

The
Fostering
Network

FOSTERING IN Scotland

issue 54

The newsletter of **The Fostering Network** Scotland

Summer 2016

In this issue:

- Letter from the Minister for Early Years and Childcare
- Foster Care Fortnight blogs
- Our new Health Matters project
- And more!

Hello everyone



I hope you are all well. It has been lovely to hear from so many foster carers and children about the exciting activities taking place over their summer. Huge thanks, too, to those of you who have been busy sky diving, tough muddering, kilt walking and more, raising money for us. As a charity, your donations make a huge difference to the amount of work we can do, and we can't begin to thank you enough!

During Foster Care Fortnight, just after the Scottish elections, we were pleased to welcome Mark McDonald MSP as the newly appointed Minister for Early Years and Childcare. Just a few days later, he wrote to foster carers across Scotland, and we are delighted to share his letter with you now in full – just turn to our centre spread.

The Minister is encouraging all of you to contribute to the Scottish Social Services Council's (SSSC's) consultation on the

implementation of the Learning and Development Standard for Foster Care (see the other article on this page for more information). The Standard aims to set out all the training areas which foster carers will need to know to allow them to support the children placed with them. We have identified some obvious gaps and are encouraging all of our readers to look at the Standard, respond to the questions and highlight anything you feel should be added or changed.

One of our foster carers, Gloria Potter, has shared her feelings on the process:

'The nature of partnership, I am sure you will agree, is that we must be listened to and engaged to find solutions that are fit for purpose. We need a learning and development pathway, for the sake of our children, and for our own sakes. Let's make sure that we are heard and that our views are included in a real effort to make a standard that is worth having.'

Given that the consultation is taking place over the summer, we asked for the deadline to be extended and are pleased to say that the closing date for responses is now 30 September. To participate in the consultation, please visit the SSSC's website: tinyurl.com/hzm5vmx, or google 'SSSC foster care standard' and the link will come up. We would urge you to take part to ensure your voice is heard!

In this newsletter, we are delighted to share with you Adam's moving essay on pages 10 and 11, in which he outlines his experience of being taken into foster care. We also have two exciting family events on

the horizon – have you registered for them yet? On Sunday 11 September we will be hosting Foster Walk Scotland (see page 9 for details of how to register). This is a family-friendly sponsored walk which will take place in Glasgow's Pollok Park which was once voted Europe's best park! Back by popular demand, we are also returning to Edinburgh Zoo in November for our 2016 Big Day Out. Places are filling up fast!



On our front cover is the charming four-year-old Daniel, who went in search of 'mini beasts' as part of his Let's Go Again Nature Explorer challenges! Here's another photograph of him completing his challenges with his foster sister, Edie. There is still time for the children in your household to complete challenges – there are five Let's Go certificates to collect.

We were all shocked and saddened to hear about the injuries sustained by judo medallist and charity patron Stephanie Inglis, the daughter of foster carers with Highland Council, during a motorcycle accident in Vietnam. Our hearts go out to Stephanie and her family, and we wish her well with her recovery.

Finally, as I am writing this, our Fosterline Scotland worker, Mirren Taylor, is about to head off on maternity leave and we will be welcoming a new worker to the role soon. We look forward to updating you on this, and are hoping to have some pictures to share with you in the next newsletter:

Until next time

Sara Lurie,
Director for Scotland

Make sure your voice is heard!

Discussions to inform the learning and development framework for foster care began nearly a year ago, but The Fostering Network has been disappointed by the lack of true engagement with foster carers and fostering services at that time.

Therefore, we want to encourage as many of you as possible to respond not just to the questions, but also to contact David Purdie from SSSC directly (e david.purdie@sssc.uk.com)

highlighting any gaps in the Standard you may find. The SSSC will also be hosting a series of webinars, to register your interest email David Purdie directly.

We have identified a number of gaps, including allegations, self-employment and tax to name just a few, and feel this is a real opportunity to ensure the Standard works for everyone involved in fostering so would like to encourage you all to contribute now.

Scotland can be proud of its fostering community

During Foster Care Fortnight™ 2016, our director, Sara Lurie, shared the following blog:

“ Scotland has many things to be proud of but the fostering community must certainly be very high on that list!

There are more than 5,500 children across Scotland who are waking up today in a fostering family. As we celebrate Foster Care Fortnight, I want to personally thank all of Scotland's foster carers for the incredible difference you and your children have made, and continue to make, to every child who enters your home. I want to also thank those children, who through no fault of their own, have come to live with you and enriched your lives in ways you probably never could have imagined. Together, Scotland is stronger and prouder because of you.

