

The  
Fostering  
Network

Scottish  
Transitions  
Forum



# Supporting positive transitions through and out of foster care:

A supplement to the  
Principles of Good Transitions

# Supporting positive transitions through and out of foster care

We all need love, care and support to realise our rights and to thrive in life – particularly during periods of change. Many young people in care experience more changes than their peers and need more support to overcome challenges.

Experiencing a move or a transition can be a common occurrence for children and young people in care. In 2021, 3,352 foster carers and 99 fostering services across the UK took our State of the Nation Survey. The results showed that 50 per cent of foster carers had experienced one or more children move on from their home in the two previous years.

Despite transitions being a regular part of the foster care picture, foster carers and the children and young people they care for are experiencing inconsistencies and differences in how transitions are conducted and supported. From our State of the Nation findings, one in six foster carers in Scotland stated that the last planned move for a child they cared for was not preceded by a child's care planning review. Without these planning reviews, an agreed upon and shared plan of action cannot be created. This may affect whether the young person experiences the transition positively.

In addition, 39 per cent of foster carers surveyed across the UK were not given the opportunity to feed into the referral information for the child's next care arrangement, and nearly one in five foster carers were not involved in the end of placement review.

Again, this inconsistent involvement of foster carers is a concern because information that can support a positive transition is not being shared. These statistics illustrate some of the inconsistencies in how transitions are conducted in practice. By developing this resource, we hope to address and alleviate the issues highlighted.

## Keeping connected

Having stable, caring relationships helps people to cope with the challenges of life, including times of transition. When a child or young person moves through their care journey, they may experience a complete change in location, school, clubs, religious groups and who they live with. Therefore, it is especially important that children and young people in care have supportive relationships. They help to manage and make sense of all loss and change, as well as help to keep children and young people connected to the relationships that are important to them.

Unfortunately, we repeatedly hear of foster carers not being encouraged or enabled to keep in touch with the young people they have fostered. It was previously believed that a child should cut ties with past relationships so that they might transfer their attachment from one set of carers to another – we now know that this is not the case.

In fact, children need support to develop additional secure attachments (see more in our Keep connected report). This change in understanding is critical to the role that foster carers

play in supporting a child to settle after a transition. It advocates a need for the supportive and positive presence of the foster carers throughout and beyond the transition process. While there will be some occasions when it is not in a child's best interests to keep in contact with their previous foster families or others, these will be the exception rather than the rule.

The Promise is aware of this need to make love the central pillar of how we deliver care, stating: 'Carers in all settings must be supported to develop caring relationships and know that those relationships must be nurtured. Young people growing up must be supported to have lifelong links with their carers'.

We need to see a shift in our understanding and culture, so the starting position in any transition planning is protecting positive relationships.

**Only 36% of foster carers always or usually keep in touch with children they have previously fostered. 40% of foster carers felt not at all supported to keep in touch with children they have previously fostered.**

(State of the Nation 2021 survey)



## Young people growing up must be supported to have lifelong links with their carers.

The Promise

### Using this supplement

This document complements the Scottish Transition Forum's\* Principles of Good Transitions to make these principles applicable to transitions into, through and out of foster care. All of this work takes a relationship and rights-based approach to ensuring children's needs are met and their rights are upheld.

Each principle will be followed by relevant tips, tools and information to support their implementation in practice. It is hoped that this document will allow the principles to be embedded in practice across social work services in Scotland for any transition a young person in care may experience.

There are many different reasons why children and young people in care may experience a transition and a change of home. Therefore, best practice is hard to define because every circumstance is individual and unique, and must be treated as such. However, it is a key step in keeping the promise and improving transitions for each and every child. This is achieved by establishing a shared vision of what we are aiming for in best practice and what young people and their families should expect of any transition.

\* The Scottish Transitions Forum aims to improve the experiences of young people who need additional support and are making the transition to young adult life. The Forum's work benefits all young people who need additional support in Scotland, including those with learning disabilities, autism, physical disabilities, sensory impairment, life-limiting health conditions, mental health difficulties, care experienced young people and young carers. Find out more about the Forum, or join as a member by going to: [scottishtransitions.org.uk](https://scottishtransitions.org.uk)

### What we mean by 'transition'

In this guide, the term 'moving homes' refers to the transitions a child in care may experience when they move into, between or on from care settings. It incorporates moving to a new foster family, an adoptive family, residential care, kinship care, moving back in with family and independent living. We appreciate each of these circumstances require individual attention and expertise, so you can find a list of resources in our references section for further reading.

