

make a difference...

foster carers
newsletter

Summer 2017



Special summer edition

Picture courtesy of [PublicDomainPictures/pixabay.com](https://www.pixabay.com/)

Editorial

This edition of the consistently excellent Foster Carers Newsletter is the first without Russ as Team Manager. I think I speak for carers and staff alike in saying that we will greatly miss him and appreciate all he has done for us personally and as a Service. We survived the parting of the "Golden Girls" and will survive without Russ, but change is difficult and he leaves very big shoes to fill.

Not standing still, the Service moves forward. Participation of young people is a key theme: the Champions Board promotes positive change by increasing the confidence of young people to speak up and out making sure that they are then heard. The emojis look like a fun way to say the serious – let's see how it works.

As for Kyle - brilliant. Well done to him on participating in and winning the t-shirt competition!

Recruitment again continues on the participation theme. The team have always been aware that carers are the best recruiters of other carers – see the feedback from preparation groups. What's more, the sons and daughters are also involved and Ronald is quite the star at preparation groups.

Please have a read at the articles by the two Sandras. The first is a relatively new carer who beautifully describes their journey into fostering, a real example of what "making difference" means through high structure and high nurture, the winning formula. The second Sandra is the 'old timer' who has overcome doubts and misgivings about Adoption Activity Days (some of which I shared) and engaged with them positively and enthusiastically. We are always learning.

I am considering an application to the Leaving Care Team to run my financial affairs. I could not contemplate living off £57.90 weekly, despite my humble tastes. Enormous credit is due to Norma Brown and the rest of the team who assist young people to make independent life workable on a very limited income.

This is a great Newsletter and will be my first and last as editor and last as a team member. I will see you all though with my reviewing hat and look forward to working with you in the future.

Dominic Gillen

Senior Social Worker



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

Foster Carer Consultative Committee

The Foster Carers Consultative Committee was held on 01/06/17. Five carers, and two supervising workers were in attendance along with the Head of Service, Kathy McCarroll and Service Manager Vivien Thomson.

At the meeting, updates were provided and discussion took place on the following topics:

- Laptop/E-mail Pilot
- Transport Policy
- Champions Board
- Learning and Development Framework for foster carers
- Carers ID badges
- PDP Review
- Mother and Baby placement forum
- Recruitment
- Training
- Feedback from the Carers Support Group
- Budget

At the meeting Julie Williams (Children's Rights Officer) attended and provided a brief overview of her role. Julie is hoping to meet more carers at the Support Groups and future training.

Feedback on the Foster Carers Consultative Committee will be provided to foster carers at the Support Groups or alternatively if you have any issues to raise, please contact your Supervising Social Worker or alternatively Elaine Stewart/Joyce MacKenzie or one of the carers who represent your on the Committee.

Sadly this was Kathy's last Foster Carers Consultative Committee and all members would wish to thank her for the contributions she has made to progressing the Fostering Service over many years. We wish her well in the future.

Skill level Progresses

- Tim and Adrienne Findlay progressed to Skill Level 2
- Mary and Jay McGuire progressed to Skill Level 3
- Sandi and Neil Bell progressed to Skill Level 2
- Deirdre Campbell and Stuart Robertson progressed to Skill Level 2
- Lorna McColl and Michael Lennon progressed to Skill Level 2
- Lee and Leanne Morton progressed to Skill Level 2

Well done on your commitment to your Portfolio and the fostering task!

Facebook

As previously highlighted, we have an Adoption & Fostering Facebook page where we post useful articles and links relating to fostering, adoption and general child care. If you haven't seen our page yet why not have a look. You can find it by searching Falkirk Council Adoption & Fostering either through Facebook or a search engine.

We made good use of the Facebook page during the recent Foster Care Fortnight and got a good response to our posts. Our number of page likes increased by around 25% in those 2 weeks. Given the response to Foster Care Fortnight we will be looking to post more information generated by us. If any Carers are interested in contributing to the Facebook page can you let your Supervising Social Worker know please.

Following recent conversations with Carers, particularly in relation to training and events, we are looking to set up a "Secret" group specifically for registered Foster Carers through our Facebook page. This would let us highlight upcoming training and events without publishing them to the general public. Having a "Secret" group rather than a "Closed" group also means the membership list for the group is not available to the public. We hope to try this out over the summer holiday period. If you haven't liked our Facebook page but would want to be part of the group can you let your Supervising Social Worker know so we can add you through Facebook.

If you have any comments or suggestions for our Facebook page we'd love to hear from you.

Jacquie Toye

Final Goodbyes

Goodbye

Writing this about 5 weeks before my estimated time of departure seems a bit unreal, given that Local Authority, Social Work has been a big part of my life for over 40 years. Working within a children and families setting has had some great moments, some sad moments and some downright depressing/frustrating moments. Foster Carers were foster parents when I started working on from children in residential care "fosters" (could have been mistakenly taken for a pint of lager!).

Things have changed of that there is no doubt – fees, training and image have all been revamped. Expectations have mushroomed beyond belief and what we now ask carers to do outstrips any previous understanding of roles.

Some of you have been fostering since before I started working as a qualified Social Worker (1976), so in terms of retention, we have done not too badly.

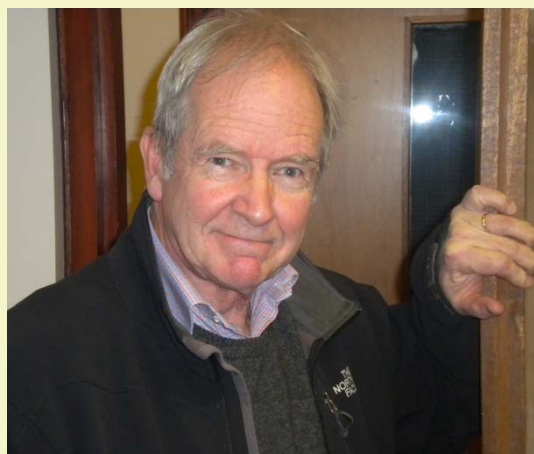
As Social Workers I think we have a tendency to underestimate what carers do and at times take it all for granted. The chaos that sometimes erupts in a Foster Carer's home has always left me feeling guilty and relieved. Guilty when I was asking people to cope with episodes that I would have struggled to deal with and relieved that it wasn't happening in my house!

I have always enjoyed working with carers and have a great deal of respect for the way you go about your business. This view is reflected within the Adoption and Fostering Team and we do try and support you as much as we can, although in the recent past financial constraints appear to have come to the fore in an unhelpful way.

I would like to thank you all for your support, flexibility and friendship over the years. You have really made a difference to many, many young people's lives, which sometimes goes unrecognised and unrewarded.

Leaving is going to be a very significant change in what I do, so in the words of Bobby Robson (Russ why do you quote somebody who scored a goal in England's 9:3 thrashing of Scotland in 1961?!) "Farewell but not goodbye".

*Russ Paterson
Team Manager*



Goodbye from the Team

The adoption and fostering team would like to express their thanks to Russ and Dominic for their commitment and support to the team, carers children and young people over many years. Whilst we have seen significant changes in policy, procedures and within the council, their management, leadership and support resulted in a stable committed and experienced team. This will mean that although their loss will be keenly felt the standard of service they provided to vulnerable children and our carers will continue as a legacy to their commitment and dedication.

Elaine Stewart on behalf of the Teamies !!

Final Goodbyes

Russ's leaving lunch

We at the FOSTERING AND ADOPTION TEAM want to say a very big thank you to everyone foster carers colleagues ex colleagues and management for attending Russ's leaving lunch. We think it's a testament to the man to have that level of turnout to say goodbye and the effort of all concerned in making it a memorable day for him. He was very overwhelmed by all the amazing gifts cards and fond farewell, and he has made some new friends, well at least till all that booze runs out. The foster carers as usual were generous in their gifts and this shows how valued he was by the people the service is designed around.

It will be a different place without him down here and the office will never be the same there will never be another russ paterson again, no more rants, no more stories of Brigadoon, he's a true champion of the underdog with the strangest taste in movies music books and football teams, a Patrick's Thistle supporter something your average person doesn't understand. We've had lunch in the office and ruffled our crisp packets in tribute to him. There wasn't a dry eye in the house when he left on Wednesday but in true Russ style he couldn't leave without telling us his postman pat jokes, grunts groans and oh no not again russ we've heard this one.

