



The Fostering Communities programme

Walking Tall: Year 3 evaluation report 2022-2023

Laura Hanks and Charlotte Wooders 2022 - 2023

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1. Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the Welsh Government for commissioning the [Fostering Communities](#) programme, led by The Fostering Network in Wales, to which this Walking Tall Project contributes.

Stage Three of the Walking Tall Project involved care-experienced children and foster carers who were very generous with their time. We would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to them, as this report is grounded in, and informed by, their engagement.

Thank you to Claire Danvers, an artist based in South Wales who illustrated the worksheets in Stage three, which beautifully extend the activities for discussions between children and their foster carers, and with the facilitator.

We appreciate the work of Siân Hopkins who transcribed the conversations with children and foster carers. Thank you to Dawn Mannay and Rachael Vaughan, Cardiff University for the handover meeting to assist Laura Hanks and The Fostering Network to continue with the Walking Tall Project.

2. Executive summary

Walking Tall is a three-year project (2020 – 2023) for children in foster care (aged 9-11), enabling them to make their voices heard and develop their confidence. Stage One and Two of the Walking Tall Project sought to facilitate a children's advisory group to assist with trialling and developing activities for later stages of the project. Foster families were posted a range of arts-based materials and activities, and once these were completed children and foster carers had an online conversation with one of the project team members about their engagement with the project, their evaluations of the materials and activities, and their recommendations for the later stages of the Walking Tall Project.

The stage [One](#) and [Two](#) report set out details of the activities and consultation sessions, outlined the key points raised by children and foster carers, and offered a series of recommendations for the remaining stage of the Walking Tall Project.

This stage three evaluation report documents the development of the project further, utilising the findings of Stage One (Boffey et al. 2021) and Two (Boffey et al. 2021b). Six children (aged 9 – 10) were provided with a resource pack containing the guidance, materials and worksheets for six craft activities. These activities were designed with specific features to explore different themes. Building upon the format of previous stages, foster carers and children were invited to complete the activities together and feed back to a facilitator on a Zoom call together. Feedback from children and their foster carers was rich and will shape the future direction of the project.

3. Section one: Background

3.1 About The Fostering Network

[The Fostering Network](#) is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice. We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes.

3.2 About the Fostering Communities programme

[Fostering Communities](#) is a national programme of improvement and support led by The Fostering Network in Wales and funded by the Welsh Government from 2020-2025.

The programme is underpinned by a fostering community shared power model, built around workstreams and interventions, which will aim to improve wellbeing in line with the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#). Embedded within Fostering Communities is a co-production approach, which means working in equal partnership with children, foster carers and fostering services to plan and deliver the programme.

This co-production within this programme is not just about children just 'taking part' or 'being present', but rather about having influence over decisions and actions.

The Fostering Network believes that children and young people should be involved in the whole process of deciding the best services for all. Children and young people should have a say in decisions about their own lives and services should be developed and improved, based on the perspectives of children and young people.

The Walking Tall Project within this programme is one way of engaging with children and providing a platform for them to share their experiences and ideas.

3.3 About the author

Laura Hanks is a Senior Lecturer at the University of South Wales, teaching on the MSc Play Therapy (BAPT). Laura has an interest in Lifelong Learning and has been an Associate of The Fostering Network in Wales for the past seven years. She has been involved in developing numerous courses for foster carers and social workers.

As a Play and Filial Therapist (Filial therapy includes providing caregivers with training in [play therapy techniques](#) so they can use these techniques with their children), Laura's background is primarily in working therapeutically with children and families, often developing caregiver's reflective skills in relation to the therapeutic care of children. Laura is

currently providing consultancy and training for Barnardo's Cymru Adoption and is a board member for [Association of Child and Adolescent Mental Health](#) (ACAMH).

Laura's qualifications include MSc Play Therapy (BAPT), MSc Play and Therapeutic Play, BSc Psychology and Education (BPS).

4. Section two: Walking Tall project overview

4.1 Introduction

Walking Tall is a three-year project (2020 – 2023) for children (aged 9-11) in foster care, enabling them to make their voices heard, whilst also learning to develop and to gain in self-confidence, and be proud of who they are. Using interactive activities, the project encourages staff and facilitators to think through how they can adopt a more participative approach when working with children and highlights the importance of co-production – working side by side with children, to empower them to share their views and be heard. Walking Tall recognises that everyone involved in fostering has a vital contribution to make, in order to improve the quality of life for children and young people in care and their foster families. In this way, the project will help towards ensuring that children are involved in designing and delivering projects that will meet their own needs.

Stage one and stage two of the Walking Tall project was supported by Dawn Mannay and Rachael Vaughan from Cardiff University. Drawing on their experience of working creatively with care experienced children (Mannay et al. 2017a, 2017b, 2019; Roberts et al. 2021a, 2021b), they have assisted The Fostering Network in designing a range of participatory, interactive, and co-produced activities.

The project was handed over to [Laura Hanks](#), a Play Therapist and Associate of The Fostering Network in Wales. Laura worked closely with Charlotte Wooders, Project Manager, The Fostering Network in Wales to develop six new activities and facilitated Zoom calls with children and their foster carers.

4.2 Children's advisory group

Children (n=6) were recruited through The Fostering Network in Wales and completed three of the six activities to discuss in the feedback session. As the activities provided in stage three were new, participant involvement in prior stages was not required or omitting.

Children participating were aware that they were participating in a project which would involve engaging in activities and discussion with their foster carers, and that their feedback on the activities was being sought.

It was reported that one child's language and emotional development was behind her chronological age. However, this was not an excluding factor for the project as the

views of all children should be held with equal value and the project aims to be accessible for children in this age bracket.

4.3 Participant feedback

Children (n=5) and their foster carers participated in Zoom calls which were facilitated by Laura Hanks to show and discuss the activities they had completed. One child had moved placement after completing the activities and feedback was provided by their foster carer by email.

Children were informed in the pack instructions that they would be invited to a Zoom call to discuss up to three of the five activities, around 2 - 4 weeks later. The facilitator's notes for the discussions were included in the description of each activity.

The Covid19 restrictions moved stage one and two of the project online and feedback from children was gathered individually, with their foster carers present. However, in Stage Two, foster carers reported benefits of being involved in the process (Boffey et al. 2021b).

The recommendations in the stage one and two reports, were considered in the development of the activities and feedback discussions. In stage three, the feedback of foster carers was explicitly sought, and their views were considered for co-production. Child and foster carer feedback is provided in detail, in the findings section of this report.

4.4 Planning stage three: Project design

Stage three took into account the findings from year one and two, which formed the foundation for the project. A model of engagement and participation had been found along with an understanding of how participants engage in the process.

A thorough planning process took place in which key performance indicators were discussed as well as the practical and ethical implications of moving forward and developing the activities to gain a more specific insight into children's lived experiences in foster care.

Aiming to offer children in foster care the opportunity to share their experiences, whilst recognising the value added to the project of foster carer participation in the process, year three continued with the format of previous stages whilst introducing six new activities. These activities are discussed in more detail below.

Ethical considerations

Detailed information about the project was given ahead of participation, and consent was obtained. This covered participation in the project as well as in audio recorded online video calls. Participants were asked to complete three of the activities, the remaining two to be completed at leisure and a gift voucher was given to thank participants for their time.

In addition, children's assent was obtained. Developmentally appropriate and detailed information to be read to children before beginning was written. This gave

children information about the aims of the project, about their autonomy with the details they share. It explicitly stated that there was no expectation for children to share experiences, but they may choose to, and that their feedback will be written into a report as well as shape the future of the project. The right to withdraw was reiterated. Children were reminded by the facilitator of these details, as well as asked verbally if they were happy to be audio recorded for the session to assist with documenting their feedback. Participants of the project were aware of the questions to be asked in the feedback session, prior to attending, as they were provided with the 'facilitators notes' with the instructions for each activity.

It is important to hold children's wellbeing as paramount in the development of any project or direct work with children. Exploring children's lived experiences in foster care is a sensitive topic and a key ethical principle to work to, is that participants in the project must not be negatively impacted by participating (non-maleficence) – (See BAPT 2020, Ethical basis for Good Practice; Vanclay et al., 2013).

