

Issue 71

September 2021

Goodbye from our director

Sara Lurie bids
farewell

Page 2

Meet the new Minister

Introducing
Clare Haughey

Page 3

Transitions: from foster care to adoption

Advice from
Fosterline Scotland
and Adoption UK

Pages 6 & 7

Landmark change for children

New rights for
brothers and sisters

Page 8

And more!



Hello everyone

I can hardly believe that it is 13 years since I joined The Fostering Network as director for Scotland. Working with foster carers, fostering services and most importantly, children and young people with lived experience, has been one of my life's greatest privileges. Your unwavering commitment to make foster care the very best it can be has taught me more than anything else. I will be retiring (rewiring, as my daughter says) in October, but I have every confidence that our team in Scotland will continue to work with and for you as relentlessly as ever. I will be taking on consultancy and panel work, so our paths may well cross again. Either way, I wish you a future filled with warmth, love and joy.

We have just welcomed the landmark change in legislation which has come into effect recently, introducing new rights for brothers and sisters, including people who have lived together and identify as brother and sister. You can read more about

this on the back page, and do keep an eye on the Stand Up For Siblings website for information on webinars on this that they will be hosting in October.

Since our last newsletter, we have celebrated the contribution you all make through our annual Foster Care Fortnight™, which was themed #WhyWeCare. One of the successes of this year's campaign was the launch of our CPD learning resource for teachers – you can read more about the emotive webinar hosted by our inspirational young advocates on page 4. Our cover image was drawn by one of our young advocates, Abigail, with each colour representing a feeling – yellow demonstrates the happiness she felt when she finally found a place to call home. We are also delighted to welcome Clare Haughey to her new role of Minister for Children and Young People and look forward to working closely with her in the years ahead.



I will be keeping in touch, and look forward to hearing how you all continue to go from strength to strength.

With the warmest of wishes

Sara

Sara Lurie
Director for Scotland

Meet Bethany

– Our new Moving On project worker

Moving On began in July with the aim of supporting young people and foster families during periods of transition.

We are delighted to introduce you to Bethany Shelton who will be delivering the lottery-funded project over the next two years:

'My family became a foster family during a foundational period of my life when I was a late-teen, beginning to dream of who and what I might be in the future. I'd always been passionate about people but before my foster sister came to live with us (she is in a long-term placement), I didn't know anything about the care system or appreciate the scale of its unmet need.

I included this poem in my application for the role of Moving On project worker:

*"30,000 kids come into care each year"
I knew that stat had fallen on deaf ears
Of students preoccupied with getting the prize
Of being top of the class
But for me, that vast lecture hall
Suddenly felt so small
Crushed under the weight of them all
-
All 30,000 kids that will come into care this year
And I can name only two,
Marcus and Mili*
Who arrived on our doorstep
And set up home in my heart.
Out there are twenty-nine thousand,
nine hundred and ninety-eight
Sat somewhere in wait
For a doorstep, for a home,
And for a fresh start.*

**Names of children have been changed.'*



'The above poem describes the searing frustration I felt when the care system and care experienced young people were reduced to impersonal, abstract stats. It expresses the desire and drive I have to ensure that in everything I do I am present and person-centred, appreciating that every placement and every child is different and unique.'

If you would like more information about this exciting new project, please contact either Bethany or our head of operations, Sara Smith, who will be happy to tell you more about it:

scotland@fostering.net.

Introducing Clare Haughey,

Minister for Children and Young People

As the new Minister for Children and Young People, I welcome this opportunity to introduce myself to you all.

To provide you with a little of my own background, my previous role in government was Minister for Mental Health. I have previously worked as a mental health nurse and been a clinical nurse manager. In May 2016, I was elected as MSP for Rutherglen, where I grew up, and where I now live with my family.

It's a privilege to now have responsibility for the children, young people and families brief which is such an important role in government and I want to assure you that I will do all that is in my power to support the fostering community.

I know that foster carers and fostering service providers have faced additional challenges as a result of the pandemic.

I am impressed by the dedication and resilience you have all shown to ensure the children and young people in your care feel loved and supported. I don't underestimate the added pressure that the necessary COVID-19 restrictions have caused - especially at

a time when some of you may have been affected by illness or even the death of loved ones.

