



The
Fostering
Network



Annual Review
2017-18



Message from the Chair

I am delighted, as the new chair of the board of trustees, to introduce The Fostering Network's 2017/18 annual report. This charity has remained at the forefront of fostering policy and practice for the past 45 years – as a foster carer and member myself, I share the organisation's passion for fostering, and I know the vital role that it plays in making sure foster care is the best it can be for children and the families that look after them.

Fostering was very high on the political agenda across the UK during 2017/18 meaning that The Fostering Network had a significant opportunity to shape the future of fostering, both directly – using the evidence collated from our members – and by encouraging and supporting our members to respond themselves. In England, there was the Westminster Government's fostering stocktake and a select committee enquiry too, while in Scotland a wholesale review of the care system was commissioned, and in Wales the public accounts committee began an inquiry into looked after children. We are hopeful that following a year of reflection and review, 2018/19 will be the year that this turns into action – including work on a strategy for looked after children in Northern Ireland – and are looking forward to the UK's governments responding to the reviews by developing and implementing ambitious frameworks for improvement of the fostering system.



Engaging with and supporting our members is key to our work – in 2018/19 our helplines were contacted over 4,700 times, there were nearly 300,000 visitors to our website and almost 2,000 people participated in our training courses. In addition, more than 1,500 people came to our events around the UK including our member conferences, our Big Days Out, and our Foster Walks.

Celebrating the amazing work that foster carers do is also a vital part of our work. Our annual Foster Care Fortnight is the UK's leading fostering awareness and recruitment campaign, and in 2017 reached more than 13 million people through our media and social media activity. Our Northern Ireland Foster Carer of the Year Awards and UK-wide Fostering Excellence Awards are a wonderful celebration of fostering and help us to shine a spotlight on foster families and social workers, as well as on the children and young people they care for.

Having a solid financial foundation allows us to more effectively plan our work for the future. The board is pleased to report that the organisation continued to improve its financial position in 2017/18, under the guidance of our chief executive, Kevin Williams, and his senior leadership team. Our corporate partners Dreams hit their £100,000 milestone in fundraising and donations at the end of 2017, and we are thrilled that they have pledged to double their efforts in 2018. We are also grateful to the other organisations and individuals who support our life-changing work, through grants, donations and vital fundraising activity.

A huge thank you to all our campaigners, supporters, staff, and of course, members for working with us during the year. We have already had a very positive start to 2018/19, and I look forward to working with you during the rest of the year to ensure foster care is the best it can possibly be.

Nigel McCartney
Chair of the Trustees

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.

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Our ability to influence so successfully is rooted in the fact that we bring together everyone involved in fostering, and that we represent the voices of our wide membership – 54,000 foster carers and more than 370 fostering services right across the UK.

Kevin Williams, chief executive

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What we achieved

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 2018, working together with our members and other stakeholders, we made substantial progress towards meeting our four strategic objectives.

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 innovative programmes, comprehensive training and resources, and celebratory events supported, promoted and shared the incredible work of our **370 fostering service and 54,000 foster carer members**.

We extended our Mockingbird programme in England from eight to 18 sites which provided more support and stability for the fostering households involved. We launched our Fostering Potential programme which aims to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children by building on the learning from previous activities. We undertook research to support Muslim children in foster care and Muslim foster carers as part of our Muslim Fostering Project, in conjunction with Mercy Mission. The work was funded by the Better Communities Business Network. Our Fostering Wellbeing programme also gathered momentum drawing on learning from our previous projects to combine social pedagogic principles and educational activities.

In 2017/18 we delivered **training** to almost **2,000 foster carers, social workers and other professionals**. We also further extended the roll out of our foster carer charter campaign, with 63 local authorities now having one in place. In Wales we developed a charter implementation toolkit as part of the Fostering Excellence programme. We also brought together thousands of people from across the fostering community with our events throughout the UK.

We also offered support and advice on the more than **4,700 queries** we received via our **helplines** around the UK and gave free legal advice in response to over **1,400 enquiries** through our **legal helpline**. Our web pages offering advice on foster carer finances had almost 64,500 unique page views while our section about looking after a fostered child saw more than 33,000 unique visitors. We also updated our financial signposts and our The Skills To Foster Handbook to offer foster families up-to-date hard copy and digital resources.

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

We provided direct resources and support to children and young people through various educational programmes, the largest of which was our **Fostering Achievement programme**, in Northern Ireland, which **reached 1,614 children and young people**. We also facilitated workshops and gave young people the opportunity to showcase their creativity in a range of ways including Thrive magazine (for young people in care) and our Sons and Daughters Month 'My Fostering Family' competition.

