

# Fostering

Promoting Foster  
Care in Scotland

Issue 8 Spring 2004



# in Scotland



## The residential weekend

Ean from Aberdeenshire, who is in foster care, reviews the residential training weekend the Young People's Project organised in November 2003.

The residential weekend was a good weekend because it brought people in foster care and sons & daughters of foster carers together as friends – we could exchange the good points and bad points of fostering. I am still in touch with some of them.

*(continues on page 5)*

**Page 3 may  
benefit you!**

We would welcome your contributions on any news, views, articles, ideas.  
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## Home Responsibilities Protection

In April 2003, Home Responsibilities Protection (HRP) was extended to registered foster carers who do not get Child Benefit. To claim HRP for the tax year 2003/2004, foster carers will need to fill in a claim form (after April 2004) and get a letter from their Local Authority or Agency to show they have been an approved foster carer throughout the year. For more information about HRP for foster carers, and how to claim it, get a copy of the free guide State Pensions for Carers and Parents:

**Telephone – 0845 731 32 33**

**Textphone – 0845 604 0210**

Quoting reference CB. The line is open 24 hours a day and calls are charged at local rates. Or download a copy from [www.pensionguide.gov.uk](http://www.pensionguide.gov.uk)

## Letter from Anne Black

**Dear Members,**

March is nearly over as I am writing this letter and there are weather warnings of snow and very low temperatures. I feel that we should not complain as we have been so lucky to get so far without too much bad weather.

The Glasgow office had a visit at the end of January from Robert Tapsfield, the new Chief Executive of TFN and we were very pleased he came to Scotland so soon after his arrival.

I feel sure that we will have a lot of support from him and I hope that he will be able to come back and meet some carers, young people and agency members soon.

The focus of this Newsletter is young people and in FN we are able to look at issues, ideas and experiences from the perspectives of the young people in foster care and those young people who are part of fostering families.

It is that unique partnership that marks out foster care from residential care and many strong alliances have been formed in foster care families.

As adults we have a lot to learn from the way young people get on with life and despite many setbacks they usually get back on their feet and live to fight another day.

It is a hard time to be young with so many pressures from education, media influences, internet dangers and within the community. There are so many adverse opinions of young people around that I feel the debates about anti-social behaviour can get the issues out of perspective. A minority of young people do cause a lot of difficulties but we have to respect and support all the young people who get on with their lives against the odds.

I was being questioned by the Children in Need assessor recently about the Young People's Project and the words that kept coming up about its work was how the project has helped to raise young people's self esteem and helped them to speak out about their hopes and wishes.

Foster carers provide the essential foundation for many of these young people to participate in projects and to support them as they move into adult life.

The Voices from Care publication last year was another demonstration of the skills and the maturity of so many young people. Their ability to capture an audience and to help workers to think in different ways is great.

The Mentoring developments have also provided extra support for young people and matched them with people from their communities to create new partnerships and to help them to greater independence.

I hope that the applications for funding that are in process at present will be successful so that we can continue to work with young people in care and with the sons and daughters of carers to maintain the momentum of Fostering Network's projects. We want to ensure that as many young people as possible get the chance to be supported towards a successful future.

**Anne Black**  
March 2004

## Your Chance To Be Heard

**Ever** thought your experience as a foster carer is not really listened to. If only they asked you what you thought then they would really know how to improve things. Well, here is your chance to be heard!

In the next few months every foster carer in Scotland will have the opportunity to participate in a survey, to find out your experience of fostering and to capture your views about the service you receive.

The Fostering Network has been commissioned by the Scottish Executive to undertake a major survey into fostering services in Scotland. The research will have three distinct parts, each informing the other, and building a comprehensive profile of the state of fostering services across the country in 2004.

The first part, a questionnaire, will drop through your door after Easter, asking you lots of questions about your experience of fostering, the service you receive from your fostering agency and your views on important issues like standards, reviews, fees and asking you about the challenges, satisfactions, skills and training you need to be a foster carer. Mary McKenna will be carrying out the research on behalf of The Fostering Network. She has lots of experience in fostering and considers this survey will be important in identifying the real issues that face foster carers today. She says "There have been lots of changes in child care in the last ten years, more specialist services to meet the needs of ever more complex children, but not all the changes may be for the better. We need to know whether we have enough foster carers with the right skills to meet future needs and we need to know what is working well and what needs improving. We know the survey may highlight some sensitive issues for carers but we hope they will tell us the real challenges that face them, in order that we know the scale of the problems so we can begin to address them comprehensively."

