Children and Young People Service
CONNECT
Gwasanaeth Plant a Phobl Ifanc

NEWSLETTER

For adopted young people, by adopted young people

2
Jan 2022

A note from the authors - CONNECT Voices 14+

CONNECT Voices is a youth council that helps support young adopted people to get their voices heard. Each month we come together to share experiences, make friends and have fun with a community we can relate to. The meetings are full of fun activities where everyone feels included and safe. It's run by supportive Youth Workers, who make the environment feel comfortable and calm.

We are creating this interactive newsletter, to reach more adopted young people, like you, to help you feel more connected to your community and to feel empowered, supported and heard. So sorry this is so wordy - but there is so much to share!

If you want to join us email wales@adoptionuk.org.uk, but you do not need to join if you don't feel up to it - you could always just email us your thoughts!

Adios- L, Zoe, C, Green, Hetty, K



Suzanne Griffiths
Director of Operations
National Adoption Service (NAS)



Ann Bell
Director Wales
Adoption UK

Interview with CONNECT Voices 18+

What is CONNECT Voices?

We aim to influence authority with our (and your) voice and to make things better for the next generation of adopted people. It connects us all together, provides a safe space where we won't be judged and makes us feel less alone.

What kind of things do you?

- We discuss our lives, have a chit chat then we get down to business,
- We are setting up training that t help us get all of our voices out there – public speaking, confidence and project management
- Meeting with potential partners to try and get money to help with our vision for better support for adopted children and adults
- We meet with influencers (the political kind not the social media kind!), like Suzanne and Ann who you can see in our last meeting to the left
- We are designing a website to help people who aren't confident enough to come to the groups so they will have a place where they can feel supported and not judged
- We keep in contact with adoption support agencies to keep our knowledge up to date
- We take part in research, interviews and we interview people
- We have recently invited Suzanne Griffiths (Director of NAS) to come to meet us
- We are organising a residential and other events
- We contribute our own experiences and listen to those of others

How long has the CONNECT Voices been going?

We started as a social group in April 2020 (during Lockdown1) and we started talking about adoption issues. However some people didn't want to talk about this, so we started a new group which became CONNECT Voices in December 2020. We started exploring those thoughts and feelings by designing a website - which will be published soon.

Why are you part of the council?

"I was applying to be an Ambassador, then got invited to Connected and then fell into CONNECT Voices. It is rewarding for me to know my experiences (which were difficult) can help others. I have made great friends and I know I am not alone. I am very grateful that young people have got a voice through CONNECT Voices. Its rewarding to help others and to speak out and get their voices heard." E

What advice would you give someone thinking about joining?

Not everybody can put themselves through it, speaking about their lives and their experiences but know your experiences are real and ok and if young people feel they would like to come and feel ready, I'm sure they will make great friends and find it rewarding.
If you can't come to the group, you can have your voice heard by emailing us and we will represent your views in any work we do.

An interview with a Connected member

In Connected we do stuff we enjoy – some of the sessions I've joined were rock painting, macrame, cooking ramen and vegan spaghetti bolognese.

Connected in North Wales has been running since January 2021, we were meeting fortnightly on Zoom and now monthly in person.

I enjoy Connected because I can relate to others. I know my boundaries which is important as adopted people can get triggered by past experiences and by sharing experiences. But here we are made to feel safe.

Tips for new starters:

- No tips needed because we become a bunch of friends, and would love to meet you!
- Be brave and go along and stick with it for a while
- We have things we share about being adopted, look after yourself & only share what you want to
- Have fun 🙂

I was really nervous before starting, I was crying and shaking but by my third session I got used to it. Now I am really enjoying it.



Vegetable sushi making



Plate decorating



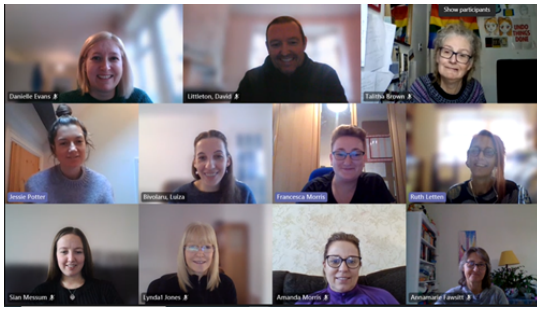
Bouldering for the December trip



Evaluating a session during snack time

An update from the CONNECT Collaboration

Do you know, four times a year, people who work with adopted children and/or young people in Wales come together to discuss how they can support you? It includes workers from 5 adoption regions and Adoption UK. This is called the CONNECT Collaboration. Do you recognise any faces in the screenshot?



In the future we will be sharing updates from the collaboration. This includes the adoption regions using this space to let you know about the opportunities they have for you in your area eg, activities and family days.

Meet the staff - Connected South East Wales



Hi, I am Fran Morris, my pronouns are she or they, I'm Connected's Lead Youth Worker who covers all of South Wales, and the Wales - wide 18+ Connected group, I also work on both adoption young persons youth councils - CONNECT Voices 14+ and 18+.

