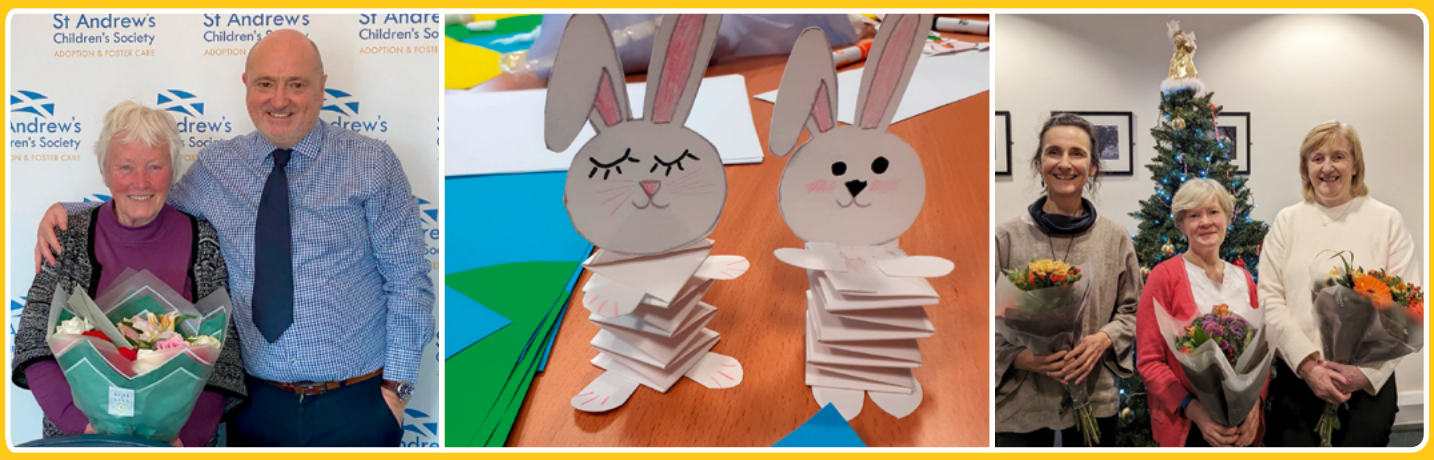
St Andrew's Children's Society
ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

Reflections

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

Issue 30 | Summer **2024**



Welcome to our summer edition

We ended the financial year 2023/24 on a positive having placed more children for adoption than we had targeted for and this was in large measure as a result of the hard work of our social workers to try and find the right child for their adoptive parents.

This, of course is not an exact science and so the families we place children with will encounter challenges to their parenting that they may not have anticipated. We are ever mindful of this and in this edition of our newsletter you will get a sense of the kinds of supports that we offer our families (pages 3 & 4). Some of these supports are low key, activity-based events such as arts and craft sessions in Aberdeen and Elgin at Easter and a Circus Skills Workshop and storytelling at the summer picnic in Edinburgh in August. In addition, we are offering a wider range of more formalised training and support events from both offices on themes such as Trauma Informed Parenting, SafeBase, Therapeutic Parenting and Introduction to Theraplay™.

We have had a number of staff changes since the beginning of 2024 that you can read about later in this newsletter. We have said goodbye to three long-standing workers; Rita Grant; Sandra Williams; and Cathryn Thomson. We keenly miss what they brought to their respective roles professionally but also what they contributed to the organisation in terms of their personalities and dedication.

However, change is an inevitable part of life and so we have been able to welcome three new staff members who have already made their mark on the agency and all of whom have brought fresh ideas about how we can be the best we can be for the children and families we serve (pages 2 & 6). We also marked the 80th birthday of Eileen Mitchell (page 1). She has been one of our cleaners since we moved to our current Leith base. She plans to hang up her dusters later this year. No one will be able to get our brass plaque and letterbox as gleaming as she does!

In order to ensure that we are offering the kinds of support that families need we regularly seek the views of those who have received a service from us.

We recently conducted a Survey Monkey consultation with our families, and I would like to thank everyone who sent back their views on how they received our services. Be assured that your comments will be influential in helping us shape those services going forward.

I hope that you will also take time to read about our Brand Ambassador scheme (page 8). Our hope is that those who have had lived experience of adoption and foster care can help us to promote our work, with a view to attracting more people to think about helping vulnerable children through adoption and foster care.

