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

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Reflections

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

Issue 35 | Autumn **2026**

Welcome to our Autumn 2026 edition

I hope you have had a good family focused summer holiday this year? Your children will be settled back in school hopefully, but we recognise that, as our children return to school after the summer holiday, this can be a time of anxiety and apprehension for some of them. In this edition of the newsletter (page 3), Mel Thomson, our Adoption Support Manager, explains how we try to help families cope with this through our 'Settling to Learn' training. She also refers to our exciting new partnership, that will develop this autumn, with a primary school in Edinburgh that aims to give school staff some tools to help them support children for whom school can be a place of stress.

In this edition there is a particular focus on our Aberdeen service where our newest Senior Practitioner, Abbey Melville (page 8), introduces herself, Lisa Davidson, Senior Practitioner (page 5), tells us a bit about her time since joining the team and the efforts she has made to help with our fundraising endeavours and Debbie McDonald, Service Manager (page 4), gives us some insights into the changes in Aberdeen and of the partnerships we are striking up with some of the local authorities in the North-East.

We conducted a service user survey in the early summer, and we have included, in this edition, some of the feedback from those who have received our support. It is always helpful to get this sort of feedback, so if you have anything you would like to tell us about the service you have received from us then please don't hesitate to contact our Head of Marketing and Fundraising, Tara Macgregor, taramcgregor@standrews-children.org.uk or me ssmall@standrews-children.org.uk.

Finally, it is clear from this newsletter that 2026 has been a year of change in terms of our staff teams. We have welcomed new staff and had to say goodbye to some long serving staff who have retired and moved into their "Third Age" or "Golden Years", when we hope they will enjoy many years of robust health and reduced obligations. I will be joining them this autumn when I step down as CEO at the end of November after over 33 years with St. Andrew's Children's Society. When people say that they are leaving after such a long time in one job, it is often followed by a comment like "people serve less time after committing a serious crime". For me, this could not feel further from the truth. It has been the privilege of my life to have met so many brilliant people who, through their commitment to vulnerable children through adoption or foster care, have transformed those children's life chances. I leave secure in the knowledge that there are still more of these brilliant people yet to contact us. The need for such people has never been greater, so if you know anyone who might be considering adopting or fostering, please tell them about us.

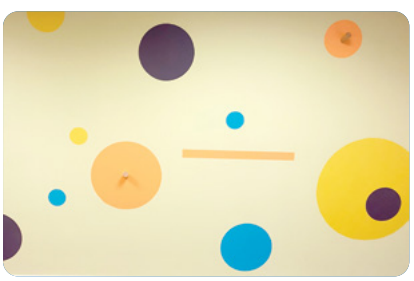
Many of you may know Tracey Turnbull, Service Manager, who will be taking over from me. I know that she understands what makes St. Andrew's Children's Society such a unique organisation and I could not have hoped to have a better person to 'hand the baton' over to.

Stephen Small CEO

Our Edinburgh office has never looked so good!

Thank you so much to Fiona McLachlan, Professor of Architectural Practice from Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (ESALA), part of Edinburgh College of Art at the University of Edinburgh and Fiamma Caseley, Anita Huang, Beini Jiang, Kathleen McBride, Alicja Mrowicka, Yuxuan Wang and Xu Zhang, who are all Architecture Students, for creating a 'live' colour design and installation project in our Edinburgh office. We are delighted with the end result.

We would also like to thank the Dulux Decorator Centre in Edinburgh for so very generously supplying all the paint for the project.



Our colourful games room and stylish wayfinding signage.

Thanks to Lada, Cloe and Pawel (left to right) for our special tree in our Aberdeen office.

We would like to say a very big thank you to Lada, Cloe and Pawel, three super talented art students from North East Scotland College who gave up their free time to paint this incredible tree on our walls in our Aberdeen office. They are in the Introduction to Art & Design Level 5 course and we are looking forward to seeing them again soon when they return with some classmates to complete even more murals for us as part of their Level 6 course.

