



Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant



St David's Children Society

Autumn Newsletter 2017

www.adoptionwales.org

A Note from the Editor

Hello to you all and a very warm welcome to our 2017 Newsletter, a very special year for St. David's as we celebrate our 75th Anniversary! As always, we have lots of news to share – of exciting developments, new faces and new families, changing lives.

Contrary to last year, we have witnessed a steady rise in the number of children in Wales waiting for their permanent family, with some of these waiting longer and longer. Unfortunately, the approval of adoptive families has not risen at the same pace, so we all know that there's lots of work to be done. From April this year, we are delighted to announce that we have already successfully placed 17 children with new families, with lots more activity happening over the coming months. Take a look at some of their stories, which are both honest and uplifting.

St. David's is always looking at ways to develop our practice, and make sure that we train and support families to meet the needs of the children waiting. Therefore, we are very excited to be involved in a new initiative, "Adopting Together", with our Voluntary Adoption partners in Wales, specially designed for those children who have been waiting the longest for their "growing up family". We are looking at different ways to recruit families and to share information about these children, at a much earlier stage so that people can start to think about whether they could be the family for this child or children, and for us to look at what we need to do to support them. We are also looking at developing a more formal buddying scheme, linking experienced adopters with people going through assessment, and so Wendy or I would be very happy to speak with anyone who might be interested in this.

Thank you to all the families who attended the event on the 19th October which provided a fantastic opportunity for prospective adopters to meet with families and share experiences. It was a great evening! We have always said that we couldn't do what we do without your ongoing commitment, loyalty and support. Not only do you open your hearts and share precious moments and numerous challenges with your children along the way, you are also willing to share these stories with others on the same path. Thank you to you all and especially to those who have given time in busy lives to meet with others, speak or write something, come to events – you have taught us so much and are the most wonderful advocates for your children, for adoption, and for St. David's!

We also know that sometimes life can be tough, and that we all need support as parents from time to time to make sense of things and help get back on track. We always look forward to seeing people at our quarterly support groups and our Summer and Christmas celebrations and are very happy for you to give us a ring or pop in to see us if you want to discuss anything. You might find some of the resources we've included in the newsletter useful, especially the ones around education as we know this is a particularly tricky area for lots of children and parents, and we have lots of forthcoming training planned so take a look and let us know if you'd like to attend. Also from April 2017, Adoption UK in conjunction with The National Adoption Service, are offering a years' free membership for new families so remember to mention this to your social worker and they can organise this for you.

And finally, there have been some changes to our small but dedicated and hugely talented team in the last year with new appointments of Cate and Coralie, and the appointment of Wendy as our new Deputy Director – welcome and congratulations!. We will also be delighted to see Becky returning from maternity leave in January, and Gail remaining in the team on a permanent basis. Although I don't want to end of a sad note, I couldn't sign off without mentioning Jackie, who has been working for St David's longer than any of us. Jackie's husband died suddenly and tragically on 3rd October, and I'm sure you will want to join me in sending heartfelt wishes to her and her family.

With very best wishes to you all for the rest of 2017 and for the coming year ahead,

Helen Hawksworth

Annual Report 2017

I am delighted to present this annual report in what has been a challenging, yet energising year in the life of St. David's Children Society. At the beginning of the year, we anticipated that the Munby judgement would lead to a decline in placement activity and repositioned ourselves accordingly. The judgement was interpreted by Local Authorities that adoption was to be considered an order of 'last resort.' In its place special guardianship gained traction in respect of securing permanency. As the year advanced and the courts reassessed their interpretation of this judgement, we witnessed placement orders rising at a rapid rate, resulting in an increased number of children waiting for a permanent family. We readjusted and in doing so, placed 26 children for adoption, the greater proportion of these were sibling groups of children. On behalf of the trustees and the senior management team, I would like to offer a very sincere thank you to our social work and admin team for their professionalism and steadfast commitment to these children and the families we work with. Thank you also to our adoption managers, Helen, Mel and Anna for supporting the team in achieving exceptional outcomes for children.

We are pleased to report that after a tentative start, AFA Cymru, previously BAAF Cymru, has securely found its nucleus within the family of St. David's Children Society. AFA's rich history of training, advice and consultancy is highly valued by our local authority partners. Kathy, the AFA lead sits on the Ministerial Advisory Group for Improving Outcomes for Children, is the Deputy chair of the LAC work stream and continues to be actively involved with all aspects of the National Fostering Framework through its work on the strategic steering group and its role in delivering on recommendations relating to Corporate Parenting and Kinship Foster Care.

Thank you also to Welsh Government for their support through the Sustainable Third Sector Grant programme which has enabled us to significantly increase outputs for children and families and in doing so, benefit our local authority partners.

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, expertise and time to support us in so many different ways. The Society is deeply grateful to our volunteers who skilfully scrutinise and inform much of what we do.

