



Annual Review

for the year ended 31 March 2019

Company Number: 1507277
Charity Number (England and Wales): 280852
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Message from our Chair

As the chair of the board of trustees, I'm delighted to introduce The Fostering Network's 2018/19 annual report. As a foster carer and member of The Fostering Network, I know what a positive difference fostering makes in the lives of children and young people, and as chair of the board I know how vital it is that The Fostering Network remains at the centre of fostering, striving to make foster care the very best it can be for fostered children and young people and the families caring for them.

A significant part of how we do that is through our campaigning and policy work, as we seek to drive forward change in fostering. During the year we saw the implementation of the 15 extra hours of free childcare for fostered children in England, something we had campaigned for in the previous year. We also continued our campaigning and policy work in a number of areas, including publishing our Keep Connected Principles, updating our Foster Carers' Charter and releasing our foster carer recruitment targets which were widely quoted in the media and within the industry.

Sometimes our role involves speaking up when we feel something is simply not good enough for fostering. That's why we took the difficult decision to criticise so strongly the Department for Education's Fostering Better Outcomes report. We felt so frustrated that, after a year of research and hearing from people across the sector, the report showed a clear lack of ambition for fostering in England, and we cannot allow that to go unchallenged. We also spoke out about the recommendations from the Scottish Government's care allowances working group which led to further procrastination around the introduction of minimum fostering allowances in Scotland.

We were particularly disappointed about both these reports because at the same time we were undertaking our latest State of the Nation's Foster Care survey, which was highlighting many of the issues that the reports failed to address. We eventually received more than 4,000 responses from foster carers, making it the biggest survey of its kind. The subsequent State of the Nation's Foster Care report – which garnered significant national media coverage – is now shaping our approach to our campaigning and policy work which we conduct with our members, the wider fostering community and decision makers at the top level throughout the UK.

One of the things I'm most proud of in my role as chair is the ability of the organisation to influence key decision makers and other bodies across the UK through the positions it holds on various working groups and through a reputation established over more than four decades. Much of this campaigning and influencing work is made possible because we have the collective voice of our almost 55,000 foster carers and more than 370 fostering services members who share their views through consultation responses, surveys and campaign actions.

Our members continue to be our lifeblood and we strive to offer them the best possible support. In 2018/19 we provided help and advice to our members directly via our helplines, responding to over 3,000 enquiries, as well as offering free legal advice to more than 1,800 callers via our legal advice line. And our digital expansion continues apace, despite some technical challenges, with significant increases in visitors to our website and followers on social media.

Celebrating the amazing work that foster carers do is also a vital part of our work. Foster Care Fortnight™ is a primary way in which we do that. In May 2018 the #proudtofoster campaign

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reached millions of people and provided countless opportunities to remind wider society of the importance of fostering and foster families.

Alongside Foster Care Fortnight we had other opportunities to champion the exceptional members of the fostering community, such as our Sons and Daughters Month in October and our award ceremonies - Northern Ireland Foster Carer of the Year Awards and our UK-wide Fostering Excellence Awards which shine a spotlight on foster families and social workers, as well as on the children and young people they care for.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the generosity of the organisations and individuals who support our work, through grants, donations and raising vital funds. We had an incredibly positive and effective relationship with Dreams who achieved a £200,000 fundraising target over the duration of our partnership. We are always keen to explore new ways of working with corporate partners who want to support our work and make foster care the best it can possibly be.

As chair of the board, on behalf of the organisation I want to extend a huge thank you to all our fundraisers, campaigners, supporters, staff and, of course, members for working with us during the year, helping us to make foster care the best it can possibly be. We have already had a very positive start to 2019/20, and I look forward to working with you during the rest of the year to ensure that all fostered children can experience secure, stable and loving family life.

Nigel McCartney

About us

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity and membership organisation. 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. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

Vision

Our vision is a society where the importance of fostering is understood, recognised and supported.

Mission

Our mission is to support those who foster, improve opportunities for fostered children and young people, and provide expert guidance to all fostering services.

Values

We are trusted – expert and independent.

We are together – a network, working in partnership, for community, for members.

We are vital:

- for raising awareness of fostering
- for creating change
- for up-to-the-minute information, advice and support for foster carers, fostering services and fostered children and young people – the whole fostering community.