Thank you so much to Angela Thouless, their great art lecturer, for her help in making it all happen.

Adoption & Fostering Support

Edinburgh spotlight on training

This autumn will bring many new experiences for our children, but a key issue for our families is the impact that a new school term brings. Starting a new school term can be a trigger to changes in behaviour at both school and at home.

To help with this, we've been running our Settling to Learn workshop since 2024. Within these online sessions, parents/carers of both primary and high school students can meet with two of our Senior Practitioners, as well as Paula Gilhooley - Head of Education at Adoption UK.

The session provides a space to talk about what's going well, areas of difficulty and gain information on the school support systems that are available to care experienced young people. The session can also be an opportunity to explore how St Andrew's Children's Society can support and advise your child/young person's school. Support can range from classroom observations, support at school meetings to training/advice for teaching staff. This autumn, we're excited to embark on a pilot project, within which Social Workers from our Edinburgh office will be training Pupil Support Staff at Scienne's Primary in Theraplay® skills.

The next virtual Settling to Learn workshop will take place on 8 October 2026 from 6.30pm - 8.00pm 2026. To reserve a place, please email info@standrews-children.org.uk.

Mel Thomson ADOPTION SUPPORT MANAGER

"We cannot thank St Andrew's Children's Society enough for the help and support they gave us throughout our adoption process; we now have a wonderful family thanks to them."

"Great support from St Andrew's Children's Society not just when we adopted our children but years later when we needed it.

Help our families by leaving a gift in your Will

We're committed to providing lifelong adoption support to every family we work with. However, many people don't realise that we receive no local authority funding for this support once a child has been adopted through us. While we set aside part of the adoption fees we receive to help fund these services, it isn't enough to meet the full cost of the ongoing support our families need. That's why a gift in your Will would make all the difference to our families.

If you choose to leave us a gift in your Will, even a modest cash sum or small percentage can make a lasting difference, while ensuring your loved ones remain your main beneficiaries.

Aberdeen & The North East

I cannot start my section of the newsletter without first thanking Velga, Brian and Lisa for undertaking a fundraising firewalk for us in February. As well as each of them getting toasty toes, they raised a phenomenal amount of money to help fund our post-adoption support service. Thanks also goes to all our families who sponsored them.

This year, we have seen several changes to our settled staff team. Gill retired in spring so that she could spend more time with her family. Gill, like always was a trouper. Even in her last week of work, she had a potential match arranged for one of her families and she also presented another family at panel for approval on her last working day. Gill has left us with big boots to fill but we are fortunate that we have a new member of staff by the name of Abbey. Abbey joins us from Aberdeen City Council and she comes with a bucket load of enthusiasm and a wealth of adoption and fostering experience. With the loss of Gill as our Moray and Highland worker, we have tried to work creatively to ensure our lovely Northen families still have the same quality of service that the rest of our families receive. Gill's caseload is now shared between myself, Abbey and Brian.

We have started working in partnership with Moray Council. We are delighted to start running joint groups with them; our first being our Moray Dads' Pizza Group which will take place shortly. Moray have also opened up their summer family event in Elgin for our families to be able to attend too.

We have taken the working in partnership theme to Aberdeen City Council as well, so they are now joining us to share resources at our Aberdeen Dads' Pizza Group...readers will recognise a theme in that we tempt dads into groups with the promise of pizza! Our plan is to extend an invite to Aberdeen City adoptive mums when we next run our Mums' Group.

We are also delighted to welcome back Brian after his footballing injury in March. Having needed foot surgery, Brian was unable to be called up for the national team at the World Cup leaving our football hopes and dreams dashed.

Debbie McDonald SERVICE MANAGER

Plant pollination fun with the Park Rangers.

We learnt about minibeasts with the City Rangers.

Meet the Team

Lisa Davidson | Job title **Senior Practitioner**

This month the spotlight is on Lisa Davidson, a Senior Practioner.

