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Front cover photo: Caroline Field
New beginnings...

As I write it feels like spring has arrived at last – the sun is out and shoots of new life are beginning to show.

And inside our offices there’s a feeling of new beginnings too. We will shortly be joined by our new chief executive, Kevin Williams, who some of you will already know from his time at TACT. We are looking forward to Kevin leading The Fostering Network on the next stage of our journey as we work to create a better future for every fostered child and young person. Kevin will be out and about meeting members once he is in post; for now you can find out a bit more about him on page 5.

We are also truly excited to be embarking on three new substantial projects which we believe have the potential to significantly improve the lives of children in care. Thanks to funding from the Department for Education’s innovation programme, we will be bringing the Mockingbird Family Model from the US to the UK to explore how a hub-based approach to peer support can make a difference to foster care here. In Wales, all foster carers will get the chance to receive Fostering Changes training through Confidence in Care, a consortium we are leading with funding from the Big Lottery Fund Wales. You can read more about both projects on page 4.

Meanwhile, more funding from the Department for Education will allow us to work with children in care councils in three regions of England to increase engagement, enhance their impact and, most importantly, give young people in care a mechanism to have a say in the running of looked after children’s services. As part of this project, we are particularly pleased to be recruiting care experienced young ambassadors in England to help strengthen the voice of young people in care, in addition to those we are already working with in Scotland.

These new projects build on the success of our existing projects right across the UK, including Head, Heart, Hands, our Fostering Achievement programmes and Community Champions – there is more detail about all our work on our website.

Over the last few months we have been listening to members’ views on the current state of foster care, gathered through our roadshows and other events, and via The State of the Nation’s Foster Care survey. We have used these views to help shape our manifesto for change (see www.fostering.net/policy-and-campaigns/issues). We have been sharing the manifesto with political parties ahead of the general election, and will do so again once the new government is in post, as well as in the build up to the elections in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales next year.

A big thank you to all who have helped us to shape these calls to action.

This year, our annual Foster Care Fortnight takes place in June. As well as the usual celebration of foster care and the focus on recruitment, we are pleased to be hosting a series of sponsored Foster Walks during the campaign which will bring foster families together and help raise money for The Fostering Network (see page 21 for details of how to get involved). We look forward to meeting as many of you as possible on one of our walks.

Jackie Sanders
Director of Communications and Public Affairs
The Fostering Network

Legal helpline  Open all day, every day  t 0845 013 5004  
Publications  t 0844 355 1892  www.fosteringresources.co.uk
The Fostering Network leads the way with pioneering projects

The Fostering Network announced this spring that it will be leading two ambitious programmes which aim to transform outcomes for looked after children.

The Fostering Network Wales is heading a consortium of charities called Confidence in Care to deliver the Fostering Changes training programme for carers, thanks to a £4.75m grant from the Big Lottery Fund Wales.

The programme empowers carers to better manage the children they look after. It is derived from research into parenting skills, attachment, educational attainment and the academic progression of looked after children in care, and is behaviourally based.

The programme will last for five years and aims to train 1,500 foster, kinship and residential carers.

Speaking on behalf of the consortium, Dr Emily Warren, director of The Fostering Network Wales, said: ‘This is the biggest project of its kind ever to have been undertaken in Wales. We will be working towards developing a more positive outlook in young people towards their education and future career goals, increasing their resilience and life skills, and then using robust learning and evaluation evidence to influence future policy development in Wales.

‘The scale of this programme of work really reflects the ambition of the sector as a whole to improve the lives of the children and young people in care in Wales. Our aim is that Confidence in Care will transform outcomes for looked after children in Wales over the next five years and influence the way children’s social care is delivered in most settings across the country for many more years to come.’

In England, a £1.6m grant from the Department for Education’s innovation programme means that The Fostering Network can pioneer a US model of foster care.

The Mockingbird Family Model has been successful in the US and is based on the concept of the extended family, using a dedicated ‘hub home’ of specially trained foster carers who offer support to a ‘constellation’ of several foster families living locally.

The Fostering Network will work with eight fostering services to deliver the programme in its first year.

Melissa Green, director of operations at The Fostering Network, said: ‘This presents a truly pioneering opportunity to change young people’s lives for the better. Mockingbird is a simple, innovative and research-informed approach to restructuring children’s services with proven positive outcomes for children, carers and services. We believe it will inspire and engage fostering services across the UK with a new, intuitive approach to foster care.’

Are you ready for #FCF2015?

The Fostering Network’s campaigns officer Rob Cann is getting ready for Foster Care Fortnight – the UK’s biggest foster care recruitment and promotion campaign – with a #FCF2015 selfie.

Foster Care Fortnight takes place from Monday 1 June to Sunday 14 June 2015 and this year The Fostering Network is inviting everyone to ‘make a connection’ to fostering.

Supporters are invited to download the Foster Care Fortnight placard, write on it their connection to fostering and post a picture of themselves with it online.

We look forward to your contributions! Find out more at www.fostering.net/foster-care-fortnight

Social pedagogy builds confidence, research finds

Social pedagogy can help improve placement stability and build the confidence of foster carers.

These are two of the conclusions reached after the first two years of The Fostering Network’s four-year Head, Heart, Hands programme to pioneer social pedagogy in foster care in the UK.

Over 280 foster carers and social workers have completed a 10-day course on social pedagogy and are now embedding the approach into their work.

Feedback from the fostering services taking part in Head, Heart, Hands shows that stronger relationships are developing between children, foster carers and social workers which, when combined with increased resilience of foster carers, is helping stability.

What’s more, the confidence of the foster carers on the programme has risen and they are now able to better advocate for the children in their care using language and theories that they have learnt.

In the programme’s final year, a focus will be placed on ensuring that the social pedagogic approach can develop, and on capturing what has been learned in order to share it with other fostering services across the UK.

See more at www.fostering.net/head-heart-hands

In Brief

Celebrating social workers

We are delighted to announce another new category in our Fostering Excellence Awards for 2015: The Outstanding Achievement or Contribution to Fostering by a Social Worker is open to children’s social workers and supervising social workers, and will recognise a social work professional who has made an exceptional difference to fostering over the previous 12 months.

More information will appear in the next issue of Foster Care and on our website. The awards ceremony will take place after our annual conference on 17 November in London (see advert on page 23).

Review of special guardianship

In March the Department for Education announced a review of special guardianship in England. The aim is to discover if the legal and practice framework is still fit for purpose, to check that the right decisions are being made for children and to investigate concerns that special guardians sometimes have support needs that are not being met.

The review will be supported by an expert panel, which will include The Fostering Network, and is due to report in December 2015. (See feature, page 8.)

Boost for children in care councils

The Fostering Network is running a one-year project to increase participation in children in care councils in England, which give young people a forum to discuss issues with representatives from their local authorities. The work is funded by a grant from the Department for Education.
New chief executive confirmed

Kevin Williams (above) will become the new chief executive of The Fostering Network this June.

For more than a decade Kevin was chief executive of TACT, the UK’s largest charitable fostering and adoption provider, and more recently he led a charity for people with learning disabilities called DGSM yourChoice.

The Fostering Network’s chair, Philip Brown, said: ‘Kevin has considerable experience in the local authority, charity and independent sectors of fostering and I know that with the help of our dedicated and skilled staff he will lead us all forward into an exciting and expanding future for The Fostering Network, and more importantly a better future for the children and young people and their carers who we all work so hard to support.’