What we achieved – some highlights

The Fostering Network brings together everyone involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be. In the 12 months to 31 March 2019, working with our members and other stakeholders we took significant steps towards meeting our four strategic objectives. Here are some of the highlights from the year.

Objective: We will support fostering families and the services that work with them to provide the best possible care for children and young people.

Our range of innovative programmes, comprehensive training, resources, and celebratory events have supported, promoted and shared the incredible work of our 370 fostering service and 55,000 foster carer members.

Shortly after the year end, we completed our Foster Carer Retention Project, funded by the Exilarch's Foundation. As a result of the findings, we produced an Exit Interview Toolkit which assists fostering services in better capturing the reasons for foster carers leaving the role so that services can improve practice and retain foster carers. We are encouraging services to share their data so that we can build a UK-wide picture.

As part of our Fostering Potential project – which is funded by the Sir John Cass Foundation and the British & Foreign School Society and aims to improve educational outcomes for children and young people in foster care – we created local educational peer support networks. Seven local authority fostering services joined Fostering Potential and 58 experienced foster carers were recruited and received training to deliver the support networks as education champions.

We continued to support more fostering families and the children and young people in their care through extending our Mockingbird programme, adding 17 constellations and working with seven additional fostering services. The Mockingbird programme was highly commended in the Children in Care category of the Children and Young People Now Awards 2018.

Our Fostering Wellbeing programme, which draws on elements of social pedagogy and our education model which focuses on empowering foster carers as first educators, has been trialled with the Cwm Taf regional partnership board. Our aspiration is to take the learning from the trial in order to roll out the programme across Wales.

Through our Fostering Kinship Support project we worked with 61 kinship foster carers and 55 young people to support health and wellbeing, confidence, self-esteem and enhance social skills.

Through our Step Up, Step Down programme, 27 families, comprising 46 adults and 79 children, have been supported intensively with the objective of enabling the children to remain at home rather than in care.

We have continued to develop our training offer, and over the year we introduced seven new courses including Fostering LGBTQ children and young people, Digital Safety and Developing a Secure Base with Teenagers. In England, Scotland and Wales we delivered a total of 150 days of training to more than 1,200 delegates. We also worked with almost 500 foster carers in Northern Ireland through our programme of workshops and masterclasses.

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Throughout the 12 months to 31 March 2019 we held the first four conferences in our new rolling programme of member conferences. The conferences enable delegates to explore local, regional and national issues, provide news and practice developments and the latest innovations in fostering, and allow our members to contribute directly to the direction of the organisation.

We offered help and advice to our members directly via our helplines across the UK, responding to 3,249 enquiries. We also gave free legal advice to 1,850 callers through our legal advice line. Almost 260,000 visits were made to our website which is an increase of 12 per cent on last year, and new factsheets were developed and made available to members online and at meetings.

We have increased our membership offer through stronger relationships with our partners and forging new ties with other businesses. This year we have welcomed Williams Giles to offer their specialist accountancy services, have developed a relationship with the Mortgage Brain to offer tailored mortgages to foster carers, and partnered with The Cinema Society which offers a discount on cinema tickers to our members.

We also held Foster Walks in Cardiff and London, which were fun days out for foster families, fostering service staff and our wider supporters, as well as raising vital money for our work.

Objective: We will provide opportunities for children and young people that benefit them, make their voices heard and enable them to reach their potential.

As part of our Fostering Attainment and Achievement programme we directly supported children and young people of various ages and reached more than 1,250 participants. We did this through the delivery of bespoke educational supports and resources, our Letterbox Club, and our range of different summer schemes and residentials, including one for school leavers to encourage aspirations to higher education.

Both our Walking Tall and Fostering Champions projects came towards a close. Walking Tall which finished in July 2019, was a project with the aim of empowering more fostered children to have their voices heard and “walk tall”. Throughout the year there were 70 foster carers and 71 children involved in a number of creative workshops using movement, play, arts and drama to allow the children to share their views and experiences. Resources for primary school-aged children were produced for foster carers and looked after children from the findings of Walking Tall and a film was produced highlighting the work of our Young Champions.

As part of the Confidence in Care project we ran two young people’s skills groups made up of a 10-week programme of arts-based activities designed to build confidence and self-esteem for looked after children aged 11+.

Our Youth Ambassadors were supported to present consultation findings to Welsh Government and also met with the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Care.

