

Regional Managers End of Year Summary 2022- 23



Current Position

The service has had a busy year focusing on business as usual alongside the development of areas of work such as birth parent support and post adoption contact. Performance data still highlights some stark differences compared to previous years, although business appears to be returning to the performance seen in pre COVID years. The service has benefitted greatly from being able to recruit some adoption support staff from some generated income, they have made a huge impact in embedding areas of the good practise guide. The income generated enables the service to maintain these additional posts for a further 12 month period, however the financial pressures on the Local Authorities will mean that the use of such income may not be possible in future years. We were able to celebrate the work of the service when we hosted a Western Bay conference in July. It was well attended from staff from the Local authorities and enabled staff in the service to showcase their work. The service were also asked to present a workshop on Post Adoption contact at the recent CVAA conference in Cardiff which was attended by the VAA's from across the UK.

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





Children

Overall Summary of Children's Information

	2019/20	2020/21 COVID	2021/22	2022/23
Number of Referrals	153 BCBC 62 NPT 32 SC 59	129 BCBC 44 NPT 39 SC 46	118 BCBC 41 NPT 21 SC 56	115 BCBC 49 NPT 17 SC 48
Number of POG	63 BCBC 18 NPT 16 SC 29	69 BCBC 26 NPT 18 SC 25	34 BCBC 9 NPT 11 SC 14	51 BCBC 18 NPT 7 SC 26
Number of children matched	80 BCBC 22 NPT 22 SC 36	79 BCBC 23 NPT 19 SC 37	51 BCBC 15 NPT 14 SC 18	38 BCBC 8 NPT 7 SC 23
No of children placed	79 BCBC 20 NPT 21 SC 38	69 BCBC 20 NPT 17 SC 32	49 BCBC 17 NPT 14 SC 18	35 BCBC 11 NPT 5 SC 19





Children

Overall Summary of Children's Information Continued

	2019/20	2020/21 COVID	2021/22	2022/23
Of these children number of children placed with WBAS adopters	44	55	32	21
Of these children number placed via the Market Share Project			3	3
Of these children number of children placed with non regional adopters	35	14	14	11
Number of AOG	62 BCBC 17 NPT 14 SC 31	63 BCBC 20 NPT 13 SC 29	61 BCBC 16 NPT 15 SC 30	46 BCBC 17 NPT 10 SC 19

