

The education magazine for foster carers

Working Hand in Hand



#messagestoschools

Young people tell us what they want YOU to hear!



Truancy, stage fright and the Mother's Day card problem



Dawn tells us about Cardiff Uni's latest education research

How **theatre, singing and drawing** help children gain confidence and overcome challenges



PREPARE FOR SCHOOL MEETINGS

LIKE A PRO!

The
Fostering
Network

In this issue...

Meet Dawn

3

Dr Dawn Mannay highlights how Cardiff University has been exploring how to improve fostered children and young people's educational achievement

We CAN achieve!

4

Children and young people tell us what they want you to hear

A problem shared...

6

Foster carers' insights into tackling common challenges at school

Creativity and culture

8

The benefits of activities like drama, singing and drawing

Five top tips:

10

Building a good relationship with school
Making the most of annual review meetings

Where next?

12

More resources to support young people throughout their education

Acknowledgements

Thank you for the support and information for this publication from the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) at Cardiff University. CASCADE is the only centre of its kind in Wales, bringing together children's social care researchers in Wales in order to promote evidence and better meet the needs of policy and practice, so as to improve outcomes for children and their families.

The research that informed some of these articles was commissioned by the Welsh Government and conducted by CASCADE in partnership with The Fostering Network, Voices from Care Cymru and Spice Innovations. The magazine was supported by an Economic and Social Research Council's Impact and Acceleration Account fund, administered by Cardiff University.



welcome

The importance of education

At The Fostering Network we believe it is vital to support the education of fostered children and young people. Foster carers know that the children and young people in their care have dreams and ambitions – just like their friends – but too often their circumstances hold them back. And, unfortunately, many children and young people in care in Wales still don't do as well at school as other children, and this can affect the course of the rest of their lives.

Foster carers, however, can and do make a huge difference. For many young people, it just takes one person to truly believe in them to turn their fortunes around.

That's why we are delighted to be working with the team at CASCADE to develop and deliver an inspiring range of activities and resources to support the education of care experienced children and young people in Wales.

In this publication, you can read more about the project, as well as gaining some useful advice. It's all designed to help you as foster carers give the children and young people in your care the support and encouragement they need to aim high – and to succeed.

Colin Turner,
Director, The Fostering Network in Wales

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk
©The Fostering Network 2019
Commissioning editor: Maria Boffey
Editor and writer: Julie Pybus
Design: eplsDesign

The Fostering Network is registered in England and Wales as a limited company no. 1507277.
Registered office 87 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HA. Registered charity no. 280852 in England and Wales. Registered charity no. SC039338 in Scotland.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without prior permission of the publisher. To protect confidentiality, some photos are posed by models.

Photo credits: monkeybusinessimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus (Pages 4, 5, 6, 10) HRAUN/iStock/Getty Images Plus, DGLimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus, Ridofranz/iStock/Getty Images Plus, steved_np3/iStock/Getty Images Plus, shironosov/iStock/Getty Images Plus, CREATISTA/iStock/Getty Images Plus, Kerkez/iStock/Getty Images Plus, DGLimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus, Andrew Olney/DigitalVision/Getty

Meet Dawn

In 2015, the Welsh Government asked researchers from the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) at Cardiff University to explore the education of care experienced children and young people in Wales.

We wanted to hear children and young people's opinions about how things could be improved, and this project was featured in the Greater Expectations magazine¹, published by The Fostering Network.

Since then, at CASCADE we have continued to work with different organisations, including The Fostering Network and Voices from Care Cymru², to run a range of workshops, activities and events with children, young people, foster carers, teachers and social workers across Wales and the UK.

This new special edition magazine showcases some of this work, including the #messagestoschools³ campaign. The ideas from care experienced children and young people about what they want teachers to think about were presented in a film, a music video and a series of posters, and they feature in this magazine.

They are just as important for foster carers as they are for teachers, to help ensure that those they care for are supported in school and make the most of their educational journeys.

We also developed a website, ExChange: Care and Education⁴, to act as a one-stop-shop for everyone who has an interest in care experienced children and young people and their education. This has lots of blogs, articles and other resources, including the From Foster Cares for Foster Carers⁵ page that shares useful stories and experiences – and we are always looking for more if you would like to contribute.

This magazine draws on the voices of young people and foster carers and aims to provide an overview of some of the main challenges that fostered children face at school.

But...

more importantly, it aims to offer some practical ideas for steps to take to help children and young people in your care do well and enjoy their education.