And, of course, I want to thank the fostering service staff and everyone else in teams around children for their unwavering commitment to helping to make Scotland the best place in the world for children to grow up.

Earlier this week, as part of our Foster Care Fortnight celebrations, I was on the radio and I was asked, “what do foster carers do?” And I thought, where and how do I possibly begin? Is this a full-length programme? Will they ever manage to fit in everything a foster carer actually does?

You open your hearts and your homes to babies, to toddlers, to pre-schoolers, to children in primary school and secondary

school, and to young people beginning to navigate their way through college and courses and job applications. You open your hearts and your homes to children who hope beyond hope that they will return to their own mum or dad. You open your heart and your homes to children who have no one, with no plan in place of how long they will stay or where they will go. You open your hearts and your homes to children who arrive with five minutes' notice and others at the end of a long planned journey. You open your hearts and your homes, 24 hours a day, to children you haven't even met. You provide that safe port in a stormy sea. Some children stay briefly and others forever. You can't undo a child's pain, but you strive to be part of the healing.

Giving without expecting

You see strengths and a positive future for each and every one of these children. You give without expecting anything in return. You share your time and give freely of yourself, to each child in your home, whether it be your own birth child or one who has just come through your door. Your patience is your strength, and your sense of humour and positive thinking is your lifeline. You share laughter and hugs and fun and games. You give love even when some children can't accept it. You record everything from meals eaten to toys played with; from words spoken and behaviours displayed; to likes and fears and secrets told



because you know, for confused children, you are the one to help them make sense of their lives. You see children grow and flourish and you know that small steps are a huge victory. You create opportunities for children to hold their heads up high and be proud of who they are. You grieve each and every time a child leaves your home.

You enrich one another's lives.

These are only a few of the endless things that you, as a foster carer, do each and every day. It is your normal way of life, and you should be so rightfully proud. To you, and your children, and to each child who has and will live with you, I want to say a huge thank you. You have touched the hearts of many, enriching one another's lives to the fullest.

As one foster carer recently shared on Facebook, 'Our youngest really makes me smile. I've started to give him more responsibility letting him go out on his own for short periods with pals... he just said to me, "Hey, you are giving me so many opportunities, you should be really proud of yourself!"'

And so you should be - each and every one of you.



Health Matters project launch

Launched during Foster Care Fortnight, our new Health Matters project - funded by various charitable trusts including The Robertson Trust and The Christina Mary Hendrie Trust - will explore health issues affecting foster carers, their families and the children they care for. Through the project, we will carry out a comprehensive consultation exercise regarding medical and health issues affecting foster families, following which we will produce guidance both for foster carers and fostering services outlining how medical reports should be stored.

The consultation involves a series of discussion days which will bring together foster carers from across Scotland, providing the opportunity for them to raise medical issues and concerns in an environment they feel comfortable doing so.

Are you a foster carer member?

Why not come along to one of our discussion days, which will address issues such as grief and loss when a child moves on:

Tuesday 25 October 2016

Edinburgh

Thursday 27 October 2016

Glasgow

Time: 10.30am – 2.30pm (includes lunch)

The second stage will be to establish the procedures fostering services have in place for storing medical files and information on foster carers. Please do get in touch if you can contribute to this. Where appropriate, we will also consult directly with medical practitioners to ensure we have considered their perspective and to establish any support,



training or guidance which may be beneficial in the longer term.

Finally, results from these consultations will be gathered together to enable us to produce guidance both for fostering services and foster carers.

Please do get in touch if you would like to be involved in this project, or if you are a foster carer member and would like to attend one of our discussion days contact Linda Bowie: **t** 0141 204 1400 or **e** scotland@fostering.net

Fostering Community Champions

Please see below for an update on the progress of our four year project.



Changes of staff

The project recently said goodbye to project worker Jane Wright, and over the summer we have been recruiting to find a replacement. We felt that it would work well having a worker for our young champions and a worker for our foster carer champions and with the help of Amy, Sam, Cherise and Jak (some of our young champions) and Dot (one of our foster carer champions) we have been busy shortlisting applicants and interviewing to appoint two new members to our team. We look forward to welcoming our new project workers who will be able to introduce themselves to you in the coming months!

