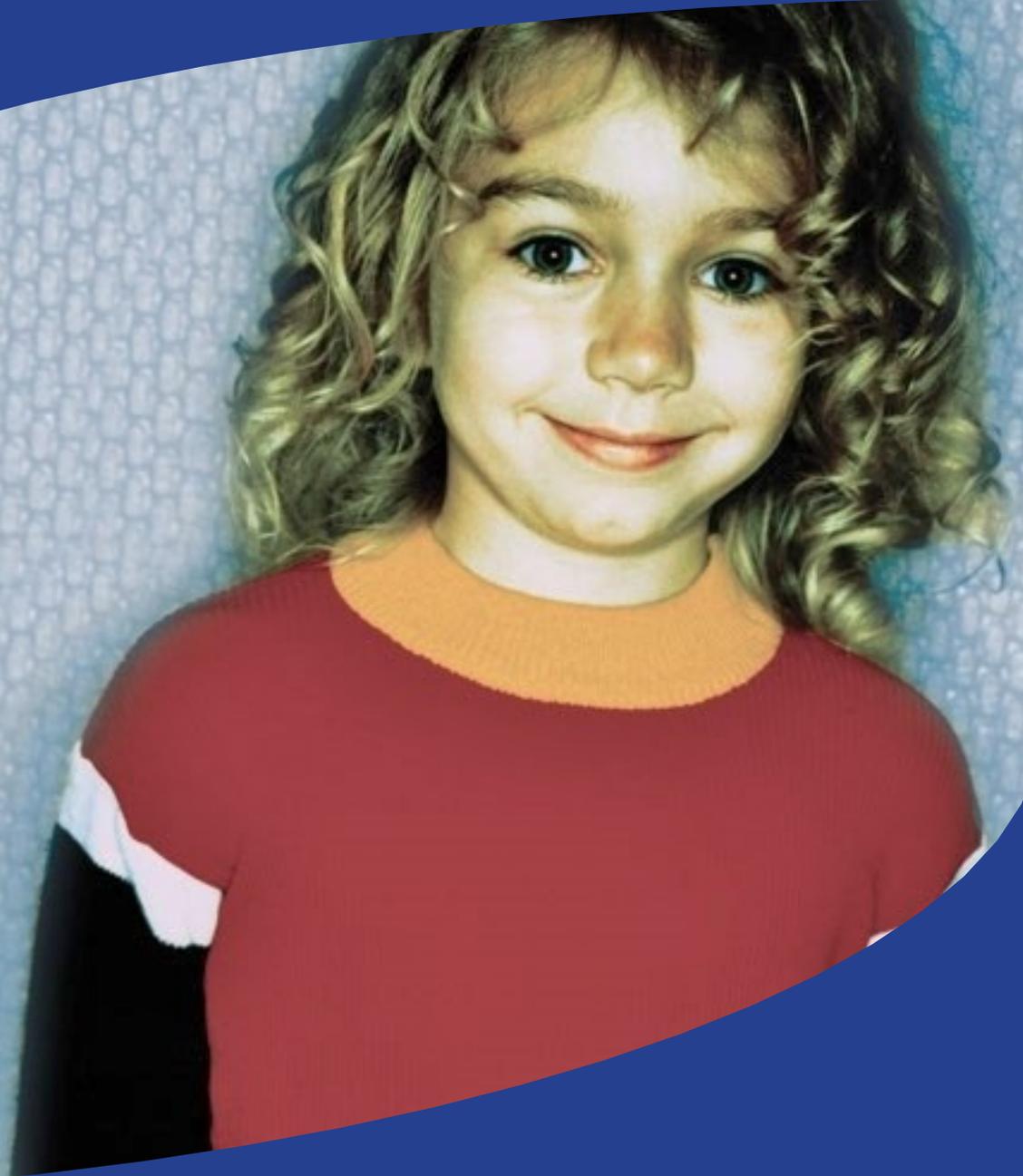


ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT

2014 / 2015



PERTH &
KINROSS
COUNCIL

Education &
Children's Services



REGISTRATION

The Council's Fostering (like the Adoption Service) service is registered with The Care Inspectorate and different aspects of our services are inspected each year. You can read these on the Care Inspectorate website: www.careinspectorate.com