The fostering community has raised a number of issues with us and I welcome that feedback. You have also told us about the crucial role that The Fostering Network and Fosterline Scotland plays in providing you with vital support. I look forward to hearing more of your views gathered through The Fostering Network's State of the Nation survey when it is published later this year.

A huge amount of work has been done over the last few years to listen to the voices of children and young people who have care experience. The Independent Care Review and The Promise have high aspirations for all who are involved in the care system to work together to make the improvements that are needed and to ensure that every child and young person feels empowered, listened to, valued and supported to reach their full potential.

We must all take responsibility to deliver The Promise - individually, organisationally and collectively. At the end of March, after engaging with over 100 organisations, The Promise



Scotland published Plan 21-24 laying out what must change over the coming three years to

#KeepThePromise to Scotland's children and families. As such we will be embedding into policy and delivery the commitments that have already been made to people with care experience, with significant and intensive work across every area of government policy.

I hope to meet with many of you in the coming weeks and months so we can discuss some of the issues that are important to you. In the meantime, I thank you all for the resilience and commitment you have shown during this difficult time.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Moving On needs you!

Moving On is an exciting new project, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, which started on 1 July 2021. It is a two-year project which looks to explore the complexities of children and young people moving on, including changing placements, moving to adoption, moving to kinship care or returning to their birth family.

How is this best done?

Moving On will look into these issues, providing support to children, young people and foster carers during these times of transition. The project will also work with families and fostering

services to issue best practice guidance.

We are setting up a steering group to support the running of the project and would love to hear from you! We would welcome interest from foster carers, social workers, children and young people to join the steering group - meetings will be held via Zoom so we would encourage those from all over Scotland to enquire. We aim to meet four times each year.

If you are interested, please contact either Bethany Shelton or Sara Smith via scotland@fostering.net.



Young advocates' webinar

On Tuesday 18 May, during Foster Care Fortnight, our young advocates led a powerful webinar on their experiences and achievements through the project. Their message was deeply moving, helping to raise awareness and reduce the stigma faced by care experienced young people. The poignant and inspiring lyrics in their music video were extremely well received, bringing tears of sadness and joy. Their artwork and poetry will remain in minds and hearts for many years to come.

The event was attended by nearly 100 people, including representatives from the fostering community, education sector and key decision makers. The feedback was extremely positive and supportive of the work being done:

'A very inspirational and informative event. The young advocates' powerful words have raised awareness and in the future, I will reflect in difficult moments about what challenges young people might be dealing with.'

– **classroom assistant.**

'... all those amazing young people who just made me cry! That was so much more powerful than I expected. Thank you so much for putting across so well and so strongly what we, as a foster family, want for our kids in the education system.' – **foster carer.**

'I just want to offer my thanks to the young people who delivered the event today, it was truly inspirational, both engaging and creative. I think there is much we can learn from them – it was very emotional. I am glad you couldn't see me on Zoom as I would have had to hide the tissues!' – **director.**

We are so proud of how hard our young advocates have worked and everything they have achieved, especially since the group has never met each other face to face. During the webinar, they were articulate, professional and passionate and we are excited to see what positive impact they will have in the future when we can hopefully speak at live events and visit schools and other establishments.

Join our young advocates

An opportunity for young people, aged between 14 and 18 who are either care experienced or part of a foster family, to join our team of young advocates. Our young advocates are gaining a range of new skills through being a part of the project, while being part of something that is creating real change.

Do you feel passionate about reducing stigma for care experienced young people and having your voice heard – or maybe you know somebody who does? If so, please email Amy Adair at scotland@fostering.net. We would also be interested to hear from you if you would like to share your thoughts and experiences of working with educators and other professionals, so please do get in touch.



Education – getting the support your foster child needs

Education can change lives. Together with good quality foster care, it can transform the life chances of children in foster care by unlocking their potential. If you are concerned about the education or additional support needs of a child in your care, talking to their school is a good place to start. We are delighted to be hosting an education webinar in partnership with Enquire: the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning, with the aim of providing support and advice about doing this.

