

Family Based Care Annual Report

31 March 2016 to 1 April 2017

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the activity of the team and the work we have undertaken in fostering and kinship care in Perth & Kinross Council over the last year. This will include how we have progressed in respect of the Team Plan for the last year and recognising our priorities in the coming year.

Perth & Kinross' standards for fostering are based on the National Care Standards. They also meet the standards set by the Fostering Network, AFA and other standards for the local authority, such as child protection and equalities.

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 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 parents.

- **Who are we?**

Our team has a range of knowledge, skills and experience in order to provide support to carers and ultimately to children and young people in placement, in partnership with their own social worker. It has been a challenging year in respect of staffing and the team has continued to evolve, including the change of Team Leader in January 2017. Where staff have moved in and moved on, we are confident that we now have a stable, experienced and committed team in place and looking forward to welcoming our new colleagues to fill the remaining vacant posts.

In addition, to developing the core staff base, the Council has also allocated funding to support implementation of the Family Based Care Transformation Project (see below) to recruit additional numbers of foster carers. We have also welcomed an additional kinship care senior social care officer to support the increased demand resulting from increased numbers of Approved Kinship Carers; as well as demand from the new Kinship Care Assistance guidance, published in July 2016.

The most significant change is to our name – previously known as The Family Placement & Kinship Care Team, our new name reflects the vision in relation to our Transformation Project and also in relation to finding alternative solutions for children and young people who cannot live in the full time care of their parents. This change reflects a move within the team to greater integration and increasingly using our skillsets across the specialisms of fostering and kinship care and meets the needs of the service. This has led to our decision not to recruit a senior practitioner exclusively for kinship care, but to transfer these responsibilities to the existing senior practitioner and recruit instead an assessing social worker.

FAMILY BASED CARE TEAM
MARCH 2017

Service Manager
Linda Richards

Improvement Officer
Steven Hatch

Team Leader
Fiona Clements

Senior Practitioner
Gail Harris

Senior Social Care Officers
Morag Griffin (Kinship)
Carol McFarlane (Kinship)
Sarah McNulty (Fostering)
Angelina Potter (Kinship)
Kareen Sharpe (Fostering)

Social Workers
Helen Guthrie (Assessment)
Megan McDade (Fostering)
Morag Ritchie (Fostering)
Hazel Oates (Fostering 3 days)
David Smith (Fostering 2 days)
**maternity cover*
Amanda Weightman (Fostering 2 days)
**maternity leave*
Lucy Letford (Kinship)
Myra Waddell (Fostering)
Jenni McRae (Transformation Project)
(These workers recruited, not yet in post)

- **What do we do?**

The Family Based Care Team assesses and supports both foster and kinship carers. Our team has 4 main responsibilities which are:

- To recruit, prepare and assess prospective foster carers
- To assess prospective and current kinship carers to care for Looked After Children
- To provide ongoing support to, and supervision of and review of approved foster and kinship carers
- To assess applications for Kinship Assistance for informal kinship carers

- **Fostering**

The team is responsible for the direct recruitment of carers who can offer short break, respite, interim and long term fostering. Our fostering service is registered with the Care Inspectorate, which means we are inspected on different aspects of our service on an annual basis. Our most recent inspection report can be accessed at [-http://www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

Applicant foster carers participate in a rigorous assessment process before being recommended for approval to the PKC Fostering and Permanence Panel. As part of their assessment, prospective carers attend a preparation group which is held over six sessions and covers key aspects of knowledge required to care for vulnerable Looked After Children. The home study part of the assessment involves their allocated social worker undertaking several home visits to understand their experience, background, values and ultimately their capacity to foster. In addition, referees and the applicant's children are interviewed, and a variety of multi-agency checks completed.

Once approved, and depending on the type of fostering families wish to provide, foster carers receive regular home visits incorporating support and supervision from their allocated social worker. Within supervision, carers have the opportunity to discuss any issues that may be arising in relation to caring for children, and they are supported to reflect on the child's journey into and through placement, in order to provide the reparative care the child needs. This is also an opportunity for carers, with their social worker, to identify their own needs in relation to further training and explore existing supports and subsequently pinpoint any unmet needs.

In addition to regular supervision, carers are also required to undergo annual review, and following their first year as a registered foster carer, they return to Fostering and Permanence Panel for this purpose, and again every three years, unless otherwise requested to do so. In the interim years, an in-house review is conducted and chaired by an allocated reviewing officer.

