St Andrew's Children's Society
ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

Reflections

Newsletter of **St Andrew's Children's Society**

Issue 21 | Winter **2019**

THE SCOTSMAN
SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

Children's charity faces daily pleas for foster homes from councils

Trending

1 David Attenborough's plea to Scotland: 'act now to save your...
2 Seven passengers bundled off budget flight after blazing stag...
3 40 Edinburgh schoolchildren miss out on Disneyland Paris 'trip of a...
4 The strangest questions on the internet asked about Scotland
5 1,000 lost ancient sites found on Scottish island

Why Adopt?

One St Andrew's Children's Society family explain what adoption has meant to them.

Euan and his wife Amanda adopted their daughter Claire as a 10-year-old through St Andrew's Children's Society in 2006 after a two-year process of assessment and preparation. The couple, both aged about forty at the time, had planned to adopt a pre-schooler, but were touched by a TV show about the difficulty of placing older children.

"A 10-year-old child felt more appropriate," Euan said, acknowledging the challenges of parenting a child from a large birth family who had had a range of often-complex experiences. "The first six months were a whirlwind. You're looking for certain behaviours, what she might do or not do; is it because she's a girl, her age, and that's what most girls her age would do? Or is it because she was adopted?"

"We had to create memories and cement her in our home and family," Euan said. That process began before they met, with an extensive family album that he and Amanda sent to Claire. "It included photos of our house, the school she would go to, our family and our friends. Since then, we have made a book for Claire every year in June to celebrate her 'Family Day' when she joined us."

Continued on Page 2

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News

Why Adopt? (continued)

Like many adoptive families, the Smiths were keen to help Claire stay in touch with her birth family as deemed appropriate by social workers, including visits with two of her brothers, who both were adopted in the same family.

"The contact can be awkward for some [adoptive families], but we would see them every three or four months. The first time, we met at Edinburgh Castle," Euan said. "Claire spotted her brothers, and just started running up the hill as the brothers ran down towards her. No one knew they were siblings who hadn't seen each other for six months.

"Most people who see us just see us as a normal family – which we are – but we do have a special approach to some things," he said.

An aspect of the special approach has been sensitivity to helping Claire to deal with her early-life experiences, which began to affect her when she was a teenager. With advice from St Andrew's Children's Society, they helped their daughter get the special therapy she needed. Euan said, "My Employer's charity of the year, Mental Health UK, means a lot to us, because we've been at the coal face. It can be really, really difficult."

Claire is now 23 years old, and enjoys music, socialising, movies and anime. She still lives with her parents and works at an Early Years Centre. When asked what advice he has for a would-be adopters, Euan said, "Make that contact with St Andrew's Children's Society! It is **the** most fulfilling thing we've ever done.

"People say that Claire was lucky to come to us. We're very lucky, too."

Please note all names in this article have been changed to protect anonymity.

SafeBase

In May 2019 we ran the SafeBase Training Programme for our families. The training was facilitated by Ruth Dolan, Lorna MacFarlane and Jill Watson.

The SafeBase Training Programme was developed by After Adoption based in Manchester, in recognition of the support that adoptive families often need when parenting children with increasingly complex needs. Sadly, After Adoption has gone into administration; however we are delighted to have been given permission to continue to use the training materials.

This was my first time facilitating the SafeBase programme and I really enjoyed the experience. Whilst it was evident that families were experiencing challenges, their commitment and desire to learn in order to best support their children was incredible. Everyone in attendance created a safe, supportive environment and shared both their challenges and successes.

Feedback from our SafeBase programme in May was very positive:

"I have changed the way I respond to challenging behaviour, most of the time"

"This has turned around my thinking, see things in a different way and changed dynamics"

"I do believe this course will help us to do a better job"

"We needed help and have had a lot of tips"

Our next SafeBase Programme is in Spring 2020. If you'd like to attend, then please contact us.

Lorna MacFarlane SENIOR PRACTITIONER

Farewell to Jill...