Its difficult to say goodbye to a gentleman a scholar a legend and a knowledge of all that has gone on for 300 years.

Happy retirement Mr Paterson!

Lorraine Hanlon on behalf of the Fostering and Adoption Team



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

To Russ from our carer

It is always happy and sad when someone leaves your workplace. Happy because you obviously wish them well in any of there future endeavours. Sad because in this instance Russ was always someone we knew we could trust and if need be, lean on. I personally think I have known Russ for over 20 years however don't really know if I'm that old. He has always advocated for fostering on all levels whether you are a carer, young person or child. While at russ' s retirement gathering you only had to look around to see how well thought of he was, and still is. Russ was one of those rare people who was passionate about any kind of injustice and was willing to go out on a limb for anyone and everyone. He was also approachable and when the chips were down, could be relied upon to give sound advice and if need be point you in the right direction. We really enjoyed hearing a few of Russ's stories from over the years throughout his working life, although we as carers could probably write a book on all our stories regarding Russ and dare I say his " Rants " which could be spectacular. Even after Kathy had finished her speech about Russ, then handed over to him, he thanked everyone for their attendance well wishes and thoughtful gifts he still couldn't resist a " Rant " which we all thoroughly enjoyed. He will be sorely missed.

Carole Shade, Foster carer



Happy retirement!

Final Goodbyes

To Russ from our carer

I was glad I had the chance to go to Russ's drop in at Camelon Social Work Office but found the day very emotional thinking this was undoubtedly the end of an era. Given the amount of people who attended I didn't get the opportunity to talk much to Russ and if I did I would have been tearful.

I have known Russ for the past 19 years and he has been my Supervising Social Work three times. I had a close attachment to Russ and while he knew me I considered I got to know him well. Russ would often share stories of his own family which helped put people at ease. Russ was also around at the time of me adopting my son.

I was very sad and upset to hear the news that he was leaving but will remember his openness and ability to say what he thinks !!!

If there is one thing I could say to Russ it would be

Your only away a week ...Come back!!

Deirdre Black, Foster Carer



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

To Russ from a young person

A 16 year old reflected on the departure of Russ by saying:

"He was brilliant, first class, nice guy to speak to, sound, and I will miss him as I have known him for a long time".

KB

Goodbye, but see you soon

Well it is Goodbye from me and Goodbye from him. I have survived Russ by a month and start as a full time Review Co-ordinator in July. I have been part of this team since 2000 (started with Joyce and Jill), which is nearly half of my career.



In that time I have seen many changes, some good, some less so, but our team and so many of the carers have remained in place until now!

I have always liked working with foster carers and did my first preparation group – Parenting Plus – in Kilmarnock in 1983. My aunt was a foster carer when we were at school, which got us interested in it.

Final Goodbyes

As a student I worked at a Glasgow Children's Home during the summer and other holidays. Little wonder I did the post-graduation social work course also at Glasgow University.

Working with foster carers is humbling. They consistently go the extra mile, tolerate the intolerable and graciously respond to our desperate phone calls of 'I realise you have a lot on, but...'

As many of you know I have done a fair bit of recruiting in my time. I could not have done the preparation groups without the participation of carers and their sons and daughters. One of my favourite activities was the Sons and Daughters Group, which Pat and I ran with a great group of young people.

As I have been around a while, I still get the occasional call from young people, who I placed years ago for adoption or with carers.

There is nothing more rewarding than feeling that they have made lives for themselves and that I can still play a part in pulling together these details of their younger life.

I will miss Adoption and Fostering work, the team and the carers. Unlike Russ and the "Golden Girls" it will not be the significant change to filling work time with leisure simply different work.

Dominic Gillen
Senior Social Worker

Goodbye Dominic from the team

Sadly, our Dominic has decided to jump ship taking up the position of full time reviewing officer at Laurieston as per" the Employees right to leave their post act "(2017) section 2 subsection 3b. This move does give some reassurance to the team that we will continue to maintain contact and have the ability to draw on his experience and knowledge which has been invaluable to the team over many years.



Picture courtesy of bykst/pixabay.com

We would like to say thanks for his commitment to the team particularly when it came to his legal knowledge, sons and daughters group, annual reports, care Inspection amongst other pieces of work and lessons on how to fold jumpers appropriately and grow sweet peas!!

You're Teamies

Ps - Hope you followed the correct procedure for leaving the premises good luck and peace be with you



Final Goodbyes

Dear Colleagues and Friends

For those of you out there who don't know me, I am the Head of Service for Social Work Children & Families and Criminal Justice in Falkirk Council Children's Services. This means I manage the Service Managers who manage, amongst other areas, the front-line Children & Families teams; support services such as fostering and adoption, leaving care, disability, residential services; and Criminal Justice (Polmont Young Offenders Institution, Accredited Groupwork, Court & Probation and Community Service).

As the Chief Social Work Officer, I provide professional Social Work advice to the Council, and therefore to Members of the Integrated Joint Board for Health and Social Care, as well as other professional Officers.



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

I qualified as a Social Worker in 1975 and I have worked in all areas of Social Work, initially as a Social Worker in Bellsdyke Psychiatric Hospital for 13 years before moving to line manage a generic Social Work team including child care, criminal justice and adult services in Alloa.

Prior to the implementation of Community Care, Central Regional Council ran a one year Community Care pilot in Alva and so I had the privilege, as a Team Manager, of managing the very first Children & Families team by default.

I then worked as an Area Manager in both Alloa and Denny, having responsibility for managing all of the Social Work Services operating across these geographical areas. After a structural change (I've seen a few of them), I then worked as a Service Manager in Early Years (pre-fives in those days).

Following Local Government re-organisation in 1995, I moved to Falkirk as a Service Manager; still working in Early Years but with a remit to develop a dedicated service for Children with Disability. Around 1999, my remit expanded to become a Service Manager for all of Children & Families services.

From 2003 to 2009, I was seconded to work in a multi-agency team as the Children's Services Integration Manager. This was not without its challenges and had many similarities to the integration of Health and Social Care. During this time, I chaired the Adoption & Fostering Panel; later moving on to the role of Agency Decision Manager, making the most crucial decisions affecting children's lives.

From 2009 to 2011 I job-shared the Head of Service position with a colleague, and from early 2012 I was appointed as Head of Service for Children & Families and Criminal Justice. This ultimately led to my appointment as the Chief Social Work Officer from July 2015 when structural changes were made to Social Work Services to accommodate both the integration of Health and Social Care as well as the integration of Children & Families, Criminal Justice and Education into Children's Services.

Over the years, I developed a genuine interest in fostering and adoption. I still miss chairing the Adoption Panel. I can still remember the very first Panel I chaired where we were matching a child with prospective adopters. When I shared the Panel decision with the adopters, they started to shed a tear and I couldn't help it, I joined in.

Final Goodbyes

I used to just love it when it was an Adoption Panel to register a baby or toddler and the foster carer brought the child to their Panel. I have been known to chair a Panel with a bouncing baby on my knee!

Then I became the Agency Decision Maker. I found this a much more difficult role. When I chaired the Panel I at least got to hear directly from Social Workers, foster carers and adoptive parents, and how people present and engage is vastly different from how that is described in reports. As the Agency Decision Maker, I only got the paperwork and that personal connection was lost, although there is something to be said for an arms-length objective view as well.

Foster carers, on the whole, are wonderful people. You all give your time, commitment and nurturing to the young people in your care. But some of the more activists amongst you often ask difficult and challenging questions. I was involved with Raymond Taylor in the development of the first Payment for Skills process and, as I recall, sometimes it was hard going but, in partnership, we got there in the end. Then, of course, some years later we did it all over again.

I have also both been a member of and then chaired the Foster Carers' Consultative Committee for many years. This has been a mixed blessing; at times, quite rightly, having to take demanding and challenging questions from carers when they thought we were getting it wrong or, more commonly, where the movement on changes/improvements was going at Local Authority bureaucratic pace rather than the pace carers expected. However, through the Foster Carers' Consultative Committee I have come to know many of you personally and come to admire your dedication to the weans in your care.

There are many changes ahead within the Adoption and Fostering team.

I am sorry that we have lost Russ to retirement but, although Dominic is moving on, he is staying in the Council as a full-time Review Co-ordinator.