As children and young people move onto longer term placements, such as adoption, or indeed return home to their birth family, carers work in partnership with their social worker, departmental colleagues and children's families to ensure a positive transition is achieved. Our team provides the support to carers at this emotional time, whilst ensuring the child's needs continue to be the central focus of the task.

○ **Kinship Care**

It is also our responsibility to undertake assessments of potential kinship carers where family members are identified. It is vital that this is conducted in a timeous fashion to ensure the child's timescales are met, particularly when there has already been a multi-agency recommendation for permanent alternative care. A social worker is allocated to undertake an initial visit and preliminary checks to determine whether a fuller assessment is appropriate for this child with the nominated family member or family friend. These circumstances usually occur where a child is very young and is at the time of kinship assessment, in the care of registered foster carers.

In some circumstances, looked after children may be placed with family members on an emergency basis. Our role here is to liaise with the child's social worker within the first 72 hours of placement and, if continuing, to undertake full assessment of the kinship carer's capacity to meet the child's needs; and to conclude this within a 12 week timescale of the decision to proceed. In a similar fashion to the procedures with fostering assessments, kinship carers are presented to the kinship care panel on conclusion of the report. The panel make recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker who will consider all of the information and approve, reject or defer for further information.

Approved Kinship carers are reviewed annually by their named link worker, who also provides regular support and supervision to the kinship carers. The remit of social workers in kinship care is to assess applicant carers and provide advice and guidance to both families and link workers, in more complex kinship arrangements, and reviewing these arrangements where necessary.

This year, the Scottish Government published guidance relating to informal kinship carers, and the responsibilities of local authorities to provide advice, guidance and assistance, including financial assistance. We have introduced new processes in order to efficiently assess kinship families' entitlement and where they are able to evidence that they have secured (or wish to secure) a kinship care order and where the child is an eligible child. Again these circumstances are reviewed each year or earlier where it is identified that there has been significant change.

○ **Additional priorities**

Each social worker in our team is linked to a specific fieldwork team and acts as a general point of contact, updating our partners on team and carer development, as well as any changes to legislation or national guidance which may impact upon service delivery.

The two senior social care officers for fostering have a varied remit which includes organising training for carers as well as facilitating four carer support groups, the carer consultation group and most importantly the two anticipated annual social events for foster carers and their families; the annual summer picnic and the Christmas Party.

These workers also have a fundamental role in independently seeking the views of children and young people in placement about their experience of foster care and of placement. This information is collated along with other information to inform the foster carer's panel review. Workers also gain the views of carers' birth children.

Family based care operates a duty system where carers can contact the team in relation to any emergencies for children and young people in placement; discuss and resolve issues relating to finance as well as sourcing emergency foster placements. The duty line is also the first point of contact for requests for assessment of kinship care arrangements, including enquiries relating to kinship assistance for informal kinship carers. Prospective foster carers are channelled through the duty line with their enquiry and when sufficient information has been provided, both enquirer and

worker agree whether to progress to an initial visit, to determine whether full application for fostering is appropriate.

- **Activities over the last year**

- **Foster Carer Recruitment**

This year, despite staffing challenges, we have recruited three new sets of foster carers. This is a reduction in the previous year's recruitment and although disappointing, somewhat reflects the difficulties we have had in attracting new applicants. A new transformation project aimed at recruiting sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of our service has been set up. The multi skilled team includes colleagues from the Council's communications team and is led by our service manager. The project has already led to the development of a focussed recruitment campaign, as well as ensuring the team's processes are concentrated and efficient.

The media campaign was launched on 27th March 2017. Immediately prior to this, in the period January to March 2017, we have had seven enquiries, three of which have either been counselled out or have decided that this is not the right time for them. The total number of enquiries for the year 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 was 30 with 8 proceeding to a full application and 3 subsequent assessments. Progressing some of these assessments has been slowed due to the impact of staffing issues, for example where allocation has not been possible due to staff shortage. At the time of writing, we have two more sets of carers booked into Fostering and Permanence Panel in April 2017. A further two assessments are underway, with two applications awaiting allocation. Our target for this year is to recruit an additional six sets of carers, in addition to the 53 sets of registered foster carers we currently support. One preparation group has taken place, and another postponed as applications were not received back from prospective carers. However, another preparation group has been diarised for June 2017, and a further group in October 2017.