The second part of research will involve all local authorities and fostering agencies, seeking information about how their services are organised, gaps in services and their plans for foster care. Lastly, in the autumn we will be consulting on the essential skills needed to be a foster carer and how we can design training to develop these further. Again foster carers will have much to contribute to this debate and Mary says she is looking forward to working with focus groups on this. "It is important to understand and identify the skills foster carers need to maintain their commitment to children and then to find the best ways of developing these. This is not something we can do through a checklist or a survey. We will be bringing focus groups together with carers, trainers and managers to discuss this in depth and develop a framework for future skills training and development."

The first and biggest part of this research is the survey of all foster carers in Scotland, all of you. We know that foster carers will be keen to participate in this research but just to ensure we get a really good response we are offering a small incentive. There will 4 prizes of £50 vouchers awarded in the summer from all the people who return completed survey forms. So look out for your form when it arrives after Easter, complete it and return it to us so your views can be taken into account, and to make sure you are included in the draw.

**bryan.ritchie@fostering.net**  
Manager for Scotland

## Sons and daughters of foster carers

**Fostering** makes a difference to everyone in the foster home and carers' children are often in a position to develop strong, positive relationships with young people who are fostered. They need to be aware of the losses experienced by fostered children and how they can develop strategies to cope with the challenging behaviours and practice safer caring.

With the introduction of a specific session for Sons and Daughters in our recently launched preparation materials for prospective foster carers - the Skills to Foster - a foundation for quality care, I now believe we have a duty to continue to offer training and support to sons and daughters.

I have recently delivered training sessions in Safer Caring, Child Development, Attachment Theory and Separation and Loss to a number of agencies where a small number of young adults have attended with their parents. These young people have found the sessions invaluable as they have been given the opportunity to share their experiences and to develop their skills and knowledge while working alongside their parents.

Courses could be developed to suit a wider audience of young people so we can better equip them to deal with the varied situations they experience in their fostering.

Sons and daughters of foster carers deserve the investment of continuing recognition and support by fostering services.

**sue robertson@fostering.net**  
Training Manager

### Next Edition

**Focus Groups are back**

**Membership Meeting  
Programme for  
2004/2005.**

# What is Mentoring anyway?

"I don't like the word mentoring. I don't know, how can I put this, it's social workers' words, it's not young people's words. Do you know what I mean?"

## Young person at mentoring conference.

Mentor is not a word that most of us use in our everyday lives.

Mentoring is the process by which one person assists another to grow and develop towards their potential, freely offering advice, support and encouragement and assisting the person to set goals and plan a path towards achieving them. The mentoring relationship is about developing a person's confidence, skills, potential, talent and networks.

Most people can think of someone they can refer to as their "mentor". Throughout our lives, particularly at times of change or personal growth, we lean on positive relationships with people we can trust and turn to for advice and assistance. These people may be family members, carers, neighbours, close friends, or work colleagues.

Young people in the care system are no different.

Most young people, whether they are living with their families, in foster care or a residential unit, experience challenges and dilemmas during their journey to adulthood and more independent living.

Young people leaving care share a lot in common with their peers, but many of them have to cope with a quick succession of challenges and major changes in their lives – in leaving foster and residential care and setting up home, in leaving school and entering the world of work or further education, or more likely being unemployed and surviving on benefits, and in being parents – and at a far younger age than other young people. This would test anyone's self-confidence and resilience.

Access to the support of a volunteer mentor drawn from the general public can be helpful for some young people at this time. This is not to replace the support of foster carers and others, who often continue to act as mentors after a

young person has moved on, but to complement it and add to the overall support available.

Research by the Prince's Trust into the impact of support from a volunteer mentor for care leavers reported that 90% of young people had found having a mentor useful in terms of raising their self-confidence, their ability to take up and make use of opportunities open to them, and reduced their sense of being isolated within their local community.

