



Response
to Social

Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill. – Stage 1 consideration.

What is Adoption UK Wales?

Adoption UK is the only UK wide charity run by and for adoptive parents. The charity's aim is to help to make adoptions successful and to promote loving and supportive relationships between children and their adoptive parents.

Adoption UK is primarily a membership organisation for prospective adopters, adoptive parents and long-term foster carers (current membership of over 5,000 families). However, many of our services are available to practitioners, as well as other groups of carers/guardians, most notably our general information, training programmes and workshops and *Children Who Wait* magazine. Our services are unique in that they are informed by a wealth of adoptive parenting experience and are delivered by experienced adoptive parents; they include the following:

- Four National Telephone Helplines (one in each of the countries of the UK and taking around 5,000 calls per year from prospective adopters, adoptive parents and professional working with adopted families)
- Four offices with locally-based staff in each country of the UK who have knowledge of the devolved structures of education, health and different legal systems. The Wales office is in Cardiff and there are two part-time staff and currently eight especially trained volunteers coordinating support groups around Wales.
- A UK-wide network of local support groups (run by adoptive parent volunteer coordinators). Eight groups currently running in Wales with two more starting up this year.
- Buddy support schemes (linking experienced parents with new parents or parents in difficulty), and other peer support networks.

- A Parent Mentoring Project which was developed in Scotland and which will be rolled out across the UK over the next two years offering intensive support to families who are struggling.
- Lending libraries in each of the four countries with inter-country loans available.
- *Adoption Today* - a magazine for adoptive families and professionals in adoption (6 issues a year).
- *Children who Wait* – a family finding service using a magazine and an online service that features profiles of children waiting to be adopted.
- Online Community (c12,000 registered prospective adopters and adoptive parents).
- Publications and other information resources.
- Training programmes and workshops, including *It's A Piece of Cake?* which is a six day training course for adoptive parents independently evaluated by the Hadley Centre in Bristol which has been shown to increase the confidence of adoptive parents and increase their range of parenting strategies.

The Wales office was established in Cardiff in 2008 with support from a Children and Families Organisational Grant from the Welsh Government. No one knows how many adoptive families there are in Wales in total. However, based on an average of 234 adoptions per year over the past 10 years (some of which will be sibling groups) there will be at the very lowest estimate 4,000 adoptive families with children between 0 and 25 living in Wales currently.

Our members have access to all of our services, but they are also part of a community of adopters who have made the commitment to help and support each other, with understanding and without judgement. This unique community of adopters is our most important resource.

A member of the Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership in Wales, Adoption UK, along with BAAF, After Adoption, Barnardos and St.David's Children's Society is exploring how the voluntary sector can work alongside the statutory sector in Wales to deliver the positive outcomes for children that Welsh Government aspires to.

Response to Consultation Questions

General

1. We believe that there is the need for a Bill to provide for a single Act for Wales that brings together local authorities' and partners' duties and functions particularly in relation to adoption services. The situation at present means that the law is often used as a reason why adoption agencies in adjacent local authorities cannot join together effectively to deliver a single service to adopted children and their families. For example, adoption panels and inspection regulations for each adoption agency make it harder for joint action. We commented in some detail on the benefits that greater collaboration between local authorities and voluntary sector partners would bring to adopted children in our response to the initial consultation on the Social Services (Wales) Bill and we continue to feel that this is the case.

2. We also believe that the Bill should include a provision to remove the “reasonable punishment” defence in relation to assaults on children in Wales

We understand that the purpose of the Stage 1 scrutiny is to consider the aims and policy objectives of the Bill and whether the Bill, as drafted, is capable of achieving its aims/objectives. The Report following Stage 1 may contain a recommendation that the Assembly either agrees or does not agree the general principles, and can include recommendations for amendments to the Bill.

We believe that given the overall context and the overall aims of the Bill, the Stage 1 Report should recommend that a clause should be added to remove the “reasonable punishment” justification for common assault on children in Wales. The overall context includes the very clear human rights obligation to remove the defence and the long-term public commitment of successive Welsh Governments to do so (a commitment it also made to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child). The First Minister confirmed in October 2011, having taken legal advice, that the National Assembly now has the power to legislate to remove the defence and we understand that there is strong cross party support for this action.

Should you require any further information from Adoption UK please contact:

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