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

Reflections 20

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

Spring **2019**

13 May – 26 May 2019

Foster Care Fortnight

Foster Care Fortnight™, the UK's biggest foster care awareness raising campaign which is organised by The Fostering Network, runs from 13 to 26 May.

We would like to dedicate this issue of our newsletter to all our amazing foster carers who are transforming children's lives and all the wonderful children who are bringing so much joy to the their foster carers. Thank you for all the incredible work you do.

The Grahams

Sonia and Dave Graham were approved as permanent foster carers with St Andrew's Children's Society in 2005 and have helped transform the lives of the children in their care ever since.

After almost fifteen years of offering the children in their care the most incredible love, support and security they are no longer permanent foster carers with St Andrew's Children's Society but continue to support the children placed, who are now young adults.

Their first child was placed with them when he was six shortly after the Grahams became permanent foster carers with St Andrew's

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News

The Grahams (continued)

Children's Society and he quickly settled into family life on the Graham's farm with their four birth children who ranged in age from five to ten years old.

The farm was a wonderful place to grow up, with tractors, livestock and horses not to mention the many pet dogs and the fact that Sonia also runs a Greyhound Rescue Centre from their farm! The boy they first fostered still lives with them and he has thrived in the Graham's home, secure with the support of his siblings and Sonia and Dave right by his side. After finishing High school he went on to attend college and is now in secure employment.

In June 2007 Sonia and Dave were feeling they had the space to become permanent foster carers to two sisters aged 7 years and 9 years. It took time and reassurance but both girls weren't long before they settled into life on the farm. The girls have done fantastically well with the younger one now at college and the older one at university. Undoubtedly all three children have benefitted hugely from Sonia and Dave's very skilful, supportive approach to fostering. But the support and acceptance from Sonia and Dave's birth children cannot be underestimated. The family have always treated their foster children/siblings as their own enjoying great family holidays both at home and abroad. Sonia has always made a point of making one to one time for each of her children something that she believes fervently in. They have enjoyed weekends away, attending concerts, wrestling matches to name but a few.

Keeping abreast of the latest developments and research in fostering has always been extremely important to Sonia. She has come along to our Prep Groups to talk to future foster carers/adopters about what it's like to care for children who have had adverse experiences in their early life. Her contributions have always been valuable, insightful and honest and everyone has gained so much from her extensive knowledge and experience.

Whilst acknowledging that fostering can have its challenges both Sonia and Dave are so proud of the achievements of all their children.

We are extremely grateful to Sonia and Dave and their family for everything they have done since they became permanent foster carers with St Andrew's Children's Society back in 2005. They have been the most amazing foster carers and we wish them all the very best. We will definitely keep in touch!

LGBT Adoption & Fostering Information Evenings

Did you see us in *The Scotsman*, the *Edinburgh Evening News* and the *i* newspaper raising awareness about LGBT adoption and fostering during LGBT+ Adoption & Fostering Week? Stephen Small, our Director was on *That's TV North* too and Rita Grant, our Support Manager was on BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* as well, talking about LGBT adoption and fostering. We hope the publicity we received will encourage even more people from the LGBT community to think about adopting or fostering a child.

Theraplay

On 20 February 2019, 'An introduction to using Theraplay Dimensions' was delivered to foster carers and adopters. Much of the workshop concentrated on experiential playing, and the theory behind this.This was attended by nine families, all of whom engaged readily with the workshop and recognised the importance and value of play as they begun to develop their attachment to their child/ren. Part of the workshop looked at the early sensory experiences for a child in the womb, and how critical the first days, weeks and months of life are to the developing child.

Family and Friends Session

In early March, we were delighted to welcome 18 people to the first 'Family and Friends Session' at St Andrew's Children's Society.
The aim of the session was to help family and friends of adopters have a better understanding of adoption and the issues adopters face, as well as how they can support the adopters. Social workers often do this work with their adopters' families – this was an extra information opportunity.