HELP US TO IMPROVE

We welcome your ideas to help make our Fostering Services even better. So whether you're a foster carer (or soon to be one), young person, parent/carers, social worker, panel member or other stakeholder please feel free to email us on:

ecsfosteringandadoption@pkc.gov.uk

or:

ecsfpduty@pkc.gov.uk

The Family Placement (and Kinship Care)Team

Perth and Kinross Council's Family Placement and Kinship Care Team recruits and supports foster carers and assess and support approved kinship carers..

Purpose

This report provides information on the activity and performance of the Fostering Service (Family Placement Team) from April 2014 to March 2015.

Standards

Perth and Kinross's Standards for fostering are based on the National Care Standards. They also meet the standards set by the Fostering Network, BAAF and other Perth and Kinross Council standards (for example, on equalities, child protection and training).

Legislative Change

Following the completion of the National Foster Care Review in 2013, the Scottish Government has begun to introduce amendments to the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and regulations, and these will be finalised during 2015. The amendments include a limit on the number of unrelated children who can be placed with carers, standardising placement descriptors, introducing a learning and development framework for foster carers, creating a national foster carer data-base and setting a national minimum rate for fostering allowances and fees.

Alongside this, the implementation of the Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will introduce a number of significant changes for looked after children, including the right to remain with their foster carers beyond 18 years of age and to seek help and support up the age of 26 years.

Background

At any one time in Perth and Kinross many children and young people are looked after by foster carers. These children and young people have often had difficult family experiences involving drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues, relationship breakdown or violence. They need carers who can offer them a stable family experience, a warm, loving home and lots of fun. Every child has the right to feel safe, healthy and happy and we, as a Fostering Service, are committed to providing this for children and young people who have experienced abuse, disruption and trauma in their lives. Our aim is to provide the best service through support, training and remuneration to carers, to value them as part of the multi-disciplinary team around the child and to recognise the enormous contribution they make to the lives of children who cannot live with their own family.

We understand that Carers require high levels of both support and supervision if they are to undertake their work in a professional manner. Some foster carers have many years of experience while others are newer to the role. Each bring their unique skills. The Council has a payment for skills framework for foster carers which is intended to

encourage carers to develop skills in exchange for higher payments and equip them to deal with more challenging children. Two sets of carers have submitted their skill Level 3 portfolio this year and been approved to move from Level 2 to Level 3.

Staffing

We have seen a complete turn-around in the staffing in the Family Placement Team in the last year in that there are four new supervising social workers. To support the growth and development of the Authority's Fostering Service, the Council has invested in the fostering service with the expectation of making longer term savings. Thus, in 2014 an additional post (assessment social worker) was agreed to support the recruitment of foster carers and also to support the increasing demands of kinship care. The post holder works as an assessment worker undertaking Fostering and Kinship assessments. In addition to this and in recognition of the changing face of kinship, the increasing demand for support and assessment and in view of new legislation the Council has also agreed an additional 1 year SSCO (Kinship Care) post to support the work currently being undertaken by the Kinship Care workers. This is in progress.

Family Placement & Kinship Care Team

March 2015

Service Manager

Linda Richards

Improvement Officer

Irene Miller

Team Leader

Debbie Gillespie

Supervising Social Workers

Morag Ritchie

Janice MacKay

Hazel Oates

Amanda Weightman (Maternity Leave)

Shirley Penman (1 year secondment
until August 2015)

**Family Placement
Senior Social Care
Officer**

Sarah McNulty

**Senior
Practitioner**

Gail Harris

**Kinship Care
Social Worker**

Sue Stokes

Kinship Care Senior Social Care Officer

Angelina Potter

Carol McFarlane

Assessment Social Worker FPT & KC

Fiona Clements

What are we doing to help support the children and young people in foster care?

