

Fostering

Promoting foster
care in Scotland

Issue 20 Winter 2007/2008

in Scotland

New strategy for foster and kinship carers in Scotland

The Government in Scotland, in partnership with COSLA, launched their national strategy for foster and kinship care in December, outlining a series of proposals which will strengthen and support the care provided through kinship and foster placements in Scotland.

Getting it Right for Every Child in Kinship and Foster Care includes a number of recommendations to improve the lives of children and young people looked after including; care planning, better placement matching, supports into independence, introduction of permanence orders, and supports for foster and kinship carers in terms of recruitment, assessment, training, remuneration and a national allegations protocol.

The Strategy states that approved kinship carers (those caring for a looked after and accommodated child) will have access to the same level of financial and practical support as foster carers. Until now, the 2000 grandparents and other relatives who are approved carers have been subject to a 'postcode lottery' when trying to obtain allowances and other support.

Bryan Ritchie, director of the Fostering Network Scotland, said:

'The strategy is the result of over ten years of campaigning, by this

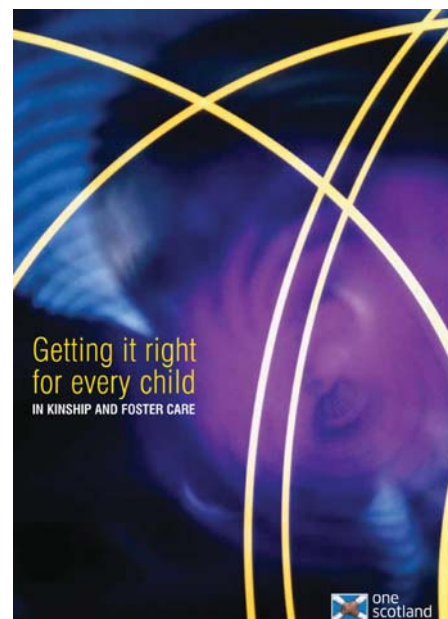
organisation. It marks the start of a fundamental shift in the way foster care is organised.

'The developments contained within the strategy and others yet to come will transform both the experience of children in foster care, as well as the experience of being a foster carer.

'The launch of this strategy marks a long overdue acknowledgement of the vital role kinship carers play in helping to keep families together and working to achieve the best outcomes for these children.

'However, there are thousands of informal kinship carers out there who have not been through the approval process so will not have access to financial or practical support. Many of them struggle to make ends meet, just as approved kinship carers do. The Scottish Government has allocated money to the Citizen's Advice Bureau to help ensure they are receiving the state benefits they are entitled to. But they will not have access to the full range of services available to approved carers. This is despite the fact that they are subsidising the state by keeping children out of the care system.'

While the strategy puts approved kinship carers on an equal footing with foster carers for the first time, the Fostering Network Scotland is disappointed that the Scottish



Government has failed to put a cap on placement limits and to introduce a mandatory allowance for foster carers based on the charity's minimum recommended rates.

A consultation on changes within the draft *Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations* is currently taking place, and will close on 14 March 2008.

The next Fostering Network focus group meeting on Friday 8 February will examine some of the themes within the Strategy and the Regulations.

For further information, visit www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/03143704/0 to download the Strategy.

To view or respond to the consultation on changes to the Regulations, visit www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/03142824/0.

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Bryan Ritchie, Director,
Anne Black and Robert
Tapsfield, Chief Executive,
of the Fostering Network

Ministers host reception at Edinburgh Castle

Adam Ingram MSP, Minister for Education and Early Years, and Cllr Isabel Hutton, COSLA welcomed young people from the Young People's project, foster carers, kinship carers and practitioners from across Scotland to a *Celebration of Foster Care* on 5 December 2007.

The evening in Edinburgh Castle's Great Hall took place following a ministerial debate in Parliament on the national fostering and kinship care strategy. Guests at the event were given the opportunity to meet with the

Minister, and give a flavour of their fostering experiences.

Also announced at the event was the *Getting it Right for Every Child in Kinship and Foster Care* strategy and the *Consultation on the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations*.

This event has taken place over the past few years now, and we look forward to working with the Scottish Government in ensuring that more foster carers are given the opportunity to attend in future years.

Note for diary...change of date

A notice for all those involved in the focus group meetings, the date of the next focus group meeting is **Friday 8 February** (previously Wednesday 6 February).

Hopefully all those involved will have received a telephone call, email or letter advising them of such, but apologies for any difficulties this has caused.