We ensured that children and young people had the opportunity to give evidence to the stocktake review in England. Our young champions contributed to the care review in Scotland and met with Bruce Adamson, the Children's Commissioner in Scotland. In Wales, we **established the first fostering ambassador scheme** which comprised several foster carer, and youth, ambassadors. The youth ambassadors spoke at events and worked with professionals to design and plan services within fostering.

Young people also shared their views at several of our regional events as well as on our podcast – All About Fostering.

Literacy and numeracy schemes, peer support and peer learning sessions have been integral to our work with care experienced young people in projects, such as Fostering the Future in Northern Ireland, which prepares fostered young people for leaving care. We have also celebrated the achievements of care experienced children and young people through our awards ceremonies and magazine features.

Our Tick the Box campaign has also informed 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.

We have been shaping and influencing policy for more than four decades by listening to our members and children and young people, and working with others in the sector to ensure these voices are heard. This year we successfully campaigned for foster carers to be able to access the 15 additional hours of free childcare in England that other working parents are entitled to.

Our 2016 State of the Nation report played an important role in our campaigning work, and heavily influenced our submissions to the fostering stocktake and fostering inquiry in England, the care review in Scotland and the public accounts committee in Wales, as well as multiple other consultations across the UK. Following the stocktake in England report we voiced our disappointment with the report's conclusions, including the impact of badly handled allegations, foster carers' pay and status, and fostering as a permanence option.

Almost **3,000** supporters were signed up to our **campaigning email group** which helped us in our calls for change, including the ongoing campaign for a minimum fostering allowance in Scotland.

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

Throughout the year we issued responses to fostering coverage in the media via the online, printed and broadcast media, on both a local and national level. For example, our spokespeople responded in the national press to the fallacious news story about a Christian child being placed with Muslim foster carers. We again grew our social media reach, with over **12,000 followers on Twitter**, and expanded the range of content shared on our platforms. We launched a podcast to explore another channel through which to reach a public audience and created several films to showcase fostering, foster carers and our events. Films for our Fostering Excellence Awards have been viewed over 1,300 times and our **Foster Care Fortnight™** films have had more than 1,000 viewers.

All of this enabled us to share the fantastic work of our members, their teams and their families, as well as the transformational power of foster care, to a larger and more diverse audience.

Events throughout the year, such as our Foster Care Fortnight and Sons and Daughters Month campaigns, our awards ceremonies in London and Belfast and our Foster Walks, recognised and celebrated the essential role of foster carers, and the vital contributions from social workers and others in the fostering family, as well as the achievements of care experienced children and young people.

Our future plans

Our ambition for 2018/19 and beyond is to make foster care the very best it can be for the tens of thousands of fostered children and young people and the foster families that they live with.

To this end we have set out some ambitious goals under three broad themes – stability and relationships, education and learning, and young people’s participation and empowerment.

The State of the Nation’s Foster Care survey which we will undertake in summer 2018 will further shape our understanding of the fostering sector and, in turn, help us with future goal and objective setting.



Kevin Williams
Chief Executive

Stability and relationships

Above all, children in foster care value stability and the chance to maintain relationships with the important people in their lives. These relationships are the golden thread that links a happy childhood to a rewarding adult life.

We are continuing our work towards all young people having the opportunity to stay with their foster carers post-18, by calling on all local authorities to have a post-18 (post-16 in Scotland) policy in place which explains how placements will be funded and supported, as well as post-18 allowances to be introduced across the UK and the Going the Extra Mile Scheme (GEMS), in Northern Ireland, to be protected in law and expanded to all fostered young people.

We want to see growing recruitment of foster carers to provide an increased choice of foster carers who can meet the needs of children and young people in their local area, enabling them to maintain their existing relationships.

We would like to see better retention of foster carers by ensuring they are all well remunerated, trained, respected and supported by their fostering service. The universal recognition of foster carers as professionals will help achieve this.

We will continue our lobbying and campaigning work including refreshing our Keep Connected campaign by developing a resource pack and building a working group with other organisations. To further support our members we will increase the capacity of our member helpline in England as well as introducing our Mockingbird programme, which promotes placement stability, to more services inside and outside of England.

Education and learning

We want all children in foster care to have the very best educational opportunities and support, giving them the chance to enjoy learning and achieve their full potential. More specifically our goal is that by 2020 compared to 2016 the educational attainment gap for 16-year-olds in foster care will have decreased by two per cent against the general population.

