

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Gwaith dilynol ar Ymchwiliad y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i Wasanaethau Mabwysiadu yng Nghymru | Follow-up to Children, Young People and Education Committee's Inquiry into Adoption Services in Wales

AS 04

Ymateb gan : Darpar Riant

Response from : Prospective Adopter

Consultation questions

Overview Question

What are your views in the Welsh Government's progress in respect of the 16 recommendations and the 25 'detailed actions' set out on pages 5-11 of the [Committee's report](#).

I am a recently approved adoptive single parent currently awaiting a match with a child. I have never heard of, or been made aware that there is a National Adoption Service for Wales. I have dealt solely with my local agency (SEWAS) from initial contact, adopter training, through assessment and approval panel to date. If my local agency is operated by a National Adoption Service this is not something they have informed me of, and I have always had the impression that I am dealing only with SEWAS.

I am on the National Register for Wales, which I am aware has undergone changes in management recently because of the disbanding of BAAF. I note with concern the Assembly's plans in Recommendation 2 to strengthen links between local authorities and voluntary organisations in light of the recent collapse of BAAF. As I am fairly new to the world of adoption I find it difficult to comment on progress since the publication of this report in 2012, however, there are things in the Recommendations which I do not recognise as being the reality for adopters/prospective adopters, so I would suggest that progress has not been wholly successful.

Question 1

What are your views on the recruitment, assessment and preparation of adopter parents?

I did not respond to any specific recruitment campaign when applying to become an adoptive parent. It is always something I have been interested in, and I had reached a point where I wished to pursue this further. I found details about an Information Day for potential adopters on my local agency's website and decided to attend.

Having attended the information day and the first lot of training, I began my assessment with my allocated social worker. I am aware from discussions with other prospective adopters that the assessment process seems to be managed by individual social workers in different ways. While this is not necessarily a bad thing and enables the social worker to run the assessment according to the needs of the individual/s I found it odd that there seemed to be no standard way of carrying out the assessment procedure.

In hindsight I was not fully prepared for approval panel. I had pretty much been given the impression that if my social worker felt I was ready to be approved then this was a rubberstamping exercise. I was therefore completely devastated when the panel recommended deferral. While this decision was ultimately overturned, it led to some sleepless nights and a lot of stress. I cannot wholly lay the responsibility for this at the feet of my social worker. She has been doing her job for many years, and I was her first client to ever be deferred. She was upset as I was by the panel's recommendation. My entire experience of approval panel was that of a naughty schoolchild being sent to the head's office for a telling off. I felt patronised and undermined. I am personally dreading my next experience of panel, and in honesty, the experience made me think very hard about whether to even continue with adoption.

In terms of preparation for placement, it is difficult for me to say how well prepared I may or may not be as a child has not been placed with me as yet. I have conducted a lot of my own reading and attended some adoption courses of my own volition. This has led me to have many more questions about the matching process in particular, and did make me feel that I had been given the "happy ending" version of adoption. Talking to adopters online and on the courses I have been on makes me realise there are far more issues surrounding adoption than can be fully explained in the fairly limited time period afforded by the training provided by my agency. While my individual social worker did

attempt to fill some of those gaps, still gaps remain.

Personally I feel that many adopters are still being sold the “rainbows and unicorns” version of adoption without really being made aware of the huge difficulties that trauma and attachment can cause for adoptive children. For people who have waited years and endured a lot of heartache before deciding to adopt, this is really not fair. I am a grown up, it is okay to talk to me like one! Many of the adoptive parents I have spoken to have opened my eyes in terms of the realities I can expect to face. In many respects this is a good thing as I now feel more prepared about what questions to ask when a match comes, but had I not conducted my own research I feel that I would still be in the dark on a lot of this. Of course I may be over-prepared for the worst and I may be matched with a child who settles in easily and is a joy to be around from day one, but in terms of preparing for the worst I feel I have done a lot of this work on my own.

How could this be improved?

There needs to be a lot more in depth training preparing adopters for the daily reality of living with an adoptive child. If people are prepared for the worst then maybe fewer placements would disrupt.

In terms of recruitment, I was appalled by the recent Daily Mirror article essentially “advertising” a young girl for adoption.

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/little-girl-no-one-wants-6684099>

That article was printed during National Adoption Week, which this year had the message “Too old at 4?” and gave the impression that there are hundreds of children over the age of 4 awaiting a forever family. Given that I am approved for a child between the age of 4–6 years old and have been waiting since April 2015 for a potential match, a relatively short time compared to some, the fact that this national campaign gave such a misleading impression was shocking to me. I am aware of some local authorities currently refusing to recruit new adopters as they have so many awaiting a match, as adopters currently outweigh the numbers of available children. Some people are waiting years for a match, and those children who wait are generally in need of specialist care and attention, which most people are unable to provide (I include myself in that group). If there are to be national recruitment campaigns, consideration needs to be given to targeting the type of people who can provide this specialist care.

Question 2

What is your experience of and view of the matching process and support for the transition?

I am currently awaiting a match, and within my agency have been transferred to the Family Finding Team. This has meant being allocated a new social worker. While my new social worker is lovely and very supportive, I have felt at times as if I am being assessed again, as I have to get to know a new social worker from scratch. I spent months being assessed by my previous social worker and I felt we had a really good relationship and a great understanding of one another. I was confident that she would be able to find a good match for me, having such an in depth understanding of my personality and circumstances. To be transferred to a new social worker and start from nothing, for what I believe is the most vital step of the process, seems bizarre.

I have been told by my current social worker that there are currently no children who could be a possible match for me, both within agency and on the Wales Register. When I queried if possible matches were being sought further afield, e.g. in England I was shocked to discover that Welsh prospective adopters are not being considered for English children (and vice versa). I was advised that I would have to have a "good reason" to apply to be considered for inclusion on the English register. As my father is English and I have spent time living in England, it appears that I may have a "good reason" to be able to apply to go on the English Register. However, this does not seem to me to be in the best interests of those children awaiting adoption. Surely the best outcome is for them to be placed reasonably quickly, with a family who will love and care for them and are a good match, regardless of which side of the bridge they live on? I feel that this misplaced nationalism, from both sides, may be letting children down.

In addition, when discussing the various National Registers with my social worker, she told me in her experience, they were not always updated in a timely fashion and it was far more likely that I would be matched using inter-agency connections. My understanding of this was that the agencies are essentially bypassing the National Registers. This may be because of the proliferation of prospective adopters, that matches do not need to be sought from other agencies, but it can't be a good sign for future management.

How could this be improved?
“Cradle to grave” caseworkers to guide adopters through the process from start to finish. If there is a National Register, make sure that people are using it, otherwise it’s just a waste of time and money for everybody.

Question 3

Do you think there is sufficient information and support for children and young people including access to quality life–story work?
As I have not been placed I cannot provide personal experience of this.
How could this be improved?
See above

Question 4

What post–adoption support for children, young people and families (including from social services, education, health and mental health services) is available and what more could be done in this area?
As I have not been placed yet I cannot provide any personal experience of this
How could this be improved?
See above

Question 5

Are there any other issues you wish to draw to the Committee’s attention?
No