Recognising the sensitivities of the participant group identified by Brown et al. (2019), it was reiterated that participants that they could choose what they share. There is a high risk of social desirability in response to the project, particularly as the Walking Tall project was being delivered by "The Fostering Network". As noticed in Stage 2, and in Brown et al.'s (2019) findings, questions about everyday life may lead to an expectation among participants to discuss narratives about their care. Wording was considered to include 'grownup' interchangeably with 'foster carer' where appropriate.

The format of this project involves providing activities remotely to children, relying on their foster carers to support the completion, and facilitating a discussion afterwards to share their experiences. Therefore, children are not emotionally supported by a facilitator throughout and the facilitator at the time of the feedback knows little or no information about the child. In stage three, all five completed feedback calls were facilitated by a play therapist who is experienced in managing sensitive conversations with the feedback being obtained by email for the sixth participant. Times offered were flexible to accommodate children's weekly activities to cause minimal disruption.

The importance of children's choice runs as a thread throughout these ethical considerations, through the way children perceive and engage with the project and each individual activity. It is notable that the project has an adult-led agenda and so, in the absence of free choice, it was essential that children have 'adaptable choice' (King & Howard, 2016), where children can choose between elements within an activity. This promotes children's engagement and perception of the activities as 'play' than work. In this project, children select which activities they wish to complete, and have control over how they complete them.

Research shows that when perceiving an activity as 'play' rather than 'work', there are measurable increased levels of children's emotional wellbeing (Howard & McInnes, 2012). Therefore, all activities were designed to be playful and prioritise children's engagement and enjoyment. The activities use metaphor and symbolism to allow children to freely participate, whilst having maximum control over which details about their own lived experiences they choose to share. It has long been known that children's behaviour is at times a result of free choice, but at others is impacted by expectations children have about how they should perform, which does not represent free choice (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Using metaphor means that activities can be

purposeful, exploring themes and promoting discussion playfully and sensitively, with minimal leading as to how much personal information a child should share.

The adults in this project take on a dual role. The facilitator of the feedback sessions was responsible for writing the activities and this report to follow, which will relate to both the sentiment and the participants' experience of completing the activities.

Foster carers in this project are responsible for sharing the details of the project, providing the space and assistance for the activities and discussing the worksheets. They are then also present during the facilitated feedback session. There was recognition that the presence of an adult reduces children's perceived control over tasks and engagement (McInnes, 2009). However, research shows that where children are playing with a known adult, they can feel supported and their control enhanced (Howard & King, 2014, in Howard & King 2016). Thought has been given to the value of absence of a known adult in obtaining children's genuine feedback, however the benefits for the foster carer-child relationship in participating together in this project appear to outweigh this. Worrall-Davies and Marino-Francis (2008) discuss sociably desirable responding as a normal part of development, and there is no clarity on the best method for collecting children's views comprehensively.

Therefore, the format of previous stages of the project was maintained. The role of the foster carer will be discussed in more details in the findings.

4.5 Resource pack design

Stage three involved designing five new activities which were crafts based, with a focus on key areas for exploration. Accompanying worksheets for each activity were designed to facilitate the engagement in discussion and discourse from children and their foster carers. These were then illustrated by an artist, Claire Danvers.

A star rating chart for the children, used in previous stages of the project was also provided.

Stage three resources were to consider the potential for provision on a wider scale and therefore needed to be financially more viable. They also needed to be replicable, allowing foster carers to use them again with multiple children. Finally, to be more sustainable, there would be an invitation to use recycling found at home. This also offers children more choice in the materials they use in their activities.

In addition to the more general ethical considerations given to participation in the project, there was careful scrutiny of each task. The rationale and considerations given in the design of each for the key areas in the following section. Each activity will be described in terms of the instructions given to families, the resources and materials used.

4.6 Project activities

Treasure hunters:

Children were provided with an illustrated map with space to write, draw or add stickers. They were invited to use a teabag to make their map look old and had two other worksheets to assist.

They were instructed to add landmarks and challenges to pass on their map. Then, together with their foster carer, they were asked to fill in a story board, a second, illustrated sheet. This story board asked participants to identify a 'team', how that team would overcome a challenge, and identify treasure at the end. A third illustrated sheet promoted discussion between child and foster carers about their most wanted treasure to bring home.

The facilitator asked the child to tell their story, using the storyboard and map. They were asked about their treasure, and how much they and their foster carer worked together on this task. Finally, they were asked what they would improve.

Through the metaphor of an adventure, this activity focuses on exploring relationships in the element of a 'team', where the team work together to overcome a hurdle. This hurdle is created by the child and can therefore be diverse in nature. The metaphor of treasure represents a fictional opportunity to have desires met, time to reflect on wants and needs, but also the team members who help. Through this metaphor, participants have full control over the parallels and congruence with their own lives, and how much they share of their reality.

Superpowers

Participants were given templates of a facemask mask and 'power cuffs' (for wrists) and asked 'if you could have any superpower, what would it be?' An illustrated profile sheet was also given, which asked for details of the superpower, what it would be used for, and what they would do with their superpowers if they had them for a day. The notes offer a suggestion that a foster carer could complete the profile too.

Careful attention to this activity avoided the use of the words 'hero' or 'superhero' which implicitly leads a child with the expectation that their powers bring responsibility to effect change or interact with others. Wording of the activity was 'what would you do with your day?' to avoid leading responses. This activity again offers children full control over how much they relate this activity to their own lived experiences and therefore can identify playful powers used just for fun, or powers which relate to their autonomy or circumstances, wishes and feelings.

My Best Day

This paper-based activity was loosely modelled on Shazer et al.'s (1986) 'Miracle Question'. Participants are invited to imagine their 'best day', with everything going the way they want it to. An illustrated picture board which indicates morning to night assists in the discussion and detailing of their fictional day. The facilitator discussion explores the similarity and differences between everyday life and the best day. The foster carer is asked if they learnt anything new about what the child likes and is invited to share an imagined best day with the child.

This activity again offers maximum control for children to share details about their likes and wishes, should they choose to. This activity offers children and their foster

carers an opportunity to discuss what typical days are like, and a playful way to articulate preferences. Children can decide how significant the changes are, whether they relate to circumstances or sensitive issues, or more benign details of the day.

Build-a-bug

This craft activity requires some team working between children and their foster carers to follow the instructions to make a functional bug which 'climbs' (holding two ends of a piece of string, looped over a doorhandle). Participants are invited to go outside and look at various bugs and their habitats. An illustrated 'bug factsheet' is provided in which the child records the details about their bug, whether this be invented or inspired. The facilitator explores how the foster carer and child worked together, and the details they share on the factsheet.

This activity offers an opportunity to discuss homes and habitats, using the metaphor of their own climbing bug. Promoting participation and engagement between children and their foster carers, this activity was pitched at a suitable level of challenge for children.

Meeting an Alien

Participants create an alien (and ship) using their household recycling. They are invited to imagine their alien has landed on earth and is coming on holiday in their house. An illustrated 'Alien Holiday Guide' is a worksheet to prepare the alien for their stay.

Through the metaphor of an alien on holiday, this activity asks children and their foster carers to think about their home and family life. They consider the details required prior to arrival and the facilitator invites a discussion about how the alien would feel.

This activity may represent the planning and transition into a foster placement and children are given the opportunity to explore these details without making any conscious connection with themselves. This activity allows foster carers to participate in a discussion about the concept of this arrival with the child, in a sensitive and playful way. Children retain the autonomy, talking about the details this alien will need to know or to extend this to their own lived experience.

4.7 Methods

Participants were provided with the Walking Tall activity pack by post, after volunteering to participate in the project. Information was given and consent was obtained ahead of participation. Participants in the project were given 2 – 4 weeks to complete three activities, before being invited to attend an online feedback session with the Walking Tall facilitator. Of the six children who completed the activities, one child did not complete the feedback session and foster carer feedback was obtained by email.

At the start of every feedback session, the facilitator reminded the child of the purpose of the project and gained verbal assent for the audio recording, including

that they would be used to assist with keeping a written record about the project before the recording began. Both the child and foster carer were invited to say 'yes' if they consented. Audio recordings were transcribed by Siân Hopkins, The Fostering Network.

