

National Fostering Framework

Final Report

2018 – 2021

National
Fostering
Framework

Fframwaith
Maethu
Cenedlaethol

Foreword

Dave Howes, ADSS Lead Director for Maethu Cymru – Foster Wales



Since taking over the role of lead director for the National Fostering Framework in 2019, it has been a privilege to be part of the programme and see first-hand the developments which have been achieved.

The progress made is considerable and it is thanks to the energy and commitment of dedicated staff from across the six fostering regions that we have reached this point.

The work programme over the final years of the NFF has been ambitious. The contents of this legacy report for the NFF will take the reader through the various elements which have been delivered and our plans for the future as we continue to strive to be the best that we can be across local authority fostering in Wales.

We now know much more about our fostering provision in Wales since the NFF performance data set was introduced in 2016 and further enhanced in 2019. All local authorities are striving to ensure accurate completion of this data return to drive strategic improvement.

We have a new national framework to support foster carers learning and development. Since the launch we have received considerable positive feedback, not least from foster carers themselves, on the difference that it is making.

Each of the fostering regions has dedicated resource both to support the national approach and to develop bespoke regional solutions to more local challenges. The relationships between staff and services which have been built locally, regionally, and nationally are a critical factor in the success to date. We remain committed to working together to achieve harmonisation where this will help improve outcomes for looked after children across Wales. Within this report we will hear about examples of good practice and further planned improvements from each of the regions.

As a nation, we have set best practice standards and will no doubt continue to identify more as we take forward our strategic programme under the banner of **Maethu Cymru – Foster Wales.**

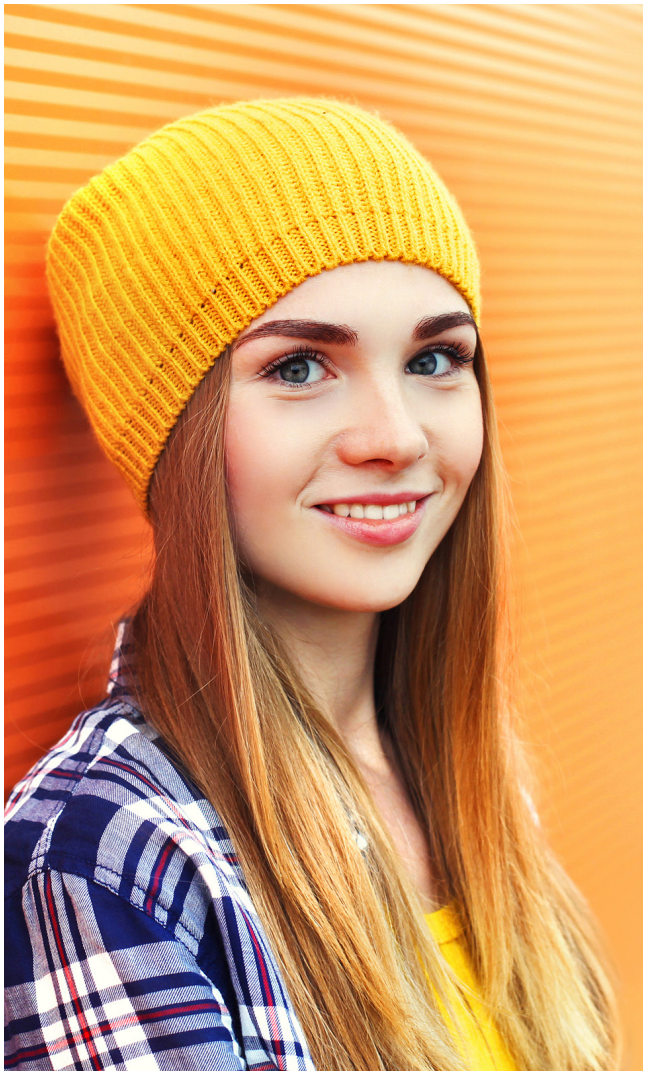
I would like to take the opportunity to thank every stakeholder who has been part of the National Fostering Framework and has helped to shape the future of fostering in Wales.



1. Introduction

Introduction

Developing a national framework for fostering services (NFF) was one of the major work strands of the work programme designed by the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group.



It was recognised that we need a system in Wales where every fostered child and young person is:

- provided with security and stability in their foster home
- helped to make and maintain relationships
- supported to stay until they are ready to leave
- helped to reach their potential.

Similarly, every foster carer deserves to be:

- respected as a professional child care colleague
- given all the information they need to care for each child properly
- be fully involved in decision making
- empowered to make appropriate day-to-day decisions concerning the children in their care.

The aims of the NFF were to:

- improve permanency planning for children and quality of placement provision
- develop a more cogent and compelling strategic intent for fostering services
- increase collaboration and co-operation by all key stakeholders
- devise sector-led improvements
- ensure greater transparency about the performance of fostering services and efficient use of resource areas
- recommend economies of scale, where appropriate, with a respect for localism
- build upon shared services planning and commissioning
- create and implement consistent use of best practice models for recruiting and supporting foster carers across all sectors
- ensure closer links to research and evaluation.

When work on the National Fostering Framework (NFF) began in 2015-16, it was anticipated that the programme would take at least five years, it has taken six and drew to a close in line with the MAG at the end of the period 20-21. Year One (2015-16) involved developing a First Thoughts Paper and extensive consultation with key stakeholders. Year Two (2016-17) involved scoping the overall shape and functional model for the NFF and further consultation about how it should operate. Year Three (2017-18) was seen as the first year of a three-year implementation programme.

Over the past three years from April 2018 – March 2021, the NFF has continued to deliver its Phase 3 Work Programme. The work has been overseen by the NFF Steering Group, with membership from all key stakeholders. In addition, a smaller executive Monitoring Group which has taken key decisions and ensured prudent expenditure of the £400,000 central resources supporting the programme. This was initially a grant from the Welsh Government but since 2017-18 has been provided by the Welsh Local Government Association. As in previous years, providing a public account of that work by means of this final report is seen as an important means for us to communicate what has been achieved, to describe the next steps and to take responsibility for implementing the Framework in accordance with our stated aims.

In this publication, the final report from the NFF, we will summarise the journey from 2015, highlighting the aims at the start of the programme and how they have been achieved, or continue to be under development. We will set out the accomplishments of local authorities and regions over the past few years and describe the plans for the future of fostering in Wales.

We would like to acknowledge and thank all of the organisations who have helped us to achieve our ambitious programme of work under the NFF collaboration, including those that made up the Strategic Steering Group.



2. The Team

Our extended network

Over the course of the last few years the team driving forward the NFF agenda has grown, and strong connections have been forged across every region in Wales.

The work continued to be overseen by the Strategic Steering Group (SSG) at a national level, this forum has benefitted from a wide range of stakeholders who have added value and held the NFF to account. They were enabled to do so thanks to the dedicated work of the Business Monitoring Group (BMG).