Training on Adolescence

On 27 March 2019, we held a workshop on 'Adolescence and Identity Issues'.
This workshop was aimed at foster carers and adopters who are living with teenagers who are going through the adolescence phase of their lives, with the added layer of where adoption fits for them. Exploring the challenges of being a teenager, along with brain changes taking place, we looked at early life experiences their child will have been exposed to. Also strategies that could be applied were reviewed. This workshop was also experiential, encouraging the parents to reflect on their own teenage experiences and challenges.

Aberdeen Team

Mums & Chums Pizza Night

In November we held our first 'Mums & Chums Pizza Night'. This took place on a Saturday night and was attended by fifteen people. Adoptive mums were invited along with their friends or family (the person they felt was a support to them). The idea behind this was to help the people who are the strongest support to adopters to learn more about adoption from other families and to build up peer support. Hopefully, if friends and family have a better understanding of the issues and challenges their loved ones face, then they can be a more effective form of support to them. We had pizza and fizzy juice and adopters have asked for another one to be held in the near future.

Dad's Brewdog Tour

In March we held our first 'Who Let the Dads Out?' group. This was kindly sponsored by Brewdog Breweries in Aberdeenshire who provided us with ten free tickets for dads to undertake a tour of their brewery. The idea behind this was that dads can often feel isolated but are reluctant to engage in what they would consider a 'support group'. This provided a more relaxed way for them to initially meet up and after the tour many of them stayed on for lunch together when their partners and children joined them; again thus building on peer support. The mums through their WhatsApp group had co-ordinated the family meet up after the tour! Another Dads group is planned before summer.

Mums' Relax Day

In January we held a 'Mums' Relax Day' on a Saturday afternoon. This was funded by recent donations from three local adoptive families through their adoption parties/christenings. We had two therapists come in who offered each mum a treatment. These included a back massage; Indian Head massage; Reki and a facial. We then had afternoon tea and cake. We had eleven mums attend and afterwards they went out for tea. The idea was to provide relaxation and build up peer relations. From this, a WhatsApp group has been set up and the mums stay in contact with each other and some of them informally meet up together. The mums have requested another relax day to be organised and we still have donation money left to do so.

Adopted Voices

On 19 November 2018, at Murrayfield Conference Centre, St Andrew's Children's Society, Scottish Adoption, and Adoption UK delivered a conference to celebrate Adoption Week and the Year of the Young Person.

This was a conference with a difference... a steering group of young people planned and executed the day, and did so with aplomb. It is no exaggeration to say the compliments from the participants present were both generous and very high in praise. To quote one adoptive parent, who has a lot of experience of attending many conferences 'this has been the best and most informative conference I have attended by far'. There were workshops delivered by the young people, and their supporting social workers, on topics such as Life Story Work, Misconceptions about Adoption, Pastoral Care, and the school curriculum.

One of the most informative parts of the day was a DVD of the young people interviewing other adopted adults about their experiences as they grew up, and their ongoing questions/challenges. We were fortunate to have two of the adults present, Laura and Robert, who responded to questions and spoke very openly and movingly about their lives.

> *…this has been the best and most informative conference I have attended by far.*

We also had a video of Mr Nicky Murray talking about how he and the staff at his school have embraced a different way of relating and meeting the needs of their pupils to amazing effect. This was important, as the young people were very keen to have their teachers attend the conference so that they could hear a fuller account of what life is like for adopted children and young people in school and the issues they deal with on a daily basis.

The closing address was made by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, after which she spent an hour with the steering group, listening to them and finding out more about them. The questions and comments made to the First Minister were insightful and lively at times, and demonstrated a maturity about how society and government need to be more in tune with the complex nature of adoption – the highs and the lows. They were able to raise the difference between the world of adoption and that of foster care, i.e. the links that are severed and the impact this can have on some, as well as the opportunity to be claimed into a family for life and be offered a secure family for life. The group were invited by the First Minister to the Parliament, which we plan to arrange very soon.

As a spin-off from the conference, we have also been asked to arrange for the young people and their parents to meet with some of the people who are undertaking the Root and Branch

Photo credit: Richard Newton Photography

Review. This is being independently carried out by the Care Review, at the request of the Scottish Government. We are confident our young people will have an influence on policy and ensuring the needs of adopted families are given the attention and support they need in the long term.