The facilitator followed a structure for feedback which included asking the child which activities they had chosen to complete. Then, inviting the child to select the first activity to share. Where children were showing their 'makes' on camera, the facilitator invited to explain what they had made, or what they had drawn or written. In this way, children were able to lead the discussion and the order in which they reviewed the activities. Children and their foster carers were asked to share or answer the questions of the star rating chart after each activity if they had not already done so. Participants were invited to rank the activities they had completed in order of preference.

Participants were verbally thanked for their time in completing the activities and in participating in the feedback to conclude the feedback session. A gift voucher for their time was then sent to all six children who participated.

5. Section three: Consultation outcomes

Participants:

Names below are pseudonyms:

Bea, aged (aged 9), has a developmental delay and speech and language difficulties. Despite this, she was able to complete the activities and share valuable feedback to the session. Please see below for her foster carer's feedback.

Erin, aged 9 participated with two foster carers present.

Rhys, aged 9 participated with one foster carer present.

Sara, aged 9, participated with her foster carer and completed two activities.

Farah, aged 9, participated with her foster carer and her younger sibling also took part in some craft elements of the activities.

Daniel, aged 10, participated in the activities with his two foster carers, however feedback was obtained from his foster carers by email.

5.1 Project activity feedback

Treasure hunters

Bea included friends from school in her 'team' and was able to describe a journey past a volcano and mountains. She identified 'gold coins' as her treasure and would save it in her money box to buy branded toys, and a card for a friend. This discussion led on to a family activity of going down to the beach and returning with shells and white pebbles.

Erin chose her foster carers, also participating in the activity, to be in her team. 'Sneaking' past challenges such as dinosaurs and sharks to get to coins, diamonds and gold. The best treasure to find, Erin said "*The first one is diamonds and then [foster carer] told me what about if mammy and daddy jumped out of the treasure box, so I did that.* Erin's foster carer clarified "*I asked her what would be the most important thing? and she said mammy and daddy.*" Erin added "*We had these old pets and they died. We had a dog called [x] and we had two little rabbits, called [x] and [x]. If you could bring the treasure back to the household, what would it be [those pets], cos we really miss them.*"

When asked if they worked together, Erin's foster carer said "*What we did with this was we let [Erin] do the answering and the writing down. Getting her point of view first, more than us.*" When asked what she liked, Erin said "*I liked everything I did, making it*", and when asked what she didn't like she said "*Nothing, I liked everything*". Erin and her foster carers each gave this five stars.

Rhys:

Rhys was confident to explain that he wanted additional resources to complete the treasure hunters activity, such as themed stickers. Despite the challenges, he was able to substitute stickers to represent sharks and developed a detailed narrative about the adventure.

Rhys described how his team, including friends and siblings, would pass many challenges. The treasure would include new a new ship, gold and new recruits who would also protect the treasure.

If he could bring any treasure back to his household, he would bring the ability to train animals, as in a book he has read. His foster carer would bring 'healing treasure'.

Rhys' foster carer shared "*I thought this was the hardest of them to do because it was like making a storyboard... I think drawing the obstacles on the map. There is not a lot of space to draw them, and it depends on your drawing as well. I thought maybe there was less opportunity for discussion with this one, compared to the other two.*"

Rhys' overview of the star rating chart was that he was 'happy and excited' completing the task and liked that he could add to the map. His foster carer learnt that he found ways of avoiding obstacles. I gave this five stars. Rhys' foster carer also noticed that '*he wasn't really able to say what he had learnt about himself or others*' but that she '*has learnt things about him*'.

Despite reporting issues with the materials, Rhys gave the activity five stars. When the facilitator invited reflection on this with "So, there are some things you would change about it. So, do you think it still needs five stars?" to which Rhys said "yes". When Rhys' foster carer explained that she rated four stars, Rhys moved his score to four and a half, before returning it to a five star rating.

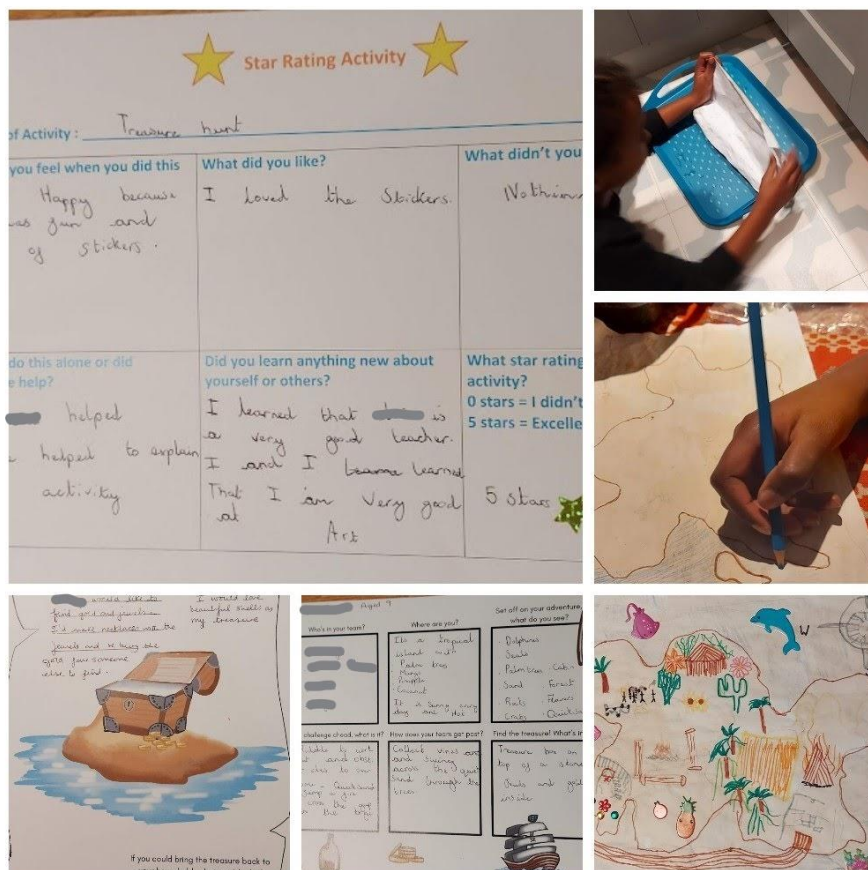
Farah:

Farah explained "I found [Treasure Hunters activity] a bit different because I have never used teabags on pieces of paper. Also, I really like how you can make it look old I think everything I added didn't make it look so old.

Farah chose her sister and pet dog to join her in her team. She described a “tropical island with palm trees, mangoes, pineapples, and coconuts. It is very sunny, and every day is very hot and warm day”. The challenges include a riddle, quicksand, and obstacles such as gaps in the bridge. They find treasure such as gold and jewels. Farah planned to “make a necklace with jewels. Re-bury the gold for someone else to find.” Farah’s foster carer said “beautiful shells as my treasure”, to which Farah said “That sounds really not nice compared to jewels” but they would “display our jewels and shells at home for everyone to see” and there was a detailed discussion about the possibilities for how the next person to use the map might be chosen. These included possible grandchildren, someone finding the map in a bottle, or someone chosen.

