



## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2015

Annual Report: 2014 / 2015:

Since 1942, St. David's has worked across Wales and Herefordshire helping to create safe, loving worlds for children who require permanence through adoption. In that time, we have found new families for over 2,000 children. A further 44 children were placed last year. 97% of our adoption placements are successful. Part of our core strength lies in the support we give to adoptive families at every stage of the process, including lifelong post adoption support services.

This review celebrates the amazing energy, professionalism and commitment that our social and admin team bring to the work, a team so competently led by Joan, Helen, Mel and Anna. We owe them all an enormous amount of gratitude. Working together with our local authority partners, we have achieved wonderful outcomes for children.

National Adoption Service was formally launched on the 5th November 2014. St. David's is a key partner in the new service where we work with our local, Regional and National partners to achieve the Minister's aim of a unifying adoption service for Wales. There is VAA representation on the National Adoption Service Governance Board, the Advisory Board and on all of the sub groups which work together to shape and design the new service. In its inaugural year, the new service has witnessed improved outcomes for children and adoptive families. This is to be applauded.

Our new Hereford office, opened on the 4th November 2014 continues to grow in strength. The Herefordshire staff play an active part in our Four Nations Partnership: St Andrew's Children Society Scotland, Family Care Society Wales, Clifton Children Society England and St. David's Children Society. One of the initiatives within the four nation's partnership relates to research on whether a digital marketing campaign would increase prospective adopter recruitment.

The partnership is undertaking a comparative exploration into a child's journey to permanence through adoption in each of the four countries. The sample will include the 108 children placed last year by the four partner agencies. The research will consider issues such as the average length of time between entry into care and the adoption decision, the average age of the child on placement and the average length of time between entry into care and placement. The Hadley Centre for Adoption is offering advice. We anticipate that the findings will be available within the next few months.

After the recent collapse of BAAF Cymru, St. David's assumed responsibility for the training and consultancy services, special interests groups (medical and legal advisor groups), advice line and the legal advisor. The continuation of these services through AFA Cymru, has only been possible due to the excellent support from the Welsh Government. The fit between AFA Cymru and St. David's extends beyond the shared value base. It is deeply embedded in a shared culture of learning with an emphasis on organisational development and professional competencies which reflects the synergy and dynamism of this natural coming together. By using the highly skilled expertise of both organisations, which have a history of effective partnership working, we see the vision of a cohesive model developing that embraces permanence for children within its widest context.

### VISION STATEMENT:

"Where every child with an adoption plan is found a new family.

### OUR MISSION STATEMENT WAS WRITTEN BY EVE, AGE 8:

"Hi, my name is Eve. I have been adopted. My mum couldn't look after me. Now I have a new family and I am very happy."

Any account of a year in the life of the Society would be incomplete without a very genuine and sincere thank you to the trustees, adoption panel members and advisors to the Society who so generously share their experience, skill and time to support us in so many different ways.

A very special thank you to all who so generously support the work of the Society through covenants, gift aid and other donations. As a charity we rely on donations to develop and sustain our adoption support services and remain very grateful for your help. Our mission remains as vibrant as ever and we can only continue to achieve it with your generous support.

Thank you.

Gerry Cooney.  
St. David's Children Society

## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

WOW.....what a year, so many changes, new faces and people to welcome and some sad farewells to say!

Let's start with the positives: A warm welcome to Dan, our very able social work assistant whom many of you will have met through training and support groups. Dan was joined by Anda , Catrin and Charlotte as assessing social workers and Anna in a management role who brings order and clarity to the team. Collectively , they bring too many years of experience to mention, but are key to massively strengthening the team. Sadly, we have said farewell to Charlotte as her commute was just too long!

Good day to Wendy too , in her new role as our Senior Operational Manager , a huge loss for the former BAAF but a massive gain for us, and welcome to Jenny based in North Wales who has nurtured families through their adoption assessments and is bringing with her a new set of skills for St. David's to develop.

Non, Erina , Holly ( based in North Wales ) and Val, (South Wales ) Sarah too, have also joined our newly expanded organisation and we look forward to seeing AFA Cymru developing its role as a significant provider of training and independent consultancy throughout Wales, for all agencies /individuals needing their support.

And unbelievably we have said goodbye to Janet, who has decided to hang up her working boots and make more use of her walking boots! We are already missing her but she has left an amazing legacy for us all to live up to , so thank you Janet for that. We should also mention the sterling support of David, (Janet's husband )who has chauffeured Janet up and down Wales, through rain, sleet and snow!