St. David's remains an integral partner within the National Adoption Service with representatives on the Advisory Board and the various sub groups that help define the work programme. As is the history of this Agency, we have responded to the challenges and changing trends with energy and vigour, seeing the opportunities to herald our relevance to the statutory sector and most importantly, offer hope to children who rely on us all to find a new family. This year has witnessed the foundations of new initiatives that will offer change in the way some of our services are to be delivered. In particular, we have focused our energies on the large number of children on the Wales Adoption Register that have been waiting longer than 6 months for their adoptive family.

Working with our statutory and VAA partners in the National Adoption Service, we developed a specialist recruitment strategy underpinned with enhanced adopted support service initially for the children who wait the longest for placement. This project has evolved through a collaborative proposal by the VAA Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership (SVAP), drawing on the particular expertise of our sector in recruiting families for children over 4 years of age, those who are part of a sibling group or children with significant needs. The Sector has agreed to collectively work to devise individual packages of support to families that will be available at the commencement of the placement. We believe that offering targeted and specialist support, including clinically led therapeutic support will increase the numbers of prospective adoptive families offering permanency to these children.

The impact of the interventions will be evaluated by Cardiff University through the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP). It is highly unusual for a KTP to be awarded to the social care sector but Innovate UK (the awarding body) saw something unique in our application that could offer both long term sustainability to the organisation and afford wider societal benefit. We are delighted to partner with Cardiff University Psychology Department and the Business School in developing this ground breaking initiative.

The NAS Advisory Group is fully supportive of this initiative with several regions considering referrals of a cohort of children. The Society is deeply grateful for the immense amount of work and energy that Dr Katherine Shelton from Cardiff University and Wendy Keidan, our new highly industrious Deputy Director invested in securing the highly prestigious KTP. Already, it has created the conditions for culture change: as one regional manager said, "It will be the first time both sectors have really work proactively together and trust one another."

Finally, I would like to thank all who have so generously support the work of the Society through covenants, gift aid and donations. St. David's relies on your generosity to help sustain our service, and remains ever grateful for your help. There are many challenges ahead but also some great opportunities. Our mission, to provide safe, loving families for children requiring adoption, remains as vibrant as ever. With your continued support, we look confidently towards the future.

Gerry Cooney

AFA Cymru has had a very busy year! We have been fully occupied in continuing to build our reputation and brand and have been working very hard to ensure we remain well informed and are at the centre of developments in permanency planning for children in Wales. We have done this by continuing to deliver some of the services provided by BAAF Cymru, such as the well respected legal bulletins produced by Sarah Coldrick, our legal advisor, but have also extended our portfolio to respond to exciting developments within the childcare sector such as the National Fostering Framework.

Of critical importance this year has been our involvement with Welsh Government's strategic planning and delivery. Following the May 2016 elections in Wales, Welsh Government's Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children Group changed status and became a Ministerial Advisory Group. This group is now a critical group mechanism by which Welsh Government develops and delivers its

improvement agenda across the permanency spectrum. As a member of the group, AFA Cymru has been well placed to keep abreast of the strategic planning agenda across the childcare sector. We have worked actively to contribute to the improvement agenda in Wales and to take this knowledge into our work as a Good Practice Hub. This knowledge has enabled us to deliver in depth training and consultancy on a range of issues pertinent to the needs of our colleagues working in the child care sector.

We have very much enjoyed working with the National Adoption Service over the past year on a number of exciting projects, including the production of a literature review on Life Story Work which is now forming the basis for the new approach to Life Journey Work for children. We have also worked with Voices from Care, which has been a real privilege and great fun and critically has enabled us to have the opportunity to meet young people and work with them on new service developments. We have also continued our partnership with CoramBaaf who assist us in providing an extensive membership offer to our members in Wales through their publications, best practice guides, newsletter, briefings and journals.

We were delighted to welcome Marianne Palin and Corina West into the AFA Cymru team last year who, alongside a dedicated small group of Associate Trainers, really bring additional specialism into our small but very dedicated staff team. None of our work would be possible without the excellent administrative support we receive from Val and Erina who not only keep us on track, but sane with their superb organisational skills.

As ever we would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who continues to embrace us into the wider family that is St. Davids. We very much look forward to another busy and successful year ahead!

Wendy Keidan, Deputy Director

Today's knowledge supporting tomorrow's families
Gwybodaeth heddiw yn cefnogi teuluoedd yfory

New Faces

My name is Cate. I am a new Social Worker to St David's having started here in March this year. Prior to this I was working in a child protection team in Bridgend and before that and prior to relocating to Cardiff, I worked as a fostering social worker in West Sussex. In relation to Adoption, that means I have experienced the Social worker role for each element of a child's journey into adoption! In my spare time I enjoy playing touch rugby, hiking and generally being outdoors. I love travelling, cooking, history and am as absorbed in Game of Thrones as everyone else seems to be. I have had such a warm welcome here that I am looking forward to working with St David's into the future and meeting families past, present and those still to come.



