



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

January 2021

Life Journey Work Newsletter



Introduction

The development and delivery of Life Journey Work has been a priority of the Adoption Support Framework since it started in 2016. This crucial element of adoption support work is fundamental for adopted children and young people and their families in assisting them to understand their 'stories' and begin and continue vital conversations about adoption.

This is the first edition of what we hope will become an annual Life Journey Work newsletter and has been developed as part of the work of a National Adoption Service Task and Finish group. The group made up of representatives from both the regional adoption services and Voluntary Adoption Agencies has provided good practice examples and resources for sharing across the sector. The main aim of the newsletter is to encourage, develop and share Life Journey Work 'good practice' across Wales and we would love to hear from anyone interested in providing information or examples to include in future editions.

Delivering Life Journey Work

We know that Life Journey Work needs to be delivered at an early stage in the adoption process. Adopters have provided feedback about how knowing about their child's early experiences is vital to helping them to understand how best to support their children. The timeliness of the work is measured at two points, and collected on a quarterly basis:

Measure 20a

This measures the number of children where life journey material has been provided by the time of the matching panel – here LJW is defined as:

- Draft later life letter; and
- Draft life story book.

Measure 20

This measures the number of children placed for adoption for whom life journey material has been provided to adopters by the time of the second adoption review – here LJW is defined as:

Preparation work – direct work using family trees, timelines, story books, ecomaps). This would go with the child at time of placement (reading a book about adoption e.g. nutmeg on its own wouldn't be life journey material) and the **Later Life Letter**.



Delivering Life Journey Work

Plus...

Life story material — a book or folder or digital record of information about child's birth family, reasons for being looked after and why adopted.

Or...

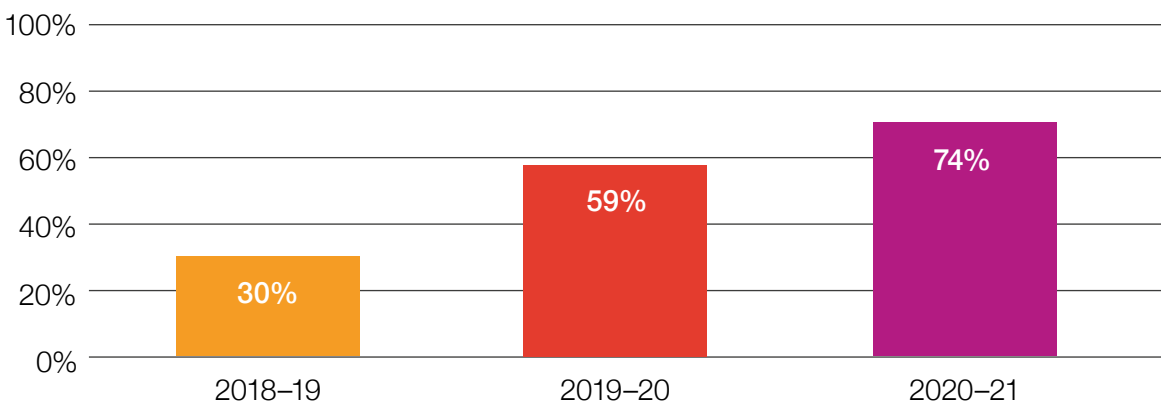
Life story work — product of direct work, often thought of as 'therapeutic' as a means telling the story of a child's life history to enable the child to understand their past. In the majority of cases this will involve direct work with the child, since even very young children can be involved in an age-appropriate way. This may include memory box, producing/building on a Life Story Book.

Other materials such as memory box, memorabilia on their own don't qualify as life journey materials if not set in a context of direct work (i.e. giving a child a box of photos shouldn't be considered as life journey material).