We will move towards this goal through our education projects such as Fostering Potential and Fostering Wellbeing both of which build on our previous work in the London Fostering Achievement programme. Fostering Wellbeing also draws upon learning from our social pedagogy programme Head, Heart, Hands and brings teachers, carers and social workers together to learn from each other. We will also provide further learning and development resources to give foster carers the skills and confidence to champion children's education as 'first educators'.

Young people's participation and empowerment

Young people want to be listened to, respected and have an influence on the major decisions in their care. Moreover, every child has the right to have a say in all matters affecting them and to have their views taken seriously. When young people are given support and training to participate and share their opinions, they gain confidence and develop important life skills.

In this context our goal is for systems and decision-making processes to be designed to reflect the views and needs of fostered children and young people. We also want to see positive role models and case studies used in the national media that challenge stereotypes and better reflect the positive outcomes for young people with experience of foster care.

To achieve this we will continue to feature young people in our media work and our projects such as our Young Ambassadors scheme, Fostering the Future programme and Walking Tall workshops. We will also develop a new children and young people's strategy to ensure they are able to influence our work and governance.

Statement of Financial Activities

For the year ended 31st March 2018
Incorporating Income and Expenditure Account

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds 2018	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds 2017
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Income and endowments from:						
Donations and legacies	338,863	-	338,863	364,740	-	364,740
Investments	4,742	-	4,742	5,661	-	5,661
Charitable activities:						
Membership Subscriptions	2,368,900	-	2,368,900	2,394,140	-	2,394,140
Specific projects	1,560,499	1,642,255	3,202,754	1,639,037	1,494,918	3,133,955
Publishing	161,006	-	161,006	187,013	-	187,013
Training and events	253,677	-	253,677	297,795	-	297,795
Advice Services	239,476	-	239,476	240,026	-	240,026
Consultancy	249,839	-	249,839	124,878	-	124,878
Total Income	5,177,002	1,642,255	6,819,257	5,253,290	1,494,918	6,748,208
Expenditure on:						
Costs of raising funds	158,118	-	158,118	150,052	127,551	277,603
Charitable activities:						
Membership Services	2,332,693	-	2,332,693	2,193,378	-	2,193,378
Project Costs	1,580,253	1,647,422	3,227,675	1,624,440	1,401,166	3,025,606
Publishing	141,447	-	141,447	220,766	-	220,766
Training and events	218,748	-	218,748	279,055	-	279,055
Advice Services	292,427	-	292,427	333,963	-	333,963
Consultancy	189,865	-	189,865	183,887	-	183,887
Total expenditure	4,913,551	1,647,422	6,560,973	4,985,541	1,528,717	6,514,258
Net incoming/(outgoing) resources from operations before transfers and Net income/(expenditure) for the year						
	263,451	(5,167)	258,284	267,749	(33,799)	233,950
TRANSFERS						
Gross transfers between funds	-	-	-	(99,048)	99,048	-
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	263,451	(5,167)	258,284	168,701	65,249	233,950
Net movement in funds	263,451	(5,167)	258,284	168,701	65,249	233,950
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS						
Fund balances at 1 April 2017	3,277,571	399,110	3,676,681	3,108,870	333,861	3,442,731
Fund balances carried forward at 31 March 2018	3,541,022	393,943	3,934,965	3,277,571	399,110	3,676,681

All of the above are derived from continuing activities.

The company has no recognised gains and losses other than those stated above.

Balance Sheet

At 31st March 2018
Company Number: 1507277
Charity Number: 280852

	2018	2017
	£	£
Fixed assets		
Tangible assets	2,908,775	2,979,136
Investments	2	2
	2,908,777	2,979,138
Current assets		
Stocks	22,592	24,998
Debtors	700,553	335,849
Cash at bank & in hand	1,605,158	1,489,714
	2,328,303	1,850,561
Creditors: amounts falling due		
within one year	(1,302,115)	(1,153,018)
Net assets	3,934,965	3,676,681
Funds		
Restricted funds	393,943	399,110
Unrestricted funds		
Designated reserve	520,000	-
Revaluation reserve	2,733,561	2,733,561
General reserve	287,461	544,010
Total unrestricted funds	3,541,022	3,277,571
Total charity funds	3,934,965	3,676,681

The financial statements were approved by the directors and authorised for issue on 26 September 2018.



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