We know that on top of all these examples of moving homes there are many factors that affect how a transition may take place (namely planned, unexpected or emergency transitions). There are also many other types of transitions that children and young people in care encounter, such as a change of social worker, a change of school or the move up to secondary school.

It would be challenging to create a document which speaks perfectly to every unique circumstance. Each child requires individual and specific support, as well as there being complex legislative duties applicable in different situations.

However, applying these Principles of Good Transitions will help ensure that transitions are positive. They will be conducted with a greater level of consistency and provide a clear model of best practice that we should be aiming for with each and every child, every time.

\* The Mockingbird Family Model™ is a global award winning and pioneering programme led by The Fostering Network in the UK, delivering sustainable foster care. It is an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families, supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. Led by a hub home carer and liaison worker, the constellation community offers vital peer support and guidance alongside social activities and sleepovers to strengthen relationships and permanence.

### Acknowledgements

A huge thanks goes to everyone, and particularly the young people, who shared their experiences and expertise throughout the creation and development of this resource. A special thanks goes to the Moving On project's steering group for their consistent support and care for all things transitions. Thanks also to Bec and Tracey at the Scottish Transitions Forum for supporting this idea to grow into a resource. Another special thanks to members of the team at Mockingbird\* for all their support in developing the stories around best practice.

Mockingbird features in this document as a leading model for best practice around many of the Principles of Good Transitions. Find out more by searching for [www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/projects-and-programmes/mockingbird-programme](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/projects-and-programmes/mockingbird-programme)

### A note on language

At the time of publication, the terms used in this document were the relevant and preferred terms by the individuals and communities concerned. We appreciate that language is ever evolving so please let us know if you think anything in this document needs to be reviewed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this resource. If you have any thoughts on how it could be improved or shared more widely, we would love to hear from you. Please email [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net)

# How the principles align with children's rights

Principles	Children's rights under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
<b>Principle 1:</b> planning and decision making should be carried out in a person-centred way.	<b>Article 12:</b> every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.
<b>Principle 2:</b> support should be co-ordinated across all services.	<b>Article 3:</b> the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.
<b>Principle 3:</b> planning should start early and continue up to age 25.	<b>Article 13:</b> every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.
<b>Principle 4:</b> young people should get the support they need.	<b>Article 31:</b> every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.
<b>Principle 5:</b> young people, parents and carers must have access to the information they need.	<b>Article 17:</b> every child has the right to reliable information from a variety of sources, and governments should encourage the media to provide information that children can understand. Governments must help protect children from materials that could harm them.
<b>Principle 6:</b> families and carers need support.	<b>Article 5:</b> governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up, so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices.
<b>Principle 7:</b> a continued focus on transitions across Scotland.	<b>Article 42:</b> governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.

## 1. Planning and decision making should be carried out in a person-centred way

### This means:

- Young people and their needs should be at the centre of their transition planning.
- Children's feelings must be treated with importance. Their feelings about the move should be held in mind, and responded to sensitively.
- Young people should have a single transition plan (in addition to, if not part of the child's plan) that is shared and coordinated across services and families relevant to the transition.
- All transition plans and timescales should focus on the needs of the child or young person and other children in the families.
- There must be resources available to allow flexibility in the planning, in consultation with the child or young person, the families and the social workers, to allow for emerging circumstances and needs.
- Staff involved in the planning process must have a good understanding of trauma and the way it impacts children and young people as they experience change and transitions.
- Extra time may be needed to ensure the child or young person is able to communicate their views meaningfully and fully.
- Independent advocacy must be offered for both the young person and the families/foster carers throughout the transition planning process.
- Consideration must be given to the health and wellbeing of the young person and how anxiety over the transition impacts them.
- Children and young people should be offered opportunities to get to know their new home before moving in.

- Belongings of the child or young person must be treated with consideration and moved in a safe and respectful way. Bin bags or shopping bags should never be used in a transition unless requested by the young person (see Madlug in references for more information).
- There should be a shared understanding and commitment to person-centered approaches across all services.

### For relationships this means:

Children should be consulted on who the important relationships are to them and how they would like to stay in contact beyond a transition.

### Example of practice:

Alex was no longer able to live with their foster carers, Bret and Darcy. Bret and Darcy fostered as part of a Mockingbird constellation and so Alex had made lots of friends who also lived with foster carers and had a good relationship with the hub home carers.

