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

Reflections

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

Issue 23 | Winter **2020**

Christmas is coming!

(and the parents are getting stressed)

It looks like it is going to be a very different Christmas for everyone this year with us all being subject to various Covid restrictions*. However, for our adopted children it may well be something we can turn to our advantage.

Christmas can be such a hard time for children who have experienced trauma, apart from the trigger memories of Christmases past, all the changes in routines at school and home, more visits with family and friends and busy mums and dads can overload them and make them anxious, and we all know anxious kids equals difficult behaviour and stressful times.

Here are some tried and tested tips to help get through the festive season.

In the weeks around Christmas, try and keep some routines the same, for example breakfast and bedtimes. Have a timetable of what's happening when, so you and your child can go over it as often as necessary, use pictures if that helps them process information.

Sometimes a timetable helps the adults as much as the kids as you can break the day down into manageable chunks and put in activities such as watching a Christmas movie that might also give you a bit of a break too.

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Christmas is coming! (continued)

Christmas dinner

Forget it!! If we are still restricted by Covid rules then not mixing households gives you the perfect excuse not to spend the day slaving in the kitchen cooking a complex meal for children who will often be too excited and hyper to sit still long enough to eat it! Make something they like and can be eaten in a relaxed way. The ritual of a full Christmas meal may well be new to your child and to them it can be stressful following the unwritten rules, when do you pull the cracker, why do they bang and make sudden unexpected noises, why is dad telling such bad jokes, how long do I have to sit here?

Some takeaways are open on Christmas Day, or a nice pizza will please the children and you can always do a nice dinner for the grown ups on a less busy day.

Family and friends

Christmas and New Year usually means lots of visitors and a level of chaos or change in the home leading to hyper dysregulated children. Depending on the restrictions we will be living with at the time this may not be such an issue but in case we are allowed visitors in our homes it is best to think about how to help your child feel safe and relaxed.

Always let your child know who is visiting or who you are visiting beforehand. Have a calming activity set up such as colouring books, reading material, whatever you know helps your child and explain beforehand that this is something they can do whenever they want during the visit. If you know your visitors are the playful, slightly boisterous type who will leave you scraping your child off the ceiling, then ask them to read a story or do a quieter activity with the child and if you feel able, ask them in advance if they could do this.

Have a clear arriving and leaving time for visits and visitors or even better arrange to meet up for a walk or visit to swing parks etc.

Your child might well have been trying really hard during the visit to self-regulate and 'be good for granny', so if you can plan for some outdoor time to let them let off steam right afterwards this may help them settle again.

Christmas presents

Many children are overwhelmed by too many gifts and quite a few feel so badly about themselves that they don't believe they deserve any presents. If you have a child that finds it hard to accept compliments and praise, they will probably find receiving gifts difficult. These are the children who will ignore the special gift they have been saying they want since July or they may even feel so strongly that they are not good enough that they will destroy the present.

There is no law that says thou shalt open all your presents on Christmas morning and it often works better if the whole process is slowed down and split in several sessions, even over a few days.

If you have siblings, be ready for sibling rivalry and if each child can have an adult to help them stay focused on their own gifts rather than their sibling's this can help and it's another excuse not to be slaving away in the kitchen!

Self-care

You probably won't get much time to yourself over Christmas so when you do get some down time, make the most of it, forget the hoovering and ironing and plan some relaxing time, savour and be present in these moments, even if you are just blobbing on the sofa in an exhausted heap, take time to appreciate the peace and quiet, light a smelly candle and get out the cheese and biscuits. You have truly earned it.

Shiona Freeman SENIOR PRACTITIONER

*At the time of publishing this newsletter a maximum of 3 households were allowed to meet in a 'bubble' from 23-27 December 2020.

'Paul has been a great tutor. K is really enjoying the DJ lessons and really looks forward to them!'

