

**Issue 69  
January 2021**

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**And more!**



# Hello everyone



I would like to begin my letter by warmly congratulating the award winners from our Fostering Excellence Awards, which were held virtually in October. Our Scottish winners were Amy Davidson, who sits on our Scottish Advisory Committee, Kelly Tawse who is a foster carer and

mother of one of our young advocates, and Kirstie Ann Duncan who won an award for Outstanding Achievement in Education and is featured on this edition's cover. You can read more about Kirstie's achievements in our UK magazine.

I would echo the thanks and appreciation expressed by Maree Todd below for your hard work and dedication during these challenging times. We have written to Jeane Freeman, Cabinet Secretary for Health, asking that the Scottish Government acknowledges the vital role played by foster carers by designating them with 'key worker' status, and stating that foster carers should be included in the £500 bonus being awarded to health and care workers. Keep an eye on our website for more information on this.

For foster carers in the unfortunate position of facing an allegation against them, our latest Fosterline Scotland update includes important

information from our solicitors, Levy and McRae. I would also recommend you attend our virtual Managing Allegations training course on 10 February 2021. Our young advocates have shared with us their thoughts on why care experienced young people should 'tick the box' on their UCAS forms and I'd encourage you all to get involved in our campaign. We also have openings for new members on our Scottish Advisory Committee (see page 7), please get in touch if you are interested. And finally, do take a read of the inspirational journey of foster carer Fionnadh Ratchford (page 3), who is raising funds for us through her ambitious wild swimming challenge.

I hope the year ahead is kind to all of us.

Until next time.

*Sara*

Sara Lurie  
Director for Scotland

## A big thank you

**From the Minister for Children and Young People, Maree Todd**

I receive regular updates on how the pandemic is impacting foster families and I know there are many challenges. Living under restrictions is tough and it becomes more stressful if anyone in or attached to our family needs to self-isolate for coronavirus-related reasons and especially if they become ill.

I wanted to send a message of encouragement to try to lift your spirits in any way I can, as well as to say a massive thank you for the way you are coping with the additional stress and anxiety that COVID-19 has brought upon all of our lives. No doubt you will have seen the encouraging news about vaccines in the last couple of months. I do, however, urge you to continue to stick with the safety advice and guidance while the virus remains a threat.

I know that trying to maintain and manage family contact has been a big concern and hopefully by now you will all have seen the guidance that we have produced to help with that. We have been working closely with The Fostering Network, CELCIS, Social Work Scotland and others who I know have been doing all they can to ensure you have the support and guidance that you need. Please continue to use their websites, which I know are updated regularly, to keep you supported. We are also working with Fiona Duncan and The Promise Team to take forward the conclusions of the independent care review to ensure foster families receive the support they need, when they need it.

I sincerely hope you managed to enjoy some happy family time



together over the Christmas season. Let us look forward to a 2021 that brings much more positivity and hope into our lives.

Thanks again for all that you do daily to support your families, and to improve the futures of vulnerable children and young people.



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

# Wild swimming, from the Ayrshire Coast to Ailsa Craig!

We have been following the inspirational journey of Fionnadh Ratchford, a South Ayrshire foster carer, as she takes on a series of bracing outdoor swims in aid of The Fostering Network:

'Fostering is an incredibly worthwhile and rewarding vocation. There are few opportunities where you have such an ability to change and positively develop a young person's life, helping them to achieve their potential. I am raising funds with a series of wild swims for The Fostering Network to support foster carers to further transform children's lives. Is it something you would consider?'

'These last months have been challenging for foster carers, having to expand our areas of expertise to become home-school teachers to anxious children deprived of familiar routines. With no respite and limited resources, compassion fatigue can creep silently up on you, so it is important for us all to create and protect some time for ourselves.'

'I'm passionate and committed to fostering and would like to give something back. My idea is to combine all the things I love, and I have set a virtual target to swim to Ailsa Craig, a volcanic plug over 10 miles from the Ayrshire coast. I will add together many individual swims throughout the winter to achieve this 17km goal. I'm hoping to complete it during Foster Care Fortnight in May 2021. It's a sobering thought that I'd need to more than triple my distance to swim one meter for each of the 65,000 children in care across the UK.'