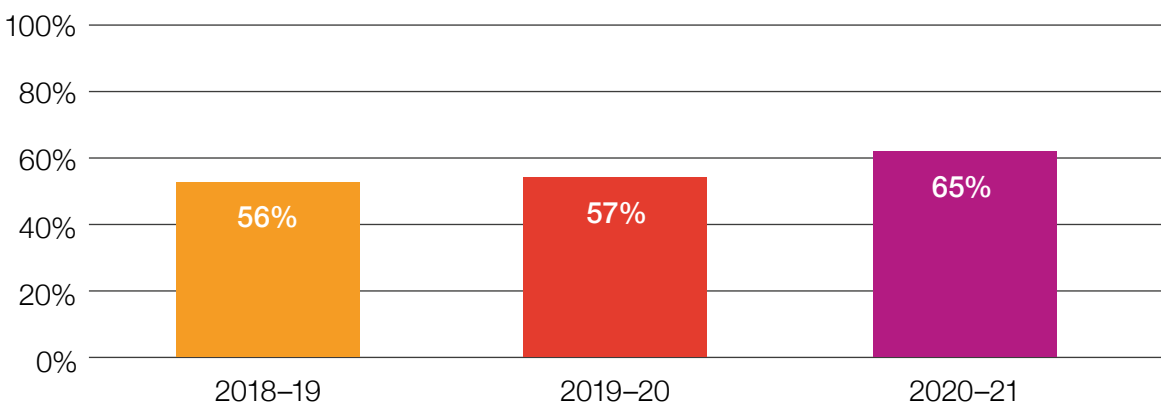
Delivering Life Journey Work

See charts below illustrating the improvements in timeliness over the past few years. Whilst more work is needed to ensure the quality of the material being provided, the increase in the number of children receiving this work is positive and we hope to see a further increase as we continue the support via the Adoption Support Framework.

Proportion of children who had their life journey materials at matching panel



Proportion of children who had their life journey materials at 2nd adoption review



Recommendations on Life Journey Work

People will be familiar with the Adoption Barometer report which in 2020 made the following recommendations with regard to Life Journey Work.

Enhance life story training and support

- ‘Life story work training to be built into preparation courses as part of a continuing programme of training and support that is designed to help adoptive families respond to the changing needs of their child or children as they grow.’
- ‘Governments to issue refreshed guidance and training about life story work to all agencies, including nationally agreed and monitored timescales for the delivery of life story materials’.

Provide life story support during teen years, in anticipation of contact

- ‘Local authorities and agencies to proactively offer all adoptive families support for life story work and birth family contact as children enter their teen years, in preparation for the possibility of direct contact outside of formal agreements’.



Refreshment of online resources – Life Journey Work Tool Kit

The LJW task and finish group has overseen the development of a Life Journey work 'toolkit' which is available on the NAS website for all social workers other professionals and adoptive families. It has recently been restructured in to a 'guide' format to make it more accessible. Below is a link into the archive to which new resources such as those shared in this newsletter can be added:-

adoptcymru.com/life-journey

Practitioner Tool for Life Journey Work: South East Wales Adoption Service

Developed by Raluca Miklovits

In January 2020, the tool 'My Story so Far' which is a practitioner tool for completing Life Journey Work (and which follows the NAS Life Journey Work framework) was given approval by Senior Management to be implemented across the Region and to be used widely by Social Workers.

This model is focussed on quality and based on a review of existing materials. It is not directive but rather provides timely prompts. The tool contains ten parts, each of these is relevant to different aspects in the life of a child who can no longer live with their birth family, came into foster care and was then placed with a "growing up" family.

The tool is very comprehensive and training has been rolled out across the five local authorities in the SEWAS region. Online training has been developed and is being delivered during the autumn.

The tool has been designed so that photographs can be kept separate if required as adopters had requested this as an option. The sections can be completed by different workers in collaboration or independently depending on the circumstances.

For access to the guide and toolkit please click [here](#).

The tools can be found by clicking on Life Journey Toolkit and then Guide for activities.

Checklist for Later Life Letter: Western Bay Adoption Service

This checklist is very comprehensive and can be used to help ensure that Later Life Letter is as informative as possible. We need some current examples of these letters for the online resource.