I started with St David's at the beginning of September as a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) Associate employed by Cardiff University. For the last 12 years I have worked mainly in the charity sector working directly with children, young people and families, in organisations including Barnardo's, Save the Children, Tros Gynnal Plant and Home Start. My experience includes family support work, delivering a variety of programmes to children and families and developing new support programmes for families. As a trained teacher I have worked in developing programmes which support families to engage in their children's learning and development. Most recently I worked with an alliance of 21 national voluntary organisations in Wales to develop the legislative, policy and resource frameworks to improve the lives of older people. This strategic role drew on my experience of collaborative and partnership working developing programmes across the sectors. This varied experience has supported me in my role as KTP Associate in which I will be supporting in the development of an approach which enables statutory and voluntary sectors to achieve shared outcomes for adopted children in Wales and create a highly effective support package for adopted children and families.

Adopting Together

In the year of our 75th Anniversary, St David's is really excited to inform you about a new initiative we have developed in partnership with the National Adoption Service and our other partners in the Voluntary Sector, such as Adoption UK. This initiative is designed to meet the needs of children who have waited a significant period of time for a family. These children include children over 5, brothers and sisters, and children with medical or other health concerns. They will all have had a very tough start in life. Often these children are labelled as 'hard to place' or 'damaged', but we know from many children we have placed over the years, living in a close family environment with lots of love, support and encouragement, these children really do thrive. Working closely with our colleagues in the Regions, Local Authorities, other Voluntary Sector partners as well as support from other specialists, such as Clinical Psychologists, we are confident that we can find the right family for each child referred to the project. We are also thrilled to be working with Cardiff University who, through a Knowledge Transfer Partnership, will be evaluating the impact of interventions for children and their families.

Wendy Keidan



happy 75th

Est. in 1942, St. David's Children Society is Wales' longest serving adoption agency

Achieving matches through Adoption Activity Days

St David's families will be aware that there are lots of different ways that matches occur. It may be via the Welsh Adoption Register, through publications such as Children Who Wait, from exchanging of profiles, from Exchange Day events and more recently through Link Maker.

What are Adoption Activity Days?

Adoption Activity Days have been taking place in England since BAAF (now Coram BAAF) first piloted the project in 2011. Over the years a few adopters from Welsh agencies, and also some Welsh children, have travelled to England to attend these events. In March 2017 Coram BAAF and the Welsh Adoption Register jointly hosted the first Adoption Activity Day here in Wales.

Adoption Activity Days are events that allow prospective adopters to directly meet children waiting to be adopted. The hope is that adopters will consider children, who if they simply just read about them from a profile, they may not have previously considered. 'Adoption Parties' have run continuously in the USA for the past 30 years or so, with lots of success. Activity Days in the UK have proved to be successful too, with Coram BAAF reporting that on average one in four children attending an event achieve a match as a result. Adoption Activity Days are also sometimes used as a place to have 'chemistry meetings' between adopters and children where a very tentative match has been identified.

What happens on the day?

Children attend with their foster carers and their social worker. The preparation of the children will very much depend on their age and understanding; foster carers and social workers are given guidance on how to prepare children for the event such as incorporating it into discussions around their Lifesitory work. They are told that it's one of many things their social worker is doing in order to find the right family for them. If a family isn't identified following the event, children are helped to understand that it was because there wasn't a family there that was right for them and their social worker will continue looking for them. For other children, who don't have the level of understanding to realise what the day is about, it's simply a party.

There is usually a theme, with children, adopters and event staff dressing up. There are lots of fun activities for the children to join in with and party food. Like with other parties, the children leave with a party bag or present. The emphasis is very much on the children having a fun day. Adopters are prepared by their social worker prior event; many adopters enjoy the day but it can be hugely emotional and quite daunting. At the event prospective adopters will receive some brief information on the children attending, they'll get to meet and play with the children and chat to the children's foster carer and social workers. At the end of the event the children return home with their foster carers and a note is made of which adopters wished to express an interest in which children. After the event it's back to the usual process of social workers exchanging paperwork and having lots of discussions, with hopefully a visit from the social worker to discuss the child/ren in more detail.

If you're going through an adoption assessment or are approved and waiting for a match, talk to your social worker about Adoption Activity Days!

For more information see <https://corambaaf.org.uk>.

Following the success of the first one, another Adoption Activity Day is being planned for 2018, and we'll keep you posted on this.



Our son has completed our family in the most beautiful way imaginable

When you make the initial call to enquire about adoption you have no idea of what awaits you. From our initial phone call, to our son being placed with us took over three years. People come to adoption for many reasons and you expect many things along the way to be difficult, but for us the hardest part was the waiting.

At the time of enquiry our birth daughter had just turned four years old and she was a part of our journey from the beginning. She met with Jodi our social worker and we had many discussions on what adoption meant and how it might affect her in an age appropriate way. It was difficult to explain the wait to her at that young age, when to her she wanted a brother tomorrow!