We hope you will find the articles and information here useful in supporting the children and young people you care for and for making positive improvements in their lives.

Dr Dawn Mannay,
Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences,
and the team at CASCADE
Cardiff University



Project Highlight

Another project that we were involved with was an

arts-based programme with foster carers and children and young people at the Wales Millennium Centre.

The project, funded and supported by the Confidence in Care Consortium and led by The Fostering Network in Wales, involved singing, drama, puppet-making and other arts activities. The article about this project shows the benefits of engaging with the arts for foster families, including gaining skills, building confidence and making new friends.

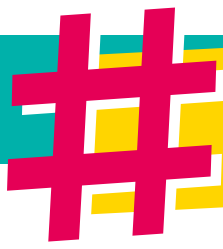
1 thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/greater-expectations

2 www.vfcc.org.uk

3 www.exchangewales.org/messagestoschools

4 www.exchangewales.org/careandeducation

5 www.exchangewales.org/from-foster-carers-for-foster-carer



We CAN achieve!

Children and young people who have been in care tend to gain fewer qualifications and have a less positive time at school. But this doesn't have to be the case - they are aspirational and with the right support they can achieve. Children and young people appreciate the valuable help that they get from teachers, but there are still some things that they think all schools could do to help.



1

We want to be treated the same as everyone else and not made to feel different or made to stand out

'They say they won't treat us different when they do'

2

We don't want to be taken out of classes for meetings, or have meetings in rooms that are visible to other people



'My school time is my learning time'

3

We want to know who the designated teacher is and what support is available



4

We want to be listened to and understood, and have a voice in decisions about our education

'Listen to children and young people'

We would like teachers, social workers and foster carers to communicate effectively to enable consistent support systems

5



6

We can achieve, and we want teachers to have high expectations for us, believe in us, and support us to realise our aspirations

'I want you to push me to reach my full potential'

7

We need access to computers, books and other materials related to our education

8

We want to be seen as individuals and not labelled or underestimated because we are looked after

'I am not just a number, I am me'



messagestoschools was developed in consultations with young people, foster carers and practitioners, facilitated by the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) in partnership with Voices from Care Cymru, The Fostering Network, and the Care Forum Wales - Looked After Children Network.

The consultation activities were supported by an Economic and Social Research Council's Impact and Acceleration Account fund, administered by Cardiff University.

Find out more about the #messagestoschools project at www.exchangewales.org/messagestoschools



Looked After Children Network
Rwydwydd Plant Mewn Golff



A problem **shared**...

One of foster carers' strongest sources of support and advice is other foster carers. Here, members of The Fostering Network share their tips on tackling some of the most common challenges they face when dealing with schools and education.



Meetings at school:

Be prepared!

Many foster carers attend meetings at school as part of their role. Here are some things that I've found useful over the years and I hope they will act as a guide and a checklist for other foster carers when preparing for their meetings.

- ✓ Write a list of questions you want answered.
- ✓ Ensure you will be speaking to someone who can make things change or implement new ideas, such as the deputy head, assistant head or head of year.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to speak. If necessary, take a deep breath.
- ✓ Befriend receptionists - they can often get you in at short notice.
- ✓ If you don't understand something, ask. School-speak takes some getting used to.

How to make a change of school go more smoothly

A change of school can be difficult for young people. We found our fostered child's move to secondary school very challenging. But the school was very supportive. We had four tours of the school, along with other support, before starting.

All of this improved our confidence and we felt much more confident about the transition.



When Mother's Day isn't appropriate

Our fostered child had to design a Mother's Day card at school. Our child didn't want to bring it up at the time, but they've got two male foster carers.

We discussed it at home and I arranged to go and see the head the next day. They listened to our concerns about this and now there's going to be awareness training for staff in the school.



Getting over stage fright!

Our fostered child had been doing really well preparing for the Christmas show and learning all her lines. But then the deputy head told me that she was refusing to go on stage.

I explained to her that we would never force her to do something that she didn't want to do, but I suggested she should keep learning the song and decide nearer the time. In this way, I allowed her to choose herself, which I think was empowering and it made her feel safe.

In the end, she decided to go for it! She's now signed up for drama and has a passion for musicals.

How can you deal with truancy?

- Drive right into the school grounds and ask a member of the school staff to greet the child at the entrance.
- When the child returns from truanting, stay calm and listen – they won't come back to you otherwise.
- Help the child to fit in with the right uniform, labels and, if necessary, brands.
- Remember that some children might be under pressure from their family to abscond.
- Try to find out why they don't want to go to school – they might be being bullied or a learning need might not have been identified.