This 'template' provides a structure for Later Life Letters. More can be added but, all of the fields relate to issues / areas that have come up in adoption support enquiries where children and their adopters have 'missing' information.

The letter needs to be informative, concise and should not be a series of cut and pasted details from other documents.

Checklist for Later Life Letter

Introduce yourself and your role in relation to the child.	
Give reasons for writing the letter.	
Other key people involved with the child and any information from them e.g. foster carers, contact worker, previous social worker, birth parents and extended family etc.	
Acknowledge that this may be a difficult letter to read , they don't have to read it all at once, and they should have someone who they can talk to about the letter on hand.	
Refer to other reports that contain additional information and how they can access these (and at what age).	
If the family/background is complex include a family tree giving full names of extended family.	
<p>Remember what information children have said they want included in their life story information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why they couldn't stay with their birth family. • Details about their birth family. • Their life before they were adopted. • Where they were born. • If they had any brothers or sisters living somewhere else and why they were split up. • Whether they could make contact with their birth family. • Names – why given and meanings – identity. • Appearance and descriptions – affirms value. • Photos – recording history, family. • Memories of pets etc. <p>(Children need to know that coming into care/being adopted was not their fault).</p>	
Information about child's ethnicity, their birth family's culture, religion and sexuality – where parents came from and customs common to that culture.	
The hopes of the birth family for the child and how these hopes were addressed in the plan for the child.	
Description of birth parents – their physical characteristics, their personality, academic and employment history, interest and skills (be honest but avoid being negative).	
What support was offered by the extended family, Social Services, other agencies to keep child with the birth family?	
Information about the child's birth mother – full name, date and place of birth, ethnicity (as above), physical description, personality, style, attitudes, talents, her family background etc.	
Pregnancy and birth details – weight, length, any complications, breast or bottle fed etc.	
<p>The child's history</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different places where the child has lived – names of caregivers, addresses, dates, reasons for move. • Name of schools, nursery playgroup, names of teachers, friends school reports. • Milestones – first words, first tooth, first steps, when they learnt to read etc. • The child's particular characteristics e.g. the things the child used to say or do, activities, interest, favourite toys, books etc. 	

Checklist for Later Life Letter (Continued)

<p>Reasons why birth parents couldn't look after the child/Reason for adoption – different stages in the planning process and your role in this process and what happened before your involvement. Reasons for any delay. (Phrases that may have been sufficient in the Life Story Book now need to be explained further).</p>	
<p>Information about the child's birth father – (as above with mother) who has provided the information? Relationship with birth mother.</p>	
<p>Giving information about the birth parent's experiences in childhood and adolescence can aid understanding of why the parent did not learn good parenting skills, why they had low self-esteem, why they were vulnerable to forming relationships with violent partners etc.</p>	
<p>Provide details/explanations of birth parent's health conditions – consider if you need to say if this condition can be inherited or is this something that the adopters will tackle?</p>	
<p>If the child has a disability this may make them more vulnerable to feeling rejected or more likely to be bullied at school – it is important that the Later Life Letter clarifies that it was not their disability that led them to be adopted but parents lack of skill/confidence, support, inability to prioritise child's needs etc.</p>	
<p>Legal issues and court orders can either be included as the narrative develops or details can be attached as a separate section.</p>	
<p>Veto and willingness or not of birth parents to be contacted in the future.</p>	
<p>The date the adoption order was made, name of presiding judge and anecdotal information about what happened at the Court. Did birth parents challenge the making of the order?</p>	
<p>What options for permanence were considered?</p>	
<p>Where child is adopted by family/friend: The LLL needs to address changed relationships within the family.</p>	
<p>Contact arrangements and reasons for any changes during the process (information about this may illustrate that the child's birth parents were interested in them or illuminate other aspects of the birth parent's characters. Any anecdotal information from the contact worker(s)? Possibility of contact in the future?</p>	
<p>Information about siblings – names, D.O.B. why they were not placed together – describe the assessment of how children's needs could be met together or apart and what factors impacted on any plans for contact. Explain the term "sibling" or avoid its use and refer specifically to brother/half-brother etc. The LLL can include info about how the siblings are doing at the time of writing the letter – may help young person to feel more connected to them.</p>	
<p>Matching – why this specific family was chosen for the child – any specific wishes of birth family and child? What was the process for finding their adoptive family?</p>	
<p>Concluding the letter – where they can get support/access records. Comment on how much you have enjoyed knowing the child – recall any personal anecdotes. Good wishes for the future. See example below:</p>	