As well as recruiting new carers, the team also has responsibility for deregistering carers whose fostering career has come to an end, often after significant periods of caring. This year, eight sets of carers have resigned and reports have been submitted to fostering and permanence panel.

- **Current Foster Carers**

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 brings 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 portfolio this year and been approved to move from Level 2 to Level 3.

The team have worked hard to ensure that carer reviews have taken place and the majority of these have been concluded within the year. Where appropriate, carers have been reassessed where there is significant change to their approval, and this has affected 4 fostering families.

- **Fostering Placements**

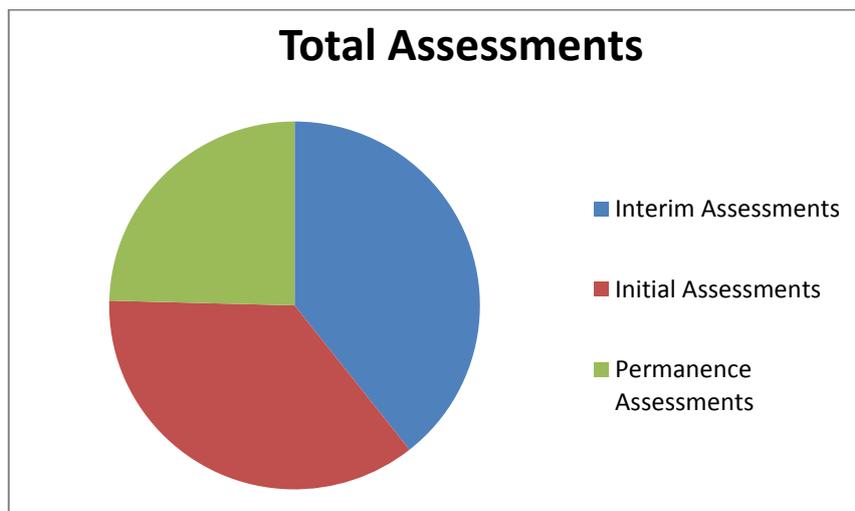
Currently, we have 53 registered foster carers, who are caring for 81 of the most vulnerable children and young people in Perth & Kinross. Unfortunately, due to constraints on the fostering resource and increased demand for placements this year, in some instances we have had to utilise placements from external agencies and this has had a significant impact on a number of levels, such as length of time and distance children travel for contact, proximity to the community and school; as well as implications for the fostering budget. We are working hard to reduce the number of external

fostering placements we use, and where available and appropriate returning children to the Perth & Kinross area.

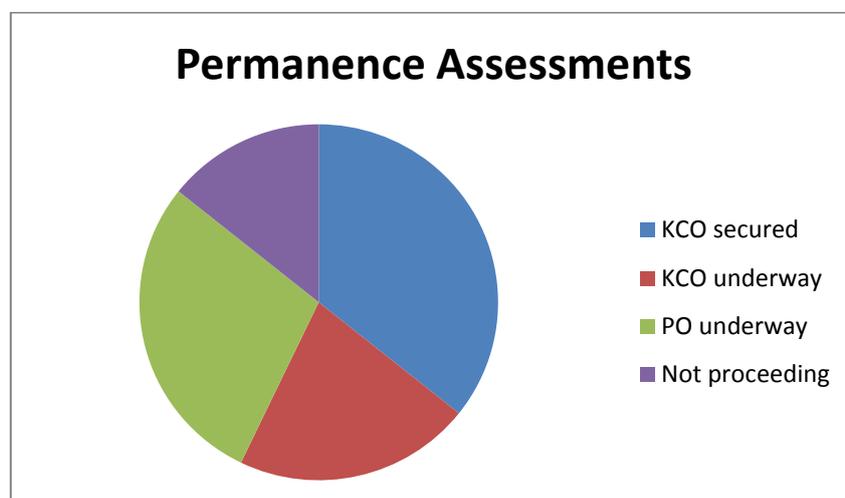
In addition to placement sourcing, the team have also arranged 5 respite foster care provisions, where children's placement at home is supported by regular respite with the same carers. In addition, registered foster carers are entitled to 35 days respite, and the team is involved in arranging an alternative care placement, including transport.

○ **Approved Kinship Care**

In the last year, kinship workers were busy assessing in total 68 kinship or potential kinship arrangements. This equates to 24 kinship care assessments of interim (temporary) placements, two of which were not approved to continue.



