



Centre for excellence
for looked after children in Scotland

Snapshots of Permanence

What is happening in Scotland?





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Introduction

Welcome to an amazing selection of articles which represent emerging permanence practice from across Scotland collated during the summer of 2013. This profile of practice reflects a range of activities that are underway nationally in which CELCIS has been collaborating with partners, including Local Authorities and other key organisations.

This supplement sits alongside Reach, the CELCIS magazine. The latest edition of Reach contains articles on permanence that give a national perspective to the extensive work going on in Scotland.

Permanence practice is about planning how best to stabilise families before care is needed. Permanence planning aims to support children's reunification with their families following an episode of care. When this is not possible or it is not safe to do so, its aim is then to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family. Permanence for looked after children is not, however, simply about the type of placement. It is also, and perhaps more importantly, about the continuity and stability of relationships, the quality of care provided to children and a commitment to offering 'family' membership.

The Permanence and Care Team (PaCT) vision is to secure sustainable improved outcomes for looked after children, achieved through systemic, strategic and practice changes in processes, procedures and planning, to ensure that safe, stable and appropriate permanence is secured for children and young people who require this.

There is already extensive work taking place across Scotland in relation to securing permanence – a fraction of which is captured in these articles. This stands us all in good stead to continue to make permanence improvements for children and young people.

As a follow-on from this supplement, the Permanence and Care Team at CELCIS will share information about emerging practice and continue to promote learning across the sector. We are committed to sharing our successes, challenges and solutions nationally.

CELCIS would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution and support of partners in the production of this 'Snapshot'.

Liz Brabender
Permanence Team Lead



Committed to Improvement

As Aberdeen City Council continues to review and develop its services, it is working in partnership with the PaCT at CELCIS and has plans to review and revisit processes over the next two years. Graeme Simpson, Children's Services Manager, Alternative Family Care Services, explains more.

The importance Aberdeen City Council attaches to improvements in outcomes for looked after children is demonstrated by the commitment to service redesign by the Children's Service Manager and a designated Practice Improvements Officer. Quality assurance systems and embedding good practice within teams dealing with children, young people and their families is a focus for leadership. Staff attend focus groups that are themed around areas of practice on a monthly basis; staff decide what they wish to discuss and this is then tied into the broader development and learning agenda. A morning a month is set aside for all staff including residential staff from children's homes.

There is strength in the process of early identification of children in Aberdeen and vulnerable pregnancy protocols are effective at highlighting children at an early stage.

A designated Permanence Team manages and supports plans for those children identified as unable to remain at home, assuming responsibility for them at the point a decision for permanence is taken. The Adoption and Permanence panel has an independent chair and this is thought to be particularly beneficial in making robust, competent decisions for children and providing a joined-up system for decision making.

Aberdeen City is working in partnership with the PaCT and has a two-year plan to review quality assurance processes, revisit processes, interface between front line teams and the Permanence Team, and provide multi-agency learning and development opportunities in respect of assessment, contact and report writing. In 2014 we will begin to review and restructure our Fostering Service.

Permanence work in Aberdeenshire Council An update

Leigh Jolly, Social Work Manager at Aberdeenshire Council describes the work its permanence teams are doing to ensure the best outcomes for their children who require to be permanently cared for away from home.

Aberdeenshire Council has two permanence teams covering a wide geographical area working very closely with colleagues in Children's Services to ensure the best outcomes for children who require to be cared for permanently away from home.