As an agency we wish to extend our thanks to all of the young people, their families, and guest speakers who were involved in making this conference the success it was.

(right) Robert McLeod and Laura Brown.
(below right) First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon meets Jodie Thomas.
(left) Bryan Lamb.

Photo credit: Richard Newton Photography

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Further information and feedback about the event can be found here: https://afascotland.com/images/documents/reports/AWS-18-evaluation-report.pdf

Foster Care Fortnight 13 May – 26 May 2019

5,252 children were living with foster families on 31 December 2017. This is three-quarters (75%) of 6,993 children in care looked after away from home and family.
Source: The Fostering Network

…Before moving to Glasgow I was a young boy with a broken heart. Sue supported my transition from being removed from my birth parents and provided me with an abundance of love and support. After this Rita and Peter came along and brought me into their family and since then have made me feel like I was always their son.

Evelyn's Humanist Service

Evelyn Murphy's parents tell us about their daughter's Humanist Service in Leven.

We would like to tell you a little about our family celebration in February 2019. We adopted Evelyn in October 2014. After the official adoption in August 2015, we had a party at home for friends and family. However we had always considered something more official but informal to welcome Evelyn; and that's where The Humanist Society of Scotland came in. Waiting until Evelyn was six – hopefully old enough to remember the ceremony – we met with Sarah Morrison, Humanist Celebrant. Sarah helped us prepare a non-religious ceremony, as we would like Evelyn to make her own choice regarding religion.

We celebrated the love and support our family and friends have shown us since becoming a family of three. We made promises to Evelyn to keep her safe and happy, nurture and support her and her choices as she makes her way through life, even if it means making a few mistakes along the way.

Evelyn's foster mum, sister and brother (who are adopted by another family, but keep close contact), guide parents, grandparents, ourselves and Evelyn all took part in a sand ceremony. Each layer of sand in the bottle below Evelyn's represented the love and support she has from her family that will nurture her and strengthen her development and confidence as

she grows. Now it's impossible to separate these grains of sand, and that is the way it is with families. Now every time Evelyn looks at her bottle she is reminded of all the people in her life who love her and are there to look after her, listen to her and have fun with her.

It was also a privilege to have workers from St Andrew's Children's Society attend who have given us a tremendous amount of support although we noticed they did not take part on the bouncy castle!

Departures...

Maureen's retiral

On Friday 23 November 2018 we held a party for Maureen McEvoy, MBE, our inspirational Chairperson who was retiring after having worked for the charity on a voluntary basis for almost 50 years. It was a super evening and it was great to see so many people connected to St Andrew's Children's Society coming along to wish Maureen all the best. To show our gratitude to Maureen for everything she has done for St Andrew's Children's Society over the years we have named our conference suite The McEvoy Conference Suite. Maureen, thank you for everything you have done for St Andrew's Children's Society.

Sally's retiral

At the end of January Sally Street, one of our Senior Practitioners retired. Sally had been with us for just over five years and will be hugely missed by everyone. While Sally was with the agency, she worked with a number of adoptive families and foster carers. Sally was well liked and respected by families and fellow professionals and her commitment to the agency shone through. We wish you all the very best Sally and hope you have a wonderful retirement.

Fundraising Report

Since I last reported on fundraising for St Andrew's Children's Society, matters of a lot more interest have been making the newsletter headlines. Cheques arriving don't make for a good photo opportunity unless you happen to catch the big smile on my face!

But cheques, or more often the bank transfer notifications, are what my job is all about and July this year marks my tenth anniversary of doing just that for St Andrew's Children's Society. My records show that I have sent out 1,285 funding applications to charitable trusts and foundations – that's a lot of second class stamps! Thankfully, a lot of trusts now have on-line application forms, so that saves on postage. The problem is that each form is different, with a variety of questions, so each form takes a lot longer to complete than adding an address and signature to a variety of standard letters.

One Wednesday last year was cake all round, as we celebrated over £1,000,000 being raised since 2009.

So, just to bring you up to date, over the last year we have received a staggering £132,750 in donations just from trusts. These donations go towards Adoption Support services, Concurrent Care development and a range of other services that make a huge difference to the families and the children that we support.