Helen Stevens has also left our offices in body if not in spirit and we thank her for the many years of support , advice and guidance and hope she has a happy and long retirement .

We have also witnessed the first year of the National Adoption Service and its impact on the lives of children and adopters alike, the birth of the regions and the implementation of the Welsh Adoption Register.

Above all else however, we have to say thank you to all those who support our work, to the families who give love and security to children and members of the adoption panel and trustees for their work in supporting and scrutinising the work that we do!

Lastly, it has been reassuring to have a restored Gerry back at the helm !



## ADOPTION HEREFORDSHIRE

It has been now been an entire year since Naomi and myself became 'Team Herefordshire' in St David's office in Bridge Street, Hereford. It's been a great year of change and learning for us both encompassing new skills, including promotion whether it be visiting the surrounding market towns with our 'pop up' information stall or you might have heard our new advert on Sunshine Radio?! It is really good to be part of such a positive organisation, knowing that our expertise has always lain in placing those considered to be 'older children' and sibling groups. First4adoption.org.uk beg the question "Too old at 4?" and we have felt positive that we can find loving forever families for these young children seeking a home and offer our adopters support through our well established post support programme.



Personally, this new role involved a change of scenery with a move to what the locals refer to with affection as 'the Shire!' I've learnt that it is less about the rugby and more about the football (though you would be surprised how many have recently 'discovered' Welsh ancestry which has allowed them to support Welsh rugby!) and that no matter what time or where you are you are never more than a few hundred metres away from a tractor! My new hobby of cycling has allowed me to absorb the beauty of the countryside and has reinforced the strong sense of community which prevails. It really is an idyllic location for family life.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

If you haven't already, why not 'like' us on Facebook or follow us on twitter....

This will allow you to keep abreast of what's new at St David's and in the Adoption world including information evenings and events.

You can view our pages without being a member



[www.twitter.com/adoptionwales](http://www.twitter.com/adoptionwales)



[www.facebook.com/stdavidchildrensociety](http://www.facebook.com/stdavidchildrensociety)

## BROTHERS AND SISTERS WORKSHOP

The first Brothers and Sisters workshop was held at St David's on Wednesday 29th July 2015. The aim of this new workshop is for prospective adopters to consider the needs of children waiting for adoption and explore the issues around adopting more than one child, as many children are part of a brother / sister group.

The workshop considers the challenges and benefits of adopting more than one child as well as practical issues. We share latest research about adopting brothers and sisters and what support is available before inviting adopters who have adopted more than one child to speak about their experiences.

Five couples attended this new workshop, all at different stages of the assessment process who were considering the prospect of adopting brothers and sisters. Everyone who attended found the workshop to be insightful and the adopters experience brought to life the benefits and challenges which was greatly received by those present. The next Brothers and Sisters Workshop will be held in November 2015 and it is hoped the workshop will continue to provide up to date information about children waiting for a permanent home, whilst supporting families to consider whether adopting a brother / sister group is the right option for them.

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## NEW PARENT

As the chorus of happy birthday dies down I look around at the smiling faces of our family and friends who are all beaming with joy and pride as our little piglet celebrates her 7th birthday. To anyone looking in, it would look like any normal birthday celebration, but to me it is a reminder of what being a family is all about. But family life has not always been this simple.

Five years ago Piglet 1 (8yrs) and Piglet 2 were not a part of our lives, as we weren't theirs. They were 3 years and 2 years when they moved in with us after a lengthy assessment and matching process that is adoption, which St David's supported us through every step of the way. However, despite all the preparation training, reading and combined experience, nothing really prepared me for that day when my husband returned to work after his 2 weeks paternity leave. For me, that's the day it all changed. The honeymoon period was finally over!



Having worked in children's homes and managing up to six teenagers with a range of challenging behaviours I thought I knew it all and I remember thinking smugly that managing two toddlers suffering with separation loss and grief would be a walk in the park. How wrong was I; the piglets had been saving up all their anxieties which came tumbling out when I was left on my own.

My expectations of what my family would look like, how we would all feel and behave came crashing down and the reality suddenly hit; these piglets that I have longed to have in my life for so long came with their own mixed up emotions which was just starting to unravel before my eyes. The initial romantic feelings I had of becoming a family soon faded and the rose tinted glasses quickly came off as I had to hit the ground running in meeting the competing needs of parenting two piglets that had experienced early life trauma.