Update from our young champions

The young champions have started working with a film company to create and produce a short film exploring stigma in foster care and what could happen if young people aren't given opportunities and the chance to succeed. Not only are the group providing ideas and experiences to help inform the film, but we are also doing the hands on work - from finding costumes and locations to script writing, casting and researching and production management! We'll be able to update you more in our next newsletter but, as a taster, the film wants to portray that young people in care can succeed and do well if people give them a chance, if there are no barriers and if the supports are in place to allow them to do so.

If you are aged 15-22 and would like to join the group to share your experience of fostering we would love to hear from you. We meet up about once a month (usually in Glasgow) and are welcoming new members all the time!



Big Day Out 2016 - filling up fast!

Have you secured your place on our 2016 Big Day Out? Taking place on 6 November 2016 at Edinburgh Zoo, once again this is proving a popular event in our calendar. To register your interest please contact Deborah Cook:
e scotland@fostering.net

A listening ear...

As a foster carer there may be times when you want to chat with someone who knows just what you are going through and can understand what you are feeling. Our foster carers, supported through the Fostering Community Champions project, are there to do just that. You can be reassured that what you share will be treated in confidence and, as well as coming up with some practical tips and suggestions together, you will also make a new fostering connection.

All the foster carers involved with the project are trained and supported by The Fostering Network and aim to provide an additional layer of support to that provided by your family and friends, supervising social worker, support group and fostering service. They've 'walked the walk' and now want to 'talk the talk' with you!

No matter how long you have been fostering, from a few weeks to many years, why not get in touch and say hello?

To find out more, contact Sarah McEnhill: e bethevoice@fostering.net or t 0141 204 1400

Aberlour Foster Carers' Support Group - a good practice example

Nicola Fearon, Aberlour's service manager, explains how they reinvented their carers' group to improve attendance: 'During a supervision session one of our foster carers proposed a different option - a group facilitated and managed by the carers. Supported by the supervising social worker they drew up the proposal and outlined the terms of reference for the group.'

'How it works in practice is excellent. The group forward the agenda and previous minutes to the service where we provide feedback and updates. We also use this group for consultations and learning and development needs. Although not all carers attend, they have access to all the information discussed and we continue to offer a support group facilitated by the team. A number of the carers who attend have grown in confidence - they feel listened to and take ownership of their fostering service.'

In the foster carers' own words

“ The training and support we have received at Aberlour has been fantastic, but we found that what was increasingly helpful along the way was our interaction with other foster carers:

- listening to their experiences
- picking up little tips
- feeling that you are not the only people going through certain problems
- getting help and advice on things that training may not cover.

Geographically we are quite a diverse group. While a local authority carer may have colleagues living close by they can pop in for a chat and a coffee with when things get tough, it's not so easy for us. In the early days as a carer it can be a little lonely and all so new. With the best will in the world, sometimes you might feel something is too trivial to discuss with your supervising social worker, but it feels important to you. Over a period of time, friendships have formed amongst carers, and eventually the carers' group came along which has now been going for a couple of years.

We normally meet every two months in what has become our spiritual home, Platform 5 in Edinburgh. It's a really convenient location that offers us a free meeting room, and has refreshments to hand. We do always say though that if anyone finds this inconvenient we are happy to 'go on tour' and arrange meetings wherever needed.

We have refreshments to wake us up, during which time we all have a catch up, and then we move on to our agenda. This can be items that Aberlour has asked us to discuss and give opinion on. It may be items raised by carers or feedback from carers who may have attended training, seminars or discussion groups with The Fostering Network, social pedagogy groups and others. There is a lot going on at the moment, for example, changes with Continuing Care and all that surrounds it.

Legislation can be complicated and until guidelines are published, it is great to have as much information as possible. The carers' group is a great way to be involved and to be kept up to date. **The future of our young people is too important for key decisions not to be fully informed.**

Looking to the future we hope that everyone will see the value of the carers' group - we certainly do. It is great that we are being involved in helping to shape what goes on at Aberlour and we should be enthusiastic, proud and positive about this. Everyone is encouraged to attend and we try to be as flexible as possible about time and venue if this helps more people to join in. ”

The Fostering Network is always keen to hear of innovative practice, please do get in touch with us if you have any good practice examples you would like to share. If you would like additional support or someone to talk, do remember you can contact our Fosterline Scotland service or our Fostering Community Champions project: **t** 0141 204 1400.



Have you collected all five Let's Go certificates yet?

