

Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant



St David's Children Society

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# Adoption Information Pack

Wales' Longest Serving Adoption Agency

Welcome to this Agency and thank you for your enquiry!

We hope you find the following information useful in taking the first step along the road to adoption. This booklet is designed to give you an overview of the adoption process from your initial enquiry through to the Adoption Order.

In this booklet, you will find:

Letter from the CEO	3
About St David's	4
What Is Adoption?	5
Steps to Adoption	6
Applying to Adopt	7
Stage One	8
Stage Two	10
Adopting Together	11
Second-Time Adopters	11
Matching	12
Post-Placement	13
Beyond the Adoption Order	14

We are always happy to share more about the process and to talk through your adoption plans. You may have specific questions about your personal circumstances that are not covered in the information pack. We can answer these questions through telephone contact with the duty social worker, drop-in sessions, information evenings, and email.

[info@stdavidscs.org](mailto:info@stdavidscs.org)

[Adoptionwales.org](http://Adoptionwales.org)

02920 667007

## Letter from the CEO

Thank you for your enquiry about adopting with St David's Children Society. We are delighted that you have taken this step with us.

St David's is the longest serving adoption agency in Wales. St David's is a not for profit charity and we pride ourselves on offering support from the moment you make that decision to become a parent through adoption to becoming a family and beyond. We are there for you every step of the way, recognising support as the norm whether you are a new parent or have been an adoptive parent for many years.

Many people have thought about adopting but can be concerned about the process and have received misinformation about who can and cannot adopt. We positively welcome applications from all sectors of the population and we base our work on the belief that there are lots of people who can become parents through adoption and can give children waiting for adoption a loving, secure family for life.

Adoption a lifelong commitment and can be hugely rewarding. You have taken the first step in requesting this Information Pack. It provides a comprehensive overview of the adoption process with St David's and information that will help you decide whether you want to progress to the next stage in the process. Please remember we are here to answer any questions you may have on 02920 667007 or email [info@stdavidscs.org](mailto:info@stdavidscs.org). St David's website will also provide further information for you: [adoptionwales.org](http://adoptionwales.org).

I wish you good luck as you move forward in the process to become a family through adoption.

Wendy Keidan  
CEO



## About St David's

St David's Children Society has been involved in the field of adoption since 1942. We are proud of our heritage as the longest serving Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) registered in Wales uniquely with its Head Office in Cardiff. As a VAA, we assess a diverse range of adopters from across Wales and work in partnership with Local Authorities to widen the choice of families available to children. We are a member of the National Adoption Service in Wales and work closely with our partners in voluntary and statutory adoption agencies.

Our staff are experienced adoption social workers who draw on the latest research and best practice. They help and guide adopters from the start of their journey in order to achieve successful outcomes for children and adoptive families. We welcome applications from all sectors of society regardless of ethnicity, disability, religion, sexuality, or marital status.

Our primary commitment is to find families for 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 recognise most families will need adoption support at some point during their adoption journey. We offer lifelong support to children and families who adopt through St David's Children Society and we are there for you whenever you need us.



## What Is Adoption?

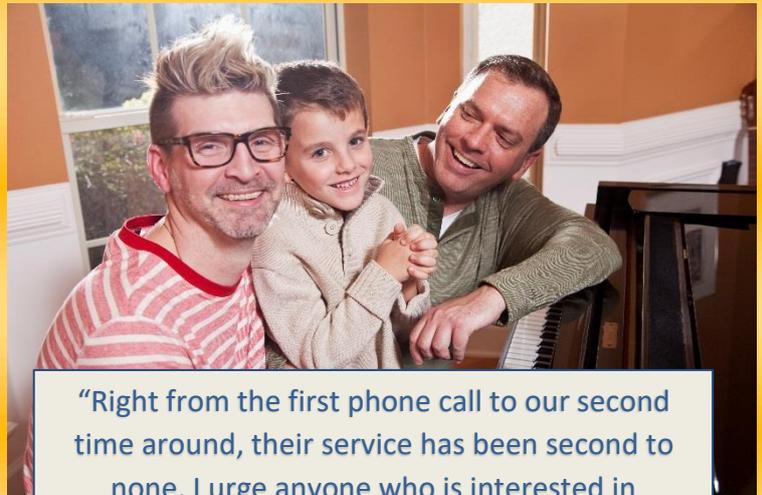
Adoption is a legal procedure, whereby parental responsibility for a child or children is permanently transferred to the adoptive parent(s) by a Court Order. You legally take on all the rights and responsibilities for the child like any other parent – it is a lifelong commitment. Adoption is a way of providing the security, permanency, and love of a new family when it is not possible for a child to remain with their birth parents or within the birth family. We place children of all ages from birth to 8 years old, including single children, sibling groups, children from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and children with various degrees of need.