Business Monitoring Group	
Dave Howes	Director of Social Services Swansea and Lead Director NFF
Tanya Evans	Head of Childrens Services Blaenau Gwent & Lead HOCS NFF
Stewart Blythe	WLGA Policy Officer
Suzanne Griffiths	Director of Operations NAS, Strategic Lead NFF
Jason Baker	Deputy Director, St David's Children Society, Third sector representative
Sarah Thomas	Programme Manager

National Strategic Lead Suzanne Griffiths	Suzanne has afforded national strategic leadership across all elements of the project. She has held overall responsibility for oversight and progress.
National Programme Manager Sarah Thomas	Sarah is employed by AFA Cymru who were commissioned to provide programme management. Sarah has led on the operational delivery of the numerous National Fostering Framework workstreams, working closely with the Regional Development Managers (RDMs)
National Marketing Manager (Interim) Matt Clark	Matt is a brand and marketing consultant who has been working with the NFF team for the last couple of years and led the project to create our All-Wales Brand for Local Authority Fostering.

Regional Development Managers (RDMs)

Each region has appointed a manager to oversee the development of fostering provision in their region. We have six recognised regions in fostering. The primary functions of the RDMs are to:

- Hold overall responsibility for service development;
- Develop, review and action regional work programmes in line with national and regional priorities;
- Develop and maintain effective working relationships with staff in every LA fostering service across the region;
- Ensure effective engagement with all HOCS (or identified senior management) within the region, including systems for reporting updates, proposals and obtaining endorsement;
- Collaborate with other RDMs, RMOs (Regional Marketing Officer), the programme manager and relevant others to agree and deliver on the national work programme priorities;
- Lead on regional performance data collation, analysis, and reporting;
- Contribute to national performance data collection, analysis, and reporting; and
- Ensure effective systems for regional consultation, engagement and information sharing are in place

North Wales	Mel Panther (lead LA Gwynedd)
Mid and West Wales	Sue John Evans (lead LA Pembrokeshire)
West Glamorgan	Nicola England (lead LA Swansea)
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	Alastair Cope (lead LA Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Gwent	Nina Kemp-Jones (lead LA Blaenau Gwent)
Cardiff & The Vale of Glamorgan	Rob Hinds (lead LA Cardiff)



3. The Journey

The journey we've been on together

The section below provides a summary of what we set out to achieve and the progress made to date.

Vast consultation was undertaken at the start of the NFF journey, and it was from this that the recommendations and areas for development were identified.

To read more about our early development see the NFF Phase One, Two and Three Reports







National Performance Framework

What we set out to achieve	Achievements, outcomes and next steps
• Create a national performance and resource framework for fostering services • Support all 22 fostering services to collate annual performance management information • Improve monitoring of outcomes for children and young people looked after in fostering provision • Develop a culture of continuous improvement using the performance management information • Align the performance data collection to WCCIS	• Developed, reviewed, and updated a national performance and resource framework for fostering services • Produced 3 annual national and regional reports – 4th report in progress for years 19/20 – 20/21 • Make best use of performance information at a local and regional level to improve service delivery • Translate performance management information into regional work programmes • Work continues to align the data set to WCCIS

Harmonisation of Fees and Allowances for foster carers

What we set out to achieve	Achievements, outcomes and next steps
• Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers • Undertake a mapping exercise on the fees and allowances that foster carers receive in local authorities, independent providers (commercial and third sector) • Achieve greater consistency and transparency in relation to payments to foster carers • Devise a toolkit to enable services to embed the recommendations effectively	• Welsh Government funded a review of the National Minimum Allowances, they continue to explore the content and recommendations • The contents of a national foster carer finance policy has been scoped and work continues on this currently • An eligibility criteria, process and assessment template has been designed and endorsed • A toolkit, bringing all the above together, to support services with any changes and recommendations will be issued



Foster Carer Learning and Development

What we set out to achieve	Achievements, outcomes and next steps
• Develop a national training framework for foster carers • Ensure a shared and consistent understanding of the expectations for foster carers development • Develop a standardised national tool for supervising social workers to use when assessing and developing a foster carers professional development plan • Improve access to flexible and accessible delivery, measured in hours of learning and in line with messages from foster carers • Aligning the framework to the All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care	• The Post Approval Learning and Development Framework for Foster Carers was published in March 2019 • The framework is fully aligned to AWIFHSC • Regional and local launch events were held right across Wales • Implementation has been highly successful in all 22 LAs • The Personal Learning Record and Development Plan has been embedded across all 22 LA's, creating a consistent approach • A national review and audit of outcomes is scheduled

Recruitment and Retention of foster carers

What we set out to achieve	Achievements, outcomes and next steps
• Develop an 'All Wales' brand for Local Authority Foster Care • Develop a national marketing strategy and campaign to recruit more foster carers • Increase local authority capacity to assess and support foster carers • Establish national standards for the recruitment and assessment of local authority foster carers • Create capacity for a Marketing Manager to deliver the marketing strategy • Secure funding from WG via a business case • Harmonise the 'offer' to LA foster carers to build on retention	• 'Foster Wales' brand was collaboratively developed and launched in July 2021 • Brand book and asset creation completed • Campaign agency commissioned • National and Local websites were developed and launched in July 2021 • Best Practice Guide for the Recruitment of Foster Carers published May 2021 • Recruitment Needs Analysis and Strategy development is in progress • WG funding secured until 2023 • National Commitment (Core Offer) established and endorsed by all 22 LAs

Connected Persons / Kinship

What we set out to achieve	Achievements, outcomes and next steps
• Establish a consistent approach to the assessment and support of connected persons foster carers • Develop best practice models for: – Viability and full assessments – Training, information and support • Develop an all-Wales assessment template	• Good Practice Guide for the Assessment and Support of Kinship Foster Carers – published 2017 • A full review of the good practice guide will be undertaken to reflect regulatory changes and wider developments which continue to unfold • AFA Cymru are leading on the development of the All-Wales assessment template under the provision of the Special Interest Group (SIG) for Connect Person and SGO team managers





4. The Data

Messages from data

At the start of NFF journey one of the most significant pieces of work was the creation of the national performance data collection set for local authority fostering services.

The first year that this was collated from all 22 services was for the period 2016-2017 and it has continued every year since. The data set has been strengthened and further developed as a result of feedback from services, we now have a well-developed data set which assists services to accurately business plan and analyse performance.

Here are some of the most significant findings from the data, from our starting stats in 2016-17 to the comparative data from the latest returns received at the period ending March 2020.



+ 1,103

At the start of the journey in 2016 a total of 5,851 children were Looked After in Wales and by the end of March 2020 this had increased to 6,954. An increase of 1,103 children.



+ 463

The first data set in 2016 reported that Local Authority foster carers were caring for 2,142 children in mainstream provision and 858 children were being looked after by connected persons. The latest data set shows a small reduction in the number of children in our mainstream provision, this stands at 2,051, however the number of children cared for by connected persons has grown to 1,321 children.

