

# Fostering in Scotland

Promoting Foster  
Care in Scotland

Issue 4 Summer 2002

the fostering network  
helping children to thrive



## Preparing for inspection

With the publication of the National Care Standards for Foster Care and Family Placement Services by the Scottish Executive, there has been some debate about where this leaves the UK National Standards for Foster Care. It is therefore encouraging to see both **Edinburgh** and **Aberdeenshire** view the UK Standards as very much alive and providing a more comprehensive set of standards against which they should evaluate their services.

As the Introduction to the National Care Standards notes:

"The UK National Standards for Foster Care, published by the National Foster Care Association (now the Fostering Network) in 1999, are comprehensive service standards that apply to fostering services provided directly by foster carers, social work services and other agencies involved in the provision of child care services."

In our consultancy work for agencies across Scotland we know that the UK Standards are viewed as a more qualitative way of ensuring the provision of good services, and are very much seen as the way forward for the foster care service.



## Pilot inspection of fostering services in the City of Edinburgh

"It's an opportunity for carers' experience of the system to be heard."

"We need a more objective look at what we do for our children."

"If it improves safety for kids, it's worth it."

"We should not always wait for national change to try and improve things here."

"Different carers hear different guidance across the city. We need consistency."

"Perhaps it will point out the need for more planned post approval training."

These were among the comments made to the Director of Social Work in Edinburgh by foster carers, at two city-wide consultation meetings about the proposal to conduct a pilot inspection in relation to UK Fostering Standards.

From the perspective of those managing fostering, there were two compelling reasons to conduct an inspection. The 1999 Edinburgh Inquiry into the Abuse and Protection of Children in Care recommended an independent inspection of foster care services, to ensure adequate safeguards are in place for children in foster care. Also in 1999, the UK Joint Working party on Foster Care launched its National Standards for Fostering. These inform the new Scottish Care Standards against which fostering services will be inspected by the National Commission for the Regulation of Care. The pilot inspection was therefore seen as a well-timed local quality check on the service against UK Standards, in advance of obligatory inspections.

The inspection involved 193 interviews with managers from social work and related agencies, social work staff, carers, carers' children, young people in foster care, their families, and young people who had left foster

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## Pilot inspection of fostering services in the City of Edinburgh

care. Thirty randomly selected fostering situations were inspected in detail, through interviews of all involved. All carers who were not interviewed were invited to complete a detailed questionnaire, and 35 took the opportunity to do so. A reference group met regularly to comment on inspection processes. This group included carers, a research adviser, senior social workers involved in placement of children and management of carers, and a Children's Rights Officer.

The inspection was completed between July 2000 and January 2001 under the supervision of the 'arms length' Inspection Service for Edinburgh and the Lothians. A summary report on the findings was approved by the Executive of the Council in October 2001,<sup>1</sup> and circulated to all foster carers, who were then invited to follow up meetings with the Director of Social Work.

The inspection found that the quality of the fostering service in Edinburgh in general measures well against UK Standards. There is a serious and continuing shortfall of foster carers for all ages of child and for both temporary and permanent placements. This is a prevalent anxiety for all involved and it can diminish awareness of effective work and positive experiences in most placements.

Examples of service strengths include: steady increase in carer numbers; reduction in out-of-authority placements; development of specialist schemes for children with challenging behaviour and complex disabilities; and evidence

of thorough practice in the assessment of carers (despite the lack of a consistent framework for assessment and review). Effective co-operation between carers, social workers and other professionals was evident, and a depth of awareness of safer caring issues was shown by staff and foster families. Recruitment methods and publicity materials had been progressively revised and improved in the previous years and were well designed in relation to the identified needs of children assessed as being in need of foster care.

Areas for attention and improvement, include the need for:

- a consistent framework for assessment and review of carers;
- a training and development strategy for approved carers;
- improved out of hours support;
- improvements in the collation and analysis of fostering data;
- a review of fee payments to carers

On approving the summary report, the Executive of the Council agreed to the Director's recommendation of a review of fee payments.

Examples of activity in the period May 2001 – May 2002 arising from or supported by inspection findings, which are either completed or in progress, include:

- production of a revised handbook/guide to family placement for staff and carers;

- pilot (involving carers) of the Fostering Network competency-based framework for assessment and review. Development of guidance for assessors and panels;
- development of a strategy for post approval training for carers and testing by carers of training materials. Pilot of the SQA Progression Award by carers;
- provision of a series of training sessions and a resource pack for adoption panel members.
- review of the structure and operation of both fostering and adoption panels

As with the inspection pilot, carers have been involved in a reference group, which has discussed progress of development activities at two-monthly intervals.