Foster Care caught up with Kevin to ask a few questions in advance of him taking up his role.

**Foster Care:** What are you looking forward to about joining The Fostering Network?

**Kevin Williams:** Not only working with a great team of people who have achieved so much over The Fostering Network’s 40-year history and working directly with foster carers and young people, but also helping to make a difference to foster care so that we can keep delivering better opportunities for children and young people in care and helping them achieve their dreams.

**FC:** Why do you care so much about making a difference to the lives of fostered children?

**KW:** Often, through no fault of their own, they have had difficult starts in life. I am amazed at how resilient young people in foster care are and know that they have the same dreams as all young people and we have to help them make those dreams a reality. This is not only important for young people, but also to society as we must capitalise on fostered young people’s talents, skills and abilities.

**FC:** What do you do in your spare time?

**KW:** I have two grown up children and spend time with them outside of work, but I also enjoy cooking and eating out. I go to the theatre a fair bit, and to music festivals and gigs.

**FC:** What has been the best moment of your career so far?

**KW:** I have been lucky to have had many highlights: most centre around seeing the difference that foster care makes to people’s lives – both young people and foster carers. Obviously, the biggest highlight so far is being offered the opportunity to lead The Fostering Network!

In Brief

**Rock for foster care**

Swedish metal band We Are The Catalyst has covered the 2012 hit Don’t You Worry Child, with all profits going to The Fostering Network. It’s available to download online, together with instructions on how to Tweet your support with a smiley face selfie. See www.rockforthechildren.com

**Security for 18-21s in Scotland**

Young people in foster care in Scotland now have the right to remain living with their foster carers until they are 21 after new regulations came into force on 1 April. The aftercare provisions of the Children and Young People Act 2014 were introduced following many years of campaigning by The Fostering Network and others.

Sara Lurie, director of The Fostering Network Scotland, said: ‘This will help to ensure that young people have the opportunity to enter adulthood supported by the foster families that have devoted their lives to caring for them.’

**Foster carers are ‘pioneers’**

Four out of five of newly appointed foster carers hold ‘pioneering’ values: they have a strong desire for fairness, care about the environment and society, and are cautiously optimistic about the future.

This is according to research from The Fostering Network Scotland, funded by the Department for Education, which aims to discover what motivates carers which, in turn, will help increase fostering services’ effectiveness in recruiting the right people. Why Foster Carers Care: part two is available via www.fostering.net

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**Long-term foster care given clear definition in England**

New regulations strengthening long-term foster care in England came into force on 1 April.

An amendment to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 introduces a new definition of a long-term foster care placement and sets out conditions which must be met.

The regulations also allow for a reduction in the frequency of reviews on a case-by-case basis after a child has been in the placement for at least one year, and introduce new provisions relating to children returning home from care.

The Fostering Network’s policy manager Madeleine Tearse said: ‘We broadly welcome the introduction of the new regulations. They will be very helpful in terms of introducing a consistent definition of long-term foster care placements across England, and in setting out the key steps and commitments involved for all parties. The changes will rightly strengthen the importance of foster care as a permanence option for children and young people in care.

‘We look forward to working with the fostering community to implement the regulations and new guidance. They have the potential to deliver a better experience of security and belonging in a fostering family for many children in care for whom a return home is not a possibility’
In March, The Fostering Network launched its report *Local Authority Fostering Services in England – performance benchmark report 2013/14*, which analyses how fostering services are performing in the recruitment and retention of carers in terms of key indicators, such as the time taken to approve carers, how enquiries are generated and how many foster carers are leaving the service.

This is the second report of its kind; the first was in 2014. It combines data collected through Ofsted and CIPFA with further information from 57 participating local authorities.

James Foyle, The Fostering Network’s foster carer recruitment and retention consultant, said: ‘By collecting this data year on year we are building a clear picture and identifying trends, which will provide a foundation to identify and determine best practice for foster carer recruitment and retention in the sector.’

One of the key findings this year is that the average time that it takes from a potential foster carer’s first enquiry to them attending panel is 273 days, which is around nine months. (The average reported in the 2014 research was 281 days.) Data provided by the participating local authorities showed that the range of approval speeds was wide, from just 30 days to 450 days.

Foyle pointed out that the range in approval times could be skewed by different fostering services’ definitions of an enquiry. However, he added that delays in the process were a frequent issue.

He said: ‘Delays in medicals and assessors being on sick leave are unfortunate and sometimes unavoidable, but both losing application forms and not having clear procedures for following up enquiries, with applicants having to call to check their progress, are alarmingly common.’

An amendment to the Children’s Act in July 2013 by the Department for Education aimed to remove unnecessary delay in foster carers’ approval with a new two-stage process.

Foyle added that The Fostering Network’s recruitment work with fostering services has helped some of them to examine the ‘customer journey’ to becoming approved which is leading to positive results.

Other key findings include:

- 65 per cent of children in foster care are placed with local authority foster carers.
- 31 per cent of local authority fostering placements appear to be underutilised.
- Around one in ten (11 per cent) of enquirers became approved foster carers.
- One-third of enquiries are generated through the web, the most prevalent enquiry source.
- 12 per cent of foster carers left their service in the past year.

The research is part of a Department for Education-funded project to support fostering services to recruit more foster carers, which ends this year. However, The Fostering Network aims to continue to produce this valuable resource in the future and is calling for more local authorities and independent fostering providers from across the UK to get involved.

www.fostering.net/lafs_benchmark_2014

To find out more about participating in the benchmarking research, contact James Foyle via james.foyle@fostering.net
What is the Fostering Community Champions project aiming to achieve?

I feel the Fostering Community Champions project is a way of getting all foster carers to keep in touch with each other. I like to think of it as a ‘buddy system’. Foster carers with some experience behind them will be available to give support to other carers.

All foster carers are different and experience different challenges with the children. This will be where the support – a friendly ear or shoulder – comes in. We may have similar experiences and be able to help each other through an unsettled, troubled or worrying period by being available for phone contact. We will also be able to signpost foster carers on to some of the organisations and resources we have found helpful in our fostering role.

Why did you choose to take part in the project as a champion?

In the past I have found myself in situations that I was unsure about and needed support. This is when we turn to foster carers nearby, but that can be a problem here in Scotland because we are spread out over a large area and may be unable to speak face-to-face with each other. By being part of the Fostering Community Champions model we will all be linked through The Fostering Network Scotland so that will be the central point of initial contact.

What do you think you can bring to the project?

I have many years of fostering behind me. During that time, I have dealt with many different situations and children of different ages – but I don’t think of myself as the expert.

In my own personal experience I have needed support when children moved on. I have seen many of my fostered children move to adoptive families, and so I felt I could help support other foster carers through this emotionally draining time.

If I can help a family through this period then I feel I will have given back something which was very special and helpful to me all those years ago.

Why is this kind of support needed?

It’s essential. As foster carers, we are bound by confidentiality and, with this, we are unable to talk to just anyone about what we are going through. If a child is moving on, for example, then not only will the foster carers be feeling upset, but other family members who usually would be there for support may well be feeling just as upset and be unable to give the back-up they normally would.