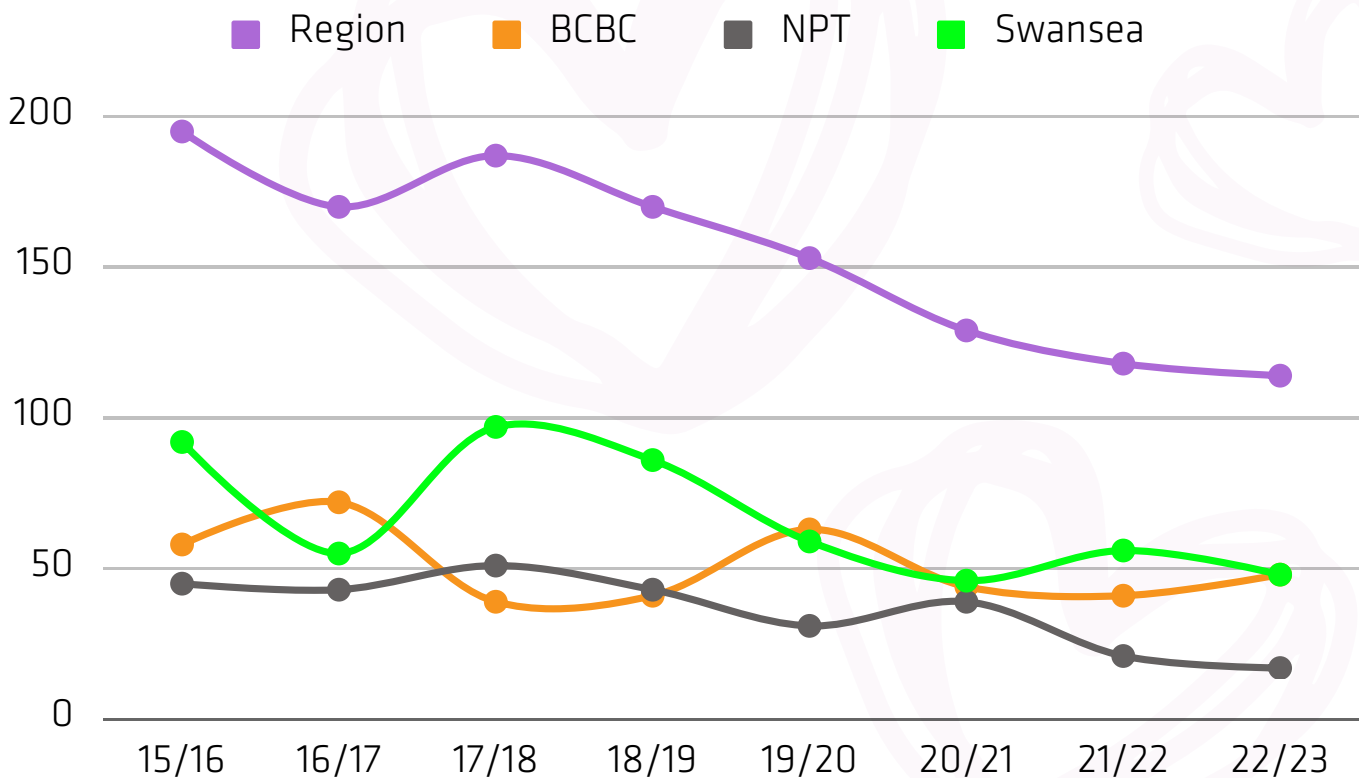




Referrals and Placement Orders

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

Referral for TwinTracking to WBAS each year:

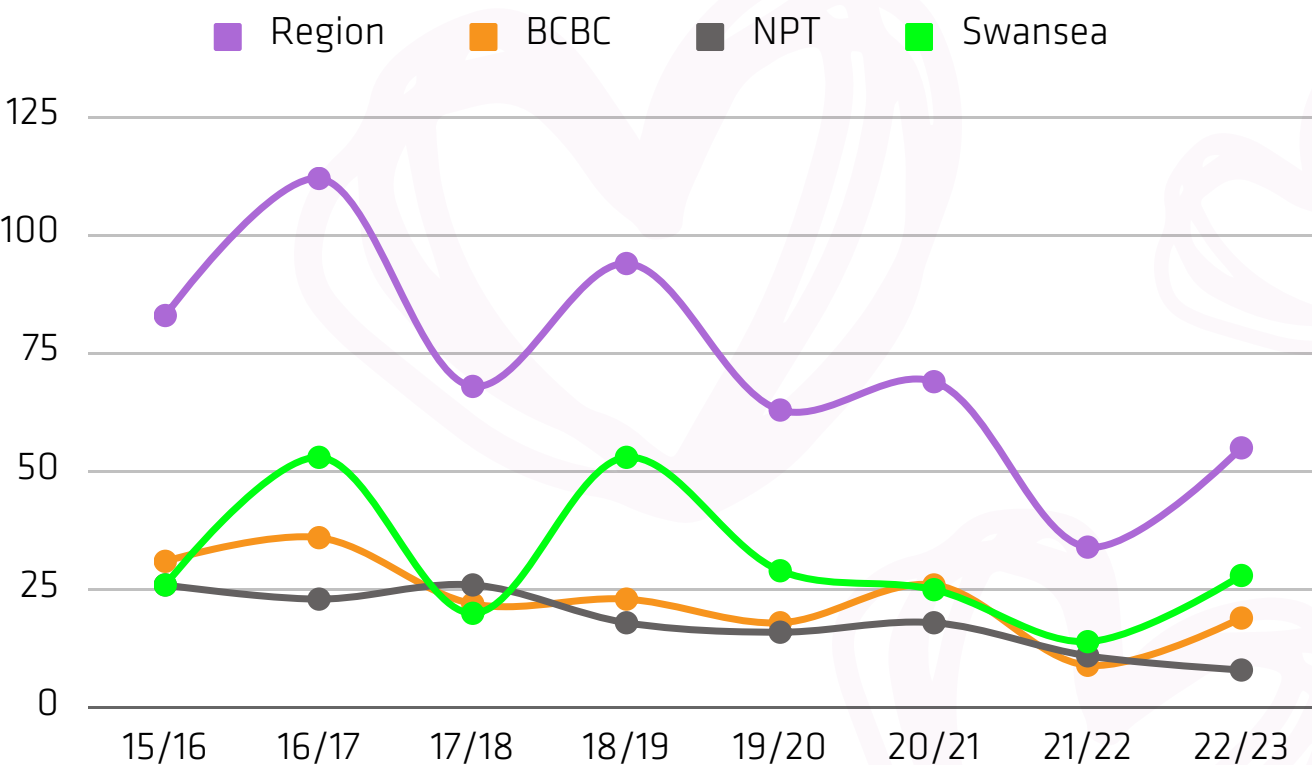




POG

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

POG Per Quarter Per Year

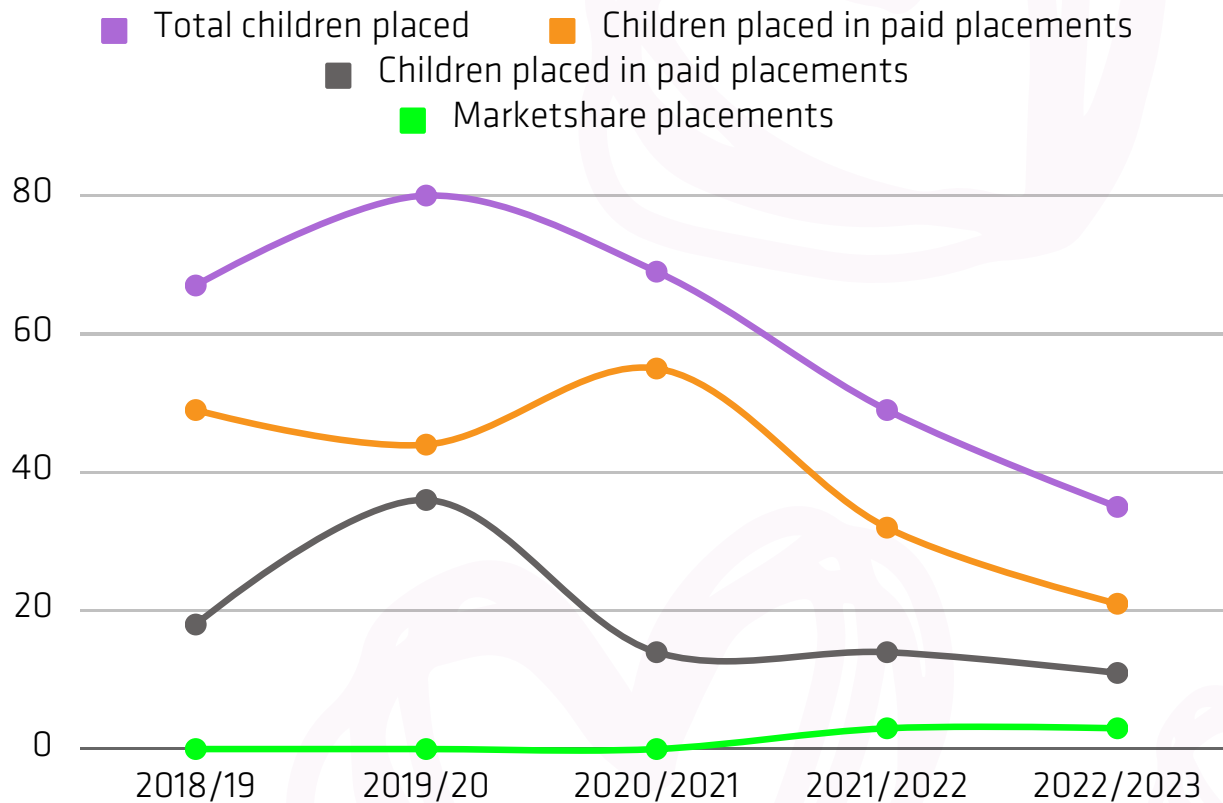


The reduction in referrals and POG has had a follow on effect in relation to the number of children placed for adoption. The children being referred are increasingly presenting with more complex health, genetic and developmental issues.





Children placed for adoption



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

Number of Adoption Order's granted

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





Disruptions & Breakdowns of Placement

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

Children Waiting

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

Birth parent adopter meetings

These meetings have been a focus for the service as when they have taken place the quality of the post adoption contact is vastly improved. Of the 35 children placed this year, 23 birth parents were offered meetings with the adopters. The parents of 12 children attended these meetings which were seen as hugely positive and beneficial to those involved, parents of 4 further children have agreed they would like to meet but have requested these meetings take place after the child is placed so these are in the pipeline.





Adopters

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

Enquiries and Adopter Approval

Enquiries are reduced on the previous 2 years (Covid years) and have returned to the levels that we saw pre covid. The service approved 31 adopters which is short of the target set but in line with the number of children that we saw with an agreed plan of adoption.

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





The reduction in children waiting and the steady flow of adopters being approved throughout the year has seen a high number of children waiting without a link. The number now stands at 25.

An audit of the 31 approved adopters at end of year March 2023 has been undertaken and the following identified:

	Number of families approved 2020-21 (53)	Number of Adoptive families approved 2021-22 (52)	Number of Adoptive Families Approved 2022-23 (31)
Bridgend	9	10	14
Swansea	25	22	7
Neath Port Talbot	8	11	4
Cardiff Area	7	5	2





	Number of families approved 2020-21 (53)	Number of Adoptive families approved 2021-22 (52)	Number of Adoptive Families Approved 2022-23 (31)
Carmarthenshire and Tenby	3	5	3
England	1	1	1

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

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

Non Agency referrals

Following an increase in referrals over the COVID years the number of non-agency referrals has now returned to previous levels. This year we have received 55 referrals. There is no longer a waiting list and the triage system in place allows inappropriate referrals to be screened out straight away.





GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
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Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE



Development of Adoption Support

Our families tell us how well supported they feel by our team around the family ethos. All our social workers are DDP and trauma recovery model trained, this is a therapy and parenting approach which enables children who have suffered trauma to form attachments. This in itself has made the biggest difference to our families who are struggling to parent traumatised children with attachment difficulties.

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

Some Key Developments in Adoption Support

Virtual Hub Consultations. Virtual hub runs fortnightly and give adoptive parents opportunity to meet with a therapeutic social worker and a therapist to talk through any difficulties they may be experiencing. The team are then able to offer support/assess adoption support needs and to refer parents into the appropriate resource within the service. All adopters attended confirmed that they felt more confident in managing the issues they brought to discuss following the consultation.

Outcomes for those who attended included signposting to other agencies such as SNAP, further discussions with school re the issues, referrals on to Pathway, referral for in house therapy, agreement to full adoption support assessment and referred on to the life-journey workshop and NVR course run by the service.





Adopters provided the following comments: "It feels like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders, I have been able to speak to people who get it".

BUSS - Building Underdeveloped Sensori Motor Systems Training. It has been recognised by research, and supported by WBAS observations, that children who have experienced developmental trauma have difficulties with their sensori motor systems. Since June 2021 all WBAS staff attend the Introduction to BUSS workshop as part of their induction enabling the Service to have a baseline understanding and common language around sensory motor difficulties resulting from early trauma. From May 2023 we will be running two 11 week BUSS group interventions in the gymnastics centre in Neath. One for 2-4 year olds and one for 4-6 year olds, the children identified for this intervention will attend with their adopted parents.

Schools training. 28 Schools have attended the workshop during the year, with 3 further onsite trainings undertaken.

Adopter and Birth Parent Reviews. In line with the recommendations of the Good Practise Guides adopter and birth parents check ins are being completed by the team. For the first year check-ins have been completed for adopters and Birth parents 3 years post AOG. This is a great way of identifying any early adoption support needs for adopters, children and birth parents.

Therapeutic Parenting Programme. All our adopters are encouraged to attend our therapeutic parenting programme. 27 families have attended the post 18 months therapeutic parenting course since September.

"I've loved the course. It's really been life changing.
Thanks so much."





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

Child and Young Person's work. The annual summer party and Christmas party were hugely successful with well over 100 families attending both events. The Adoption support workers are currently undertaking work on a one to one basis with 15 children. The youth group for 13+ started in September and has been a huge success particularly for previously hard to reach children. For most of the children who attend this is the first time they have successfully engaged in a group. 16 young people are engaged in the group.

Life-Journey Framework. In October/November 2022, the third year of the WBAS Life Journey Awards took place. Social Workers, Practice Support Workers, Foster Carers, Adopters and Birth Family Members were nominated and celebrated for the work they have done in helping a child/children to understand their journey to adoption. The winners were very pleased to be recognised for their work.

Birth Parent Support. Separate Groups now run in the 3 Local Authorities, once a month. A winter wellbeing event was arranged in December bringing Birth mothers from across the region together, 18 birth mothers attended. The session ended with a mindfulness exercise and Mums were provided with well-being bags to take home. Feedback after the event was positive:

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





Marketing

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



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



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

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

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



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





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



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This theme continued in early November with our presence at the TATA Steel Richard Burton 10K and Kevin Webber Mini Miller Race in the heart of our NPT community in Cwmavon. We gave out WBAS goodie bags to all children who attended the race with the help of the local scouts and Air Cadets and created an impact on the event which was attended and participated in by 1000's.



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

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

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



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





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



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



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

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



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



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





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

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



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

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

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



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





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



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

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

#TeamWBAS





Future Recommendations

Areas and priorities for future development for the rest of this year are:

One of the future hopes for our service is that we would be able to access respite for our adoptive families.

Re-modelling of the service to align with the available budget, a forward look at the service over the next 1, 3 and 5 years.

Further embedding of the GPG's

To increase the number of approved adopters to 40 next year.

To ensure a continued marketing focus in each of the LA areas

Further Implement the BUSS model of sensory processing and start the 10 week sensory course

Partnership with Foster Wales at local and regional level

High visibility at local and national events.

Review all Letterbox post 18. We will contact all adopters when their child reaches 17 to ask adopters and young person if they would like to continue letterbox post 18, this can continue until age 25.

Thanks for reading!

