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

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Reflections

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

Issue 33 | Autumn **2025**

Welcome to our autumn edition

I hope that everyone reading this edition of our Reflections newsletter has had a great summer. I am sure that the good weather we had meant that you were able to be outdoors doing and seeing interesting things and places.

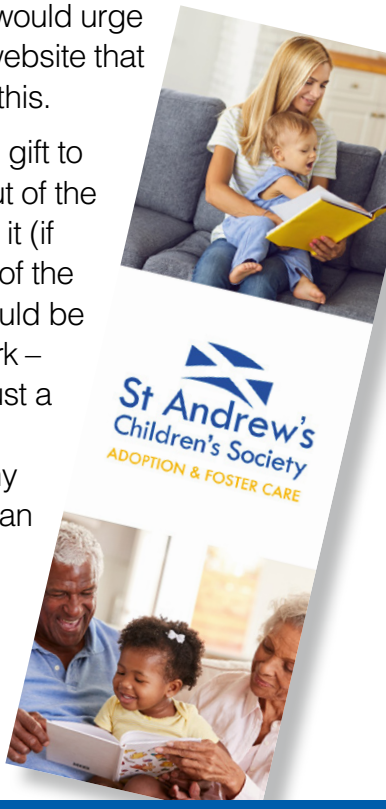
I hope you will find this autumn edition of our newsletter an interesting read. I have given some of my 'reflections' on my 32 years working for this amazing organisation in our *Meet the Team* section.

As usual we have included a run-down of some of the events and training sessions we have run recently, and I hope this will encourage you to take up the offer of attending some of these events if you think you and your family would benefit from it. We are also open to suggestions from you about things you think we could do in terms of training and support. If you have any suggestions, then please send them to Mel Thomson, our Adoption Support Manager at mthomson@standrews-children.org.uk.

Tara Macgregor, our Head of Marketing & Fundraising, has also highlighted our ***We won't stop until every child feels safe and loved*** fundraising campaign and I would urge you to read the blog on our website that explains the thinking behind this.

You will have noticed our little gift to you of a bookmark that fell out of the newsletter when you opened it (if you didn't receive your copy of the newsletter in the post, we would be happy to send you a bookmark – please see page 6). This is just a reminder to say that we are always pleased to receive any donations and support you can offer to help us fund our adoption and foster care support services.

Stephen Small CEO



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Meet the Team **Stephen Small |** Job title **CEO**

This month the spotlight is on Stephen Small, our CEO.

When did you join St Andrew's Children's Society?

In 1993 I was working for Midlothian Council with foster carers who specialised in caring for adolescents. In the 1980s and into the 1990s there had been a big 'push' to move adolescents out of residential care facilities into family settings. I had done this job for around seven years but had always been interested in doing some permanence/ adoption work. There was an opportunity to do a year's secondment to St Andrew Children's Society for two days a week. As a Catholic, I had been aware of the agency but did not know much about it. I applied for and was successful in getting the secondment and started in September 1993.

Stephen pictured back in 1995.

How has your role evolved since joining the charity?

This was a very small organisation at the time with one full-time Principal Social Worker, Shiona Easton, and two part-time social workers, Denise Burgess and Sue du Porto, with a part time administrator, Thelma Dewar.

About 6 months after I started, Shiona Easton became ill and after a while it became clear that she would not be returning to her job. As an interim measure, I was asked if I would be willing to go full-time and extend the secondment for another year. Towards the end of my second year the agency decided to create the role of Director and although I had no real management experience, I had loved working here and so I decided to apply for the job and surprisingly was successful. I started as full-time Director (changed to CEO in 2021) in September 1995.

What's the most rewarding part of your job and why?

On a personal level, I think the most rewarding thing about this job has been the privilege it has afforded me to meet some extra-ordinary people who have come forward to adopt and foster children in the name of St Andrew's Children's Society. The families that I have had the honour of playing a small part in the creation of, have consistently shown me the human impact of what I do and seeing the remarkable children, young people and adults who have flourished in these families is what has allowed me never to doubt that my job was worth doing.