Feedback from **adopters about the free Musicares tuition** they received, arranged by St Andrew's Children's Society

Family Tree

I thought it would be a good idea to have a visual representation in the office of the families that had been brought together through St Andrew's Children's Society. I think I knew St Andrew's Children's Society was where I was meant to be when the ladies in the office also thought it a great idea. Stephen and Claire agreed to allow me to paint a tree on the wall (given the landlord's permission too, of course) and run with it. That was in 2015, and we got the hands of families from 2013 up too, and it now includes our most recent 2020 family.

When children are placed and settled with their families we send them out (or their social worker takes to them) coloured card or paper and ask them to draw around their hands and return them to us. We started off with birds and moved on from there having a different creature for each year that the children are placed with their family. Then in 2018 we started doing all sorts rather than sticking to a specific creature – we were running out of air and branch space.

We have the majority of our families on the wall, but not all unfortunately. The children quite often come and look for their family's hands when they come into the office, (not sure when that will ever be again) and it's a great conversation point.

From the early years…

We have also had Christmas lights, snow and the changing seasons on there too – autumnal leaves and budding flowers.

Velga McDougall ABERDEEN ADMINISTRATOR

Our most recent in 2020.

Adoption Support

Virtual 'Friends and Family' event

We had been looking to follow up our successful March 'Friends and Family' event with an equally successful event in September which honoured the restrictions laid out by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As much of our work this year has been conducted virtually, we knew it would be necessary to deliver our 'Friends and Family' event in a similar manner. Spaces on this event were limited and quickly filled up. The programme was redesigned to be delivered virtually, limitations of time and not being in the same room meant some information needed to be changed.

The evening of the 30th September fast approached, with everyone logging onto the Zoom® event with virtually no problems. We had a 'full-house' on the night, with attendees from across the globe including Canada, Spain and even someone on holiday in Turkey! We had helpful and insightful questions asked, which highlighted to us the support our adopters will have within their own friends and family. While we were not able to honour our guests with a cup of tea and an informal chat, we were able to cover more miles in the friends and family we could reach out to.

We would like to thank our guests for taking the time out of their busy lives to learn how they can best support their families, and for being the 'guinea pigs' in our first virtual 'Friends and Family' event.

The December 'Friends and Family' event filled up quickly and up next are the 'Friends and Family' events on 3rd February and 14th April 2021.

Iona Hughes SENIOR PRACTITIONER

Single Adopters' Group (SAG)

The Single Adopters' Group is open to adopters with children of all ages. Prior to Covid-19 the group was held on Monday mornings with meetings taking place approximately four times per year in March, June, September and December. As we're unable to provide a crèche, unfortunately the group is only for adults.

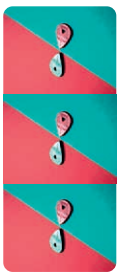
The group is facilitated by staff from St Andrew's Children's Society, the Edinburgh Permanence Team and Scottish Adoption. Generally, the format of the group has included a topic for discussion, coffee/ tea and an opportunity for adopters to share ideas and connect with other parents in a relaxed atmosphere. A wide range of issues in relation to adopted children have been considered including education, transitions and resilience.

Occasionally, we have engaged in a small activity such as making slime or painting pottery; this has been fun and has helped people to feel relaxed while forming new associations within the group. Our December meeting usually has a more social theme with a Christmas craft activity and some festive treats…

Sadly, we have not had face-to-face meetings since Covid-19 restrictions commenced in March 2020. However, we have had two Zoom meetings taking place on Tuesday evenings in July and October and hope to have a further Zoom meeting in December. A small number of people have participated but some adopters have advised that they would prefer to wait until we are able to have face-to-face meetings again.

If you are interested in attending the Single Adopters' Group, please contact your social worker or Carole Bell (Senior Practitioner) at St Andrew's Children's Society. New members are very welcome!

Carole Bell SENIOR PRACTITIONER



'B has really enjoyed his guitar lessons with Moteh, who is just fantastic. Such a talented person and his manor with B is just brilliant. He can see when B has had enough of one thing, and changes things to catch his interest again.'