It is easy to become a little bit obsessed with ringing and emailing your social worker to ask for news, checking Linkmaker and the Children Who Wait newspaper and letting it crowd into everyday life. We had to find a balance between getting on with life with our daughter as well as making sure we kept up our reading and training so that when a match did come along we felt ready. In the meantime our daughter was getting older and our discussions became a lot deeper, so in some sense it was beneficial for her that she was actually 7 years old when our son came home as she had a much fuller understanding of the situation.

We did have a couple of matches in that time, but they fell through because it was felt that our family wasn't right for that particular child. It's immensely difficult to go through that at the time as you invest a lot of emotions in imagining that child with you, this part was also hard for our daughter as the child's social worker wants to make sure you have prepared your birth child and so they are also involved in these linking meetings. Though your instinct is to shield your birth child from disappointment, it is just not possible as they need to go through this journey with you too. I believe as a family unit we are all a lot closer and stronger together as a result.

I remember a time when we were all in tears when a match fell through, as for a while it had seemed it was all going to work out; once we were approved our social worker felt almost like a friend to us as they were so supportive to us throughout. We are glad that we trusted in the process and in the experience of our social worker to know what was right for us as when our son was linked to us, it was most definitely the perfect match.

Our son has been with us now for 9 months and it has been the best and worst of times adjusting to life as a family of four. Our daughter has been incredible and although it has been a difficult adjustment for her, the preparation and talking we did with her has paid off. They now have a pretty normal love/hate sibling relationship!

There are times in the adoption process where it feels like it has taken over your life as you are advised to not book any long holidays whilst waiting for a match and things like moving house, job or family bereavements (all of which happened to us) can also place delays on things. My advice to anyone waiting for a match would be to first and foremost, look after yourself. Concentrate your mind on your health and also on preparation. Read as much as you can, join social media support groups and if you can, book last minute weekend breaks away.

It is a very hard journey but it is worth every step. Our son has completed our family in the most beautiful way imaginable.

Free Resources for Schools

[HTTP://WWWINNERWORLDWORK.CO.UK](http://www.innerworldwork.co.uk)

Download these FREE handouts for your child or young person's teacher or trusted adult at school/college to help them understand your child in the school environment and subsequently improve their learning.

No Turning Back; Nor do I want to

Yesterday, our family waved goodbye to our children's social worker, Claire, for the last time. She had been with them since the beginning of their adoption journey. The term 'journey' is so very X-factor, but for once, it really does seem appropriate. Our children have been on a journey of epic proportions in their short lives and Claire has been with them for most of it. She was there when they were taken from their birth family and during their time with a foster family; when they first met us – their two Dads – a year later, and during our first year as a family together.

Two weeks ago the Adoption Orders were granted. Our children are now legally ours. No turning back.

As our children waved goodbye before running off to play, largely unaware of the significance of what was happening, my body was overwhelmed by racking sobs. Moments before, I'd watched as Claire quietly looked at them, taking them in for one last time. They were sitting next to each other on the floor laughing as they played together. It was, on the surface, entirely unremarkable; and yet, the fact that they were sitting together at all – concentrating, laughing happily – was remarkable. Through love, boundaries, playfulness and empathy, they have come such a long way within the space of two years.

It was Claire's cue to leave. Her job was done. We now continue the journey together as a family, for the rest of our lives.

Adopting isn't always easy. On the morning we went to pick the children up from their foster carers, I thought we'd made "the worst mistake of our lives", "the 'match' was all wrong", "we really couldn't do this" - or words to that effect, peppered with others that are unprintable. I wanted to turn back. The first three months after they moved in were the most challenging of our lives. Everybody said that adopting siblings would be really tough, and we nodded and smiled and said, yes, yes, we understand; and then they arrived and we nodded and cried and said, no, no, WE REALLY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. Another father told me during that time that though he always loves his children, there are times when he doesn't like them, and that's OK. I quietly thought, "oh dear, I don't like them but I really don't love them either. What do I do with that?"

But the love grew.

I still have those days when I swear. A lot (in private). When you adopt, there will be days when your child will push you to your limit and you feel like the worst parent on planet earth. There will be days when you want to scream, and days when your children scream whilst wondering why you're standing in the corner doing deep-breathing exercises in order not to scream back. As I said, it isn't always easy; but parenting itself isn't easy, and now we've made it through the first year we are encouraged that we must be doing something right because they are thriving. And the love? The love grows and grows....

Which is why there are those other moments, like the one I had yesterday when I sobbed, not because of the terror or the exasperation of it all, but simply because of the overwhelming love and pride I felt about how far our children had come, how we are part of that, and how we will continue to be part of that for the rest of our lives together.

No turning back; nor do I want to.



ADOPTION FACTS

69%

of children that St. David's placed last year were part of sibling groups

It seemed strange at first, being called Mum and Dad

Our adoption journey had begun with a massive false start and an extended wait as we sorted out a few things, so when things actually moved forward we were impatient to get on. We started 2017 newly approved, knowing that there was a possible match with a sibling group whose social worker we'd met at an Adoption Exchange Day; however, we quickly came down to earth with a bump!