The overall split of foster care provision at the start of the NFF showed that 72% of children were living with local authority foster carers, 23% of children were living with Commercial providers and 5% with The Third Sector (not for profit). At the end of the NFF the overall split stands at 73% of children living with local authority foster carers, 24% of children living with Commercial providers and 3% with The Third Sector (not for profit).



When the NFF commenced 1,255 children were cared for by foster carers approved by IFPs. The latest data shows that this has grown to 1,324 children living with foster carers approved by independent providers.

The majority of children living with Local Authority mainstream foster carers are living within their own local authority or a neighbouring LA. Less than 20 children have been cared for in a LA foster placement outside of Wales since the NFF data collection began. For children living with IFP foster carers the number placed outside of Wales has almost doubled from 35 children at the first data collection to 67 children at the end of March 2020.

For those children cared for by foster carers approved with IFPs in 2016, 532 were living locally, within their own LA and 688 were living outside of their LA but within Wales. In 2020 this had changed to 493 children living in their local area and 764 living with foster carers outside of their home LA but within Wales.

+ 410

Across Wales, at the start of the NFF programme, a total of just over 690 approved connected persons foster carers were fostering children. This number had grown to 1,100 by 2020. The number of new approvals made in connected persons fostering has grown from 282 in 2017 to 387 in March 2020. Connected persons fostering continues to generate significant demands on service capacity.

During 2016-2017 just over 2,000 families enquired to become mainstream local authority foster carers and from these enquiries 167 new households were approved. A loss of 207 fostering households were reported in the same period and therefore an overall net loss of 40 households was reported in the first data set return. In 2020, enquiries had dropped to 1,670, however these enquiries converted to 169 new households approved to foster. 193 fostering households were lost in the same year and therefore LAs collectively reported an overall net loss of 24 households.



The data sets received over the past 5 years do not indicate any changes in staffing or resources provided to LA fostering services on a national level.

A key finding from the NFF data returns from the past 5 years is the stark difference in respect of the location of placement provided. Of those children cared for by foster carers approved with independent commercial and third sector fostering providers at the end of March 2020, 5% were placed with carers who live outside of Wales, 58% were living with foster carers outside of their home local authority and only 37% of children remain living in their local area.

When comparing this to the location of children living with Local Authority approved Foster carers, 1% are living with foster carers who live outside of Wales, 15% of children are living with foster carers outside of their home LA but within Wales and 84% of children remain able to live with foster carers within their own local area. The greater the use of LA fostering provision the higher the likelihood of children remaining within their own area.

We know from listening to children and reviewing research findings that children who are able to live with foster carers in their own locality are more likely to thrive and to achieve their full potential. It is a core objective of all LAs to recruit more local authority foster carers to be able to provide children with the right foster carers, in the right location and to keep children at the centre of fostering provision in Wales.

KEY MESSAGES

Building our internal fostering provision is essential to continue to improve outcomes for children, this means shifting the balance of care and resourcing our fostering teams to enable growth and the ability to respond to demands. Exploring new ways to build alternative provision such as parent and child fostering, support breaks services and a focus on building a fostering workforce empowered to support reunification plans for children when it is safe to do so. The data shows key differences in the location of children's placements related to the provider, with children placed in local authority provision much more likely to be enabled to remain within their home authority. We must strive to maximise local placements in order for children to maintain important links.

Connected persons fostering provision has reported a net growth in demands year after year, we need to ensure that we have the capacity to respond to this growth or to consider alternative, effective ways to ensure that children can remain within connected person arrangements. Considering alternatives which support families to remain together outside of fostering arrangements needs further consideration. We also need to manage this important work in a way that does not impact on our ability to manage mainstream fostering provision effectively.

Mainstream fostering provision continues to report net loss in the total number of approved households. We must strive to improve the number of new enquiries, conversions and approvals made each year and retain our foster carers by providing the best retention offer and support services that we can.