Adoption UK Cymru Online Training Programme



To book a course, please click on the Zoom link beneath the relevant course.

For further information, contact wales@adoptionuk.org.uk or telephone **0300 666 0006**.

Courses are suitable for adoptive parents, kinship carers, foster carers and social workers to attend alongside one another and are **FREE OF CHARGE**.

Life Journey Work Focus Group

This session will help de-mystify Life Journey Work and introduce the Wales National Adoption Service's Life Journey Work Good Practice Guide, Framework and Toolkit. These documents are available on the NAS website www.adoptcymru.com/life-journey.

An opportunity to ask all those niggling questions and hear some practical suggestions to help children understand their background and promote a positive sense of identity.

**Tuesday 9 March 2021
6:30-9pm**

[Register here](#)



Promoting the importance of Life Journey Work: Mid & West Wales Adoption Service

Developed by Sian Gibbon

In Spring 2020 the Adoption Mid & West Wales adoption service held the 'Your Life - Your Journey' competition for all adopted children and young people in Mid & West Wales. The 'Your Life-Your Journey' competition provided the children and young people from within the region an opportunity to tell us what Life Journey Work means to them and to share with us about their journeys to whom they've become today, what questions they asked and what they wanted to know to understand who they are.

The adoption service received a wonderful variety of entries which varied from stories, short films, songs, poems, drawings, paintings, and collages. The judging panel thoroughly enjoyed looking at each piece that was entered and had the difficult task of choosing 5 winners, who were rewarded for their winning entries. Congratulations to all the winners and well done to everyone who entered the competition.

Promoting the importance of Life Journey Work: Mid & West Wales Adoption Service

(continued)

During National Adoption Week 2020, the Adoption Mid & West Wales adoption service held their annual Life Journey Work Awards ceremony. The Life Journey Work awards recognises and rewards workers from within the Mid & West Wales region for their outstanding contribution towards Life Journey Work within the last year.

The Life Journey Worker Award was awarded to a worker from each of the four Local Authorities within the region, which are Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys. The Best Team Award was also awarded to a team from each of the four Local Authorities. The Special Recognition Award was awarded to the Adoption Support Workers from the adoption service for their remarkable contribution towards supporting adoptive families during COVID 19 pandemic. A new award was added the awards list this year, which was the 'Family's Choice Award', where families were be able to nominate a worker within the region who had supported and contributed towards the development of their child/ren's Life Journey Work.

Life Journey Project: Western Bay Adoption Service

Developed by Karen Williams.

Our aim is to significantly improve not only the number of children having life story materials at the time of placement for adoption but to also improve the quality of those materials and to enable and equip adopters to use them more effectively. We are by no means there yet, but are seeing improvements and have changed our infrastructure, processes and resources to achieve our aim. The project is resourced by one social worker (2 days a week) and one project worker (4 days a week).

Linking and Matching

When a child is linked with an adopter, the Western Bay adopter is also referred to the project. The matching process is expected to include consultation with the prospective adopters as to the working of the Life Story Book. This reflects research and our own enquiries, which show that where an adopter has been actively involved in the construction of the Life Story Book they are more inclined to use it. It also avoids the use of wording which they may struggle to use and provides opportunity to reinforce with adopters the importance and value of the child having a comprehensive narrative throughout their life of their own journey.