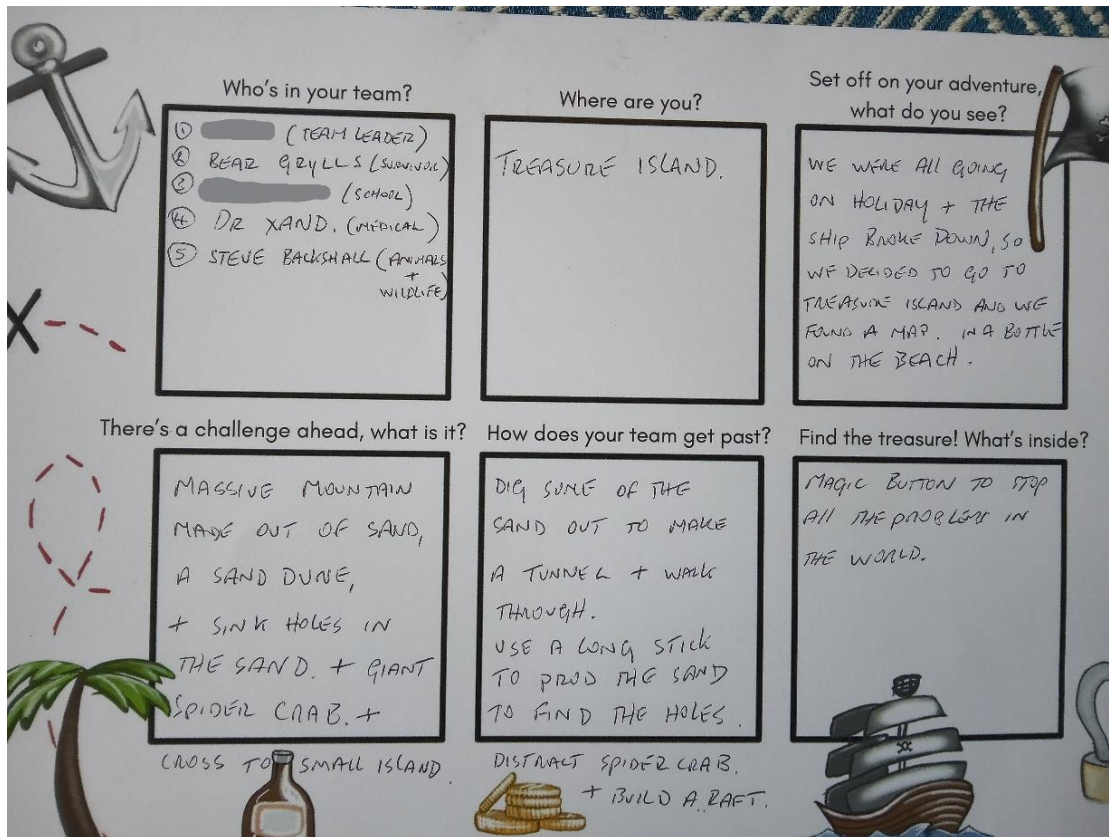
Regarding this activity, Farah’s foster carer said “Yes, we enjoyed it. It was a bit difficult in the beginning, the concept of an island was something I had to do a bit of explaining on.” “What we did we used that story board and I used that first and used it as a kind of brain-storming thing. We did that first and then she drew the map so she had something to go from.” “Otherwise, there were too many ideas and it got complicated, didn’t it? Once she had something to follow, like a scenario, it was a bit easier”.

Using the star rating chart, Farah explained that she had enjoyed using the stickers. Farah’s younger sister also participated in the activity by creating a map and joined the call to show hers. Farah said, “I learnt that [my foster carer] is a very good teacher, explaining stuff when children are stuck” and “I learnt that I am very good at art”. Farah’s foster carer said “She is a good listener, asks lots of questions and is very inquisitive. And you take it all in, don’t you? And like I said she is quite resilient, she will just keep on going, doesn’t give up. We had breaks. We had a couple of little breaks, but I didn’t have to drag her back to the table to do it.” Farah gave this activity 5 stars.



Daniel:

Daniel's foster carer provided these images (with his consent):



He has created a detailed story board where he has been selective with team members as to the skill they bring, including celebrities who are survival experts, medical and 'animal and wildlife'. His challenges include "a massive mountain made out of sand and a spider crab". They manage to dig a tunnel through the mountain of sand and 'distract the spider crab'. The treasure he would find was a "Magic button to stop all the problems in the world".



Daniel's foster carers gave the following feedback by email:

- a. We enjoyed seeing [Daniel] use his own imagination to complete his map & we very much enjoyed just sitting with him & listening to his reasoning behind his choices & decisions. For us as a family we found this activity a more subtle, therapeutic based activity where we could just sit & listen to his thoughts & watch his process of creativity.
- b. We don't feel there is anything that needs improving.
- c. We learned that [Daniel] was able to draw from his own experiences of both his life with us & his own social life when he is not in our direct care, i.e. school etc.
- d. Instructions were clear & easy to understand.
- e. We would give this activity 5*.

Superpowers

Bea:

Bea said her superpower would be invisibility, to play tricks on people. Power cuff buttons called emergency services and one to order pizza.

Erin:

Erin described her super powers as 'reading people's minds to help them'... *If they are feeling sad inside and they don't want to tell anyone, then I will read their mind and then I can help them*'.

Erin then shared a gift she had been given in contact yesterday. On returning to the activity, she said she felt 'amazing' when doing this activity. When asked what she liked about the task, she said *'The mask. It took me longer. If it takes longer, it means more effort'* and there was nothing she did not like. Erin didn't give any suggestions

for what she and her foster carer had learnt about each other, but her foster carer said *“Well I think we learnt that we like doing things together.”*

Rhys:

Rhys wore his mask to give feedback on this activity. He was unsure where his powercuffs were and his foster carer said they have been *‘playing with it quite a lot’*. A photo of the powercuffs and mask had been sent prior to the feedback session. His foster carer commented *“There was a lot of glitter, wasn’t there wasn’t there?”*.

Rhys explained *“I did my cuff to turn my powers on and off. My superpowers are light and invisibility.”* If he had superpowers for a day he would *“Be a superhero of my town for a day and make sure there is no crime.”* Rhys explained that his younger brother now also had a mask and an alterego. He described how he can “unlock new powers”.

“Then we talked about my daughters’ playing superheroes and everyone wants to be invisible or fly. So, the whole family were talking about it then. This activity was much quicker than the alien one but there was a lot more talk afterwards. And also the whole game of playing superhero. I think [Rhys] was really energised by it. And all of us were talking about what our superpowers would be.”

The facilitator asked *“I am wondering if you thought of having superpowers before this.”* To which Rhys replied *“Don’t think so.”* His foster carer said *“Not something they have played.”*

Feedback was given about the size of the printed cuff, which needed increasing to fit Rhys’ wrist.

Sara:

Sara described decorating a mask and power cuffs using jewels, where there was a button to switch on and off her superpowers. Her superpowers would enable her to speak to all animals and breathe under water. Another button helped her swim faster underwater, her ‘superboost’.

With this superpower, Sara would speak to her dog, getting to know more about him. *“I think we will probably be best friends and go out to the sea and I think will talk about what his favourite colours are and that.”*

Sara and her foster carer reflected on how Sara can understand her pet to some degree without the superpowers *“I understand when he is happy as he chases me around” “And his tail wags,” “And he smiles, he goes like that.”*

Regarding the activity, Sara reported *“When I was making it, it seemed not too hard and not too easy, just right and it was what was it’s called it helped me figure out what I like.”*

Sara’s foster carer said *“You liked to think about it. She thought about it didn’t you every detail you could see. Very, very good. She didn’t have a lot of help as I am not very good with crafts. I was just reading it out, little bit complicated for the younger ones. Wasn’t simple to read and understand. You didn’t understand a lot of it so we had to read it together.”* to improve the task, Sara’s foster carer suggested simplifying the instructions.

When completing this activity, Sara felt *“happy. I felt very creative”*. *“I loved it all”*. Sara *“did all the cutting out herself. I (foster carer) didn’t do any of it. She did the majority of it herself. We laid it all out on the table here and spoke about what she wanted to do and use. So, we put what she was going to use and the templates out and we put what she wasn’t going to use back in a box. What she didn’t want for that activity.”*

Despite completing this activity on her own, Sara had a detailed response when asked if she had learnt about herself or others. She said *“Well, I learnt that I never really learnt that I loved stickers so much. I normally really like stickers but I didn’t know I loved them that much and I ended up using quite a few.”*

Sara’s foster carer said *“I think you didn’t realise you liked colouring so much. You are more hands on and didn’t realise you actually liked the colouring as much.”* *“[Sara] hasn’t been with us very long. [Sara] has been with us since January. I knew she was creative because all her belongings when she came was lots of arts and crafts and things. I was quite shocked how creative she is. She can turn her hands to anything, sewing. There is potential there definitely. I could have left her on her own with a pair of scissors, I wasn’t worried about her misusing scissors.”*

Sara’s foster carer said Sara *“played with it for quite a while afterwards, being a super hero”*. Sara added *“I was talking to [dog], well trying to.”* Her foster carer said *“Wandering around being a super hero. It wasn’t that she made it and then put it back in the box. She made it and has been wearing it again”*. Sara described the playful interactions with her pet whilst she was wearing her mask.