Secondly, foster carers don’t usually live next door to each other. There may not be any other foster carers in the same town so the only way they may be able to get help and support, apart from through their supervising social worker, is to use this service.

What would be your advice to a foster carer who feels that they need support?

I’d always say: don’t be frightened to ask.

In the first instance, my advice would be to speak with your supervising social worker. But at times the support which can be offered by another foster carer is very much more ‘hands on’ and it can be reassuring to know you’re not alone.
Special guardianship orders are popular and there are many success stories of children settling well into secure homes. But are some foster families being pressured into taking them out? Do they risk children missing out on vital support? And are alternatives being dismissed too quickly? 

Gideon Burrows investigates

Special guardianship orders are considered by many to be a success story. It is eight years since they were introduced in England and Wales, and new research shows they are generally leading to good outcomes for children, especially for those with fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Special guardianship orders (SGOs) are usually granted by the courts to a member of the child’s family, and in much smaller numbers to an unrelated foster carer who has been caring for the child. The special guardian has the care of the child but birth parents retain some parental responsibility and the orders come with legally binding responsibility to maintain contact between the child and their birth parent, if the child wants it. Children under SGOs are not in the care system.

In December 2014 Jim Wade, senior research fellow at the University of York, and his colleagues in the Policy Research Unit there published Department for Education-sponsored research evaluating SGOs. (His team looked at SGOs only in England, though the relevant legislation covers England and Wales. In Northern Ireland consideration is being given to introducing SGOs.)

The research found that the use of SGOs has increased year-on-year since they were introduced. Around one in 10 children leaving care in England in the year to March 2013 (some 2,740 children) were doing so through SGOs. And these orders were not replacing adoption, they were in addition to it. Disruptions of SGOs amounted to just one in every hundred, per year.

These figures only partially illustrate the effectiveness of SGOs when it comes to foster carers. The first phase of research was based on Department for Education (DfE) figures that don’t separate kinship and non-kinship carers. The second phase was qualitative interviews including both types of carers.

Jim Wade told Foster Care: ‘There are reliable indicators that if the child has been in foster care for some time and the relationship between the child and carer is good, that the chances of success are better. So it is proving to be a reliable and stable option for permanency.’

However, The Fostering Network has been keeping a close eye on the development of SGOs. Some members have reported being pressured to take out SGOs while others have spoken of a lack of support for becoming special guardians – the University of York researchers note considerable variations in SGO policy and practice between local authorities.

‘The child’s needs should always be paramount,’ says Jackie Sanders, director of public affairs for The Fostering Network. ‘There’s an important place for SGOs but they should never be used by services to push children out of the care system or to satisfy a foster carer or child’s desire for less social work involvement in family life if such involvement would be beneficial to the child. All the legal options for a child should be carefully considered.’

While there are many success stories of SGOs enabling children to settle into stable and loving homes, there are concerns that they could be used inappropriately in some cases.

A quick way out of the system?
Instead of considering SGOs as one of a number of permanency options – as DfE guidelines demand they do – there are suspicions in some quarters that some local authorities may be pressuring foster carers and independent fostering providers (IFPs) into them.

Indeed, Jim Wade’s research showed that one in five special guardians felt they had been strongly pressured by the local authority to accept special guardianship when an alternative legal order may have been preferable. Half said they felt ill-prepared for the placement.

Sue Williams, chair of the IFP Forum for Yorkshire and Humberside, says some of the providers she works with have experienced this. IFPs are more likely to take on children with some of the most complex needs for whom a rushed SGO is least likely to be appropriate. However, she...
explains, local authorities are now coming to understand that the issues for very vulnerable children and complex cases can’t work in a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

‘We’ve asked them to look at their commissioning framework and to understand it needs to be founded on a child-centred service. But there’s still a way to go,’ she says.

Foster carers too could push for an SGO when it might not be in the child’s best interests. The Fostering Network says there is anecdotal evidence that some carers may think this is a good way to create a more ‘normal’ family life for a child in their care for the long term, with less social work involvement. But the downside is that the child then loses the automatic support net of the care system, and it can be hard to negotiate an adequate ongoing package of support.

What’s more, children under SGOs are not eligible for staying put – arrangements to help over-18s stay with their foster families until they are 21. SGOs end when a young person reaches 18.

Another option

Changes to the regulations governing long-term foster care in England introduced this April (see news, page 5) may have an impact on the number of SGOs used in the future. For the first time, long-term foster care will have a distinct status; placements will be more secure and minimum requirements for social work visits will be reduced, with the aim of strengthening relationships in the fostering family.

Brian’s story

Brian and his wife were already long-term fostering three sisters when special guardianship orders were introduced. They took out orders for them, but it hasn’t all been plain sailing.

‘We were already permanently fostering the girls. The oldest, Katie, was seven when she came into our care, and she was 11 when we took out the SGO on all the sisters together. She was timid and shy when she first came, but as soon as we had the piece of paper she changed overnight. She grew into a clever, achieving and confident young woman.

‘The piece of paper confirmed to her that she wasn’t going anywhere else. It was the first point she realised social workers couldn’t come in and give her a new family. It said to her: you’re not in care any more. That was what she needed.’

Support questions

The question of support is important, particularly as, according to Jim Wade’s research, this is an issue that foster carers considering becoming special guardians expressed worries about.

Support can be both practical and financial. Responsibility for payments rests with the local authority for the area in which a family lives; if the family moves, this could lead to problems. Foster carers have greater entitlements than others. The DfE guidance advises that foster carers who become special guardians should continue to receive their fees for two years after gaining an SGO, although that’s not a binding minimum or maximum.

In particular, foster carers told researchers they were significantly concerned about managing birth parent relationships as the child grows up. A package of support is expected to be agreed prior to the SGO arrangement, but, as most children are young when this happens,
relationships with birth parents could become more challenging and this could happen long after social work support has dropped away.

Wade’s research, however, discovered that local authorities are actually putting support in place. Every one of the seven local authorities his team spoke to offered continual support until the child reached 18, or until the end of the order. But the researchers did find huge variability in the quality and the content of the packages on offer.

‘Some guardians said they were given verbal agreement they’d be given this or that, but it never emerged. So it was really important to get negotiations written into agreements in the courts, because they were much more likely to get what was promised,’ says Wade.

He adds that foster carers tended to end up with better support packages than kinship carers who are not foster carers, probably because they knew the care system better and were more savvy about getting what they need.

Hertfordshire is one local authority that does provide a full package of support until the end of an order. In fact, it has a dedicated officer in place for this. For two years Sharrone Rogers has been senior supervising social worker responsible for pre-order and post-order support services for SGOs. One of the first things she did when she took up the post was to switch the emphasis of her own position to include pre- as well as post-order support.

Her emphasis is on making sure potential special guardians know exactly what is expected of them and she runs regular workshops and consultations.

‘We often say to foster carers that SGOs are asking you to take children out of public care and that means a shift for you as professional carers,’ she says. ‘We’re asking them to go for the closest thing to adoption – something above and beyond what they came into fostering to do. That does mean a change of life and a change in commitment.’

She says that she’s very pro-SGOs when they are right for the child, but she’s just as happy if a foster carer decides against it. ‘This is their life and I want carers to make the right decision.’