We have been linking up closely with the fieldwork teams and other stakeholders e.g., health, family change, education, Who Cares and working in partnership with our colleagues in efforts to achieve high stability within placements. Joint visits with social workers, the Looked After Children's nurse and consultations with family change have all increased over the past year. Staff from the Family Placement Team have participated in fieldwork development days and have also attended fieldwork team meetings on a regular basis to discuss current issues, share ideas, talk about changes and processes etc.

C U @ Sport Activity Respite Weekends for children and young people in foster care continues to take place once per month with additional weekends twice per year for sons and daughters of foster carers. C U is a weekend of activities provided by Perth & Kinross Council Sports Development Team. Children and young people from foster care aged 8 & over attend an overnight in either BlackWater or Kinloch Rannoch Outdoor residential facilities in order to provide Foster carers with respite. Foster carers have expressed that they are more likely to ask for respite from this provision as the children don't perceive this as carers needing a break but instead a fun activity for them to participate in. When possible, children from the same household are invited to attend the same group.

Welcome packs have been re-introduced to children and young people who are accommodated and the views of children and young people are now been more systematically gathered and presented at foster carer reviews:

- ***“M is good at what she does and is supportive and listens. We have a laugh together sometimes, especially about each other's taste in rubbish music!” - Young person about their foster carer.***
- ***“C & T are good at talking to me about dangers when speaking to strangers.....they encourage me to learn new things.....they can be funny and do silly things which make me laugh....we have family meetings at the breakfast table so we can all decide what to do....both C & T are cuddly and I can seek this out when needed.” - Young person about their foster carers.***

Perth and Kinross Council alongside the Who Cares worker have been attempting to establish their own Champions Board of young people and discussion has been ongoing over the last few years with a number of young people to try and pilot this in a targeted area of the Council. After a lot of effort with this it has been decided not to progress any further as, due to the rural nature of the area this caused major difficulties in establishing. However, a group of teenage Looked After young people have developed a DVD about being Looked After and have presented this to a number of groups. A representative from this group is also going to be on the Corporate Parenting Group.

In addition to this a post has been advertised through Who Cares to look at recruiting a participation worker on a part-time basis.

Participation

As a Service we continue to strive for greater participation from all our stakeholders to improve and develop. Foster carers have been involved in all our interviewing/recruitment processes for new staff. Carers have also continued to be involved in helping deliver the Preparation groups to prospective foster carers. Several carers, along with other stakeholders have been involved in the consultation process in relation to the new Medication Policy and there are plans to set up a small group to focus on assisting in the review of the Foster Carers Handbook. Feedback questionnaires are sent out annually to our stakeholders. This formed part of the agenda for our Team Development Day in November 2014. The themes from the foster carers` feedback were collated and several small workshops took place during the annual Information Day for foster carers held in March 2015 to facilitate further discussion around these themes. Following on from the Information Day we plan to have a session with our colleagues in the Permanence Team and a training event with foster carers later in the year. This is to look specifically at the issues around transitions/co-ordination and moving on which has been very topical this year and raised in several forums.

Examples of some feedback received for reviews of carers:

- ***“G is a genuinely caring individual who is committed 100% to S and his care.” - Young person`s social worker commenting about a foster carer.***
- ***“L & D always treated C`s parents with civility and respect.....and they maintained a high level of contact with social work staff, ensuring that information was shared on an ongoing basis.” - Young person`s social worker commenting about a foster carer.***
- ***“Our support worker provides great moral and emotional support, practical ideas about dealing with children in our care and we find her to be very flexible in her approach.” - Foster carer about their Supervising support worker.***
- ***“We find the quality of our support worker is very good and helpful and feel comfortable making contact with her whenever we feel the need.” - Foster carer about their Supervising support worker.***

Our Carer Support groups have continued throughout the year as has the Consultation Group and these have contributed to the participative process. As a result of an expressed wish to start up another support group in a particular area one of the staff members has been helping carers facilitate this and this is now up and running.