My Best Day

Erin:

Erin had included details of a typical day. Erin explained that she had done her best day on her own, however had received suggestions from her foster carer to think about the day she arrived too. This activity was not discussed in detail as it was not one of the three chosen to give feedback.

Rhys:

Rhys had not completed this activity, however his foster carer feels it will be an interesting one to do together.

Build-a-bug

Sara:

Sara described how the build-a-bug was a simple task, due to the instructions having drawings, however had used the string as a lead for her bug and not realised she could make it climb. Her foster carer stated *“Just looking at this now. That was quite complicated, I thought. It is very clear now, looking at it.”* Sara added *“We didn’t really read the instructions we just went for it”*.

It was established that wording *‘threading two ends of the same piece of string’ through the straws’*.

Despite this, Sara said *“I had really fun. I have done two as I had so much fun, I did two”*... *“I did this little ladybug and I also did a bumble bee and I added some wings on it but it doesn’t really fly, just pretend.”* *“I also built a bug house”*.



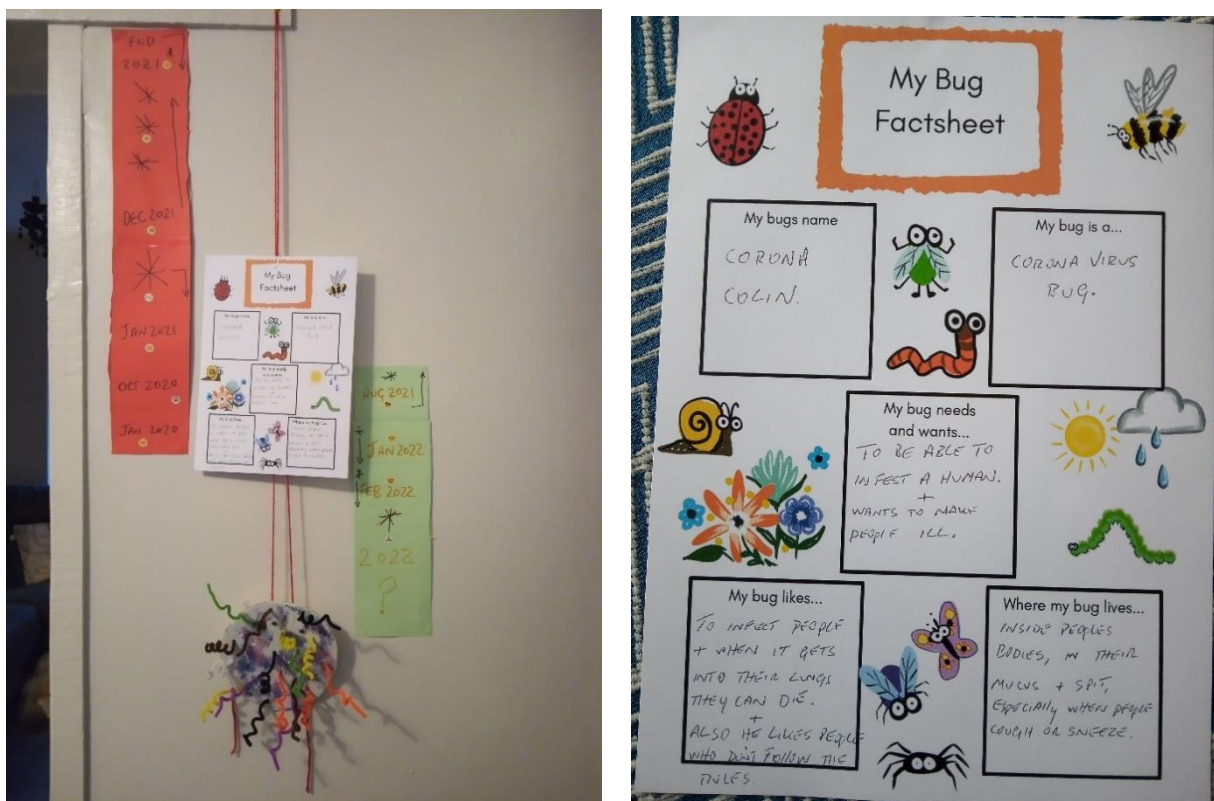
Sara felt that a good home *“For bugs that are ladybugs and things like that they more like dark spaces or like little spaces for them to make, so no big creatures will see them for them to hide” “My bug likes to make like a little nest for sleeping and then what it does is it piles thing onto it, like a blanket. Has a leaf like a blanket”*. Sara said *“I think that is what I call my bed”*. Her foster carer clarified *“A nest, snuggle up”*.

When completing this task, Sara said *“I felt as happy as a bug in a rug”*. *“I really was excited to finish it and also to do it because I would then have a little friend to walk around with me. Just like a little thing to pull around with me. When I was pulling it around and playing with [dog], [dog] thought it was an actual living thing because I was pulling it around like on a lead and he started chasing it and I was like stop it, don't do that please, so I think he kind of liked it as well”*. *“I loved how you can do it like you don't have to stick to just one bug, you can do any bug you want, like a bumble bee I have done, you can do anything you want to do. It lets you like run free and do your own thing”*.

Sara said she did *“Most of it alone, but we did read over it.”* Her foster carer said *“We started off together but she was very clear what she wanted to do and she didn't need me around”*.

Daniel:

Taking a creative approach to this activity, Daniel created 'Corona Colin' and explored how the corona virus bug lives and 'wants'. Corona Colin can climb the wall moves along a scale for the infection rate over time of the pandemic.



Daniel's foster carer provided the following feedback by email:

- a. We liked the way that [Daniel] immediately went to the idea of the covid pandemic as the basis for his bug. [Daniel] decided that simply doing a bug which you could see wasn't what he wanted to express in this activity.
- b. Good instructions.
- c. We learned that [Daniel] was really aware of the situation of the pandemic & this led to lots of discussions about how Covid changed our lives.
- d. Instructions were ok.
- e. Yes we made Covid Colin climb & we used this ability to highlight how the virus spread around the UK, by putting a date scale up the wall & [Daniel] could demonstrate how we went from zero infections to the height of the pandemic & back down again.
- f. 5*

Meeting an Alien

Bea:

Bea talked about creating the alien and enjoying the craft with her foster carer. Bea identified that coming to stay would be scary, particularly going to school would make the alien scared because 'everybody would be mean to him'... 'because everybody shouts in school'. The foster carer added "Everybody shouts in school. *Bea* is in the

learning difficulty class and there are 18 boys and two girls, so it is very, very boisterous.”

The child differentiated that the alien would feel ‘happy’ in her home because he would have a bed in her bedroom’.

Bea’s favourite part about this was creating the alien.

When asked if she learnt anything about the child, Bea’s foster carer explained that she already knew about her concentration difficulties but ‘It is surprising doing something like that, it takes the time up and we did have a nice time.’

Erin:

Erin showed two aliens, one she had made, called Bobby and a second one called Bob made alone. She had also made a spaceship. She described her house as “red, kind and beautiful’. Her foster carer clarified they have a red door. Erin went on to say *“About living here. What happens in your household? Having fun, cooking, crazy time and dancing... Every time in the morning me and [child] do this crazy dance.”* *“Things we can do together. Cooking, movie nights, walks and holidays Are there any family rules that the alien needs to know about? A caring alien, and sharing alien and a happy alien.”* This talk of caring led to Erin bringing her pet dog on screen to meet the facilitator, describing him as *‘He is cute, but he’s a monster’*. She continued *“a fun fact about your household. I said a crazy family.”* Erin’s foster carer added *“Basically just having fun all the time”* to which Erin replied *“Yes, we have funny half hours”* relating to time spent doing a *“funny dance”*.

Erin said she felt *“arty”* doing this activity and liked *“Making the alien called Bobby, the nice one”*. When asked if there was anything she did not like, Erin explained that *“I didn’t like Bob [one of the aliens], cos when I was [out] [older child] sneakily did it.”* Erin’s foster carer explained *“I enjoyed this one more, the alien one because it made you think more and when she was in [children’s club], I was thinking how I can do this alien so what we did was we tried it so when she came home she could have the idea”*. Erin said *“I want to do something else. Not the alien thing but something else. If we did more, I was thinking to have a mug, to design it for aliens”*

Discussing the star rating chart, Erin said *“I did this funny new alien. I drew it. It is something on the five stars. We did five stars and then we did a little alien called Smith. Ready. This is a little alien (showing the image to the camera).”*

Rhys:

“So here is our alien... This is the evil alien spaceship which is trying to catch all the stars.”