There is a national shortage of foster carers for children and so we are making a special effort to try and recruit new carers. Please take the time to look at the blogs and fostering section of our website to hear some of our 'memorable moments', as well as hear from one of our longest serving carers and the young man that has become one of their family through foster care (page 7).

I hope you all have a wonderful summer and remember that we are here if you feel you need to talk anything through or require a bit of support during the long summer holidays.

Stephen Small CEO

Leavers: Saying goodbye to...

Rita Grant

Adoption Support Manager

We are still adjusting to the retirement of Rita Grant at the end of last year. Many of you will have had contact with her and will remember her sensitive and respectful approach to supporting children, young people and their adopters.

Rita joined us in 2007 as a Senior Practitioner and was involved in all aspects of our family placement work. However, it soon became apparent that she had particular skills in working with children and families who needed some extra support and so in 2012 was successfully appointed to the post of Adoption Support Manager. She very quickly got to task remodelling and driving forward our Adoption Support Service. She was involved in introducing our SafeBase Therapeutic Parenting Programme and as part of that helped to introduce Theraplay to our staff and families as an accessible way to help adopters connect on an emotional level with children.

Her sense of humour and positive approach to her work and in her relationships with her colleagues will be her legacy, alongside how she touched the lives of all those she supported through the years.

Sandra Williams

Administrator

Sandra came to St Andrew's Children's Society in 2007. Sandra had worked for the Halifax for many years before taking a break to have her two children. When the children started school Sandra came to work for us part-time. Now her son is travelling round Australia and her daughter is a primary school teacher!

Sandra was a great asset to the admin team and all staff appreciated her patience and calm, methodical approach. This was especially evident when co-ordinating the Theraplay training events whilst also organising Rita!

Sandra was a big part of St Andrew's Children's Society for many years and will be missed, but we wish her well in her retirement.

Adoption & Fostering Support

Aberdeen and Elgin

During last Christmas we tried something new and booked a local community centre for our children's Christmas party. Ferryhill Community Centre proved a big success, being staffed by lovely workers and volunteers. They also provided us with a bouncy castle and quiet room for families. Feedback was very positive about the venue and our magician, so we hope to be able to use both again this year, although it took us ages to get some of the dads off the bouncy castle!

Our last few months have seen our Aberdeen office feeling inspired by art. A local artist, Ian Cargill, kindly donated over a dozen pieces of his artwork to decorate the bare walls of our office. Being local, his landscapes of the north-east of Scotland are familiar and comfortable for us. As I write this, I am sitting looking at a beautiful painting in my office of the rugged Portknockie coastline. Ian's artwork has helped disguise the legacy of ripped wallpaper we inherited when we moved in, which is about to be rectified as our office gets redecorated next week.

Ian's art inspired us to hold our own arts and crafts sessions in the Easter holidays. We held a session in our Aberdeen office and also one in Elgin library. Both were well attended, and the children all left with lovely crafts to take home. The parents all left covered in PVA glue and glitter!

In February, we held a *Trauma Informed Parenting* workshop facilitated by Suzanne Scott. This explored therapeutic parenting and the impact of trauma in adopted and looked after children. Suzanne also gave families strategies to try at home with their children when they were feeling fearful and dis-regulated. We had adoptive and fostering families attend from Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. We delivered the same workshop for our Moray and Highland families in May in Inverness library.

Debbie McDonald SERVICE MANAGER

(top) Artwork from our Easter activities in Elgin.

(middle) *Portknockie* by Ian Cargill, now adorning our office.

(above) *Trauma Informed Parenting* workshop; Artwork from our Easter activities in Aberdeen.

Edinburgh

Adoption support kicked off in January by welcoming five families to *Introduction to Theraplay*. This workshop is the first stage of St Andrew's Children's Society's three-part core training programme:

1. Introduction to Theraplay
2. SafeBase Parenting
3. Parent and Child Theraplay

If you missed any element of your core training, don't worry, as it's never too late. In fact, attending later on down the line, when you know your child and their behavior better, can be more helpful. More so, within the current climate with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) waiting times, undertaking one of our filmed assessments can be an excellent way to gain more insight into your child's development, behavior and family within the dynamics.