We love receiving your Let's Go booklets, there's still time to complete yours! We are delighted to share with you some of the drawings children have included in their challenge booklet – it would be fantastic to receive more!

There are five Let's Go booklets to complete: **Sport; Arts & Crafts; Fun with Food; Scotland has Talent; and Nature Explorers.** Collect all five certificates and discover what can be achieved!

All children who complete challenges will be rewarded with a themed certificate and gold medal. Rather than *being* the best, we want to celebrate every individual *doing* their best - Let's Go enables everyone to be a winner!

If you would like additional copies of any of our Let's Go booklets, please do get in touch: **t** 0141 204 1400 or **e** scotland@fostering.net



Ellie, 8 months



Paige, age 8



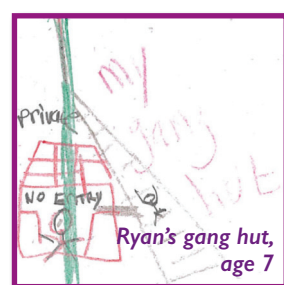
Erin, age 10



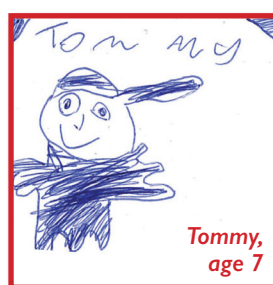
Kaleb, age 9



Cameron, age 9



Ryan's gang hut, age 7



Tommy, age 7

Minister for Early Years and Childcare

Mark McDonald MSP

T: 0300 244 4000

E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

To: Foster Carers and their families

May 2016

Dear Foster Carers

I am writing to express my sincere thanks for your continued dedication to fostering. There can be no doubt that your commitment is life changing and vital to supporting children and young people who can't remain at home.

The Fostering Network's Foster Care Fortnight campaign gives us all the chance to recognise the incredible contribution you and other carers are making every single day. We also use this time to encourage others to think about fostering and show the public how rewarding it can be.

As Minister for Early Years and Childcare I want to ensure that we are doing all we can to support looked after children and the people who give them a home, provide them with stability and affection and build brighter future.

I want to hear the views of carers from all across Scotland to the proposal to introduce new standards of learning and development for Foster Carers. There is a consultation on this being led by the Scottish Social Services Council that will run until August and I would urge you to make your voice heard on this.

A new National Allowances Review Group will be formed shortly to look at how we can go about creating a scheme that will give Foster and Kinship Carers across the country consistent support.

We have also produced draft guidance to support carers with the sort of decisions they face each day, with the final version due to be published in the summer. I have included more detail on all of this work below along with links where you are able to share your views.

Improving the care available to Looked After Children has been important to this government since we came to office. So far we have extended the age that a young person can remain in care and raised the age that they are entitled to financial support.

All of this relies on there being Foster Carers and others opening their families to vulnerable children and young people who may not have had the best start in their lives.

Thank you once again for all that you do to give children and young people the greatest gift imaginable. I look forward to meeting more of you and hearing your experiences and ideas to continue to improve the support available for families.

The Review - Next Steps in 2016

I am especially keen that we continue to work collaboratively in order to benefit from the wealth of experience you all have so I'd like to draw your attention to the consultation launched by SSSC on 16 May. This will run until 15 August and is all about the new learning and development Standard for Foster Carers. There are links on that page to a consultation survey, the draft Standard document and information on how to book a place on workshops being run in June. I would encourage you to respond to the consultation and to attend a workshop if possible. If you can't, I know SSSC have plans for run online webinars which you can listen to, so look out for these.





We will also soon be issuing invitations to a National Allowances Review Group, which will have foster carer representation and will be tasked with agreeing a new national allowances scheme to meet the needs of children living in both kinship care and foster care. At the moment we are undertaking some preparatory work and hope to be in a position to issue invitations to a first meeting this summer.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

Some of you may already be aware, that the new Act from 1 April 2015 allows 16 year old young people to remain with their foster carers up to the age of 21 in new Continuing Care placements, should they wish to do so. It also entitles them to Aftercare support up to the age of 25 to support a much more gradual transition into independent living. We want our young people to feel confident and supported into further education and adulthood in the same way any non looked-after young person would be. Consultation events for foster carers, service managers, practitioners and young people took place last year to help explain this new policy and also to assist us in developing practice guidance for Aftercare and Continuing Care. We will publish the guidance this summer.