In our first meeting of the year with our social worker, we were told that the children's needs were greater than we'd initially thought, that we wouldn't be moving ahead with the match and that there were no other potential links at the moment. We were totally deflated and wondered when we'd hear any news, so it was a massive relief when just over a week later we got a message asking if we had seen a sibling group on Link Maker. We had, we remembered them (they were gorgeous) and we wanted to know more. We read and reread their profiles every day and after a few more weeks we had met with their social worker and family finder, and it was agreed to move forward with the match.

Over the following months we met with the foster carers, paediatrician and teachers. The more we heard about "our" children as we were thinking of them, the more certain we were that this match was right for us and them. We knew there was going to be plenty to think about, the children would be losing contact with their older siblings and they had a close relationship with their carers after being with them for 18 months - a long time when you're 6, practically forever when you're 2 and a half.

As well as this new loss in the children's lives, there were their different experiences to consider: neglect and abuse, one child being scapegoated whilst another was heavily favoured. Hearing about these aspects of their lives was difficult but also made us more keen to get on with it. So we filled our time with finishing bedrooms and the garden, taking no end of photos of ourselves around the house with the toys we were going to give them, and making their books about us and their forever home.

Finally we got to matching panel which was a lot less stressful but a lot more emotional than we expected - tears from us and the panel, but we were approved! The decision was ratified and our final step before intros was to meet the children's older siblings. Knowing that they were going into long term foster placements and had been to their final contact with our children was tough but it was definitely worthwhile and our children are pleased that we "know" their big brother and sister.

Nothing can truly prepare you for the intensity of introductions. As helpful as the foster carers were, going into a stranger's house for hours every day is not easy or comfortable. We spent most time in their house in a small, very hot room and it was a relief when we moved on to the trips out part of the week.

It seemed strange at first being called mum and dad, and there were a few times when we had to remind each other - "that's you they're talking to". It was exhausting and draining, and that was in spite of it all going smoothly. If anything, that was a worry to us as it was all too easy, I remember sitting in the review meeting saying that we knew it could only go downhill - and we were right. The first few weeks seemed to consist of lots of crying (all of us) and refusing to eat (them). We quickly learnt that the change from a cot was not a good idea for our youngest, who on discovering she could get out of bed, spent the first evening doing just that, over and over and over again. A supermarket visit for a second bed guard the next morning sorted that out.

Other troubles haven't been so easy to deal with; the relationship between the two older siblings can be challenging, seeing them take pleasure in deliberately spoiling things for the other is hard and the competition between them is grating at times; one's seeming expectation and acceptance of poor treatment is upsetting and the teenager-like attitude of another's can be infuriating.

Add in tantrums that aren't always from the toddler, plenty of oppositional behaviour, lying, screaming and shouting, and the difficulty of one child in particular desperately missing her foster carers, and it's safe to say it's been hard work. But we know it could have been a lot worse and there have definitely been good times too. The children's enthusiasm for even the smallest of things can be contagious; the caring nature of one and the sense of humour of another are lovely, and moments when we're all able to have fun in the garden, play games and do puzzles or eat and talk together have kept us going. We're getting to share the little moments that we'd hoped for, like cwtching on the sofa to watch a DVD, reading stories together and going to the park (although if we never have to push another swing, that will be fine with us!)

We're lucky to have made some good friends through the different courses St Davids offer, and talking and messaging fellow adopters has been a godsend. It hasn't mattered that we're at different stages of the journey; they are there to moan to and share a laugh with. As good as our support network is, having people who are going through similar experiences to offload to is a great help.

As we head towards Christmas and the six month mark, we know that we are still in the early stages but we have gone from pretty much hating it and regretting ever hearing about adoption, then on to feeling like we've got visitors who overstayed their welcome, now to feeling like these children are ours. It's certainly not a fairy tale, in truth we don't always like our children but we're getting there with loving them and I can now say we wouldn't be parted from them. As we've told them, they are ours forever and we are (almost always) very happy about that.

85 Days...

85 days ago our home and lives changed completely FOREVER!!!! The rooms we had ready, the car seats we bought and the mountains of toys we had given to us by friends and family finally had little fingers to play with the toys, get sticky fingers all over the car windows & even nimbler fingers to pick the wall stickers off the bedroom wall in an arc the size of a 2 year olds reach. Our whole family has totally embraced its latest additions, from my 92yr old grandad to our 9 year old nephew, who wrapped up his own toy diggers to give as a birthday present to one of his new cousins. Our 20 year old daughter is totally adored by her 3 younger sisters who were 2, 3 & 5 only 85 days ago and are now so quickly older and, in their opinion, wiser. Some of the cute toddler phrases have already disappeared but we feel so lucky to have those early memories & are sure that conkers will forever be known as "wonkers", "toetats" formerly known as tattoos & "a car with a flat", also known as a campervan. But perhaps the most memorable comment was after a visit from their social worker we were all sat on the floor chatting about the visit, saying that one day soon we won't have a social worker & our gorgeous 5 year old, the thinker of the trio, screamed "Yay, you mean I really am staying forever!"