We also worked with six groups of young people to develop two editions of our magazine for young people, *Thrive*. The young people shared their experiences, views and opinions with us, which helped inform and develop the content of the magazine.

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We have also heard the views of young people and their experiences of care through our UK-wide member magazine *Foster Care*, in the Fostering Changed Me feature.

Our Tick the Box campaign continued to inform young people about the support available to them during their time at university and how to access it.

Objective: We will influence policy and the legislative framework so it supports and promotes excellence in foster care.

Campaigning and influencing policy to ensure foster care is the best it can be for all involved is a key area for the organisation. Our campaigning is heavily influenced by our members' views and from June to August 2018 we conducted our *State of the Nation's Foster Care* survey, which was completed by more than 4,000 foster carers. It is the largest survey of its kind in the UK and the results, published in a report in February 2019, are helping to shape our future responses, policies and campaigns, and to influence national policy agendas. The report received coverage in the national media, including the front page of The Observer.

This year we have increased our campaigning capacity by appointing a new campaigns and engagement officer, and have campaigned on a range of issues affecting fostered children and young people and the families who care for them. We released our seven Keep Connected principles to ensure children and young people who move within and out of the care system are enabled and supported to maintain their relationships with their former foster families and other people who are significant to them. We also released our report, *Staying Put: An Unfulfilled Promise*, outlining our disappointment in the implementation of the post-18 legislation in England and giving recommendations for Government and fostering services.

We also strongly expressed our disappointment in the Government's Fostering Better Outcomes report in England, which we described as 'lacking teeth' and 'failing to set out an ambitious plan that will create the much-needed systemic change in the fostering sector.'

We continued to express our concern at the Scottish Government's decision to omit Continuing Care allowances from its review of fostering allowances and also the subsequent failure of the review to make a concrete recommendation on a minimum fostering allowance in Scotland.

Also in Scotland, we were part of the CELCIS group exploring international practice about what makes good quality foster carer and welcomed visitors from Tajikistan to discuss similarities and differences in foster care practice.

In February 2019 we launched our revamped Foster Carers' Charter and called on fostering services across the UK to implement it during 2019.

During the year we continued to work with multi-agency colleagues in Wales to create capacity for a central team to provide the co-ordination and leadership for the National Fostering Framework. The Fostering Network and AFA Cymru led on the development of a Learning and Development Framework for foster carers in Wales, and we also contributed to the early stages of creating an all-Wales brand for local authority fostering, including the establishment of a marketing strategy at regional and central level for the brand.

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Despite the ongoing lack of a devolved Government in Northern Ireland we have continued to work with the Departments of Health and Education, the Health and Social Care Board, MLAs and senior civil servants on a number of issues to ensure that foster care is kept on the agenda. We sat on the Adoption and Children's Bill stakeholder group and were involved in all three of the working groups associated with the legislation.

We have also been inputting into the care review in Scotland and chaired the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers in England.

Objective: We will promote foster care to ensure society understands, values and recognises how foster carers transform lives.

Throughout the year we responded to fostering issues in the news, regularly offering comments and interviews to press and broadcast media. For example, we wrote responses to the first year's report from the Westminster Government's National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, the CELCIS report about the number of care experienced people in higher education and the launch of the English Children's Commissioner's stability index.

In addition, we proactively released our own reports and statements to inform the fostering sector and wider public of our work and the work and views of our members. In total we received 1,288 pieces of media coverage throughout the year, reaching almost 51 million people, with a value of £1.78 million (this is how much it would have cost us to buy the same amount of advertising space).

We raised awareness of the many positive aspects of foster care by utilising all channels available to us, including social media. We have increased our following across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in the past 12 months, and doubled our engagement rates on Instagram. We gained 1,177 followers on Facebook (taking us to 13,634 followers) and 801 followers on Twitter (taking us to 12,871 followers). We have had more of a focus on utilising short films across social media, as well as developing our relatively new podcast series.

An important time for disseminating our message of the importance of foster care is during our Foster Care Fortnight™ campaign – the UK's largest fostering awareness and recruitment campaign. In 2018 the #proudtofoster campaign reached approximately 27 million people with 955 pieces of coverage in the press and broadcast media, while our campaign films were viewed more than 2,000 times. There was also strong support from celebrities, politicians and other key decision makers from across the UK.

