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

Reflections

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

Issue 28 | Summer **2023**

Welcome to our summer newsletter!

Our Centenary celebrations culminated in a Parliamentary Reception at Holyrood at the end of January. The event was sponsored by Christine Grahame MSP, and we were pleased that the Minister for Children and Families, at the time, Claire Haughey, was also present and spoke very supportively about the work of St Andrew's Children's Society.

However, the evening was really all about those people whose lives have been affected by our work and most of our attendees were adopters, foster carers and their children. There were four speakers who really had a profound impact on those attending with their personal accounts of how adoption had affected them and made them the people they are today.

Once again, I would like to thank them for their open and heart-felt testaments and for what they all continue to do to support us. Maureen McEvoy MBE spoke of how St Andrew's Children's Society helped her and her late husband, Jim, fulfil their dream of becoming parents to their five children. Claire Smith, was able to talk about the loving home that her adoptive parents provided to her that allowed her to become the confident young woman she is and how it is shaping her choice of career. Thomas Anderson, a strong supporter of St Andrew's Children's Society for many years talked about his journey to parenthood as the first single, gay man to be approved as an adopter in Scotland. Patrick Carr-Creighton, rounded off the evening with his emotional recounting of how he and his husband, Paul, became fathers to a sibling group of four children. The children were there to support him although, in the case of his youngest son, this support took the form of 'heckling' during his speech!

I would also like to make a special mention of our musician on the evening. Esther Swift is a professional musician and is the daughter of our Chair of Trustees, Robert Swift. One of the pieces of music she played for us on her harp she had composed especially for her adoptive brother, Antony. Her music provided the perfect backdrop to what was a truly memorable evening.

I think it is also important to recognise the support we continue to receive from across the political spectrum, and we should note that Liam Kerr MSP, tabled a motion in parliament congratulating us on our Centenary prior to the Reception and Christine Grahame MSP led a debate in the Chamber following the Reception at which MSPs from all the major parties spoke about the impact of our work on Scottish society in the last 100 years.

The First Minister's recent apology for the unacceptable adoption practices of the past was also welcomed by this agency. Without accepting the fact that during a period of the 20th century civic society took a sometimes harsh and punitive approach to pregnancy outwith marriage, we could not also be proud of the good work agencies like St Andrew's Children's Society did to support thousands of vulnerable women and their children either to help them keep their children or to find loving and supportive adoptive homes for them.

We continue to face the challenges that these difficult economic times present by striving to finding the best adoptive and foster carer families that we can for those children who cannot be raised in their families of birth. Sadly, there are still too many children in Scotland who are in this position, but we are grateful that there are still many couples and single people who approach us to offer their love and commitment.

Stephen Small CEO

(right) Some pictures to give a flavour of the evening. Harpist, Esther Swift, adding to a memorable evening.

Overleaf: Robert Swift, Maureen McEvoy MBE and Stephen Small.

Adoption Support

Aberdeen

It's hard to believe that Easter has already passed us by as we look towards summer in our Aberdeen office. It's been a busy few months but enjoyable too as we welcomed two new members of staff onboard; Brian and Lisa. Both come with a wealth of experience, and it already feels like they have been part of the team forever; I write this with a smile as the word 'forever' can be interpreted in many different ways.

Like our colleagues in the Edinburgh office, we too had our Christmas party. A local magician provided fab entertainment with tricks, games and balloon sculptures. Who knew that one could make a Grinch from balloons? Seventeen children attended this event along with their parents and we also had one family come along who had been matched with their child, but he was yet to move to them.

February saw our first ever Aberdeen SafeBase take place, following on from the course being delivered in Moray last year. In Aberdeen we had four couples attend who are parents to six primary school age children. Two of the families were established several years ago, whilst two of the families are still relatively new to the world of parenting. All four families commented that they had really enjoyed the course and also got to know some other adoptive families. One of the disadvantages of adopting during a pandemic was that it was quite isolating when preparation groups, etc. all ran online.