As a Team, we have reviewed all the paperwork for Carer Reviews and are encouraging carers, young people, birth parents, social workers and stakeholders to help the participative process by completing and submitting these.

- My child gets “really good care” from his carers” – [Birth parents view about quality of care provided by his carers.](#)

We recognise that we need to continue to strengthen ways particularly for children and young people to communicate their views and see action has been taken. We would like to engage more with young people to find out how they would like to be communicated with when starting and during a placement and will be looking at the kinds of questions they would like to be answered, their interests and things that are important to them. We hope to commence this during the next year.

In addition to the formal participative events we also arrange three social events during the year for carers and children and young people. The annual pic-nic in August and the Christmas lunch and party in December are always very well attended and enjoyed by all.

Fostering

At the time of writing this report (end March 2015) there are 52 active fostering households within Perth and Kinross Council with an additional 9 carers registered but “on hold” for a variety of personal reasons. Of these 52 fostering households, 9 are respite carers and 2 are offering short break respite care. Within the remaining, active, 41 fostering households, 81 children are being looked after either on a temporary or permanent basis and some of these carers also offer respite to other carers or to several children/young people on a regular basis within their approval. The Family Placement Team have worked hard in the last year undertaking Carer Reviews that have been out of date and also ensuring that Emergency Extensions are in place for carers who are out-with their approval for periods of time. Following the introduction of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, foster carers have their review considered by Panel after their first year of fostering and thereafter every three years unless there is a change to their registration or a specific matter for discussion. In between, an annual review of carers is undertaken by Education and Children’s Services staff. An additional Panel was convened at the end of March 2015 to assist us in our efforts to ensure carer reviews are up to date and carried out within acceptable time scales. This is reflected more thoroughly within the Panel Annual Report (2015) which reports on Fostering Panel Business.

As a Team we have recognised and acknowledged the difficulties there have been, particularly in the last year, in finding suitable resources for children and young people in need of short break support. For disabled children and young people, the benefit of family-based short breaks to contribute towards meeting their needs is increasingly recognised as being more appropriate than a residential option and is one that parents, in general, seek to be sourced. Although we are currently looking at possible options for a targeted recruitment drive we will need to maintain this on the agenda and have further discussions with our colleagues in Child Health and within Senior Management about the way forward in terms of supporting this area.

Children Placed

There continues to be a shift in the age groups requiring foster care, with a marked increase in the number of babies who are accommodated, most of whom have serious health and developmental needs generally associated with parental substance misuse.

The number of sibling groups who need foster care continues to present challenges to the service, as keeping siblings together, where possible, is one of the many things to consider. These sibling groups are often characterised by profound neglect, with the eldest often having been a carer for younger siblings.

The profile of children requiring foster care is complex. They often have challenging behaviour and struggle with relationships and boundaries. Their families may also struggle to engage with foster carers and social workers. Newly recruited carers need time to develop skills and experience to care for these children.

There has been an increase in the number of requests for children to be accommodated which has created a significant demand for placements for children. This has been a major challenge for us as our own fostering service has been unable to always meet the demand and, as a result, the authority has had to seek placements from independent fostering or residential providers out-with Perth and Kinross Council. We remain committed to resourcing in-house, wherever possible, to retain local networks and familiarity.