The future

It is clear that the terrain of SGOs is complex. Jim Wade’s research was the first of its kind. But at least it reveals foster carers are in a strong position if they do feel an SGO might work for them, and some will benefit from the extra security an order brings to their relationship with a child they already foster – the research also shows that there is greater success where there is a pre-existing bond between the child and their special guardian.

‘The findings are encouraging, but they’re not conclusive,’ emphasises Wade. ‘Almost half of the children we studied were still under 10 years old at follow-up. If you want to be able to fully assess permanence through SGOs for these children, you need to be able to see them when they are becoming adults. So there’s a need for further research to understand the impact of special guardianship.’

One final point is key. Over the eight years that SGOs have existed, the way that they are being used across England and Wales has evolved. They were initially designed to work for children with an existing relationship with a carer who would become their special guardian, and the legislation had older children in mind. Since then, they are being used more frequently where no significant relationship exists between the child and the guardian, and there has been a huge rise in special guardianships for babies. The Government has recognised this and in March the DfE launched a review of special guardianship to see if the legal and practice framework is still fit for purpose, to check that the right decisions are being made for children and to investigate concerns that special guardians sometimes have support needs that are not being met.

The review will be supported by an expert panel – The Fostering Network will be a member of this – and is due to report in December 2015. The legal landscape could change yet again.


Caroline’s story

Caroline® and her husband have their own children and have also been providing foster placements for over five years. One short emergency placement turned into a difficult decision for the couple when the local authority asked them to become special guardians.

‘We’d been fostering her for around six months, because her family situation was known to be occasionally volatile and involved mental health difficulties. One day, out of the blue, our social worker told us there were only two options for this child: either we had to take out an SGO for her, or she would be placed in permanent adoption.

‘When we looked into it, we were shocked that we’d really be getting no support at all. We would be taking on a child who we really didn’t know that well, but we’d also be taking on her family.

‘Our own social worker had experienced volatility from the family at the contact centre, yet she was the one asking us to take on a relationship with them without any support. Social services didn’t want to deal with them, so it felt like we were being asked instead.

‘We realised it was an impossible situation, and could even be dangerous for my family. Two weeks later, the social worker came back, this time bringing her manager. They asked us again, demanding to know why we wouldn’t do it. Again, they said if we didn’t, the child would be adopted. We felt really pressured.

‘But you can’t ask someone to take on another family that you don’t know, or have only met in a contact centre. If you are long-term fostering, you get social work support. There are agreements, family conferences, contact centres and it’s dealt with legally. With an SGO, you lose everything like that. You’re on your own.

‘Saying no was the right decision. On the brink of being adopted, it was decided that she did have a good enough relationship to go back to her family, if there was proper supervision. If we’d have agreed to the SGO, that could never have happened. The family would have been broken up, and my family would have had to deal with any negative consequences. Six months isn’t long enough for a foster carer to know a child and their family well enough to decide about an SGO.’

*Caroline is not the foster carer’s real name
Much of Martyn McCormack’s life has revolved around journeys. Having left school at the age of 15 with no qualifications, Martyn began work on the railways and was employed in a range of jobs from delivery driver to train crew to middle management. He has also used his weekends to crew on a 45-foot yacht, giving him all the fun of sailing without the expense of owning his own vessel.

But Martyn’s latest journey may be challenging and exciting too, as he has recently joined The Fostering Network’s board of trustees.

Martyn and his wife of 39 years, Marilyn, were introduced to fostering by a friend: ‘We have always had children in the home and when they grew up the home felt empty. A foster carer friend of ours asked if we had thought about becoming foster carers. After some thought and talking to our friends and family, who all thought it was a good idea, we made enquiries and we’ve now been fostering for six years.’

Despite fostering for a number of years, it was only when Martyn and Marilyn changed services that they became aware of The Fostering Network: ‘I didn’t know I was a member of The Fostering Network until I changed fostering service,’ he says. ‘My current service talks about The Fostering Network at lots of our meetings and at our supervision. Once I found out I was a member I looked at ways I could get more involved. I have used the member helpline and I was impressed with how friendly and helpful it was.’

I would like to see a consistent approach to fees and allowances throughout the UK, and The Fostering Network to continue in its role in promoting foster carers as professionals

With four children, a fostered child, nine grandchildren, and a new job with a software development company, Martyn lives a full and busy life, but a sympathetic boss and a well-planned diary means he is looking forward to finding the time to make an impact on the work of The Fostering Network.

He says: ‘The opportunity arose to apply to be a trustee and I was pleasantly surprised when I was elected. I see this as my opportunity to put some ideas forward, such as I would like to see a consistent approach to fees and allowances throughout the UK, and The Fostering Network to continue in its role in promoting foster carers as professionals.’

‘Also I think it is important for all involved in the care of children to be trained together. This is why I am watching with great interest the Head, Heart, Hands project [The Fostering Network’s programme exploring the impact of social pedagogy on foster care].’

Being a trustee is an important role with a number of vital responsibilities, and can be extremely rewarding. ‘Since becoming a trustee of The Fostering Network I have found it to be a friendly organisation which I hope to see go from strength to strength, as this can only be good for children, foster carers and social workers,’ says Martyn.

The Fostering Network’s board of trustees is elected to govern the strategic direction of the charity. Trustees are elected at the charity’s annual general meeting each autumn. If you would like to find out more about the work of the trustee board or talk to a current trustee, contact the chair, Philip Brown, on chair@fostering.net
A child runs up, bursting with news. ‘Mum, mum! I did several lengths today.’ Clutching his violin and a bag of swimming things, he tucks his hand into that of the tall woman who walks beside him, her braids swinging and her face wreathed in smiles. As Devante chatters eagerly about his forthcoming ninth birthday, the two link arms along a London street.

Another commonplace end to a school day, you might think. Yet this is not the child’s birth mother. He is living under a special guardianship order which means that Joy shares parental responsibility with Devante’s mother and Devante is settled with Joy until he’s at least 18 (see the feature on page 8 for more about special guardianship). Joy also offers foster placements. Over the last four and a half years, Devante’s home has included other children in short-term foster placements plus mothers and babies.

This sunny day, the focus is on swimming, cooking – ‘you make the best burgers!’ Devante affirms – who to invite to Pizza Express on Saturday, what cake aunty might make and how it will feel to wake up tomorrow, being nine years old. A quick burst of their favourite song, R Kelly’s The World’s Greatest (‘I am a mountain, I am a tall tree…’), keeps the two entertained till they reach home and Money the dog’s enthusiastic greeting.

Joy Harris has had some tough challenges to face in her role as a foster carer – not least the murder of a young man she used to care for. Victoria Neumark finds out how she’s made a new start and how The Fostering Network’s social pedagogy programme is helping her to offer a warm, nurturing home to many children.

Joy Harris is one of the first foster carers in the country to develop skills in social pedagogy under The Fostering Network’s Head, Heart, Hands programme.

She had not long begun the course when her 22-year-old former fostered son Antonio was murdered in Hackney. The police have yet to arrest anyone or find a motive. Antonio and his sister had been cared for by Joy after their mother died, but by this stage, Antonio was living independently.

‘It left me stunned,’ says Joy. Since then, the family has moved to south London – this relocation is about new beginnings. The social pedagogy programme helped, she says. ‘It gives you new ways to think about things.’