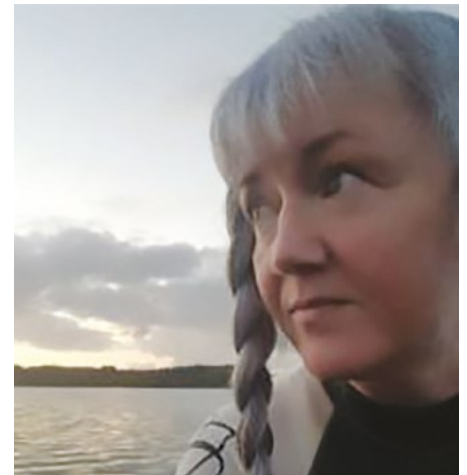
'My journey so far has been exhilarating, exploring the coasts, bathing in dark peaty waters of lochs within easy reach of my pedals. Each joyful dip is different, exploring a Crannog or watching the fin of a large pike breaking the surface, passing within metres before shivering into clothes with a slice of cake and a hot chocolate. Glen Trool is starkly beautiful, with rolling banks of mist revealing the lower slopes of the

Merrick, under pungent pine trees with raindrops catching on eyebrows and eyelashes. As I wobble out, I discover that there are still midges in October who have found exposed skin on my wrist. 640m swum, hard won!

'Moments in wild locations can be unsettling: yellowing leaves move under you, caught in unseen currents. You learn how quickly the wind can whip up waves and change direction, an unexpected crest, how to catch your breath. You monitor the temperature, where the safe exit points are and when to stop before you become too cold and tired. You become more aware of the changing seasons, appreciative of these amazing, beautiful places: swallows leaving, geese over head, frosted leaves. Swimming with a friend is a delight, bantering and chuntering along, treading water because you're laughing so much or pulling long slow strokes in quiet waters, ripples moving ahead of you.'

'Last year, South Ayrshire Council supported me to complete Oxford Mindfulness Centre's *Mindfulness for Life* course. I incorporate the lessons from this into my daily life and wild swimming offers much as you are completely immersed in this aqueous environment. There are moments too, to consider and reflect, like how the rolling ocean swells, surges and pulls you much like the journey of a care experienced child, moved by forces beyond their control. How then to support this child, to adjust and attune their journey to the changing environment, how best to care for them and help them with their own adverse experiences to meet the challenges ahead, to change their future?'

'Heading towards the end of Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters, as days shorten and temperatures plummet, the length of time you can safely spend in the water reduces. I'll need enthusiasm, determination and commitment, as you do in fostering, to complete this journey. Each session is

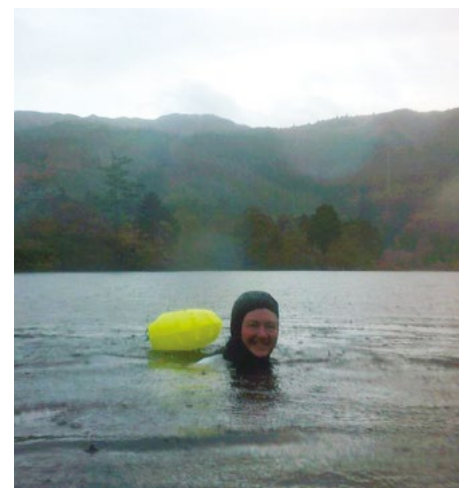


becoming shorter and there will be times where the best decision is not to swim. I hope it shows the children I foster that it's tough but you keep going, building resilience and the ability to thrive.'

'I've no idea how long I can swim for or how close to my target I'll get, whether that's due to Covid-19 or sensible winter swimming. But with dusk falling, cold, sandy, damp and tingly from a bracing dip, streaky sunset behind Ireland, I'm crossing the sand dunes with another 650m towards my target, heading home with a daft smile. It is magical and I'm lucky to have this moment. I love what I do and I am privileged to foster for South Ayrshire Council.'

If you have been inspired by Fionnadh's journey and would like to support her challenge, please consider making a donation:

[virginmoneygiving.com/WildswimtoAilsaCraig](https://virginmoneygiving.com/WildswimtoAilsaCraig). I know she would want to encourage you all to give it a go and discover the joy of it yourselves.



