



Adoption Information Pack



Welcome to this Agency, and thank you for your interest in adopting with us. We hope you will find the following information useful in helping you to take the first step along the road to adoption.

1. **About St. David's Children Society**

St. David's Children Society (formerly known as the Catholic Children & Family Care Society Wales) has been involved in the field of adoption for nearly 60 years. **Since 1942 we have placed over 2,000 children for adoption.**

We have helped to transform the lives of children and adults alike.

We continue to successfully place an average of 35 children each year with adoptive families who first started the process by looking at information like this. We have one of the lowest disruption rates in the UK and 1 in 6 children placed for adoption in Wales are placed in our families!

The children of today who are waiting for adoption are often beyond infancy and may have experienced pain and disruption in their lives. They could also have particular physical or emotional needs, and sometimes they are part of a sibling group who need to be placed together.

We are especially keen to hear from adopters who wish to adopt brothers and sisters.

In common with all children, above all else they need to have a positive experience of family life.

We welcome applications from all sectors of society.

Although we may occasionally place children from across England & Wales for adoption, **our primary commitment is to find local families for local children, whatever their cultural or religious heritage.** We are keen to ensure that Welsh children have an opportunity to maintain their links by being placed within Wales.

We are proud of our heritage of being the only Voluntary Adoption Agency, which is registered in Wales and has its Head Office in Wales.

2. **What is Adoption?**

Adoption is a legal procedure, whereby all parental responsibility for a child or children is permanently transferred to the adoptive parent(s) by a Court Order. You legally take on all the rights and responsibilities for the child like any other parents – it is a lifelong commitment!!

3. Children Needing Adoption

The children available for adoption come in single placements, in two's, three's and even four's. We are always pleased to welcome enquiries from families who know what it's like to have brothers and sisters and have room in their lives for two, three or more!!

Children like **Tom, Jack and Oliver, aged 2, 4 and 6 years, all needed to stay together.** Tom had done his best to look after his younger brothers but he needed time to be a child and give the responsibility to grown-ups he could love and trust.



Millie aged 3 years whose Mum had an alcohol dependency and moved around the country a lot. Millie found it hard to settle in her foster home and had a poor sleeping pattern. She had suffered neglect and had dental decay. After the stability of being in a foster family and settling into routines, Millie was ready for a family for life. Millie was placed with adopters who had previously adopted and 2 years later she is doing really well. Millie's adopters update her birth mother on Millie's progress in an Annual report sent via Children's services.



Terry and Leona were 4 and 5 years of age when they were removed from their birth family. They had spent some time living with their grandparents and had also been in foster care for short periods of time. Terry had some specific needs in his speech and language and got easily frustrated taking out his anger on his big sister. With help and support in 18 months Terry made a lot of progress, and he and Leona built a better sibling relationship. Terry and Leona were placed with a childless couple and are lively and happy.



Jennie 18 months old, had a West Indian Dad and a white mother. Jennie's mum had learning difficulties which meant she did not always know how best to look after Jennie. Jennie's dad had left when she was few weeks old and there was little support for Jennie's mum as she had spent her own childhood in care. Jennie's development was delayed and there was some uncertainty about whether she had had any learning difficulties herself. Adopters needed to know that Jennie's future was uncertain and Jennie was placed with adopters when she was under 2 years old. Jennie still has delays in some areas, but she has settled well and is proving to be a real character!!

Many of our adopters have commented on the fact that although their children may have experienced trauma and loss, they often surprise them with their resilience and capacity to overcome adversity. The majority form strong, healthy attachments with their adoptive families and adopters report that the investment of their time, energy, love and commitment to such a child is hard work, but worth it!

Some adopters even come back for more!!!

Adopters with children in placement indicate a varying picture of experiences.

Some find the initial days after placement hard going:

"If I'd known what the first couple of days were going to be like I'd have thought again".

but the same applicant says that five weeks into the placement of a young child with developmental delay:

"things have really settled down, our 2 ½ year old is settling, we are becoming attached to her".

Other applicants say:

“since the court day he has been incredibly settled and we’ve noted a difference in him...he just seems so relaxed and calm. He’s doing really well in school and his teacher is full of praise saying that he is improving every day....he’s just making fantastic progress and we’re so proud of everything he is achieving!”



“new mums and dads are good, they love them and they like the fact they are dressed well and have good food”.

A birth child a couple of years older than his adoptive sister says he does not like it when she has a tantrum:



“it makes my head hurt”

but he has liked teaching her to slide downstairs and the best thing about having a sister is:

“when I haven’t seen her for a long time she gets excited when she sees me”.