In addition, 60% of them achieved short term goals that they had set themselves.

We currently have two mentoring schemes in place in partnership with North Ayrshire and North Lanarkshire Councils, funded by the Scottish Executive and the Local Authority.

Other schemes will be starting in the Spring in West Dunbartonshire, Edinburgh, and in partnership with NCH in South and East Ayrshire. A scheme is planned for Fife in the Autumn.

Each of these schemes seeks to support young people at a time, and in a way, that complements the other services locally available to them. This means that they are offered the support of mentors at different stages of the transition to adulthood and more independent living. Details of all these schemes can be found on the Fostering Network website.

Our mentoring schemes are a bit unusual for TFN services in that they are open to young people regardless of whether they are, or have been, in a family placement or residential care. Recent research suggested that at least one third of young people have experience of both and we believe that care leavers share many of the same challenges and dilemmas in moving on from their placements.

Some of the young people who receive support from our schemes, and the mentors who support them, recently appeared in a BBC documentary.

Here are some of their reflections on mentoring:

**Chris** "I was approached by a worker at the Social

Work Department about whether I would like a mentor. I wasn't sure what it was at first, but said why not?

Since I have got to know James it has been good.

It's a good way of learning new skills, or socialising differently, in a way you wouldn't normally do. I'm picking up a lot of new skills."

**Michelle** "I'm enjoying having a mentor because they help you with things you might not want to speak to other people about. It's like an older friend, it's like a best friend.

I'd like to become a nurse. I've been interested in it for a couple of years now. I've been wanting to do it at college but I've been too scared to go and see about it. My mentor and I have just started an evening class at college as a way of building my confidence. I was lacking in confidence. I was scared to do things myself. Now I can do things myself. Yvonne has helped me a lot, building up my courage."

**Catriona (mentor)** "Mentoring is about bringing people together. Whether you're a mentor or a young person, you both have something to give and you both benefit. We set goals together. We look through job centre info., practise interview skills, and I am learning too – basic computer skills!"

**Yvonne (mentor)** "I think it's quite important for care leavers to have a mentor because it's something they have asked for, it's not been pushed upon them. They know I am there voluntarily – I'm not being paid. I'm not a social worker, it's not my job. I am doing it because I want to and that seems to give the young person a lot of confidence and a sense of trust."

If you are a young person, or are caring for a young person, who you think would benefit from having a mentor or you would like to volunteer your time as a mentor then please contact either Scott or Deborah at the Glasgow office or check out details on the website.

[scott.telfer@fostering.net](mailto:scott.telfer@fostering.net)  
Mentoring Project

## The residential weekend

(continued from page 1)

The activities were good because they highlighted the different ways that those in foster care and sons and daughters of foster carers had of solving problems.

The sons/daughters did quite a dramatic play, which showed how they sometimes have to put up with difficult behaviours by taking those in foster care in. When those in care did their presentation - it highlighted some of the difficulties faced by them – eg lack of trust and isolation.

It was a very relaxed atmosphere – good for getting to know one another and breaking the ice. The accommodation was good and it was a good laugh on the first night.

Overall the weekend gave me a better outlook on what sons/daughters of foster carers have to cope with – letting those in foster care into their homes. It also gave sons and daughters some insight into the lives of those in foster care and their concerns.

Also for sons/daughters it showed how they get foster kids chucked in with them without knowing the young person's background- does he/she harm people, why is he/she in care? It makes it difficult for all parties to settle.

It let the two groups understand each other better. It showed us all the changes needed in the foster care system to make those in foster care lives easier.

The main highlight of the weekend was being with others involved in the foster care system. I usually find it difficult making friends but it was easy this time as we were all from the same background and had similar things in common. I look forward to meeting up with them again and being more involved with the Young People's Project.