In sharing the alien holiday guide, Rhys shared who lived at home, and that they have a dog. A key rule in their house is that they need to be careful about what the dog eats, because twice, he has had to go to the vet from eating something she shouldn’t have.

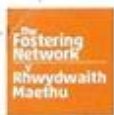
Rhys and his foster carer wrote down more information to share with the alien. Rhys told the alien about himself, including his birthday, his town and that he is in foster care. Rhys’ foster carer read that he defined this as *“I can visit my mum and dad but I can’t live with them but with another family’, which I thought was a very good*

description.” In talking about which food the alien should try first, Rhys’ foster carer learnt a new food Rhys likes.

Rhys’ foster carer was surprised to hear that Rhys thought the Alien should go to see the war memorial in his town, and the ‘*Baptist church...to see what Christian’s do*’. In talking about where else this alien should visit, Rhys identified places he has been and significant countries such as his parents’ countries of origin.

Rhys felt the alien would feel ‘*surprised*’ when they land, and a ‘*bit happy*’ knowing more.

Rhys described the responses on his star rating chart: “*how did you feel when you did this one and I said calm happy and courageous. What did you like? We could be creative by using our recycling. We could make whatever we wanted because it was an alien so we don’t know what they exactly look like.* His foster carer added “*You could do whatever you wanted as there was no set thing about what the alien would look like and you could make whatever you wanted.*”



★ Star Rating Activity ★

1. Name of Activity: MEETING ALIENS

<p>How did you feel when you did this activity?</p> <p>Calm Relaxed Happy Creative</p>	<p>What did you like?</p> <p>Could use recycling Could make whatever wanted</p>	<p>What didn't you like?</p> <p>Liked everything</p>
<p>Did you do this alone or did someone help?</p> <p>██████ helped</p>	<p>Did you learn anything new about yourself or others?</p> <p>That ██████ did not know I liked Spring Rolls.</p>	<p>What star rating would you give this activity?</p> <p>0 stars = I didn't enjoy it :(5 stars = Excellent, I loved it!</p> <p>★★★★★</p>

Farah:

Farah explained how she had made her alien and she had also created a detailed spaceship from recycling materials and resources from the Walking Tall pack.



She had written detailed information on her Alien Holiday Guide which included details about her household, such as being *“fun, crazy and loud”* ... *“no fighting and we listen to each other and we don’t interrupt when someone is talking”*; about planet earth and about herself *“I like cooking and doing sport. I like to try things like climbing up a mountain, I like books, I am a book worm.”*

Farah expanded on the detail about her household, explaining *“Well, I said it was fun, crazy and loud. It is loud because when we all have a lot of fun, We might be a bit too loud. We are fun because we do lots of nice different things. We are crazy, I guess”*. Farah shared some jokes she knew and picked up and introduced her pet dog, who her foster carer said *“This is the other person who makes a lot of noise in the house”*.

Farah gave detailed guidance on places to visit, including *“Lots of fun and games, and you will be tired by the end of your holiday. Climb up the [named] mountain, it is very windy at the top, but you will shout hurray when you reach the top. The views from there are great. You can see Cardiff and the sea from there.”*

Farah thought the alien *“might feel a bit nervous but by the end of the alien’s holiday I am sure they will always love come to earth for a holiday”* and if they were feeling nervous *“We would make them feel welcome. Let them participate in activities we are doing”*.

Farah’s foster carer said *“She really enjoyed it, it took a long time, not because it was difficult but because she was enjoying it so much. The space craft was the extra thing but she really enjoyed doing that. So, yes, she had a great time. All the resources that were sent, there was so much choice, that took you a lot of time didn’t it, what shall I do. How can I get that glitter on here? She loves glitter. It was a good activity. The kitchen table is in the kitchen obviously but we were all together”*

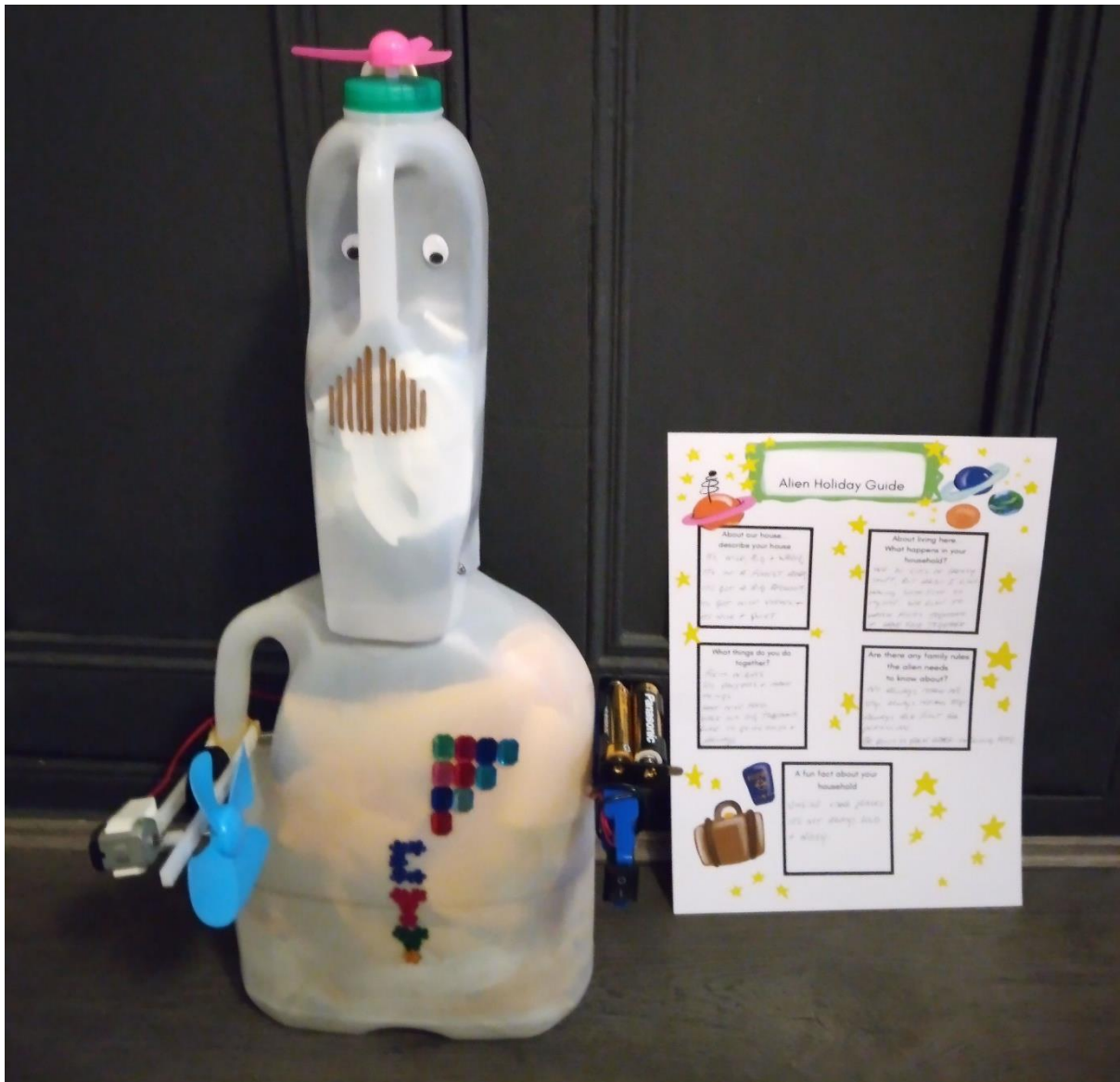
Using the star rating chart, Farah said *“I felt calm when I was doing the task”* and *“I liked it was crafty, how I was enjoying this activity. I enjoyed making the alien’s spacecraft”*. There was nothing she didn’t like.

Farah’s foster carer explained that they did *“quite a lot of chatting”* and that Farah’s younger sister joined in, together they made a rocket with a bottle and some toilet rolls. Farah explained that *“in school [my sister] is leaning all about space in the class”*.