Our current approved adopters come in all shapes and sizes!!



4. Who can Adopt?

St. David's Children Society, Cardiff welcomes enquiries from:

- ❑ people of all racial backgrounds
 - ❑ people of any or no religious faith
 - ❑ people with, or without children
 - ❑ married couples
 - ❑ cohabiting couples
 - ❑ couples who are in a same sex relationship
 - ❑ single people
 - ❑ people whose children are grown up
 - ❑ people of all ages, over the legal minimum age to adopt of 21 years
- } whose relationship is, in the opinion of the Agency, of significant duration

There is not a fixed upper age limit. However, we need to be sure that you will be fit and well to care for an adoptive child, not only now, but as they grow older.

Our adopters reflect each and every one of the above criteria, in various combinations, just as each child's needs are different.

Sometimes infertility issues/treatments may need some time and further discussion to ensure the time is absolutely right for moving forward with adoption.

Health problems do not necessarily prevent approval to adopt, but all applicants are subject to a medical report and the agency works in line with government advice regarding a healthy diet, lifestyle and exercise. Factors such as obesity and alcohol consumption can affect whether adoption is achievable.

In line with this advice, this Agency cannot accept an application from those who wish to adopt if either applicant smokes.

Where applicants have recently ceased smoking, they will have to evidence, via their GP that a period of at least six months has elapsed before an application can be taken up. **This position is the same for E cigarettes and applicants are advised to speak to their GP in relation to this issue.**

Income levels do not affect your ability to adopt, or whether you are in receipt of benefits. The important thing is that you can afford to care for a child until they reach adulthood.

Likewise it is not relevant whether you own your own home, or whether you live in rented accommodation. What is important is that you are settled, that you will not need to leave at short notice and that there is sufficient space and the accommodation is suitable for a child.

We cannot accept applications from people who have a recent criminal conviction or pending criminal charges, or a previous conviction for a violent offence or an offence against children. However, if you have an isolated conviction for a minor crime, we may be able to accept your application.

Please note: We are committed to working in partnership with applicants and endeavour at all times to openly share and discuss any issues/concerns, which emerge in the course of the assessment process.

On occasions however, there may be situations/information, which develops or emerges in the course of an application, which means the Agency, in its professional judgement, formally ceases the application.

We would for example want you to inform us of any of the following and perhaps a good opportunity for doing so would be when an Initial visit takes place in your home.

- Any convictions which have related to serious driving offences including driving whilst under the influence of alcohol, those relating to fraud, dishonesty and/or assaults against a child/adult. These may also be relevant in the context of the extended family.
- Incidents of Domestic violence within a relationship.
- Medical conditions of a nature or degree which would suggest a health check would need to be undertaken at an early stage in the process.
- Any family disputes which are likely to impact on a child, e.g. loss of contact with family members including adult children, ex partners etc.
- Financial issues including bankruptcy, County Court Judgements, Child Support Agency arrears.
- Housing issues including eviction, mortgage arrears etc.

Although this may appear daunting, it is important that collectively we share responsibility for any information we are aware of that could affect your application. It is better for us to know about these issues at the outset, so that we can determine how best to manage these.

In the vast majority of cases even if there are issues we are able to deal with these but it is helpful to know about them as soon as possible, so that we can, with yourselves, make a judgement call on whether the issues are so significant that they would not enable us to move forward.

As every family and every situation is unique, it is not possible to be prescriptive about the detail of each circumstance, but we hope you will appreciate the need for these matters to be addressed as soon as practicable.

The adoption procedure is outlined below:

5. Steps in the Adoption Process with this Society

- ❑ After initially contacting St. David's Children Society a discussion takes place between yourself and an Adoption Social Worker.
- ❑ The Society responds with an Adoption Information Pack.
- ❑ On reading the Adoption Information Pack, if you wish to continue, you complete and return the request for an Initial visit form. **This is not a commitment to adoption** by either party.
- ❑ A Social Worker will arrange an informal visit to your home usually within two working weeks. This is to share with you more information about the adoption process and to enable us to find out about you and discuss relevant information. **Please note there is no obligation on either party at this stage to move beyond the initial visit.**
- ❑ After this initial visit subject to further discussion, you will be invited to attend a 3 day pre-adoption preparation/training course.
- ❑ Once the 3 day course is completed you will be asked whether you wish to pursue your interest in adopting and you will be given a Declaration of Issues form to complete, so that we are clear about whether there are any particular issues which may affect your application. (see above) Once we are in receipt of this we will then look at whether the agency can accept an application and you will be sent a formal application form and consent forms. The completed application form will enable this agency to begin the process of undertaking checks in relation to the applicant/s suitability.
- ❑ **If there is agreement to move forward, you will need to be aware that from the point of accepting your application a number of statutory checks will be undertaken so it is important that applicants are serious about their commitment to adoption at this stage as this will alert other people in their family circle to their interest in adoption.**
- ❑ **The Formal Application Pack** includes a number of consent forms for you to sign your agreement to the necessary checks being made. Eg permission for:
 - A full medical(for which your GP will charge a nationally agreed fee)
 - Disclosure and Barring (formerly the Criminal Record Bureau check)
 - Local Authority checks.
 - CSSIW/Ofsted

Please refer to checks and references summary sheet for detailed information.

If you already have children in your household we would also seek a reference from their school, or if you have younger children we would seek a reference from the health visitor.

If you are in work we would seek a reference from your employer. This normally takes place at an agreed point mid-way through the assessment.

If you are self-employed we would seek a reference from your accountant.

We would also require that you supply the names of at least three referees who would be willing to vouch as to your suitability as adoptive parents, one of whom should be a family member.

What is the Preparation training?

Preparation Training takes place over 3 days and each applicant is expected to attend. :

The preparation training aims:

- To help inform you about important issues in adoption, and
- To help families to decide whether adoption is right for them.

Not all families decide to move forward with adoption even when they have completed the training and made a formal application to the Agency.

Some decide to take time out and then come back at a later point; others may decide it is not for them.

Topics covered in the training include:

What does parenting involve?

How do we support a child in learning about their origins and in their contact with the child's family of birth?

What are the extras needed to parent an adopted child?

The impact on children of difficult and painful experiences, including emotional, physical or sexual abuse

What is the legal process of adopting?

Parenting in multi-racial and cultural society

The groups also give an opportunity to meet with adoptive parents and others involved in the adoption process. **For example you will meet all the members of the social work team.**

Post Preparation training course:



The agency will in discussion with the applicants and in receipt of the Disclosure of Issues form make a decision about whether the application can progress. It would be after this stage that a social worker is allocated to the assessment.

If the agency decides that it cannot recommend moving forward, the applicants will be advised in writing of the reasons for this and can at this stage, access the Agency's complaint process if they are dissatisfied with the decision.

Once the preparation training has ended and a positive decision has been made by the agency to move forward, applicants are invited to attend a PAR workshop which will be one of 3 workshops that form part of the agency's assessment and preparation of adopters.

The PAR workshop is another opportunity to meet with social workers from the Agency and is when the format for the Prospective Adopters' Report is shared. There is further discussion/exploration about the assessment process itself and applicants are able to start completing some aspects of the report themselves. This is the first stage of completing the report which is presented to the adoption panel charged with recommending whether applicants are suitable to adopt.

More details about the assessment process is set out below: Please note other than the medical check there are no costs to applicants.

- **The Assessment itself consists of 6 to 8 visits, sometimes more** of approximately 1½ to 2 hours duration. Basically, it is a preparation/assessment procedure, which will require your active participation by:
 - **producing a profile about yourselves:** this would include your own personal family history, details of any brothers/sisters, your education/employment history, your interest/hobbies, places you have lived in etc. All of these help us to better understand the person you have become.
 - **providing information that tells us about your potential capacity as an adoptive parent(s).** This will take the form, for example, of supporting statements/observations and tasks, which may include your own reflections about relevant life experiences you may have had. Your assessing Social Worker will support and assist you in this process.
- **Midway through the Assessment we undertake a review** as to how the adoption process is proceeding. It is a three way meeting between yourselves, your Social Worker and a senior member of the Society's staff. A summary of this review meeting will be included in the report that is presented into the adoption panel. This review is important in helping us to look together at the progress of the assessment, whether there are any significant issues that need to be discussed, and your views on the process to date.
- **When the Assessment is completed** your Social Worker will write up the assessment report, in a nationally agreed format, called the **Prospective Adopters Report**, which will be presented to the Society's Adoption Panel. You will be given a copy of your Assessment (minus the referee interviews and other third party information given in confidence) in advance of the Panel meeting, and will have a timescale of 10 working days in which to reply with any written observations. Following on from this, the report, along with any written observations from the applicants, will be submitted to the Adoption Panel.