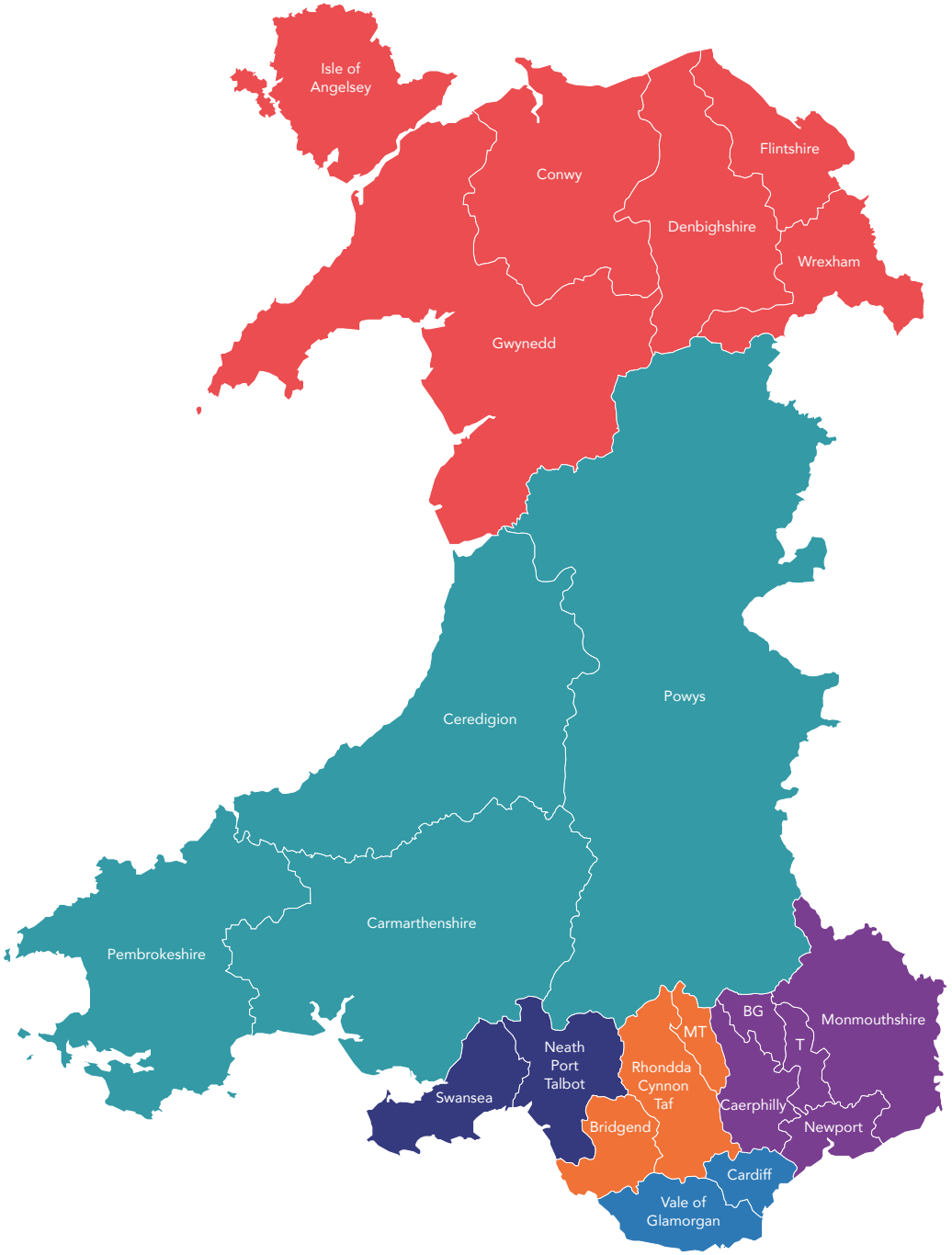


5. Regional Work Programmes

The regions

A major part of the NFF work programme has been the development of the regional approach to some aspects of fostering services. Wales has been divided into six regions, overseen by Regional Development Managers.

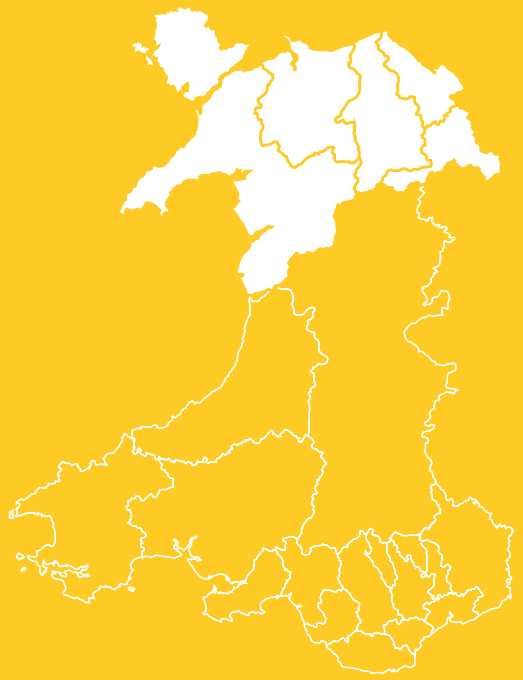
Region	Local Authorities
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire
Mid and West Wales	Ceredigion, Powys, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire
West Glamorgan	Swansea, Neath Port Talbot
Gwent	Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Newport, Caerphilly, Torfaen
CwmTaf Morgannwg	Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Bridgend
Cardiff and Vale	Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan



North Wales

Regional Report 2018 – 2021
Completed by Mel Panther

Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham



The region of North Wales covers the long stretch of the North Wales coastline from the edges of Pen Llyn in Gwynedd, the island of Ynys Mon, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire to the border county of Wrexham. There are large rural areas as well as substantial conurbations such as Bangor, Llangefni, Llandudno, Rhyl, Flint and Wrexham city.

The region shares a geographical footprint with the areas Safeguarding Board, the Judiciary, Cafcass Cymru, the Health Board, Police, Probation and the North Wales Adoption Service. We continue to build on a proven capacity and willingness to work together.

The region has worked hard to develop a North Wales approach to the sharing of information and good practice, further developing positive communication between the six local authorities. The monthly regional fostering managers meeting has proved pivotal in this development and has led to further regional groups being developed such as the shared agenda of the two dedicated family and friends' teams in the area as well as the regular meetings of the areas recruitment and retention personnel led by the regional marketing officer, who are instrumental in promoting the national as well as regional agenda. The regional development manager links between the various meetings, this then gives direct substance to the discussions held within the heads of service meetings and assists driving forward the workstreams.

North Wales continues to develop its consistent approach to meeting need regionally and to providing consistency of experience to its foster carers, applicant foster carers, panel members and other stakeholders.

The region has adopted the connected persons good practice guide as regional good practice and continues to develop its regional approach to the roll out of the post approval learning and development framework, this necessary redevelopment over the last year reflects the impact of non-contact/online learning and adjustment of learning delivery to an online platform.



GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM NORTH WALES



Flintshire Mockingbird Programme

The North Wales region is the only area in Wales to have an active Mockingbird programme. Flintshire local authority has led the way for Wales and after successful planning and recruitment, they are now supporting the growth of an excellent initiative in innovative fostering practice.

Flintshire has led the region in its piloting and now running of its Mockingbird programme, and this February has seen the launch of its 2nd Mockingbird constellation. They now have two constellations in place including 13 Fostering families supporting 14 children looked after, 4 young people in 'When I'm Ready' and 11 birth children.

Hub carer "For me personally, the benefits have been a warm and supportive group of like-minded to people, who helped me as much as I've helped them through this difficult period… It's been brilliant to be part of the first regional Mockingbird constellation. The peer support has been fantastic, and we are collectively getting so much out of this new way of working"

Another foster carer reflected on the difference mockingbird makes to the child in her care, "Mockingbird has been fantastic for her and really beneficial as has given her lots of opportunities to meet new people and improved her socialisation and communication which has improved her confidence"

Flintshire's hub carer and liaison social worker recently participated in The Fostering Network's Mockingbird Impact Conference as panellists including keynote speaker Vicky Ford (Minister for Children and Families). The region looks forward to sharing its success with several services identifying appropriate times in difficult circumstances to follow the agency lead.

Flintshire Mockingbird Programme

Mid & West

Regional Report 2018 – 2021
Completed by Sue John Evans

Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Powys



Mid and West Wales region encompasses Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys. The region covers a wide geographic area of Wales, which combines a mixture of isolated rural and urban populations. The region is mindful to consider the individual local authority identities as defined and influenced by differing cultural, social, political and economic needs. The regional footprint for fostering matches that of the adoption regional collaborative and the safeguarding board.

In December 2017 the region appointed a Regional Development Manager on a full-time seconded basis. The initial and continuing focus remains that of facilitating and establishing communication and engagement across the region and liaising with national forums to drive the changes as set out in the NFF agenda.

As a region our communicative working relationship relies on the sharing of ideas, practices and policies. We are becoming better at working together, which is evolving over time and evidenced in our solid commitment as four counties to support the identified objectives as set out in our regional work plan. Regional co-production can be clearly evidenced in the regularity of meetings which enable our shared values to inform the planning and delivery of regional fostering developments.

Our regional approach supports the development of an organic and systemic remodelling of fostering services to improve outcomes for children/young people in receipt of care across Mid and West Wales. Our regular regional working groups, include both meeting with the fostering team managers and fostering service managers. This helps drive the regional work programme as per the identified key work themes, to deliver quality, effective services, whilst managing resource challenges within the confines of budget demands.

As a region, one, of our key objectives over the past three years was to address our recruitment and marketing challenges, to attract and approve a more diverse range and number of foster carers to better achieve needs-led matching processes. The region wished to provide placement choice and further reduce the use of Independent/ Commercial Fostering Agencies and residential placements.