In October 2019 we bid farewell to Jill Watson who had been a Senior Practitioner with St Andrew's Children's Society for just over two years. Jill's enthusiasm, hardworking nature and professionalism shone through from day one. She worked with families from the initial adoption or fostering enquiry stage right through to the child being placed and the adoption order being granted. She also introduced and led our Healthy Working Lives award programme. Jill was hugely respected by all members of staff and her families and we wish her all the very best in her new role. She will be missed!

Adoption Support

Summer Drop-In

Our Aberdeen service hosted four drop-in play and activity sessions over the school summer holidays. The sessions were very popular and well-attended by parents and children.

Mums and dads relaxed and enjoyed a cup of tea and a chat, while the children had fun playing together and creating some wonderful works of art. We were delighted to see the children engaging to produce some lovely and interesting artwork.

Some of the activities the children enjoyed were producing magic glittery wands in beautiful, sparkly and vibrant colours. We're sure some very interesting wizardry and spells were cast with these!

The children also spent time painting real seashells collected from the beach. All shapes and sizes of shells were given a beautiful makeover using bright and pastel shades and sparkles.

The children also enjoyed making dough shapes. It was lovely to see how the children used different moulding and cutting techniques to create unique ornaments and shapes ready for painting and colouring. We are sure these will all look beautiful on display at home.

We all had a very relaxed and fun time together, thank you all for coming along!

Pampering Sessions

Approximately eight months ago, our colleagues in Aberdeen put on a Pampering Session for parents, consisting of therapists offering treatments such as massage and facials. It was such a welcome experience for our adopters that we decided to offer something similar in Edinburgh.

So, in August we had Debi and Kaspers come to the office and they set up their chair and massage tables and offered back massages/reflexology and facials to our parents who loved the experience. Both of the offices, are now offering these therapeutic opportunities to our adopters. Keep an eye on our Facebook page for future Pamper dates in Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

Coffee & Cake Morning

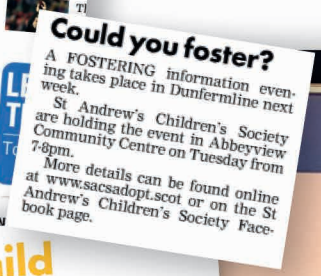
We held our first Coffee and Cake Morning for adopters and foster carers on 5 June at our Edinburgh office.

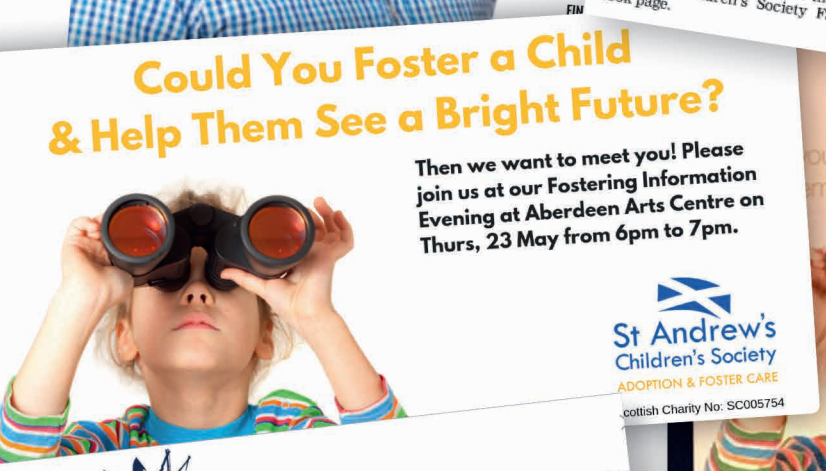
This was in response to feedback from those attending one of our workshops on the benefit of our parents coming together who understand the challenges, and the joys, and can offer each other mutual support. Those who attended were able to share their experiences, suggestions and ideas, as well as the cake! We are hoping to hold these on a regular basis, so if you are interested keep an eye on our upcoming events and we look forward to seeing you here.

Foster Care Fortnight: In the News

We had a tremendous response to our Foster Care Fortnight campaign, held between 13 May to 26 May this year, to raise awareness about fostering in Scotland.