Guidance on Decision making for Foster Carers

Last year the Scottish Government commissioned the Scottish Child Law Centre to develop other more practical guidance to support you in your role as foster carers. This Guidance will help you to understand your legal stance on the many everyday decision you may need to make about the children in your care.

The guidance covers a vast array of topics which we consulted on in November last year. The consultation is now closed but you may find it of interest to read the draft guidance. We are working on the final guidance now and we hope to be in a position to publish it this summer.

The Fostering Network

I hope that you find this information to be useful, however should there be other issues which you require advice or guidance on, the Scottish Government fund The Fostering Network to provide a national helpline which you can call on 0141 204 1400 on Mon-Fri between 10 am and 4 pm or alternatively you can e-mail them at fosterlinescotland@fostering.net

Thank you once again for the crucial day to day support you provide for children and young people who may have not had the best start in their lives.

MARK MCDONALD

STOP PRESS!

Consultation deadline extended from 15 August to 30 September 2016.

St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot



Fosterline Scotland update

Hello everyone. Fosterline Scotland has taken a number of queries lately where foster carers do not have relevant person status under the Children's Hearings System, or they may have relevant person status but be unsure of what rights and duties this gives them.

The Children's Hearings System is the care and justice system for Scotland's children and young people up until the age of 16 (for some children, until 18). Children and young people are referred to the children's reporter because some aspect of their life is causing concern. This is usually done by social workers, the police or health or education professionals, but anyone can make a referral.

If the reporter receives a referral about a child or young person, they investigate it and determine whether or not compulsory measures of supervision are required. If they are required, the case is referred to a children's hearing. Further information is available on the children's hearings website: chscotland.gov.uk/the-childrens-hearings-system.

The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 resulted in some changes for foster carers. The most significant of these was the change to the law relating to relevant person status. Relevant persons have particular rights and duties under the law. As a relevant person, for example, you have a right and a duty to attend hearings, as well as having a right to receive the papers and to send in a report to be considered by panel members. You also have the right to appeal against the decision of the children's hearing within 21 days of the hearing. Relevant persons can be involved in proceedings and contribute to decisions about the child.

As a foster carer, it is likely that a child or young person is in your care because they are subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order which was put in place by a children's hearing. If a child or young person that you



are looking after has a Compulsory Supervision Order, they will need to attend a children's hearing at least once a year.

Here are **10 points** all foster carers should know about being a relevant person in the Children's Hearings System:

1. Under the 2011 Act, foster carers are not automatically considered to be relevant persons.
2. The 2011 Act provides a route for foster carers to be deemed as relevant persons by a pre-hearing panel or a children's hearing.
3. Foster carers can ask the children's reporter to arrange a pre-hearing panel if they believe that they meet the significant involvement test to be deemed a relevant person.
4. The test for being deemed a relevant person is that the foster carer has, or recently has had, significant involvement in the upbringing of the child. The

hearing will consider many factors including - is the foster carer fulfilling a parental role in relation to the child; is the foster carer involved in key decisions in relation to the child, and also the length of time the foster carer has been involved in the child's life.

5. If the panel members think that the foster carer has, or has recently had, significant involvement in the upbringing of the child, they will make that person 'relevant'.
6. Once you have been deemed a relevant person this status will continue while you have ongoing significant involvement in the upbringing of the child.
7. As a relevant person, you can bring a representative to the hearing - this could be your supervising social worker, a lawyer, advocate or friend, and you can also send in a report to be considered by the panel members.
8. Foster carers who are not deemed to be relevant persons may still be able to attend the hearing, either as a representative of the child, or at the discretion of the panel members.
9. This change recognises that while foster carers play an important role in the lives of the children in their care, it may not be appropriate to grant relevant person status if a foster carer's involvement in the child's life is on a temporary or very short-term basis.
10. Once relevant person status has been granted, it can only be removed by a hearing if the person ceases to have significant involvement in the upbringing of the child.

Please note the above points are not an exhaustive list. Please contact **Fosterline Scotland** if you have any further questions about this, or any other fostering issues. Our Fosterline Scotland telephone line is open Monday to Friday, 10am until 4pm. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have a query you would like help with.

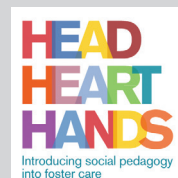
Scotland's Social Pedagogy in Foster Care Practice Forum

The Fostering Network's Head, Heart, Hands programme has now ended, but our involvement in social pedagogy is continuing.