I am delighted to welcome Monique Ferrie to the team. Monique was a student when I first went to manage the generic team in Alloa and then stayed on as a new qualified Social Worker.

I know the plans for the way ahead involve concentrating on recruiting more Falkirk foster carers. We know that word of mouth works better than anything so a last plea from me – get your friends/neighbours/ relatives interested without, of course, sharing any confidential information.

I am due to retire on 4 August 2017 after 42 years in Social Work, but I am delighted to be able to inform you that my successor has been appointed. Sara Lacey, who joined us in December 2015, will be taking up post as the Head of Service/Chief Social Work Officer from 7 August 2017.

What more can I say than:

- thank you for all your support throughout the years;
- thank you for your dedication and commitment to the job, but especially to the young people.

Please continue to give Sara the same level of support and commitment going forward.

I hope to see as many of you as possible before I go. An informal drop in is being held on 3rd August at Rossvail from 2–4 pm. Do please come along.

I have many happy memories of working with you all.

Best wishes.

Final Goodbyes

Goodbye Kathy

The adoption and fostering team were sad to hear Kathy had decided to leave Social Work after a lengthy career. As such we would like to take this opportunity to wish her well in the future.

Kathy always kept in close touch with the Fostering and Adoption team through her many roles as friend, colleague, panel chair, Agency Decision Maker and latterly as Chief Social Work Officer, where she chaired many Foster Carer Consultative Committee meetings.

I know that past and present colleagues and carers would wish to thank Kathy for the contribution she made over the years to developing the service and achieving the best possible outcomes for our young people and carers.

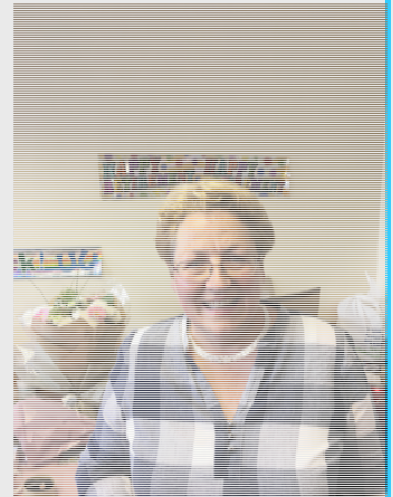
We hope that in the future you will continue to keep in touch with the team as your knowledge and experience over many years would be invaluable.

Good Luck in the future Kathy,
A&F Team

Goodbye Gillian

Gillian Brown whom many carers will know from her role as Reviewing officer for looked after children has decided to board the same ship leaving Falkirk for retirement. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Gillian for her support to colleagues and carers over many years and wish her well in the future. We know that whilst Gillian leaves her role as reviewing officer it will be in safe hands as Dominic will now be taking over this role full time and continue the good work Gillian achieved to date.

Best wishes Gillian
from all in the A&F
team you will be
missed!



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

Goodbye Kirsten

Like many others boarding the ship, we would also like to say goodbye and thank you to Kirsten Stobie, who left our admin team to move to her current role with Stirling Council Criminal Justice Admin Team. Kirsten will be missed by all and whilst it is our loss, it is Stirling's gain.



welcome!

We would like to warmly welcome Beena Khan to the Fostering and Adoption Team as our first Modern Apprentice. Beena will be with us for approximately 9 months. We would like to thank our admin team for the support, guidance and training that they will provide to Beena over this period. Carers will have the opportunity to get to know Beena when calling the office.

Children's Rights Service



Quarriers

To refer just call, email or pop in for a chat – No Paperwork required!

Location: 9c East Bridge Street, Falkirk.
FK1 1YD.

Telephone: 01324 612308

Email: falkirk.childrens@quarriers.org.uk

Who Are We

Our service is funded by Falkirk Council to provide independent **Advocacy & Support** to care experienced children and young people and those affected by disability. We are a small team consisting of a Children's Rights Officer, and Information and Advocacy worker. Together with the Who Cares? advocacy worker we make up the Falkirk Children's Rights Service.

The Team remit is to ensure that children's rights are upheld and to represent their views. We are guided by **THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD** which promotes Human Rights for children. There are 42 articles which promote the rights of the child and the four principles of children's rights:

Non Discrimination: no child should be treated unfairly on any basis (Article 2)

Best interest of the child: When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect those children (Article 3)

The right to Survival & Development: Children have the right to live (Article 6)

Respect for the Views of the Child: In order to know what is actually in the interest of the child it is logical to listen to them & have their opinion taken into account. (Article 12)

What We Do

- Provide information on Rights & Responsibilities
- Support young people to present their views at meetings such as Children's Hearings & Looked After reviews
- We listen and offer advice
- Help children and young people have their say about things that affect them
- Encourage young people to contribute to the improvement of services by supporting their participation in Falkirk's Champion Board

Advocacy is a way of helping children and young people have their say in decisions that affect them. The Falkirk Children's Rights Service is an independent service which offers that support and guidance. Please encourage children and young people to contact us

Julie Williams & Catherine Harrison

Champions Board

The Champions Board young people meet every Wednesday from 6-8pm in Park Street Community Education Centre. The aim of the Board is to provide a platform for Care Experienced Young People aged 13+, to come together to discuss their experiences and opinions about being in care and the services they receive. The group will select members to discuss ideas with the Elected Members of Falkirk Council and other Corporate Parents.

There are opportunities for everyone involved; from participating in fun group activities, to gaining awards and qualifications such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The group has recently returned from a five day sailing trip with the Ocean Youth Trust!

A group for Care Experienced Young People aged 8-13 will begin in the summer holidays.

To find out how you can get involved please contact Emily on 07970739174.



PACE

Falkirk are delighted to have signed up to the PACE programme, which, in brief, looks at where drift in permanency planning is occurring and then tests how blocks and gaps can be shifted to improve the child's journey to permanent placement. The work takes a whole systems approach and the areas where the work focusses therefore could be at any stage or part of the system e.g. our internal processes, around the Children's Hearing system, medical areas or legal aspects. We are in the initial phase of gathering data which will inform where we focus in Falkirk.

Some background on the approach from CELCIS who host the work, is outlined below and we will feature further information as we progress. As carers some of you may be involved at stages. Evidence from other councils is that the approach can make a real difference to children's journeys and we are sure that carers and staff alike will find this an effective tool for change.

Background to PACE

When a child is removed from their birth family there is rarely initial agreement that the separation will be permanent; instead, most children experience a period of uncertainty while decisions are made about their future care

Such uncertainty can be prolonged. Children often move through a series of temporary placements with different carers, or may be reunited with their parents before being removed into care again. Late separation and disruption of attachments can have a profound effect on children's development and wellbeing and influence their future. Recent Scottish research highlighted drift and delay in decision-making processes as problematical. The Scottish Government responded to these concerns by commissioning CELCIS to develop a whole systems change programme to be delivered in partnership with local areas..

The Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE) programme has evolved to support multi-agency

partners rise to the challenge of ensuring that every child has a stable home that offers them nurturing relationships as early as possible. PACE is focused on supporting evidence-informed sustainable improvement in systems, process and practices critical to good permanence practice.

The policy context

In policy, 'permanence' is defined as providing children with *'a stable, secure, nurturing relationship and home, where possible within a family setting, which continues into adulthood'*.

There are a range of different routes to achieving permanence. These include:

- Returning or remaining at home where family functioning has improved. This may require on-going support for a child, parents and the family as a whole.
- A permanence order for a child who is living in kinship care, foster care or residential care
- A kinship care order
- Adoption

The PACE approach

The PACE Programme brings together key stakeholders in an area to analyse how the system to be changed is operating. A 'process map' is established as a reference for developmental work towards a more efficient system, which, along with existing data, provides a helpful picture of the issues that are causing blockage at any point and areas that are working well.

Based on an analysis of the local data, aims are agreed, and tests of change using PDSA (plan, do, study, act) cycles take place to trial and evaluate and sustain change.

The impact of whole system partnership working makes any work particularly effective. Learning to date from PACE is that the greater the 'buy in' from each corporate parenting agency, the greater the impact and potential improvement in drift and delay.

If you are interested in learning more, full details can be found on the CELCIS website.

Foster Care - Fortnight!