This pilot inspection was an opportunity to examine a range of professional and personal perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of Edinburgh services. Their views and experiences have been taken into account in developments such as those listed above. The prospect of independent scrutiny by the Commission in 2003 may be the cause of some healthy trepidation amongst fostering and adoption service managers. However there were signs in this pilot of the potentially encouraging and constructive outcomes of inspection activity.

purchased for them by their local authority. Eight out of ten local authorities now purchase individual membership for their carers as a valuable way of supporting them.

# Audit of fostering service

## Aberdeenshire Council's experience

### Background

The timing of the audit of Foster Care Services based on UK Foster Care Standards coincided with the restructuring developments within Aberdeenshire and the introduction of the Looking After Children materials. The standards, which were developed by a Working Party on Foster Care, describe best practice in foster care and were viewed by most authorities as a sound basis for the development and evaluation of the Foster Care Service. The Scottish Executive confirmed that the UK Standards (published in 1999) would form the basis for the development of the National Care Standards (published in April 2002) for Foster Care and Family Placement Services. These Standards have now been introduced and the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care ('the Care Commission') now has the task of registering and inspecting a range of services provided by fostering agencies.

### Methodology

The audit involved randomly selecting foster carer and children's files (some cross referencing was involved); observation of the Adoption and Fostering Panel; the setting up of reference groups to cover the whole of Aberdeenshire's operational area; meeting with senior management, managers, fieldwork staff, family placement seniors and foster carers. Additionally, comments were obtained from the foster carers' own children and from young people in foster care.

Anne Black, in her capacity as Independent Child Care Consultant, developed the template for the audit and acted as a consultant for its duration between May and September 2000. Her support and input ensured that the audit considered the UK Standards in detail.

### Key findings

The key questions of the quality of care and the safety of children and young people placed in the care of Aberdeenshire Council were addressed by the audit and many positive aspects of the foster care service were identified, for example:

- children and young people are valued as individuals and are consulted;
- the introduction of the looking after children materials;
- regular reviews of children;
- good links with education and health by foster carers and social work staff;
- the number of children who remain with their carers beyond age 16

Areas identified that require addressing related to:

- recruitment and retention of foster carers;
- the formality of reviews;
- the patchiness of psychiatrist and other specialist supports

There was also recognition that the geography of Aberdeenshire creates positives, but also some problems for the foster care service. The mixture of rural and urban communities provides a diversity of settings, but the distances involved create difficulties maintaining contact. It also means that social workers spend a lot of time travelling and this inevitably reduces the direct contact time they have with the child, young person and carer. The spread of areas also means that the organisation of carers meeting for support and training is more problematic than would be the case in an urban area.

Additionally it was noted that the nationwide shortage of qualified and experienced staff has an impact on Aberdeenshire, in terms of recruiting staff and foster carers.

Some areas attracted specific comment, namely children with disabilities and reward payments for carers. For children with disabilities, no one specific standard related to caring for children with disabilities although they are among the most vulnerable. Consideration of reward or fee-based payments received mixed views from foster carers and the audit considered the need to enter very detailed discussions across the Council with foster carers and staff. The foster carers, like Triseliotis and others, identified clearly that it is the combination of support, being valued, having training opportunities and the provision of realistic allowances for the care they provide, that is most important to them.

Since the completion of the audit report Aberdeenshire Council has adopted the UK Standards as aspirational goals for the development of foster care services within the county. As part of the ongoing development a Looked After Team has been set up to progress long term plans for children more effectively. Additionally, the Scottish Executive's Changing Children's Services Fund has provided the opportunity to integrate specialist support for looked after children and their carers.

The introduction of the National Care Standards presents many challenges, but Aberdeenshire's experience, derived from the audit process, has set the scene for the future through reinforcing the council's commitment and vision for the ongoing development and delivery of a quality fostering service.

## Welcome

We are pleased to welcome  
249 City of Edinburgh carers  
14 East Dumbartonshire carers  
90 East Lothian carers  
into individual membership of  
the Fostering Network,



## Membership meeting

The North Membership Meeting was held in April at Pittodrie Stadium, Aberdeen, when Stan and Liz Godek addressed carers and social workers from different fields on the topic 'Managing Conflict in Foster Care'. The presentation was very informative and helpful to all concerned and, while it dealt with difficult situations, there was humour generated. There was also a presentation by two young people about their experiences in foster care, one the daughter of foster carers and the other living with a foster family. In the afternoon, workshops gave the opportunity for further discussion of issues, which had been raised by both presentations in the morning.

The meeting also provided very useful 'time out' for all participants to look at their practice and identify different strategies. The buffet lunch allowed socialising with other carers and colleagues from different areas and helped to facilitate discussion in the workshops. At the end of the day, the main criticism was 'not enough time'.

This membership meeting was particularly relevant for me as I was experiencing a placement which was generating conflict within the our home. I came away refreshed and encouraged, thanks to all those who attended.

### Marjorie Ruddick,

Focus Group Representative – North, who is also a member of the Scottish Committee.