An initial year of monthly sessions introduced some basic social pedagogy; Head – sharing knowledge from academic research and established child development theories; Heart – emphasising emotions, recognising that everyone in the family has their own emotional and ethical needs; Hands – using practical tasks and everyday activities, the so-called ‘common third’, as vital opportunities for learning together and building bonds. Over the next three years, participants meet monthly to share progress, and they can also support each other online, via a dedicated Facebook group.

“A place in the Sun”

Joy Harris has had some tough challenges to face in her role as a foster carer – not least the murder of a young man she used to care for. Victoria Neumark finds out how she’s made a new start and how The Fostering Network’s social pedagogy programme is helping her to offer a warm, nurturing home to many children.
The Fostering Network is pioneering this approach to building positive relationships which value carers as well as the children in their care. The idea is to support foster carers in a new way, encouraging them to reflect on their daily experiences.

Joy sees the programme as particularly helpful in the weight it places on thinking before acting. For example, if a child displays difficult behaviour—sent home from school, maybe—instead of simply policing the transgressions, you break down with the young person what they think has happened and why boundaries have been broken. And you are patient, however long it takes.

Looking for the meaning in behaviour rather than reacting to it has made Joy a better parent, she believes. "It is not that I am less strict—Devante would say that I am strict!—but I uphold the boundaries in a less strict way."

Joy is using the social pedagogy 'diamond model' (set out by Eichsteller and Holthoff, 2011), which always focuses on the best in a situation, with Sarwat, her current mother with baby placement. Rather than dwell on Sarwat's challenges—learning difficulties, the aftermath of a Caesarean, rejection by her husband and wider family, cultural isolation—Joy and Sarwat create a timetable of care to help Sarwat keep her baby and meet Pakistani cultural norms. For instance, the baby had her hair shaved in the first week. "The programme encourages you to look holistically, to take time, be patient and model the kind of behaviour you want," she says.

It is no sterile formula, though. The social pedagogy notion of a 'common third' finds many expressions. Joy's immaculate home is full of musical instruments. "We can sing and play for hours!" she says.

I don't go to the course folder when I am talking to someone. But by using some of the methods, we can find a way to express feelings

They all enjoy cooking, with curries a big favourite. Sarwat is teaching them new ways to prepare and serve food.

"Last night I saw Devante talking with Sarwat. She is teaching him Urdu," Joy says. "They were laughing. Devante's birth parents are African-Caribbean and Anglo-Indian; Sarwat's heritage fascinates him. And he is determined to learn as many languages as possible.

Learning together creates new bonds and, in turn, greater security. When Devante came to Joy, just after starting school, he was classed as delayed. Now he is well above average.

Confidently, he declares that he is going to go to university. He reads all the time; current favourite is the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series. Over the summer, he chose extra tuition in English and maths over an adventure play scheme. When Joy offered him the chance to do both, he said, 'No, I'd rather spend extra time with you.'

Joy reflects back on fostering Antonio and his sister. "When I first began to raise a child—and they came to me aged 10 and 11—I had no help whatsoever. You fall back on what your own family did. That may not work, depending on the circumstances of that child. But now I am more open to talking about what to do. The Head, Hearts, Hands programme really helps in that way. For example, recently someone talked online about running an activity day where all the responsibility was placed on the children. They had to schedule, to budget, to organise it. And the pleasure the kids got out of that. That is inspiring—practical ways to share responsibility, so the children are aware of the impact they can have.

Joy uses social pedagogy every day. She and Devante cycle all over the common, taking the dog. It makes it easy to talk. Money the dog has been a great help, Joy says, in releasing her charges' emotions. The dog is the silent person you can hug and show love to. He's like a little counsellor: if you won't talk to me, talk to the dog. Any children that come here—and lots of children come here all the time—they are drawn to the dog.

But family life is not a textbook exercise. 'I believe we need to be real,' Joy says. 'The biggest thing is to be there for someone. I don't go to the course folder when I am talking to someone. But by using some of the methods, we can find a way to express feelings.'

Many young people who have suffered disruption are afraid to express their strong, and sometimes challenging feelings, Joy believes. It is these feelings which erupt in difficult behaviour, but their foster carers will often be unaware of why they are acting in this way. ‘I see so many people—maybe especially young men—who cannot express their feelings but are tortured by them. I have learned to wait, for as long as it takes, so we can talk. When we can talk, I can help you.'

Social pedagogy, Joy explains, works by meeting underlying emotional needs, rather than patterning behaviour. Modelling is not simply demonstrating how to act, it is also showing how to cope with emotions, which means carers acknowledging their own needs in turn. This is more challenging than traditional parenting approaches, but can also be more fruitful, as experience from other European countries has shown.

She puts it more simply: 'When we do something Mum likes as well as what the young people like, we all feel good.' On his birthday shopping trip, Devante settled on a big box of Lego. Joy decided to treat herself as well and nipped into Lush. 'I am going to get that pamper time in the bath—some day!' she laughs. But for now, time to sing with R Kelly ‘I’m that little bit of hope’ while Devante bashess his new drum set and the baby smiles contentedly.

Find out more about Head, Heart, Hands at www.fostering.net/head-heart-hands
Are you wondering whether your fostered child might have a hidden talent for dancing? Did you lack confidence in drawing lessons at school? Is your family keen to go to the theatre?

Radhika Holmström finds there are many projects that can help nurture creativity in children – and sometimes their foster carers too.

Acting, painting, taking photos, dancing, playing music, going to the theatre or taking part in any other sort of arts or cultural activity can bring benefits to any child. However, many children coming into foster care have had very little experience of the arts. And though schools do provide this to some extent, they cannot do it all. Indeed, at secondary level schools are increasingly squeezing out the arts, in accordance with the increasing emphasis on so-called ‘useful subjects’ and, in England in particular, the demands of the English Baccalaureate (a core group of subjects, which doesn’t include any arts).

The arts can often play a useful role in helping looked after children to try doing new things and explore their own feelings – they do not have to be specifically ‘therapeutic’ to be extremely useful. And taking this further, arts projects are a great way for foster carers and fostered children to explore their world together – they can play a role in a social pedagogic approach to fostering, with the shared art activity strengthening the relationship between the fostered child and the foster carer. For example, the fostering services involved in The Fostering Network’s Head, Heart, Hands programme have been focusing on creative activities with children and young people, including dance workshops in Surrey, photography in Hackney and exploring computer animation in Orkney (read more about the social pedagogic approach to fostering in our profile of Joy Harris on page 12).

However, it’s not always easy to know where to start. To that end, a number of cultural organisations have been working with looked after children – and often with their foster carers as well.

Starting with the carers

Arts Award is a set of qualifications which aims to support young people up to the age of 25 to grow as artists and arts leaders, developing their creativity, leadership and communication skills. The award framework motivates and celebrates young people’s artistic achievements in whatever type of artistic activity they choose to pursue, such as film-making, photography, poetry or dance.

Managed by Trinity College London in association with Arts Council England, there are five levels, starting with ‘discover’ and ‘explore’, through to bronze, silver and gold. The qualifications are recognised and accredited through the Qualifications and Credit Framework which covers England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

In March 2013, Trinity commissioned the National Children’s Bureau to work with families who foster, in order to build foster carers’ confidence in engaging with arts and cultural activities. The aim was to train foster carers to become Arts Award advisers (people who support children and young people through the award) for the first two award levels, ‘discover’ and ‘explore’.