85 days is no time at all to learn each other's funny ways, and that goes for all of us – we are all still learning what makes things easier, how to calm conflict, who likes broccoli today when they didn't like it 3 days ago. We are all still learning though, and learning from each other every day, they share bits of their past with us in the same way we talk about things we did when we were small.

We were lucky enough to have our gorgeous girls at the beginning of summer so were able to spend hours playing in the garden, or at the allotment and just exploring. They love being outdoors so walking up a mountain in August all dressed as minions seemed like a fun thing to do. They were very keen on planning a holiday, something they had unfortunately never experienced before, so with a lot of planning and testing out the "party bags" (sleeping bags) we decided to give it a go. We put the tent up at home first and tried out the sleeping bags in their own beds, talked about what happened on a holiday (apparently you have a stick of rock and go to the beach!) We chose somewhere close enough that, if things weren't going as we had hoped, we could easily pack up and come home. We spent days picking what things they wanted to take from home and what things would be here when we came back – it's a good job we have an 8 seater mini-van!!!! We had more cuddly toys than Hamleys, Pop-Up Pirate, enough crafts to last the winter and enough bedtime stories an insomniac would struggle to get through..... Our thought was to let them choose the things they feel are important and made them feel relaxed at home – we read ONE story, didn't play dominoes or matching pairs once & poor old Pop-up Pirate stayed in his box! They adjusted so well to being away (it was only 2 nights in Brean) and if we hadn't been hit by a vomiting bug (not pleasant in a tent) the holiday would have been a roaring success. They had the best time ever and talk about it all of the time & are already planning the next holiday!!!!

So 85 days really isn't long but feels like a lifetime and its impossible to imagine life without our little ones now and in another 85 days we will have another big milestone – their first Christmas at home – we have planned already what we have for breakfast and we NEED candy canes on the tree & in the middle of august spent the evening singing Christmas songs – we think they wanted to make sure we knew the same ones as them ! We are sure the next 85 days will be as amazing and briefly challenging as the last but each one is a step closer to another big family event – but never as big as the one 85 DAYS AGO



What does it take to adopt three siblings?

We asked families who have adopted three siblings just what it takes to manage the needs of three children of different ages in an adoptive placement, here is what they said:

- Calm**
- Organised**
- Strong Support Networks**
- Multi-Tasking**
- Space in your home**
- Emotionally Robust**
- Ability to take a minimum of 12 months adoption leave**
- Active lifestyle**
- Patience**
- Relevant Childcare Experience**
- Insight into the practicalities of caring for three children**

If you would like to talk to us about adopting a large sibling group, please contact us on 02920 667 007 or info@stdavidscs.org

Cyndeliths Parent Deaf Care  David's Children Society

St. David's Children Society's Adopters Group

All adopters and their children are welcome to attend the above group after their assessment's Mid-Point Review.

The group meets on a quarterly basis on a Saturday morning/early afternoon and there is a crèche facility for the children which is staffed by Police checked workers.

The session also includes a communal lunch which is much enjoyed by all.

Over the last few months we have sent out invites to the group via e-mail with an attached letter rather than the Royal Mail. So watch out for an invite. The next session is on the **2nd December 2017**, which is the ever popular Christmas party with our favourite children's entertainer and Father Christmas.

Apart from the Christmas session, we arrange a speaker for adopters on a topic relevant to adoption. Most recently we had a presentation from a music therapist that really opened our eyes to the usefulness of music as a communication with the children. As well as being a lot of fun, the therapist highlighted how making music – maybe even shaking a rain maker, can empower a child, unleash their creativity and provide an outlet for their emotions.

Earlier in the year we also had presentations on indirect contact and from SNAP Cymru which provided those present with useful information and enabled people talk about their experiences.

In readiness for next year's sessions we already have our "thinking caps" on. We hope to have presentations from a therapist in CAMHS and on a separate occasion we hope that a play therapist will attend. I was also thinking of having a session on how children's understanding of adoption develops as they grow to include the impact of their early experiences.

We are always open to suggestions for topics from our adopters for the Adopters Group. It is great to see the networking that occurs between adopters attending the groups and the children report they have a good time in the crèche

Jane Smith



A few words about the Summer Celebration...

We love seeing you all at St David's Summer Celebration and the Christmas party as well as at our regular Support Groups, and really hope you enjoy them as much as we do. We are always open to suggestions of what we might change or improve on, so please get in touch if you have any.

We wanted to share with you something that was shared with us after this year's event by one of the parents:

I'm writing to say thank you to St Davids for the summer party.

This is the first time that I have taken my son to the summer event and it was fantastic! He has just been diagnosed with ADHD and sensory disorder (as well as attachment disorder).

The ADHD diagnosis wasn't exactly a surprise as I'd thought that he was for a while. Mind you now that I've researched it I've realised just how much it has been affecting his everyday life.