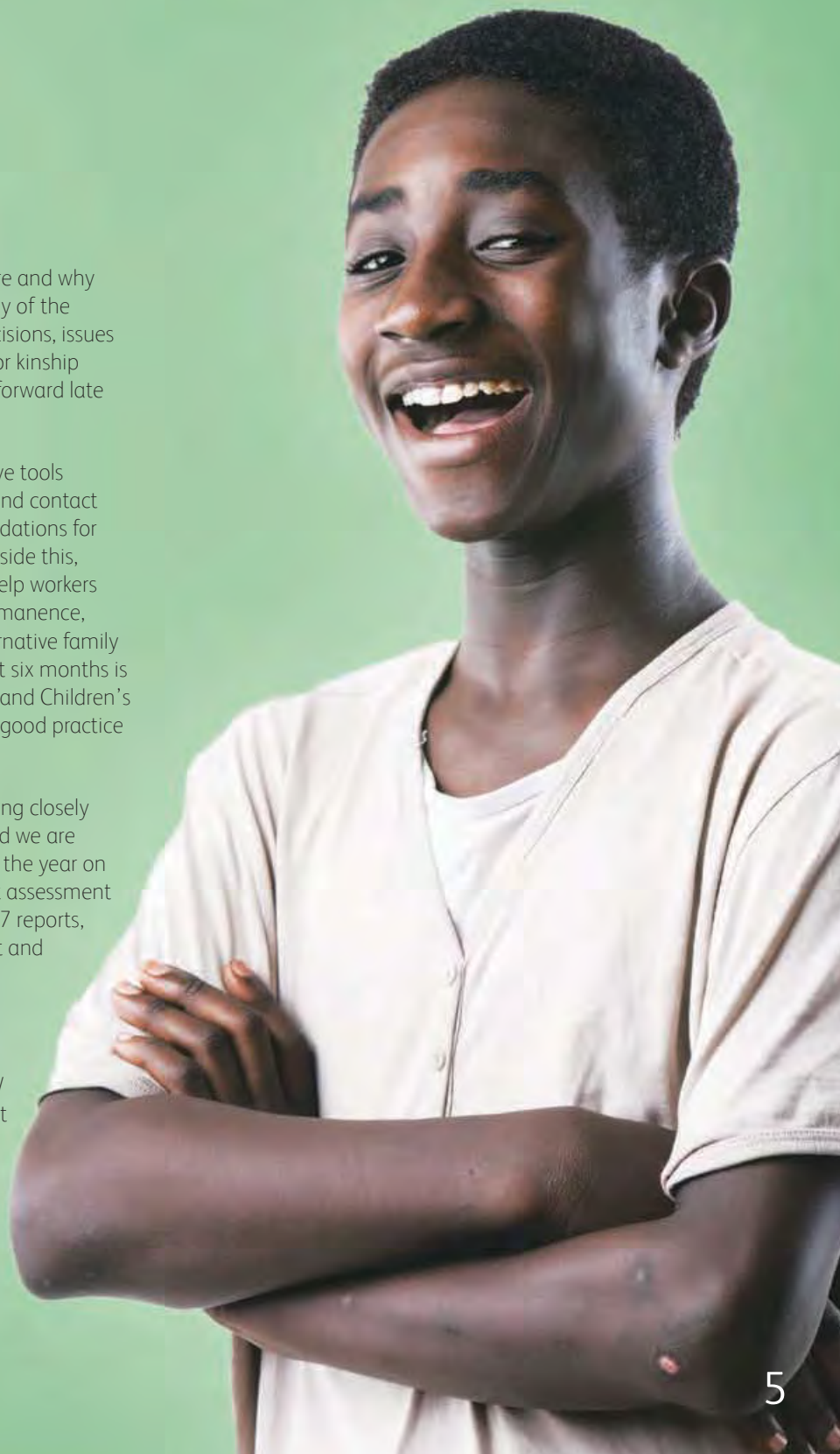
A recent self-evaluation exercise involving both qualitative and quantitative analysis of practice in permanence provided clear evidence of Aberdeenshire's commitment to ensuring children's plans are not subject to drift or delay and are managed carefully and robustly.

The self-evaluation also highlighted where and why some children's plans were delayed. Many of the reasons related to Children's Hearing decisions, issues around contact, lengthy court processes or kinship carers who required assessment coming forward late in the day.