Anyone with an interest in the arts can train independently to become an Arts Award adviser; but this 10-month programme, the Families who Foster Arts Award, operated...
This first programme was a pilot and it proved successful. In South Tyneside they have continued with the project – it’s now in its third round and has become a regular part of the offer to foster carers in the area.

Arts Award’s national reaching out programme manager Ruth Jones points out that she is keen to replicate the project in other parts of the country. ‘As a result of the project in South Tyneside, we’ve got a model, a way of working’, she says. ‘The success factors have been identified as the partnership between the fostering service, a cultural partner (which does need to be used to working with vulnerable children) and the LEA provider or virtual head teacher.’

Other opportunities

Though this is the only targeted Arts Award programme to date, it’s far from the only project working with looked after children. The nearby music venue Sage Gateshead runs weekly sessions and mentoring schemes for young people in care, young people leaving care and pre-schoolers who are being fostered, while in Cumbria, Whitewood and Fleming Music and Arts specialises in working with vulnerable and traumatised young people – many of whom are in the care system – taking a social pedagogic approach.

Karen Rossiter was one of the first cohort to complete the Families who Foster Arts Award

“When my fostering support worker first asked me if I wanted to do it, I said, ”No, I’m no good” – after all, I wasn’t very good at art at school. I still wasn’t convinced when I decided I would give it a go; it was mainly to give the kids – a little girl of five and her seven-year-old brother – something to keep them busy.

“From the beginning, the kids loved it. I’d pick them up from school and they’d be really excited about it all, asking “what are we doing this week?” and talking about doing their portfolios. In fact they did so much that they had to put their extra work in a scrapbook. We went to the children’s book centre Seven Stories where the kids did crafts, we went up and we went to Sage Gateshead where we all played on the drums. They did two filming sessions too, and we all went to see the musical Cats.

‘Over the course of a few months, I got involved in cutting out and sticking things, and started loving it and wanting to do more. We all ended up with certificates – the little girl took hers in for show and tell at school – and I’m going to do the next level with the boy, and bring along his sister to join in the activities as well.

‘I’d tell someone else to give it a go. It’s not as hard as you might think and you’ll all enjoy it.’

If you are interested in offering training and/or running Arts Award, please get in touch with Ruth Jones, Arts Award Access and Inclusion at t 020 7820 6178 or 07968 954452, or e ruth.jones@artsaward.org.uk.
What children and young people say

“I have learned so much about myself. We do amazing things that help me and others in similar situations. I know now I can achieve, I can succeed – I’ve proved it!”

Josie Lawrence, Chatback participant

“It was fun. I made lots of friends and liked what we did.”

Pie Factory Music participant

“We love the trips… ‘We have great fun’… ‘We make new friends’… ‘We try something new.’

Young Arts Award participants

“We get to create amazing things, learn so much, have fun, how to survive positively with being in care. Where else would we do this?”

Sharmin, Chatback participant

This spring in Wales, The Fostering Network has been running ‘Let’s Go!’ workshops in partnership with SuperStars, which provides extra-curricular activities for children, and the Millennium Stadium Charitable Trust. The main focus is on sport, but alongside this the participants have been taking part in craft workshops to decorate gym bags and to use the arts as a way of evaluating the project. During April and May there are more workshops across Wales which are using the arts with 11 to 18-year-olds to explore their experiences of education.

In Ramsgate in Kent, the charity Pie Factory Music provides free, accessible music and arts activities to children in the area, with a special focus on those in challenging circumstances, and a separate project for looked after children every year; working with Virtual School Kent and foster carers.

“We feel that it’s our duty to take creativity to the children and to make it accessible. Many of them may come across as not enjoying music and art, but that is more about how they’re experiencing school overall,” explains Pie Factory Music managing director Steph Dickinson.

“One project involved young people creating a digital ‘Life Book’, collecting all sorts of important information about themselves using music, film, art and photography to collate their memories, their interests and their aspirations into something which could be given to prospective carers in a new placement. Another project involved working alongside Virtual School Kent to assist in producing a film.”

In Kingswinford in the West Midlands, Jane Ahmed works with Chatback, a group of young people aged 11 to 18 who are either in care or the children of foster carers.

“We’ve been going for 10 years and mainly do film, but we’ve also done live drama performances,” Jane explains.

“We have a director, and bring in other professionals when we need them. They step into another world, and it’s all to do with using the arts in a way to communicate. We’re instilling skills like communication and taking the lead in people who find education very difficult, but we have kids doing GCSE drama and going on to drama school too. And the first young person has just graduated with a degree in film studies.”

Chatback’s latest production is a film exposing the dangers of child exploitation and trafficking, Anybody’s Child premiered in Dudley in October 2014, with the young stars walking along a red carpet into the Showcase Cinema. Actor Josie Lawrence, who was one of the cast members, attended too.

In Northern Ireland, the Fostering Achievement project, managed by The Fostering Network, aims to improve educational outcomes for fostered children. It takes a broad view of education, promoting learning and development in a variety of ways, including providing resources for music tuition and drama classes, helping children join in local activities such as choirs, running one-off workshops, such as a recent event with children’s illustrator Nick Sharratt, and much more.

“One participant in the project, 17-year-old Amy McCullough, has been able to develop her talents as an artist, with Fostering Achievement supplying Amy with a range of resources. Her manga-style fantasy illustrations are being commissioned from people as far away as Canada, and she is developing her skills through her A-level in art.

A positive difference

It’s true that getting children involved in arts and cultural activities takes time and energy. But foster carers don’t have to be creative types themselves – there are many organisations across the country focused on the needs of looked after children that could help.

As Pie Factory Music’s Steph Dickinson points out, the rewards can be worthwhile. “It’s about getting looked after children and young people to realise how much they do have to offer,” she concludes.

“Many are still fighting huge battles – and when you listen to their stories, you realise how the challenges they’ve faced in life could take up all their energies. But we’ve seen the impact that creativity can have just by giving them the opportunity and seeing the positive difference it makes.”

The Fostering Network would love to hear other examples of arts projects across the UK that are open to fostered children and young people. Email us on editor@fostering.net or share your experience on our Facebook page.

To find out more about the forthcoming workshops in Wales, get in touch with the Cardiff office (see page 3).
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‘I have been fostering for the past 15 years and I’ve cared for more than 50 children in this time. But my fostering service has raised a few concerns about the standard of care I provide to the two children I’m fostering now. They are planning to take me back to panel. I am really worried they don’t want me to foster any more. What can I do?

Joy, East Midlands

You are in England, so in this country a foster carer must have their approval reviewed within a year after first being approved, thereafter it can be reviewed at any time where the fostering service provider considers it necessary (for example, where standard of care concerns have been raised), but at intervals of not more than a year.

The first ever review must go to the fostering panel; subsequent reviews do not have to. However, The Fostering Network considers it good practice for a fostering service to use the panel if it is planning to terminate or change terms of approval (where the foster carer disagrees with changes to terms).

The process
When a fostering service undertakes a review of a foster carer’s approval they must collate all the information they consider necessary in order to assess whether the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable. They are required to take into account the views of the foster carer, any child placed with the foster carer (subject to the child’s age and understanding), and any placing local authority which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster carer (this will be via the child’s social worker).