Are you a fostering service manager? Would you be interested in coming along to our social pedagogy forum? If you would, please do get in touch. If you are a foster carer and would like

to increase your service's involvement, why not encourage your service manager to contact us?

For more information about social pedagogy in foster care in Scotland, please contact us:
e scotland@fostering.net



Foster Walk Scotland

Have you signed up for Foster Walk Scotland yet? Being held on Sunday 11 September 2016, Foster Walk is a family-friendly event taking place in Glasgow's beautiful Pollok Park. Why not enjoy a fun walk, while raising money to help us to continue our work transforming children's lives.

Walkers are encouraged to dress in orange and challenged to raise just £25 individually or £75 as a family. We can provide you with a Foster Walk fundraising pack, and give you advice on setting up an online giving page. Everyone who manages to raise £100 or more will receive one of our branded t-shirts for free.

To register, please head to our website: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/foster-walk. There is a registration fee of £11.99 per family or £5.99 per adult.

We look forward to seeing you there!



Scouting out the route for Foster Walk Scotland

Education – getting the support your foster child needs

If you are concerned about the education or additional support needs of a child in your care, talking to their school is a good place to start. It's often possible for issues to be sorted out by explaining your concerns to the child's teacher or head teacher, or by asking to discuss the child's personal learning plan or individualised education programme. If you have done this and are still concerned, you could talk to your education authority – ask to speak to the additional support for learning officer or the parent liaison officer.

If you have done this and are still unhappy you could consider using mediation. By law, education authorities must provide an independent additional support needs mediation service free of charge for parents, carers and young people.

Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process where an independent person – the mediator – helps those involved in a disagreement to explain their concerns to each other and find a shared solution both parties are happy with. Any disagreement about the education of a child with additional support needs can be referred to mediation. Using mediation will not affect your rights to take the matter further later on.

If you would like more information, please come along to our education workshop, led by Sandra Mitchell, mediation manager for Additional Support for Learning, Children in Scotland, Edinburgh.

To register your interest: [e scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net) or [t 0141 204 1400](tel:01412041400).

Back to School – a brief guide on working with your (foster) child's school

We are pleased to share with you a brief guide compiled by David Woodier, a support teacher for looked after children. David has an adopted daughter, and blogs about teaching children with attachment difficulties at saia.org.uk/blog

- Be an advocate for the children in your care but try not to become adversarial. Encourage teachers when they are trying to help. A good relationship with the teacher may result in more support.
- When meeting teachers, take someone with you who can help you remember what was said.
- Do your homework and know your child's rights. More information can be found through the Scottish Government's advice service: enquire.org.uk
- Under Additional Support for Learning legislation you may have the right to request an assessment of your child's needs, or make a placing request to a special school independently.
- If your child is excluded or being threatened with exclusion, ask to see your local authority's policy on exclusion. Most authorities have specific guidelines for excluding looked after young people. Informal type exclusions should not be used.
- Exclusions should only be used as a last resort, and the school should be proactive in trying to address the underlying reasons for a child's difficulties in school.
- Encourage your child's teacher(s) to learn about trauma and attachment. For more information, see L. M. Bomber's *Inside I'm Hurting: Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties in Schools* (2007).
- Remember, if your child is having difficulties at school, it is a shared problem – don't feel that it is all your responsibility to fix things.

More information can be found through the Scottish Government's Enquire advice service, and you can also download a parents' guide to additional support for learning from Enquire's website: enquire.org.uk/20100622/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/parents-guide.pdf



Happiness, belonging, caring - I would not be who I am without foster care

This remarkable essay was written by Adam, a 19-year-old university student in Scotland, and was shared during Foster Care Fortnight:



Adam with his foster carer, Colin

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

Robert Frost

'Will you come into my office?' Those hallowed words that terrified me the most when I was around Ms Smart. She was a giant of a woman. She must have stood 8ft tall, without high heels of course. My friends and I believed she hunted hobbits in her spare time because she caused fear in the mind of every child, even more so to me. Therefore, being invited into the dragon's lair was not something I wanted to do; even now I would run away. I reluctantly and hesitantly and cautiously and tentatively dragged my legs into her den of detention; her class of confinement; her office of misery and despair. I stood in a militaristic fashion - those six months in the cadets paid off after all. I stood: head high, shoulders straight, legs locked, knees weak and slight tremble.