Our Fostering Excellence Awards are another opportunity for us to shine a spotlight on the transformational power of foster care. They are the UK's most prestigious foster care awards, celebrating outstanding achievement in fostering and recognising those who make exceptional contributions to foster care every day. In 2018 the Fostering Excellence Awards received 494 nominations and selected 18 winners including foster carers, sons and daughters, social workers, young people with experience of foster care, Fostering Friendly employers and supporters. Our President's Award winner, Afia Choudhury, was also featured on BBC One's *The One Show* in front of an estimated audience of 4.8 million.

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We also held our annual Foster Carer of the Year in Northern Ireland, with the Kinship Carers of the Year winners, Chelsea Nobel and Patrick Sojka, receiving widespread coverage across Northern Ireland.

Our annual Sons and Daughters Month campaign in October celebrated the hugely significant role the children of foster carers play in ensuring fostered children and young people have a loving stable home. This was exemplified in our competition where children and young people growing up in a fostering household were able to submit entries to our competition along the theme of "Our greatest memory", with the winning entries being featured on our website.

In December 2018, we were invited to meet with Arthur Cox Solicitors whose Corporate Social Responsibility committee were considering appointing a charity partner. We were delighted to be offered the partnership and have been working closely with them to raise awareness of the importance of foster care, its impact and raising funds for The Fostering Network.

Our successful partnership with Dreams came to an end during the year. Staff throughout the company fundraised for two and a half years to help us raise the profile of fostering and the need for more people to come forward to foster. During the partnership, they raised over £200,000 and have had a huge impact for foster families and the children they care for.

Our future plans

We continue to strive for improvements to and within fostering to ensure it is the best it can be. We are currently developing our strategic plan for the period 2020-23, with input from our members. Over the next 12 months we will begin to look at the introduction of our new strategic drivers, focusing on better engagement with our members, developing our evidence-based practice and ensuring we grow our influence in the fostering community. Here are some of the activities we have planned:

Member engagement

- Ensuring we listen to our membership is essential to ensure we remain effective and relevant, and we plan to continue our series of member conferences throughout the UK to ensure we are able to hear directly from our membership. Through these conferences and other mechanisms our members will be able to feed in to our new strategic plan. We will also survey our members as to their views of our membership offer.
- We will consult our members on issues such as the impact of universal credit on foster carers and the introduction of a central register for foster carers. We will also begin work on our next State of the Nation survey, which this time will also survey members of staff of fostering services.
- We will continue our Fostering Potential series of webinars, enabling our members to gain useful insight into supporting children and young people with their education.
- We will work to improve the status of foster carers within the team around the child, for example by encouraging our members to implement our Foster Carers' Charter and Keep Connected Principles.
- Following feedback from our members, we will further develop our thinking around family and friends foster carers, in terms of our member offer, the support family and friends carers need, and how family and friends foster carers are currently being used.
- We will grow our Fostering Excellence Awards to include the presentation of President's Awards across the UK.

Evidenced-based practice

- We will use the findings of our 2018 State of the Nation's Foster Care Report, as well as other surveys and focus groups throughout the year, to guide our campaigns, policy and practice work.
- We will also be conducting an extensive review of our resources and information to ensure we offer the most appropriate content.
- We will continue to develop our training offer, growing the range and scope of courses and ensuring that our training remains in line with current best practice and legislation.
- We will also seek to build new partnerships and improve the services and offers we provide to our members.

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- We will aim to roll out our Fostering Wellbeing programme to all local authorities in Wales.
- We will develop closer working relationships with research disseminators such as What Works and Research in Practice and relevant academics.
- We will further develop our view on the impact of a change of employment status for foster carers and how to support the sector were a change to take place.
- Working alongside the What Works Centre, and with funding from the Department for Education, our Mockingbird programme will be part of a randomised control trial in eight local authorities.