Anyone who wants to find out more about the work of the project, or wants to get involved should contact:

Kausar Karim c/o The Fostering Network,  
227 Ingram ST, G1 1DA, or send an e-mail to  
[kasuar.karim@fostering.net](mailto:kasuar.karim@fostering.net)

## Foster Carers or Foster Parents

**The move** in terminology from being a foster parent to being a foster carer was based upon a number of assumptions. It assumed that carers would not replace the role undertaken by parents in the life of the children they were looking after. It reinforced the idea that carers were carrying out a task on behalf of an agency, rather than assuming the parental role in respect of the children they were looking after.

Whilst this still seems an appropriate distinction for many foster carers, and the children and young people they look after, increasingly we are coming across situations where carers are first of all looking after children for years rather than months, and are being left due to the shortages of staff to undertake many of the tasks associated with others in the social work department, or indeed parents.

When you talk to many of these young people the role they ascribe to the carers looking after them is that of parent. Of course parenting isn't just a name it's a massively complex combination of factors and issues, and carries with it an enormous weight of emotional and personal baggage. Parenthood is one of the fundamental tasks ascribed to being human.

It will be interesting to see in the years to come in terms of the move towards greater permanency for children within the looked after system whether we once again revisit the need to call foster carers, foster parents.

## Throughcare and Aftercare

**The new legislation** for young people leaving care in Scotland becomes law on April 1st 2004. For the first time local authorities have a legal requirement to continue providing support to young people being looked after away from home, up to the age of 19, with the option to extend this further depending on individual circumstances.

There is a real attempt to join up the wide range of services that everyone thinking of leaving home would have to deal with, somewhere to live, getting a doctor and a dentist, getting a job or further education or training and of course financial planning. The new system mean that one person will be appointed to ensure all the different people do what is expected of them.

There is an underlying theme through all of the guidance documents that the young person should have their say at each stage in the process, and wherever possible their wishes should be acted on. This is going to require a cultural shift for people working in certain departments, so let us know whether you think it is working or not.

There has been a huge amount of consultation co-ordinated by The Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, in which we at TFN have been actively involved. Although there are some things we would have liked to see changed – for example, we still feel the cut off point for compulsory support should be at least 21 – overall there are many positive elements to the new legislation.

One area where we had a minor success was in making the option to carrying on living with your foster carer explicit in the guidance. We know from the questionnaire young people completed for the "Voices from Care" report that many people approaching 16 felt under extreme pressure to move on to independent living, even if that is not what they wanted to do. Social workers often didn't present the option to carry on with a successful placement with a foster family, even suggesting that there were people waiting for their place as soon as it became vacant. This sort of thing should not happen in future. The option to stay where you are must be made explicit and should happen if that is what the young person wants. Although of course anyone is legally allowed to leave home at 16, the average age that most people leave home is 22

The proof of the pudding will be once the system starts to operate in April, and we would be very keen to hear from you how things are working out so that we can report it in the next magazine.

Full details of what the new legislation means can be found at The Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum web-site [www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk](http://www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk)

## Does anybody know where the front line is?

**You** may have recently witnessed the national advertising campaign across Scotland to recruit more staff to the social care work force. The main emphasis seems to be on the need to recruit more social workers. One of the questions that we put to the people responsible for the campaign, was where foster care featured and why when they considered "front line workers" foster carers were not seen as part of that workforce. We are still waiting for a response.

Whilst there is no doubt that social work is an extremely demanding undertaking, not helped by the fact that it is extremely difficult to recruit and retain social workers, equally foster care suffers from the self same problems. Fostering Network has campaigned for many years to have fostering featured much higher in both local, and national government's recruitment agendas to allow for placement choice which would be of benefit to both children and young people coming into the care system and carers themselves.

We will focus on the need to recruit more carers in this year's Foster Care Fortnight 10th May- 24th May 2004. Our theme during the fortnight will be the need for a national allowance scheme based at a realistic level.

## Looked after children - police checks on their friends

**The** Scottish Executive has written to local authorities requesting information on policies on police checks, particularly when children and young people want to stay overnight with friends.

This is a direct result of Fostering Network's Young Peoples Project report "Voices from Care", which highlighted this as the issue which caused most difficulty for young people, trying to live as normal a life as possible and sustain friendships.

In the letter it is suggested that this policy conflicts with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and also that there is nothing in Regulation or Guidance that states that police checks must be sought.