The hub home carers knew Alex would be leaving Bret and Darcy's home so they offered for Alex to live with them. Alex thought about this, but at the next sleepover at the hub home carer's house they realised that the house smelt similar to their birth family home. Alex found this association upsetting and informed their social worker that because of this they did not want to go ahead with the move.

The scaffolding of Mockingbird allowed Alex to trial and imagine living with the hub home carers and decide that it was not the home for them.

**Consider:** What is an informed choice? How can we empower and collaborate with children and young people through the transition process?

## 2. Support should be coordinated across all services

### This means:

- There should be a consistently coordinated approach to transitions in each local authority.
- This coordinated and collaborative approach should also stretch between local authorities to make moving out of a local authority easier for young people.
- Learning and development opportunities for all members of the team around the child should include an understanding of all aspects of transition.
- Transitions should be evaluated, and this data should be recorded.
- There should be opportunities for families and/or foster carers to give and receive feedback on transitions with their social work teams.
- Those involved in the transition planning must have a good understanding of trauma and the way it impacts on transitions. Consideration should be given to training needs.
- There should be representation in transition planning from those who have developed relationships with the young person, including their foster carers.
- If the young person has learning disabilities or other additional support needs, there should be relevant representation from the services supporting them.
- When moving into independent living and considering potential living arrangements for the young person, their social worker should be kept up to date and informed of current opportunities in the local area for the individual.

### For relationships this means:

Every member of the team around the child should understand the importance of the child's key relationships, particularly the foster family, throughout the transition and beyond.

The relationship between new families and former foster families should be considered as an ongoing relationship that needs to be sustained and supported over time. Some continuity of relationships and environment will support the child in managing the loss of the previous home and building trust in the new family.

When any staff changes happen in the team around the child, it is important the young person can develop relationships with those who will become involved, always considering that building trust will take time.

**“Talk to me directly but don’t start with the scary stuff. [Talking to me about a transition] could take 10 minutes, or it could take three hours”.**

a young person in foster care



## 3. Planning should start early and continue beyond the transition

### This means:

- Planning must start early, and implementation of plans should happen in a clear, transparent and timely way.
- Transition planning and support should continue until the young person's 26th birthday.
- Whilst transition planning should start early, there must be awareness that for some individuals, talking about change too far in advance will cause distress. The way the transition is communicated to the individual may need to change.

### For relationships this means:

- Important relationships in the child's life must not be ended abruptly and early planning should prevent this.
- Planning who to keep connected to and how should start early and continue beyond transitions.
- The child and the new family should be given opportunities early in the transition to become familiar with each other and the new home before the new carers undertake caregiving tasks (see Moving to Adoption in references for more).
- Opportunities for the current foster carers and new families to build a positive relationship should be promoted at an early stage in the moving process (see Moving to Adoption for more).

### Additional considerations for care leavers:

- Planning must be available from age 14 and continue until the young person's 26th birthday, being proportionate to their need.
- Children's pathway plans and assessments should be adopted by the throughcare and aftercare team (if the service has one).

- For young people with disabilities, their plans should be adopted by adult services.
- Services with dedicated throughcare and aftercare teams should become involved early to allow time to build up relationships and develop an understanding of the young person and their goals.
- Children's social workers must be familiar with the need for pathway planning.

### Example of practice:

After spending a few years living with foster carers, Fearne was moving back in with her mum. Fearne's foster carers were part of a Mockingbird constellation and regularly met up and had play dates with other families who foster. Fearne's mum was invited to some of these social events. The relationship between Fearne and her mum was able to grow and Fearne's mum got to know Fearne's foster carers and the hub home carers. This early transition planning and regular, relaxed contact enabled Fearne and her mum to re-establish their relationship before living together.

Both Fearne and her mum keep in contact with the hub home carers. Fearne likes to send them pictures of what she's up to and Fearne's mum likes to call them occasionally for a catch up and asks for advice when she needs to.

**Consider:** What might the lasting impact be of Fearne's mum having positive introductions to Fearne's foster carers and the hub home carers? How might regular and relaxed contact with current and future families have made a difference for a young person you know?