- ❑ **You will be invited to attend the Panel meeting. This maybe a bit daunting but your social worker will be there with you!**
- ❑ The Adoption Panel makes a recommendation about whether applicant/s can be approved as **suitable to adopt**.
- ❑ **Occasionally the Panel may defer making a recommendation.** This may arise in situations when the Panel feels that more information is required in order for it to make a recommendation.

Applicants are informed of the outcome as soon as possible after a recommendation has been made, usually within 24 hours of the Panel sitting.

The Panel recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker, who is the Chief Executive of the Society. **It is the Agency Decision Maker who makes the decision about whether a particular applicant/s is/are approved as an adoptive parent/s, having considered all the information available to him. This decision is made within 7 working days of the Panel meeting, unless effected by sickness or leave.**

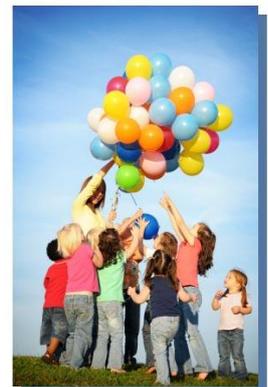
- ❑ **If your application is approved you will then be in a position to be considered for the children who are available.** You will be supported in this by your Social Worker.
- ❑ **At this point the time-scale since your first contact with the Society is likely to be 6-8 months.**

Please note: All Adoption Agencies broadly follow the above process. We will support and encourage you throughout what can appear to be a daunting process and work alongside you to ensure that you are fully informed and involved in every step of the way.

It is a rigorous process but it needs to be as we need to get it right for the children.

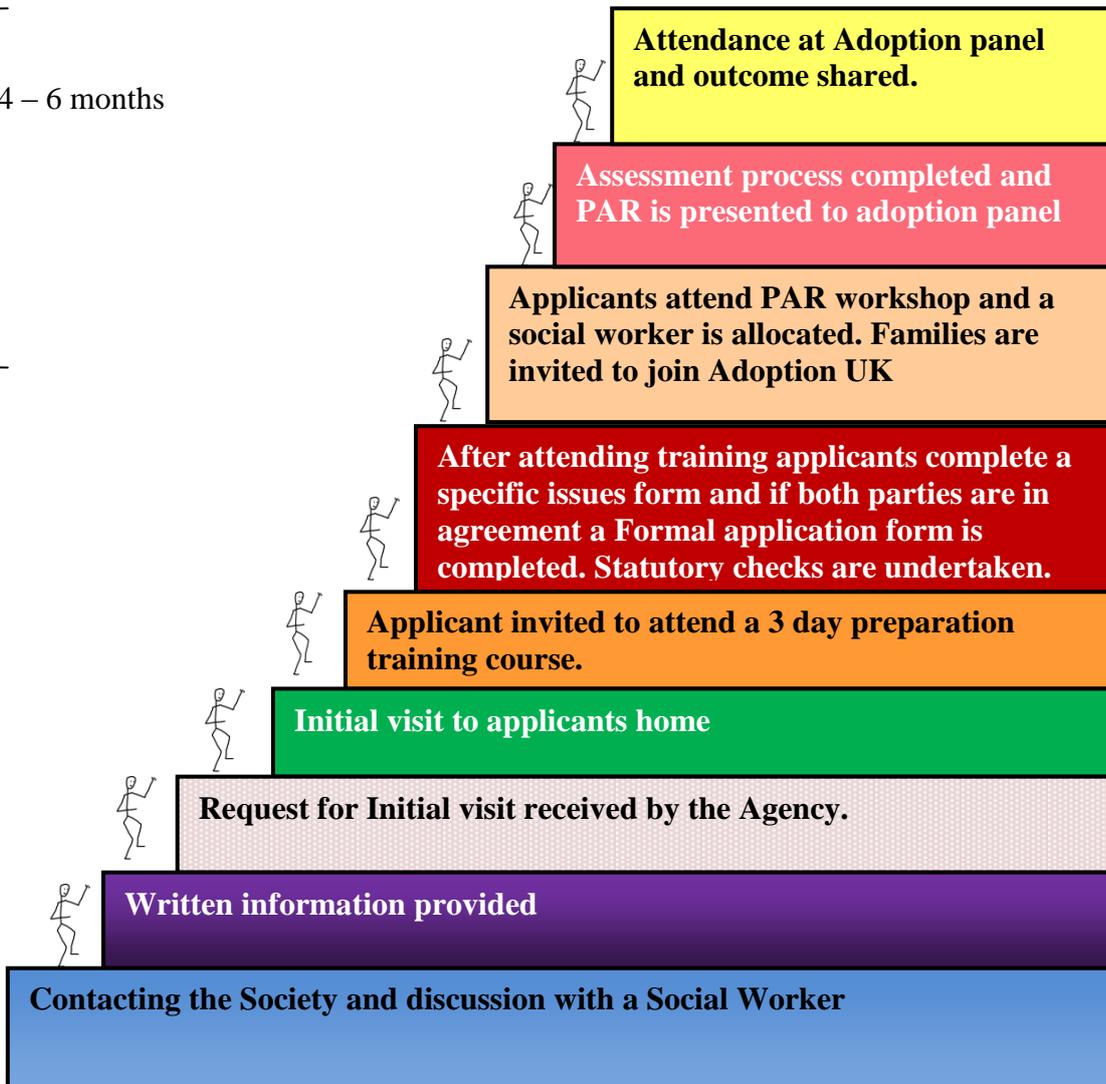
Remember:
we have a lot of experience,
Of the children placed for adoption in Wales , we have successfully placed 1 in 6 and
we want to get it right for them and right for you.