In terms of my professional life, I think this job has allowed me to develop my understanding of what children really need to flourish, however, understanding this is not enough. I have been able to make decisions that have helped the agency do it's very best for the families and children we support.

None of that could have happened without the team of people who make up the staff and Board of Trustees, sharing a vision and making change happen. When people become involved in the work of St Andrew's Children's Society their commitment tends to last so we don't have a high staff or trustee turnover. This consistency makes a real impact on the lives of children.

What one event in our history stands out most for you and why?

After all this time being involved with St Andrew's Children's Society, there is not just one event that stands out for me.

To have been able to work alongside Maureen McEvoy, as Chairperson of our Board, for so much of my 32 years has been such a feature of my time with St Andrew's Children's Society. So, her retirement in 2019 after over 50 years of involvement was a significant event and whilst no one person is bigger than the agency, her impact as an adopter and a trustee has been immense.

Whilst St Andrew's Children's Society has always had foster carers to take children on a temporary basis to allow birth mothers to decide if adoption was right for them and their child, it was a big decision for us to establish a more formal foster care service in the mid-1990s. My previous experience working with foster carers in a local authority setting had given me insight into the powerful influence a good foster carer can be in the lives of vulnerable children so I knew we could make a success of developing such a service at St Andrew's Children's Society. The calibre of the foster carers we have managed to recruit has proven that to have been a significant development in our history.

The introduction of the Sexual Orientation Regulations in 2011 significantly widened the range of people who could adopt. As a charity with its roots as a faith-based organisation, we made the decision to sever our links with the Catholic Church in order to comply with the new equality legislation. This meant that we were able to embrace the wider definition of what a family

Stephen now, in his role as our CEO.

was, and how this was good for children. This wider societal change was huge, and I am proud of how this agency adapted so quickly to this change.

In a more practical sense, when we moved to our current offices in Leith in 2003, we were able to grow significantly in terms of staff numbers but particularly in the range of services we could offer from such a wonderful building.

In a similar way, when we established a new service based in Aberdeen, offering our services to the North-East of Scotland in 2013, we were able to extend the range of our services to an area of the country that had no voluntary adoption agency operating there.

Landmark celebrations such as our 75th, 90th and 100th anniversaries stand out for me because the fact that we have been around long enough to celebrate them says a lot about how relevant what we do for children still is.

Charlie Egan on BBC Scotland

Did you see Charlie Egan on BBC Scotland's *Reporting Scotland News at Seven* in June? Charlie, who took part in our *Meet the Team* feature in the last issue of our newsletter, was interviewed by Laura Maciver for the TV interview. He talked about what we, along with the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA), are trying to do to attract more adopters for children of Black, Asian and other diverse ethnicities. One of the things Charlie discussed was the new advice guide for adopters – *Adopting children of Black, Asian and other diverse ethnicities*, which can be found on our website. Well done Charlie!

Charlie Egan was on BBC Scotland.

Adoption & Fostering Support

Aberdeen & The North East

Our regular update from our northern office…

As a team we continue to try and offer different experiences for our families, so in March we trialled a Saturday Kids Club, aimed at primary school age children. The aim of this was to build on parent/child attachments through quality time together and support youngsters with their peer relationships. We had nine children attend along with a parent over the three sessions. We made air clay creations, played a blow football tournament, read stories, created beautiful sun catchers, did an Easter bunny drive and had snacks as a group. Feedback has been positive, so we hope to run some more sessions later this year on in-service days.

We have also tried shaking up our Dads' Group by offering a night of playing pool and socialising instead of being in our office eating pizza… It's a hard life sometimes facilitating groups, but Brian and I are willing to eat pizza if it helps the Dads bond over food! We are also looking to expand our Dads' Group up into Moray.

We would like to thank both Aberdeen City Council Countryside Ranger Service and Aberdeen City Duthie Park Rangers for their continued support. Through the Easter holidays they have facilitated classes for us in various locations where we have undertaken ponding and planting. Who needs to go on a bear hunt, when we can go on a minibeast hunt instead?