See notice on page 9



## The Fostering Network's Advice, Information and Mediation service

The Fostering Network's Advice, Information and Mediation Project was set up in Scotland 12 years ago to provide an independent and confidential support service to foster carers who were the subject of allegations or in dispute with their agency. It also aimed to help agencies develop policies to handle complaints and allegations in ways which were sensitive to the role of carers.

I have been the worker for the past 10 years. Foster care has changed considerably over this period and foster carers are now looking after children and young people with more complex backgrounds and damaging experiences, which may result in difficult and challenging behaviour. Foster carers need as much information and support as possible to assist them in this task.

### We can offer:

a telephone help line to provide advice and information on a wide range of issues relating to foster care to all those involved in the fostering service- foster carers, resource workers, children's social workers and policy makers;

an in-depth service for foster carers with more complex problems-how to access information from agencies, how to progress this by discussion with

the social worker and how to compile reports putting forward their views. Carers have also been accompanied to meetings, such as fostering panels.

With the complexity and emotional demands of foster care it is inevitable that disputes will arise but it is important that these are dealt with in a fair, transparent and equitable manner allowing the participation of foster carers and acknowledging their status.

Allegations are now a fact of life in foster care. In 2002 the Fostering Network knows of 22 allegations against foster carers, five of whom have been charged.

### We can offer:

a 'listening ear' for foster carers to off-load their feelings about the situation they find themselves in;

help to understand and negotiate a way through the procedures involved when an allegation is made;

face-to-face contact and help to attend meetings. Support may need to be sustained over several months, particularly if there is police involvement.

Carers feelings of the experience mirror those described in the article by Bray and Minty, reviewed in this issue.

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## Letter from Anne Black

By the time that you receive this newsletter we will all be thinking about holidays, sunshine and no school! As I write this letter it is cold, grey and windy. You can guess that I am from the East Coast!

A lot has been happening since I last wrote to you. The Fostering Standards have been published though they will not be used to inspect fostering agencies for probably another year or two.

The standards are less comprehensive than the UK ones that most agencies have been using to date. The new ones do place requirements on agencies to organise their services effectively and to support the best possible care for young people who are looked after and accommodated with foster carers.

We have recently arranged a meeting between the Minister for Children and Education and some of the people involved with foster care. In England there has been an announcement of a review of all aspects of fostering. I am not sure if that is going to be replicated in Scotland but it would be good to let Cathy Jamieson, the Minister, know the concerns of all the partners in foster care. It will also be important to let her hear about the successes of fostering.

The lack of state pension provision to carers after a lifetime of looking after children has recently been getting the prominence that it has deserved for a long time. It is good to see several politicians becoming involved. The Fostering Network will continue to do all it can to lobby for and debate the need for state pensions for carers.

We have now got a young person employed in the office in Glasgow and Michelle will be working with Kausar and Theresa on the Young People's Project (and other things!)

Michelle will be one of the friendly voices you hear when you phone the Glasgow office. I hope that she will be happy with us.

The Membership meetings have started their next round. The meeting in Aberdeen was successful and started to look at the difficult subjects of aggression and managing stress and violence. We are planning to repeat the session in Edinburgh.

Do get in touch with Anne Fisher or Margaret Sim if you have other topics that you feel would be good subjects for meetings across Scotland.

Marjorie Ruddick and I were recently guests of the First Minister, Jack McConnell, at the Great Hall at Edinburgh Castle. The occasion was to thank the cast of hundreds who had contributed to some of the sets of standards that have been produced for the new Care Commission. We did not get the chance to speak to Jack McConnell but did feel that it was important that the Fostering Network was part of the whole process.

There was an excellent Radio 4 programme recently about fostering and I know that the Fostering Network in London worked hard to get the right people involved and the issues came across well. We could do with a good local feature about foster care with a Scottish personality from TV or radio as the presenter. Let us know if you can think of who might be good for this task!

You will have seen that the main articles in this edition feature two councils that have carried out an audit or an inspection of their foster care service. Other councils are also working on an audit in preparation for the Care Commission in due course.

It will be encouraging to be able to share good practice both in the audit process and in how foster care is being provided.

At The Fostering Network we have been looking at what I think is one of the most stressful parts of being a carer or a support worker. That is when an allegation is made against a carer. Some of the procedures for investigating these allegations that I have been hearing about have sounded very uncaring about the foster carer. It is everyone's fear that an allegation will be made but how the response is made can help carers not to feel so alone and devastated. The safety of the young person has to be paramount but we need to look at how to make the process less difficult for everyone

We hope that in meetings we can begin to share some of the difficult feelings and times that carers, young people and staff have gone through after allegations. Sharing some of the ways that have helped carers could be very positive.

Please get in touch with Bryan Ritchie or myself to tell us what you think the Scottish Committee should be addressing at this time. I cannot promise that the issue will be resolved but it will mean that it gets an airing at the Committee.