Our regional vision looks towards scoping a single Mid and West Wales Fostering Strategy; taking into consideration, the local and individualistic nuances of each county; the development and efficacy of a single overarching regional fostering strategy is to be further considered.

A challenge to be considered for the future: how can we better structure our fostering services to both prioritise our duty to respond to court directed childcare hearings for Connected Persons whilst simultaneously prioritising the need to equally assess and create new foster care resources to provide a range of mainstream foster care placements.

An addition of supplementary business and social work staff is required to support the work in its fullest sense. Increased investment would improve and support further regional development, to achieve any real, progressive change, as set out in the original NFF agenda.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE – MID AND WEST WALES

Pembrokeshire
FOSTER CARER PEER MENTOR ROLE

The purpose of a Peer Mentoring role is to provide an additional layer of support to foster carers, with the aim of developing the skill and understanding of newly approved and less experienced foster carers. This results in sustainable placements and improved outcomes for children whilst providing the mentors with an opportunity to expand upon their professional and personal development. The mentor's remit is to share their experience, offer support and talk through problems the mentee may be experiencing and ultimately, help the mentee problem-solve as they develop their practice. The Peer Mentor also provides encouragement and support to the mentee with regard to taking part in appropriate training and to take charge of their own personal development. A Peer Mentor can provide emotional support (supporting a mentee through allegations and providing out of hours advice for example), practical hands-on help as well as offering guidance when their mentee first has a placement or when a placement becomes particularly challenging. A Peer Mentor will assist foster carer mentees to identify appropriate goals and tasks and will support them in working towards achieving these.

A Peer Mentor is encouraged to maintain contact with the foster carer mentee on a monthly face to face basis at an agreed time and date. This is agreed at an initial introduction meeting between the Mentor and Mentee which is facilitated by the Peer Mentor Coordinator. In addition to this, contact by telephone/email/text is encouraged.

As well as promoting and participating actively in evaluating the peer mentoring scheme, Peer Mentors are also asked to:

i) Participate in the Skills to Foster training courses and other training as deemed appropriate, such as P&C training.

ii) Attend information sessions and other recruitment events

iii) Accompany foster carer mentees to training events and support groups

iv) Assist in recruitment of staff and foster carers

A Peer Mentor is an experienced foster carer who is deemed by the fostering service to have the skill set and appropriate qualities to support up to five foster carer mentees at any one time. Training and an induction is provided for Peer Mentors before they undertake the role, and the expectations of the role are made clear. Peer Mentors are encouraged to attend a quarterly mentor's support group and they are supported by their SSW as well as the Peer Mentoring scheme coordinator who offers the Peer Mentors formal supervision every six weeks. Peer Mentors are expected to comply with fostering service policies and procedure and in particular with regard to the confidentiality and recording policies relating to peer mentoring scheme. The Peer Mentor is financially remunerated for their time with a monthly payment.

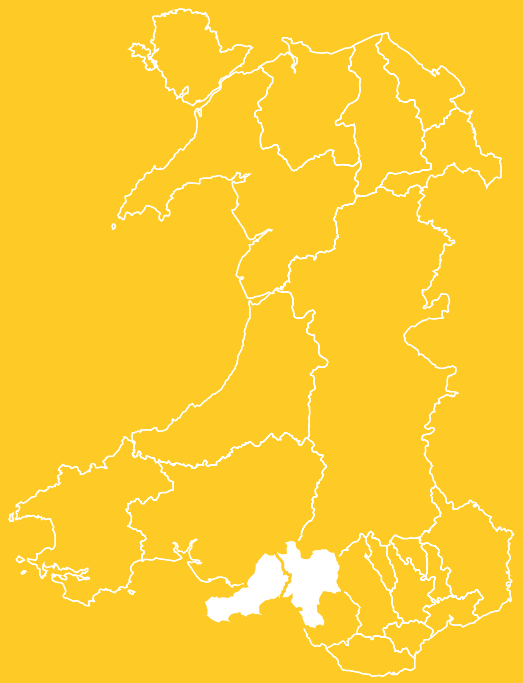
The regional vision looks towards developing fostering services built on regional consistency, best -practice and quality, whilst identifying local needs and nuances in developing a single approach model. This integrated approach, involves all stakeholders, and is inclusive of strategic, operational and practice stratum. We always recognise and value the important and demanding role of our foster carers; and through the provision of support services, including learning and development opportunities, work to retain our approved and experienced Foster and When I'm Ready (WIR) carers.



West Glamorgan

Regional Report 2018 – 2021
Completed by Nicola England

Neath Port Talbot, Swansea



The West Glamorgan region encompasses the Local Authorities of Neath Port Talbot (NPT) and Swansea, the region formerly named Western Bay included Bridgend Local Authority. In 2019 a decision was reached for Bridgend to join the Cwm Taf region which prompted Western Bay to be renamed West Glamorgan. The region is aligned to the Swansea Bay health board footprint. It differs from the adoption regional footprint as Bridgend's move is in respect of fostering only.

Swansea and NPT have different population size and demographics which can affect the needs and direction of each service. The LAs have worked together to improve opportunities for regional collaboration.

The current RDM commenced the role in June 2020 following a period of the post being vacant for 12 months. On commencement of the RDM role Covid-19 had gripped the nation. New methods of building relationships and networks needed to be identified, alongside the additional competing demands the pandemic created. Staff members across the region embraced the NFF agenda and worked together to implement changes through very testing and challenging times, which is evident in the progress made to date.

In November 2019, the NFF post approval learning and development framework launched at a regional event. Fostering service staff, senior management, panel members and foster carers attended. The launch was well received, and implementation of the framework has been embedded across the region. An e-learning course was devised by the region to support foster carers gain an understanding of the framework and to aid them adapt practice in line with the new requirements.

The personal learning record and development plan has been embedded into annual review and assessment processes, this will assist local fostering panels in making informed recommendations. The region will be undertaking a full review of the implementation.

In October 2020, West Glamorgan submitted a bid to the Fostering Network to lead the Independent, Advice and Mediation programme pilot, which is funded by Welsh Government. West Glamorgan were successful in securing the pilot and a full launch of this service took place in February 2021. A specific full time worker is now in place to undertake this role. The programme provides an extra level of support for foster carers and fostering staff. The purpose of the programme is to promote placement stability, increase co-production, support foster carer retention and reduce concerns and complaints.

NPT and Swansea fostering services meet regularly as a collaboration. A number of regional meetings are in place to allow services to communicate and look to each other for support, share good practice, recognising that as a collective, we are stronger and together we can build better outcomes for children across the authorities.