Our biggest single grant was from the Scottish Government's Children Young People & Families Early Intervention Fund and I am happy to report that this funding has been continued for 2019/20. Next come three trusts that have put faith into our Concurrent Care project, they are, The Henry Smith Charity, Cattanach Charitable Trust and The R S Macdonald Charitable Trust. The Robertson Trust have been donating to our Adoption Support services for over two years.

Last year we introduced our Relax Kids programme thanks to the generosity of Radio Forth Cash for Kids, The Russell Trust and the Nancie Massey Charitable Trust.

And then come those wonderful trusts that have supported our core work. They are The Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust, The Clara E Burgess Charity, The Sir Iain Stewart Foundation, The Souter Charitable Trust, St Katherine's Fund, The John Gordon Charitable Trust and The Stella Symonds Charitable Trust.

But that's not all. A big thank you to the sponsored Marathon Runners and Kilt Walkers and those who make a regular donation to St Andrew's Children's Society. This year's Edinburgh Marathon has five runners supporting St Andrew's Children's Society – Adrian Harrison, Alison McGregor and Elaine McDonald from Forres and Buckie, Chris Thacker and also Thømas Anderson, who is doing a three event challenge including the Marathon.

Thank you all.

Dan Docwra FUNDRAISER

...and arrivals

We welcomed Tara Macgregor as our Head of Marketing.
Tara is a Member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing (MCIM) and a Chartered Marketer and brings with her a wealth of marketing experience. What one thing would Tara stockpile ahead of Brexit? Tea!

Foster Care Fortnight
13 May – 26 May 2019

There are approximately 4,000 foster families in Scotland. The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services need to recruit a further 550 foster families in the next 12 months.

Source: The Fostering Network

St Andrew's Children's Society Events for
Foster Care Fortnight

20 May 2019 6pm–7pm
Dundee Fostering Information Evening
Dundee Science Centre, Greenmarket, Dundee

21 May 2019 7pm–8pm
Dunfermline Fostering Information Evening
Abbeyview Community Centre, 26 Abbey View, Dunfermline

22 May 2019 6pm–7pm
Edinburgh Fostering Information Evening
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

23 May 2019 6pm–7pm
Aberdeen Fostering Information Evening
Aberdeen Arts Centre, 33 King St, Aberdeen

11 Points of advice from a foster carer about foster care

- Enjoy the journey.
- Mistakes are never mistakes if we learn from them.
- Children come to us and the problems they carry are not of their making.
- Make a difference.
- Approach each issue with positive thought "I can and I will."
- Explore all avenues to solve problems.
- Humour can be a great tool in trying moments.
- Don't ever tire of repeating yourself.
- Have fun.
- Those who encounter love and support thrive.
- Love and laughter are very important.

Events Diary

11 May 2019 12 noon–5pm
Edinburgh Pride Community, Charities and Business Fair
Cockenzie House & Gardens, Cockenzie, East Lothian

15, 16, 22 & 29 May 2019 10am–5pm
SafeBase Training
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

25 May 2019 1pm–5pm
Grampian Gay Pride
Charity Tent, Pride Village, Queens Links, Aberdeen

18 June 2019 10am–11.30am
Coffee Morning
St Andrew's Children's Society, Aberdeen

22 June 2019 12 noon–5pm
Edinburgh Gay Pride
Edinburgh University Student Union, Teviot Row House, 13 Bristo Square, Edinburgh

6 July 2019 1pm–5pm
Fife Gay Pride
Outside Kirkcaldy Town House, Kirkcaldy

9 August 2019 1pm–3pm
Teddy Bear's Picnic & Storytelling Event
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

10 September 2019 10.30am–12.30pm
Talking About Adoption / Life Story Work
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

20 November 2019 10.30am–1pm
Internet Safety Training
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

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@StAndrewsChildrensSociety **@sacsadopt**

7 John's Place, Edinburgh EH6 7EL
T: 0131 454 3370

St Andrew's Children's Society
Scottish Charity No. SC005754

West Lodge, Greenwell Road, Aberdeen AB12 3AX
T: 01224 878158