I am looking forward to meeting more carers, young people and social and residential workers over the next months. I hope that when the summer holidays arrive you will be able to enjoy a change of routine-know better than to say a bit of a rest!

I hope that the sun will shine for everyone throughout the summer months.

With best wishes,

Anne Black



Brian Minty (School Of Psychiatry, University Of Manchester)  
Sheila Bray (Stepping Stones Residential Home For Children, Marple)

**This report** is an in-depth, descriptive study of allegations of maltreatment made against 22 foster carers, based on interviews with the foster carers, 18 family placement officers and all principal family placement officers in six local authorities in the north of England.

One of the authors, Sheila Bray has considerable experience as a foster carer.

Allegations against foster carers is a subject which touches on a number of areas crucial in child care i.e. child protection, fairness to foster carers, retention of foster carers and placement stability for children. However, there appears to have been a considerable growth in the number of allegations of abuse made against foster carers.

Previous studies by Verity and Nixon calculated that 4 per cent of foster families had an allegation made against them in 1994. A study in Scotland by Triseliotis estimated that 3.5 per cent of all foster carers had an allegation made against them in 1996/97 and that 17 per cent were likely to experience an allegation over a lifetime career in fostering.

This study hoped, by interviewing a representative sample of foster carers and their family placement officers, to gain a comprehensive picture of allegations against foster carers and of agency responses and policies.

The foster carers interviewed had been fostering for between four months and nineteen years. Over half the allegations came from children and a further quarter from birth parents. Just over two-thirds of the alleged perpetrators were foster fathers and under a fifth foster mothers. Allegations were also made against older birth children in the family and in one case against a grandfather. The biggest group of allegations was of physical abuse, followed by sexual abuse.

Less than 10 per cent of the allegations were found to be substantiated (i.e. found to be true on investigation), and roughly a quarter were found to be untrue. The remainder were pronounced unsubstantiated (i.e. unproven), were not proceeded with or never reached a conclusion. Less than a quarter of the children involved remained in placement by the end of the investigation, although two thirds of the carers continued to foster. Almost a third of the carers had been subject to a previous allegation.

For the majority of cases the allegations had been preceded by a long period of difficult relationships and nearly one third of the children involved had already left placement when they made their allegations.

Nearly two thirds of the foster carers were dissatisfied with the way the investigation had been carried out. They believed that social workers started investigations with the assumption that they were guilty of abuse and no longer fit to look after children. They complained of lack of information, particularly in writing, and felt a lack of natural justice in not being invited to present their side of the story at case conferences and other meetings which could impact drastically on them, for example leading to them being stigmatised as child abusers. They also felt they were not given adequate support by their department – in one case this appeared to be departmental policy – and in some cases that the investigation took too long (longer than three months in 23 per cent of the cases).

In conclusion the study states that, while the investigation of allegations must be carried out thoroughly, foster carers need to experience natural justice and this appears to require a more official approach to investigations than found in the study. Such an approach would imply the use of written statements of allegations and the invitation of foster carers to attend case conferences and other important meetings.

Foster carers also deserve and require a lot of support after an allegation has been made and thought needs to be given to the issue of how and by whom this could be best provided. Better preparation needs to be given to foster carers on how to cope if an allegation is made.

However, the authors comment that fairer treatment for foster carers and better preparation will not necessarily lead to improvements in the difficult task of deciding where the truth lies when allegations are made.

First published in *Child Abuse Review*, Volume 10-2001

We are grateful to the authors for allowing us to summarise this report.

Copies can be obtained by contacting the Fostering Network on 0141 204 1400.

## Relevant persons

The **Scottish Children's Reporter Administration** has issued practice guidelines in the light of the recent decision in the Court of Session regarding 'relevant persons'. Foster carers and their support workers will need to consider how carers will exercise these new legal rights.

Any carer who has a child living with them as a result of a supervision requirement should be recognised as a relevant person, once the situation has become a settled factual arrangement. The critical factor is the length of time the child has resided with the carer concerned, although other factors may be relevant in individual cases. These may include:

- the expected length of stay with carers;
- whether the placement is full time or part time;
- the degree of contact with pre-existing relevant persons;
- whether an appeal against the placement is being pursued;
- absconding or other absence from the carers.

Each case will require assessment on its own particular circumstances and other relevant factors.

This does mean that a carer who meets the definition of relevant person will receive notification of the hearing and will be expected to attend (legal action could be taken against them if they fail to do so). They will receive reports and other papers for the hearing and will have the right to appeal the hearing's decision. For instance if a supervision requirement is varied to remove a child from a particular carer who has been recognised as a relevant person, the carer retains the right to appeal that hearing's decision. They continue to be recognised as relevant persons during the appeal.