This year, we've also launched several new adoption support services. In March, we ran the first installment of two virtual workshops: *Settling to Learn 2024*. This two-part workshop is open to all parents who have children either eligible to start P1 and S1 in 2024, or prospective adopters/foster carers who have children joining their family who will undertake a school move. The training aims to support families to consider deferment, plan a therapeutic/enhanced transition, learn how to access support and provide individual consultation from both our Senior Practitioners and Paula Gilhooly, Education Lead at Adoption UK. The second part of the training will take place in October 2024 and any families who didn't make part one are still welcome to sign up. For all families who have children due to start P1/S1 in 2025, please see the events section for *Settling to Learn 2025*.

Virtual Parents Communities

In April, we launched two new virtual groups for both fostering/adopting families. Our Virtual Community (for parents of young people under 13) and our Parents of Teens Virtual Community. These groups have proved to be a safe and welcoming space for our families. Within the session, families have come along to share how they're getting on – the highs as well as the lows – gain advice, share resources or sometimes just listen.

> *From a personal experience, I was a bit apprehensive about the group. This is mainly because I am usually terrible at sharing experiences and I didn't think anyone else would be in a position similar to ours.*
>
> *I couldn't be more wrong. My first dial in was very relaxing and everyone was friendly and accommodating. It was very refreshing to see that there are parents out there experiencing very similar issues as ourselves. Wanting to share their stories and see if they can get any ideas on how to cope with life's little (big) problems.*
>
> *All in all, I found it a great experience. A lot of the time it was peppered with fun and humour! It's good to get a bit more perspective and some ideas and thoughts from everyone else. As Arnold would say, we'll be back!"*
>
> **Adopter** of 13 and 15 year olds

Events and Services for Children & Young Adults

This year's Summer picnic will take place on Friday 2 August, at our Edinburgh Office from 12–2pm. As well as bringing back Ailie to provide storytelling for our younger children, we'll also be running a Circus Skills Workshop, which we think will be a hit with our older children.

For a number of years, we have run a Teen Group, for S1 upwards. This is a small and gentle group, which continues to provide a calm space for young people who might otherwise struggle to attend busier activities. This summer/autumn term, we'll be starting two new groups for children and young adults. The Gang, for children in P5/6/7 and The Voice for young people age 15 – 25. The Gang will be mostly based outdoors and will involve high energy games, bush crafts and safe risky play. The Voice – our working name – is ideal for young people with an interest in exploring themes around adoption, or who might want to contribute to the agency. We hope that in time, members of The Voice will be paid for the work they do and that they will be able to help us run groups for younger children, become peer mentors, as well as support us to #KeepThePromise.

To learn more or enquire about any of our services, please contact rmcbride@standrews-children.org.uk

ADOPTION SUPPORT TEAM

Fundraising

(far left) Lisa Davidson and Brian Chalmers from our Aberdeen office did the Aberdeen Kiltwalk and raised £1,118. This is them after completing the Mighty Stride (18 miles) on a very sunny day. Well done Lisa and Brian!

(left) Quiz night at the Wellington Hotel, Pub & Grill, Aberdeen.

I am usually an optimistic individual – my glass is nearly always half-full – so why am I a fundraiser? The period that elapses between completing funding applications and receiving a donation seems to get longer and longer. It is a fact shared by many fellow fundraisers, that the number of funders that we can apply to has dropped considerably since the Pandemic. Either merged, closed or the causes that can attract funding have become less.

My optimism is frequently rewarded thanks to a number of funders that have previously funded us. It was particularly gratifying when a past funder contacted us, inviting a further application after a previous grant had expired. This was the case with The Garfield Weston Foundation resulting in an award of £60,000 funding over two years.

We are very grateful for other funding totalling £39,600, received since the winter newsletter. This funding has come from the Scottish Government's Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund, The Robertson Trust, The Ward Family Trust, Trelix Charitable Trust, The W M Mann Foundation and The Raymond Kenneth Thomas Harris Trust.

No one had raised funds for us by entering a boxing tournament until Jason Hood told us that he was taking part in a charity boxing event in March. Jason said, "I'm trying to raise as much money as possible to help young kids that have been fostered or are in children's care units". He did just that, raising a fantastic £1,766.

Other thanks go to Michael and Claire, the manager and assistant manager of the Wellington Hotel, Pub & Grill in Aberdeen. They organised a Charity Christmas Quiz, with St Andrew's Children's Society receiving £510.

We are very grateful to Sian and Mike who raised £190 after taking part in the Aberdeen Kiltwalk. They totally smashed their target which was £100. Well done!

