FOSTER CARE FORTNIGHT 2011

This year’s campaign got under way in May with a major call to the public highlighting the urgent need for foster carers and showing why now is the *time to care*. The Fostering Network was successful in securing widespread media coverage across the UK.

Highlights included interviews on *Daybreak* and STV, and on numerous BBC and independent radio stations. Plenty of newspapers also covered the campaign including the *Guardian, Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Telegraph, Belfast Telegraph, Scotland on Sunday’s Spectrum* magazine and *South Wales Echo*.

In addition, over 135 fostering services generated media coverage in their local area.

Hundreds of events were planned, ranging from a ‘fostering freeze’ in a shopping centre in Blackburn – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvoY8PRkdy4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvoY8PRkdy4) – to PACT (Parents and Children Together) setting itself a challenge to meet all the mayors across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire to present them with an *I support PACT fostering* medal. Read on to find out about other creative events and activities planned.

BORIS BACKS CAMPAIGN

The Fostering Network was delighted to work with the Greater London Authority to hold the first Mayor of London Celebration and Recognition Awards for London’s foster carers. Over 70 foster carers were invited to City Hall by the Thames on Friday 20 May to be thanked by London Mayor Boris Johnson. The event was a great success and really helped to get media coverage of the need for foster families in the capital.

NORTHERN IRELAND’S FOSTER CARERS OF THE YEAR ANNOUNCED

Marion and Hugh Corr received the *Foster Carers of the Year* award at a special family event at Stormont on Saturday 21 May, in recognition of their commitment to fostering and dedication to the children in their care. During the fortnight a campaign was launched to find long-term foster homes for 60 children across Northern Ireland.

WELSH ASSEMBLY ASKED TO HELP

In Wales *Foster Care Fortnight* was used as an opportunity to call on the new government to make tackling the shortage of foster families a priority. On Wednesday 25 May the Fostering Network hosted an event at the Senedd in Cardiff. They were joined by new assembly member Mick Antoniw AM, who is a former foster carer and spoke at the event.
A brand new campaign was launched by Stockton-on-Tees’ fostering service during Foster Care Fortnight. ‘Put yourself in the picture’ is the message of a new high profile fostering and adoption campaign. Posters and leaflets have been produced which feature artwork designed as part of a competition by looked-after children and the birth children of foster carers.

Stockton’s foster families and the children they look after also had a special treat when they became the first to try out the newly refurbished ice rink at Billingham Forum. This, along with a host of other activities, enabled the team to secure extensive amounts of media coverage.

Winner Molly McDermott and Jane Humphreys, corporate director of children, education and social care

Wandsworth Council’s foster families were treated to a special family fun day in Battersea Park, London as part of this year’s Foster Care Fortnight, joined by local MP Jane Ellison. Local people interested in finding out more about fostering were invited to attend the Jamboree. Foster carers were also treated to a pamper day during the fortnight, planned in partnership with the local foster care association.

International Welsh singer Iris Williams, who was fostered as a child, is spearheading Rhondda Cynon Taf Council’s fostering service as its new champion. The New York-based jazz performer, whose career has spanned four decades, returned to the valleys of her birth to champion the council’s cause to find more foster carers during this year’s Foster Care Fortnight.
Co-op finds time to care in the north east

Northumberland County Council and North Tyneside Council have teamed up with the Co-operative Group as part of their ‘Pop up a Poster’ foster care recruitment campaign. The Co-op displayed foster care recruitment posters in both their food and pharmacy stores across the area. The councils recently appointed a joint fostering service manager, to pave the way for more partnership working between the two services in the future, leading to improved placements and more opportunities for looked-after young people.

Elsewhere in the region participating councils in the north east marketing forum took the fostering: time to care theme on board by holding events and celebrations near to clock towers or with the help of giant fob watches. It was hoped that the critical mass of publicity in the region would give a much-needed boost to enquiry rates.

Care for coffee? in NI

All five trusts in Northern Ireland arranged a staggering 15 coffee mornings to take place simultaneously on the first Wednesday of this year’s Foster Care Fortnight. Staff and foster carers were available at a range of locations to talk to anyone interested in fostering.

Bristol launches promotional film

In April Bristol City Council held the premiere of their new fostering promotional film. The new film features interviews with current foster carers and is designed to inform local people about the task of fostering and working for the fostering service. Residents can borrow the film from all of the council’s libraries. Local voluntary and community groups are being encouraged to help spread the word following a special screening at a local cinema.

Blogging about fostering

Kirklees Council’s fostering team enlisted the support of one of its foster carers to share the blog she has been writing during this year’s Foster Care Fortnight. Angela and her husband were approved to foster in March this year and the blog tracks the personal journey from meeting the fostering panel, to getting a phone call about their first child and through the emotional and uplifting days that follow. Lucy Kirby, recruitment officer at Kirklees Council, said: ‘This unique opportunity is the perfect way to find out what it’s really like to take up this challenging and rewarding role.’ Read the full blog at http://angelasstory.wordpress.com/
**Recruitment Champions – WE NEED YOU!!**

The Fostering Network is launching an exciting new initiative later this month. With the help of funding from the Department for Education we are planning to recruit up to 20 recruitment champions in England. Recruitment champions are staff and foster carers from fostering services who are able to offer advice and guidance to other fostering services on improving the recruitment of foster carers. The Fostering Network will manage the scheme and link individuals with recruitment champions who have the relevant experience and specialisms.

**What’s in it for me?**

Becoming a recruitment champion will look great on your CV, give your fostering service kudos and provide an excellent learning opportunity for you. This is a voluntary role and support will be time-limited via phone and email, to avoid impacting on current workloads.

If you would like to find out more information about the recruitment champions initiative you can email helen.clarke@fostering.net

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**Supported lodgings**

The Four Agency Supported Lodgings Project, involving the Fostering Network together with Depaul UK, YMCA England and National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), was funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government from April 2010 until May 2011. The aim was to bring together supported lodgings schemes and services developed by housing, children’s services and Supporting People in England to establish a national network of supported lodgings schemes.

In May 2011 more than 160 delegates came together at the More than a Room? conference to share knowledge and experience about developments and issues affecting supported lodgings.

To download materials visit www.fostering.net/supported-lodgings

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**Foster Carers' Charter**

Earlier this year, the Government launched its Foster Carers' Charter and has said it wants all fostering services to sign up to a charter and that it will be monitoring this closely. In response to this the Fostering Network has produced the Foster Carers’ Charter: putting it into practice in England.

The aim of the Fostering Network’s document is to help fostering services build on the Government’s charter to meet their needs and put it into a local context. It is available to download at www.fostering.net/members from Monday 13 June.

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**Social networking for short break care workers**

Short Breaks Network (formerly Shared Care Network) has launched a new interactive social networking site for all those working directly with disabled children during their short breaks. Members of the Short Breaks Network can join by visiting http://shortbreaksnetwork.ning.com/

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**Congratulations** to all the fostering services that got involved in this year’s Foster Care Fortnight. It was yet another great campaign. The Fostering Network really appreciates all the hard work its members put in to plan great events and generate valuable publicity for fostering. Let’s hope we get the enquiries from the people we need!

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