Some people call me a nerd, but I don't think I know enough, maybe we can have a conversation and you can decide! When I get the chance I love exploring new places, going on long walks and playing my double bass or curling up with my cats, Sonic and Caru or my snake, Geoff. Dw i'n dygsu Cymraeg, felly dw i'n deall ychydig.

I am a qualified Youth Worker and before coming to Connected I previously ran many youth clubs including a LGBTQ+ group, a group for young people with additional needs, disabilities, and/or Autism and managed a training program for young people, Youth Workers and the public.



Hello, I'm Jessie and my pronouns are she/her. I work for Connected as the Children and Young person Support worker in South and South East Wales. I work part time for Adoption UK with Connected helping to run the monthly youth sessions, which I really enjoy! In my other job I work as a Creative Youth Worker, where I run a weekly art club, textiles course and a LGBTQ+ group.

When I'm not working with young people, I love to spend time being creative and making art. One of my biggest passions is textiles and I love sewing, weaving, embroidery and print making! I also love being in nature, growing veggies, camping and going on hikes. I am hoping to adopt a dog soon, so I have a furry friend to take on adventures!



Hi I'm Dave (he/him). I work for South East Wales Adoption Service, and have helped Fran and Jessie get the new SEW area Connected group up and running. I have been working for SEWAS for 3 years now, as their TESSA Coordinator in the Adoption Support team. Before this job I worked in lots of different roles with children and young people, so it's nice to be able to work with Connected and do creative fun things again.

Away from work you would be most likely to find me out in the countryside with my daughter's rescue dog Chunk. I also love cooking and mushrooms are my favourite food! I'm also a football fan, however my team Carlisle United are really quite rubbish at the moment. One of my aims for 2022 is to learn some Welsh, so if you meet me, please teach me a few words.

Did you say 'Oh! You're adopted...'

This is an opinion piece by CONNECT Voices 14+ and may not reflect the opinions or views of any partners

What do you think about 'adopted' jokes? Do you think we need to make people aware of how this makes us feel? How do you think we can do this? We think they are not funny nor creative! This song is what we've heard in schools and how the insults lack creativity: "your mum, your dad, the ones you never had, you're adopted".

Most adopted young people we have spoken to have experienced bullying either for being adopted or a mixture of things. We know that around 70% of adopted children will have additional learning needs and/or are neuro-diverse. One common theme we found was they were bullied because of these difficulties.

"Bullying worries me - because I don't want vulnerable people I care about being picked on. People make fun of things they don't understand" – C, one of our members

<u>So how can teachers help us?</u>

Be informed – Teachers need to know more about adoption and early life trauma. We have been asked for things like baby pictures or to talk about genetic inheritance, which feels like it is planned without considering how this might affect their adopted learners (and the longer term affects on their wellbeing). If teachers were taught about this, it will not only benefit adopted students but also anyone who is in the care system or facing any sort of family difficulty. If teachers are more informed then they in turn can educate students about how it is not ok to make fun of someone's family. In addition, schools are generally designed to work best for neuro-typical people and so they don't always provide a good learning environment for people who are neuro-diverse. Examples might be the noise levels, the lighting, the way that classes are arranged, and how people have to transition from class to class at the end of each lesson. Being more informed will help learners. We know Adoption UK offers training - encourage your teacher to get in touch.

Have confidence - Teachers need to be more confident in stopping teasing like this as it may be meant as a joke but it is really hurtful. Some people might not be affected by something like this but for others this can make them feel like they are hated, unwanted, unloved. Teachers would stop teasing about other topics so why it this one ok?

The bigger picture – Schools need better funding to be able to provide better support for all of their students. For example funding for good quality counsellors. We have had lots of conversations about how funding might be improved for better well-being services - **what are your thoughts? - We would love to hear your views!**

<u>What are we working on?</u>

As a youth council we feel being adopted or care experienced should be a protected characteristic (like sexual orientation, disabilities and religion). We are hoping to start a lobby in relation to this and in turn, if we are successful, this would mean bullying/harassment about adoption or being care experienced would be a hate crime. We are currently at the beginning of this journey so can't tell you too much more! But we have already secured some support (hopefully will be a partnership) from a another youth council (not adoption specific).

As a Youth Council we have been making connections with other organisations and professionals who want to help and support us to make our world a better place where more people understand adoption and some of the challenges we face.

The youth council members have also been working with partners to apply for funding to support adopted young people in education and with their mental health. In addition there will be support for young people to explore their identity and to build support networks. Even if we are not successful this time, we hope the links we have made will help other adopted people in the future.

<u>Just a note from us</u>

Some topics can be difficult to talk about or listen to. If you want to talk with someone, get in touch with a trusted adult and/or your Connected Youth Worker, or you can phone **Meic on 080880 23456** or **Childline 0800 1111** These are trained professionals who are there to listen to anything you want/need to talk about

Groups Galore!

CONNECT provides lots of opportunities for adopted people aged 7 to 30 to get together right across Wales, both locally* and nationally. Check out the map and table below to see where your closest group is.