Adopters Musicares feedback

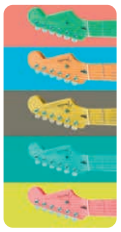
What our families have to say about our Adoption Support

Letterbox support

We continue to provide letterbox support to a small number of families (this duty has been placed with local authorities for some years now). One example of how important this service is to an adopted child and her birth parents and adoptive family is as follows:

W is a child who lives with her adoptive family and has always known of her adoptive status. Her Mum, K has supported and maintained letterbox (and gift sharing) with W's birth parents over the years. The adoption support worker from St Andrew's Children's Society is the person who facilitates this approximately 3-4 times per year. The open and transparent nature of K has truly served W well, in that she is able to ask age appropriate questions about her birth parents, and as she matures, is able to understand why she needed to be adopted. She is also hearing from the worker and through the letters/cards how her birth parents are. This helps W to integrate both sets of parents in her life, and understand what and who has made her, shaped her and given her such a unique identity.

Rita Grant ADOPTION SUPPORT MANAGER



'L has been enjoying his classes with Jenn thank you!'

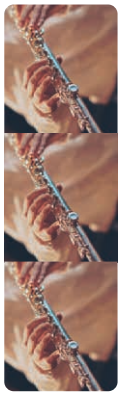
Adopters Musicares feedback

Adoption Support feedback during the Covid-19 pandemic

During the adoption process, nothing can prepare you for the 'full on' experience it is to take a neglected child into your heart and your home. You want to love them and care for them but they are, unfortunately, in a never ending struggle with emotions, so strong, that they can barely contain themselves from minute to minute and you are, as a parent, on tenterhooks waiting for the next trigger to set them off.

I am not sure how we would have managed to get through the first month, or so, without St Andrew's Children's Society's help, support and guidance and even during the worst of the Covid-19 lockdown, they were available at a moment's notice, on the phone, on Skype group calls as well as arranging video calls for moral support and family Theraplay™ sessions. The selfless support from this organisation is priceless, as is the dedication of its highly trained and intuitive staff and we can honestly say that without them we, would probably not still be going through the process.

St Andrew's Children's Society Adopter



'My daughter has really enjoyed her sessions with Deni from Musicares. She looks forward to the sessions as Deni has made it fun; between them, they have created an amazing song, which includes a flute instrumental, so my daughter is both singing and playing in the final recording. Deni has been patient and supportive, and really excited my daughter about what she can do – it has boosted her self-confidence as well as producing a great song. Thank you very much Deni and Musicares!'

Adopters Musicares feedback

Fundraising

It seems so long ago that I was able to write a fundraising report that wasn't yet mentioning the Coronavirus Pandemic. Just as St Andrew's Children's Society has been able to adapt over the months, so charitable trusts, the major focus of our fundraising, have also adapted.

During the lockdown earlier this year, the majority of trusts and their administrators closed their doors and requested applications via email rather than post. This has saved a small fortune in postage! What was most heartening was the speed with which a lot of trusts, especially the bigger ones, began to open up special streams of funding specifically to help charities affected by the pandemic. The UK and Scottish Governments also made funds available to charities as well as introducing the furlough scheme which has helped many charities to stay afloat. Sadly, a few have not survived.

We were very fortunate that our Senior Management and Trustees reacted quickly to put in place the measures to enable St Andrew's Children's Society to continue to function. This was a very positive message for us to convey to existing and potential funders.

Our first donation came from the Community Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund. This was a first grant of £1,875 in May, followed by £5,000 in October. This was funding to enhance our IT systems for staff working from home. This was followed by a grant of £22,005 from The Wellbeing Fund, specifically to support our engagement with families affected by lockdown and school closure – then came £8,225 from the National Lottery Community Fund.

kiltwalk

Royal Bank of Scotland · Arnold Clark · The Hunter Foundation

Charitable Trusts have been generous, with donations from The Welch Trust, Nancie Massey Charitable Trust, The H D H Wills 1965 Charitable Trust, The Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust, The James Weir Foundation, The de Brye Charitable Trust and the Miss Isabel Harvey Ferguson Charitable Trust – a big thank you. We continue to benefit from continuing multi-year funding from The Garfield Weston Foundation, The Robertson Trust and from the Scottish Government via The Corra Foundation.