Aberdeenshire has worked hard to improve tools and guidance around observed contact and contact reports, detailing reasons and recommendations for any future contact in permanence. Alongside this, we are developing a 'Contact Policy' to help workers think about contact in the context of permanence, both in kinship care placements and alternative family placements. Our ambition within the next six months is to roll out joint training for social workers and Children's Panel members to promote and improve good practice around permanence.

Aberdeenshire is also committed to working closely with our Legal and Governance Team, and we are embarking on a series of seminars across the year on topics including the importance of robust assessment and early planning for children, Section 17 reports, working with Permanence Orders, contact and Section 11 Orders.

Our Adoption Team and Kinship Care Team are also facilitating regular support groups to offer alternative post-adoption/ placement support to families throughout their journey with their children.



Significant steps forward

Robin Duncan, Service Manager, Children's Services, describes the Permanence Action Plan for Angus Council and their focus on developing strategic policies and planning.

Work has commenced at Angus Council to update and implement operational instructions. This has included colour co-ordinated checklists for all tasks, with timescales, from the point a child is accommodated. A new policy in relation to permanence planning for older children is currently underway.

Significant steps have been made in providing accurate management information and performance data in relation to looked after children, with a view to this being reported on and assessed regularly by senior management. This information will be key for managers, who as a result are able to track and progress the movement of children through the care system more efficiently and so improve timescales and outcomes.

In terms of staff development and training there has been a joint initiative for children's service staff and the children's panel. A second training event took place earlier this year and for the second year running, panel members are being offered the opportunity to job-shadow in a children's services team. This has helped develop a shared understanding of roles. In recognition of the need to build on everyone working with the child's ability to understand attachment, a multi-agency training event was held in March 2013 facilitated by Kate Cairns.

Permanence learning events were organised for all children's services staff over May and June, where the staff were given the opportunity to hear about the current developments and research as well as an opportunity to discuss the issues for them.

Angus Council has been represented at the National Adoption Exchange days and welcomes the opportunity to be involved in new developments that can help to secure permanent placements for children.



A rural view of permanence

Like most Scottish authorities, Argyll and Bute welcomed the SCRA Report and the Scottish Government Response and took the opportunity to review their own Adoption Plan. Alex Taylor, Service Manager Resources, Children and Families talks about the clarity this gave the council in relation to their own rural path to permanency.

The revised Adoption Plan gave renewed focus to our business processes and decision making, highlighting the importance of effective assessment and care management and the key role of the Independent Reviewing Service in supporting these improvements. The reviewing service had already adopted concurrent planning and had been directed to challenge drift and delay more robustly. Importantly, links were also made to the Getting it Right for our Looked After Children Plan which provided a multi-agency framework with which to concert a more joined-up approach to looked after children's outcomes.

In order to address past and current delay, a Permanence Team was established for a trial period. The team comprised a permanency worker from each of the four geographical areas (Helensburgh & Lomond, Cowal & Bute, Mid-Argyll, Kintyre & Islay and Oban, Lorn and the Isles). The team developed expertise and began to make a positive impact on what had been historically the more resistant cases. At the end of the trial period the Permanency Team had generally evaluated well as a 'case-busting' exercise, however, in the process, expertise had been developed and vested in a very small group of staff when a more profound reworking of our processes and a wider practice-based change had been indicated.

At this point, contact was made with the CELCIS PaCT in March 2013, with a view to seeking support in evaluating our progress to date and supporting us in achieving a wider practice-based and cultural

change. The methodology is presently being worked out but it will include our role as leaders in implementing improved processes with supporting procedures and clear guidance as well as in shaping an uncompromising practice-based culture that promotes the child's right to security through permanence.

Early discussions with the CELCIS PaCT have been productive. Agreement has been reached to share with our staff and key stakeholders the permanence tool kit in preparation for a collaborative enquiry exercise through which we would hope to learn what our front line practitioners and managers consider to be the local obstacles to permanency as well as the possible solutions. Further work will be undertaken to review our current procedures and guidance, establish a permanency course for our training calendar and develop within our management information system a reliable method of tracking and reporting on each permanency case.