WE KNOW ADOPTION CAN WORK!



STEPS IN THE ADOPTION APPLICATION

4 – 6 months



Checks and References carried out by St. David's Children Society in respect of Adoption Applicant/s

This Society aims above all else to achieve safe adoptive placements for children. Our work is governed by legislation that all Agencies have to adhere to. We try to undertake these checks in as sensitive and timely a manner as possible. This information is normally subject to Data Protection requirements. The majority of these checks will be undertaken once we receive a completed formal application form.

- ❑ Health checks, including a medical undertaken by the applicants' G.P.
- ❑ Disclosure and Barring Certificates (formerly Criminal Record Bureau checks), are currently undertaken on all those in the household who are over the age of 16 years.
- ❑ Local Authority checks for the previous 10 years.
- ❑ CSSIW or OFSTED checks in respect of the applicants themselves.
- ❑ Personal references from two non-relatives who know the applicants well and can comment on their lifestyle, experience with children etc.,
- ❑ A reference from a family member.
- ❑ A reference is usually sought from ex-partners when they have jointly parented, but the Agency may also wish to obtain a reference from an ex-partner when, in the Agency's view, this would be helpful to the assessment process and the relationship has been longstanding and significant.

At a later point in the process these referees will be interviewed by the assessing social worker:

- ❑ If applicable, a written reference from the school that the applicants' child attends.
- ❑ If applicable written confirmation of employment from an employer, or from an accountant if self-employed.
- ❑ Any additional references/enquiries that the agency considers would be helpful e.g. SSAFA when applicants have served in the Armed forces, or a Local Authority, when applicants have previously applied to foster or adopt. (Please note the applicant/s written consent would be sought)
- ❑ Child Support agency.
- ❑ All assessments have a Mid Point Review undertaken which is chaired by a senior member of the adoption team. This identifies any gaps and the action to be taken.

For some of the checks it will be necessary to have sight of highly personal information in order to verify the identity of the applicant e.g. bank account, pay slip etc.,

At all points in the assessment process, the assessing Social Worker will aim to be as supportive as possible.

What happens next is usually referred to as:

6. The Matching Process

Once you are approved as an adoptive parent your Social Worker will work with you and support you in the process of being matched with a child/children.

Several things will happen:

- ❑ Your details will be sent for registration. Currently this is with the **South Wales Consortium**, which operates locally. You will be asked to sign your agreement to this, before the information is sent.
- ❑ You will be registered with the **National Adoption Register**, which covers the whole of England and Wales.
- ❑ If you are selected, there will be a series of discussions and meetings with the relevant social workers and information relating to the child/children will be shared with you, and an assessment of any Adoption Support needs will be made. The proposed link will then be presented to the adoption panel of the Local Authority that has responsibility for the child/children. Your Social Worker will attend the panel, together with the Social Worker for the child. Some panels also invite the prospective adoptive parent.
- ❑ If the panel approves the link then there will be a planning meeting which will agree the process of introducing the child to your family.

