Race in the heart of our NPT community in Cwmavon. We gave out WBAS goodie bags to all children who attended the race with the help of the local scouts an Air Cadets and created an impact on

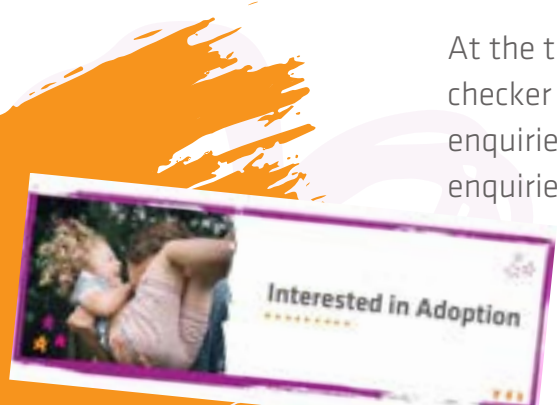


the event which was attended and participated in by 1000's.

Still in chilly November Team WBAS 'dipped deep' for Children In Need raising a few hundred pounds by taking a cold water swim down a brisk Caswell Bay.

At the end of November we attended the Bridgend Council Family Support Event, creating some useful connections with various Bridgend family and children services.

In December we launched some new features on our recently refreshed and redesigned website. One feature which has proven to be very successful our new Adoption Checker function. It serves as a pre-screening and myth busting tool, allowing users to find out if they eligible to adopt and what to if they can't.



At the time of writing the adoption checker is our main source of adoption enquiries, generating 4 - 5 pre-qualified enquiries per week.



Our WBAS Christmas Party was then a great way to sign off the year with a bang. Proving as popular as our big events such as the WBAS Summer Party, staff and adoptive families alike had a 'bearilliant' time!



We kicked off the New Year with an explosion of colour and creativity from our adopted children with the unveiling of our Children's Art Mural in Tregelles Court. We held a workshop earlier in the winter with around 10 children and prominent Swansea based company Fresh Creative. The mural now takes pride of place in our office corridors adding some much needed colour! Julie Davies Swansea Council Child and Family HOS and Victoria Smith LAC PO were on hand to help with the unveiling.

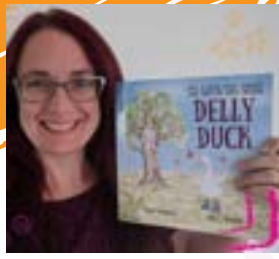


Still in January Julie and Victoria were on hand again to help us with the judging of our Annual Life Journey Awards. Winners were given book and cinema vouchers. The judging was a heart warming occasion, showcasing the care and effort that adoptive parents, birth parents, foster carers and professionals put into important life journey work.

At the end of January we also attend the awards ceremony for the Richard Burton 10K at TATA Steel - making some great community connections and receiving acknowledgment for our efforts on the day of the race. The Chief Executive of TATA Steel was also present at the awards.



Finally at the end of a busy month we kicked off our Let's Talk Adoption series of talks and content with a virtual talk by adoption author Holly Marlow. Around 40 adopters booked in to the talk with some fantastic feedback received from adopters. The series continues throughout the year with different guests.



Sticking with campaigns and content our social media has also developed during this time offering a much bigger range from our community work and recruitment messages to more educational posts.





Our social media is currently performing better than ever with 1000's of engagement and reach per month - this contrasts quite starkly to other regional adoptive agencies and similar sector services.

February we were out in the community again, this time supporting Children's Mental Health Week at Swansea Quadrant Shopping Centre.



Meanwhile we also received our new signed jersey from Bridgend Ravens RFC for our commercial partnership which has certainly helped us to address the issue of low recruitment in the county.

Following on from feedback from the workshop with children for the mural we also held a Street Art/Graffiti Lettering workshop with children in Gnoll Park.

March we continued our Let's Talk Adoption series on 'World Book Day' with popular adoption author Rosemary Lucas. The event this time was face to face in the Aberavon Beach Hotel. Around 30 adopters registered for the event, with again fantastic feedback from those who attended. The series of talks have so far been engaging and educational to those to attended, and have also contributed to our overall very strong social media performance with blogs and recordings of the events proving popular.



Our busy stream of social media continued during the month with our support of New Family Social's LGBTQ Adoption and Fostering Week, whilst we also got out into the NPT community with Foster NPT at the new town leisure centre. Continuing our NPT community outreach work in Margam, I ran the Margam 10K to support the Lord Mayors Charity with support from NPT and WBAS staff.