Also in March, Lisa and Shiona ran an Introduction to Theraplay® session where five of our newer families attended. As well as

Some of the beautiful artwork from our Aberdeen Saturday Kids Club.

We all had fun with the Aberdeen City Council Countryside Ranger Service pond dipping at Maidencraig Nature Reserve.

(left) Everyone enjoyed the Senses Workshop with Duthie Park Rangers too!

We had a great Planting Workshop with Duthie Park Rangers.

learning more about Theraplay, this has helped them start to build their peer relationships now that they are part of our St Andrew's Children's Society family. We look forward to the next stage of their adoption journey.

For all you artistic parents and foster carers out there, keep an eye out for our next Mums' Crafts Group. The one we ran in May was attended by eight families, many of whom all went out for lunch afterwards. Velga and I were quite shocked that many of them did not want to take their colourful creations home with them, so these now adorn our offices.

Debbie McDonald SERVICE MANAGER

Edinburgh

Spotlight on training

Are you a member of our Virtual Parents Community? If not, now is a great time to get involved. Once a month, two of our Senior Practitioners facilitate an online space that can be accessed by both adopting and fostering families from Edinburgh and Aberdeen. We have a group for parents of under 13's and a group for those parenting teenagers. Since the group started, we've trialled different approaches to the time, day and themes. In 2025, we've had casual sessions, where families bring their own questions, problems or news, but we've also invited speakers to talk to us on topics such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), neurodiversity and internet safety. The group is also a great way to access further support from the agency. Sessions can be used as an opportunity to have consultations with our social workers and often problems shared can lead to families getting direct support for things they didn't know we could help with. There have been some teething problems associated with using Microsoft Teams™. Going forward we will be using the same links/ access codes for every session. Please see the enclosed adoption/ fostering training events page for the remaining dates for 2025.

If you'd like to receive the access codes and get up to date information about the themes, please email info@standrews-children.org.uk and ask to join the WhatsApp group for the Virtual Parents Community.

Mel Thomson ADOPTION SUPPORT MANAGER

Let's keep in touch

Do we have your current email address? Did you give us your work email address when you first contacted us but have since moved jobs? So we can keep in touch, please send your new email address to our Duty Worker at info@standrews-children.org.uk.

Fundraising

We won't stop until every child feels safe and loved

We have just launched our new fundraising campaign – *We won't stop until every child feels safe and loved*.

We came up with the idea for the fundraising campaign as a team at our Staff Development Day in June. You can find out more about how we decided upon it by reading our latest blog post on our website by clicking **Blog and further reading** and then **Blog** – sacsadopt.scot/blog-further-reading/blog.

Bookmark

We hope you like our new bookmark – please see front cover! We have included one with every copy of the newsletter that was posted out.

If you haven't received one, or would like more, please call 0131 454 3370 or email info@standrews-children.org.uk and we will pop as many as you would like in the post to you.

Leave a gift in your Will

Our *Leave a gift in your Will* page is now live on our website. On it, you can find out how to leave a gift in your Will to St Andrew's Children's Society and the difference it would make to our families. You can find the new page by clicking on **About us**, then **Support us** and then **Leave a Gift in your Will** – sacsadopt.scot/leave-a-gift-in-your-will

Remember a Charity in Your Will

We are delighted to let you know that we are now members of *Remember a Charity in Your Will*, the charity that helps to raise awareness of charitable gifts in Wills. ***Remember a Charity in Your Will Week*** takes place this year from Monday, 8 until Sunday, 14 September and we're looking forward to being part of the nationwide campaign.

Please keep an eye out for our special *Remember a Charity in Your Will* videos and posts on Facebook and Instagram.

Thank you

We would like to thank the following organisations for their support. Their very generous grants and donations help us to continue to support our adoptive and foster care families:

Garfield Weston Foundation, The Trelix Charitable Trust, Trustees of the John Kirkhope Young Endowment Fund, The National Lottery Community Fund and the Scottish Government's Children, Young People, Families and Early Intervention Fund and Adult Learning and Empowering Communities Fund.