As some of you may have been aware, Falkirk Council participated in Foster Care Fortnight from the 8th to 21st May. A big thank you to all the carers who took part in foster care fortnight and took the time to support us in the three local Tesco stores across Falkirk.



Picture courtesy of Lisa Evens

Foster Care Fortnight is the UK's biggest foster care awareness raising campaign, delivered by leading fostering charity, The Fostering Network. Established for almost 20 years, the campaign showcases the commitment, passion and dedication of foster carers. It also supports fostering services to highlight the need for more foster carers. Across Scotland 600 more foster families are needed to care for children, with the greatest need being for foster carers for older children, sibling groups, disabled children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

As well as having a stand at each Tesco over the course of the Fortnight, we tweeted on a daily basis and posted regular Facebook updates and events pages across the Council Websites.

So far our posts about Tesco/Carers' photos have generated a reach of over 5,500 combined. Our post reach is up 4,816 and we have picked up 19 likes since the start of Foster Carer Fortnight. We would like to continue this and if you haven't already Liked us on Facebook or on our Adoption & Fostering Website page, then please do! We post some really interesting articles about both fostering and adoption and also provide links to other pages of interest.

A real achievement for us was the article which the Falkirk Herald printed in relation to Foster Care Fortnight. We had two super carers, Neil Bell and David Morton who were willingly interviewed and photographed for the Herald. The article was positive and encouraging and we hope to be able to recruit some more carers on the back of this campaign.

As you know the majority of foster carers are attracted to fostering because they have spoken to existing foster carers, seen or heard a description about fostering in the local media or both, so keep up the good work and keep spreading the word!



Picture courtesy of Lisa Evens

News for the young people...

Champions Board: Falkirk

April 2017

Update on the 'Falkirk Champs'

What a start to the year..... We currently have a participation group called 'Falkirk Champs' open to 13-25 year olds. They meet every Wednesday in Park Street Community Centre. They take part in meaningful activities that are designed for them to form positive relationships with each other, and to increase their confidence. Everyone in the group has opportunities to engage in creative activities, to discuss their experiences of being in care and to share their ideas for improving the care experience.

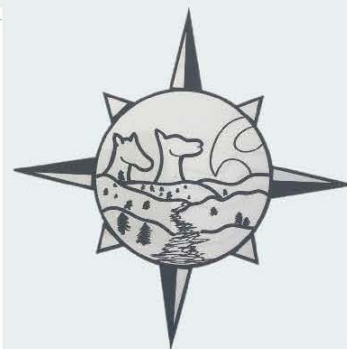
Since January, the group has had many successful meetings with all who have signed up to be full members. The group have looked at what Corporate Parenting is, who they are and what we should expect of them, but we have yet to ask the same of the Professional Champions. In the coming months, we hope to have a clearer idea who these Professional Champions will be.

Eventually roles within the group will be established, with nominated members becoming the 'Young Champions' who will sit on the Champions Board with the 'Professional Champions' after our launch in Autumn 2017.

A wider group of young people will feed their ideas and concerns into the 'Falkirk Champs' via subgroups, then the 'Young Champions' will have meetings, discussions and consultations with the 'Adult Champions' in a setting that the young people choose.

Our Leaving Care monthly Surgery will start on 31 May 2017, this subgroup will be jointly staffed by the Champions Board and the Leaving Care Team. This will give a safe and comfortable opportunity for young people to share their thoughts and feelings on their experience and to put forward ideas to best maintain and/or improve the service.

By Summer we will have the 'Mini Champs' established for 8-12 year olds. The purpose will be to establish their equally important views and sow the seeds for our future groups.



STAFF CONTACTS

Janet - 07860778679

Ray - 07769327816

Emily - 07970739174

Laura - 07541100683

GROUPS

- Participation Group
- Leaving Care Surgery
- Under 12's (summer 2017)

...would you like to get involved?



What are we doing?

To get to know each other better and gel as a team most of the group have been able to attend a fantastic opportunity on an Ocean Youth Trust adventure .

This was a time to work together and create memories while building good communication and group working skills. The group were on the voyage for 5 days /4 nights in tight accommodation, so it was a very cosy and trying time for all!

The group learned skills in sailing, which lead to an Introduction to Sailing Certificate. Issued by the Royal Yacht Association.

"I have really pushed myself and the group has helped me, I feel more confident and able to help" Jack, 18

Dates for the Diary:

Falkirk Champs:

Every Wednesday 6-8pm
Park St Community Centre
Falkirk, FK1 1RE

Leaving Care Surgery:

Last Wednesday of each
Month 5-7pm
LCT Office

Mini Champs:

Summer 2017 Playscheme
Weekly group thereafter
4pm - 5.30pm TBC.

If you want to know more or get involved.....

The groups offer young people from all experiences of care the opportunity to share their views on what was good in their experience and also what they would like to improve. The group is looking at issues and identifying possible

solutions in order to make future care better for other children and young people.

Long gone are the old moaning shops—make way for the forward thinking and radical care experienced young people of Falkirk who will positively work with the council and

other corporate parents to make things better for all.

The group is excited about meeting their corporate parents and start the ball rolling for the future. But to do this we need as many young people to share their voices with us- how that's done is up to the young people- we will opening a social media page soon so everyone can join in on the discussion.....

If you want to join in or find out more contact any of the workers overleaf.

Where are they now?

The "golden girls"



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

I've heard countless numbers of people say once they've retired, that they didn't know how they ever managed to find time to work. Not one to buck a trend, I would say the same thing. I've found that, contrary to what I thought would happen, my days are still busy and even sometimes never long enough.

On reflection, I'm not exactly sure what I do that fills the days but I never get weary. It's a real luxury being able to make plans without the restriction of work and working around holidays and it is an aspect of retirement that I find I relish above all else.

I've always enjoyed reading, doing crosswords and puzzles and cooking for family and friends - I still do all of these things, only a lot more. My garden, especially when there is a blink of sunshine, is getting a lot more attention, as is my lovely mum who only lives 5 minutes away. Oh, and Tom just loves having me around all day (!?!)

Bus pass in hand, shopping days locally and further afield are regular occurrences, and I look forward to our "Golden Girls" days out with Pat and Judy and whoever else can be persuaded along.

Just to keep up my typing skills I have been invited to be minute taker once a month for Airth Parish Community Council, which also keeps me up-to-date with what's happening locally - and they pay me too, so a win-win situation.

Of course I miss my colleagues, the team and the carers - especially for the laughs and the daily banter - but I'm never forgotten when any event is being organised and have regularly seen almost everyone for a catch up and a laugh. And what would I do without Facebook - it's great for keeping up with everyone's stories.

So over a year on from leaving I would say that this definitely is one of my better decisions - every day is a holiday!

Jane Rae



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

One year on – life in the slow lane

I can't believe that more than a year has already passed. I have never regretted my decision to go, although I do miss the people I worked with – team mates, carers and other colleagues alike. Something will happen or something will be said through me and I will think how much the Team (particularly Russ, strangely enough) would enjoy that or indeed be very rude about what happened!

Like Jane, I often find that the days are very busy. In the sunny weather, I love to sit outside and read my book and this is still such a luxury,

I don't think I will ever tyre of it. Being retired is definitely easier and more enjoyable in the warm weather, there have been times in the winter where I have had to make more of an effort to find something to do.

Living in Edinburgh, I am blessed with the multitude of things that are on offer – many of them at cut priced rates, now that I am a "concession".

Where are they now?

I often go to the Pictures for £3! (and a free cup of tea and a biscuit). The Art Gallery always has some interesting exhibition on and the Friends Card that my team mates gave me as part of their very generous leaving gifts was extremely well used, let me tell you. I meet up with fellow "golden girls" Jane and Pat on a regular basis and the format is a cultural event followed by lunch and light refreshments!

On a more productive note, as some of you will know from having seen me there, I kept my Panel work on as an independent Panel member. I am so glad I did this (thanks Jacquie for the suggestion) as it is a very easy way to keep in touch with people and reading the papers and reflecting on the issues (I hope) will keep my mind in reasonable shape!

I also started volunteering in my local Cancer Research shop one morning per week at the beginning of the year. This makes me feel that I am making something of a contribution to others, rather than just indulging myself every day. The other advantage is that I have spotted some very nice items there to buy for myself. The downside is I regularly come home with books that I really don't need, but can't resist! All and all in, the last year has been a very enjoyable one for me and I am looking forward hopefully to many more years of the same.