The meeting will still take place in Stirling Management Centre, Stirling and will involve focus group representatives from throughout Scotland. Information should, hopefully, be with all those who have advised Sarah of their attendance.

The focus group meeting will explore the themes arising from the *Getting it Right for Every Child in Kinship and Foster Care strategy*, as well as the consultation on changes to the *Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations*.

Government consultation on changes to Regulations

As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, the Scottish Government is currently seeking views through their consultation of the *Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations*.

The consultation runs until 14 March 2008, and the Scottish Government is seeking views on a range of proposals, including:

- Care plans
- Reviews and timescales
- Placement of the child
- Fostering panels
- Approval of foster and kinship carers
- Payment of allowances
- Placement outwith the local authority
- Records and recording

Your views are important, and if you wish to respond to any or all of the consultation, please visit www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/12/03142824/0.

Or, for further information or help in responding, please contact Sarah
t 0141 204 1400

Dear Members,

I am sure that I will not be the only person wondering where 2007 has gone!

It is hard to believe that as I am writing this letter, Christmas is now 'next week'. It will be a very busy time for you all but I hope that you will have found some space occasionally to recharge your batteries.

2007 has been a very busy and challenging year for foster care in Scotland. The consultation on the *National Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy* took a lot of time and planning but the results were excellent with very powerful views from foster carers, kinship carers and social work staff about what needed to be done to improve fostering and the outcomes for children.

Now the Strategy is published and has a new name. *Getting it Right for Every Child in Kinship and Foster Care*. There are many challenges in working out the details and I am happy that many Fostering Network members and carers will be part of the Working Groups which will report to the Scottish Government in the summer about the best way forward.

I hope that other people involved in fostering and kinship care will let the Fostering Network have any points they want to make about the strategy and its implementation.

I was very fortunate to be invited to Edinburgh Castle after the debate in Parliament on the Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy. It is always a celebration of all that foster carers and kinship carers do for Scotland's children. It is a pity that many more of you cannot be

invited but space is limited.

Over the year we have had several very successful membership and focus group meetings looking at key areas of concern for the service. We have been fortunate in having the Care Commission's Marjory Booth at the last two meetings and she has shared some of the results of inspections and found out what carers in particular want to know from the inspections and how they can get more involved in future inspections.

The most recent membership meeting focused on Education and there were teachers, social workers and carers and a lot of lively debate.

At UK level there was a successful conference in London and several carers from Scotland were there. It was a great success and Debbie Booth, a carer from Dundee, was one of the best speakers, lively and challenging!

There have been elections for new Board members and thank you to those who voted. Still a very low percentage of members vote and that is a pity as the more people who vote the more varied the Board. Adrian Clark from Scotland has been elected so I am looking forward to meeting Adrian and to working with him so that he can raise the issues and ideas from the Scottish Advisory Committee and from Scottish members at the Board.

Other changes are the development of a National Recruitment project with monies from the Government. Sarah Crangle from the Fostering Links project is going to be working on the project and she will be in touch with all the Agencies to hear

about their recruitment processes and their successes.

We will miss Sarah a great deal in the Fostering Links project but she will be continuing to do work for the project until March.

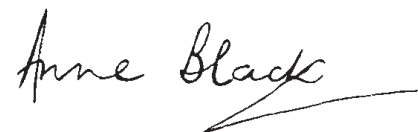
I realise that the uncertainties of future funding for Fostering Links made it very difficult for Sarah. We are hoping to get funding to continue the Links Project but nothing is ever certain till the cheque drops through the letterbox.

The other big event is Bryan's decision to leave the Fostering Network for a post developing foster carer services in New Zealand! Bryan has done so much to take the Fostering Network forward and to ensure that the Government and other organisations turn to the Fostering Network first for views on the issues related to fostering.

Bryan will be missed very much but he goes with our good wishes. We expect him to become the Alistair Cooke of New Zealand and to keep us in touch with developments at the other side of the world!

I hope that 2008 will be a good year for you all and that the recognition of the importance of fostering services to so many of Scotland's children will help to achieve better resources for carers and more staff to support carers in the valuable work they do day in and day out.

