



## **Adult Adoptee Movement Response to the Welsh Government's Formal Apology for Forced Adoptions**

The Adult Adoptee Movement welcomes the Welsh Government's formal apology for the historic adoption practices that separated children from their families. On behalf of adult adoptees, we commend the government for acknowledging the harm caused by these practices and taking steps to address the lasting impact on adoptees, birth families, and adoptive families.

### **Adoption trauma**

We are concerned by the lack of understanding of the full adoptee experience and the general underplaying of the degree of trauma experienced by those of us taken from our mothers and sent to live with strangers.

Research has shown that the separation of an infant from its mother causes trauma and affects brain development. Babies learn to regulate their nervous system through contact with their biological mother before and after birth. This is integral to brain development and mental health. For adoptees taken at such a young age, there is no pre-trauma self or memory to provide a stable foundation.

Even now, adoption is rarely plan A and is commonly used to fill a hole for those suffering from infertility issues. Many adopters of the period were lied to, with the narrative of nurture over nature. Adoption did not guarantee a loving caring environment or, as we were so often told, 'a better life'. We got a different life, not necessarily a better one. As reported in the JCHR report many adoptees suffered a childhood of abuse at the hands of their adopters.

For adoptees, the trauma is compounded with carrying a burden of gratitude, if not explicitly by the adoptive family then by wider societal expectations. Many adoptees felt unable to express emotions or ask questions for fear of hurting others. While appreciation may be appropriate, adoptees should not have to perform gratitude in order to feel safe.

### **Closed adoption practice**

The Welsh Government recognises that forcing women to give up their babies was unethical, immoral, and perhaps even illegal. In no other circumstance is a person signed up to a contract that they have no right to revoke upon reaching the age of majority. It is a fundamental abuse of human rights.

The fundamental principles of closed adoption have not changed significantly. Birth certificates are still voided, medical records still sealed, and names still changed. There is little recognition that the act of adoption itself causes trauma and identity issues.



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### Guardianship

In this day and age, with so many blended families, it is not necessary to completely and permanently erase a child's identity. Adoption agencies still promote adoption with 'you can adopt', 'create your family', and other harmful slogans. We would like to see more focus on offering children and young people permanence through guardianship arrangements.

### Adoption agencies' conflicts of interest

If we are to truly learn from the mistakes of the past, the voices of adult adoptees are of critical importance. Those involved in past adoption practices, and those who represent adopters do not have the benefit of decades of lived experience. It is inappropriate for those who have always held the power and benefitted from adoption to be in control of new policy.

Many of the adoption agencies of today were complicit in the abhorrent practices and human rights violations of the past, and have yet to apologise for their role. Future counselling services must not be delivered or gate-kept by charities and agencies who are still arranging adoptions.

There is an acute conflict of interest and these organisations enjoy extremely limited trust amongst the adoptee community. Adoption survivors cannot be supported by those who facilitate today's adoptions. We would like to see training and counselling services delivered by those who are independent of the adoption industry.

### Thank you

We would like to extend our thanks to the Movement for an Adoption Apology for their tireless campaigning, which has taken an emotional and physical toll. We would also like to acknowledge the cross-party support in the Senedd for this apology, and for recognising that forced adoptions were unethical, immoral, and an abuse of the human rights of both the birth parents and adoptees.

While we recognise that an apology cannot undo the pain and trauma caused by past policies and practices, it is a crucial step towards acknowledging the harm inflicted and ensuring that such injustices are not repeated in the future. We hope that this apology will be followed by concrete actions to support adoptees and their families, including access to records and support services.

The Adult Adoptee Movement stands in solidarity with adoptees and their families in Wales and around the world, and we will continue to advocate for their rights and wellbeing. We urge other governments and institutions to follow the Welsh Government's lead in acknowledging the harm caused by past adoption practices and taking steps towards healing and reconciliation.