The review might be carried out by your supervising social worker or an independent reviewing officer (who will be different to the person who chairs a child’s review).

Once all information has been obtained, a report will be written and you should be provided with a copy of it. The report must be factually correct and there must be a clear distinction between what is fact and what is opinion. Where an opinion is given there should be evidence to support it.

You should read the report and if any information is factually incorrect and/or you wish to make any comments we would advise you to put these in writing to your fostering service.

We would expect factual errors to be changed. It will be at the discretion of the fostering service whether any other disagreements are amended, and you can negotiate with them about this.

The next stage is for the fostering panel to consider the approval.

Aileen Lovat, advice and information co-ordinator at The Fostering Network

AILEEN WRITES...
Your fostering service should have a clear policy which details how it investigates standard of care concerns. Many services use their fostering approval review process and seek a recommendation from their fostering panel. Joy, you should make sure you are clear about the concerns that have been raised, get these in writing and know what process is going to be followed.

Responding to Joy:
Aileen Lovat, advice and information co-ordinator at The Fostering Network

REVIEWING A FOSTER CARER’S APPROVAL: THE PROCESS IN ENGLAND

1. Review starts
2. Supervising social worker or independent reviewing officer undertakes review
3. Report of the review is written
4. Fostering panel considers report
5. Fostering panel makes recommendation
6. Decision maker at the fostering service makes a qualifying determination
7. Foster carer is informed and can make representations via IRM or fostering service
8. Final decision from fostering service’s decision maker
When a foster carer is taken to a fostering panel you:

• have a right to see all information being sent to the panel in good time.

The Fostering Network considers it good practice for this to be at least two weeks before the panel date.

• have a right to make your own written submissions to the panel.

Find out the deadline to get this to the fostering service.

• have a right to attend and be heard at panel.

• have a right to take a supporter with you. This is to provide moral support, not to speak on your behalf.

It is advisable for a foster carer to give written submissions to panel as this provides an opportunity to put your case forward, respond to any concerns, respond to any reasons why the fostering service wants to terminate or change terms of approval, and to provide positive examples to show you are suitable to foster.

The role of the fostering panel is to make a recommendation about whether the foster carer should remain approved and under what terms; the panel does not make the final decision.

The panel’s recommendation, along with the minutes, will be sent to the decision maker at the fostering service, who will be a senior member of staff. The decision maker must make a decision within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes, and will issue a ‘qualifying determination’ if they propose to terminate or change the terms of approval of the foster carer.

You must be informed verbally of the decision and any qualifying determination within two working days. Written confirmation must be sent within five working days. Where a qualifying determination has been issued the letter must give the reasons for the decision and a copy of the panel’s recommendation.

The ‘appeal’ process

If you are not happy with the qualifying determination you have the right to make representations within 28 days of the date of the letter. You have two options for doing this:

1) submit written representations to the fostering service and it will be referred back to the fostering panel for consideration and a new recommendation made.

or

2) apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review, and a recommendation will be made.

If you don’t make any representations within 28 days, the fostering service may proceed to make its decision.

The IRM is not a higher appeals body, although, understandably, having a case heard by a completely independent panel is a very popular choice by foster carers.

The decision maker at the fostering service will then make the final decision, taking into consideration any new recommendation by the fostering panel or IRM. Throughout the whole process the carer remains approved until the final decision.

The reviews process is slightly different across the UK.

The main difference is to do with the appeals process. In Wales there is also an Independent Review Mechanism. However, there isn’t in Scotland or Northern Ireland. In these countries appeals must be heard by fostering panels whose members were not involved in the initial decisions.

Check with your fostering service or with your relevant member helpline if you need more detailed advice.

Your opportunities

As you can see, joy, there is a legal process the fostering service must follow and there are a number of opportunities for you to put your case forward.

Make sure you are given a copy of the review report, and that you know the date of the fostering panel and the deadline to submit your own written submissions. If you can, attend the fostering panel in person and take a supporter with you. Remember you can make representations if you are not happy.

Don’t forget, you have been fostering for 15 years and cared for more than 50 children, so show your fostering service examples of excellent care you have provided, how you can work as part of the professional team and how children have thrived in your care.

The Independent Review Mechanisms

The Independent Review Mechanisms in England and Wales are operated by BAAF on behalf of the Department for Education and the Welsh Government respectively. They deal with both fostering and adoption cases. The cost of having a case reviewed is met by the fostering service.

In England during 2013/14:

• the IRM heard 111 reviews; 97 concerned fostering;

• in 40 of these cases, the IRM recommended that the applicants were suitable to foster; in half of these cases, the fostering service’s final decision agreed with this recommendation. For the other half, the fostering service decided the applicants were not suitable to foster;

• in 57 of these cases, the IRM recommended that the applicants were not suitable to foster. In all of these cases, the fostering service’s final decision agreed with this recommendation.

www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk
Coping with loss

Megan Farmer, a former foster carer who specialises in bereavement support, looks at two books designed to help children deal with the death of someone close to them

Seeds of Hope Bereavement and Loss Activity Book

Seeds of Hope Bereavement and Loss is a very different, but interesting book to read. It puts a new perspective on death and bereavement. This is achieved by using nature as a tool, which helps children to realise that all living things have a beginning and an end to them and that it is okay to feel sad when the endings happen.

The book is clean, bright and fresh-looking with good illustrations. Each section has practical activities for children and is designed, without being obvious to the child, to help children express and work through how they may be feeling in relation to the death of someone they loved.

At the end of the book there are some extracts and drawings from children who have been through a bereavement themselves.

There is also a section giving some advice to the teacher, foster carer or another person working with the child about what the child’s understanding of death is at a particular age.

I would certainly recommend the book to professionals working with a child who has been bereaved.

Little Ladybird Lost
Lyne Burton, AuthorHouse UK, 2011, paperback, 16 pages
ISBN 9781456779603 £5.38  

Little Ladybird Lost is aimed at children of nursery age and tells the story of a mother who is ill and has been told that she will die.

It is written as if it were the child’s own story and talks about doing things with mum and how the dad and grandparents are involved too. Moving through the story, it describes mum being unwell and unable to play games as well as she used to. Ultimately, dad fetches the child from school as mum has died and there is to be a funeral.

There are some lovely bright illustrations in the book. However, this book could only be used very selectively as not everyone has a terminal illness and there may not be a father or grandparents around. Sadly, it does not include some positive ideas that can be helpful during an illness, such as making a memory box.

There is no real answer to the child’s question of why when mum dies she will not come back. Additionally, I don’t think some of the language reflects the very young age group that it’s aimed at.

I personally would not recommend this book for a child unless the family circumstances were very similar to that written about.

Megan Farmer, fostered for 20 years and experienced the death of a fostered child. She offers telephone support to bereaved carers. To get in touch with her, contact The Fostering Network’s member helpline in England.

Creating Stable Foster Placements
Andy Pithouse and Alyson Rees (foreword by Freda Lewis, former director of The Fostering Network Wales), Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2015, 240 pages
ISBN 9781849054812 £24.99  

This is a qualitative study of 10 foster families (all white British, but some caring for black children) living in urban and semi-rural areas, and working with both local authority and independent fostering providers.

The research highlights the key elements of success in foster care placements, as seen by the birth children, the fostered children and the foster carers, based on their everyday lives and experiences. It covers the implications of food and sharing meals, the provision of clothes and attention to the outer self as well as offering emotional warmth. Touch, time, space and play all feature.