A regional task and finish group has been established to construct a regional Foster Carer handbook utilising co-production methods. Fostering services recognised that current handbooks required updating; the region agreed that this would be most beneficial as a regional collaboration. As part of this work, the region will be mapping current policies and procedures, where these are identified as requiring an update, consideration will be given for these to be revised as regional documents.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM WEST GLAMORGAN

Parent and Child fostering and community support

The local authorities in this region have worked together to improve the offer in respect of fostering placements for parent and child (PAC). The region is one of the only areas to run a community parent and child provision. This service utilises approved foster carers with experience of working with families to work alongside other professionals as part of the team around the child. It takes parent and child provision to a new level and is a great example of child focused practice and preventative service provision.

The region is exploring ways to increase the number of PAC foster carers and are often contacted to provide advice and guidance to other services looking to expand into this provision. The community parent and child support has demonstrated good outcomes and is proving an effective way to ensure that children can remain living with their families with the right support and access to services. Whilst also supporting the need to ensure sustainable service provision.

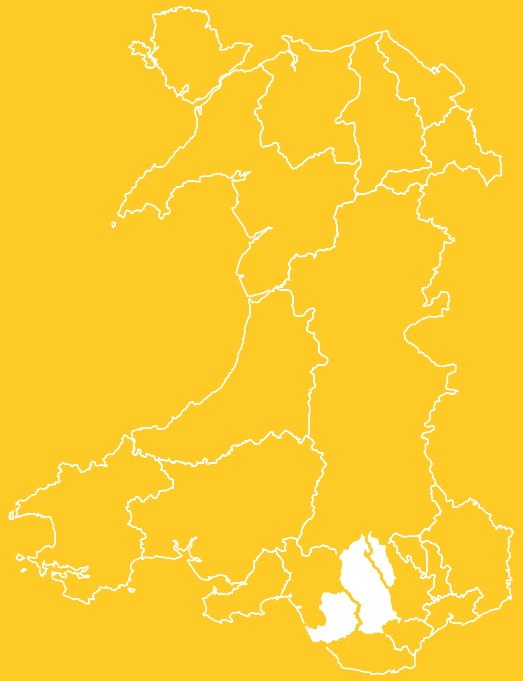
The region has recently launched a regional support group for parent and child foster carers. The group recognises the specialist role that these foster carers undertake and provides a forum for mutual peer support and reflection. This is a milestone for the region and they are proud to have come together to provide this shared support service to foster carers who have welcomed the opportunity.



Cwm Taf Morgannwg

Regional Report 2018 – 2021
Completed by Alastair Cope

Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf





The region of Cwm Taf Morgannwg is made up of three Local Authorities, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend. The region was formerly named Cwm Taf and made up of RCT and Merthyr Tydfil, however in April 2019 a change to the regional footprint meant that Bridgend left the Western Bay region and joined the Cwm Taf region to form Cwm Taf Morgannwg. The region is fully aligned to the footprint of the health board which covers this area. The adoption regional footprint does differ as Bridgend have remained with Neath Port Talbot and Swansea under the umbrella of Western Bay and for adoption Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil are joined by two other authorities.

The region appointed a full time Regional Development Manager in August 2018 in order to coordinate the development of the various NFF workstreams and the regional working group met Monthly initially.

The region has also focused on the implementation of the NFF National Learning and Development Framework for foster carers and a regional launch event took place in November 2019, with over 90 people in attendance including foster carers, supervising social workers, team managers and panel members.

Feedback was wholly positive from this event and in turn led to a regional learning and development working group to be formed in January 2020, consisting of supervising social workers and foster carers from all three local Authorities. This approach has ensured consistency of learning and development for all foster all foster carers across the region.

Cwm Taf Morgannwg has promoted a culture of sharing information and good practice. This has been led by the regional working group, involving heads of service and service managers. Consistent communication is also in existence between the RDM and the fostering Team Managers across all three LAs.

The scoping of a regional core offer for foster carers has been completed by the RDM and presented back to the Regional Strategic Group. The group unanimously agreed in favour of adopting the National Commitment in addition to agreeing where the region was aligned in terms of what it offers its' current foster carer cohort, this will provide consistency for those applying to become foster carers across the region and provide additional strength in the area of recruitment.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM CWM TAF MORGANNWG

Regional Front Door for Fostering Recruitment

In September 2018, following consultation with Heads of Service and Service Managers at the NFF regional working group it was decided that in order to work collaboratively on a regional basis, Fostering Services in both RCTCBC and MTCBC would benefit from the implementation of a regional front door to handle all fostering enquiries, process applications, coordinate the marketing function and support potential carers through the process.

The region has appointed a marketing officer and recruitment officer on a full-time basis that form a regional team responding to fostering enquiries in the Cwm Taf region, supported by a clear, long term marketing strategy.

By developing and implementing a marketing strategy that ensured we were continually campaigning and raising awareness of Local Authority foster care generally and specifically attracting people in Cwm Taf to consider whether they could become a foster carer for either Merthyr Tydfil or RCT.

From 1st April 2019, RCTCBC and MTCBC have been working in collaboration to operate a Regional Front Door for fostering recruitment. The team consists of a Regional Development Manager, Regional Recruitment Officer and Regional Communications and Marketing Officer. The recruitment team facilitates all enquiries, recruitment visits, marketing activity and initial visits up to the point of assessment. Once at the point of assessment the applicant is transferred over to the team manager responsible for fostering assessments in each LA.

The region is proud to report that they continue to meet all of the targets and good practice expectations set for recruitment activity nationally.

Since launching the front door the conversion rate from Initial Enquiry to the pre assessment Initial Visit screening has increased from 26.3% to 40.9%. This has been supported by a dedicated recruitment officer offering consistency throughout the new adapted process and being able to progress to home visit phase at a faster rate. There continues to have been a benefit to having a localised responsive service in place.

The conversion rate from initial enquiry to proceeding into full assessment has increased from 13.2% to 17.2%. The fact that the timescales for IV process have improved significantly, there are regular monitoring meetings between Recruitment Officer and Assessments Manager and having some capacity within the service to allocate Form F assessments to has assisted this improvement, alongside the development of an online skills to foster course.

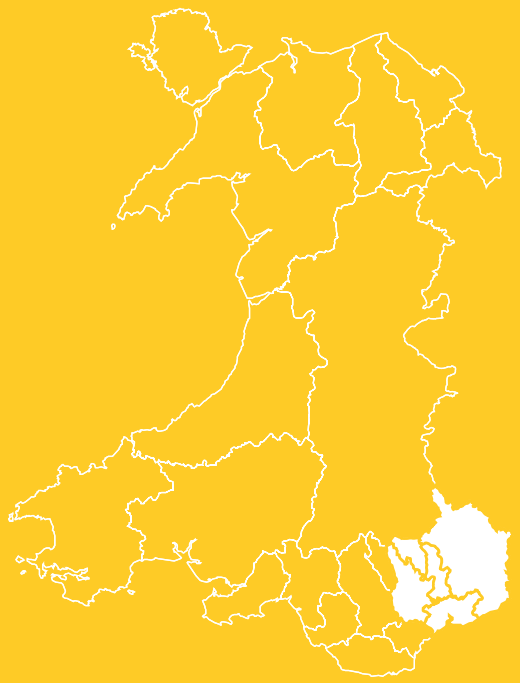
Response times from initial enquiry to both follow up recruitment call, initial visit and allocation of form F assessments have improved significantly than of the previous two years, this again can be attributed to applicants' availability in addition to dedicated staffing at the front door.