Join the discussion on 27 October, 10am until 12pm.

To register your interest, please email Julie Reid at scotland@fostering.net. Places are limited.

Supporting care experienced young people in education in Scotland: an online resource

The webinar also saw the launch of the young advocates' free online resource, which has been designed to support individuals to reflect and develop their knowledge and practice on how best to support care experienced young people in education in Scotland. The young advocates spoke to a range of professionals about their experiences, including foster carers, educators and Scottish Government representatives, which helped inform the creation of the resource. We are looking forward to seeing how people engage with this powerful resource, and would encourage foster families to share it with teachers and others who would like to learn more about supporting care experienced young people in education.

The resource is aimed at teachers, prospective teachers, and others in education, and it can be accessed through Children in Scotland's website: childreninscotland.cicmoodle.org. It takes around 45 minutes to complete, and was created as part of The Fostering Network's Young Advocates project, funded by Life Changes Trust and the Young Start Fund.

Below is an example of what to expect:



Update from The Promise Scotland

As a foster carer, or parent, you will be thinking about the, as yet unknown, long-term impact of the last year on our children and young people. Missing friends and family and worrying about loved ones whilst simultaneously trying to keep up with schoolwork - sometimes without the right equipment and in accommodation not conducive to learning. There have been too many lost opportunities to take part in sport, music, art, sleepovers, with volunteering and work experience placements vanishing. It has been devastating.

But a difficult truth is that those circumstances are not far from the everyday, pre-pandemic reality of children and young people who experience the very worst of Scotland's 'care system'.

On 25 June, Change Programme ONE went live. A plan of action for the coming year, and aligned to the five priorities in Plan 21-24, it outlines what is happening now, what is happening next, and what needs to happen. It also includes an assessment as to whether what is happening is good enough.

There are commitments from organisations across Scotland about what they are doing differently, based on what matters to children and families – and what they will do differently. There's good work

happening; but it is not enough. The Promise Scotland's assessment of the twenty-five priority areas in Change Programme ONE is that only nine are on track, fifteen are insufficient and there is nothing underway in one.

But there is reason for optimism. Those that The Promise Scotland engaged with in the process of devising Change Programme ONE are approaching keeping the promise with honesty about where they are now and ambition for where they need to be.

But Change Programme ONE is not where Scotland starts, nor is it an exhaustive list of all that is happening. Everyday people, like you, are supporting children and families, caring for the children in Scotland's care, championing their rights and helping make sure they go on to have a fulfilling life. Making the changes that they are able to make, right now.

The Promise Scotland will continue to provide oversight and support, to drive the change that children and families told the care review was needed. It is Scotland's job to deliver it.

Change Programme ONE can be read here: thepromise.scot/change-programme-one.



Working with The Promise

We were delighted to receive funding from The Promise Partnership to enable us to recruit the new post of implementation manager to join our team in Scotland. Through this new work, we will look at how we as an organisation align with The Promise, including looking at the language used by ourselves and our members.

We recognise the importance of listening to care experienced young people and taking their views on board, and this funding will enable us to work with them to find out the language they prefer and how we can reduce the stigma created by language. Through this one-year piece of work, we will work towards ensuring our projects and activities align with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and identify how they affect children and young people. In addition to this, we will be reviewing our policies and procedures to ensure children and young people are at the heart of everything we do.



Foster Walk brings families together

Foster walk provides the opportunity for the fostering community to come together to celebrate the contribution foster care makes and took place during Foster Care Fortnight this year.

This year's challenge took us on a virtual tour of the UK, combining the steps of 350 participants. One of those teams was Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership, and we are pleased to share their experience:

Ten foster families, two supervising social workers and our new champion's board worker met in two locations for a hugely enjoyable trip. The foster carers all thoroughly enjoyed the day and it was truly lovely to see the carers chatting away and the kids running wild together, completing the scavenger hunt with ease (which incorporated Tarbert Castle and the colour and scents of Benmore Gardens).

The families loved spending time together: 'It was a lovely day and so good to meet up again. West Loch House was a perfect finish to a very successful day.'