The mid-term February break was our first ever class with Jack and Heather from Aberdeen City Countryside Rangers Service; we made a campfire and toasted marshmallows and boiled hot chocolate. It was a beautiful sunny day as eleven children trailed off into the wilderness of Hazelhead Park.

In March we completed our three days Preparing to Adopt training. Four prospective families attended this, and social workers have already been allocated to applicants.

During the Easter break we worked with both Aberdeen City Park Rangers and Aberdeen City Countryside Rangers to facilitate classes for our adoptive families. At Duthie Park Winter Gardens, the children helped with Spring planting and also took away their own plant to grow at home. On 15 April families attended Den of Maidencraig to try their hand at pond-dipping. Thankfully the sun shone, and all sorts of weird and wonderful water-life was discovered within the nature reserve.

During April we also held an introduction to Theraplay™ virtual session for two families who are about to start introductions with their children. Their workers will follow this session up face to face.

Debbie McDonald SERVICE MANAGER

Edinburgh

We had our first in person Children's Christmas Party since Covid in December 2022. It was great to see new and familiar faces there – the children milling about and taking part in Magic Gareth's Show.

In January we kicked off the training year with our *Friends and Family Online Training*, which has been really successful to extended family members of adopters. It provides an insight into attachment and trauma, developmental gaps, and how they, extended family can meaningfully and usefully support prospective adopters. This training is offered approximately four times per year online.

On 25 January, the *Introduction to using Theraplay Principles* with our approved adopters and foster carers took place in Edinburgh. This brings to life the significance and value of play to all children, though especially children who have not had this kind of attuned interaction and playfulness in their early years of life. It also reminded parents of how important it is to play themselves. There was a lot of fun had, and the opportunity for adopters and foster carers to make links with each other too.

Our first Preparation to Adopt of 2023 took place in February and we've just finished the May one too. Both were well attended and received by a super interactive group of people. We would like to thank our trusty band of experienced adopters and foster carers, who are very generous with their time. We very much appreciate it when they come along to our prep group sessions to talk about their adoption and fostering experiences. They're always the stars of the show, and we get lots of positive feedback from participants who say that they get so much from hearing from them and having the chance to ask them questions.They also make themselves available to other parents who may be considering larger family groups, or having similar challenges with regard to school/behavioral issues. Their input and advice is invaluable.

During 7–8 March we delivered our *SafeBase Parenting Course* to a group of experienced adoptive parents. Our colleagues in Aberdeen also delivered their first SafeBase of the year up north. We are very grateful to the Gallo Foundation and to John Timpson who generously funded this training. The next Edinburgh SafeBase takes place 3–4 October 2023.

We had the *Adolescence and Identity Training* take place in the Edinburgh office on 19 April 2023. Another valuable training for parents of teenagers who are navigating their way through the challenges of teen life.

Puppet training is something we have had some input on, and on 18 April 2023, Ailie Findley delivered a workshop in Aberdeen to the team there, and on 24 April 2023 to the Edinburgh team. This training supports emotional and verbal communication and is particularly useful for sorting out feelings and emotions.

On 17 May 2023, *Talking about Adoption* took place in Edinburgh. We encourage our families to make talking about adoption as natural as possible, so that as a child grows older, they are also growing in their understanding of their adoption.

Future training: on 14 June 2023 from 10am to 12.30pm Edinburgh will host another *Introduction to using Theraplay Principles*. Do call in or email if you would like to attend. On 21 June 2023, the *Friends and Family Online Training* will take place from 6pm to 8pm.

Do keep an eye on our Facebook page/website for all events – we look forward to seeing you at some stage.

ADOPTION SUPPORT TEAM

'Friends and Family' online training feedback

Thanks, that was really interesting. Great to have ideas of ways to support adoptive parents and having this knowledge will definitely help.

Thank you very much for your time, two hours is a small commitment for such an important process and more than happy to tune in again.

Thank you, very informative, gives us an idea of what is needed from us to support our son.

Fundraising

At the end of 2022, we were able to look back over the very successful celebration of our Centenary year with events for celebration, participation and contribution – and we still had the postponed Centenary Ceilidh and prize draw to come.