Many of the children we place are vulnerable and have needs resulting from early childhood experiences, including abuse and neglect. Adoption is both a rewarding and challenging experience.

## What Do Our Adopters Say?



“It seemed strange at first being called Mum and Dad... but now we wouldn’t be parted from them. They are ours forever.” – Adoptive Parents



“Right from the first phone call to our second time around, their service has been second to none. I urge anyone who is interested in adoption to contact St David’s.” – Adoptive Dads



“Each day he makes us smile and brings a tear of joy to my eyes.” – Adoptive Mum



“I have felt supported every step of the way.” – Single Adopter

So, you're interested in adoption...

Can you:

Provide love, time, and consistency to a child?

Empathise with a child's experience? They may never have felt safe.

Be patient, flexible, and adaptable to a child's individual circumstances?

Have the energy and health to provide a long-term family for a child?

### Steps to Adoption

Initial Enquiry

Initial Visit

Registration of Interest form

Stage One

Stage Two

Adoption Panel and Decision

Matching with a Child/ren

Placement

Adoption Order

Post-Adoption Support

## Applying to Adopt

St David's believe there is no such thing as a perfect adoptive family. We are looking for families who can parent a child or children with a range of needs. When you make an **Initial Enquiry** with us, we will provide you with an information pack and accompanying letter within 5 working days. Should you wish to pursue adoption, you will make a request for an **Initial Visit** and St David's Children Society will respond within 2 weeks.

This may be an invitation to the next information event, a pre-arranged meeting at your home or the Agency's office, or a pre-arranged telephone call. In each circumstance there will be the opportunity to have a private discussion with a social worker.

Following this, you will need to complete a **Registration of Interest (ROI)** form. To do this, you must be:

- At least 21 years old
- Living in the British Isles
- Not have been convicted or cautioned for certain criminal offences. (There are specific offences that will prevent you from adopting, but many do not. If you have previous cautions or convictions, please discuss with us).

If you do not meet these above criteria, we will not be able to proceed at this time.

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.

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.

In line with this advice, this Agency cannot accept an application if either applicant smokes cigarettes or e-cigarettes. If you have recently ceased smoking including smoking e-cigarettes, you will have to evidence, via a GP, that a period of at least 6 months has elapsed before an application can be taken up.

We will also consider alcohol consumption and offer guidance on what is deemed acceptable in respect of parenting children who are adopted.

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.

The Registration of Interest is quite in-depth and asks for a lot of information. Please try to complete as fully as possible to avoid delay moving forward. When we receive your ROI, we will let you know whether or not we can accept your application within 10 working days of receipt. Your ROI will be reviewed by a manager, and you may be contacted for more information prior to a decision being made. If for any reason we are unable to accept your application, the reasons will be discussed with you.

Once we accept your application, you will move onto Stage One of the process.

## Stage One

We will complete an agreement with you at the start of each stage.

Stage One should take no more than two months and Stage Two no more than four months unless there are good reasons for it to take longer or upon the request of you, the prospective adopter.

Prospective adopters can take a maximum of six months between Stage One and Stage Two (the agency could also recommend you take a break). Should a break be longer than 6 months, you would be required to restart Stage One.

The focus of Stage One is gathering factual information and checks. We will also allocate a social worker in Stage One. Your social worker is likely to visit you two or three times in Stage One, and there will be a number of tasks for you to complete, for example, preparing a family tree and documenting your support network.