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As alluded to above throughout this 6 period our social media and online presence has gone from strength to strength with 1000's of engagement each month. Key to this is the diversity of our content from educational content to funnier, irreverent team based posts. To keep improving and drive our assessment rates we are aiming to target LGBTQ audiences and potential adopters for siblings more in the next quarter.

The refresh of our website has also been successful, with the new look of the site better encapsulating the dynamic and colourful values of the service. We have around 150 visitors to the site a week at the moment but this is something we can improve on in the next quarter with improved digital advertising and site refinements.



Finally, still looking ahead we need to increase enquiries in Swansea and NPT whilst maintaining our improvement in Bridgend. We will achieve this with better targeted digital advertising and increased presence in these communities.

*#TeamWBAS*





## 8. Development of Adoption Support

Our families tell us how well supported they feel by our team around the family ethos. All our social workers are DDP trained, this is a therapy and parenting approach which enables children who have suffered trauma to form attachments. This in itself has made the biggest difference to our families who are struggling to parent traumatised children with attachment difficulties. The adoptive parents we work with feel held and nurtured by our DDP informed practice. This approach is also used in the supervision of adoption support staff, holding their wellbeing at the centre and recognising the challenges of supporting families experiencing complex emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The social work team have also received Trauma recovery model training which has assisted the team in knowing which interventions to use with families first. It provides practical guidelines for knowing which interventions to use and when. This means practitioners understand the psychological needs that underpin behaviours and can identify the types of interventions that best address those needs. TRM has further cemented out DDP focused relationship building/connected approach to working with families. These models also have a hugely positive impact on our team connection and support for one another.

We have successfully developed and are embedding our early intervention services, this ranges from using the adopter check ins at 12 months and 3 years, families being able to book in to a virtual hub consultation to discuss the issues they face rather than make a formal referral for an assessment when that may not be needed and screening cases that may be suitable for ongoing referral to Pathway formerly known as TESSA.



## Virtual Hub Consultations

Virtual hub runs fortnightly, we have a social worker and a therapist (four staff in total) who run the hubs. This gives adoptive parents opportunity to meet with a therapeutic social worker and a therapist to talk through any difficulties they may be experiencing. The team are then able to offer support/assess adoption support needs and to refer parents into the appropriate resource within the service. 7 Virtual Hub consultations have been completed since November. All adopters attended confirmed that they felt more confident in managing the issues they brought to discuss following the consultation.

Outcomes for those who attended included signposting to other agencies such as SNAP, further discussions with school re the issues, referrals on to Pathway, referral for in house therapy, agreement to full adoption support assessment and referred on to the life-journey workshop and NVR course run by the service. Adopters provided the following comments: 'it feels like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders, I have been able to speak to people who get it', 'I feel listened too and not on my own', and 'I feel more confident in speaking to school about the issues now'.

## **BUSS - Building Underdeveloped Sensori Motor Systems Training Update March 2023**

It has been recognised by research, and supported by WBAS observations, that children who have experienced developmental trauma have difficulties with their sensori motor systems. We have been spending monies on specialist Occupational Therapy assessments and felt that we needed to build our skills in house.



The BUSS Model is congruent with our needs as a service as it is designed specifically for children who may have missed out on early sensory experiences both in the womb and in their early life, it is an intervention that can be put in place early and also fits with the Service ethos of DDP and Theraplay. The quote used by BUSS practitioners about how our children are needing to “fight against their own bodies” has struck a chord with colleagues across WBAS.

Since June 2021 all WBAS staff attend the Introduction to BUSS workshop as part of their induction enabling the Service to have a baseline understanding and common language around sensori motor difficulties resulting from early trauma. We have embarked on two strands of further training, one to run BUSS groups for our children and adopters, and the other to carry out BUSS assessments and interventions with individual families.

We opted to include colleagues from Fostering across the 3 regions in the training so that the rebuilding of sensorimotor systems start as soon as the children come in to care.

Nineteen WBAS colleagues attended the 3 day Level 1 training starting 13th February 2023. Colleagues from Recruitment and Assessment, Family Finding, Adoption support and the Therapy team participated along with 6 representatives from the 3 Fostering regions. The training was very positively received. In April 2023 a proportion of the Level 1 trained group will attend BUSS Groupwork training.

From May 2023 we will be running two 11 week BUSS group interventions in the gymnastics centre in Neath. One for 2-4 year olds and one for 4-6 year olds, the children identified for this intervention will attend with their adopted parents. We envisage that the intervention will run again in September 2023.