# Reasons to 'Tick the Box'

Young people who have experience of care should be able to aim high and fulfil their potential. This might include going to college or university. When applying to study via UCAS, you are asked to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question 'Have you been in care?' Care experienced young people should say 'yes' or hypothetically 'Tick the Box.' This opens the door to the support they may need, to help them enter and thrive at college or university. However, some young people have told us that they are concerned about who the information will be shared with. The Fostering Network believes that too many care experienced young people are missing out on support, and we want to change that.

## What young people think:

Below are some thoughts from the young people involved in our Young Advocates project about their experiences. Remember, it's never too late to Tick the Box. If you have already submitted your application or started studying, you can still contact your college or university directly. Please try to do this as early as possible so that support is available if you need it.



### Jeanette (23)

'Academically, I have had extra support in classes, like a person who takes notes for me and a study skills tutor. I probably wouldn't be at uni without these supports. Normally, I wouldn't ask for help, so it is

good that the support was there for me already.

'When I first went to college, I didn't 'tick the box' as I didn't want to be stigmatised. Then I happened to mention I was care experienced to a guidance person and they told me to 'tick the box' and the benefits that it has.

'Financially, ticking the box means I get the care experienced bursary, which helps with bills and stuff. I probably wouldn't have gone to uni if I had to take out loans.

'If I hadn't been told to 'tick the box' I wouldn't have done it and I wouldn't have received all the support and benefits that come along with it and I probably wouldn't be at uni now.'

### Rosie (18)

'Tick the box is good because it is giving kids a push into higher education because they will get money to help them. Some people wouldn't be doing it if they had the worry of paying back loans.

'It gives every kid in care a chance to pursue higher education because there's only a really small percentage who go on to higher education.

'Nobody has contacted me about 'ticking the box' apart from a tutor at the start to say, "hey I see you are in care, do you need extra support?" I didn't need it, but it felt good he was on the ball. At high school I didn't have that kind of support, so it was nice to feel that.'



### Denisha (21)

'Without 'ticking the box' I think I would've struggled to get into uni. I found it difficult to focus in school because of how challenging my home life was at times which impacted my grades. My guidance teacher told me about ticking the box which meant that I qualified for widening access so I only needed the minimum entry requirements to get in. The stability and independence I got from moving to uni meant that I was able to really showcase my abilities and I ended up graduating with a first-class honours degree.

'When I got to uni, I got a mentor and we had coffee once a month to chat about how things were going and if I needed extra support. I opted out of this in my second year, but it was good to know that the support was there if I needed it. I got emails about things available like financial support, internships and helplines for mental health even after I graduated.

It didn't feel stigmatising to access, which is important because this support was available to anyone part of 'widening access' so I wasn't singled out as a young person with care experience.

'The care experienced student bursary came out when I was in my second year of uni which gave me so much more financial freedom as before that I had two part-time jobs in first year which gave me little time to focus on uni. I was living with my sister until I moved to uni but because this was an informal kinship care arrangement, I was told that since she wasn't my official guardian I'd only qualify for the minimum student loan. The care experienced bursary helps overcome situations like this and makes it a fairer way which I am so grateful for.'



### Abigale (19)

'I ticked a box on my college application, which registered me as a care experienced young person. I receive a care experienced bursary through college of about £214 a week. I also got emailed asking if I wanted any support. I felt happy there was help if I needed it.

'I didn't realise the value of ticking the box to say I was care experienced until my guidance teacher at high school told me to do so. It was lucky I did.

'I feel if I hadn't had the 'tick the box' option, I would have needed a student loan which isn't easy to pay off.'



## Tick the Box – please support the campaign

As highlighted by our young advocates, schools and colleges have an important role to play in encouraging young people to apply to UCAS. Please help to spread the word by speaking to your local school or college about ticking the box. You can email the principal of your local school or college: a template is available for this on our website: [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/tick-box](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/tick-box). We would love to know if you've got involved, so please do contact us about this, our young advocates project, or for more information or support: [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net).