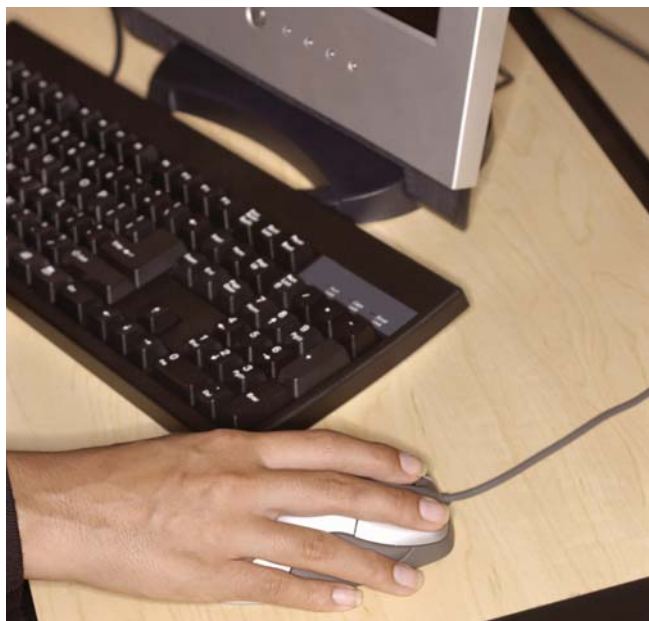
With best wishes,



Anne Black
Chair, Scottish Advisory
Committee

Akamas online training for

Akamas was established by Brian and Kate Cairns to provide training in child care, child protection and education. In particular the range of training includes online learning opportunities.



Aberdeenshire Council have recently piloted the Akamas training for their foster carers and in this article, Eilidh Rose & Caron Westmorland, from the family placement team, share their experience...

...Back in 2005, a number of our foster carers were identifying the need to increase their skills and preferring to do so whilst working towards a formal qualification. Our training team were approached and began sourcing a qualification for foster carers that would offer a skills base more suited to the fostering task than the SVQ qualification. It was at this point that contact was made with Akamas in relation to their BTEC Level 3 and Level 4 online qualifications. Akamas was considered relevant due to the involvement of directors, Brian and Kate Cairns and their long standing acknowledged expertise in family based therapeutic child care.

The decision was made to 'pilot' the Akamas training, and a group of four foster carers were selected to embark on the course alongside another four foster carers who were completing the SVQ Level 3. An induction day was held for the four selected foster carers, where a presentation was given by Akamas, with family

placement staff present. Six months later, with some of the work completed, the carers were invited back to meet up with the social work training officer and staff from the family placement team to discuss progress and address any problems or issues that they needed to raise. At this point it was clear that carers were enjoying the challenge and very positive of the benefits the course offered. The problems some had

encountered were in relation to the need for some basic IT skills on helping them submit their assessments. This was acknowledged, and put in place.

When the courses were completed, an evaluation was conducted, and the outcome was that the Akamas training was deemed more cost effective and resource effective, given that a higher number of carers could access and be signed up to gain the qualification. The quality of the materials was felt to be very relevant to the fostering task, of a high standard, and also felt to be accessible and user friendly.

Further funding was secured for another 45 Aberdeenshire foster carers to complete the course at Level 3, and a further eight at Level 4. Each cohort would have 15 carers, and they would attend an induction 'First Steps' day, along with their family placement social worker, where there would be a formal presentation from Akamas on the course content and a member of the corporate training team present to enable carers to access their online accounts and be guided around the website etc. It was also agreed that all future cohorts would be offered IT training as soon as they had accessed their learning accounts. The first

group began the course in September 2007, with a further cohort to start in January 2008, and then in March/April 2008.

Our first fifteen carers are currently working hard, and showing a high level of commitment and determination. Feedback from both carers, and their supervising social workers, is generally very positive and upbeat. So far, carers are feeling suitably supported by the agency and by their Akamas tutor. One carer states:

'My link worker has been excellent and willing to lend books and offer advice whenever I have asked...I have also been on the Akamas training days which helped a lot'.

Another carer states that: *'The Kate Cairns training provided by the agency is a must to complement the online training'.*

Carers are saying that it is early days yet, but so far contact with their tutor has been encouraging, although one or two have been a little confused by what the tutor is asking of them. They recognise that this is a new learning experience, and takes time to get used to what is expected.

Of the material, the general view is that it is of a high standard, relevant, interesting and enjoyable. One carer says:

'The material online is excellent. It is very easy to access and is laid out in an interesting way. The course work does not require any additional reading, but a list of useful books is included with each module and I have found the content of the course so interesting that I want to go and read these books. Everything is well explained and there are various exercises along the way to help you to or show you how you should be thinking...'