A final thanks to Team members, colleagues and carers alike for their massive generosity in terms of leaving gifts and for all the help and support offered over my working life.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at Panels or social occasions to which we are still generously being invited. Best wishes to you all!

July Hart



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

Well, it's hard to believe that it has been over a year since I retired. At first I thought I would struggle a bit and really miss the company and friendships that I have made over the years. After the first few weeks, life begun to settle down and slowly I begun to find new interests. I had put a couple of things in place before I retired. I had a walking group and tap dancing classes every week. Now added to the list are yoga, belly dancing, another walking group, the rumbling club and keep fit. Some weeks I have time to do them all and some weeks I don't.

Well, I have to make time for my numerous holidays. I am just back from Budapest, then a 12 day tour of Slovenia and Croatia, followed by a week in Spain with friends.



I think one of the things that I enjoy most is not having to set the alarm for the morning. I love just getting up when I wake up and if it's rainy, back to bed with a cup of tea and my book. Of course friends and family are important as well. Now at last I have time to enjoy all of these relationships. I meet up with Judy and Jane in Edinburgh or Glasgow. Judy usually encourages us to do some cultural things in the morning, but come 1 o'clock, my suggestion is lunch and a nice glass of wine or two. We have had some great days out in the last year.

I also have had the time to catch up with old friends, who I kept meaning to phone, but never got round to it. I can also spend time with my two grandchildren, Kay, 4 years and George, who is 2 years. This is great fun and as any granny will tell you, it is also nice to be able to wave bye bye and put your feet up. To say, life is busy as an understatement. I still need to keep a diary to keep track of where I am supposed to be. There is not much of a time to miss about working. I really value the friendships that I have made over the years and I will no doubt see you all at some point, as I am still a Panel member.

Take care, it was great to see you all at the drop in for Russ. Best wishes and kindest regards!

Pat Dunham

Good to know...

“Eating well in foster care” guidelines

A Short term working group was recently formed to develop “Eating well in foster care” guidelines. This group comprised of representation from the LAC Health Team, NHS Forth Valley Dietetic department, CAMHS, carers and representatives from Local Authority and Adoption and Fostering Teams. The aim of the guidelines are to inform foster carers on up to date nutritional guidelines and give helpful hints to help overcome negative, food focused behaviours.

On 11th May 2017 the foster families eating well guidelines were launched.

Food is an essential way to express care and nurturing in the way in which it is prepared, delivered and enjoyed as crucial in setting down healthy eating down from a young age. If children have developed an unhealthy, dysfunctional relationship with food, it is important that foster carers are giving all the help required to help the children in their care. Those children, who have experienced neglect, trauma and who may have attachment difficulties or separation and loss, it is likely that they may have had a more negative experience with food. Given foster carers play a significant role in supporting children who are looked after, the guidelines provide information which covers a wide range of topics coping with difficult food behaviours, nutrition in early years and weighing. Further information in relation to food and fostering can be found on the links below:

www.nhsforthvalley.com/healthpromotion;

www.foodforthoughtproject.info;

www.foodincare.org.uk;

www.foodstandards.gov.scot



Picture courtesy of Meditations/pixabay.com

Care leavers don't get sanctioned in Falkirk thanks to Moneywise

Norma Brown, a throughcare and aftercare worker at Falkirk Council describes their Moneywise project and the difference it has made to the lives of care leavers in the area.

Leaving care and going it alone can be really daunting for most young people. There's a minefield of 'adult stuff' to negotiate, such as managing a tenancy agreement, wading through the benefits system, handling money, and fuel bills. I've found that care leavers are often ill informed on how to navigate their way through the maze and have no one to turn to. It can be completely overwhelming for some.

The Leaving Care Team at Falkirk Council recognised that the risks to the wellbeing of care leavers were really significant. Such as:

- Homelessness
- Escalation of mental health issues including suicidal tendencies
- Alcohol and drug misuse
- Poor Physical health in relation to lack of food/fuel
- Prostitution and sexual exploitation
- Multiple debts

The Council applied for a grant to fund a dedicated worker (me) as part of their Moneywise Project. Funding was awarded by the Big Lottery under the Support and Connect funding stream to help mitigate against the effects of the Welfare Reform Act. The Act changes many of the current rules and benefits, including the introduction of Universal Credit, and the so called 'bedroom tax'.

Sanctioning care leavers

We know that young people are disproportionately sanctioned and care leavers even more so. When the project started in 2014, benefit sanctions were hitting care leavers in the area

Good to know...

hard, at a time when their lives were already chaotic.

I came on board to work with young people, to help them before it reaches crisis point. An assessment of every relevant young person was completed and an individualised plan put in place to tackle areas of concern.

The assessment is based on the Rickter Scale which monitors and measures lots of areas of the young person's life including stress, health and confidence and can be tracked over time. The support is then tailored to whatever is needed to get the young person back on track.

The current amount a young person receives from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is £57.90 a week, and budgeting, something many care leavers have little experience of, can be difficult. They often feel overwhelmed, and rather than face their issues, often 'bury their heads in the sand'. It's not their fault – they're out in the big bad world and just don't know how to cope.

It's all about teamwork

We forged really good links with the DWP, in fact we now work alongside them and train them in line with the DWP Care Leaver's Strategy. This acknowledges that care leavers are vulnerable and will struggle with the new requirements of the Welfare Reform Act. And, we're able to lift the phone and have a conversation about a young person to avoid a situation becoming critical. In fact the DWP won a National Partnership Award in 2016 for their work with us.

A real feeling of teamwork both externally and within the council developed. We worked really closely with our community advice team and together adapted software to capture data and evidence which helped to evaluate the success of the project and calculate the savings the work was making.

Care leavers were helped to negotiate job seeker's allowance, housing benefit, council tax and discretionary payments, and our advisors gained real insight and intelligence.

Was Moneywise successful?

You bet it was!

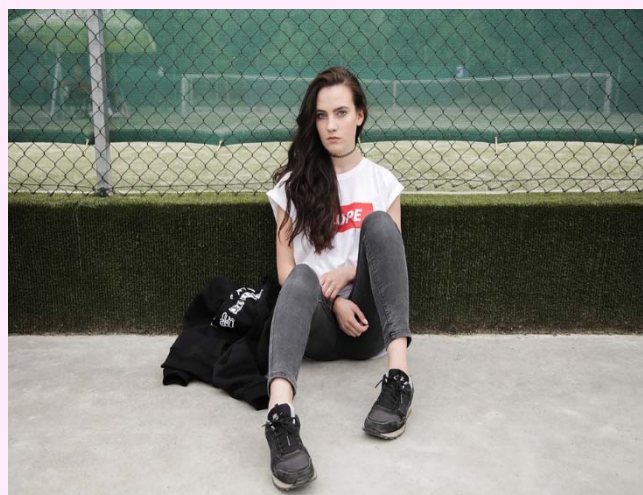
In the 15 months of the pilot project, and in the 18 months since, NO care experienced young people have been sanctioned by the DWP.

While the Moneywise Project has ended, the benefits definitely remain. What the pilot did was give us the evidence we needed to show the approach was working. We were able to show that a saving during the project of £170,000. And the money going to the young people is being spent in the local economy.

We're making real change to real lives and the satisfaction of seeing young people turn their lives around can't be quantified. Around 50 young people have been helped since the project started.

I came across one young man recently who had racked up £1500 in fuel arrears. Under the current system it would have taken him 20 years to repay the money owed and he risked being disconnected. I worked with him and managed to get funding to write the debt off and allow him to start again with a clean slate. A much better outcome!

The success of the project also allowed me to stay in a job I absolutely love – in the front line and making a difference!



Picture courtesy of smykcure/pixabay.com

Good to know...

Falkirk emoji pilot

29 May 2017

Background

Children and young people from the Falkirk area have suggested the use of emoji cards during Children's Hearings as an aid to help and support them to participate in their hearings and express their feelings.

It has been decided to trial the use of emoji cards in SCRA's Livingston and Falkirk Children's Hearing Centres. The idea has the full support of SCRA's Central Locality Management team and Falkirk Lead Panel Representative.