Your social worker is likely to give you greater insight into the needs of children and start to gain an understanding of your personal history.

### **Checks and references at this stage:**

- A UK DBS check – you will be sent an email to complete an online DBS. St David's will cover the cost of the DBS in the UK only.
- Overseas checks if you have lived abroad for an extended period since the age of 18. Any costs involved would be payable by yourselves.
  - Health assessment with your GP – the agency must obtain a written report about a prospective adopter's health. It is essential a medical check takes place as soon as possible within the two-month period in order for it to be considered by the agency's medical advisor.
    - A local authority check from the previous 10 years.
    - CSSIW or OFSTED checks in respect of the applicants themselves.
  - If applicable, written confirmation of employment from an employer, or from an accountant if self-employed.
    - Other household member checks, e.g. other family members or adults living within your home.
- Personal and family references. These should include at least two referees who are not related to you and, if applying as a couple, it is helpful to have a longstanding reference from each prospective adopter.
- Ex-partner references. Should a prospective adopter have parented or cared for children where there has been a significant relationship, a reference would be sought. We understand that this can be uncomfortable but it is necessary to ensure children will be safe. If for any reason there would be a significant risk from a previous partner, then external evidence of that relationship would be sought from referees or other sources.
- School or nursery checks. If you currently have a child living with you, we would ask for a school or nursery reference to be obtained.
- SSAFA checks. If you have ever been employed by the military/RAF/British Forces, a SSAFA check is required.
- If you have previously applied to become a foster carer or adopter, we would seek a written reference from that agency or local authority.
  - Child Support agency.

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.,

There may be other checks and references relevant to your application, and these would be discussed with you on a case by case basis. At all points in the assessment process, the assessing Social Worker will aim to be as supportive as possible.

### Preparation to Adopt

In Stage One, you will be invited to attend a three-day adoption preparation course which will provide an understanding of the types of children who need adoptive families, how their experiences of abuse or neglect may impact on their behaviour and/or development, and how therapeutic parenting may help.

The course is held in Cardiff and takes place over three consecutive days. You must attend all days.

The training provides an opportunity to meet with adoptive parents and others involved in the adoption process including staff at the agency.

### Completion of Stage One

At the end of Stage One, your social worker submits a report to a manager and a decision will be made as to whether or not you can proceed to Stage Two. A review meeting may take place with a manager. If for any reason we are unable to proceed, the reasons for this will be shared with you. This decision will be followed up in writing.

If you want to take a break before starting Stage Two, you are able to take up to six months.



## Stage Two

After Stage One is successfully completed, we would sign a prospective adopter assessment plan with you, which sets out what is expected throughout Stage Two. We will do our best to ensure you have the same social worker throughout Stage One and Two, however if this is not possible, we will let you know. Your social worker will arrange weekly visits in Stage Two and complete an in-depth assessment of you.

Your social worker is likely to set tasks that you will need to complete. We recommend that you have the time and space to complete these tasks and not have significant life events at this time, e.g. moving home, house extensions, extended holidays.

We aim to complete Stage Two within four months and you and your social worker will have a panel date that you will be working towards.

### **During Stage Two we will gather:**

- Information about you and, if applying as a couple, discuss your relationship
- Information on your wider family and support network
- Information about your home and its suitability for a child
- Information about your income to ensure you are financially stable
- Your motivation to adopt
- Your childcare experience and parenting capacity
- Your learning needs and understanding the long-term implications of adoption
- A social media check which will be completed with you

We recognise that the assessment process can be daunting but we are there to support you through the process. We aim to be open and honest with you throughout the entire process. Should we have any concerns, we will discuss these with you at the earliest opportunity. We want you to also be open and honest with us and, should you have any reservations, to share them with us.

You will also be invited to attend a fourth day of training, which will build on the three-day preparation course.

At the end of the assessment, your social worker will write a Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR). This will be presented to the St David's adoption panel with your social worker's recommendation about your suitability to adopt. If for any reason they cannot make a positive recommendation, this will be discussed with you.