Placement Order

All children subject to a Placement Order are automatically referred to the LJP. They are allocated to one of the two workers and their social worker is contacted. This ensures each child has a nominated LJP worker and each social worker has a point of call for support. They are offered advice, guidance and support to provide a suitable life story and life story materials from the resources they have been collecting since the child was accommodated/referred for twin tracking. This is also an opportunity to assist in 'plugging gaps' and obtaining additional information if this has not already been done.

Life Journey Project: Western Bay Adoption Service

Referral for Twin Tracking

All children referred for twin tracking become 'eligible' for access to the LJP. As part of twin tracking, a referral planning meeting is held and at this meeting and in the preparation prior to this meeting, staff in the three local authorities are provided with the full suite of LJP documents (minimum standards, good practice, Life Story Book template/example). The quality assurance and action plan checklists are also shared at this point. Awareness of the LJP project is raised.

CAR 'B' Training

This is run monthly by the adoption service for social workers with children who are being twin tracked or with placement orders. Within this training there is reference to the role and function of the Life Journey Project (LJP). The CAR 'B' is also a vehicle for a strong narrative of the child's journey and this is reinforced in the training by using FAQ's from children (as adults accessing their files), case examples etc.

Monitoring

The LJP project contacts every adopter post placement to check they have the draft and in due course the final Life Story Book and Later Life Letter (we have set a local performance indicator of the first review). Where support is needed to add to the Life Story Book or Later Life Letter, the project team worker will assist. Adopters are also invited to access support, reading materials, one to one guidance and can access workshops which WB run periodically. There is an aim in the New Year to run more of these.

Should Be Placed

The family finders, guide and support the LA workers to ensure that the CAR 'B' used for the SBP recommendation has a strong narrative of the child's story. Where workers need additional support and advice, access can be made to the project early.

Life Journey Project: Western Bay Adoption Service

Matching Panel

It is expected that as a minimum, a draft Life Story Book (0-7 template) for each child and a draft Later Life Letter is presented. For children 3 years old and above there also the requirements to include a transition plan and evidence of any work that has been done to prepare the child for a potential move.

We have agreed across all three LA's that a Life Story Book for a child under 7 does not need to have extensive detail. To this end we have provided an age appropriate template to give guidance. Some workers will want to put in more detail, and whilst this is permitted, we have found and adopters have fed back that extensive detail makes the book unusable for the younger children. As a result, we produced a comprehensive Later Life Letter checklist and included throughout the CAR 'B' guidance opportunities to capture the detail that would have (in the past) been added to lengthy Life Story Books.

Performance

Whilst we are pleased with the improvements in quality and provision, we have a long way to go to ensuring all children have both a Later Life Letter and Life Story Book on placement and a final by the time of the adoption review. The referral for children and adopters is closed only when there is a satisfactory Life Story Book, Later Life Letter and adopters feel able to use both. Beyond the initial involvement. Adopters can come back at any time for additional advice, guidance and support and can access the workshops outlined above.



Useful Contacts

Below is a list of the Life Journey Work co-ordinators who are in post across Wales currently. It would be useful to know who to contact in your area if you need guidance, advice or have access to any training opportunities.

Mid and West Wales Adoption Service

Sian E Gibbon | SEGibbon@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

North Wales Adoption Service

Sarah Ryan | Sarah.Ryan@wrexham.gov.uk

South East Wales Adoption Service

Raluca Miklovits | Raluca.Miklovits@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Vale Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service

Michelle Hughes | michughes@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Western Bay Adoption Service

Josie Slee | j.slee@westernbayadoption.org /
Sarah Vaughn | s.vaughn@westernbayadoption.org

If you have developed anything new to help with good practice or know of any information on delivering life journey work please contact your adoption service representative above or the National Adoption Service Central Team on [**contact@adoptcymru.com**](mailto:contact@adoptcymru.com)