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

I joined St Andrew's Children's Society on 14 February 2023 after working as a Supervising Social Worker for an Independent Fostering Agency for 14 years. Prior to this role, I worked in residential children's homes and a parent and family residential assessment centre. I have always loved working with children - before qualifying as a Social Worker I worked in a nursery, children's centres and was an Au Pair in Michigan, looking after a sibling group many years ago.

How has your role evolved since joining the charity?

Working in a small team in Aberdeen requires us to be all singing and dancing, we all complete a number of tasks which ensure the service runs smoothly and are not necessarily social work related. First and foremost, I love working with families. It is a great privilege to be part of people's adoption journeys from assessing to matching, and then watching their families grow. I also enjoy delivering training and feel passionate about the benefits of Theraplay and how this helps to support connection and attachment. My role also includes foster care which provides another dimension to my caseload as this requires ongoing support, guidance and supervision. Also lots and lots of meetings!

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

Ultimately I love being part of family finding, creating a family and providing ongoing support as and when this is required. I do enjoy a challenge, finding out new ways of doing things and can often be found researching topics or ensuring I have attempted to find a solution to matters which can not always be resolved. I believe everyone has the ability to grow and develop and I am inspired by the difference our families can make to children's lives.

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

Not one, but many! Since joining the service, I appreciate all the work that goes into fundraising events and I have actively supported this by attending locally sponsored quiz nights; completing the Aberdeen Kiltwalk in 2024 and a sponsored firewalk in 2026. I am intriged to see what our next big adventure will be……!

Lisa Davidson

Fundraising

St Andrew's Day Fundraising Extravaganza

Would you jump out of a plane 10,000ft above the ground and free-fall for 30 seconds – skydiving through the air at speeds up to 120 miles per hour? That's exactly what Stephen Small, Emma Quinn and Tim Rogerson have rather madly freely volunteered to do just for us!

They will hopefully not be risking life and limb when they take part in our charity tandem skydive to fundraise for St Andrew's Children's Society on Saturday, 24 Oct 2026 as part of our St Andrew's Day Fundraising Extravaganza to mark Stephen Small's retiral and to celebrate St Andrew's Day, Scotland's Patron Saint and part of our name since 1983. You can find out more and donate to their Just Giving fundraising pages here – www.justgiving.com/campaign/skydiveoct2026.

We'll also be asking our families to join in with our St Andrew's Day Fundraising Extravaganza, although don't worry, we won't be asking you to do take part in a skydive!

Perhaps you could organise a Scottish bake sale at your work or wear tartan for the day.

Please keep an eye on our Facebook page for more details or contact Tara Macgregor on taramcgregor@standrews-children.org.uk.

Lisa, Velga and Brian (L-R)

They did it!

Three members of our Aberdeen team took on the incredible challenge of walking across 20 feet of wood embers burning at 1,236°F to raise vital funds for our families.

Lisa Davidson and Brian Chalmers, both Senior Practitioners, along with Office Administrator Velga McDougall, showed remarkable courage and determination as they completed the **Aberdeen Firewalk** on 28 February 2026. Their original fundraising target was £600, but thanks to the generosity of supporters, they raised an outstanding £1,895, with a further £450 in Gift Aid.

We are exceptionally grateful to everyone who donated and helped make this achievement possible. Every contribution supports our work and makes a real difference to the families we help.

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:

Allied Vehicles Charitable Trust, The National Lottery Community Fund, the Scottish Government's Children, Young People, Families and Early Intervention and Adult Learning & Empowering Communities Fund (CYPFEI & ALEC) administered through Corra, The Alex Timpson Trust, The Robertson Trust, The Misses Barrie Charitable Trust and The Trelix Charitable Trust.

We would also like to thank all the people who have so generously donated to us since the last newsletter by making a donation to our ongoing We won't stop fundraising campaign.