Growing our influence

- We will continue to work towards our vision of a society in which the importance of fostering is understood, recognised and supported.
- We will host The Fostering Network host APFEL's (Acting for the Promotion of Fostering at European Level) eighth European conference, *Foster Care Transforming Lives*.
- We will seek to influence the National Fostering Framework in Wales, in particular the work on standardising fees and allowances. We will also be feeding into the proposed review of When I Am Ready.
- We will sit on working groups of the care review in Scotland and of a Northern Ireland foster carer recruitment
- We will continue to campaign for the proper funding and implementation of post-18 care, including conducting some "deep dives" in a number of fostering services to better understand the implementation issues.
- We will be feeding in to the comprehensive spending review in England.
- We will continue to chair the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers in England.
- We will launch our Young Advocates scheme in Scotland, raising awareness of foster care in schools.
- We will develop our above the line advertising, including the trial of an advertising campaign to raise awareness of fostering in 3,000 GP surgeries across the UK.
- We will continue to strive to grow the reach and impact of our awareness raising work through the media, social media and campaigns such as Foster Care Fortnight and Sons and Daughters Month.

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Statement of financial activities (incorporating an income and expenditure account) For the year ended 31 March 2019

	2019			2018		
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Income from:						
Donations and legacies	330,131	-	330,131	338,863	-	338,863
Charitable activities						
Membership subscriptions	2,423,068	-	2,423,068	2,368,900	-	2,368,900
Specific projects	1,331,942	2,020,087	3,352,029	1,560,499	1,642,255	3,202,754
Publishing	158,892	-	158,892	161,006	-	161,006
Training and events	272,190	-	272,190	253,677	-	253,677
Advice services	243,732	-	243,732	239,476	-	239,476
Consultancy	266,437	-	266,437	249,839	-	249,839
Investments	6,836	-	6,836	4,742	-	4,742
Compensation for property rights	145,000	-	145,000	-	-	-
Total income	5,178,228	2,020,087	7,198,315	5,177,002	1,642,255	6,819,257
Expenditure on:						
Raising funds	(142,610)	-	(142,610)	(158,118)	-	(158,118)
Charitable activities	-	-	-	-	-	-
Membership services	(2,621,011)	-	(2,621,011)	(2,332,693)	-	(2,332,693)
Project costs	(1,386,353)	(1,669,837)	(3,056,190)	(1,580,253)	(1,647,422)	(3,227,675)
Publishing	(76,131)	-	(76,131)	(141,447)	-	(141,447)
Training and events	(266,823)	-	(266,823)	(218,748)	-	(218,748)
Advice services	(288,412)	-	(288,412)	(292,427)	-	(292,427)
Consultancy	(199,725)	-	(199,725)	(189,865)	-	(189,865)
Total expenditure	(4,981,065)	(1,669,837)	(6,650,902)	(4,913,551)	(1,647,422)	(6,560,973)
Net income / (expenditure) before net gains / (losses) on investments	197,163	350,250	547,413	263,451	(5,167)	258,284
Transfers between funds	(1,132)	1,132	-	-	-	-
Net income / (expenditure) before other recognised gains and losses	196,031	351,382	547,413	263,451	(5,167)	258,284
Gains / (losses) on revaluation of fixed assets	(326,491)	-	(326,491)	-	-	-
Net movement in funds	(130,460)	351,382	220,922	263,451	(5,167)	258,284
Reconciliation of funds:						
Total funds brought forward	3,541,022	393,942	3,934,964	3,277,571	399,110	3,676,681
Total funds carried forward	3,410,562	745,324	4,155,886	3,541,022	393,942	3,934,965

These figures are an extract from the complete statutory accounts available from
<https://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/showcharity/registerofcharities/RegisterHomePage.aspx>

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Balance sheet

As at 31 March 2019

		2019		2018
	£	£	£	£
Fixed assets:				
Tangible assets		3,679,127		2,908,775
Investments		2		2
		3,679,129		2,908,777
Current assets:				
Stock	46,219		22,592	
Debtors	1,547,991		700,553	
Cash at bank and in hand	512,452		1,605,158	
		2,106,662		2,328,303
Liabilities:				
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(1,283,333)		(1,302,115)	
Net current assets / (liabilities)		823,329		1,026,188
Creditors: amounts falling after one year		(346,572)		-
Total net assets / (liabilities)		4,155,886		3,934,965
The funds of the charity:				
Restricted income funds		745,324		393,942
Unrestricted income funds:				
Designated funds	100,000		520,000	
Fair value reserve	-		-	
Revaluation reserve	2,047,509		2,733,561	
General funds	1,263,053		287,461	
		3,410,562		3,541,023
Total unrestricted funds		-		-
Total charity funds		4,155,886		3,934,965