We held fostering information events in Aberdeen, Dundee, Dunfermline and Edinburgh and we were delighted with the excellent coverage we received across the media to help us spread the word about the urgent need for foster carers. In case you missed it, we featured in *The Scotsman*, *The Press and Journal*, *The Courier* and the *Dunfermline Press* as well as being on Northsound 1 and Kingdom FM. We hope that many more people will now think about fostering a child in Scotland.





Healthy Working Lives

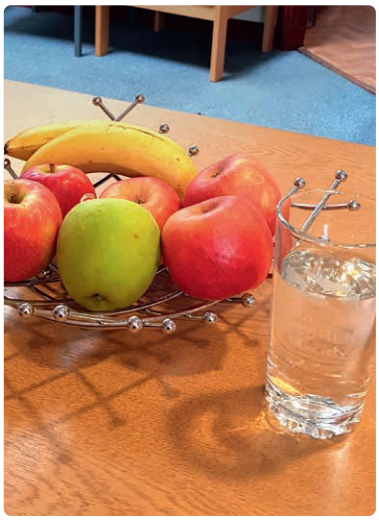
Everyone at St Andrew's Children's Society is now working towards achieving the bronze Healthy Working Lives award.

Some of the aims of the award are to

- Have a healthier, more motivated and productive workforce
- Contribute to the health of the wider community

So far we've organised a number of fun events including Macmillan Coffee Mornings in Aberdeen and Edinburgh as well as a Teddy Bears Picnic and Storytelling Time – when we also celebrated National Play Week.

We've been trying to eat more fruit (with Aberdeen setting a very good example!) and getting out for a walk at lunch time or having walking meetings.



Look out for updates about future Healthy Working Lives events we're organising and keep up to date with the progress we're making on our Facebook page and Twitter account.

New arrivals

Tracey Turnbull

In April 2019 we were delighted to welcome Tracey Turnbull to our team as a Senior Practitioner. Tracey was already well known by everyone at St Andrew's Children's Society as she had been a Panel Member here for 4 years. She graduated as a Social Worker 8 years ago and has an impressive background in adoption and fostering. One thing you might not know about Tracey is that she successfully summited Mount Kilimanjaro nearly 2 years ago all in the name of charity! Now, there can't be many Senior Practitioners who can say that.

Carolyn Smith

Carolyn Smith joined St Andrew's Children's Society in May 2019 as our new Administrative Assistant and quickly settled in due to her friendly and helpful nature. She has worked for a number of different companies, big and small and has a broad range of valuable admin experience. Her main duties include general administrative duties, assisting the Social Workers and servicing Panel Meetings.

Ellie Clarke, Student Placement

Our newest member of staff is Ellie Clarke, who started her final placement with us from Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen at the end of August. She will be with us until the middle of December.

Ellie is a final year social work degree student and hopes to gain further experience in adoption and the third sector when she graduates. She'd also like to work with children and in family social care.

Horses and Healing

"Horses carry the Wisdom of Healing in their hearts and offer it to any humans who possess the humility to listen." - Unknown

This has been our experience. Adopted children have often had overwhelming experiences that have compromised their ability to cope with everyday life and to regulate their emotions.

Our child has always been drawn to horses. The child who would not go on a climbing frame if other children were on it was happily feeding grass to horses in the field opposite our holiday cottage surrounded by and engaging with other children.

We started regular riding lessons which led to helping out at the stables and a horse share. While riding helped significantly, having a horse to help look after and bond with was key to helping cope with challenges such as the move from primary to secondary school.

There are many interesting articles on healing with horses. As well as the motion of riding supporting emotional regulation, for us, it seems to be these benefits:

- the horse does not judge you, he taps into a deeper sense of who you are unencumbered by any accumulated baggage which you can let go for a while;
- he picks up on your mood, he reflects how you are feeling and, if that is negative, you have to deal with that to get him to respond;
- in caring for him you find unconditional love and can reciprocate knowing this will not be rejected.

I hope that in sharing our experience this may help others find some healing through horses and encourage organisations to extend existing horse therapy (such as for the disabled and veterans) to adopted children.

Written by a St Andrew's Children's Society Adoptive Parent

Fundraising Report

Adoption Support has been the focus of our fundraising this year.