Then Covid-19 reared its ugly face again. The 2020 Edinburgh Kiltwalk was cancelled, but replaced by the 2020 Edinburgh Virtual Kiltwalk. Rather than a walk with thousands along a prepared route, our supporters chose any walk they wished and walked it over the September weekend. As with 2018, our staff and supporters didn't let us down, raising an amazing £11,554. I've added some photos of our wonderful walkers for you to see.

So, a pretty fantastic few months despite the pandemic.

Turning to think of Christmas – and hopefully a better year in 2021 – when someone asks you what you'd like for Christmas, do you struggle to think of things? Rather than receiving more socks or another box of chocolates, how about asking friends and family to make a donation to St Andrew's Children's Society instead? It's easy! Point them in the direction of the 'How to make donations' section of our Fundraising page on our website, sacsadopt.scot, or set up a Facebook fundraiser. You'll be putting a smile on a lot of faces! And talking of smiles and of Christmas shopping, there's now another way you can help us…

If you happen to be shopping via Amazon, here's another way to help us. AmazonSmile customers can now support St Andrew's Children's Society in the Amazon shopping app on iPhones and Android phones! Simply follow these instructions to turn on AmazonSmile and start generating donations for us.

1. Open the Amazon Shopping app on your device.
2. Go into the main menu of the Amazon Shopping app and tap into 'Settings'.
3. Tap 'AmazonSmile' and follow the on-screen instructions to complete the process.

Please get in touch if you have any questions.

Dan & Karen Docwra FUNDRAISERS

Virtual Preparation Groups
for Prospective Adopters

At St Andrew's Children's Society, like everywhere else, we have had to adapt to different ways of working during the 'Great Pandemic of 2020'. This has meant meeting the challenge of moving services online to minimise face-to-face contacts including our preparation groups for prospective adopters.

At St Andrew's Children's Society our preparation groups were traditionally carried out over 3 days, across 3 weeks with lots of interaction, input from our experienced adopters and an all-important tasty lunch. Due to the nature of online meetings we shortened our sessions to 3 hours over 3 days, with a 90 minute morning and afternoon session. Our biggest challenge was to condense and present vital information about the nature of adoptive parenting and our children's needs in a shorter time frame as well as creating some interaction for attendees. All of this required a crash course in using the platform Zoom, which has served St Andrew's Children's Society well over the extended period of homeworking.

Although unable to carry out our more active and participatory activities, we were able to field questions via the chat box function and break attendees into groups for them to interact and start building up relationships with each other. This has always been a great by-product of the groups, so this year we also established WhatsApp groups for attendees to start building up those all-important connections, and to begin sharing experiences on their adoption journey.

Despite our concerns about some elements being lost with the video groups, they have gone very well and feedback has been great. Another positive is that due

to these being done remotely, we have merged the Aberdeen and Edinburgh groups, bringing our teams and attendees closer together as well.

Our first online preparation group was in May and we have held three since, meeting the increased interest from people wishing to start a family through adoption. We've gained new skills and pulled together new resources, with a few IT fails stylistically managed on the way. One of our social workers is so confident with their newly found IT skills they claimed they may be headhunted by Apple in the coming months. Alas, Lorna never got that call but she did make sure my IT fails went unnoticed. Go team SACS.

Although we can't wait to get back to our lovely St Andrew's Children's Society homes in Aberdeen and Edinburgh, we have still managed to share our ethos and children's stories with those interested in adoption, and that is something we can all feel proud of!

Michael Optz SENIOR PRACTITIONER

'K has also enjoyed her singing lessons with Jenn, though they have had just three so far, and it's taking K time to get to know Jenn and get her confidence up enough to actually sing. Jenn is also fantastic and really talented too. After the first two lessons when K wasn't joining in with the singing, she made a couple of videos so that K could practice on her own which are great. Jenn is very patient and is great at chatting to K and we're hoping that this week's lesson will result in more singing.'

Adopters Musicares feedback