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In September 2023 we have provisionally booked for WBAS colleagues to attend Level 2 training which will lead to Level 3 and 4 training resulting in qualified BUSS practitioners within WBAS. We will then be able to provide assessments and interventions to all of our children who need more than the group intervention, or who are older than 6 years.

## Therapy Team

The Therapy and Psychology team have continued to work closely with the therapeutic social workers and support workers in Adoption Support having settled in to the working environment of Tregelles. Eighteen children have accessed play therapy during the year, five children have accessed music therapy, six families filial therapy and twenty six families have engaged with family therapy. Reflective case consultations have continued to be an important forum combining the psychologist, creative and systemic therapists with therapeutic social workers to consider complex cases.

Thirty-six Reflective Case Consultations have taken place this year. Therapists have paired with therapeutic social workers in Adoption support to pilot Virtual Hub consultations. This forum allows parents direct access to therapeutic support without the need for initial assessment or screening. The pilot has been extended by another three months as the Hub is well received by the families accessing it. The psychologist and a play therapist, as part of the Understanding the Child team, have also offered consultations earlier on in the adoption journey around the time of placement order being granted, 47 of these consultations have been carried out this year. The psychologist and therapists have also provided adopters of complex children newly placed with therapeutic support sessions. In addition to consultations and direct therapy, the team have facilitated groups and training.



For example, adoption support case work highlighted a need for therapeutic work with teenagers. A group was therefore set up and facilitated by a play and systemic family therapist. Six teenagers attended over a period of 8 weeks. The evaluations have been very positive. A systemic family therapist has also designed a series of three workshops for parents of teenagers, the feedback from the first of these was excellent. Non Violent resistance and therapeutic parenting courses for children under twelve month placed have been run by therapists periodically throughout the year, as have direct work training for children's social workers across the regions. The Therapy and Psychology team continue to extend and develop their skills by participating in CPD including BUSS training, Enhanced Case Management Training and attending discipline based conferences. Our music therapist has recently qualified in selective music and imagery therapy which can be offered to our adopters. The team are continually evolving their practice to meet the needs of the Service as the needs arise.

## **Understanding the Child Day Team**

The Understanding the Child team have continued to evolve and embed good practice. The team consists of a psychologist, play therapist and two Family Finder social workers each dedicating a proportion of their working week to carry out this work. We recognise the importance of becoming involved very early on in a child's adoption journey to think carefully about the potential impact of early experiences on development prior to considering potential adopters. We work collaboratively with the children's social workers, Family Finders and supervising social workers to complete trauma nurture timelines and circles of understanding. This has helped us achieve a shared understanding of the type of family we are looking for before considering potential adopters. Since April 2022 we have had 47 initial consultations with Family Finders at time of ADM/SBP. Thirteen cases have progressed to a half day Trauma nurture time line/circle of understanding meeting.



The evaluations from these meetings have been positive. The participants invariably rate feeling more confident in understanding how the children's early experiences could impact on their presentation at the end of the meeting. Qualitative feedback includes;

'very pertinent sharing of information. A very helpful unpicking and exploration of all past information and what this means to (child's name) in terms of his progression and longer term matching. Fantastic stuff!' Practice Lead to CSW

'helpful to break down thinking around finding the best match for the child' CSW  
'I always find these sessions (trauma nurture timeline CoU) so informative and helpful' SSW

'Compiling the information with the team is invaluable and crucial for matching. I have really valued the meeting as I have a better understanding of what I would look for in adopters' FFSW

We have carried out four Understanding the Child Days with sibling groups of two and two Understanding the Child Days for individual children with complex needs. Those most involved with the child attend the day including foster carers, school staff, child social worker, supervising social worker, family finder along with prospective adopters. Participants have invariably rated the days as being very useful. Qualitative feedback includes;

'I knew, or thought I knew what he had gone through, but after today I have much more understanding' Foster carer

'It has been an amazing experience to be part of this day. The organisation, structure, clarity has been brilliant. We would never have gained this level of





understanding about the children without this day. Absolutely fantastic.' SSW

'Hearing the information first hand and with emotional content made such a difference. The children's story really came alive!' WBAS therapist

'Having been given a more comprehensive and detailed brief of the children's early years, I am much more confident I understand where they have come from' prospective adopter.

The therapist and psychologist have also provided families with therapeutic support sessions in early stages of placement and have carried out play based assessments to add to the understanding of children's needs prior to Understanding the Child Days.