Life as we knew it had gone, those carefree days of ad hoc days and evenings out with friends had turned into planned routines, Peppa Pig playing on loop, the same games over and over again and throwing cars off a ramp (piglet 1's obsession)! My life had become Groundhog Day. Nothing had prepared me for how I would feel, I remember hearing a lot about attachment and bonding but in all honesty, when it came down to it I just felt like an unpaid babysitter who had been left with two children who didn't feel like mine. I wanted nothing more than to have my life back to how it was before adoption – and yes, I did feel guilty for feeling this way because having a family has been my dream for as long as I can remember.

The challenging behaviours tested me, the emotional trauma was relentless, and their inability to express themselves came out in behaviours which took me a while to recognise, unpick and respond to appropriately. Once I did, life made a big U turn. I had tried everything from star charts to time out but what worked for me was reflexology. No, I'm not a therapist but my friend has given me several treatments which helped me relax. One day I gave Piglet 1 a foot massage which he responded to so well – who'd have thought that something so simple could help attachment, build a relationship, trust as well as opening up discussion. This is something we still do today and in the busyness that is our lives a simple foot massage helps us to re-connect on so many levels.

Would I change those first few months? I don't think I would, parenting is relentless, boring and very tiring. The first six months were the hardest months of my life but was necessary for the foundation we formed which has served as the platform for us making new memories as a family – this is what I've always wanted and is something I will cherish every day for the rest of my life. Parenting through adoption does bring extra challenges and I do parent differently to my friends and family but I embrace that.



## NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE TO RUN WALES ADOPTION REGISTER AFTER BAAF CLOSURE



More people are coming forward to adopt and more children are being placed for adoption more quickly following the launch of Wales' National Adoption Service a year ago today.

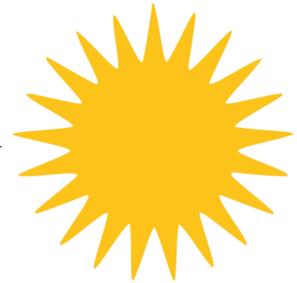
The National Adoption Service for Wales was established in November 2014 to increase the pool of adopters and ensure good quality post-adoption support is available to those who need it. It promotes adoption and, most importantly, helps give more children the opportunity to become part of a loving and supportive family.

Since its launch 12 months ago, the National Adoption Service for Wales has had a very positive impact on looked-after children and those wanting to adopt:

- The average time for a child from becoming looked after to being placed for adoption was 16.5 months in 2014-15 compared to 26 months in 2013-14
- The number of children placed for adoption has increased by 29%, rising from 300 in 2011-12 to 386 in 2014-15
- The number of adopters has increased by 51%, from 197 in 2011-12 to 297 in 2014-15.

Health and Social Services Minister Mark Drakeford said: "Wales' National Adoption Service has had a strong start with local government and the voluntary adoption agencies across Wales working together to deliver more permanent family placements and improve adoption services.

"I want to pay tribute to the families who have been ready and willing to give some of our most vulnerable children the love and stability of a new family; to the hard work of local government in helping to establish the new service and to the third sector agencies which provide the crucial support these families need."



The Welsh Government has been working with the National Adoption Service on a programme of work to further develop a strategic approach to adoption and adoption support services in Wales.

Funding of £110,000 has been made available to the National Adoption Service to take this work forward which will include:

- Developing adoption support services
- Rolling out training about the issue of child/adolescent-to-parent violence
- Developing a recruitment campaign
- Engaging with adopters and adopted children and young people in the work of the National Adoption Service.

Suzanne Griffiths, director of operations at the National Adoption Service said:

“It’s been a good first year for the National Adoption Service. We have seen more children than ever settled with a new family; fewer children are waiting and children are being placed more quickly.

“We have also consulted with adopters and adopted young people so they have been able to inform our priorities. We know we have more to do, particularly where adoption support services are concerned but we’ve made a very good start from which to take this forward.”

Councillor Mel Nott OBE, chair of the National Adoption Service Governance Board said:

“The launch of the National Adoption Service for Wales a year ago today was a significant milestone, supporting us to work side-by-side and meet together the challenge of transforming the way in which we provide care and support to all those involved in adoption across Wales.

“The development and implementation of a national adoption service demonstrates local government’s commitment to offering every child the best possible start in life and it is very pleasing to see early signs of improvement with more children being placed more quickly and increased numbers of adopters being approved.

“These are the sorts of outcomes local government is striving for as it changes delivery models to implement the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.”