*Please note the locations on this map are estimates.
Too far to travel? Please still fill in an enquiry form as the service is still expanding, so CONNECT can try and meet your needs.



Mid & West Wales	First weekend of the month near Carmarthen
CONNECT Voices 14+	First Tuesday of the month 6.30-8.30pm on Zoom
Western Bay	Second weekend of the month in Swansea
North Wales East	Second weekend of the month near Flint
CONNECT Voices 18+	Second Tuesday of the month 6.30-8.30pm on Zoom
South East Wales	Third weekend of the month near Newport
North Wales West	Third weekend of the month in Bangor
Connected National 18-25	Last Wednesday of the month 6-8pm on Zoom
Vale. Valleys & Cardiff	Last weekend of the month in Cardiff

If you are not currently registered for the group of your choice, email wales@adoptionuk.org.uk to find out how to register

Some things to have a go at...

Make some slime!

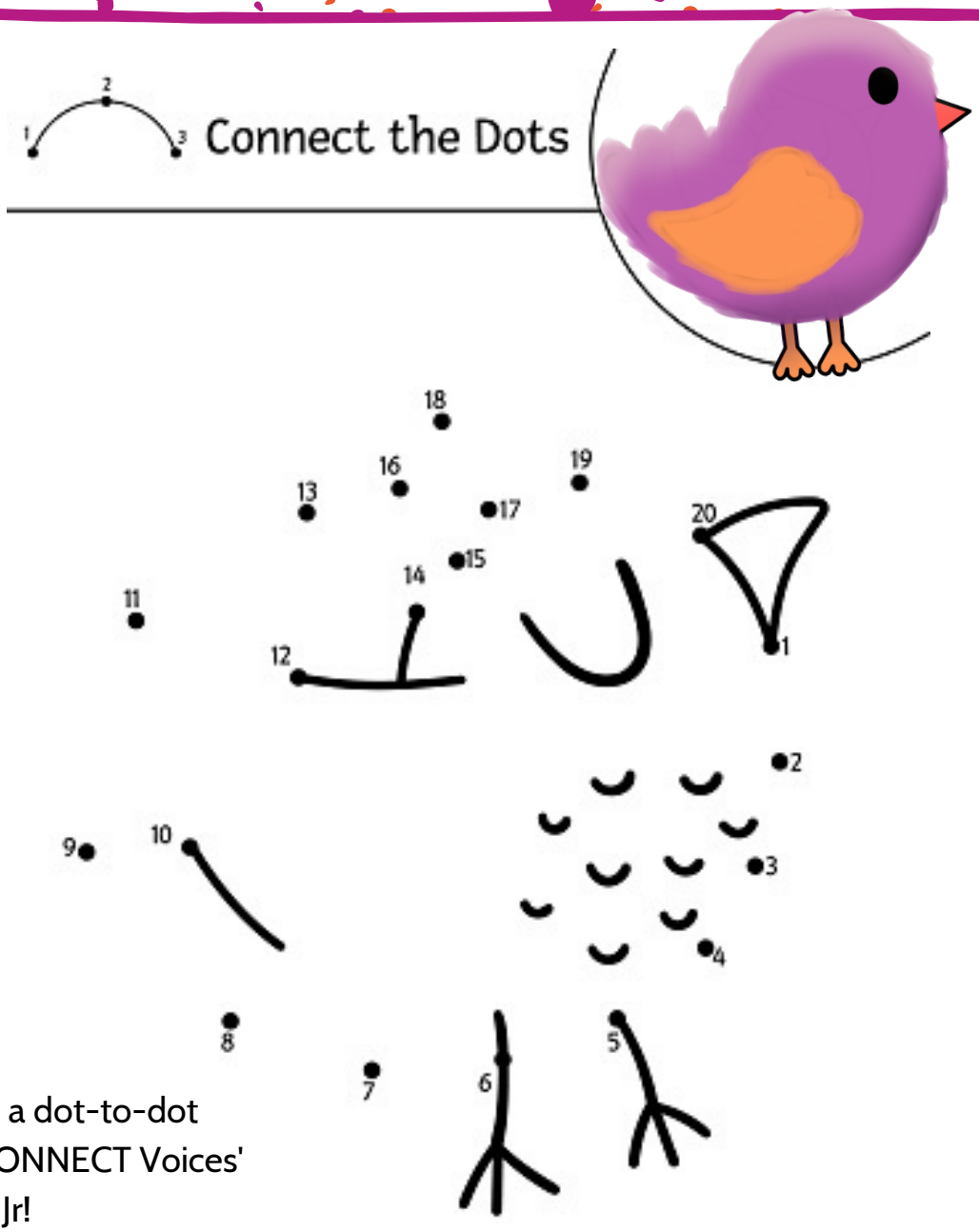


We all LOVE making cornflour slime... there are loads of different recipes and this website has all of our favourites.

Some are really simple and some are more complex - and there are some handy videos.

Have a go and we would love to see any photos you take :)

www.wikihow.com/Make-Cornflour-Slime



Have a go at a dot-to-dot version of CONNECT Voices' mascot Bob Jr!