Things to remember:

- ❑ Different Authorities operate different styles of introduction
- ❑ You may or may not have met the child prior to the linking panel
- ❑ You may or may not have met the birth family. This will depend on the needs of the child, your wishes and feelings and those of the birth family
- ❑ If you are not adopting from your local area, you may need to travel for a short period of intense introductions, requiring a period away from home. In some situations, financial assistance may be offered by the Local Authority.
- ❑ During the period of introductions you will be involved in a progress review, which will look at how the introductions are progressing. The review may make decisions about:
 - The pace of the introductions
 - A possible date of placement
 - Whether the proposed link is viable

THE MATCHING PROCESS

Registration with the Welsh Adoption Register



Specific child identified as a link



Basic information scrutinised by the Agency and discussion with the child's Agency



If the link is a positive one the information is shared by Agency Social Worker with the proposed adopters



If adopters interested in child – the child's Social Worker and Agency Social Worker visit to share more information



If both parties wish to proceed – Agencies hold a Matching Meeting



Any additional information shared with adopters and a Placement Plan and Adoption Support Plan are drawn up. Adopters may meet with medical adviser, foster carers, etc.,



The link between child and adopters is presented to the child's Adoption Panel and recommendation made



Child's Agency Decision Maker makes decision and all parties meet to plan introductions



Introductions are reviewed regularly – usually last two weeks and provided all parties are happy, the child/children will be placed!!

7. Post Placement

The time between a child/children being placed and an Adoption Order being granted can vary from several weeks to several months.

During this time, the child/children and yourselves will be visited and supported by the Social Worker from this Society and the Social Worker for the child/children placed.

There will be regular visits to your home and the placement will be reviewed in accordance with the Adoption regulations, to make sure that all is well and that the child's needs and those of the family are being met.

The Courts will not consider an Adoption application until the child/children has lived with an adoptive family for 10 weeks. Often it is considerably longer as everyone needs to feel that they are ready, that the child has settled and that everyone has made the transition to becoming a family.

Once an application to adopt has been lodged in the court, then the court process begins of timetabling the case, ensuring that all the legal documents are in place and that the necessary reports have been written. You will be kept informed of the progress each step of the way and will, along with your child/children, attend the court for the final hearing!!

Child and adopters visited on a weekly basis by child's Social Worker and adopters' worker



Placement reviewed after 4 weeks by an Independent Reviewing Officer



Placement reviewed after another 3 months and consideration given to lodging an adoption application at the Court



If all parties agree adopters will be assisted in lodging application and supported through the Court process



The Court timescale can vary from 8-12 weeks to several months depending on the complexity of the situation



Adoption Order granted. Adoption support needs reviewed.

8. Post Adoption

Once you have legally adopted your child/children all parental rights and responsibilities transfer to the adoptive parent/parents.

Many families feel at this stage that they want to get on with their lives and may not need support from the Society again, but adoption support may be required in line with the Adoption Support regulations.

All families presented to Adoption Panel will have had their adoption support needs assessed at the time of approval and also prior to the placement of a specific child/children. This will form the basis of any post placement support and would be reviewed in line with the Regulations, in recognition that over time these needs may well change.

The Local Authority that placed the child/children has a responsibility to support the placement for 3 years after the placement begins in line with the Adoption Support Regulations. After the three year period has elapsed, then at any point in the future, adoptive families can approach the Local Authority in which they live and request an assessment of their Adoption Support Needs. This does not necessarily mean that Social Workers will still be visiting your home, but it does mean that families are entitled to have their support needs assessed. Sometimes the support may mean for example a referral for play therapy, or support in dealing with contact arrangements.

This society also has responsibilities in supporting adoptive families and we will endeavour to offer a service to families in recognition that adoption is a lifetime commitment. The exact nature of this support will vary according to the needs of each child and family.

For other children and families, the supports already available to all families within their own communities, may be all that is required.

All families who make an application to adopt with this agency are invited to become members of Adoption UK at the start of their assessment process and this membership will continue until the child reaches the age of 18. This enables families to access support groups, receive newsletters and generally avail themselves of support from other adopters.

There may also be a Post Approval Support Group within your area, which is organised by this Society, Adoption U.K. or the Local Authority that the family lives in.

9. **And finally**

Good luck and remember you are not alone. Adoption is a lifetime commitment, which we all share responsibility for in trying to get right, especially for the children.

If having read this information,

- You are interested in hearing more, please complete our Initial Visit request form and we will undertake to visit you, usually within two working weeks
- You are still uncertain, contact us and we can discuss things further.

You may also wish to access some advice/support from the following before proceeding further with your interest:-

- **Ourselves – St. David’s Children Society** ... **029 2066 7007**
- BAAF Cymru ... 029 2076 1155
- After Adoption Wales ... 029 2066 6597
- Adoption U.K. ... 0844 848 7900.
- The Local Authority in which you live.