14 permanence assessments, including matching, were concluded with only one not proceeding due to the couple withdrawing, and a young person not agreeing to permanence. Of the remaining 12 permanence assessments, five children (five single kinship care placements) have already been removed from the Looked After system due to their approved carers securing, with the support of the team, Kinship Care Orders. A further three placements are pursuing Kinship Care Orders, which includes two single placements and a large sibling group placement.) This is a significant achievement.



A further 26 initial assessments were made, including one which was undertaken on behalf of social services in Canada. Of these, two applicant kinship carers have progressed to permanence assessments, seven carers haven't progressed from initial assessment because the children have either returned home or have moved to local authority care. The remaining 17 family members were assessed as not having the capacity to provide permanent care to children currently in foster care.

Overall, the team currently support 54 Approved kinship placements, and within these placements, 73 Looked After Children are cared for. This is in addition to 23 sets of carers who are previously approved carers, where the children and young people (26 in total) have been removed from the Looked After system as their futures were secured in the kinship arrangement.

- **Kinship Assistance**

Following the introduction of the guidance on kinship assistance and since the Support to Kinship Carers paper was presented to committee in January 2017, the team has assessed 11 cases and in all of these, advice and guidance has been provided. In eight instances, payments have been processed and financial assistance will continue for these families.

Progress in the last year

The team improvement plans for fostering and kinship care were separate documents prior to this year and the development of the new Family Based Care approach. There were clear priorities in both documents which included for fostering, ensuring each carer had an up to date profile of their family and home life, as well as the preparation of individual safer caring profiles. These will look at the individual risks that can be identified in the household and in relation to the placement of vulnerable children and/or young people; and demonstrate the measures carers and their families can take to minimise those risks. The majority of our carers now have an updated profile, and the development of safer caring profiles continues to be an ongoing piece of work.

Another priority identified was to update the carer handbook; a significant task. The team's focus has remained upon the core work that we do to ensure carers receive the regular support and supervision they need in order to provide high quality care to vulnerable children and young people. As a result, this task has been unable to be prioritised. Our carers, have, however made significant contributions through the carer support groups and as our team welcomes new members, the development of the handbook will be allocated and progressed within the next year.

As earlier stated, it has been the team's core focus to recruit new and retain current carers. Whilst the staff group has been depleted for around six months of this reporting year, that focus has had to narrow to ensuring support and supervision to our current foster carers. The aim of the transformation project is to provide support to the Team in our aim to recruit sufficient and subsequently surplus carers. With this additional support, the project remains on task and though there remains much work to do, it is important to recognise that in this early stage progress is being made. New staff members have been recruited to support our business, and in particular to focus on the recruitment of additional foster carers.

For kinship care, the team itself was in a development phase, and up to date operational guidance was required, as well as clarification for fieldwork colleagues of their roles and responsibilities when placing looked after children in the care of family members. These tasks have been successfully

completed and the processes are embedded in our daily practice. Kinship care workers have strengthened links with teams across the service, and have successfully raised the profile of our work.

Other areas we had hoped to develop include a handbook for kinship carers (approved) and we aim to progress this in conjunction with the fostering handbook as described above. Our core focus, however, is to ensure that all children who move to live in a kinship arrangement on an emergency basis, are cared for by adults who have been assessed and approved within the statutory 12 week timescale. With only 2 exceptions to these 24 assessments, which each had external influencing factors, this was achieved.

It has therefore been a busy year within Family Based Care, but we continue to strive to improve our practice and develop more efficient processes to support our work with our most valuable resources in our local authority; our carers.

Priorities for the coming year

In the next 12 months, we will focus on these areas:

- Review Team Structure and implement strategy for Family Based Care
- Support staff to understand roles and responsibilities of the two specialisms in our team
- Deliver information to fieldwork teams and other stakeholders
- Recruit additional foster carers within appropriate timescales
- Continue to effectively support and supervise all carers- fostering and kinship
- Review Team operational guidance for foster care and on completion deliver information to fieldwork teams
- Develop a cohesive induction and training plan for both kinship and foster carers, particularly within first year of approval
- Create accessible public information regarding kinship care through the Council website
- Develop and implement systems for managing information in the team
- Reduce use of external foster placements through recruitment of sufficient carers to meet local need



Fiona Clements
Team Leader
Family Based Care
31.03.2017