#### 4. Young people should get the support they need

##### This means:

- Support should be available for all young people in care, when they need it and for as long as they need it.
- An improved understanding of the number of young people who require support and levels of unmet needs.
- Planning and decision-making for services should be done in partnership with young people and their foster carers.
- Advocacy is important for the young person and information about options for this must be made clear to them.
- Information and processes must be available for young people to feedback their experience of a transition and make a complaint if they need to.
- Within planning consultations, consideration should be given to a range of factors that the young person may need support with to reach their full potential, for example:
  - expectation, routine and culture changes within homes
  - getting used to new environments and new transport links – ensuring that accessing transport does not become a barrier
  - education needs and skills including time management
  - social skills and developing new relationships in the new environment, school and/or community
  - managing the change in relationships with previous foster carers and family members. Individuals should be empowered and able to continue these relationships if they wish, in an appropriate way.

- Interventions that can support these needs include:
  - having a mentor or buddy at school, college or university
  - getting to know the young person, identifying their specific needs, and developing strategies
  - co-creating rules for the home (underpinned by the needs of the family members and their values where possible to embed relationship-based practice. For example, we don't listen to loud music in the evenings because everyone needs to be able to relax).

##### For relationships this means:

Children should get the support they need to continue their important relationships. This should include actively encouraging and supporting new families (including birth family members, new foster families and adopters) to enable their children to maintain contact with former foster families.

##### Other consideration for care leavers:

The changes in responsibility which come with moving to your own accommodation alone without foster carers or other trusted adults for direct support.

“  
Transitions shouldn't  
be rushed.”

A child of foster carers



#### 5. Young people, parents and carers must have access to the information they need

##### This means information should:

- Clearly state what young people are entitled to during transitions
- Show what support is available
- Be inclusive of different communication needs
- Use common and agreed language
- Be sufficient, child-centred, up-to-date, and shared in a timely fashion as this increases the chances of a match being successful (see more in our State of the Nation report)
- Be shared with the young person – they should get to see who they are moving in with and have this information accessible throughout the transition.

##### For relationships this means:

- Young people must have access to the information they need to keep in contact with their important relationships.
- Where it is not possible to maintain direct contact with foster families in the longer term, children and foster carers should be encouraged to keep in contact in other ways. This could include letters, cards, telephone calls and social media, but should not be used as substitutes for the initial face-to-face contact post-move, unless necessary.

**‘Foster carers must always be given all the appropriate information they need to help children reach their potential and keep them, and those around them, safe. Information sharing is a prerequisite of good fostering practice.’**

State of the Nation 2021



##### Example of practice:

Since moving to a new foster home, Islay stays in her room as much as she can.

Islay's social worker, Katie, noticed Islay wasn't quite herself in the new home. Katie asked Islay where she feels more comfortable to chat, and they went to Islay's room.

Islay explained she couldn't remember the names of her foster carers. Katie reassured Islay that learning names is hard and then sent a copy of her foster carers' profiles to Islay's phone so she could check their names whenever she needed to. Islay noticed on their profile that they shared a fun fact: they love animals.

That evening Islay felt more confident to have a conversation with her foster carers. They learned about each other's favourite animals and made plans to go to the zoo at the weekend.

**Consider:** Beyond statutory information sharing, what information could we gather and share with young people to support them through a transition? How might it have helped Islay to have this information before she moved homes? If Islay didn't have a phone, how else could this information be shared?

## 6. Families and carers need support

### This means:

- The wellbeing of the significant adults and family members in a child's life need to be supported both before and after transitions.
- All services should have a mental health and wellbeing support offer for foster carers, the foster carer's family and the children they look after.
- Advocacy should be available at the start and throughout transitions.
- Former foster carers should have the opportunity to contribute to the referral information to support a smooth transition for the child (see more in our State of the Nation report).
- Foster carers should be empowered and confident to have an ongoing dialogue with social workers about the stability of placements. They should also be confident that action will be taken to avoid placement breakdown following any concerns raised (see more in our State of the Nation report).

### For relationships this means:

Maintaining contact after a child or young person moves on should be routinely considered part of the role of a foster carer, and foster carers should be supported to carry this out.

### Example of practice:

Rory is a foster carer who has experienced some emotionally demanding transitions with the last few children who lived in, and moved on from, his home. These transitions had been a struggle and Rory was feeling exhausted.

Rory believed he may have reached the end of his time as a foster carer and was ready to hand in his resignation. However, after some emotional support and advice from The Fostering Network, Rory felt empowered to ask his fostering service for a period of sabbatical so that he could rest and take time to look after himself. Rory hadn't realised this could be an option and after his period of sabbatical, he felt refreshed and ready to welcome another child into his home.

**Consider:** How might tending to foster carers' mental wellbeing contribute to the retention of good foster carers? Similarly, how might tending to foster carers' mental wellbeing contribute to the recruitment of good foster carers?