Thanks to all the foster carers who contributed to the tips on these pages.

For more insights from foster carers about supporting children and young people through their education, see the From Foster Carers for Foster Carers page on the ExChange: Care and Education website at www.exchange.wales.org/from-foster-carers-for-foster-carer



Creativity and culture

Getting involved in creative projects can improve young people's confidence, build friendships and boost mental health. However, schools often emphasise core subjects, such as maths and English, at the expense of an involvement with the arts, which means that foster carers may need to explore other opportunities for young people.

A programme at Wales Millennium Centre gave eight young people, aged 12 to 15, the opportunity to explore drama, singing, drawing and more with their foster carers and a team of researchers. They discovered a wide range of benefits.

Dawn and her grandchildren



During 2018, Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff ran an arts-based programme which was funded and supported by the Confidence in Care Consortium led by The Fostering Network in Wales.

The programme was delivered between May and July and involved eight care experienced young people and their foster families.

Dawn Mannay, senior lecturer in social sciences, and colleagues at Cardiff University evaluated the project. In this interview with Dawn we hear about what happened in the project and what the outcomes were for young people and their foster carers.

Q What sort of activities did the young people and foster carers take part in?

Dawn: The project involved a range of activities such as singing, drama, games, character design and puppet-making. There was a session with puppeteers from the War Horse theatre production and everyone got to watch War Horse in the final week.

Foster carers participated in some of the activities and others were only for young people. Young people also completed an Arts Award – a certificate in the development of their arts and leadership skills.

Q Did foster carers enjoy being involved?

Dawn: Yes, even though the project was aimed

at young people, foster carers enjoyed the sessions and had a lot of fun taking part in the games and creative activities.

They also reported a real benefit from meeting other foster carers and making new friendships and supportive networks.

Even though the project was aimed at young people, foster carers enjoyed the sessions and had a lot of fun taking part in the games and creative activities.

Q What did the young people think about being involved?

Dawn: The young people all reported a wide range of benefits, including improved confidence, learning new creative skills, teamwork, patience, and making friends – and, of course, having fun. The benefits went beyond the project and young people used what they learnt in other contexts such as drama and art classes at school. Two young people went on to join a drama group and performed in a play.

Foster carers talked about how the young people they care for had grown in confidence across the project, as did the facilitators who saw a real transformation in young people.

I attended the sessions as well as interviewing all those involved, and I was surprised at what a big impact the project had – some young people were quite shy at the beginning but by the end they were all able to give a presentation, displaying their puppets and talking through their journeys.

Q How can other fostered young people get involved in similar projects?

Dawn: The advantages of this project were that it was free to access and, as it was aimed at care experienced young people, this established a common bond between the participants. The creative team were also skilled and had a lot of experience that helped to create a supportive environment.

I would love to see a range of other free programmes rolled out across Wales so that other young people and their foster carers could benefit from participating.

I also think that it is important to create opportunities for foster carers to meet up and form networks, and have the opportunity to chat and share their experiences.

Q What advice would you give foster carers following this project?

Dawn: I would recommend exploring opportunities for young people to engage with the arts locally. The arts are often seen as an add-on to other more mainstream forms of education; but being involved in the project has made me appreciate the value of cultural and creative engagement.



Drawings by the young people who took part in the project

//
I learned that I'm creative. I learned how to make a puppet move and how horses move and walk.

Charley

//
I learned how to overcome challenges and to have fun. I learned how to be confident around others.

Amy

//
We all worked together in a team. Working in a team is AMAZING!

Ebony

//
I'm proud of myself not getting into conflict and I managed to make friends and my confidence has improved.

Bella

Find out more about this project at www.exchange.wales.org/culturalandcreativeengagement and see what's on at Wales Millennium Centre for young people at www.wmc.org.uk



Building a good relationship with school

5 TOP

Fostered children do better at school when their foster carers work together closely with their teachers. Sharing information about what works well with a particular child – as well as what doesn't – can lead to a more constructive partnership.

1. Make yourself known to key members of staff

It's important to know who the designated member of staff is for care experienced children. However, it's also crucial to communicate closely with the child's class teacher if they are in primary school or form tutor and head of year in secondary school.

2. Share essential information about your fostered child

A one-page profile can help teachers to understand what's important to your fostered child and what works to support them during challenging times.