The above actions are being loaded into our Getting it Right for our Looked After Children Plan where we would expect to demonstrate the impact of our approach by March 2014.

A partnership approach

Val de Souza, Acting Head of Service, explains the improvement plan at Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils and the partnership approach it has adopted with the CELCIS PaCT and other key organisations.

September 2012 saw the start of a partnership approach to the delivery of an improvement plan covering all aspects of service delivery to children and families, from the first point of contact with social work services until court applications are lodged.

The partners include Clackmannanshire Council, Stirling Council, the CELCIS PaCT, BAAF and WithScotland.

The outcomes from the work are being overviewed by the Care Inspectorate as part of their inspection regime.

The aim is to address local concerns and deliver improved outcomes for children and young people. A number of areas have been specifically identified for action including:

- The implementation of GIRFEC principles and materials with the adaptation of IT systems and staff training
- Development of workload management systems
- Staff training to improve knowledge and confidence in terms of assessment, decision making and legal processes
- Implementation of an integration plan to realise the benefits of shared services
- Process mapping to reduce potential for delay and duplication
- Creation of reporting mechanisms to improve performance and enhance ownership and accountability
- Research and evaluation of the impact of the improvement plan

From the end of October 2012, we have been working in partnership on the activities of the long-term team. These have included the revision of policy and procedural documents; peer review/action learning activities; collaborative inquiries in relation to toolbox kits for permanence work, and workshops in relation to permanence, Form E's and the statutory/non-statutory framework for children and families practice. Training has also been provided in relation to attachment and trauma.

The partnership approach, which will continue until June 2014, is underpinned by a change plan which is firmly based on principles of improvement, stakeholder engagement, local ownership of issues and national sharing of good practice. This approach will provide opportunities for staff and other key stakeholders to show where they add value to permanence and to understand the differences which they can make, highlighting assets and creating anchors of sustainability for practice change and improvement.

CELCIS has brought a very welcome dimension to the improvement agenda for Clackmannanshire Council; their approach is one of real partnership, getting alongside staff, supporting and challenging. The key objective is to gain and sustain real improvement in our service for the children, young people and families in Clackmannanshire.

Achieving permanency for children and young people

Dumfries and Galloway Council are committed to sharing the good practice that they implement in relation to permanence work with other local authorities. To this end, they are working together with the CELCIS PaCT and presented a model of practice at one of the recent Practice Exchange Work Shops. Here, Jackie Dean, Team Manager (Fostering, Adoption and Kinship) explains.

In Dumfries and Galloway, services for looked after and accommodated children and young people are co-ordinated by a small group of social work managers (fieldwork, charing and reviewing, fostering, adoption and kinship). The members of this group are committed to achieving permanency through rehabilitation, placement with kin or permanent/ adoptive carers and, in a small number of cases, residential care.

Fostering, adoption and kinship care is managed by one regional team who are able to monitor and plan for a child's journey through the looked after and accommodated process. Before a child is removed from home, activity begins in earnest, checking out any possible kinship arrangement that will avoid the need for 'stranger care'. The kinship arrangements are assessed, approved and supported on a needs-led basis, including a financial payment. For those children without any viable kinship carers, foster carers are able to provide the children with a safe, caring environment whilst rehabilitation is being explored.

Where reunification with their family begins to look unlikely, plans are made to make available a permanent family for them by targeted recruitment locally. This avoids the need for any of our children to be placed with families outwith the region or in any 'agency placements'. This policy may lead to adoption or use of Permanence Orders which allow foster carers to have the day-

to-day caring responsibilities which are vital in giving children the sense of being part of a family. More permanent, local placements also allow birth families to play a part in foster children's lives, affirming the child's identity and sense of belonging.

Our aim is to ensure that our children have confidence in our ability to provide them with a safe, secure base as early as possible, lasting throughout their lives.



Dundee City Council has a strong commitment to ensuring that robust, early and effective plans, based on sound evidence, are made for children and young people who cannot live at home. Gail Aboim, Senior Officer, Adoption & Fostering 'Review and Improvement in Dundee' explains the creative approach they take to seeking permanent homes for children.