The PAR will be shared with you so you can read and add your views. References are confidential, as are checks provided by third parties, and these cannot be shared with you. You are invited to attend the panel held in our Cardiff office and it is a great opportunity for panel members to meet you in person.

The panel make a recommendation. You will be informed by telephone of this recommendation within 24 hours of the panel taking place. This recommendation, along with the minutes, is then sent to the Agency Decision Maker who has a maximum of 10 working days to make the decision about whether you are suitable to adopt. You will be informed of this by letter. If your application is approved, you will then be approved adopters and can be considered for the children who are available on the Adoption Register Wales. Your Social Worker will support you in this.

If St David's is unable to approve you as suitable to adopt, you can either accept this and withdraw, or request either St David's reviews the decision, or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review. You have 20 days to request this in Wales.



### Adopting Together Service

Adopting Together is an exciting child-focused adoption service, supported by the National Adoption Service, which brings together the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) in Wales to find families for children who may be waiting for a long time for their forever family.

Children who wait the longest are mostly aged over 4 years, brother and sisters who need to stay together, children with additional needs, children with some uncertainty regarding their development, and children from a BAME background.

Through this service we will provide specialist recruitment, including child-specific recruitment and adopter-led events, and a programme of therapeutic customised support to find the right families for these children and we will walk alongside them in their adoption journey.

Adopting through Adopting Together will offer you a customised therapeutic model of assessment, training, therapeutic transitions and ongoing psychological support which enables and empowers you to meet the needs of children while creating your family.

### Second-Time Adopters

Enquiries from second time adopters may be received by letter, telephone call or email. This communication will be passed to the Adoption Services Manager who will ensure that enquiries receive a written response within the Stage One timescales. Depending on the length of time between second-time adopters' first application and subsequent application, you may need to redo Stage One. Recent second-time applicants may be able to start on Stage Two. Either way, the timescale for second and subsequent applications is four months from Registration of Interest to ADM decision.

If a child was adopted into a family, we generally recommend a period of 2 years before a family apply again. However, each case will be considered on an individual basis and exceptions may occur where a family are approached by the Local Authority about a sibling to the child in placement.

Second time adopters receive a tailored assessment which takes account of your previous experience of adopting and the needs of the child you have previously adopted. You will be offered training specific to second time adopters which is usually one day.

Updated personal and employer references will be required for all second time adopters. Where the applicants have school age children, the relevant school(s) will be contacted, with your permission, for information regarding the applicant's ability to promote the child's education.

## Family Finding and Matching

Once you are approved, your Social Worker will ensure you are referred to Adoption Register Wales and start to actively look for children you may become a parent for.

### **Linking and Matching**

You will be given access to Linkmaker, an online national database where local authorities upload profiles of children. We will assist you to create your profile as approved adopters. If you wish to use this service, you will be able to search for children, otherwise your social worker will search on your behalf. Local authorities will also be able to view your profile and it is a tool used to share information and find the right families for children.

If a local authority social worker wishes to find out more about you, they will contact you and your social worker via Linkmaker and your social worker will respond.

In St David's, when a link is identified, a meeting occurs within the Agency to determine both the positives and potential challenges of any link. This information will be shared with you.

Should you wish to find out more about a child and the child's social worker wishes to meet you, a visit will be arranged at your home with the childcare social worker, St David's social worker, and the adoption social worker from the child's local authority.

This will provide an opportunity to have up to date information about the child or children, and a chance for you and the childcare social workers to decide whether or not you wish to proceed with the link. A decision is usually made by the local authority within a week, though it can take longer if more than one family is being considered.

If you are the right match for a child or children, you will be invited to meet with:

- The child's foster carer
- The child's local authority medical adviser,
- Other professionals (this is decided on a case-by-case basis, but may include: nursery teachers, schoolteachers, or any other professional involved in the child's life)

These meetings provide an opportunity for you to gain as much up to date information on the child or children to ensure you understand the child's needs prior to moving forward. You will be involved with preparing an adoption support plan which will reflect why it is felt you will be the right parent for the child and any anticipated support you may need in meeting the child or children's needs.