We received a £45,000 donation from The Garfield Weston Foundation, in support of our Adoption Support services, as well as funding totalling £12,000 from The Morrison's Foundation, The Pump House Trust, The W M Mann Foundation, The JTH Charitable Trust, The PF Charitable Trust, The Tay Charitable Trust and The Kuenssberg Foundation.

Over the course of the summer, we have received £20,250 towards our core costs as part of our Children, Young People & Families Early Intervention Fund grant from the Scottish Government.

Once again, summer marathon time has brought forth those intrepid runners. As reported in the spring edition, the trio of Adrian Harrison, Alison McGregor and Elaine McDonald from Forres and Buckie all ran the Edinburgh Marathon. At the last count, with sponsorship still coming in, they have raised an amazing £2,000.

Cris Thacker also ran the Edinburgh Marathon and has so far raised £500.

Not to be the only competitor in the family, Cris' wife Kelly, has raised over £500, considerably more than her £100 target. She walked 40 miles of The John Muir Way (Edinburgh to Dunbar, via North Berwick) over two days and raised a little cake and care money for us in the process.

Thomas Anderson undertook a three-event challenge 'A Climb, a Run and a Night Full of Fun' – all funds going to St Andrew's Children's Society. He climbed Ben Nevis on 4th May, ran the Edinburgh Marathon on 26 May and also held a family fun event on 18 May, raising a fantastic £1,500 in the process.

Thank you so much to our wonderful supporters.

Dan Docwra FUNDRAISER

(top) Alison McGregor, Adrian Harrison and Elaine McDonald. (far left) Cris Thacker. (left) Thomas Anderson.

LGBTQ+ Events

2019 marks ten years since joint adoptions by same sex couples became possible in Scotland when the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 came into force in Scotland on 28 September 2009.

For the first time ever people who were civil partners of each other and people who were living together as if civil partners in 'an enduring family relationship' in Scotland were allowed to jointly adopt a child. St Andrew's Children's Society want as many people as possible in the LGBTQ+ community to think about adopting or fostering a child and so we've been out and about all over Scotland since our last newsletter raising awareness amongst the LGBTQ+ community that we welcome adoption and fostering enquiries from all members of the LGBTQ+ community including, single people.

St Andrew's Children's Society were at the Edinburgh Pride Community, Charities and Business Fair at the glorious Cockenzie House and Gardens in East Lothian in May and then later that month we were at Grampian Gay Pride in Aberdeen. We had a very rewarding response to our stall at Edinburgh Gay Pride in June and then were flooded with people coming up to the St Andrew's Children's Society stall at Fife Gay Pride in in July. Thank you to everyone who came to speak to us on the day.

If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community and you would like to find out more about adopting or fostering a child please get in touch. We want to hear from you.

Events Diary

2 December 2019 10am–1pm
Pamper Morning
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

7 December 2019 11am–1pm
Aberdeen Christmas Party
St Andrew's Children's Society, Aberdeen

8 December 2019 2–4pm
Edinburgh Christmas Party
Lauriston Hall, 28 Lauriston St, Edinburgh EH3 9DJ

10 December 2019 11am–1pm
Coffee Morning
St Andrew's Children's Society, Aberdeen

12 December 2019 12.30–2.30pm
Support Group
Activities Room, Elgin Public Library, Moray

24 January 2020 6.30–8.30pm
Dad's Pizza Night
St Andrew's Children's Society, Aberdeen

29–30 January 2020 10am–12.30pm
Introduction to Theraplay
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

7 February 2020 11am–1pm
Coffee Morning
St Andrew's Children's Society, Aberdeen

25 February 2020 10am–12noon
Parent & Child Theraplay Pop-up
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

2 March 2020 10–11.30am
Single Adopters' Group
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

7 March 2020 6–8pm
Friends & Family Evening
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

1 April 2020 10am–12.30pm
Identity & Adolescent Workshop
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

St Andrew's Children's Society would like to wish all our families and everyone who has so generously supported us this year a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Please note that our offices will be closed for the festive period in the afternoon on Christmas Eve, 24 December and we will reopen Monday, 6 January, at 9am.

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