She said the most shocking phrase, a phrase unheard in the halls of this high school. A phrase even some of my friends still do not believe, words that still shock me today. However, this phrase would echo throughout my life: 'My dear.' She pulled the seat out and asked me to sit down.

I was confused, why was the dragon doing this, treating me like a pet? Was it part of her evil plan? I realise how ridiculous that thought process was. Nonetheless she continued with these "strange" phrases: 'Are you comfy?', 'Do you need a drink?', 'How are you feeling?' I was confused, where was the giant, the dragon, the incarcerator?

Blowing dreams into my mind

I had heard these phrases in children's stories. I never believed the stories. They were only a creation of Hollywood. I was fantastically wrong. Someone cared about me. Just like the BFG in the Roald Dahl book, Ms Smart was blowing dreams into my mind, dreams of someone looking after me, even if it was this terrifying woman. This giant was friendly and caring and gentle and loving and thoughtful and considerate and interested, interested in me.

She bought my lunch, from the school canteen, and even bought me a little cake - empire biscuit (my favourite). I was beginning to like the dragon. She was about to lead me down the road less travelled.

I now realise and understand her actions. She wanted to ease my mind, and not worry me about the news she had for me; the bad news, the really bad news, the horrible terrible news!

Or was it? It was the best news of my life!

'I'm sorry, but you're not going to go home today, you're going to go stay with different people.'

Where was I going? Who would look after me? How would they look after me? I never asked these questions, although I was shouting them in my mind.

This was going to change my life. I just had no idea how much. I did not speak; I did not move; I did not think. Ms Smart knew this was going to be difficult for me. She wanted me to return to class, to take my mind off this 'horrible' day. I do not remember much after being told I was not going back 'home'. I have never figured out why I forgot. I only recognise being in a state of shock and anxiety.

I spent the entire day in her lair, reading and doing lots of school work. I needed to take my mind off what had happened. Ms Smart asked me simple questions like: What were my hobbies? What did I do at home? My favourite holidays? These simple questions could not be answered. I had no answer; I had no hobbies, and I had no life.

Surviving and living are different

I still contemplate how I lived. Surviving and living are very different and I don't think I lived. It was hard, having no potential to achieve, nothing to show for 14 years of life and no one to pick you up when you felt down. We all take our lives for granted, however I underestimate my life, it was an extremely difficult life, but it got easier; a lot easier. I was about to take the 'road less travelled'.

These roads were the escape from no-man's land. I had lived in the trenches all my life, a constant bullet of hurt. I was used and abused. Uncared and unloved. It was manipulating me like a pawn on a chess board. If the knight captured me then they were not concerned.

I now care about how appalling these people were as a family.

“ I still contemplate how I lived. Surviving and living are very different and I don't think I lived. It was hard, having no potential to achieve, nothing to show for 14 years of life and no one to pick you up when you felt down. ”

They were meant to provide love and care.

Foster care was going to change my entire being. The shy, timid, scared, talentless boy was to become a confident, happy, out-going individual (with an amazing sense of humour!).

I was heading down a road that would help me. There is no way a child could comprehend how magnificent this change was going to be. However, I had to take a giant leap of faith. The road would change my life forever and anything was better than the warzone. I should have been scared but I know it was for the best. Five years is a very long time. I travelled across Europe, I met the future king, and made great friends and memories. Thanks to my new family.

Family is something I have never really comprehended. What is a family? Why do we have one? What is really the purpose of a mum or dad? Do you really need to see your grandparents every weekend?

Family is 'a group consisting of two parents and their children living'. I live with a very kind, thoughtful and caring man. A family does not need to be related. A man who would lead me down a road very much created by his love, as much as my hard work.

A family should be a group of people that love and care for each other.

My friends ask me if I call him Dad and I say no. He is so much more than that. He is a mum and dad and a family wrapped into one. I do not know what family is but this great man is the closest I will ever get to it.

I remember it all, all of that day, even down to how many pens were on her desk. Did that matter? No. Not a lot did matter up until that day.

I visited my old school three years after I left. It was astonishing. The wall was the same disgusting grey, they had still not fixed the sign, which I may or may not have broken three years previously. All my past was opened up and flashing before my eyes.

Ponder what my life would have been

Then I saw the dragon. She was standing waiting for her next victim to step into the cave. However, age had told me she was no longer hunting hobbits; she was now hunting a promotion. At first, I tried to escape. Yet I was trapped between a gaggle of pre-pubescent and a steel pillar. You could say a rock and hard place. Going into a school, being the only one with a blazer on, was never a great idea. So the dragon saw me and she flew over to me.