Now to future news. We are once more taking part in the Edinburgh Kiltwalk. Lisa Davidson and Brian Chalmers, two of our Aberdeen social workers, completed the Aberdeen Kiltwalk on 2 June. The Edinburgh staff will be Kiltwalking on 15 September as 'St Andrew's Children's Society Kiltwalkers 2024', so why not join them by registering for the Kiltwalk…?

Dan & Karen Docwra FUNDRAISERS

Do the 'Kiltwalk 2024' for St Andrew's Children's Society

Edinburgh Kiltwalk: 15 September

kiltwalk

Royal Bank of Scotland · Arnold Clark · The Hunter Foundation

There's the **Mighty Stride** of 20.5miles, there is also the slightly less exhausting **Big Stroll** of 11.2miles. For families with wee kids, we have the **Wee Wander** at 4.6miles.

Registration fees vary from £20 for the Mighty Stride and Big Stroll, 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!

To register, go to **in.justgiving.events/edinburgh-kiltwalk-2024**

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

New starts

As a new member of the team, I bring a strong commitment to the third sector and a passion for social enterprise. I am currently pursuing a degree in Business Management with Entrepreneurship and I am eager to embrace the challenges this new role brings. I look forward to helping make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and new families and learning from each unique experience.

Outside of work, I enjoy staying active and being creative, with running and sewing being my two favourite hobbies.

Rex McBride ADMINISTRATOR

I am delighted to have joined St Andrew's Children's Society. It is such a welcoming place, with a wealth of experience in adoption and fostering.

Prior to joining the team, I worked within a local authority for a number of years. First, in a busy practice team as a children's social worker for six years. Following that, I worked within the fostering team for six years before moving to the adoption team for four years.

I am thoroughly enjoying getting to know and working with the lovely families who are part of the service, as well as new prospective adopters and supporting them along their journey.

Geogia Gialpa SENIOR PRACTITIONER

In January, I was warmly welcomed into the St Andrew's Children's Society team. I didn't have far to move, as my previous role was just around the corner with Scottish Adoption & Fostering. I worked there for six years as a senior practitioner, and latterly as a manager within adoption support. My career in social work started in 2000, working as a residential childcare officer and then as a manager at Southhouse Close Support Unit. This was followed by roles in Kinship Care and Family Based Care with City of Edinburgh Council and Midlothian Council.

I think I've found my perfect job working in adoption support. I love that it allows me to combine my interest in attachment, while still being part of lots of groups and face to face work, with children, young people and their families. No day is ever the same. Last week I facilitated one of our new online parents communities, but left work the next day covered in stickers and paint!

I hope to continue to grow our adoption/fostering support services. I also look forward to meeting many more of our families at the groups, events and training we have planned for the rest of the year.

Melanie Thomson ADOPTION SUPPORT MANAGER

Marketing

Fostering Moments

Did you see our special vlog which we made to thank our incredible fostering families?

We published it during Foster Care Fortnight™, a nationwide campaign organised by The Fostering Network to raise awareness about fostering and how foster care transforms lives. We're always proud to take part in this fostering campaign because we see firsthand what a difference fostering makes. Some of us talk about special fostering moments we have experienced in the vlog. You can watch it if you go to the **Blog & further reading** tab on our website and then click on **Blog**.

While on our website, why not look at our new fostering stories page which we published during Foster Care Fortnight? A couple of our fostering families share their feelings about fostering and what a difference it has made to their lives. We are hugely grateful to our families for sharing their fostering stories with us.

'Speak to an adopter'

Thinking about adopting? Would it be helpful for you to speak to someone who's already been through the whole adoption process before you decide if it's right for you?

Well, now you can. We have introduced a new **Speak to an adopter** scheme. If you're thinking about adopting through St Andrew's Children's Society, you can speak to one of our adopters. They would be happy to answer your questions and share their adoption journey experiences with you.

Please email info@standrews-children.org.uk, or call 0131 454 3370, if you would like to find out more or visit the 'Speak to an adopter' page on our website.

Forth 1 interview

Patrick and Paul, two of our adopters, talked about adopting ***four*** young siblings at the ***same*** time, so that they wouldn't be separated on Forth 1 during LGBTQ+ Adoption & Fostering Week. What a remarkable family they are. You can read their adoption story in our blog post – *The Promise in Action…one year on…* on our website. Thanks to Patrick and Paul for helping to raise awareness about the importance of keeping siblings together.