Farah learnt about herself that *“I am quite determined and although it took a long time, I kept at it and finished the alien and the spacecraft.”* Farah explained *“Well, it does say a 4 but I think I might have a changed my mind and I will give this one a 5 [stars]”*.

Daniel:

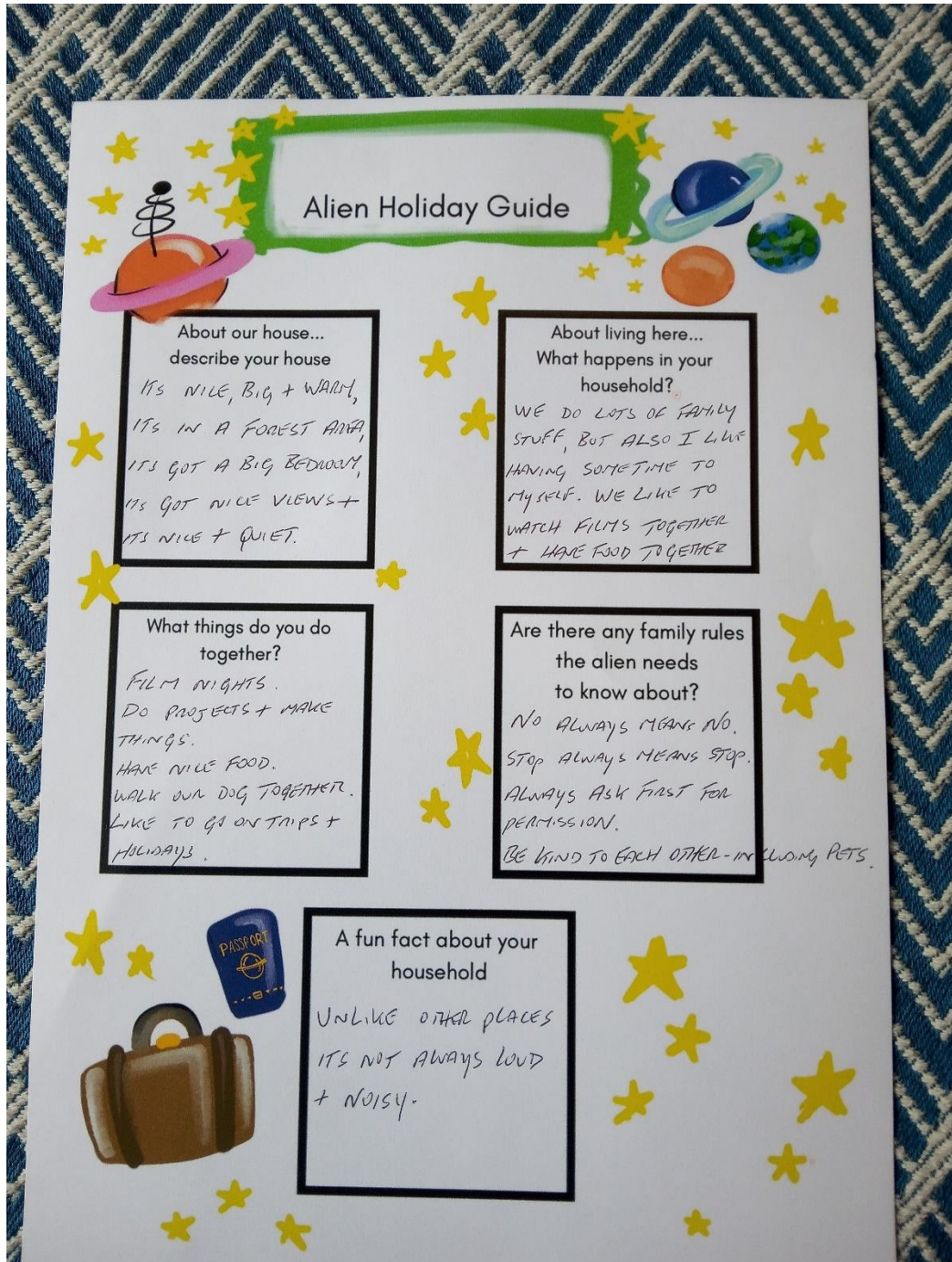
Daniel’s foster carer shared the following image (with Daniel’s consent):



Daniel’s foster carers gave the following feedback by email:

- a. This project was way more fun than the others, mainly because [Daniel] had the opportunity to not only be creative & let his imagination go wild but also it gave him the chance to include his real passion about environmental issues.

- b. Again no improvement needed.
- c. We learned that [Daniel] could cross over his own interests into other arenas & was able to adapt his passion about environmental issues into building his robot.
- d. Instructions were fine with no issues.
- e. We would give this activity 5*.



Ranking

Bea, liked them all, unable to pick a favourite. Farah was also unable to rank by preference and said "that's a tricky question. I really enjoyed them both. In the start I really wanted to do all the activities".

Rhys favourite was the superhero, followed by Meeting an Alien and then Treasure Hunters.

5.2 General feedback from foster carers

Bea's foster carer said: *"I was dreading it a bit to tell you the truth, Laura. To keep [Bea] occupied because she goes off on a bit of a tangent you know. We had a lot of fun and she actually did concentrate. She was very good doing these. She liked the sticking. The box that you sent was brilliant, with everything in it. It was great. What it is with [Bea], I have got her sister as well and she is quite demanding, so it was nice for [Bea] and I to have something to do together and just concentrate on her. I had a nice time. Did you have a good time?"* Bea said "yes".

Bea's foster carer explained *"No, it was a lovely pack and when it came, it was like Christmas. It was all really nice things as well. The pencils and everything. That's what I put on the feedback thing. I said how we really enjoyed it. I just said it has been a lovely experience. I don't much one-to-one time with [Bea], having the others, and I really think [Bea] has enjoyed just the two of us doing something. We have a few children here and you know what it is like, Laura, you haven't always got the quality time to spend with each of them, so it was good to get the box and make the time to do it. It was really, really good."*

Bea's foster carer said *"I did make a note, something like this would have been great when we were in lockdown. We had schoolwork and we did do the schoolwork but a lot of that was English and reading. That sort of thing. She looked forward to doing this. She was asking me all the time if we could do it. So we spaced it out so when we did it we could concentrate on one thing at a time. So, it was really nice wasn't it?"* Bea replied "Yes".

Bea's foster carer and Erin's:

Taking photos and emailing was a challenge for some foster carers. 'WhatsApp' was a preferred method which was not the standard channel for sharing images.

Erin's foster carer said *"Thinking about the activities, were there any benefits to us and our foster child for taking part. As foster carers we can sit down and interact with each other together as well as teaching the foster child various principles"* *"We think the projects worked really well and we are not sure how we could improve on this... Perhaps in the summer months to go outside with the outdoor activities"*

Rhys' foster carer:

Would have liked to have time estimates for completing each activity so she could set the time aside to complete them.

Sara's foster carer said *"The pack was amazing. Everything you could think of was there. We didn't have to leave the table to get anything. Everything was there. Pack was very well thought about"* and Sara added *"I thought like the pens were sent and the scissors and glue and tape you could use that for different crafts. So I really enjoyed it"*.

Sara's foster carer said *"I think it is amazing, absolutely amazing. We are quite privileged that we have been chosen to be little guinea pigs and I can highly recommend it. Everything that was in it. You didn't need to move, everything was there, the glue, scissors. Everything"*

had been thought of. Sara added "There was even things like tape in case you didn't want to use glue. Not messy like glue you can use tape instead"

Farah's foster carer said "Half term, it was great actually. Something planned everyday so we would go out and then come back and do some crafts. It was nice, wasn't it?"

Foster carer feedback forms provided as an example:

Foster carer for Rhys

The Fostering Network Rhwydwaith Maethu

The Walking Tall Project: Foster Carer Activity Feedback

Thank you for supporting your foster child to take part in the Walking Tall project. We hope that you both enjoyed doing the activities together.

The 'Star Rating' activity will give your foster child the opportunity to provide feedback on their three chosen activities. We would also like to find out your thoughts regarding the activities and so, we ask that you take a few minutes to complete this form and bring it along for the online call with Laura. Thank you!