'We enjoyed our walk at Benmore on Saturday, it was great to meet everyone in person. We hope that it is something that can be done again in the future.'

'It was a lovely day and so good to meet everyone! Thank you so much, it was just lovely to see all the kids get on so well together.'

Keep an eye on our website for ideas of other activities and events in support of our work, and of course look out for details of Foster Walk 2022: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fundraise.

Fosterline Scotland update



Hello everyone, we hope this reaches you well and you are enjoying your summer. On the advice line, we answer a lot of queries about transitions – these could be transitions home to birth family, to a permanent placement, or to adoption. Sadly, we hear that transitions can be rushed and not at the child's pace; children's views and feelings are not sought and often they are unprepared for the move to their new home.

We also hear that foster carers may not be fully included in transition plans when they know the child best. Worryingly, foster carers may also be accused of not working with the plan or being obstructive if they disagree with any aspect or if they advocate for the child in their care. Many foster carers and children have formed strong attachments and it can be a very emotional time for everyone involved when a child moves on. Some have faced very abrupt endings, which could cause unnecessary trauma. Others have endured no proper ending or goodbye and worse, no contact. Contact between foster carers and children seems to be problematic post move and it is our position that this should be encouraged and supported. Please read our Keep Connected report on our website. One of our seven principles states: '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' and The Guidance on the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 states:

'Times of transition are particularly stressful for children - especially as so many of them have experienced multiple moves. Links with familiar people who have supported them in foster care will be reassuring. The move itself may stir up thoughts and memories about the past which their social worker may be best placed to handle. A move into an adoption placement is usually carefully planned and should feel very different from any earlier experiences of sudden or unplanned moves. It is important therefore that during this period there is continuity for the child.'

With the above in mind, please take a look at the article on page 7 by Adoption UK, which offers advice when a child moves on to adoption.

The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 has brought many positive changes for children and young people. The new act brings the law further into line with children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The act also brings sibling rights, which places a duty on local authorities to consider how to maintain contact between siblings and more importantly, to ask for their views on what should happen. The new act also provides an opportunity to look at the other relationships that are important to children, and how these are supported. The Fostering Network is therefore delighted that the Scottish Government has committed to developing additional guidance. It will set out how local authorities should help children to keep in touch with the people that are important to them, including their former foster families. Please read more here on our website thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/Championing-childrens-relationships-Scotland.

We are here to support you so please give us a call anytime for advice and support. If our operating hours of Monday to Friday, 10am – 4pm, are not suitable, we can arrange to call you outwith these hours. Please also consider our stress support helpline on **01384 889 549**, 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Thanks,
Mirren and Julie



Foster Carer forums

The pandemic has made it hard for us to engage with our membership and we are seeking to change this by setting up foster carer forums online three times per year.

We want to engage with foster carers from all over Scotland and have the ability to set up quick meetings when we need to consult with foster carers to inform them about campaigns and projects.

If you want to keep up to date with what is happening in The Fostering Network, learn about and support campaigns, and have your say then please register your interest.

To be on our forum list please email Sara Smith, head of operations, scotland@fostering.net. Please include your full name, who you foster for, and the email address you would like to be used.

Transition: from foster care to adoption

Fiona Aitken, director, Adoption UK Scotland

Transitions are challenging in any child's life, particularly when they are significant. For a care experienced child, there is no bigger or more significant transition than when they leave one family to join another.

Some looked after children may experience more than one transition during their time in care – their earliest move from their birth or first family into care is their first, but there may be further moves while they find the right family placement to care for them in the longer term. When we know so much about children's need for stability and consistency, and the importance of early attachment, we can understand how difficult these moves are for children to experience.