The total for our Centenary Fundraising was £24,000, so a huge **thank you** to all the folk who undertook an amazing variety of events for friends and family to support, and in turn donate to our Centenary campaign. Thanks also to our Trustees for organising the Ceilidh and Prize Draw.

So, on to a new year. The Daundering Duo in Aberdeen raised £390 and donations instead of wedding presents to Bill and Leslie's wedding raised over £4,000.

In addition to all the supporters mentioned, we would like to add our grateful thanks to the following organisations for their generosity:

The Scottish Government's Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund (administered by The Corra Foundation) which has extended our funding for a further two years to March 2025, and to Thistledown Trust, Murdoch Forrest Charitable Trust, Baillie Gifford Community Fund, Ponton House Trust, Russell Trust and James T Howat Charitable Trust.

Dan & Karen Docwra
FUNDRAISERS

kiltwalk

Royal Bank of Scotland · Arnold Clark · The Hunter Foundation

Do the 'Kiltwalk 2023' for St Andrew's Children's Society

Aberdeen Kiltwalk: 4 June

You've a choice of:

The **Mighty Stride** of 17.8 miles, or, for families with wee kids, **The Wee Wander** at a nice easy 3.1 miles.

Edinburgh Kiltwalk: 17 September

You've a choice of:

The **Mighty Stride** of 21 miles, there is also the slightly less exhausting **Big Stroll** of 14.7 miles. For families with wee kids, we have **The Wee Wander**, that is a bit longer than Aberdeen's one, at 5 miles.

To register, go to **in.justgiving.events/edinburgh-kiltwalk-2023**
Or **in.justgiving.events/aberdeen-kiltwalk-2023**

The registration fees vary from £20 for the Mighty Stride to £12.50 for adults and £6.50 for kids on the Wee Wander. Please let Dan Docwra (07903 104557) know if you would like St Andrew's Children's Society to repay this to you – make sure you get plenty of sponsorship though!

Staff at St Andrew's Children's Society are going to be walking with you – so choose your walk!

Further details on our website sacsadopt.scot

Centenary Ceilidh

A ceilidh to celebrate St Andrew's Children's Society's Centenary was held on 21 January 2023 at Lauriston Hall in Edinburgh. Adoptive families, supporters and staff danced the evening away to the lively music of the band, Jiginaboot. Halfway through the evening the dancers paused to eat stovies and home baking and the raffle was drawn and prizes given out.

A good time was had by all and there was a great atmosphere with swirling kilts and whooping dancers. Many thanks to all who helped organise the event and who provided food and prizes. Particular thanks to Anne Hampton and Colin (who ran the bar), Celia Borland, Sean and Moira Rafferty, for their delicious home baking, and Claire and Stephen and all the other staff who worked so hard behind the scenes.

As well as having a great night, we raised well over £1,000 for St Andrew's Children's Society.

Robert Swift CHAIR OF ST ANDREW'S CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

New arrivals

Lisa Davidson

Senior Practitioner

I started with St Andrew's Children's Society on 14 February 2023, and continue to be very positive about being part of a dedicated team that provide a high standard of support for adoptive and foster care families. Throughout my working life I have always worked with children in various roles and settings. These roles have included being a playleader, live-in nanny, nursery assistant, residential social worker, children with disabilities social worker, and latterly 14 years with Barnardo's fostering service.

I am a mum of two boys, live in Aberdeenshire and work in our Aberdeen office on a part-time basis. I am delighted to be part of St Andrew's Children's Society, and look forward to meeting prospective adopters and foster carers and working with the wonderful families who are part of this service.

Brian Chalmers

Senior Practitioner

I am delighted to have joined the St Andrew's Children's Society team up in Aberdeen in January 2023. I have worked with children since 2001, when I started my career working in a residential school. I subsequently worked in various children's homes, worked with adults with disability, and then for the last 12 years with Barnardo's fostering team. I am looking forward to finding families for the children out there that deserve to belong in a loving family.

Fostering

Could you foster a child on a short term, long term or short break – also known as respite – basis? We are very keen to hear from anyone who thinks they could be a foster carer for St Andrew's Children's Society. Or perhaps you know someone who would make a perfect foster carer?