Anyway, the reason we loved the party so much was because everybody there was so laid back, they understood. Many times lately we've gone out to parties, soft plays etc. and he has struggled. The comments I've heard from other parents or the whispers and tuts about his behaviour have been horrible. What a difference on Saturday though! When he was waiting for his face painting, he struggled in the short queue. I had him do star jumps and instead of looks and whispers that we normally get, the parents next to us joined in!!

So, I just wanted to say that these events are worthwhile and please continue them.

Thank you for taking time to share this, and thank you to all you lovely people for being there – especially the star jumpers! - for helping this parent feel the way she did.

over 10 % of approved adopters from St. David's over the last 3 years come from same sex relationships

Other Useful Resources

What is FASD?

FASD is a series of preventable birth defects caused entirely by a woman drinking alcohol at any time during her pregnancy, often even before she knows that she is pregnant. Beer, wine, spirits - it's all the same to the developing baby.

FASD Wales Support Group

This group is run by Rachel and Team and meets at;

Taff Meadow Community Centre, (Old Reading Rooms), Broadway,
Pontypridd, CF37 1DB.

If you want to email Rachel beforehand, please do so at
rachelinsouthwales@gmail.com.

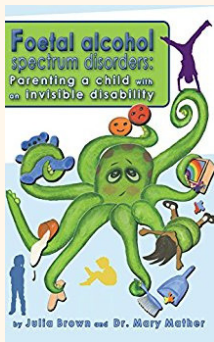
All meetings start at 11am and finish by 1pm.

All the family are welcome.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: Parenting a child with an invisible disability

by Mary Mather (Author), Julia Brown (Author), Liz O'Donnell (Illustrator)

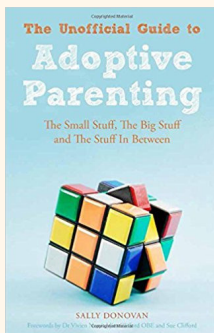
This unique book has been written for those parenting children / young people with FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders) by Dr Mary Mather, widely regarded as one of the UK's foremost medical experts on FASD and Julia Brown, CEO of The FASD Trust, the UK's leading charity in this field. Julia and her husband are parents of two children with FASD and she brings her practical, real life knowledge of strategies that are helpful on a daily basis, alongside Dr Mather's medical expertise explaining the reasons behind the child's behaviour and responses. Whilst this book is a must for any parent or carer with a child affected by FASD, it will also be of value to professionals particularly in social work, mental health and counselling / therapy who are supporting families affected by FASD.



The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting. (The Small Stuff, The Big Stuff and The Stuff in Between!) Sally Donovan, 2014

This is another book about adoptive parenting. Probably not the kind of parenting you hear about in training, or read about in text books, but the real stuff: dynamic, messy, baffling adoptive parenting, rooted in domestic life. Adoptive parent Sally Donovan combines her knowledge of trauma and attachment gleaned from training courses and therapeutic parenting experts with her lived experience of parenting two traumatised children and bridges the gap between the two. She offers realistic advice on how to be 'good enough' in the face of both day-to-day and more bewildering challenges responding to meltdowns, overcoming anxieties about changes to established routines and, most importantly, how to be a strong parent who can protect and nurture your adopt-ed child. This is another book about adoptive parenting, but it is unlike any other book you have read on adoptive parenting read it, weep, laugh and learn.

ISBN 978-1849055369





SNAP Cymru is a Welsh Charity that provides independent information, advice and support for parents, children and young people (0 – 25), who have additional learning needs. Their advice is impartial, honest and reliable and is provided through their All Wales helpline, website and specialist casework service.

Head Office: 10 Coopers Yard, Curran Road, Cardiff, CF10 5NB.

Tel: 029 20384868;

email: headoffice@snapcymru.org

www.snapcymru.org

adoptionuk
for every adoptive family

Adoption UK

www.adoptionuk.org

Don't forget that Adoption UK have loads of resources on their website about education and support with school including a downloadable booklet that you can give to the school called 'Getting it Right For Every Child'. Adoption UK also offers Inset training for teachers so this is something you might be able to encourage the school to think about as well.

St. David's Children Society Training

Remember that alongside our usual Workshops for prospective adopters, we also hold free training for adopters:

NVR - Non Violent Resistance was developed for families in which children and young people show aggression, violence and other harmful or self-destructive behaviours. Aimed at supporting parents and preventing the increasing social exclusion of vulnerable young people, the approach is now finding many more applications in areas such as severe anxiety, self-harm, internet misuse, self-isolation or the dependency of younger adults on their parents. The training is delivered by Jill Lubienski.

Secure Base - Secure Base is a model of caregiving in fostering and adoption that is based on theories of attachment and resilience while also drawing on child placement research. It provides a valuable framework and strengths-based approach for making sense of fostered and adopted children's needs and behaviours and sets out the dimensions of caregiving that can support children to thrive and to fulfil their potential. The training is delivered by Corina West.