The Understanding the Child team presented and facilitated a workshop at the WBAS Conference in July 2022, this helped to share practice of completing trauma nurture timelines and Circles of Understanding amongst a wider group of collaborators. In December 2022 we also presented to Abertawe Bro Morgannwg Community Paediatricians in their Journal Club.

### **Schools training**

28 Schools and 2 CAMHS school in Reach attend attended the workshop during the year, with 3 further onsite trainings undertaken.

### **Adopter and Birth Parent Reviews**

In line with the recommendations of the Good Practise Guides adopter and birth parents check ins are being completed by the team. For the first year checkins have been completed for adopters and Birth parents 3 years post AOG.



This is a great way of identifying any early adoption support needs for adopters, children and birth parents. We have found that everyone has welcomed the opportunity to talk to an experienced member of the team. In summary check ins with birth parents 12 months after their child has been placed have been undertaken for all children placed from April 1st 2020. 38 of 58 eligible parents have engaged in these discussions.

All of these parents have been offered support with letterbox contact if they have not already engaged in it. Sadly 3 birth parents had died since the child had been placed and three were now in prison. Positively 12 requested support with letterbox and 5 were engaging well in the letterbox in the first year.

Check ins with adopters 12 months after their child has been placed have also been undertaken 25 of the eligible 58 adopters have been engaged in these discussions. Two families had been referred to TESSA, a further 6 families had attended the therapeutic parenting course. Four families had recently had an assessment of their adoption support needs and were receiving support.

### **Therapeutic Parenting Programme**

All our adopters are encouraged to attend our therapeutic parenting programme. We run a course for adopters in the early stages of placement and separate course for adopters where children have been placed for over 18 months. 27 families have attended the post 18 months therapeutic parenting course since September. This is some feedback we received in following the Sep course:

“I really benefited from the training and used PACE to empathise with my son when he was having a ‘blow out’ and at the height of his distress, which is something



I would not have dared doing previously for fear of making him worse. It really worked and helped him to calm down quicker, and I feel more confident using this approach.”

“I’ve loved the course. It’s really been life changing. Thanks so much. I wanted to let you know that I’ve bought the A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting, Theraplay and TP for teenagers – so my post course study continues.”

## Post Adoption Contact

We have developed a Letterbox team who have worked hard to improve the efficiency of this area of our service. We no longer have backlog of letterbox and are more able to keep on top of our contact investigation referrals. A focus group on post adoption contact has commenced, participants from all areas of the three local Authorities have come together to consider how we can influence the contact agenda.



## Child and Young Person’s work

Our adoption support workers have set up various activities for children and young people throughout the holiday periods, we’ve had great uptake for these activities and positive feedback from families. The annual summer party and Christmas party were hugely successful with well over 100 families attending both events.

The Adoption support workers are currently undertaking work on a one to one basis with 15 children. The youth group for 13+ started in September and has been a huge success particularly for previously hard to reach children. For most of the children who attend this is the first time they have successfully engaged in a group.



In total 16 young people are engaged in the group and a video has been produced of the young people sharing their feedback.

## **Life-journey Framework update**

In October/November 2022, the third year of the WBAS Life Journey Awards took place. Social Workers, Practice Support Workers, Foster Carers, Adopters and Birth Family Members were nominated and celebrated for the work they have done in helping a child/children to understand their journey to adoption. The winners were very pleased to be recognised for their work. Where appropriate winners were celebrated in WBAS Social Media and across the three LA newsletters. We currently have 40 referrals across the adoption support team related to adopters not being confident to share life-journey work with their older adopted children, We are working with the Recruitment & Assessment Team to work proactively in training prospective adopters about the importance of children understanding their identity in order to promote their development & wellbeing. The Life Journey Team recently presented at a Prospective Adopters Support Group to share this message on 2nd March in which approximately 14 prospective adopters were present.

During a support group for adopters who have children placed with them was held, focusing on how they can share their child's life journey information with them. We will be showing the parents child-friendly resources and methods that can be used to do this. We will be advising on how to share difficult & sensitive information, and what information is suitable to be shared given their child's developmental stage. This is an open support group for any adoptive parents who are interested in coming.

The Life Journey Team has analysed the referrals that we currently have and we have decided to offer adoptive parents an invitation to workshops that



I we will be running from April depending on their life journey needs. We have noticed themes across the referrals of parents wishing for advice on how to share their child's life journey information with them and secondly parents who would like to adapt or make their own life journey books.