### **Matching Panel**

If everyone agrees the match should proceed between you and the child, you will be invited to a matching panel. The panel is held at the child's local authority. The matching panel is similar to an approval panel, however its main purpose is to ensure that you as the prospective adopter can meet the child's needs now and into the future.

The panel will make a recommendation and you will be informed of this within 24 hours. This recommendation, along with the minutes, is then sent to the local authority agency decision maker who has up to 10 working days to make the decision about whether the match is approved.

## Meeting Your Child and Starting Your Journey to Become a Family

Once a match is approved, introductions can begin. Introductions are where you will finally get to meet the child in person. The aim of introductions is to help the child move from their foster carer to your home. Introductions can vary in length depending on the age and needs of each child. They usually take place over 14 days and involve you observing the child in the foster carer's home and gradually taking on the parenting of your child. Your social worker and your child's social worker will support you through introductions. There is usually a review halfway through and the child or children will move to you when everyone agrees the child is ready.

### Things to remember:

- Different Authorities operate different styles of introductions
- You may or may not have the opportunity to meet the birth family.
- If you are not adopting from your local area, you may need to travel for a short period of time. In some situations, financial assistance may be offered by the Local Authority.

## Becoming a Family (Post-Placement)

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

During this time, your child/ren and yourselves will be visited and supported by the Social Worker from St. David's and the Social Worker for your child/ren 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 your child's needs and those of the family are being met.

The Courts will not consider an Adoption application until the child/ren has lived with you for 10 weeks before making the application. 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 move to becoming a family.

Once an application to adopt has been lodged in the court, the court process begins. You will be kept informed of the progress each step of the way. Courts can sometimes take a few months to grant an Adoption Order. Once this is done, you legally become your child's parent and guardian. You will receive an adoption certificate directly from the court which shows the child's new surname and replaces their birth certificate. An Adoption Order is irrevocable, and a child has the same legal rights as any birth child.

You and your child will be given the opportunity to attend a Celebration Hearing following the Final Hearing. This celebration at court can be attended by other family and friends, and gives you all the chance to celebrate your new family.

### What can impact on this process?

When a birth parent is notified that an adoption application has been lodged with the court, they may seek to oppose the granting of an Adoption Order. There is a strict protocol, which the Judge will have to follow in order to fully consider whether to agree to the birth parent's request.

To date, this Agency has no experience of Adoption Orders not being granted to adoptive families. There have been some situations where adoptive families have experienced delayed introductions and delays to the granting of the Adoption Order. We will be there to help you as this can be a stressful time.

## Beyond the Adoption Order

Many families feel at this stage that they want to get on with their lives and may not need support. If adoption support is required, St David's will offer ongoing support to the family as long as needed.

You can contact St David's at any stage in the future should you need support or advice. We offer lifetime support through regular support groups, stay and play sessions, etc. A social worker is always on duty during office hours to answer any queries you might have.

We encourage you to keep in touch and send regular newsletters. We also offer post-placement training which you can talk to your social worker about.

The Local Authority that placed your 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, you can request additional support needs that we pass onto the Local Authority in which you live.

Adoption UK also offers support, advice and training to families and you will be offered one year's free membership of Adoption UK once you have been approved.

We hope this overview has been helpful, however if you have any questions, please get in touch with one of our team on **02920 667 007** or contact us at [info@stdavidscs.org](mailto:info@stdavidscs.org).

We also have regular drop-ins **every Tuesday and Thursday 12pm – 2pm** if you would prefer to meet a social worker face-to-face. Just show up on the day!

There is further information, including a Legal Framework for Adoption, on our website [www.adoptionwales.org](http://www.adoptionwales.org).

We look forward to supporting you on your adoption journey!

Other places to gain information on adoption:

Association for Adoption and Fostering Cymru (AFA) – 029 2076 1155

<https://www.afacymru.org.uk/>

Adoption UK – 02920 230319 <https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

Coram BAAF – 020 7520 0300 <https://corambaaf.org.uk/>

National Adoption Service -- <https://www.adoptcymru.com/>