Some carers are still struggling a bit with what they feel is a lack of computer skills, but are also stating

or foster carers

that the agency are assisting them appropriately to overcome this. Most carers are finding the material online user friendly, with some finding it easier to print the page they are working on rather than read it on screen.

Carers have been asked how they are managing their study time, and there are mixed views here. Some are finding they manage the tasks in the recommended allotted time, or in less time, others find it hard to combine the care of the children alongside the extra demands of study. One carer says: *'It was going really well until the school holidays, and then a child was ill...and I lost five weeks.'*

Another says that he manages the time really well, but maybe because he does not have a television, and spends the evening on the Akamas material instead!

More feedback from a carer says that she finds the material takes her more than twice as long as stated to get through. This evidences that carers have to be encouraged to discuss this with their family placement social workers and their tutors.

When asked how useful the learning is, all carers were clear that this was a really positive experience. All say that they are now thinking a lot more, and developing a greater understanding of the reasons why children present such challenging behaviours. Feedback is also saying that carers are learning new strategies for managing these behaviours in a more positive way, and are feeling more confident as a result.

Tutor feedback indicates that the group, whilst responding to the material at differing timescales, are communicating well, are understanding the material, and beginning to make the connections,

for example, between the behaviours the children are presenting, and the possible underlying reasons. Some are now looking back to previous placements, reflecting, and making sense of how they now respond, where in the past they felt they were relying on instinct. Most carers are saying they feel privileged to be part of the Akamas training programme, and are pleased the agency have offered them the opportunity, and are very keen to do it justice.

The Akamas training programme is running alongside Aberdeenshire Council's ongoing training programme for foster carer's, as part of their continuous professional development. As mentioned, foster carers are already seeing the relevance of continuing to attend the other training offered, as it links to their learning through Akamas, and increases their understanding and confidence. Aberdeenshire Council continue to work in partnership with Fostering Network, who offer us support and guidance in our commitment to raising the standard and profile of foster care, alongside assisting us with the delivery of our training.

Although still early days, the feedback from carers is very positive, and the need for the agency as well as the course providers, to support them through this learning experience, listening to their views and responding to any needs arising is crucial. In turn, we envisage our carers becoming more confident and able to speak with personal authority in an informed manner, when the situation requires. We believe their skills will increase, and over time, children will have fewer placements, will experience less placement breakdowns and have carers more able to meet their needs and more assertive in their role.

'My link worker has been excellent and willing to lend books and offer advice whenever I have asked...I have also been on the Akamas training days which helped a lot'.

Training from the Fostering Network

February - June 2008

Managing Stress in Foster Care

****New Programme****

1-day course
14 February 2008
Glasgow

Skills to foster leaders' course

3-day course
18, 19 & 20 March 2008
Glasgow

Court Skills

****New Course****

1-day course
24 April 2008
Glasgow

Competency based assessment of foster carers

1-day course
28 April 2008
Glasgow

Role of the Supervising Social Worker

2-day course
21 & 22 May 2008
Glasgow

Men in foster care

1-day course
7 June 2008
Glasgow

Also, coming soon...

Our training team are currently developing a range of training on Kinship Care. These courses will be aimed at kinship care support workers, or kinship carers and will cover the impact of kinship caring on the family; changing relationships and also how best to support kinship carers.

To book a place or for further information on any of these open courses or any other training offered by the Fostering Network, contact Joy Crawford **t** 0141 204 1400, or visit our website www.fostering.net

The Young People's project

Advisory groups...

Young People's Advisory groups will take place in February 2008 in Glasgow, Stirling, Edinburgh and Dundee.

These groups are open to young people in foster care and the sons and daughters of foster carers.

Young People will have the opportunity to have their say on the Scottish Government consultation on *The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations*.

So, if you're over 12 and fancy coming along to let us know what YOU think

about fostering, why not get in touch... we'd love to hear from you!

East meets West...

Young people who attend the Glasgow advisory groups welcomed young people from Edinburgh for a fun event in Glasgow at the beginning of January.

This event was supported by the Big Step.