Please leave us a review

Have you adopted or fostered a child/ren through St Andrew's Children's Society? Have you received adoption or fostering support from us?

Please consider leaving a review on one of our Google Business Profile pages.

How to leave a Google review for us **in 4 easy steps**

1. Make sure you are signed into your Gmail email account – you can create one for **free**, if you don't have one.
2. Go to our website – sacsadopt.scot
3. On the homepage you will see a section asking you to leave a review. Open it.
4. Click on one of these links and leave a review:
   - **Review Edinburgh**
   - **Review Aberdeen**

Are you on Facebook? You can leave a Facebook review for us in this section of our website too – you don't need a Gmail email account to do this. Click on the Facebook review button.

Please contact us if you experience any problems leaving your review. We thank you in anticipation.

Marketing *continued*

Could you become a Brand Ambassador for us?

Could you help spread the word about the important work we do? It could be anything from speaking at one of our Preparation Groups (Prep) or Information events, to speaking to the press, to speaking to prospective adopters as part of our new Speak to an adopter scheme. It could even be writing something for our next newsletter or a blog post! We would love to hear from you if you can help us in any way, however big or small.

Please email info@standrews-children.org.uk **or call 0131 454 3370, to let us know you would be interested in becoming a Brand Ambassador for us and we'll get back to you.**

March with us at Pride!

Are you free on Saturday, 22 June? March with us at Pride Edinburgh! We're also going to have an information stall at Pride Edinburgh, so come along on the day to the McEwan Hall if you'd like to chat to us about adopting or fostering.

Then on Saturday, 20 July we will be taking part in Glasgow's Pride March. Last year's event was a great experience and so we're looking forward to doing it again this year.

Would you like to join us on either of these Pride marches? Please let your social worker know or call 0131 454 3370 and speak to the Duty Worker.

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

10 Jun 1–2pm ONLINE EVENT
Lunch Time Connective Parenting
Every second Monday over 6 sessions starting week beginning 10 June.

11 Jun 11.30am–12.30pm ONLINE EVENT
Lunch Time Connective Parenting
Every second Tuesday over 6 sessions starting week beginning 10 June.

19 Jun 6–8pm **ONLINE EVENT**
Friends and Family online training

22 Jun
Edinburgh Pride

24 Jun 10.30am–12.30pm
Support Group Coffee Morning
Aberdeen

26 Jun 6.30 – 8pm **ONLINE EVENT**
Virtual Parents Community
Takes place on the last Wednesday of the month via Teams.

27–28 Jun
Prep Group Aberdeen

1 Jul 6.30 – 8pm **ONLINE EVENT**
Virtual Parents of Teenagers Community Group
Takes place on the first Monday of the month via Teams.

10 Jul Time dependent on tide
Collieston Beach: Family fun session
Aberdeen

20 Jul
Glasgow's Pride March

22 Jul Time dependent on tide
Aberdeen Beach: Family fun session
Aberdeen

27 Jul 11am–2pm
Moray/Highland Picnic Forres

2 Aug 12–2pm
Summer Picnic Edinburgh

10 Aug 10am–12pm
Pond-dipping with Park Rangers
Maidencraig, Aberdeen

17 Aug 11am–2pm
Aberdeen Picnic
Hazelhead Park, Aberdeen

18 Sep 11am–1pm
Parenting a teenager Aberdeen

18 Sep 6–7.30pm ONLINE EVENT
Parenting a teenager (virtual option)

18–19 Sep
SafeBase in Moray Elgin

30 Sep 1–2pm ONLINE EVENT
Lunch Time Connective Parenting
Over 6 sessions starting week beginning 30 September.

1 Oct 11.30am–12.30pm ONLINE EVENT
Lunch Time Connective Parenting
Over 6 sessions starting week beginning 30 September.

10 Oct
9.45am–1pm Prospective adopters & families already parenting siblings
2–4.30pm Families already parenting siblings
Siblings: What adopters/foster carers need to know
Venue tbc

22–23 Oct 10am–4pm
SafeBase Parenting Programme
Edinburgh

28 Oct 12–1.30pm **ONLINE EVENT**
Settling to Learn: Primary School Virtual Workshop

29 Oct 12–1.30pm **ONLINE EVENT**
Settling to Learn: High School Virtual Workshop

Scan me to visit our site to find out more:

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