Embraced me.

In a hug.

Why was I being hugged by this scary woman? Oh yeah, she helped save my life. If she was not this brilliant, superb and caring woman, I would have been left to suffer the worst fate of them all: nothing. Nothing would have happened. I would not be living this amazing and joyous life. I would not be writing this essay.

Ms Smart gave me the platform to what I am today. I went back to visit Ms Smart again on my own terms. She loved this essay it made her laugh, cry and ponder what my life might have been like without foster care. I ask you to do the same.

I am confident, outgoing and greatly modest. I am not a boy stuck in the middle of a battlefield. I am a man walking through Flanders field, staring at the poppies wondering how I survived. I have everything I have ever wanted. Happiness. Belonging. Caring.

I would not be who I am without foster care and without Ms Smart.

And that is why I took the road less travelled.

Why not attend our training?



'My name is Marjorie Ruddick. I have been a foster carer for 30 years and I am an associate trainer with The Fostering Network. I co-present one of their most popular courses, The Skills to Foster: Train the Trainers. It is a three-day course designed to enable participants to develop the knowledge and skills needed to deliver training, and provides the opportunity to become familiar with the materials used in preparation of foster carers across Scotland.

'Every participant experiences co-presenting a section of a particular session, and also participates as a prospective foster carer. General feedback has highlighted the benefits of involving foster carers in this training. It promotes working together and sharing personal experiences which further enhances the relevance of the materials and provides a realistic and practical insight into the role of a foster carer.'

If you would like to book a place on The Skills to Foster: Train the Trainers, or any of our other training courses, please see below.

Men Who Foster*

Saturday 27 August 2016

Glasgow

Price: members £110.00 plus VAT/non-member £220.00 plus VAT

*Please note this course is for men only.

The Skills to Foster: Train the Trainers

Tuesday 4, Wednesday 5 and Thursday 6 October 2016

Glasgow

Price: members £310.00 plus VAT/non-member £620.00 plus VAT

Receiving, Giving and Storing Information – Now available as an open course!

Wednesday 9 November 2016

Glasgow

Price: members £110.00 plus VAT/non-member £220.00 plus VAT

This new course includes open discussion and will look at:

- why foster carers need to keep records
- how we receive and give information
- who is the information for?
- what happens to this information?
- what the law says
- report writing.

All our courses include lunch. To secure your place, or if you would be interested in holding one of our courses in-house, please contact Joy Crawford:

t 0141 204 1400

e scotland@fostering.net

or visit: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

A huge thanks to all those who support our charity

We have been touched by the many individuals who have been raising money for us here in Scotland over the last few months. Our special thanks go to: the enterprising MacIntyre foster family who raised money by knitting Easter chicks; Ben Cook for enduring the Tough Mudder for the second year running; Stewart Duncan for braving a skydive in July; and to our Kiltwalk trekkers Douglas Ruffhead and Angie Taylor (pictured above). As a charity we are reliant on the generosity of people like you, helping us to improve the lives of more children in foster care in Scotland.



If you would be interested in making a donation, or setting up an online giving page, please either contact us directly or follow this link: mydonate.bt.com/charities/thefosteringnetworkscotland

Do you know your MSP?

With the elections still fresh in our minds, and a new government in place at Holyrood, now is a good time to get in touch with your local MSP to discuss with them issues related to your role as foster carer, such as allowances and the Learning and Development Standard.

You can find out how to get in touch with your local representative here: parliament.scot/msps and if you want any further advice please do not hesitate to get in touch: Sara Lurie [e scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net)

Dates for your diary ...

Saturday 27 August 2016
Men Who Foster (Page 11)

Sunday 6 November 2016
Big Day Out (Page 4)

Sunday 11 September 2016
Foster Walk Scotland (Page 9)

Wednesday 9 November 2016
Receiving, Giving and Storing Information (Page 11)

Tuesday 4, Wednesday 5 and Thursday 6 October 2016
The Skills to Foster: Train the Trainers (Page 11)

Tuesday 25 October 2016
Health Matters discussion day (Page 3)

Thursday 27 October 2016
Health Matters discussion day (Page 3)



If you are interested in attending any of these events:
t 0141 204 1400 or **e** scotland@fostering.net

The Fostering Network Scotland...



With thanks to the funders who supported this edition.

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Registered Charity Number: 280852
Registered in Scotland SC039338

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