In most cases relevant person status will be recognised from the commencement of proceedings subsequent to the hearing, which placed the child (for example the next review). However, in some cases the next proceedings may commence before the placement has become adequately settled and relevant person status would not be recognised (for example an early review or an emergency transfer).

The reporter should make the decision about who is a relevant person. In cases where there is information causing reasonable doubt it is possible for the reporter to call a business meeting.

All of this will have support and training implications for foster carers and their local authority or agency. The Fostering Network feels that this is an important move forward as foster carers are often one of the most significant people in a child's life. Hearings will not be missing out on the vital information that carers can provide to help them make decisions about future care in a child or young person's life.

See notice on page 9.

## 'Running - Other Choices'

Following a study which found that one in nine children in Scotland run away from home before they reach the age of 16 years, the Aberlour Trust has established the 'Running - Other Choices' (ROC) Project. It is an initiative designed to assist young people who run away or are at risk of running away. It aims to find solutions to the circumstances, which cause this action.

## Children's commissioner

The establishment of an independent statutory office that promotes children's rights is currently being pursued by the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Parliament's Education, Culture and Sport committee has been given the task of looking at this issue. It has recently completed a consultation with children and young people about the idea of a children's commissioner in Scotland, involving the Fostering Network's Young People's Project.

The committee consulted with young people in a variety of ways. They held events for people who work with children and for children themselves. One hundred young people were also invited to the parliament to tell the committee what they thought about a commissioner. Three young people from the Fostering Network's project were invited along to this event. The opportunity to vote in the parliament chamber was seen to be a very positive experience and encouraged some of those attending to get more involved in issues affecting them.

The Fostering Network's Young People's Project has, throughout its work with young people involved in foster care, found that a common complaint by young people is that they are not listened to and that they are not consulted about their opinions or experiences. Both young people who are looked after and accommodated in foster care and young people who are the children of foster carers share this complaint. While the consultation and participation of young people is a central feature of this project, this remains the exception rather than rule.

After the process of consultation the Education Committee decided that a children's commissioner is required in Scotland. As a result a Bill will be drafted and hopefully debated by the Scottish Parliament later this year. The Committee recommended that the commissioner should involve all children and young people throughout Scotland in its work to ensure that his/her work is informed by their views. The development of an independent office would provide the opportunity for scrutiny of issues affecting children. Listening to the views of children and young people has not in the past been high on many organisations' agendas, but hopefully the work of a children's commissioner will help to address this.



# A day in the life of Les McEwan

Director of Social Work, City of Edinburgh Council 6 June 2002

**The first** (or was it the second?) alarm goes off at 6 am. It's Wednesday – no it's not, it's Thursday! We had a day off on Monday for the Jubilee. Shower and shave and watch Breakfast TV. Declan Currie is explaining whether and why we are a nation of shopkeepers. Very tempting thought passes my mind but is quickly dismissed. Shopkeepers probably get up before 6 am and work seven days too! Weather is misty, damp and lowering. My teacher wife's school sports are going to be a wash-out, according to the weather man.

Leave house bang on 6.55am. Arrive at bus stop 7.05 am in time to see the back of Number 3. Check watch – one minute slow! At office by 7.40 am, start to sign yesterday's mail. Take my eye off the clock and at 8.35 am I'm five minutes late for weekly Committee Business Meeting with deputies. Annual reports on Children's Rights and Complaints both approved, as is my corporate report on Prostitution Tolerance Zones. We read collectively the second draft of the report on Review of Fostering Fees, which we planned to launch during Foster Care Fortnight in June.

Alan Jackson, who leads on fostering, has done a fine job as always, but the figures have to be checked and we wanted to consult with foster parents. The big issue is, can we afford to increase fees? No, but we need to find the money from somewhere.

We get to the final paragraph of the report when my secretary arrives to say that the Executive Member for Social Work has arrived for our weekly meeting and we have limited time. Give Executive Member copies of reports, which we discuss prior to these going to the Council Executive (the Cabinet). Get a political steer on the Foster Parent Fees report. There is a real commitment amongst the Members to raise fees. We agree the report needs a bit more work done on it. The Executive Member will announce that it will definitely be available in July. Note and agree to propose relating the future uprating of fees to the annual pay awards that apply to Residential Care Officers. This achieves what was planned when Edinburgh, as part of Lothian, introduced the first fee payments to foster parents in the mid-1970s. Payment for skills is trendy but bureaucratic! (I suspect I'll regret even thinking that!)

11 am – switch on the e-mail – 69. But they're coming in faster than I can reply to them. I am becoming depressed by the constant pinging when my secretary tells me that I should be at the City Chambers for the launch of the 'Dementia Awareness in Scotland' report.