The council has well-established systems in place detailing the expectations on all parties in relation to permanence planning, and monitor adherence to these, both in terms of quality of information and timescales which meet the needs of children.

A strategic action plan was established in 2008, providing both quantitative and qualitative information in relation to all aspects of permanence planning, from care planning decision making to family finding activities and legal processes. This plan is reviewed regularly with operational and strategic planning managers.

Dundee has established a Family Finding Group that meets monthly with the case-responsible workers for children who require permanent placements, and identifies potential links. The group also offers advice and practical assistance with family finding activities, particularly for children who cannot be placed within Dundee's own resources. Dundee has a well-established practice of taking a proactive and creative approach to seeking permanent families for children when unable to meet this need within its own resources. This has included engagement in a range of activities under the auspices of Scotland's Adoption Register and the North East of Scotland Consortium.

We also have a dedicated Recruitment Group, responsible for structuring and implementing the combined recruitment programme for both fostering and adoption. Data is continuously collected on the placement needs of children and young people and is used to inform and implement recruitment strategies which are reviewed quarterly. Recruitment activities have included multi-media campaigns on TV, newspapers and radio as well as targeted recruitment for specific children within national publications.

Dundee has made a significant commitment over recent years to ensuring that front-line staff and managers are knowledgeable and skilled in preparing assessments of children's needs based on a sound understanding of attachment, child development and resilience building. A core training programme was initiated in 2008 on child-centred assessment and care planning and rolled out throughout Children's Services. A programme of additional training on permanence planning has been provided at least annually since 2007.

In 2010 Dundee commissioned BAAF to deliver a series of training days on permanence planning. A small group of operational staff and Learning and Workforce Development staff received training and support to enable them to jointly deliver the training alongside BAAF in the first six months and then to deliver the programme completely in-house on a rolling basis. Initially, delivery of the training was focused on Children's Services but was then extended to other Social Work staff. This training will continue to be delivered as part of core training at least four times a year. It is anticipated that this will be extended to multi-disciplinary forums within the foreseeable future.



Improving Outcomes through Permanency

East Ayrshire Council's permanency planning has been on a journey of change and the team is working in partnership with the CELCIS PaCT to focus on contact as a key issue for development work. Celia Gray, Senior Manager Locality Services, talks about the journey so far.

East Ayrshire has undertaken a three-year service redesign, focused on keeping children at the centre of everything we do, working from a strengths-based approach and using relationships with children and families to improve outcomes. Staff are encouraged to have high aspirations for children and families and are supported to improve practice.

We have three tiers of staff dealing with front line services: team managers, lead professionals and family support practitioners. The family support practitioners come from a range of backgrounds, such as play therapists and psychologists, and this skill mix has enhanced the services we offer. We have a family support team that works alongside the Lead Professional, supporting contact arrangements and carrying out individual and specific pieces of work with children and families, such as life story/memories albums.

Children and family services are delivered from the Department of Education and Social Services and this has enhanced our approach to corporate parenting, with strong working relationships improving outcomes for looked after children. The Head of Service works with the local Sheriffs and monthly liaison meetings have led to the development of training. Permanency work will be a focus of future meetings.

In terms of permanency planning a 'whole system' approach has been developed across Locality Services and Corporate Parenting. This has improved our practice and offers staff the time and space needed to prioritise work and secure children permanently. Our success in this area can be attributed

to the following key areas which have enabled a change in systems including processes, culture, and practice:

- Updated Permanency Planning Procedures with flow chart
- Permanency standards
- Used 'small steps of change' in permanency planning with babies identified pre-birth
- Permanency workshops offered to all staff who are progressing a permanency plan
- Developed a five-day training development programme on permanency for all Qualified Social Workers.

East Ayrshire encourages staff to build strong and meaningful relationships with children to enable the lead professional to have an understanding of the experience of the child.