Introduction

To publicise the emoji pilot to children and young people coming to a Hearing in Falkirk, and to make their parents/carers and workers aware, notices will be posted in Falkirk's Hearing centre reception area and waiting rooms at the start of the trial.

The Hearing room will have its own emoji 'pack' which will be kept in the hearing room at all times, and made available and accessible to children and young people at every hearing.

The emojis

Based on the information provided by the young people 8 different emojis have been prepared by SCRA's Press and Communications team. The emotions are:

- Angry
- Happy
- Sad
- Worried
- Stop
- Help
- Listen
- Don't understand



Picture courtesy of stuardo/pixabay.com

Each emoji is A5 and has been laminated. Included with the emojis is an explanation of their purpose and how they can be used by children and young people during a hearing. Spare packs of emoji cards will be available in case replacements are needed.

Using the emojis

The emojis will be visible in the waiting rooms and Hearing room, somewhere that is easy for the child or young person to see them and access them.

At any point throughout the Hearing proceedings the child or young person can hold up an emoji to represent how they are feeling at that moment.

Panel members should then respond to this by acknowledging an emoji is being displayed, clarify the feeling being shown and explore the feeling with the child or young person.

Pilot assessment and potential future roll out

It is estimated that the pilot will run for 3 months, though this is open to extension if it is felt that running it for longer would be of benefit. The Locality Management team will make this decision.

During the trial period, and at the end of each hearing where an emoji is used, panel members will be asked to fill out a very short feedback form. Blank forms will be provided and left in the Hearing room and completed forms will be handed to the Reporter along with the Hearing paperwork.

The Reporter will gather feedback from any child or young person who used an emoji, by asking them to complete a short feedback form after the hearing has ended. The Reporter will leave the Hearing room with the child or young person and their parent(s)/carer(s) to do this.

Good to know...

Once the pilot period has come to an end it will be assessed by studying the feedback gathered from children and young people, and Panel members.

If the pilot is considered a success, it will be rolled out in Falkirk as 'business as usual'. The success of the pilot will then be shared with other SCRA teams around the country and they will be offered the chance to trial it themselves.

If you would like more information about the pilot please contact Jacqui Stephen, Central Locality LSM on 0131 244 8700.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

Do you know you can use emojis during your Hearing?

There will be '8 emoji cards' in the Hearing room:

Happy		Sad	
Angry		Worried	
Stop		Help	
Listen		Don't Understand	

You can hold up any emoji which shows how you feel.

The panel will see it and ask if you want to say something.

You don't have to use the emojis if you don't want to.

After your hearing the reporter will ask you what you thought about using emojis.

Good to know...

Adoption Recruitment

Our adoption recruitment information evening was held on 23/2/17 following advertising and press releases in the local paper.

Prior to the event, we had 23 enquiries dating back to our last campaign all of whom were sent an invite to the night. On the evening itself we had 8 couples and 4 individuals in attendance.

The information evening was presented by Jill Hunter and Elaine Stewart Social Workers from the adoption and fostering team and supported by one adoptive couple.

Those who attended were able to hear about;

- The reasons why children are looked after
- Those children requiring adoption
- Issues in Adoption
- Criteria for adoption
- The Assessment Process
- Hearing from adopters



Picture courtesy of Greyerbaby/pixabay.com

Following the information evening we provide a few weeks in order that enquirers can reflect and decide whether they wish to pursue there enquiry further. To date we have 23 people identified going to our adoption prep groups and a few more enquiries to screen.

It is hoped that we can run our groups beginning in August and concluding at the beginning of October

Elaine Stewart / Jill Hunter
Social Workers

Fostering Recruitment

Foster care recruitment is an issue across Scotland with all local authorities needing more carers for the young people who are accommodated. At June 2017, Falkirk Council have 59 foster carers offering a mix of up to 136 placements which, at the moment, includes 19 short breaks, 79 interim fostering, 25 permanent and 1 supportive carer placements.

Within Falkirk Council retention of foster carers is something that we are delighted to say is generally very strong. However annually we lose around ten per cent of our foster carers. This is usually due to foster carers retiring or a change in personal circumstances. In terms of recruitment this means that we need to recruit a minimum of 12 foster carers annually in order to increase our carers by ten per cent. Having local foster carer placements is vital.

Good to know...

A reliance on independent agencies often means young people are placed at a distance which impacts adversely on education, contact with family, friends and community links. Since January 2017 due to an increase in demand for foster placements particularly for sibling groups and teenage young people, we have referred 15 young people to external fostering agencies. Many of these young people are now placed out with Falkirk council - something that young people tell us they do not like and find very difficult.

As a result, we have been reviewing our recruitment process and developing a recruitment strategy. The aim is to ensure that we recruit carers for the ages and needs of Falkirk children and young people who require foster placements. As many of you will know from our recent placement requests, at the moment we urgently need foster carers for siblings, teenagers and children who require permanent fostering and supportive carers

Key to our recruitment strategy is our carers! The best and most effective recruitment method is undoubtedly word of mouth so please, help us get the right carers for Falkirk young people. If you know of a relative or friend who could be a carer or is interested in becoming a carer let us know!

Another effective recruitment method within Falkirk is advertising in the local papers using "real life" interest stories like the one in the recent Falkirk Herald article in May. Going forward we aim to do this more and are keen to hear from any carers and young people who would like to be involved in this or to tell their story. It can be anonymous if you wish

All of the fostering and adoption team are actively involved in the recruitment process with Shelley Lefort heading up recruitment and preparation groups together with Marie O'Holleran and Lorraine Hanlon. Enquirers can now register their interest with a direct email sent to the fostering team and a dedicated recruitment phone line is also being explored. The team aims to respond to any enquirer immediately with a phone call and an initial screening visit within 10 working days .

Thereafter, enquirers are invited to a preparation group run in conjunction with Stirling and Clackmannanshire Council. We have also increased the number of groups over the year. Feedback from preparation groups is always excellent with attendees commenting particularly on the involvement of foster carers which applicants often cite as the highlight of the group. Going forward we would like to have carers co-facilitate the groups and recruitment events and also involve young people who have been accommodated, perhaps via the Champions Group.

Our future recruitment strategy will aim to recruit 12 new carers per year, targeting those able to meet the gaps. We will focus on extensive advertising using social media and on line opportunities, involving carers and young people and maximising opportunities with partner agencies and groups. As a team we will be responsive and keep reviewing and monitoring how effective our approach is and grasping any opportunities which arise

We are always interested in hearing any events, ideas, or input on how we can best recruit foster carers so please get in touch team if you have any ideas.

The team is looking forward to working with carers to meet the challenges of effective recruitment and would like to thank you for your on-going support, which highlights the strength and commitment of our carers to Falkirk children and young people.



Picture courtesy of Pezibear/pixabay.com

Monique Ferrie, Social Worker

From our Carers

Our Fostering Journey

The process initially started back in 2013 for us when we made contact by phone and by email. We were in contact with various people from the family fostering team but myself and husband felt it wasn't the right time for us to go forward with the application process after talking with them.

We then revisited the idea again in 2014 but felt again the time was not right for us but had learnt a bit more about the process and what would be involved.

In April 2015, we decided to take the plunge and we were in a good place emotionally and financially to go forward with the application process. By December 2015 we had both had our medicals, and attended all the prep group sessions and still wanted to go forward.

We knew that fostering wasn't going to be an easy option and after hearing some of the foster carers talk at the prep groups that we could also face tuff challenges. We were open minded as to the type of child i.e. age, sex, background they will have come from that could be placed with us. We ideally wanted a long term or permanent placement to try and give the child a loving stable home where they could be child happy and looked after. But we also knew that respite and short term placements were in demand to.

We were contacted in the January 2016 to advised we had been allocated a supervising social worker and that she will be going through the form F with us and also carrying out the checks and reference checks, we met on a regular interval normally every 2 weeks.

We carried out the homework as requested the process was painless but does make you think about yourself life your past and your future and what you can offer a child or children.

Day arrived for the panel meeting to decide if we had been successful in the fostering process.

We were both so nervous as our future and the future of potential foster kids was held in their hands, there was nothing more we could do other than be honest and be ourselves at the meeting.

We had a unanimous YES from the panel and were approved for 0 – 12 and for up to 2 children as we had 2 spare bedrooms. On leaving the meeting our supervising social worker had some fantastic news for us and wanted to visit us before we flew away on holiday 2 days later about a possible permanent place for our first child.