Plans are in place for further regional collaboration with BCBC who agreed to join the regional front door in March 2021, with the implementation work being undertaken currently. It is hoped this will build on the existing regional front door and exploration of regional campaigns will take place to share resources and attract new foster carers to all three Local Authorities.

Gwent

Regional Report 2018 – 2021
Completed by Nina Kemp-Jones

Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen



The region known as Gwent, covers 5 local authorities, each of differing size and demographics. The LAs are situated in close proximity to one another and geographically the region is small in comparison to other regions. The regional footprint is aligned to the Aneurin Bevan university health board, the Gwent police service, and the South East Wales adoption service.

The RDM has been in post in this region since 2017, Gwent were the first area to recognise the importance of this role and the region are fortunate enough to have maintained the same post holder for the duration.

A regular schedule of meetings between the RDM, the placement team managers, corporate communications, workforce development, performance managers, and regional heads of service are well established and progress implementation of the regional work programme, which is regularly updated and aligns to the national work programme.

The region has established a newsletter for staff, foster carers and stakeholders which helps to keep key people informed of developments as well as a continuing presence and link to the NFF and the RDM.

A regional recruitment and marketing group is well established and has met regularly since 2018 to develop regional approaches and campaigns to support the recruitment of foster carers, where we have had success in increasing the number of fostering enquiries.

A Recruitment Needs Analysis for each LA has been completed which reflects the current and predicted demand in line with the national rebranding work. Capacity and structure required within each LA to meet the anticipated demand is included.

The Learning and Development Framework was launched in Gwent at a regional event in November 2019. A regional foster carer agreement is in place and regional common core elements of supervision recordings have also been introduced as a result of feedback from the 2019 launch. The framework, including the personal learning record and development plan is becoming well embedded into services with feedback from annual reviews being provided to workforce development to plan for future learning needs. The RDM is currently undertaking a review of the Learning and Development Framework in practice.

The region is signed up to the National Commitment and work is actively ongoing to ensure that the expectations are fulfilled and enhanced.

As a region we have mapped all our fostering services policies, identifying which need to be updated and prioritising in line with the current regulations. We have worked on developing as many regional policies as possible. Services share new policies across the region for consistency and to avoid duplication and a regional handbook template for foster carers has been developed.

Gwent are leading the work to embed the Performance Information Data Collection into WCCIS and provide quality assurance to be able to report information to the highest standard.



GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM GWENT

Every child looked after/foster carer in Gwent has access to timely psychological/therapeutic input above that of mainstream services through the services outlined below.

My Support Team (MyST) – a trauma informed practice model

MyST is a child and adolescent mental health service commissioned by the Gwent Partnership Board and funded by Social Care, Health and Education. MyST works with children looked after with complex mental health needs who would otherwise be cared for in residential children's homes, secure units or mental health inpatient units. The service works very intensively 24/7 with young people and everyone in their ecosystem (including their family, friends, carers, school/college/employer, professional network) as well as offering consultation (practice and foster clinic), training and mental health resources.

The intensive wraparound service includes out of hours support (24/7, 365 days). An assessment of the child's psychological needs is undertaken which informs interventions. MyST have the flexibility of being creative in how they deliver intervention. There is no set time limit on intervention – this is reviewed regularly within the team and with the adult system.



Some of the values and principles that underpin the work of MyST are:

- It is usually best for young people to grow up in families and their local community rather than in institutions with staff teams.
- All young people can be understood in the context of their experiences, circumstances and development. Their presentation always has a logic.
- Adult systems around young people need to be healthy and well integrated to avoid further harm being done inadvertently through the care experience. So achieving and maintaining this is a key focus of our work.
- It is not useful to think of young people and families as 'not ready' for psychological work, but to bring psychological approaches to where they are at. All young people are capable of change given the right circumstances.
- It is usually best to work with young people to become more insightful, skilled and resilient in managing the challenges of their lives rather than removing them from these.
- It is vital to work in partnership with young people and families as experts in their own experiences and needs.
- Birth families usually have a vital and unique contribution to make to the lives of young people, which can usually be found and sits alongside safeguarding.
- Secure and consistent attachments, and a resilient healthy adult network of family, carers and professionals are the most important things we can provide to children looked after.
- This work takes time, perseverance and resilience to bounce back.

Gwent Attachment Service – a trauma informed practice model

- The Gwent Attachment Service (GAS) aims to support better outcomes for children and young people who have experienced early adversity and trauma across the region served by ABUHB. It is a flexible resource that offers an indirect model of intervention by training and upskilling professionals and frontline staff across Gwent who support such children and their families. As part of meeting theses aims GAS has designed a 6 module attachment training course for foster carers.
- GAS is supporting the Gwent in delivering the attachment modules by providing analysis of pre and post evaluation forms, enabling local 'tweaking' if needed, as well as opportunity to consideration further changes to the modules in better supporting foster carers and other professionals involved with children in care, so their attachment needs are better understood and support needs anticipated.

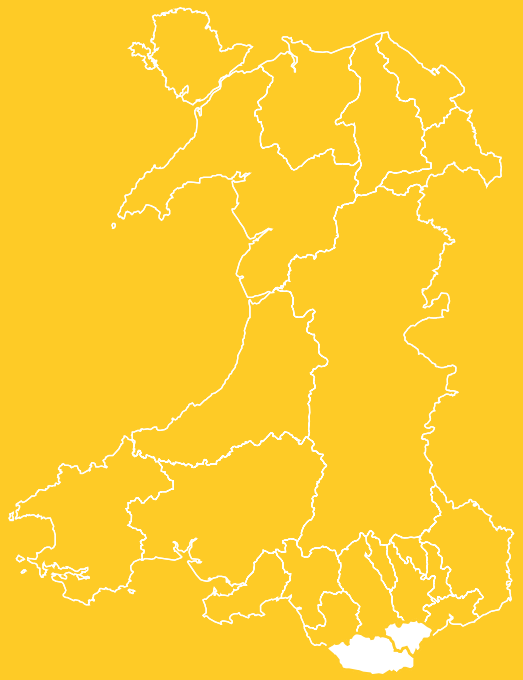
Some of the feedback from foster carers attending this learning is stated below:

- Learning how attachments work, the impact they can have on me as a carer and the child we look after. There are different techniques to use on different aged children too. It's about being there, present and available offering safety, love and being a sounding board and a constant in their life.
- It made me understand why the behaviour happens and what we can do better to help the individual
- It helped me understand why the placement I had was acting in the way she was. It helped me respond to her needs much better.