Some young people complain that, even when a police check is not required, they have to seek the permission of their social worker which can cause considerable and unacceptable delay.

S.W.S.I. guidance is that children's friendships should be dealt with as closely as possible to how they would be dealt with in an ordinary family. This will usually entail delegating decisions about overnight stays to the direct carer, so that decisions can be reached quickly. Only exceptionally will police checks be required.

Fostering Network welcomes the delegations of this responsibility to carers. However, carers should always be able to discuss these issues with the social worker and be supported by them in the decisions they reach. Delegation should not mean that foster carers will be held solely responsible if things go wrong.

We will keep you up to date with the discussion but would value your opinions.

## Summer School 2004

September 3rd, 4th and 5th September 2004

### Yes it's on again.

After Easter we will be writing to all Local Authorities and Agencies to both inform them of their allocated places, but also to give them an idea of what this year's theme will be.

If you want more information about this free event why not give us a call. For further details see page 8.

[Linda.curran@fostering.net](mailto:Linda.curran@fostering.net)

# Summer School

**Summer School this year** will take place during the 3rd to the 5th of September, once again at The Hilton, Coylumbridge.

As in previous years we will be writing to all Fostering Agencies including Local Authorities, Voluntary Organisations and Independent Organisations inviting them to send Foster Families.

In the last few weeks we have received a number of telephone calls concerning the school, and I thought it might be worthwhile detailing some of the issues in the newsletter so everybody can get a clearer idea of them.

## **Q. How are people chosen to attend?**

A. TFN allocates places to each "foster agency" according to their size ie the more carers a local authority /agency has the more places they are allocated. These are allocated in April every year in writing, to allow plenty of time for carer families to be chosen. This means TFN has no control over who comes, nor how they are chosen.

## **Q. Our families don't exactly match our allocation?**

A. We recognise that this is often the case, all we ask is that you contact us as soon as possible to let us know that this is an issue, we almost always manage to offer you a place for all of your families. Indeed we are keen that all the family comes not just bits of it. We would ideally like both carers if there are two, as well as birth children, and foster children.

## **Q. Who pays for this?**

A. The Scottish Executive pay for most of the event, we fundraise for the remainder.

## **Q. Why is it called a "Summer School"?**

A. We provide a variety of Seminars and Workshops for both Carers and Young People, as well as Sons and Daughters, over the course of the weekend.

## **Q. What about this therapy I heard about?**

A. Over the weekend we have a dozen Alternative and Complementary Therapists, on site. They provide about a hundred individual therapy sessions, as well as workshops on Stress Reduction, and Introductions to various types of Therapy. They also run workshops for Children and Young People.

## **Q. I'm worried that the school might not suit my children?**

A. We have over thirty staff to work with the children and young people, all of whom have experience of working with children, we ask each carer to look at the programme for the children and if there are issues we adapt the programme to suit each child where we can.

## **Q. What about the other guests?**

A. Everyone at the hotel is a carer that's often the best bit, as carers find the opportunity to talk to other carers from across Scotland a real benefit. In addition Staff, and Board Members from TFN are on hand to talk to carers about their issues.

## **Q. With over two hundred children isn't it a bit of a mad house?**

A. Actually the Hotel Staff look forward to the weekend, year after year they comment on how well behaved all the children are, and what a pleasure it is to have them stay with them. Most years there is a real "buzz" about the place, and carers and young people swap telephone numbers etc staying in touch years after the weekend.

## **Q. Does everything take place a Coylumbridge?**

A. No the School includes activities across Strathspey, including Adventure Centres, Wildlife Parks, Family Parks, as well as the activities within Coylumbridge itself.

## **Q. Is it just for Foster Families?**

A. Mostly, although every year we enjoy the company of Social Workers, we feel that this encourages the notion of partnership working. Although we seldom have many we encourage them to attend, and for their part they tell us afterwards that it has helped them in their work with both foster carers, and children.

## **Q. How do I find out more?**

A. Speak to your link worker as soon as possible, the list of those attending changes almost daily. We need responses from everyone by the end of May. If you have a question give us a call, drop us a line, or send us an e-mail.

Look forward to seeing you in September.