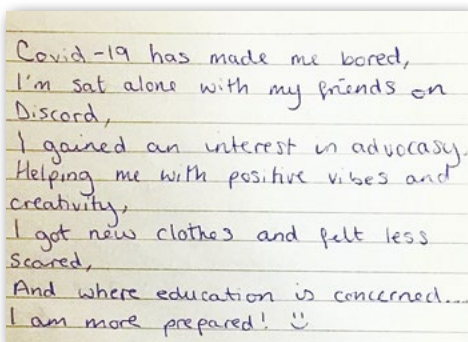
Maree Todd MSP  
@MareeToddMSP

This made me smile broadly - thank you! Have a read of this wee poem



Sara Lurie @tfn\_sara · 4m

Another fabulous evening with our young advocates who are all part of fostering families. Tonight was poetry writing and contemporary dance. Thank you Abigale for letting me share your great poem! 🥰  
@fosteringnet @LifeChangesTrst @MareeToddMSP



# Our Young Advocates project

## Why not join our young advocates?

We are looking for both care experienced young people and the sons and daughters of foster carers, aged 16-18 from across Scotland, to join our young advocates. The project will be running over the next two years and will include a range of fun activities and workshops.

During lockdown, we have been meeting regularly online for a mix of fun activities including rap, DJing, digital art, singing and song writing, mindfulness and much more. We are raising awareness of the stigma faced by care experienced young people with the aim of reducing it, and invite others to do the same! Our young advocates will be involved in more creative sessions and events, and will also be sharing ideas with teachers, educators, foster families and others. We would also like to hear from those aged 19-25, so do get in touch if you would like to be involved.

We are keen to ensure geography isn't a barrier and are using various techniques to enable young people to participate. For face to face meetings (when it is safe to hold these), travel expenses will be reimbursed and refreshments provided.

By joining us, you will have the chance to:

- make new friends
- have your voice heard
- engage in fun activities of your choice
- work towards accredited awards
- be part of an inspirational group of people
- work alongside a variety of professionals to make a positive difference for care experienced young people in education in Scotland.

Our Young Advocates project is being led by young people with the support of The Fostering Network, thanks to funding from Life Changes Trust and Young Start Fund.

To find out more, or to get involved with this amazing group, contact project worker Amy Adair, [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net) or call **0141 204 1400**.

## Education sessions for foster carers

We will be running free Zoom sessions for foster carer members in Scotland between now and April 2021.

These sessions will explore foster carers' experiences of supporting children and young people with their education. How has the pandemic impacted the education of the children in your care? Have you had a positive experience of working with schools? Have the children in your care faced stigma at school, and how has that been dealt with?

We would like to hear from you about what has worked well and what could be improved. We would also welcome suggestions of other topics we could discuss. We are keen to hear from teachers as well, so if you know of any who are passionate about reducing stigma for care experienced young people, please let us know or ask them to get in touch.

For more information, or to register your interest in attending one of our sessions, please email [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net) or call **0141 204 1400**. Please include your name, telephone number, fostering service and the ages of the children in your household.

We look forward to working with you!

## We want to hear from you - add a leaf to our Tree of Positive Change

Our young advocates would like everyone to have a say in how to improve education for care experienced children and young people. We would like to know the positive change you would like to see.

Please contact Amy Adair to have your voice heard at [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net). She will email you a brief leaflet to complete which will enable us to add your leaf to our 'Tree of Positive Change in Education.'

# Fosterline Scotland update



**Hello everyone,** I hope you and your families are keeping well during these difficult and challenging times. We are here to support you so please give us a call anytime for advice and support. If our regular operating hours of Monday to Friday, 10am-4pm, are not suitable we can arrange to call you out with these hours by appointment.

We have had a significant number of enquiries regarding allegations this year, especially from March to October. If an allegation is made against you and you are a member of The Fostering Network, please contact our legal helpline on **01384 885 734** as soon as you have been informed.

Our legal team, Levy & McRae has provided the following advice:

## Managing allegations

'Levy & McRae has been proud to represent the interests of members of The Fostering Network since 2017. We fully appreciate that foster carers and their families make huge personal sacrifices to give children the love, support and stability that they so desperately need and can transform the life of a child. However, being a foster carer carries with it an element of risk.

'Although criminal allegations being made against foster carers are only made in a relatively small number of placements, we are here to provide you with full legal support if one is made.