The day after the panel our social worker visited us with the child's file and could help answer questions we had about the child and the type of placement we would be offering.

We went on holiday and talked about the fantastic opportunity that we have been given and that we wanted to meet the wee one and see if there was a connection.



Picture courtesy of Lisa Evens

On returning from our holidays we met with her then foster carer and her supervising social worker and the child's social workers. Our first meeting was in the child's then current foster placement, it went very well and then progressed to having her for long weekends for respite while we were all getting to know each other. This worked fantastically for us all.

There was a definite connection and the 3 of us had such fun and laughs while we spent time together.

We then had the matching panel in September 2016 and again it was approved that we were a good match for the child's permanent placement. She moved in with us at the end of September 2016.

From our Carers

So now nearly a year since we became registered and 8 months of having the wee one with us full time our lives have changed and changed for the better.

We have helped the child integrate into our local community where she attends various clubs after school. We have helped her also change schools to settle in the village school so now rather than a long drive to and from school it's not even a 5-minute walk and in time she will be able to do the commute to school herself or on her scooter or bike. She has settled in to the new school very well and is progressing well in her class and has made lots of new friends.

We enjoy going on holiday, days out play days and spending time as a family with the 3 of and our close family and friends who have welcomes the wee one as our own, it's as if she's always been with us.

Don't get me wrong there can be times that its ruff no one said it was going to be easy but it's so worth it. One of the most difficult things was the child's sleeping or should I say lack of sleep. Very unsettled during the night waking up 2 or 3 times a night screaming on shouting with bad dreams. This lasted for several months but thankfully has now all but gone. We have changed her night time routines and this has worked so much better.

No shower before bed as this was too stimulating for her.

No chit chat before bed in her room, instead she plays a relaxation CD every night which helps her settle very quickly and also a pillow spray with lavender gives her such a restful full and sound sleep.

We have built good relationships with the child's parents especially her mum, this allows us to have good contact meeting with them and also keep in contact via phone and text message with the child's mum. This give the child their parents approval of being with us.

What work particularly well is that once a month myself the child and the child's mum have contact out in the community doing a play date, it can be something simple like going to the park and playing on the swings or going for something to eat. It gives the 3 of us time to get to know each other better and is a more natural environment for the child and her mum to be in.

People don't understand what's involved or well we personally didn't know what would be involved being a foster parent. It's not just being given a child and that's it. Its paperwork, training support groups constantly being needed by a little person. But in return they give you unconditional love, smiles and the best hugs. It's nice to give a child the chance of being part of a family and a community and to watch them grow as a person, to be able to see their confidence soar and to make them feel wanted and neutered.

The child will stay with us as long as she wants to and through the years she will be with us, we would like to give her opportunities to travel to go places and to do things that she may not have even thought were possible. Sometimes all it takes is for someone to believe YOU can do it and YOU WILL DO IT.

*Sandra Platt
Foster Carer*



From our Carers

Adoption activity day May 2017

We attended a adoption activity day in May 2017 with our 4 year old foster child. This was the second time we have attended a adoption activity day. Although both had a similar format there were some differences. Activity days aim to give children waiting for a permanent placement, and prospective adopters, the opportunity to meet in a relaxing and child friendly environment, where both can interact using some fun activities.

This year the activity day was at a primary school in East Kilbride with approximately 15 children and a similar number of adopters, foster carers and social workers in addition to volunteer staff in attendance.

Prior to the event, we and our foster child were sent a personal invitation from Scottish adoption and also some guidance about how best to prepare and talk to our foster child about the day.

On the last activity day we attended the weather was lovely, and we played mostly outside with a range of toys with a theatre group Lickety Split finishing the day with a short theatre "show" which kept everyone's attention. It was really relaxed and informal and people generally seemed happy and at ease to interact in a fun way.

On this activity day the format and venue was a bit different and overall perhaps not quite as good as last year. This time the day was slightly shorter; we arrived at the school by 12:45 and had 15 minutes or so to see the range of available activities; outdoor ride on toys in the play ground, dining hall with lunch set up, quiet area, face painting and another inside area with a craft table. At 1pm the adopters arrived and we all had lunch for 30 minutes following which Lickety Split a theatre group did some organised group games. The rest of the time from 1:45 to 3:15 was spent with the children playing wherever they wished and with adopters interacting with the children.

From 3:15-3:45 Lickety Split organised some group games to finish. The days theme centred around the sea with a treasure hunt in the "sea" and the organised games and crafts all having a sea theme.

Our foster child very much enjoyed the day. A lot of people in attendance remarked how active and happy he was and how much he was always on the go! He left very happy with a spider man face to match his outfit courtesy of the face painting!

I think activity days are a very good idea. It helps adopters have the opportunity to meet real children who are often much more than how they are described in a profile or in a report. As a foster carer it also means you are much more actively involved in family finding. Adoption activity days gives the opportunity for adopters and social workers to ask foster carers more questions about the children and the challenges and joys of caring for them.

Although on this day, there were not as many outside activities and adopters generally seemed less confident in interacting with the children, there were still opportunities for carers to talk to adopters. It was also a really good opportunity to talk to other foster carers from other areas.

I think a lot depends on the location, the range of age appropriate activities, and good preparation of everyone who is attending. Another important thing is not to have high expectations and to accept this is a day to be enjoyed without any preconceived ideas or guaranteed outcomes! Our foster child has very much enjoyed both days and has come away feeling happy with good memories.

This is the fourth adoption activity event in Scotland; the first one took place in October 2015. The overall matching rate of children with adopters is 26 percent to date so there is quite a good chance of successful matching!

Sandra Brown
Foster carer

From our Carers

Child's comment on the activity day

I went to the adoption activity party day in my spider man outfit. I had a great time, I played with some boys, I got my face painted as spider man. I looked for treasure and made a fish picture, which I brought home.

4-year-old boy in foster care



Feedback on the boy from

I thought you were a great superhero as Spiderman!

I liked meeting you!
You were very polite and friendly!

You are such a lovely boy!
You're a fab bike rider and sea swimmer!

What an amazing, fantastic Spiderman!
Great to meet you!

Well done, you set so well to have your face painted!
It looked great!

SPOTLIGHT ON ...

OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Image courtesy of geralt/pixabay.com

Memories of my time with my carers

I'm KR I have been living with my foster carers Sharron and David Morton for about 4 ½ years. Things weren't good when we came into care my sister and I as there are A LOT OF USE AND WE ALL HAD TO BE SEPERATED that was hard one day your all together in your own house. Next day your in someone else's house It takes a while to get used to someone else's house and rules. But what was hard to get used to was someone taking care of us. Feeding us making us go to school taking us on holidays knowing what would happen each day. I never really went to school when I lived at home didn't really have a lot of friends so I had a very different life from what I have now. I never really experienced holidays and had never been on a plane.



Picture courtesy of confused_me/pixabay.com

4 years on I've been around Europe I've been to Australia I've walked the west highland way I feel I've really achieved a lot but mostly the place I'm happiest is I have friends I have a 'family' I have people I can rely on, that care about me and I've been supported to achieve things I could only have dreamt about.



Picture courtesy of FraukeFeind/pixabay.com

I have a part time volunteering job, and unconditional offer of a place at college and I am able to stay with my carers until I am older and wiser. I'm looking forward like most young people at 18 and I know it would have been so different if id still been at home. Even if I would have been placed with other carers, I know not all carers take the kids on holidays and I don't say this often enough to my carers but I have been given so many opportunities by them and I've completed one of my ambitions ..flying... I've seen lots of countries I've had my basic needs and a lot more met. I know that I wouldn't have the opportunities for life that I have in front of me now and that is down to Sharron and David.

I suppose young people don't really say thanks or feel love for their carers, but I love what they have done for me I cant thank them enough and I feel part of a wider family that I love.

Young person in foster care



Picture courtesy of stux/pixabay.com

Achievements of a young person

L been with us for 6 years we started as short term foster careers then became permanent foster carers after 4 years for L and her two younger siblings L attending school in the early days was always a struggle and she did not mange mixing with other children and would disrupt the class.

As we progressed as fosters carers and through liaison with education L made good progress within her class and managing day to day over the next couple of years.

L in high school has had glowing report cards and her teachers at high school comment of how well she is managing in a large high school.