Recruitment

The number of new Foster Carers approved from April 2014 – March 2015 was five with three foster carers being re-assessed and approved for a change of approval (either respite to temporary or temporary to permanent). This is a decrease in the number of assessments being progressed to the approval stage compared to previous years, with several assessments having been started and not progressing due to a variety of circumstances, including applicants being counselled out of the process. Regular advertising in local publications, on the Council website and a tripartite approach with neighbouring authorities in the Autumn of 2014 failed to attract any significant increase in enquiries. A resurgence of the Recruitment group has resulted in the following action being agreed:

- Targeted website recruitment campaign involving Short Breaks carers and birth families who have used the service in addition to workers from the Child Health Team. This is currently in progress with the Communications Team.
- The website has been updated and has been made easier to access although content will be reviewed and amended by the end of the year.
- A Facebook page will be set up to establish an interactive public face of PKC fostering to encourage interest and will be used again for specific targeted recruitment campaigns.

All prospective foster carers are required to attend preparation groups and undergo a home-study assessment. The Family Placement Team uses the BAAF Form F to assess foster carers readiness and capacity to foster. At present, due to the skills set within the Family Placement Team, the level of support required by carers who have been without consistent, regular support and the requirement for re-assessments, at times, it is only the Senior Practitioner and the Assessment Social Worker that undertake new foster care assessments. Previously, these have also been undertaken by sessional workers from out-with the Team but from within Perth and Kinross Council. Home-study is an in-depth investigation of the applicant's experience, skills, motivation and suitability for the task of caring for other people's children. Assessing workers work closely with applicants to ensure each assessment is a true reflection of the applicants' circumstances, strengths and areas for development. Home-studies are completed within six months of commencement unless there are clear and recorded circumstances explaining why a longer period is required.

Although the number of approved carers has remained relatively static, it is an ongoing challenge to replace those who stop caring, mainly due to retirement, employment, and changes in health and family circumstances. We have had 5 de-registrations of foster carers in the period from April 2014 – March 2015. A large number of enquirers do not proceed with their application for various reasons and this reflects the national picture in terms of recruitment.

Preparation, Training and Support

To ensure our children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes, we provide comprehensive support, training and supervision for carers.

This support helps to give carers the knowledge and expertise to be there for children and young people displaying behaviour that may be challenging, and it can help to prevent placement breakdown. A fostering preparation group is being undertaken in April/May 2015 and will be repeated in November 2015. Due to staffing difficulties and not enough applicants only one group ran in 2014. In addition, a wide range of training continues to be delivered to staff and carers, both 'in house' by experienced colleagues, and through 'specialists' from other agencies. The undernoted shows the training calendar of opportunities for carers from January – June 2015:

Emergency 1 st at Work	Rolling Programme
Baby & Child 1 st Aid	Rolling Programme
Understanding Eating Disorders	3 February 2015
Makaton for Beginners Part1	11 February 2015
Makaton for Beginners Part 2	12 February 2015
GIRFEC Keeping your child safe	5 March 2015
Foster Carer Information Session	12 March 2015
Understanding Self Harm	20 March 2015

Speakeasy (4 day course)	21 April 2015 28 April 2015 5 May, 2015 12 May 2015
Makaton for Beginners Part 1	13 May 2015
Makaton for Beginners Part 2	14 May 2015
Scotland Mental Health First Aid – Young People	22 May 2015
Child Obesity – Level 1 PRI	22 June 2015
Catriona Rioch – Parenting Capacity Assessment and the importance of Contact	24 June 2015

Inspection

Perth and Kinross Fostering Service “continues to provide a very good quality of care and support to their foster carers and their young people, and outcomes for young people remain very good. The team are committed to further improving their service.”

We were inspected in June 2014 and received grades of 4 and 5 against the Quality Statements. Several Recommendations were made but no Requirements were made of the Service. Following on from this we have worked hard to tackle the suggested areas for improvement and this effort we hope will result in sustained improvements to our practice.

As a Team and Service, along with the carers and young people, we are determined to continue developing and promoting a culture which will benefit the children we look after, striving towards achieving an environment of “...*a family, not a service....a home, not a placement*”.

Debbie Gillespie
Team Leader
Family Placement Team

Date: April 2015