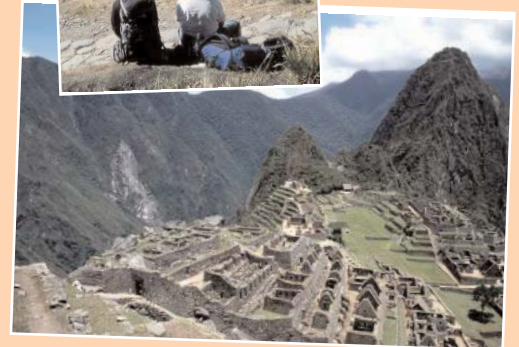
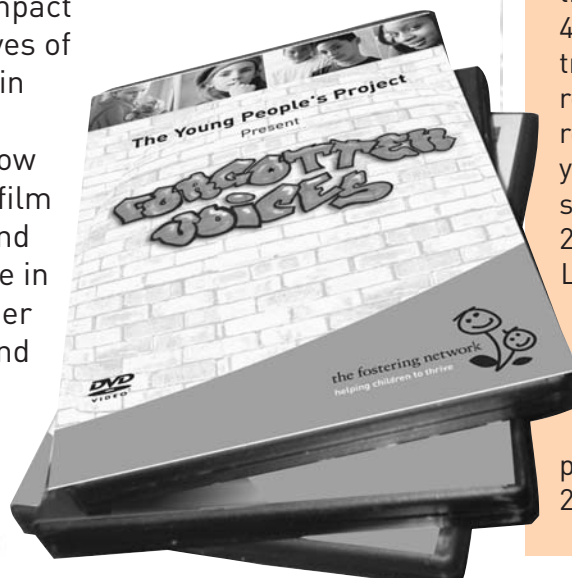
Funding...

... and a big THANK YOU! to the Moffat Charitable Trust and the Souter Trust in supporting the Young People's project.

Forgotten Voices DVD's still available for purchase

These two films are written and produced by young people involved with the project and are based on their real-life experiences. Featuring actors and aimed at social workers and trainers, the films contain hard-hitting messages about the impact fostering has on the lives of young people involved in foster care, and the support they require now and in the future. One film highlights the needs and issues for young people in foster care and the other highlights the needs and issues of the sons and daughters of foster carers.

Available on DVD, each film costs £25 incl. p&p. For further information or to purchase the films please contact Alison Boswell, Young People's project worker
e alison.boswell@fostering.net
t 0141 204 1400



Fancy trekking for funds?

The Fostering Network is seeking volunteers who fancy the challenge of joining us in a chance of a lifetime opportunity in October on the Inca trail.

The ten-day trek will explore many of Peru's highlights, including the legendary lost city of the Incas's, Machu Picchu, as well as many fascinating temples and settlements, views of the snow capped Andean peaks and the Sacred Valley.

The trek takes place from 3 to 12 October 2008 and between now and then we will be working with Discover Adventure to ensure that participants are fully supported in their fundraising efforts.

Places for the trek are limited, and the trek is challenging as it climbs to 4200m in altitude. To take part in the trek you simply have to complete a registration form and send us the registration fee of £150. Providing that you can raise a minimum of £2,900 in sponsorship by the end of September 2008 then your food, flights (from London) and accommodation are provided at no extra cost to you.

So, if you fancy supporting the Fostering Network, visit www.fostering.net/peru, email peru@fostering.net or call us on 0141 204 1400 for an information pack.

IFCO conference in Europe



Staff from the Glasgow office were fortunate to take part in the IFCO regional training seminar in Malta in November.

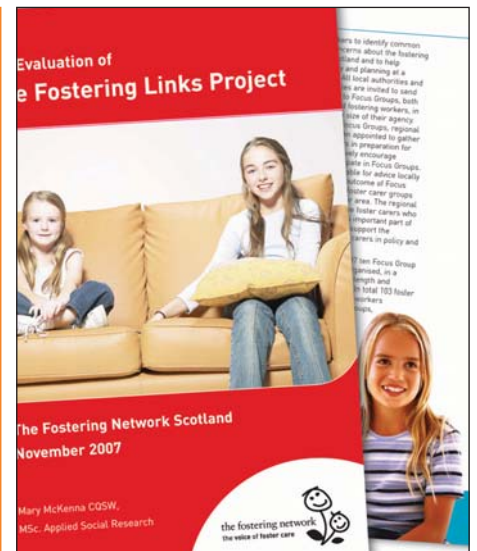
Sue Robertson and Sandra Moody presented a workshop on Allegations - how to make a difficult experience more positive. With an audience of over 60 delegates this workshop was extremely popular.

Meanwhile, Bryan Ritchie and Sarah Crangle presented the work of the Fostering Links project to a similarly packed audience; how it works; how it brings everyone in fostering together, and how this joint working has been so effective in ensuring foster care is pushed up the agenda.