1. Name of activity: Treasure Hunters

Please tell us how many stars you would give this activity (please circle): ★★☆☆

Can you tell us a little bit about why you gave this score?
Maybe because of my child's age and lack of experiences I had to do a lot of explaining and prompting. Once she got going she really enjoyed having all the resources provided at her fingertips. I took us two 1 hour sessions to complete the task. Maybe a story scenario would help.

2. Name of Activity: Build an Alien / Meeting an alien

Please tell us how many stars you would give this activity (please circle): ★★☆☆

Can you tell us a little bit about why you gave this score?
Lovely activity. She liked the thought of showing the alien around and telling him about her life. The task itself took a very long time, over several days, but only because she was having fun and decided to make a spacecraft for her alien too.

3. Name of Activity: _____

Please tell us how many stars you would give this activity (please circle): ★★☆☆

Can you tell a little bit about why you gave this score?

Foster carer for Daniel



The Walking Tall Project: Foster Carer Activity Feedback

Thank you for supporting your foster child to take part in the Walking Tall project. We hope that you both enjoyed doing the activities together.

The 'Star Rating' activity will give your foster child the opportunity to provide feedback on their three chosen activities. We would also like to find out your thoughts regarding the activities and so, we ask that you take a few minutes to complete this form and bring it along for the online call with Laura. Thank you!

1. Name of activity: MEETING AN ALIEN

Please tell us how many stars you would give this activity (please circle):

Can you tell us a little bit about why you gave this score?

Was initially unsure about the amount of Arts and Crafts required! But gave us a good opportunity to talk and think about home, our local area and identity. Was perhaps a bit too long - question to discuss?

2. Name of Activity: SUPERHERO

Please tell us how many stars you would give this activity (please circle):

Can you tell us a little bit about why you gave this score?

This was fun! Provided a fantastic opportunity for play as a superhero - saving the world. Row men to the rescue!?

3. Name of Activity: TREASURE HUNTERS

Please tell us how many stars you would give this activity (please circle):

Can you tell a little bit about why you gave this score?

Less opportunity for discussion.
Perhaps more difficult to complete - drawing obstacles on map?

4. Thinking about the project and activities, can you tell us if there have been any benefits for you and your foster child for taking part?

Yes - opportunity for 1-2-1 time together structured, but not rigid.

→ have learnt things about each other in relaxed way.

- foster child has enjoyed all activities

5. Do you have any ideas or suggestions for improvements, that we should consider for the project next year?

• The cuff for the Superhero does not fit on hand if glued together.

• More information about time to allow for each activity - can be hard to set aside time in a busy household!

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral road, Cardiff, CF11 9HB.
t: 029 2044 0940
cwales@fostering.net www.fostering.net

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5.3 Discussion

Children gave very little negative feedback, and it was apparent that these tasks captured children's imagination. Children extended their engagement in the activity beyond the instructed task. For example, Rhys and his brother played extensively with their superpowers, play which had not been observed by the carer before. Sara also continued to play with exploring her superpowers, wearing her mask and attempting to communicate with her dog. Sara also described how she had enjoyed pretending her bugs could walk and pulled them around *'like on a lead'*.

Pets featured in four of the five calls, including two children, Farah and Erin, lifting their pets to introduce them on screen during their feedback of an activity. Where pets were not formally introduced, they were included in discussion about the household, such as Rhys and Daniel's house rules. Sara's relationship with her pet was a significant focus of discussion throughout her call.

A key aim of this stage of the project was to promote children's choice in how they participate. Offering metaphorical activities and reducing limiting factors meant children were free to adapt and explore their own *'passion'* and *'interests'* as Daniel has done with 'Corona Colin' and Sara has done with sharing her love of animals in the super powers task.

On one task, Rhys suggested that pirate and shark stickers would have improved the treasure hunters activity because *"when you think of treasure maps, you think of pirates and sharks"*. Adding these themed stickers has been considered, however it may remove the element of creativity and spontaneity which currently allows the map to be a wider range of destinations, and does not preclude that the treasure will follow the same theme, which would typically be 'gold coins'. Whilst some children may choose to identify jewels gold coins as their treasure, others identified other lucrative findings such as Daniel's "button to stop all the problems in the world", or Erin's pets and people she misses. Bea's treasure initiated the sharing of a regular family activity, collecting shells and stones from the beach.

A theme of 'loud' and 'noisy' was also featured in four of the children's feedback. Bea thought her alien would be 'scared' going to school because it was so noisy, and everyone would be shouting at the alien. Bea's foster carer linked this to Bea's experience in her special needs class in school. Bea felt her alien would be happy in her home. Daniel also described his home as *'unlike other places, it is not always loud and noisy'*. In contrast, Erin and Farah described their homes as 'crazy', 'loud' and 'fun', viewing this loudness positively.

In addition to describing their homes, children described important places when informing their alien. This sense of place also connected with activities, adventures and days out together. Rhys told the alien that he is in foster care, and what this means, and Farah told the alien about her personal interests.

These activities were designed for aged 9- to 11-year-olds. However, one child within that range had significant language and developmental delays and the activities were still accessible with the support of her foster carer. It is interesting to note that younger siblings and others in the household were able to engage in the activities too. For example, Farah's younger sister created a rocket with her foster carer, an older child in Erin's home participated in exploring how to make an alien. The use of craft resources and household recycling also meant that the activity was limitless. Children were able to make multiples, such as Sara making two bugs and a bug home, Erin having two aliens and a spaceship, Rhys' brother also having a power mask.

Stage 2 found positive feedback from foster carers as to their involvement (Boffey et al. 2021b), and this was continued into Stage three. Foster carers valued setting time aside for the activities with their child. Foster carers reported learning details about each child they did not already know, and the activities facilitated an opportunity for detailed discussion about their child's interests. Bea, who has developmental delay and language difficulties, was described as able to concentrate and engaged well, in which this time together was an unexpectedly positive experience for her foster carer.

There was varying involvement from foster carers in the completion of activities. Some foster carers were present throughout, participating in the making. Where children were more independent in the craft activities, some foster carers were available for discussions. Other foster carers assisted in 'setting up' and discussing the activity, before leaving their child complete the task alone. Some foster carers also rehearsed the making element to prepare for the child. Interestingly, this child described this as 'sneaky' and disliked the alien made in the trial run, describing her own as the 'nice one'. Future stages of the project may develop guidance for foster carers around supporting their children through 'attending', even when they do not seem needed for assistance in the craft and encourage participation from adults in the task as led by the child.

An observation from the facilitator was the variety of ways in which foster carers managed the feedback sessions. In some circumstances, foster carers waited for children to respond to questions before expanding or clarifying, and in others, the foster carers answered with enthusiasm, meaning questions needed to be rephrased or asked directly to the child for an answer. Consideration needs to be given to the way in which guidance is given for future feedback calls. When the project is delivered to a wider audience, the guidance for foster carers in facilitating children's expression will again need to be developed.

One particular challenge faced by foster carers was the provision of images of the children's creations to the Walking Tall team by email. This process should be considered in future stages, particularly if feedback calls are not provided. Guidance should also be given around providing clear pictures whilst protecting children's identity.

6. Section four - Stage three recommendations

1. Future packs should consider the recommendations for resources. Review the guidance for the treasure hunter's activity – create the story board before the map.
2. It would be good to get more feedback on the 'My Best Day' activity. Perhaps being worksheet only, this did not capture the interest of children in the same way that the other tasks did. Foster carers are interested in the discussion for that this activity will bring and have suggested that there are intentions to complete.
3. Guidance for foster carers around 'attending' during activities where children are independent, or promote participation.
4. Develop guidance around feedback sessions / alternative methods.
5. Explore how the project can sustainably reach a larger number of participants in the future through alternative feedback.

6. continue with: Time should be built into the end of the online discussion sessions to explicitly ask foster carers' views on the activities and their recommendations for future stages of the Walking Tall Project.

7. continue with: If new facilitators are involved in later stages of the Walking Tall Project, it would be useful to arrange a discussion with existing facilitators to share practices and techniques used in the previous consultation sessions.

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Contact details

If you would like more information, please contact:

charlotte.wooders@fostering.net

The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9HB.
Telephone: 029 2044 0940
Email: wales@fostering.net
Website: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk



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Blackfriars Road London
SE1 8HA