We welcome fostering enquiries from people who live within 60miles of Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Elgin.

To help people find out more about fostering through St Andrew's Children's Society, we've added lots of new information to our website including:

- The types of foster care we offer
- Government help and support available to foster carers
  e.g. Did you know that foster carers are classed as self-employed and that they can claim a tax exemption of up to £18,140 per household?
- Who needs fostered
- How to transfer from another agency or local authority to St Andrew's Children's Society
  e.g. If you're a foster carer and moving to Edinburgh from somewhere else.
- There's also a fostering frequently asked questions page (FAQ) that covers many of the most common fostering questions we receive.

However, nothing beats speaking to someone if you have questions about fostering a child, so please do give us a call on 0131 454 3370 and we will be able to answer any questions you have. Fostering is a big step, and so most people want to chat it through before they make that step!

During The Fostering Network's *Foster Care Fortnight*™ campaign we enjoyed holding three events to raise awareness about the important job foster carers do and to try to encourage people to start their fostering journey with us. In addition to holding an event in each of our offices in Edinburgh and Aberdeen we held a Fostering Information event in Elgin Library. Thank you to everyone who came along.

> Finally, we would like to say a massive thank you to our current foster carers. We truly appreciate how much you put into giving the children in your care all the love and support that they need to help them flourish and have a better life. **You really do make a difference and for that we will be eternally grateful.**

Marketing

In November 2022 we held two *Adoption Week Scotland* events to encourage people to think about adopting. Steven McFarlane, one of our adopters, spoke to Radio Forth about his experiences of adoption as part of our campaign, and we would like to say a big thank you to him for doing this as he was on the news so many times the day the story ran that we lost count! Stephen Small, our CEO, also wrote a detailed article for *Scotland on Sunday*.

We were delighted to be featured as a 'New Member' in the winter issue of *Somewhere: for us*.

After the Lord Provost's visit we appeared in T*he Edinburgh Reporter* in November and then again in the December issue to mark our Centenary. Stephen Small talked about the services we offer including counselling for adult adoptees who were adopted through St Andrew's Children's Society. Maureen McEvoy MBE, our former Chair, talked about her own personal experiences of adopting through St Andrew's Children's

Marketing (cont.)