Cardiff & Vale

Regional Report 2018 – 2021
Completed by Rob Hinds

Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan



Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan are situated in the southeast corner of Wales, encompassing both city and coastal areas. The two LAs cover a small footprint, with significantly different population size and demographics. These differences can affect the needs and direction of each service. The LAs have worked together to improve opportunities for regional collaboration.

The footprint of this region is shared by the Local Health Board, the Regional Safeguarding Board and Regional Partnership Board. The Regional adoption collaborative does differ across this area, these LAs are situated with Vale, Valley and Cardiff (VVC) Adoption Service.

Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Region appointed a permanent Regional Development Manager (RDM) in November 2019. Since then, work has taken place to build productive relationships with managers and staff in the region, other RDMs and the NFF Programme Manager, taking forward the various work streams in a co-ordinated way within the region and contributing to national activity.

The region has collaborated in respect on ongoing recruitment developments and as a result of successful campaigns has seen a substantial increase in the number of enquiries being received. The region strives to dispel myths about who can foster: for example single people, or people from ethnic or LGBTQ+ backgrounds. Increasing the number and range of foster carers is a corporate priority of both Local Authorities.

The region is signed up to bringing the National Commitment to life, work is ongoing to identify any regional gaps with respect of the proposals, and to agree resources to fill those gaps.

In keeping with the principles and aspirations of the NFF, the region takes a strategic approach to ensuring where appropriate local children are placed locally. Each Local Authority emphasises the value placed on their respective cohorts of foster carers by holding "thank you" events.

Examples include exclusive, private access to Cardiff Winter Wonderland and recognition gift bags, including a thank you from Head of Service, to enable foster carers to feel rewarded and valued.

The region has seen a significant increase in the number of Connected Persons foster carers, and has a clear strategy of shifting the balance of care. Cardiff has made the decision to separate the service provided to Connected Persons carers from the mainstream Fostering Service, and provide appropriate resources to both teams to meet the increased demand.

The RDM has established and leads on a regional Operational Group which meets monthly to take forward work streams, develop collaborative opportunities, and share ideas, good practice experience. In addition, a Strategic Group, consisting of both Heads of Service, both Operational Managers and the RDM, meets monthly to set the priorities for the Operational Group, act as a form of governance, and monitor performance across the region. Both groups have gone some way to developing regional relationships and collaboration.

The Performance Framework now forms part of the performance reporting across both Local Authorities and the RDM has met with the performance teams and Operational Managers in each Local Authority to ensure consistency of interpretation and quality across the region. It must be noted that the two Local Authorities use different case management systems, and this makes completing and quality assuring the performance return across the region more complicated. Work has commenced in both Local Authorities to produce the data return automatically across the two systems.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM CARDIFF AND THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN

The region has worked together to build on the initial service developed by the Local Health Board. In May 2020 'Enfys' was launched thanks to the Health Board, Education Service, and Cardiff and The Vale of Glamorgan pooling resources to ensure the most robust support services were available to children looked after across the region.

The team offer support to foster carers and all staff working as part of the team around the child to ensure a shared understanding of needs, behaviours and how to support everyone to help the child. They place a great focus on therapeutic parenting techniques and provide essential insight into behaviours and best ways to support children to thrive.

The service prioritises working with children who have experienced developmental trauma and aim to support them to develop trusting and secure relationships with adults.

Part of the service offered by Enfys is a 'nurturing attachment' group. This is a 6 week programme to help foster carers to gain an understanding of child development, the importance of attachment and how good attachments are critical to enable children to develop healthy relationships. Feedback from participants has been very positive, enabling foster carers to put into practice their learning and make best use of techniques including PACE.

Enfys Support Services





6. The Future

Maethu Cymru-Foster Wales emerges

Over the past 5 years the opportunities and possibilities available to local authorities when they work as a collaborative have become stronger and clearer. Services are proud to demonstrate and share good practice, whilst building relationships to strengthen and unite in a central goal, to improve outcomes for children looked after in Wales.

The goals of the NFF have been partially or fully achieved and the new collaboration taking forward this ambitious work, focused on local authority fostering services, is Maethu Cymru – Foster Wales.

Foster Wales is the product of vast collaboration, consultation and testing by Welsh local authorities. All 22 LAs in Wales are proud to have seen it become a reality and are striving to work together to achieve its current goals, these include;

- Co-ordinating national and local foster care marketing and recruitment
- Managing and using the fostering National Performance Management framework
- Coordinating national retention initiatives such as the National Commitment
- National workforce improvement initiatives such as foster care Learning and Development
- Continuing work in respect of harmonisation of foster carer payments
- Promoting best practice standards and quality improvement across the sector

It was recommended during Phase Two of the NFF that it might be appropriate for its national or co-ordinating functions to be undertaken through a close working relationship with the existing central team of the National Adoption Service (NAS) Central Team. There have been increasing ties between the work undertaken by the two organisations, both strongly grounded in local government. Since then the Director of NAS and the central team has provided leadership, strategic support and enabling to the work of the NFF and Foster Wales as it emerged.

These proposals have been further developed and Foster Wales will be led through a new collaboration of the National Adoption Service and Foster Wales led by the current Director Suzanne Griffiths.

Foster Wales will also be supported with additional staff at national and regional level. This includes a National Marketing Manager and National Head of Foster Wales. At a regional level the Regional Development Managers will now be joined by Regional Marketing Officers.

National Marketing Manager	
Jill Jones	Jill is an experienced fostering service marketing officer having been in this role with Flintshire for a number of years and then taking on the role of Regional Marketing Officer for North Wales prior to being appointed to the national post.
Regional Marketing Officers (RMOs)	
Each region has appointed a marketing officer to oversee the co-ordination and delivery of all marketing activities, materials, and campaigns across the 6 regions. The RMOs work closely with all communications, marketing and recruitment teams in each Local Authority to bring the recruitment activity to life, update existing marketing materials, develop new dedicated fostering websites for each local authority, and create new local and regional marketing and recruitment campaigns using the new brand.	
North Wales	Jill Jones (Flintshire)
Mid and West Wales	Angie Moore (Pembrokeshire)
West Glamorgan	Jenny Owen (Swansea)
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	Rachel Crosby (Rhondda Cynon Taf)
Gwent	Amy Battrick (Blaenau Gwent)
Cardiff and Vale	Amy McArdle (Vale of Glamorgan)

Foster Wales was launched in July 2021 with the support of the Deputy Minister for Social Services Julie Morgan MS welcoming a foster carer, Sally, to her garden for a 'cuppa and chat' about the benefits of fostering with her local authority. Local authorities across Wales are proud of the achievement in bringing Foster Wales to life and appreciate the support provided by Ministers and the Welsh Government. We look forward to delivering on our ambitions for Foster Wales by working together to build better futures for local children.

Visit our website to find out more
fosterwales.gov.wales