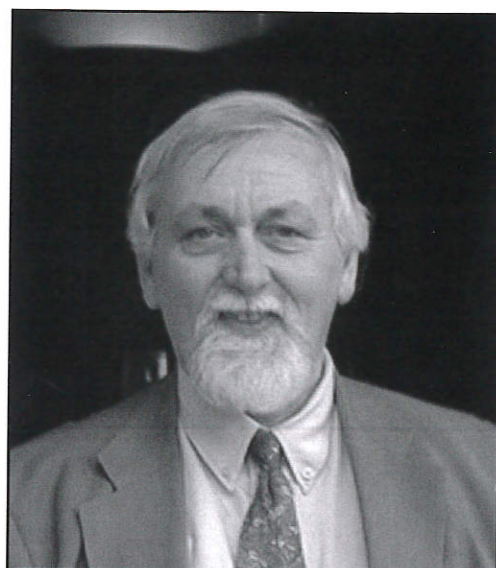
Depression replaced by panic. Jump in taxi and get weather report for Midlothian from the driver. It's sunny – some people have all the luck! Also get latest score on the Cameroon/Saudi Arabia match. Not a football fan but I'm supporting the British team and have a real soft spot for the Irish, as they were getting slated by the media (why is that familiar?). Like most 50+s with frail, elderly parents, experiencing the premature 'loss' of one of them with dementia, I try to keep abreast of the latest developments. The Dementia Awareness report does just that and is essential reading. I see it launched, help the Executive Member greet guests at the Chambers, grab a Pakora or three, then walk down the High Street for a meeting of the Chief Executive's Audit Group – got to read my agenda but at least I'm half an hour ahead of my diary! Tourists sitting out in the sun – the sun? – it has still not rained. Enjoy the tourists enjoying themselves in the street bars. Bump into Council Solicitor and get an update on the position of the Prison Social Work contract. Get to Council HQ with five minutes to spare, quickly immerse in Audit, PMP and Best Value reports. Suddenly realise one of the latter is about overtime. Surreptitiously shove on my departmental hat and read the bit about Social Work overtime.

Remember I did a lot of work on this three months ago. Report says we are overspending on overtime; basic pay is underspent but staffing budget is in balance! Somebody must be able to explain this. The auditor smiles and says Social Work have taken a positive approach to the study and I metamorphose corporately again. Leave this meeting five minutes before its end to grab a taxi to Victoria Quay for a meeting with the Education Minister as part of a COSLA delegation on the three-year Spending Review.

The Minister invites us to tell her about Children's Services pressure points and is clearly listening. Get in a few points about shortage of foster parents, the need to pay them more and for us all to be clear about why there has been an upturn in demand for child care services. All of this she responds to positively. She really is listening. Meeting ends about 6 pm and I cadge a lift to Midlothian from the COSLA Vice-Convenor. We arrive in Dalkeith and it's still sunny. Teachers don't know they're alive – long holidays, McCrone and the sun!

## Les McEwan

PS Guess who got soaked coming back from his evening meeting?



## Sleepovers - whose responsibility?

**Sleepovers with friends** has, for a number of years, been one of the most often repeated concerns of young people who are looked after in foster care.

Most children agree it is not fair that they cannot stay the night with friends when others can. They feel left out, different and embarrassed, and lose friends who get fed up asking if they can sleep over and are always turned down.

Most want foster carers to be allowed to give them permission to stay the night at a friend's house, just as carers would do for their own children. In this way looked after children say they would feel more like they were part of a normal family.

Although attention to safety issues for looked after children and young people remains paramount, there is in fact no legal requirement for police checks to be carried out on a household where a young person wishes to stay, apart from the foster home.

Guidelines issued by the Fostering Network suggest that the issue of overnight stays be addressed in the Foster Placement Agreement. This should include a strategy on who needs to give permission for overnight stays, as well as in what circumstances.

In cases where foster carers are given permission to make the decision, the guidelines state that the carer should be expected to 'exercise the same level of care in making a judgement about the safety of the fostered child/young person as they do in respect of their own children'.

## Nurses for looked after children

**A new development** in the health care of looked after children has been the appointment in Lothian of two nurses specifically for looked after children. These are exciting new posts, addressing the inequalities of health care in this group of children and young people. These nurses are liaising closely with primary care, school health teams, education and social work in relation to individual youngsters, and supporting the overall process of needs assessment, caring, planning and review. They are facilitating effective use of carer held health records for children and helping social work colleagues with the implementation of the health aspects of the new looking after children materials.

The nurses want to ensure appropriate and effective sharing of information in partnership with young people, their natural families, carers and other appropriate professionals. They are supported by 'looked after children' support clerical officers, who will have a vital role in collating essential health information from the many sources in the system previously relatively inaccessible to those caring for looked after children.

These appointments mark the start in Lothian of a new way of working towards better health and wellbeing for looked after and accommodated children and young people, and hopefully will be the building blocks for further developments in conjunction with social work and education colleagues in the future.