'In the event that an allegation is made by a child in a foster placement, Police Scotland and the social work service will ensure that the allegation is robustly considered and that the health and wellbeing of the child is safeguarded. At this point, limited information will be provided to the foster carer accused, and his/her interests will be secondary to this process.

'Our legal team is here on a 24/7 basis to respond urgently to protect members from the earliest possible stage of the process. We strive to resolve cases quickly and discreetly, through early analysis and engagement with the relevant authorities.

'Should you become aware of an allegation having been made against you, carry out the following steps immediately:

1. Phone Fosterline Scotland: **0141 204 1400**. If unavailable, please follow step 2.
2. Contact our legal advice line: **01384 885 734** as soon as possible. As a member of The Fostering Network, our advice is free and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
3. Where possible, obtain the names of the investigating police officers. This will allow our team to contact the officers and obtain further information regarding the allegation.

4. Do not discuss any details of the allegation until you have taken advice from our legal team or The Fostering Network.

'As part of the investigation process, you may be required to attend a police station for a police interview to be asked questions about the allegation. During this process you have legal rights, which include:

- To have a solicitor present during your interview.
- To have a consultation before, during, and after interview.
- To say nothing at all during your interview.

'In the vast majority of cases, we are able to arrange your attendance at a police station on a voluntary basis. In some cases, you may be arrested and taken to a police station. Please ask the police officers to contact us irrespective of the time. It may seem that by requesting a solicitor you will appear to be guilty of the allegations, this is not the case and the police officers will expect, and sometimes encourage you, to seek the assistance of a solicitor.

'This can be a distressing process and you need to ensure you have a member of our team with you for interview. This will allow us to assess the allegation so that we can immediately respond, if appropriate, and allow us to begin a criminal defence at this early stage should a prosecution be raised.

'Separate to the criminal process, the allegation may be submitted within a report to a fostering panel to consider your approval to continue to be a foster carer. If you have contacted us immediately, we can have a control on the process to date, in order to present clear and comprehensive representations on your behalf.

'Our team is also on hand to provide general legal advice on the children's referral process, your rights as a relevant person, and any other matter you may encounter during your time as a foster carer.

'We look forward to continuing our work with The Fostering Network and

please remember we are contactable 24 hours a day, seven days a week: **01384 885 734**.

'Our legal team for The Fostering Network is led by Callum Anderson. Callum is joined by Iain Cahill, Andrew Park and Chris Shaw who between them have an in-depth knowledge of the criminal justice system, the children's referral process and regulatory issues related to local authority approval of a foster carer.'

Remember, **Fosterline Scotland** is here to help with any query. The service is open from Monday to Friday 10am until 4pm, or outwith these hours by appointment. In addition to our 24-hour legal helpline, you can access our stress helpline on **01384 889549**. We also deliver a Managing Allegations training course (see our training update on page 8). Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have a query you would like some help with.

Thanks,  
Mirren & Julie



## Capturing the Voice of disabled children and young people in foster care

The voice of disabled children and young people is sadly often overlooked, and through our Capturing the Voice project we are looking to address this. We would like to connect with foster carers and supervising social workers to explore what plans are in place to support disabled children and young people, and how we can better support them in the future.

We will be hosting four online discussion groups and would encourage members to join:

**Tuesday 19 January**, 10.30am – 12pm

**Tuesday 26 January**, 10.30am – 12pm

**Wednesday 27 January**, 10.30am – 12pm

**Thursday 4 February**, 1pm – 2.30pm

These sessions will allow us to meet foster carers and social workers virtually through Zoom, enabling us to discuss some of the challenges you have encountered and possible solutions.

We are keen to hear what is working well and what requires improvement. If you have any suggestions of topics you would like to be included, please email to let us know.

Please register your interest in advance by emailing **scotland@fostering.net** or call **0141 204 1400**, including your name, phone number and fostering service.

## Help to shape our work

The experiences and views of foster carers shape all of The Fostering Network's work. Through forums, training, surveys and our helpline we hear about what matters most to foster carers and their families. We also use our mailing lists to share information and rapidly hear back from foster carers on our policy and campaigns priorities. In the coming months, we'll also be using our campaigner's mailing list to reach out to the fostering community about The Promise.