Last but not least…
A special thank you to our monthly standing order donors. Your recurring donations are so appreciated and we're very grateful for your ongoing commitment to St Andrew's Children's Society.

Edinburgh Marathon Festival 2026 (EMF)

Our incredible runners raised just under £6,000 in May at the EMF on what was possibly one of the hottest weekends of the year. The Sunday was a scorcher!

Thank you to everyone who ran on our behalf and to those who donated so generously. We are completely indebted to you.

EMF 2026 Runners

Marathon

Jefferson Shirley - ADOPTER
Willie McBlain - ADOPTER
Tim Rogerson - ST ANDREW'S CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

Half Marathon

Danielle Haggon - ADOPTER
Duncan Greenhorn - ADOPTER
Sophie - SUPPORTER
Mel Thomson - ST ANDREW'S CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

10K

Iona Hughes - ST ANDREW'S CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

Kids Kilometer

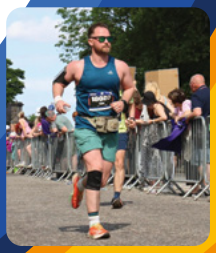
Alice Dougall
Adam Haggon

Junior 1.5K

Olive Dougall

Willie McBlain & his Daughter

Adam & Paul Haggon



Tim Rogerson

Hayley, Alice & Olive Dougall

Lisa Haggon

Paul Munro & his daughters

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who has fundraised for us since the last newsletter…

Alison C, one of our adopters, mountain biked a staggering 100 miles in 24 hours and raised £1,272.50, more than doubling her target of £500. Alison had to change her route close to the day due to the terrible wildfire in the Cairngorms. SSE, Alison's employer, also very generously match funded her total and donated a further £250.

Alison C raised £1,272.50 cycling 100 miles in 24 hours and her employer SSE match funded her amount and donated £250 more!

Paul Munro, who was fostered through St Andrew's Children's Society from the age of 8, ran in the Scottish Half Marathon and raised £705.

Britta and Kirsty Peters took part in the Dundee Kiltwalk and raised just under £450 between them.

We'd also like to say best of luck to **Connor Newman**, who is taking part in The Loch Ness Marathon on 27 September 2026. He is well on his way to reaching his fundraising target of £1000.

Other news

Goodbye

Gill originally started with our agency in Edinburgh in 2012 when she lived in the central belt. She and her husband had planned to move up north, so it felt natural that Gill would then transfer to our Aberdeen team when they moved up to the Moray area. Gill worked remotely, usually coming down to the Aberdeen office once or twice a month and we always looked forward to her visits. She came to social work from a background of having worked in the civil service, and everyone was in awe of her admin and recording keeping skills!

Gill retired in May and we wish her all the best.

Gill McHaffie

Charlie Egan retired in March this year after 29 years of service, initially as a social worker and then as a Service Manager. His time with St Andrew's Children's Society has been characterised by his approachable and amenable personality. Colleagues and the many families he worked with expressed nothing but praise for his compassionate approach to his work. He very much embodied the ethos that we try to live up to as an agency – he always focused on the primacy of the needs of children and how all the adults around them can be helped to remember this. We wish him a very long and happy retirement.

Charlie Egan

Hello

I worked with Aberdeen City Council as a social worker from 2009, working within children and families, permanence, fostering, kinship and adoption. While there I worked alongside St Andrew's Children's Society (SACS) when I worked in permanence, where I was struck by how committed the social workers within SACS were to their families, as well as being very experienced in adoption. It was evident how closely they worked with their families, building positive connections with them and the children in their care, always going the extra mile. The positive and motivated ethos amongst the SACS team was also very apparent, so when a position was advertised for the Aberdeen Team this year, I jumped at the chance to apply!

I was lucky to join the Aberdeen Team in May 2026 and I'm enjoying ongoing interactions with our lovely families, and my colleagues in Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

Abbey Melville

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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.

Text **CHILD10** to **70255** to donate **£10**

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