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### The Fostering Network Scottish Membership Meetings

**DATE:** Saturday 5 October 2002  
**VENUE:** Meadowbank Sports Centre, 139 London Rd, Edinburgh, EH7 6AE  
**TIME:** 12.00pm-4.00pm (a buffet lunch will be provided)  
**TOPIC:** Working with conflict & aggression

**SPEAKERS:** Liz & Stan Godek, experienced Child Care Managers / Trainers

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRESENTATION AND WORKSHOPS



### The Fostering Network Scottish Membership Meetings

**DATE:** Tuesday 5 November 2002  
**VENUE:** Quality Central Hotel, Gordon St, Glasgow, G1 3SF  
**TIME:** 10.00am-2.30pm (a buffet lunch will be provided)  
**TOPIC:** Relevant Persons-implication for carers

**SPEAKERS:** Kenneth McK. Norrie, Professor of Law, University of Strathclyde  
Other speaker to be confirmed

WORKSHOPS  
Further information will be sent nearer the time, or contact us on 0141 204 1400





# An advocacy service for accommodated young people

Last year Glasgow City Council decided to consult with accommodated young people about a proposed independent advocacy service to be funded jointly by Glasgow City Council and Greater Glasgow NHS Board. They wanted to know what kind of service young people would want and what kind of qualities they would look for in an advocate. Moira Walker and Roseann Maguire, then at Glasgow University's Centre for the Child and Society, carried out the consultation and here summarise some key messages from young people in foster care.

The council was particularly keen to consult with young people in foster care, since this group had not always been well represented in previous consultations, and less was known about their views. We met with 94 young people in all, of whom 58 (60 per cent) were living with foster carers. The foster care group included 27 girls and 31 boys who ranged in age from seven to 17, and encompassed young people who had grown up in long term placements, alongside some new arrivals. They were living in placements within Glasgow and beyond. We met with the young people within their own foster homes, nearly always in small groups, but occasionally on their own. The young people had loads of ideas and we are very grateful to them for talking to us. We also very much appreciate the crucial support from link workers and carers in setting up the meetings.

We started off by asking young people what they understood by the term 'advocacy' and, not surprisingly, it meant very little to most. A few thought an advocate was a kind of lawyer but the most common association was to think of the Rangers Football team manager at the time (Dick Advocaat) or the drink by the same name!

We then described what an advocate might do in terms of: *'helping someone put their point of view or argue for what they want; helping people prepare and put their own case or speaking on their behalf; making sure whoever they are acting for gets their point of view across and that other people listen and take it seriously'*.

Asked whether they would find this kind of help useful, the most common response from those in foster care was to say that their carers already did that for them and were very good at it. The following comments were typical of many:

*'My carer does that for me'*

*'She gets right into them and doesn't stop till she gets it'*

*'My mum (carer) gets things sorted for me. I don't need anyone else'*

This confidence that carers already acted as effective advocates applied across short and long term foster care, but there was an added dimension among young people placed with families on a permanent basis. There

young people pointed out that the carers were their 'parents' and for them retaining a sense of normal family life was more important than ensuring they received whatever they were entitled to. They said they might use advocacy if it was offered in school or the community about ordinary matters, such as tax liability on part-time earnings, but would avoid at any cost a service which drew attention to their looked after status.

Others thought that social workers *should* act as advocates. A few said their social workers listened to them and fought well on their behalf, but far more said social workers did not have enough time to get to know them and (consequently) seemed to care less than foster carers.

The strongest message from young people was that they wanted someone familiar to advocate on their behalf, rather than introducing a new person who would have to get to know them and their histories. Even in circumstances where they thought an advocate might be able to help, most young people said they would prefer their carer to be involved in contacting the advocate and even being present when they met. The exceptions were some older teenagers who would have wanted to meet with the advocate in private, an expectation, which would fit more readily with the kind of independent model of advocacy the council envisaged.

There was support in principle for an advocacy service, because young people recognised that not all carers would act in children's best interests and some may even maltreat them. In these circumstances they thought an advocate could make sure complaints were taken seriously. Advocates were also seen as a potentially useful extra voice, where it had proved impossible to get things done through the usual channels (such as securing a school place or changing access arrangements). However young people emphasised advocates would only be any use if they were able to achieve results, and some questioned whether an additional person arguing their case would make much difference (and so would be good value for scarce resources!).

These attitudes suggest that if young people in foster care are to benefit from independent advocacy, they may need some convincing of its potential benefits. There might well be a case for providing advocacy in collaboration with carers in some instances, while also producing accessible information about what independent advocacy can offer.

**Moira Walker,**

Senior Research Fellow, Social Work Research Centre, Stirling University.

## Book Review

**Caring for a Child with Autism  
A Practical Guide for Parents**  
Martine Ives and Nell Munro  
Jessica Kingsley Publishers  
2002 ISBN 1-85302-996-3

**This book** is another in a growing number of publications which seeks to expand knowledge and understanding of autism and its impact on a family.