We would also like to thank all the people who have donated to us since the last newsletter and Ooni, who gave us a fabulous Ooni Electric Indoor and Outdoor Pizza Oven. We can't thank you all enough.

Fundraising

The Edinburgh Marathon Festival 2025

Thanks to our incredible supporters, in May we raised over £5,000 at this year's Edinburgh Marathon Festival. We hope you like these photos of just some of our runners from after the big event!

(top row L-R):

Alexandra Sutton ran the Half Marathon; Mel Thomson ran the Half Marathon; Iona and John Hughes ran the 10k.

(bottom row L-R):

David Mendez ran the 10k; Fiona ran the Relay; Jenny also ran the Relay together with Fiona and with Allie and Kelly (not pictured).

Ava Ross ran the 1.5k and Charlie Ross ran the 1k.

A huge thank you to everyone who took part and to all who donated – you've been truly fantastic!

Goodbye Shiona Freeman

Shiona started here in June 2013 when the Aberdeen office was initially established. We worked out of a small serviced rented office with no window and used to joke that we had all relocated to a shipping container. As a service, we have come a long way since then.

Shiona made our first adoption placement in the Aberdeen service and that munchkin has blossomed over the years. I know she and her family still hold a special place in Shiona's heart.

Whilst we are delighted for Shiona as she goes adventuring in her campervan throughout the UK, we do miss her. She has always been a calm voice of reason with nearly forty years of experience. She was particularly talented at delivering training as she always had a story to go with whatever learning she was trying to impart. I am going to end here as it is starting to sound more like an obituary, but we do want to thank Shiona for all she has given to her families (and us as a team).

Debbie McDonald SERVICE MANAGER

Shiona retired in March 2025, after starting with us in 2013. We wish her well!

Unsubscribe

If you would prefer **not** to receive our newsletter again, please send an email to our Duty Worker at info@standrews-children.org.uk or call 0131 454 3370.

Other news

Level One Theraplay & MIM Training and one-day Group Training – November 2025

We are delighted to be hosting in our Edinburgh office The Theraplay Institute's *Level One Theraplay and MIM Training and one-day Group Training* event from the 17–21 November.

Theraplay is a short-term, therapist-guided dyadic psychotherapy that focuses on parent-child relationships and has been accepted by SAMHSA as an evidence-based practice. Theraplay:

- Enhances attachment, self-esteem, and trust in others through joyful engagement.
- Elicits cooperation and improves behaviour issues in children through positive connection rather than focusing on solving negative problems.
- Creates an active and empathic connection between child and parents.
- Focuses on four essential qualities found in parent-child relationships: structure, engagement, nurture and challenge.
- Results in a changed view of the self as worthy and loveable, and of relationships as positive.

In the past, the course has been attended by a wide variety of professionals including psychologists, social workers, school counsellors, play therapists, infant mental health professionals and Additional Support Needs (ASN) teachers.

If you would like to attend this training, please call 0131 454 3370 or email info@standrews-children.org.uk. Full details about the training and the course fees are on our website.

We would also be grateful if you could let any colleagues, friends or family know about the training if you think it would be of interest to them.

We are hosting The Theraplay Institute's Level One Theraplay and MIM training and One-day Group Training event from the 17–21 November.

In memoriam – Kath Fraser

It is with great sadness that I am reporting on the death of one of our panel members, Kath Fraser, the wife of Ian Fraser who is our medical advisor.

Kath joined our Adoption and Fostering Panel in June 2024 having worked for a number of years in teaching and higher education.

She brought warmth and insight to her role as a Panel Member and during the short time she sat on the Panel, was enthusiastic and encouraging of families and staff alike.

We offer our sincere and heartfelt sympathy to Ian and his family as they cope with the loss of Kath who will be sadly missed by Ian and his family as well as everyone connected with St Andrew's Children's Society.

Charlie Egan SERVICE MANAGER

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