With a delegation from across the world, including Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Russia and Europe as well as every foster carer in Malta, the conference provided a fantastic opportunity to share experiences of foster care, including similarities and differences from around the globe.

The next IFCO international conference will take place in Dublin from 12 - 17 July 2009, and will be of interest to foster and relative carers, childcare workers, social workers, managers, policy makers, residential care workers, young people and all who have an interest in the provision of good services in foster care.

For further information, visit www.ifca.ie/ifco2009



Evaluation of Fostering Links project

An independent evaluation of the Fostering Links project carried out by Mary McKenna is now available to download from our website.

Having received three years funding from the Big Lottery Fund, the Fostering Links project has, in particular, provided membership meetings, the focus group structure, the *Fostering in Scotland* newsletters and media training for foster carers.

To find out more about what the project has achieved through its partnership with foster carers and practitioners from across Scotland, visit www.fostering.net/scotland, or contact project worker, Sarah Crangle.

Changes to Disclosure checks

The Scottish Government is currently preparing for the introduction of the *Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007*, which will include a robust vetting and barring scheme that will safeguard children and protected adults.

With consultation on the secondary legislation for the Act running until 12 February 2008, a new electronic scheme record system will replace the current one off Disclosure

checks, and in place will be an individual scheme record membership for all those working with children and protected adults, including foster carers.

The scheme is intended to ensure that people who are unsuitable to work do not gain access to children or protected adults through work, either paid or unpaid (in paid employment or voluntary work), and that those who become unsuitable are detected early and

prevented from continuing to work, through an effective barring process.

The scheme would link in with those in operation in the rest of the UK and also with similar schemes in Europe.

For further information or to respond to the consultation, visit www.scotland.gov.uk/pvglegislation

Staff changes at the Fostering Network



Bryan Ritchie, Director

Sad farewell....

As many of you may know, at the end of December the Fostering Network team in Glasgow and colleagues from across the UK were sad to say goodbye to Director Bryan Ritchie as he left Scotland to take up a new challenge in New Zealand.

Bryan began his career as a trainee social worker in the mid 1970's, with Strathclyde Regional Council. Over the course of the next twenty-five years he worked throughout Scotland in a variety of settings, both as a practitioner, and manager.

Throughout this period he concentrated on working exclusively within childcare being a witness to many of the changes in social work during this time.

He left local authority service to take up the post of Director of the then National Foster Care Association in 1999, which became the Fostering Network in 2002.

Bryan has been with Fostering Network for eight years and has done an amazing job in getting the Fostering Network firmly on the map in Scotland as the voice of foster care.

Bryan does not often talk about his achievements but they are considerable. Over the last few years he has made a very great contribution to the *Adoption Policy Review* process and to the development of the *National Foster and Kinship Care Strategy*. We will try to ensure that foster care remains at the heart of services to children where Bryan would want to see it.

We will all miss Bryan's quiet approach and the way he just gets on with the job but we do wish him and his family well in this new adventure to the other side of the world.

The Fostering Network are hopeful of appointing a successor to the post of Director in the early part of 2008, and in the interim the team in Glasgow will be supported by Anne Black and Mary McKenna to ensure that we all continue to keep foster care high on the national agenda.

... and new projects...

As part of the *Getting it Right for Every Child in Kinship and Foster Care strategy*, the Scottish Government is funding the Fostering Network to provide a National Recruitment project.

Sarah Crangle began as National Recruitment project worker in January 2008, and will be in touch with all agencies through the course of the year to establish a picture of the needs of the foster care service in Scotland, as a starting point for a Government backed national recruitment program for foster carers.

To find out more about the National Recruitment project, contact Sarah on 0141 204 1400, e sarah.crangle@fostering.net

Sarah will be continuing as Fostering Links project worker until March 2008 when the Big Lottery funding comes to an end for Fostering Links.

Further funding applications have been sent in to funders, and it is hoped that a successful application will mean that we can continue with the good work of the project, including this newsletter.

Also within the Strategy, the Government in Scotland has funded, for three years, Sandra Moody as our Advice and Mediation worker based in Glasgow, as well as creating a second Advice and Mediation post covering the North of Scotland.

This is a welcome support, which is much needed at times of crisis by foster carers, as well as being an invaluable source of information on a whole range of topics in relation to foster care for foster carers and practitioners alike.

We are hopeful of welcoming the successful project worker for this post shortly.