The book is focused on the practical aspects of caring for children with autism and has parents as its target audience. The authors have both worked on the National Autistic Society's Helpline for parents and carers. From this experience they have a wealth of knowledge to share.

It will, however, be equally useful for a wide range of people who come into contact with families with a child with autism.

The details of some of the behaviours which a child may display, the endless vigilance needed and then some proposals for living with autism less stressfully are dealt with well. These will help workers coming in and out of the lives of families to appreciate in a more real way some of the stresses they face daily. The book helps you see why it is so important for families to have respite services, but will help carers to understand why parents need to know that their child's needs are well understood by any carer providing respite.

The descriptions of behaviour could also help parents to share their child's particular areas of difficulty and their fears with others who may be involved with their care.

For foster carers, teachers and others the insights into life with a child with autism and the impact on other children in the family will enhance their understanding and ability to support the child and the family.

This book helps to answer many of the questions a family and other carers may want to ask but may not feel able to put easily into words. The book describes in a straightforward way some of the different therapies that may be of help to families.

The book is presented as a journey from diagnosis through therapy and identifies some useful sources of help for families. This is a book that is clearly set out and could be very useful to people involved in foster care services.

Reviewed by **Anne Black.**



## Internet Safety

### Internet Safety for Young People

The NCH Net Smart Rules are enclosed with this edition. Further information can be obtained from the following :

Home Office

[www.wiseuponthenet.co.uk](http://www.wiseuponthenet.co.uk)

The Once Project for parents

[www.theonceproject.net/parents.htm](http://www.theonceproject.net/parents.htm)

for children

[www.fkbko.net](http://www.fkbko.net)

### Sister Josephine

Joanna Traynor

Bloomsbury Paperbacks

ISBN 0-7475-3511-6,

**Over** my years of caring for foster children and also for a mother with dementia, I have often enjoyed fiction about these situations. Recently, I was inspired by 'Sister Josephine', even although (or perhaps because) the foster carers are not portrayed sympathetically. No, number one in this story is Josephine, a nine year old in care, unable to remember anything before her current Mum and Dad, not knowing where her birth parents are, thinking maybe the Caribbean, but never finding out.

Josephine lurches through her childhood, getting a raw deal, with her foster brother Gary who kicks her around, her gentler older foster brother Martin who protects and then sexually abuses her, Bernadette who sisters her for a while, her first foster carers whose care does seem rather minimal, and her second carers who 'put up with me for two years'.

So one way or another, Josephine learns about people, violence, schools, sex and race and somehow she holds herself together through the terrors of her nursing training, starving for three days because she doesn't know how to get money to buy any food and is too proud to ask. As a Catholic she plucks up courage to rock the medical boat by refusing to attend abortion operations, but ends up needing one herself. And then? Well, read it yourself. It's well written, in print, and worth £6.99.

Reviewed by **Kristin Barrett**, foster carer for 15 years, now a carer with Perth and Kinross Council

## Focus Groups

Focus Groups have taken place in Aberdeen for the North, Edinburgh for the East and one is planned in Glasgow for the West in June 2002.

See the next edition for a summary of last year's issues and action planned by the groups.





## The Scottish Committee

**The Scottish Committee** continues to drive forward the business of the Fostering Network in Scotland.

The various partners involved in foster care are represented and ensure that our organisation remains uniquely representative in its approach and operations.

By way of the committee and our consultative process we stay in touch with what is happening to young people, social workers, carers, and all the other stakeholders in the fostering service in Scotland.

The people in the photograph of the Scottish Committee are as follows, from left to right:

**Stephanie Stone** - Fostering & Adoption Manager, Glasgow

**Gillian Baldwin** - Carer, South Ayrshire

**Gerri McAndrew** - Executive Director, the Fostering Network

**Linda Curran** - Administrator, the Fostering Network in Scotland

**Bryan Ritchie** - Manager, the Fostering Network in Scotland

**Anne Black** - Chair Scottish Committee, the Fostering Network in Scotland

**Kausar Karim** - Project Worker, the Fostering Network in Scotland, Young People's Project

**Marjorie Ruddick** - Carer, Aberdeenshire

**John Renwick** - Carer, Glasgow

**Bill Atkinson** - Service Manager, West Lothian

Not in picture - Joyce Tant, Carer, City of Edinburgh

### Next issue:

Sons & daughters of  
foster carers

Dilemmas around  
care & control

## Young people's advisory group

These groups meet across Scotland in the North, East and West. An inaugural meeting has taken place in all areas. They are attended by sons & daughters of foster carers and young people accommodated. In the next issue we will have more information on these groups, but if you want to know more in the meantime, please contact Kausar Karim on **t 0141 204 1400**.