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

## CHILDREN'S SECTION



The most dominoes stacked in 30 seconds is 48 and was achieved by Silvio Sabba (Italy) in Pioltello, Milan, Italy, on 28 April 2013.



The largest pizza commercially available is 1 m 37 cm (4 ft 6 in) by 1 m 37 cm (4 ft 6 in) and is sold at the Big Mama's and Papa's Pizzeria, Los Angeles, California. It costs £130!



The most matchsticks stacked into a tower in one minute is 74, achieved by Silvio Sabba (Italy), in Pioltello, Italy, on 2 July 2012.



The most forward rolls in one minute is 75, achieved by Ashley Wallis (UK), in Honiton, Devon, UK, on 5 May 2013.



The record for the fastest time to travel a mile on a space hopper is 13 minutes flat and was set by Ashrita Furman (USA) New York, United States on 19 August 2010.



Residents of Bethel, Maine, USA, and surrounding towns, built a snow woman measuring 37.21 m (122 ft 1 in) tall, over a period of one month, completing her on 26 February 2008.

**Q: Why was 6 afraid of 7?**

**A: Because 7, 8, 9.**

**Q: What do elves learn in school?**

**A: The elf-abet.**

**Q. Why don't you give Elsa a balloon?**

**A - Because she'll let it go!**

**Q: Why did the boy bring a ladder to school?**

**A: He wanted to go to high school.**

## HOW TO MAKE SALT DOUGH CHRISTMAS



These easy to make homemade tree decorations are such a favourite part of our craft preparations for Christmas and for that reason we make them every year, enjoying the process as much as the end product.

They are so simple that even a toddler can muck in and help and yet very striking and beautiful when decorated and hanging on the Christmas tree or a sprayed branch. Perfect for adding the personal, home-made touch this season.

**You will need:**  
**1 cup of plain flour**  
**1 cup of salt**  
**(up to) 1 cup of water**

### What to do:

**1.** Mix together the dry ingredients then pour in the water, bit by bit until it mixes together to form a dough like consistency. If it's too sticky add some more flour. It should be workable and just dry enough that none should come off on your fingers.

**2.** Roll out the dough on a floured surface and choose some cookie cutters to cut some shapes from it. cutting salt dough into shapes



**3.** Stars, Christmas trees, robins, hearts, bells and angels all look perfect hanging on the tree.

**4.** Stick a straw near the top of each shape so that a ribbon can later be threaded through the hole.

**5.** Lay the shapes on a baking sheet and cook at 100 degrees C for 2-3 hours, turning half way through if the shapes are thick.

**6.** When dry, they can be painted and decorated using ordinary paints or metallic acrylics, which look stunning! Use a little PVA glue when the paint has dried to add glitter, sequins, beads and other embellishments. Thread with raffia or thin ribbon and hang!

Homemade decorations for almost no money, made by the whole family. **Perfect!**



## NEWS AND EVENTS COMING UP

### FASD Wales

A support group for parents and carers of children diagnosed or awaiting diagnosis of FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder).

The next meeting is at 7.30 pm Wednesday 9 December at Natural Health 98 Cathedral Road Cardiff.

RSVP or further information please call @ Catherine Markey on 07855 937076

### Cardiff Support group dates for 2016: (for St David's Adopters)

Saturday 27th February  
Saturday 23rd April  
Saturday 3rd September  
Saturday 3rd December

### Coffee Morning in Rhyl

We are having a coffee morning on Thursday 21st January 2016 at our Rhyl office between 11.30 and 1.30 for all our adopters in North Wales . Our address is: AFA office Morfa Clwyd Business Centre 84 Marsh Rd Rhyl LL18 2AF. Come and meet Jenny Mc Guggan , Non, Erina and Helen! Save the date in your diary.



### BOOK RECOMMENDATION: Nurturing Attachments, supporting children who are fostered and adopted: Kim S. Golding, (2007), Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Nurturing Attachments combines the experience and wisdom of parents and carers with that of professionals to provide support and practical guidance for foster and adoptive parents looking after children with insecure attachment relationships. It gives an overview of attachment theory and a step-by-step model of parenting which provides the reader with a tried-and-tested framework for developing resilience and emotional growth.

## A BIG THANK YOU

**We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have been involved in talking at our groups, seeing people in their homes, and contributing to this newsletter.**

**We want to hear from you and you can help shape the service we offer, so please stay in touch and send in any ideas !!!**



Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant



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