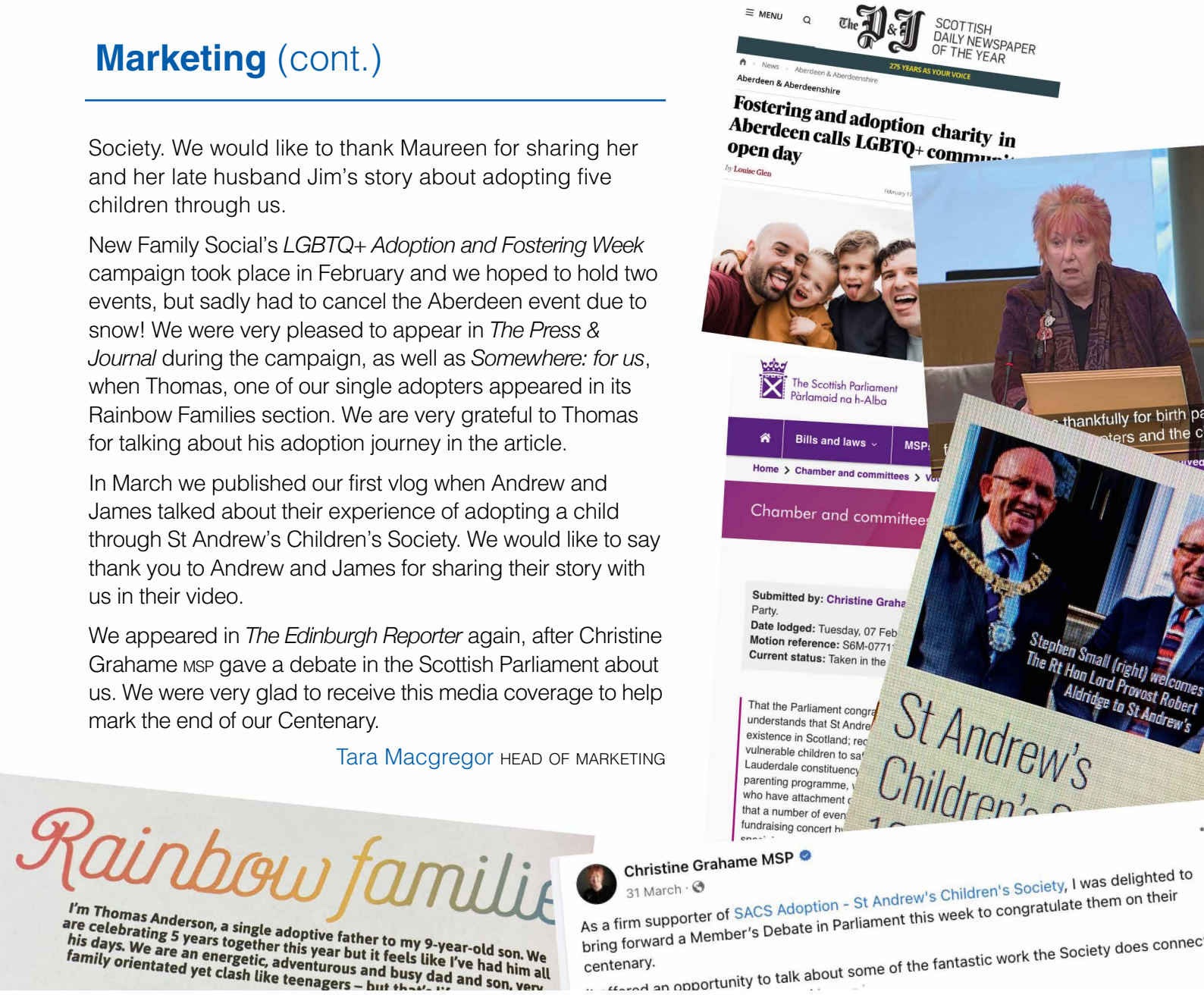
Society. We would like to thank Maureen for sharing her and her late husband Jim's story about adopting five children through us.

New Family Social's *LGBTQ+ Adoption and Fostering Week* campaign took place in February and we hoped to hold two events, but sadly had to cancel the Aberdeen event due to snow! We were very pleased to appear in *The Press & Journal* during the campaign, as well as *Somewhere: for us*, when Thomas, one of our single adopters appeared in its Rainbow Families section. We are very grateful to Thomas for talking about his adoption journey in the article.

In March we published our first vlog when Andrew and James talked about their experience of adopting a child through St Andrew's Children's Society. We would like to say thank you to Andrew and James for sharing their story with us in their video.

We appeared in *The Edinburgh Reporter* again, after Christine Grahame MSP gave a debate in the Scottish Parliament about us. We were very glad to receive this media coverage to help mark the end of our Centenary.

Tara Macgregor HEAD OF MARKETING



Please note, that all our public relations we have generated since the last newsletter can be found in the **'PR & media links'** section of our website (under **'About'**).

Events Diary

14 June 10am–12.30pm
Introduction to Theraplay principles
St Andrew's Children's Society, Edinburgh

21 June 6–8pm ONLINE EVENT
Friends and Family online training

24 June
Stall at Edinburgh Pride

1 July
Stall at Fife Pride

12 July
March Prep Group recall day Aberdeen

12 July
Pond Dipping with Park Rangers Aberdeen

29 July
Stall at West Lothian Pride

30 July 11am–1pm
Summer Picnic
Hazelhead Park, Aberdeen

2 August
Pollinators Class with Park Rangers
Aberdeen

10 August (THUR) 12–3pm
Storytelling picnic Edinburgh

16 August
Senses session with Park Rangers
Aberdeen

17 September
Edinburgh Kiltwalk

11 October 6–8pm ONLINE EVENT
Friends and Family online training

3 December
Children's Christmas party
Lauriston Hall, Edinburgh