Contact Fosterline Scotland to find out about the support currently available.

“  
Transitions should  
be easy.”

A young person in foster care



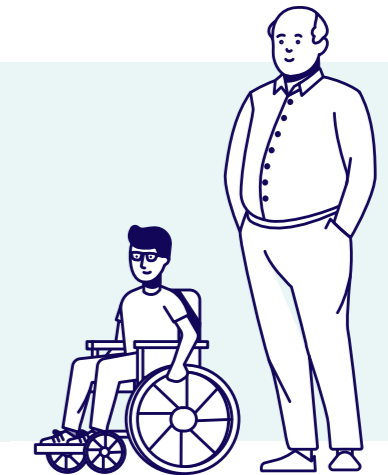
## 7. A continued focus on transitions across Scotland

### This means:

- The Fostering Network developing training and tools to support the Principles of Good Transitions to be embedded into practice.
- The Scottish Transitions Forum working collectively to promote the Principles of Good Transitions and improve practice across Scotland.
- A continued focus on transitions within policy and legislative developments.
- Learning good practice from project-funded work and embedding this into sustainable longer-term strategies.
- There should be a continued focus on keeping children and young people with care experience connected to their important relationships.
- Information from reviews about why children moved care arrangements must be gathered and shared. This is to ensure that lessons can be learnt and fed into individual and wider practice learning. Governments should explore options for capturing data on why children moved care arrangements (see more in our State of the Nation report).

### For Continuing Care arrangements this means:

- Fostering services should ensure foster carers maintain their approval during a post-16 or Continuing Care arrangement if their plan is to return to fostering.
- The Scottish Government should focus on introducing a national minimum allowance for post-16 and Continuing Care arrangements.
- Governments should carry out a full cross-departmental review of how post-16 and Continuing Care arrangements have been implemented.



# Resources and references

For further information about the Moving On project, our full State of the Nation 2021 report or to find out about other areas of our work head to our website: [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](https://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk) or contact us directly at [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net)

Call us through our members' helpline, Fosterline Scotland: **0141 204 1400**.

For legal support, members can call our UK Legal Helpline: **01384 885734**.

For emotional support, our members can call our Stress Support Helpline which is operated twenty-four seven by trained counsellors: **01384 889 549**.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – the complete statement of children's rights and the most widely-ratified international human rights treaty in history: [unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/](https://unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/)

## Resources on transitions

**CoramBaaf** – an independent membership organisation for professionals, foster carers, adopters, and anyone else working with or looking after children in or from care, or adults who have been affected by adoption. Their resources include practice support for adopter and birth family relationships: [bit.ly/3Fz6Vdo](https://bit.ly/3Fz6Vdo)

**Clan Childlaw** – Scotland's law centre for children and young people, providing advice, training and resources to protect and strengthen children's rights and improve their lives: [clanchildlaw.org](https://clanchildlaw.org)

**Comfort Cases UK** – provide filled bags to children's social workers before a child moves home: [comfortcasesuk.org/](https://comfortcasesuk.org/)

**ILF Scottish Transitions Fund** – have grants available to young people aged 16-25 living with a disability, as defined in the Equality Act 2010. They help these young people to engage in a community activity and grow into independence: [ilf.scot/transition-fund](https://ilf.scot/transition-fund)

**Madlug** – Make a Difference Luggage, a Northern Ireland based Community Interest Company provides bags to social workers for children's transitions so that their belongings are never placed in bin bags or plastic shopping bags: [madlug.com](https://madlug.com)

**Moving To Adoption** – a model of transitions specifically designed around the move from foster care into adoption. They share information, research and training for social worker professionals, adopters and foster carers on how to deliver a transition with this model:

[movingtoadoption.co.uk](https://movingtoadoption.co.uk)

**NYAS My Things Matter Campaign** – an England and Wales based advocacy service that run an award winning campaign about how young people's belongings matter and must be treated with care during transitions: [nyas.net/news-and-campaigns/campaigns/current-campaigns/my-things-matter/](https://nyas.net/news-and-campaigns/campaigns/current-campaigns/my-things-matter/)

**Project Change** – creating a care community to support all those in and around care. They have produced a toolkit to support anyone to share their voice safely: [projectchange.scot](https://projectchange.scot)

**Scottish Transitions Forum** – a network of organisations united in striving to improve transitions for children with additional needs. They host networking and sharing events, as well as developing resources to support transitions, such as the Principles of Good Transition: [scottishtransitions.org.uk](https://scottishtransitions.org.uk)