The transition from foster care into the child's adoptive family is therefore a crucial one to manage in order to ensure it is as supportive and child led as it can be. There are several things that can be taken into account and put in to place to ensure the process goes as well as possible for the children involved:

- 1. Communication** – open and regular discussions during the planning period between the prospective adopters and their social worker and the children's social worker and foster carers is crucial to ensure that everyone has the same understanding of the needs of the child involved, and how best to plan the move.
- 2. Planning** – what will the first introduction look like – a 'bump in' meeting in the park? A visit to a soft play centre? The prospective adopters visiting your home? You can help to guide this plan with your knowledge of what will best suit the children in your care depending on their age and stage, level of confidence and understanding of what's happening.
- 3. Sharing of information** – this is the opportunity to share as much as you can about the child's needs, likes, dislikes and routines. What food they like, washing powder you use, bedding they prefer – all of this can help to provide valuable consistency in the early days of the move.
- 4. Preparation** – when the communication is ongoing, planning in place and information shared, you can begin to prepare the children in the most appropriate way. Again, this is highly dependant on age and stage. For very young children you could start putting them to bed with a teddy or blanket provided by the prospective adoptive parent(s), play them recordings of lullabies sung by them, show them photographs and videos, and play recordings of their voice.
- 5. For older children**, prospective adopters should be supported to provide engaging and child-friendly introduction books with photographs of them, their home, and information about their lives. You can use this as a means of beginning conversations with your young people, showing them that you know these prospective parents, that it is safe for the child to be curious about meeting them, reassuring fears or worries about who they are and the change to come.
- 6. Narrative** – it is important that children understand their story fully, particularly to understand that they are not being moved to a different family because of anything that they have done wrong. Their life story begins when they are born, and therefore their life story work should begin at the earliest stage of their care journey. At a very young age this can be as simple as keeping photographs and mementoes of early experiences, but as a child grows older you can share more information, in an age appropriate way.
- 7. There are several** good children's books available with stories that can be used with children moving to a different family (e.g. Blanket Bears by Samuel Langley-Swain) and you might want to read these to prompt discussion, or help children to reflect on their own situation.
- 8. Goodbye** – don't be afraid to show your emotion – it is both natural and expected for you to feel highly emotional about the transition – it is a loss for both you, and your young people. It is helpful to be able to share your emotions with your children, while reassuring them that this move is positive, safe and permanent. They can be reassured that they won't lose their relationship with you by replacing it with a relationship with their adoptive parents.
- 9. Keep in touch** – as part of your planning with prospective adopters consider how you will keep in touch in the early days of placement and beyond – via text message, letters or postcards, visits or phone calls. A secure attachment with a caregiver gives a child a better chance of forging more positive attachment relationships – so don't be afraid that your ongoing contact will prevent a child from bonding with their parents. Positive relationships are necessary anchors in children's lives.

It is as crucial for you to recognise how big a piece of your children's life that you have been, as it is for them to know they were an important part of yours.

For more factsheets and information about the transition process and Adoption UK Scotland please visit adoption.scot or adoptionuk.org.uk/scotland.



Training update – courses now online!

'We thoroughly enjoyed the online training, it was very informative indeed. It has increased our confidence very much, and made us more assertive.'

Foster carers, Managing Allegations Against Foster Carers

Our training programme is now running successfully online. Don't miss out on our upcoming Zoom courses:

Men Who Foster

Tuesday 5 October 2021

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

Skills to Foster: Train the Trainers

Wednesday 24 November; Tuesday 30 November; and Wednesday 1 December 2021.

£395 plus VAT for members and £790 for non-members

These and other courses are also available to be purchased by fostering services as 'in-house' training. Other courses include: Managing Allegations Against Foster Carers, Moving Into Adulthood, Life Work, Moving On and the Role of the Supervising Social Worker.

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 or visit thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/events.

Landmark change for children

Amendments to the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2021 mean that local authorities now have a legal duty to ensure siblings are supported to stay together, where appropriate. These changes are not only for brothers and sisters who have the same parent, but also for people who lived together and are just like brother and sister. The Scottish Government has published guidance on their website: gov.scot/publications/staying-together-connected-getting-right-sisters-brothers-national-practice-guidance.

As they are for us all, relationships between brothers and sisters are so important to children who have experience of care. Do you care for a child who has brothers and sisters? Would you like to find out more about a child's rights to live with, see, or spend time together with their brothers and sisters? If so, you'll love the October 2021 webinar series from Stand Up For Siblings. Further information on the webinars will be available soon, keep an eye on standupforsiblings.co.uk if you'd like to know more.

Stand Up
For Siblings



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