3. Seek regular feedback on your fostered child's progress

This can help you and the teachers recognise which learning strategies are working well, as well as giving you the information you need to continue to support their learning at home.



4. Agree how to exchange information quickly

Face-to-face discussions are usually best, whether through scheduled meetings or when picking up or dropping off your fostered child. These are not always possible though, so a home-school book, email or even texts can work well – discuss this with the relevant teacher.

5. Say thank you when things go well

A school will welcome feedback to help reinforce the positive steps they have taken to support the child.

Dylan, the child I care for, was struggling in school and some of the teachers didn't seem to understand his needs. I decided to speak to the school's designated member of staff to get more help for him. Establishing a good relationship with her was the best thing I could have done. I shared my concerns with her and we then discussed how best to tackle them. She was then better able to help other teachers to understand Dylan's needs and relieved some of my worries.

Foster carer

Fostered children's personal education plans (PEPs) should be reviewed regularly in partnership with the child, school staff and foster carers. Review meetings are a great opportunity to keep your fostered child's progress on track.

1. Ensure that the PEP meeting is scheduled at an appropriate time and place

Fostered children should not be taken out of lessons, and the meeting room should offer privacy to discuss sensitive issues.

2. Make sure you have gathered all the necessary information

You should have a copy of the latest PEP. Take any records of your interactions with school which will help to inform the discussion, such as a home-school book, emails, school reports and your own notes on your fostered child.

3. Prepare your thoughts before the meeting

Think about questions that you have for the school, and be prepared to highlight things that have gone well as well as concerns that you have. Be ready to offer some constructive suggestions for how things could be done differently.

4. Help your fostered child prepare for the meeting

According to your fostered child's abilities, you can help them to prepare for the meeting by talking



through the issues in the PEP. You can help give them the language and confidence to describe what they think about their progress.

5. Be clear about what happens next

During the meeting, make your own notes about what is agreed upon. If any dispute arises, follow it up after the meeting when the child isn't present. You will receive an updated version of the PEP afterwards, so ensure that you are happy with its content.

I was concerned that Sam had special educational needs. In order to get them diagnosed, I spoke to Sam's social worker and the designated teacher at his school to highlight my concerns. I also shared my feelings at his PEP meeting. They all then worked with the school's special educational needs coordinator to determine his needs and how the school could best work to support him.

Foster carer

Where next?

There are lots more resources to help foster carers support children and young people throughout their education.

ExChange: Care and Education

is an online one-stop-shop for everyone who has an interest in care experienced children and young people and their education www.exchangewales.org/careandeducation

On the website, you can find many resources, including:

- Details about the Looked After Children's Education (LACE) project. In 2015, CASCADE conducted a study with care experienced children and young people to explore their aspirations and experiences of education. Here you can read the final report, including a child-friendly summary, music videos, posters, songs and magazines. See www.exchangewales.org/laceproject
- The From Foster Carers for Foster Carers page for foster carers to share their experiences, strategies and advice. See www.exchangewales.org/from-foster-carers-for-foster-carer
- The #messagestoschools from young people. Here you can explore the materials that children and young people helped to produce highlighting what they think is important for schools to understand about their education. See www.exchangewales.org/messagestoschools

The Fostering Network

also has a wide selection of resources to support foster carers in the education of children and young people.

These include:

- The Fostering Network's Guide to Education in Wales. A comprehensive guide to understanding the school and higher education system. Download for free at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/education-guide-Wales
- Making It Happen. A magazine to inspire foster carers to help fostered children and young people raise their ambitions and fulfil their potential in education. Read it at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/making-it-happen
- Greater Expectations. A magazine to help foster carers understand more about the challenges fostered children face at school, as well as giving practical advice for steps to take to help children aim high and fulfil their potential. Read it at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/greater-expectations
- Amy's Diary. A fictional account of a fostered young person's life at school with advice for teachers, social workers and other professionals. Download it at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/amy-diary

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. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

- Thrive magazine. A special publication for young people in Wales, each issue focusing on a different theme. Read the Education issue at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/thrive-education




Contact details


The Fostering Network in Wales
33 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9HB


T: 029 2044 0940

E: wales@fostering.net

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

 find us on Facebook
facebook.com/thefosteringnetwork

 follow us on Twitter
[@fosteringnet](https://twitter.com/fosteringnet)

 follow us on Instagram
[@thefosteringnetwork](https://www.instagram.com/thefosteringnetwork)