**Who Cares? Scotland** – supports care experienced people to have their voice heard through advocacy, membership and campaign work: [whocarescotland.org](https://whocarescotland.org)

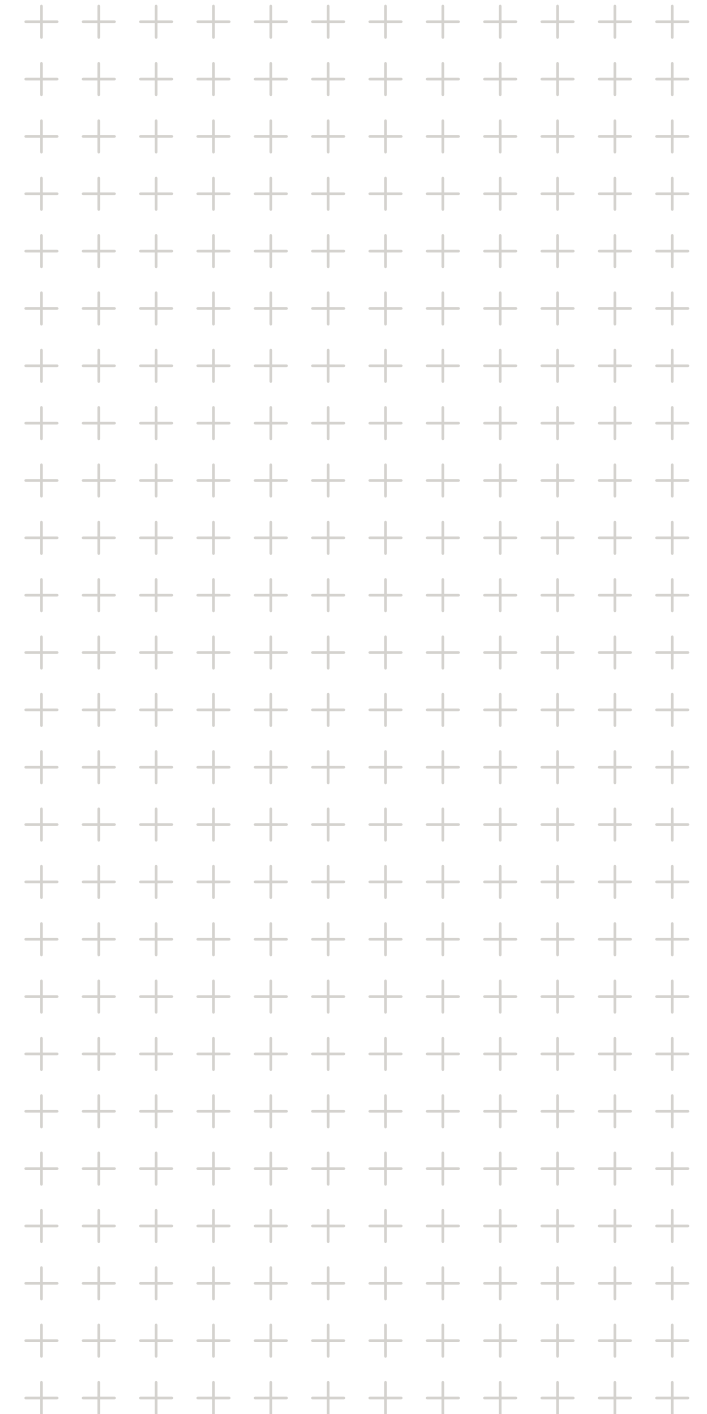
## Resources on the transition into independent living

**Become** – provides help, support and advice so that young people who spend time in care can unleash their potential and take control of their lives: [becomecharity.org.uk](https://becomecharity.org.uk)

**CELCIS** – a leading improvement and innovation centre in Scotland sharing research into policy and practice. Search 'Continuing Care' on their website to find resources on young people's rights to Continuing Care and a report on the implementation of Continuing Care in Scotland: [celcis.org](https://celcis.org)

**Staf** – Previously known as the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum is Scotland's national membership organisation for all of those involved in the lives of young people leaving care, influencing policy and practice, encouraging networking and collaboration to increase good practice and delivering learning and development opportunities. Search the staff website for their online toolkit to support those leaving care: [staf.scot](https://staf.scot)





## The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of children and young people who are fostered to make foster care the very best it can be.

This guidance has been written and published as part of the Moving On project. Funded by the National Lottery Community fund, the project supports positive transitions through and out of foster care.

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