Join our campaigner's list to keep up to date with our work and to have your say: [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/campaign-us](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/campaign-us). Make sure you tell us that you live in Scotland so we can give you the most relevant information and opportunities.

### Children's Hearings – advocacy service

The Scottish Government has launched a national advocacy service to reinforce the rights of children involved in the Children's Hearings System. Children and young people will be offered support to express their needs and views on decisions that affect their lives. A Children's Hearings Advocacy Expert Reference group has been set up to support the design, delivery and implementation of the service, which will be offered Scotland-wide by third sector providers.

For more information, please visit: [gov.scot/groups/childrens-hearings-advocacy-expert-reference-group](http://gov.scot/groups/childrens-hearings-advocacy-expert-reference-group).

Maree Todd, Minister for Children and Young People, said: 'This marks a significant milestone on our way towards fully respecting and incorporating children's rights. Advocacy is central to the promotion of children's rights – it helps to ensure their voices are heard. The service will put the views and interests of each child at the heart of their hearing.'

### Scottish Advisory Committee

Our Scottish Advisory Committee meets on a quarterly basis, overseeing our work in Scotland and advising on the delivery of our strategic objectives. Over the last few years, it has been led by the experienced voice of Janet Smith, a social worker who also sits on our UK board. We would like to extend a huge thanks to Janet for her support during this time and wish her well now she has made the decision to move on. We are, however, delighted that Kay Jackson, a foster carer and associate trainer, has agreed to step into the role of chair in her place. She brings with her a wealth of experience of fostering and we look forward to working more closely with her in the years ahead.

Another member of our team, retired foster carer Glo Potter, is also moving on. She has been a valuable member of the team for a number of years and we are grateful for the contribution she has made. These changes mean we have an opening for new members – if you are interested, please do get in touch by emailing **scotland@fostering.net**.

## Training update – courses now online!

*'The course I attended was very beneficial to me, as being a carer of two older teenagers I felt I could relate to the topics and gained more understanding and knowledge that I can use moving forward with them. This was my first training course online as I have been hesitant about online Zoom training, but everything worked really well, and I felt I learned some great skills. Thanks again.'*

Our training programme is now running successfully online, with the added benefit that you don't need to leave your home!

Don't miss out on our upcoming Zoom courses:

### Managing Allegations against Foster Carers

Wednesday 10 February 2021

£102 plus VAT for members and £204 for non-members

### Men Who Foster

Wednesday 3 March 2021

£102 plus VAT for members and £204 for non-members

Other courses, including Moving into Adulthood, Life Work, Moving On and the Role of the Supervising Social Worker, will be available soon. We can also deliver virtual courses 'in-house' for fostering services to purchase. Do get in touch if you would like more information.

To book a place on one of our courses, or to find out more about purchasing an in-house course, please call Joy Crawford on **0141 204 1400**, email [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net) or visit [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/events](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/events).

## Dates for your diary...

**Tuesday 19  
January 2021**  
Capturing the Voice  
Zoom (Page 7)

**Tuesday 26  
January 2021**  
Capturing the Voice  
Zoom (Page 7)

**Wednesday 27  
January 2021**  
Capturing the Voice  
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**Thursday 4  
February 2021**  
Capturing the Voice  
Zoom (Page 7)

**Wednesday 10  
February 2021**  
Managing Allegations  
against Foster Carers  
Zoom (Page 8)

**Wednesday 3  
March 2021**  
Men Who Foster  
Zoom (Page 8)



If you would like more information on any of the above, please contact us on **0141 204 1400** or [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net).



With thanks to the funders who supported this edition.

### The Fostering Network in Scotland

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e [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net)  
[thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)

### The Fostering Network Head Office

87 Blackfriars Road  
London  
SE1 8HA

For help with membership queries:  
t 020 7620 6440  
e [membership@fostering.net](mailto:membership@fostering.net)

### Publications & Resources

t 0844 335 1892  
e [orders@fosteringresources.co.uk](mailto:orders@fosteringresources.co.uk)

### Legal and Stress Helpline

t 01384 885 734

Registered Charity Number: 280852  
Registered in Scotland: SC039338

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