Understanding Our Children - Understanding Our Children looks at the understanding of child and parent behaviours when there is appropriate attachment and bonding. It takes into account; the child, parenting capacity and the wider environment. The training is delivered by Professor Joan Hunt.

Theraplay based training - Theraplay is a child and family therapy for building and enhancing attachment, self-esteem, trust in others, and joyful engagement. It is based on the natural patterns of playful, healthy interaction between parent and child and is personal, physical, and fun. Theraplay interactions focus on four essential qualities found in parent-child relationships: Structure, Engagement, Nurture, and Challenge. The training is delivered by Kathryn and Marj Hawkins.



Training Dates:

Understanding Our Children

28th Feb - Cardiff

10th May - Abergavenny

NVR

30th Apr - Cardiff

9th Oct - TBC

Secure Base

24th Apr - Cardiff

13th Nov - TBC

Theraplay based training

15th Mar - Cardiff

27th Sep - TBC

If you would like to attend any of these course, please email Dan at: daniel@stdavidscs.org

Easy Peasy Slime Recipe by Maita, aged 5 and three quarters (written with a little help from Mummy)

This is a really easy slime recipe. There are lots of more fancy ones online that you can try if you are feeling adventurous, such as sparkly slime, balloon slime, glow in the dark slime and even slime you can eat using chews!

You'll need a little help from mummy or daddy depending on how old you are.

For this really easy slime you'll need:
120ml PVA glue

A medium sized mixing bowl,

Food colouring – whatever your favourite colour is,

A measuring jug,

60ml liquid starch – more on this later

A wooden spoon or similar

How to make the slime:

1. Poor the PVA glue into the mixing bowl
2. Add a few drops of food colouring
3. Slowly stir in the starch liquid a little at a time but leave some for later. It won't work if you add too much liquid too quickly
4. Once the mixture starts to get a bit firmer you then start to knead it, like you would knead bread. Add a little more of the starch liquid and keep kneading. It's ready when it's soft and stretchy slime!

Tips

My mummy really struggled to find liquid starch so we ordered laundry starch powder off amazon, we use 6 tablespoons of very warm water mixed with 12 teaspoons of starch powder until we get to about 60mls – it should look a bit like milk when it's made.

After kneading the mixture for a minute or two if it feels too sticky add a little more starch liquid, or if it's too firm and not stretching very well add a bit more glue – you can keep doing this until you get the perfect slime!

Store it in an air-tight container and it'll last a few weeks.

Mummy says to remind you that you can't eat this slime!



ST. DAVID'S CHILDREN SOCIETY
ADOPTION DROP IN SESSIONS
12NOON - 2PM TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ADOPTION, AND WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE ABOUT IT, WE OPEN OUR DOORS TWICE A WEEK FOR PEOPLE TO COME ALONG AND SPEAK TO ONE OF OUR EXPERIENCED MEMBERS OF STAFF. NO APPOINTMENT IS NEEDED, JUST POP ALONG AND WE WILL PUT THE KETTLE ON!

Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant  St David's Children Society

Fundraising

If you ventured in to Cardiff on Sunday 1st October, you may have been interrupted by 25,000 people running the Cardiff Half Marathon. Every year, over £2million is raised for charities at this event and it is a huge achievement for all those that take part. This year we had some of our adopters running and raising money for St. David's and we are extremely grateful for this. Over the calendar year there are plenty of events to take part in if you feel inspired to dig out your running shoes, jump on your bike, get baking or do something creative to raise money for St. David's. If you want to get in touch with us for a sponsorship form and even a St. David's T-shirt to train and race in, we will support you in any way we can.

Did you know that since 1981
more than £700m has been
raised for charity by runners
running the London
Marathon?

Are you taking part in a challenge and want
to raise money for St. David's?

If so, please contact us on:
info@stdavidscs.org



Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant  St David's Children Society

Newsletter Jokes 2017

What do you get on the beach with a witch?
A sandwich!

Where do cows go on a Saturday night?
To the MOOOOOOOOOOOOOooooooooooooooooooooooooovies

What did the hat say to the scarf?
You hang around and I'll go on ahead.

What's did one tomato say to the other tomato?
You go ahead and I'll ketchup.

What do you get if you cross a kangaroo with a sheep?
A woolly jumper!

What is a pirate's favourite shop...
AAAAAAAAAAAAArrrgos.

What is brown and sticky?
A stick!

Why did the banana go to the doctor?
Because he wasn't peeling well.

Why did the ice cream go to the doctor?
Because he wasn't lickin good.

What's the fastest cake in the world?
(you have to say the answer VERY quickly)
A scone!

What do ghosts eat?
Spook-hetti

@ info@stdavidscs.org

02920 667 007

28 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BA
Drop In Sessions Tuesdays and Thursdays 12-2

www.adoptionwales.org

Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant  St David's Children Society

NEXT YEAR'S NEWSLETTER

If you would like to
write an article for next
year, please contact
Helen on

HELEN@STDAVIDSCS.ORG

Thank you