Working with children long term give you the chance to get a better understanding of their need and hard work and commitment to them leading to better outcome in the long term.

L was never a confident girl with social skills and it took her 5 years to manage to swim with a lot of lessons, but eventually she is now able to swim. It's not about giving up, but keeping encouraging children.

L loves dancing and she has enjoyed attending dance classes but since starting high school she is part of a dance classes leading to performing at dance shows.



Picture courtesy of 3dman_eu/pixabay.com

L has now managed to dance in the school show in front of 2000 people, we encouraged her to continue with the dancing as she was very good at it and it has given L a great interest and her confidence has come along way from the girl when placed with us.

We celebrate any achievement with her whether small or large and this has built her confidence for the future.

Margaret Redford
Foster carer



Picture courtesy of Alexas_photos/pixabay.com

About my carers

I would like to start with thanks you. You guys have made me through a lot and put up with so much. Words don't come close to explain how thankful I am for what you guys have done for me. I am honest I don't know what I would do without you guys, if it wasn't for you two, I wouldn't be the confident, independent, sassy, funny girl that I am today.

And so you know even when I leave here I will always call this place my home and you guys will always be in my heart. I have to say my gran has placed me with the best foster parent anyone could ask for.

Young person in foster care



Picture courtesy of pixel2013/pixabay.com

SPOTLIGHT ON ...

OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Image courtesy of geralt/pixabay.com

Grandparents foster

My grandparents have fostered before I was born and I have grown up being at my grandparents every day after school and on the holidays.

Babies have lived with my grandparents with some going home to their families or moving on to adoption. I have been close to different babies and children over the years, enjoying being involved with meeting adoptive families before babies/children move on to adoption. It was important for me for adopters to keep in touch with up to date pictures and sometimes being part of important events for children ie. birthday parties, celebrations when they've been officially adopted and I have enjoyed adopters coming back with the children and also going for visits to adopters.

My gran is good at preparing me for babies/children either moving home or moving on to adoption. She



Picture courtesy of bryandilts/pixabay.com

will tell me before the plan begins and she is very matter fact about what is happening and always gives me the message what's best for children either returning home or being adopted Even when I miss them and at times I am upset. Some grandchildren could feel jealous and feel that their grandparents may not have time for them if they foster, but in my case, my grandparents always share their time with us all and foster children are very much part of the family. The only time it can be difficult if these children are very noisy, but on the whole I enjoy meeting different children and their families.

I see us as a family that fosters which includes us all and I would not change anything as I still get time an attention from my grandparents.

Alisdair 13 year



Picture courtesy of HaiRobe/pixabay.com

Kyle Gow 03 MAY 2017
99 Thornton Avenue
BONNYBRIDGE
FK4 1AP

Mr Robert Naylor
Falkirk Council
Children's Services
Sealock House
2 Inchyra Road
GRANGEMOUTH
FK3 9XB

turning
lives
around

Dear Mr Naylor,

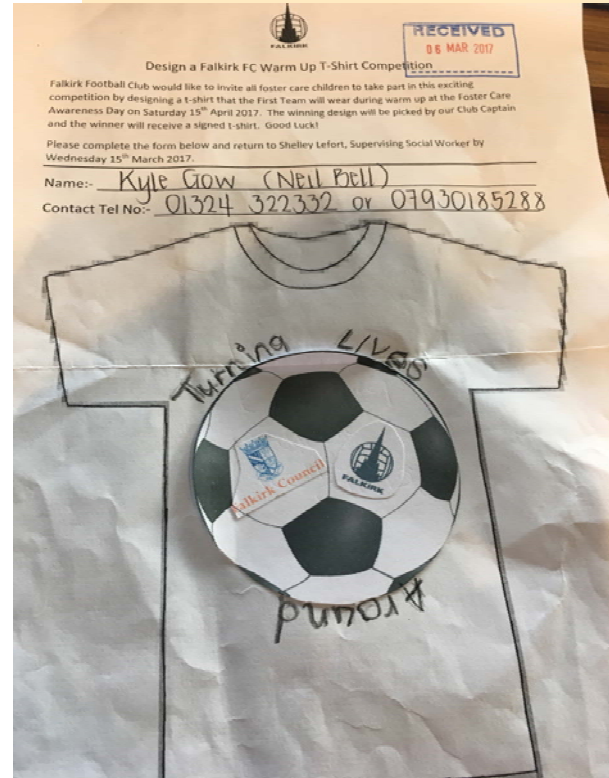
Thank you very much for your letter. It made me very happy. It is very sad that we do not have enough carers.

I would be very happy for you to use my logo. I hope this helps you to get people who want to help boys and girls like me.

Thank you

Kyle

Age 7



Kyle Gow - Competition Winner

In April Falkirk Football Club and Falkirk Council Adoption & Fostering Team invited all foster care children to take part in an exciting competition by designing a t-shirt that the First Team would wear during warm up at the Foster Care Awareness Day [Falkirk v's St Mirren] on Saturday 15th April 2017 at Falkirk Football Club. The winning design was picked by the Club Captain and the winner was Kyle Gow, aged 9 years who resides with his carers Neil and Sandi Bell. Kyle received a signed t-shirt as well as a personal letter from Falkirk Council's Director, thanking him for his very creative logo.

Going forward, the team would very much like to use this logo as part of our fostering recruitment campaign and we are super proud of Kyle who has been able to play a key part in this process. Kyle's win was also acknowledged by Tom Falkirk player and Grandson of a foster carer. The presentation will also feature on the club's webpage and magazine. **Well Done Kyle!**

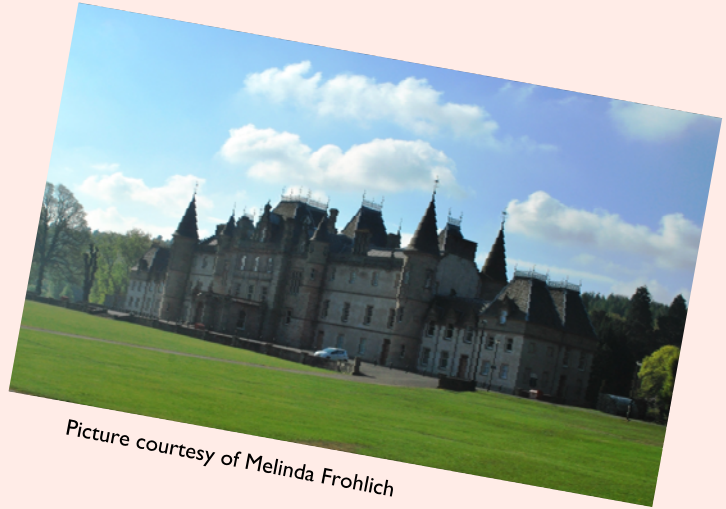
Shelley Lefort, Social Worker

Top tips

Outdoor places to go to take kids in the summer holidays!

Local

- Callendar Park
- The Kelpies
- The Falkirk Wheel
- Blackness castle
- Wellside farm Denny
- Linlithgow Palace
- Polkemmet country park – great adventure playground
- Five sisters zoo Livingston
- Jupiter wildlife centre Grangemouth
- Zoo Lab jungle room at Torwood garden centre



Picture courtesy of Melinda Frohlich

Further Afield

- Blairdrummond Safari park near Stirling
- Briarlands Farm – activities and cafes for kids next to safari park
- Doune Castle
- North Berwick - long sandy beach suitable for all ages, ice cream, chippies
- Inchcailloch island – take ferry from Balmaha on loch Lomond, no roads or cafes, beach, walks woods magical for children
- Balmaha – great pub, playground, ice cream, boats by the loch Lomond
- Loch Katrine by Callander - boat trips, café, cycling
- Inchmahome priory on an island in Lake of Menteith near Callander – ruins, picnic, great for kids wandering, boat trip
- Stirling Castle – dressing up, history, adventure



- Transport Museum – Riverside Glasgow – free, cars, buses trains, interactive
- Cutty Sark sailing ship – paid entry – great for exploring, right next to transport museum
- Museum of Scotland – Chambers St Edinburgh – free, dinosaurs, animals, interactive – walk from the station
- Museum of Childhood – High Street Edinburgh - free entry – 4 floors of toys through the ages – suitable for older children aged 8+. Walk from the station.