## **Birth Parent Support**

Bridgend Group is held on the first Wednesday of each month at Hope Baptist Church, Bridgend.

Swansea Group is held the third Monday of each month. Again we tried to find a venue that was central to the bus and train station so birth Mums could access the groups independently. We secured the Include Hub on Humphreys Street which holds a woman only day on Mondays. The Include Hub offers support and advice to disadvantaged groups and offers free food for anyone in need.

We are exploring the Well-being Centre for future groups and may need to offer two groups in Swansea due to numbers. It has been easier to establish relationships with Swansea birth mothers due to the support Reflect have provided.

The NPT Group are held at The Gathering Place in Neath town centre. NPT Mums have initially been difficult to engage with. The first two groups were poorly attended so the team are undertaking some further 1:1 sessions with the birth mothers in order to develop that trusting relationship.

In total 14 birth mums regularly attend the groups. A winter wellbeing event was arranged in December bringing Birth mothers from across the region together, 18 birth mothers attended.



The session ended with a mindfulness exercise and Mums were provided with well-being bags to take home.

Feedback after the event was positive:

“Just wanted to say thank you for inviting me yesterday, I really enjoyed. I will definitely be coming to the next big event xx”

“Hello, really enjoyed at the adoption wellbeing group last week, my candle looks lovely on my window”

The plan is run two of these larger events each year. The service would also like to develop a birth dads support group.





## 9. Policies and Procedures

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The Service has worked with NAS to review of all policies and procedures across the Welsh regions and VAA's. The set of policies and procedures are nearing completion and are expected to be available imminently.

## 10. CSSIW

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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. The future plan in respect of adoption service inspections isn't known currently.

## 11. Local Monitoring and Governance

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The Management Board is fully compliant with the Directions Powers Regulations, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) 201. Work to identify and education representative to join the Board will take now take place. 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 continues to be used to receive feedback from families and professionals that have experienced the service.





## 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 were received in Q3 and Q4, it became apparent that a common theme in three of the complaints was the difficulty individuals had in finding out the complaints process for the service.

This was immediately rectified and the website updated. The complaints centred around peoples experience of a specific part of the adoption process, communication, the interface between the CMHT and the service and letterbox contact. All of the complaints were dealt with at the first stage and resolutions agreed. The service has had no significant data breaches in this reporting period. Compliments received are celebrated.

A National Quarterly Assurance framework has been established and is due to be signed off by all Regions in April. The outcomes from the identified activities within the framework will be reported on in this report in future period.

## 14. Overall assessment of the Service

The overall assessment of the service during this reporting period is good and significant progress has been made in a number of areas. The service has presented a workshop at the CVAA conference in respect of post adoption contact.



A focus group considering post adoption contact has also been established and this was attended by IRO's, CAFCASS, LAC SW's, Front line SW's and was supported by a birth sibling who has not had contact with her adopted siblings. Key priorities for the service identified at the end of 2022-23 are in progress, significant areas of the Good practise Guides have been developed, the cases that did not go as well as hoped have been reviewed and learning from these cases have been considered at staff events, panel business meetings and a summary provided to the interface meetings and management Board.

Supporting the development of the WCCIS adoption module continues with all of the adoption processes being mapped. Subject to the work going to plan the regional service could be testing a module from late Autumn. The service has been able to allocate all adoption support assessments in a timely way with no waiting list for these assessments.

## 15. Future recommendations

- One of the future hopes for our service is that we would be able to access respite for our adoptive families.
- Re-modelling of the service to align with the available budget, a forward look at the service over the next 1, 3 and 5 years.
- Further embedding of the GPG's
- To increase the number of approved adopters to 40 next year. To ensure a continued marketing focus in each of the LA areas
- Further Implement the BUSS model of sensory processing and start the 10 week sensory course
- Partnership with Foster Wales at local land regional level



- High visibility at local and national events.
- To Continue to roll out the Understanding the Child Day as part of the transition service, increasing the confidence of the family finding team to grow capacity in the service.
- Review all Letterbox post 18. We will contact all adopters when their child reaches 17 to ask adopters and young person if they would like to continue letterbox post 18, this can continue until age 25.
- Invite all adopters with active letterbox to a workshop to look at contact issues post 18. This will be an opportunity to check in with adopters to see if there are any Life journey issues which need to be addressed.
- Workshop/advice to birth parents when their child reaches 18. There has been an increase in birth parents making contact with the letterbox team to request contact with their child who has reached 18.

*Nichola Rogers*

April 2023