The first two chapters provide a thorough overview of existing literature using themes to group the comments, theories and approaches.  

While all the chapters provide a conclusion and often a list of key messages, each is worthy of detailed reading. Frequent quotes from the foster carers, birth children and fostered children illustrate the points made.

The final chapter acknowledges a few limitations of the study. Some issues did not surface in the contributions of the 10 chosen families – ethnicity, sexual activity, sexuality, education and school life – and these were therefore not covered. To me, one surprising area of no comment was also that of the role of the supervising social worker, but this would inevitably have led to a much larger study.

Overall, I found this an absorbing and enjoyable read with much food for thought. It is a book to refer to on practical, professional and academic levels. I recommend this book to all those concerned with achieving successful fostering.

Raya Tibawi, The Fostering Network member helpline adviser and independent social worker
it’s time to get connected

_Foster Care Fortnight_ is coming up and it’s a great opportunity to enjoy the company of other foster carers and supporters of The Fostering Network, at the same time as raising funds to help create a better future for every child who is fostered.

**Tony Round**, The Fostering Network’s head of fundraising, explains how you can get involved

Why does The Fostering Network need to fundraise?
The Fostering Network is a charity. We rely on the generosity and enthusiastic fundraising activities of our members and supporters to help us in our aim of transforming the lives of fostered children and young people. And we want to do more. We are passionate about foster care and our ambition is to develop more programmes and activities to work directly with children in foster care, to improve their prospects and to help them develop the skills, attitudes and positive behaviours they will need to succeed in education, in work and in life.

We’ve got lots of ideas about how to work alongside foster carers, fostering services and fostered children and young people in order to make foster care the best it can be, and with your help we can turn these ideas into reality.

Why is now a good time to get started?
With _Foster Care Fortnight_ coming up, and with all eyes on fostering during the campaign, it’s a great opportunity to get together, and to raise vital funds for The Fostering Network.

The theme of _Foster Care Fortnight_ – which runs from Monday 1 June to Sunday 14 June and is a celebration of fostering and the amazing work that foster carers do – is ‘make a connection’. So this is a great time to link up with friends, family and others involved in fostering and to have some fun while you fundraise to help make foster care better.

This year, for the first time, there are a number of sponsored Foster Walks taking place on the weekend of 6 and 7 June. See the box for more details.

What else could I do to help raise money?
Apart from coming on one of our Foster Walks, we’re sure that you’ll have loads of fabulous ideas, but here are a few to start you off. You could have a Bake the Difference event – we can send a party pack to help you make it a success – or you could hold a coffee morning, run a raffle, go out for a picnic, get competitive with a quiz… Whatever you do, have fun while you fundraise!

How can The Fostering Network help me organise my event?
Kirsty Whipp is our new community and individual fundraising officer and she’s here to support you. Get in touch with her on 020 7620 8403 or email fundraising@fostering.net

Foster Walks
As well as being a fantastic way to raise money for The Fostering Network, Foster Walks are a great day out for the family and an opportunity to meet other foster carers. You can find out more about our Foster Walks and register to take part at [www.fostering.net/fosterwalk](http://www.fostering.net/fosterwalk)

- **Foster Walk London, 6 June**: This is our flagship fundraising event during _Foster Care Fortnight_ and the focus of the celebration of fostering in London. Join us for a great day out with other foster families in the heart of the capital and take part in a sponsored 5km walk from the shadow of Tower Bridge to the London Eye.

- **Foster Walk Gloucestershire and Family Fun Day, Cheltenham, 7 June**: The generous people at Endsleigh Insurance are hosting a one-day family event to celebrate _Foster Care Fortnight_. Take part in a family-friendly ramble through some of the lanes and woods around Endsleigh Park and join in races, games and lots more when you get back.

- **Wales, the Midlands and more to come**: As we went to print, more Foster Walks were being arranged. Visit the Foster Walk page on our website to find out what’s new.
FOSTERING CHANGED ME

CHANGING VIEWS

When Casey, 16, was given the opportunity of a lifetime to go trekking in Nepal he was excited. He hurt his ankle and got bored of eating rice, but he gained new perspectives on himself and on the world.

**Interviews by Daniel Sinclair**

**Casey**

I’ve been in foster care for about nine years. Before that I was rarely going to school, so it was a bit of a shock when my foster carer said I had to go every day.

I started trekking when I did my Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award at school, but had never had the opportunity to trek outside of England, even though I really wanted to. That’s why the opportunity to trek through mountains in Nepal was so exciting.

The trip was arranged by Swindon Borough Council’s fostering team and a great social worker called Gus. My social worker suggested I should go as she knew how much I liked trekking.

In the end I was actually the only young person who went on the trip and, although that was a bit strange at first, it was a great experience.

I was bit scared before going because I knew Nepal was going to be so different from what I was used to. And it was! We flew in to Kathmandu and I was amazed at just how busy it was… the traffic, the noise and, most of all, the number of people.

From Kathmandu we travelled to Pokhara to start the eight-day trek, which was very hard work. The weather alternated between being clear enough to see incredible mountain tops and, because it was the end of the monsoon season, there being more rain than I have ever seen. After one hailstorm the hail froze making the ground very slippery. Unfortunately, I lost my footing and sprained my ankle meaning I couldn’t go quite as far on the trek as I had hoped, although with support I was still able to keep walking.

Even though I hurt my ankle (which still aches a little), and got bored eating rice for two weeks, the trip was extremely worthwhile. It changed my view of myself, showing me how I need to push myself but also making me aware of my limits; and it changed my view of the world as I realised how well off we are, how little some other people have and how willing to be generous the people in Nepal were.

I hope to go on a longer trek in a couple of years’ time. In the meantime, I’m studying fishery management at college, as I’ve kept all types of fish since I was little. My course could lead on to a career in marine biology or fish farming, although I hope to join the Marines which will give me an opportunity to travel more and because Marines work alongside the Navy, which my dad was part of.

Janet and Gareth, Casey’s foster carers

The opportunity for Casey to go trekking in Nepal was too good to turn down. We knew he would get a lot out of it so we committed to finding the money to pay for it — although in the end the local authority and a local association helped with the funding.

We thought that the trek would help develop Casey’s self-esteem and confidence, as well as helping him become more independent. Actually, the fact that he ended up going with a group of adults rather than his peers really added to developing his confidence and he is now much happier around that group of people.

The Fostering Network is seeking intrepid explorers and adventure seekers to join us in trekking the Great Wall of China. If you or a team can raise £2,700 each and be a part of a very special 10-day trek, which will take place from 8-17 October 2015, then please email fundraising@fostering.net or call 020 7620 8403.

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FOSTER WALK

help make foster care better

Take part in our 5K sponsored walk
Raise funds, meet other foster families and have a great day out
6 June 2015
London
fostering.net/fosterwalk

If you can’t make our London walk, how about hosting your own?
Email fundraising@fostering.net or call 020 7620 8403

The Fostering Network’s annual conference will be held on
17 November 2015

This year’s event will focus on education and will be held at BMA House in London

With over 150 foster carers and fostering services attending the event last year, we expect this year’s event to be bigger than ever.

Register your interest early by emailing conference@fostering.net
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