We are particularly keen to explore a joint understanding of contact with reporters and panel members, recognising that contact for children is critical in the context of making decisions about permanency. The views of children and young people tell us that meaningful contact needs to be facilitated with friends and people who have supported them, as well as parents/relatives. We will secure early engagement with colleagues in SCRA and panel members to take this work forward.

A whole systems approach

Freda McShane, Children and Families Manager in East Dunbartonshire discusses the Council's design review and a whole systems approach to permanence.

Working on a multi-agency basis with colleagues from disciplines across the Council, supported by the CELCIS PaCT and CELCIS Throughcare Consultant, they plan to realign services for looked after and accommodated children, securing a robust alternative to residential care for children and young people.

At East Dunbartonshire Council we will initially target teenagers who have significant problems in their lives and who are at risk of requiring a specialist placement (day/residential), are at risk of becoming accommodated, or are at risk of remaining accommodated unless an appropriate community-based education and care service is available.

At the core of this process is the need to improve outcomes for all of our looked after children and young people and care leavers. Ensuring that assessment, care planning and review processes are designed to meet the needs of children and young people throughout their care journey and ensuring that the most effective resources and supports are available and appropriately targeted are key to delivering better outcomes in a more consistent manner.

Whilst the initial focus of activity is around teenagers at significant risk, further work is underway to address issues around earlier care planning and decision making; key transitions including primary to secondary school, and leaving care, in order to improve outcomes for our care leavers.

The service model is being developed within an overall framework which promotes GIRFEC as well as approaches focused on attachment and mindfulness. Mindfulness-based approaches aim to teach people practical skills that can help with physical and psychological problems and on-going life challenges.

Our colleagues in education and psychological services are vital to this work as many of our young people currently placed in residential child care have had difficulties at school. The relationship between school difficulties and offending or challenging behaviour is complex. The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime has produced two key reports which offer useful insight into the links between school failure and offending behaviour within the Scottish context. The reports are entitled Social Inclusion and Desistance from Crime (Smith, 2006) and School Experience and Delinquency at ages 13 to 16 (Smith, 2006). The key points from this research are:

- A child's sense of attachment or belonging to school are fundamental in influencing behaviour both within and outwith school.
- Behavioural difficulties at school age 13 are associated with increased levels of challenging behaviour over the next two years.

The vision for this new service is to have a fully-integrated care service which is responsive to the needs of children and their families. This is a challenging venture which will involve all of our key stakeholders, especially those staff who provide residential care, our foster carers, throughcare staff, children and families staff in area teams, early years support and of course our colleagues from psychological services, education and health. The support of the reporter and the children's hearing will be integral to the successful delivery of this service.

East Dunbartonshire wants to support children and young people to remain within their own communities wherever safe to do so. This initiative will set down a significant anchor in achieving this.

Popping the Balloon of Permanence

Max Smart, Assistant Manager at Lothian Villa, questions current thinking that permanence tends to be thought of in terms of adoption or fostering and not residential care.

Here Max argues that it is the philosophy and quality of care that is important in creating connections and a sense of belonging in the lives of young people.

In the past, permanency has been thought to be the province of adoption or fostering. It has been less thought of within the context of residential care. Since Goffman's (1969) work on Asylums, residential child care has been tainted with notions that it is detached from making relationships with youth that last over time. It has been thought that the nature of shift systems detracts from the continuity of care that is required if permanency is to be achieved.

Unfortunately, many of these assertions have been made by politicians and academics who perceive residential care as the last resort, however, over the last 15 years there has been a significant shift in understanding about the issue of permanence.

A Different Way

Since 1995, I have worked as an Assistant Manager in a small Local Authority residential child care resource. I have worked with lots of youngsters with acute emotional and behavioural difficulties, all of whom have one factor in common. They bring with them, into care, deep, pervasive emotional pain and a distrust of adults. They are youngsters who don't seem to belong, who don't fit in at our schools or our communities. They come into care, as Austin & Halpin (1987) describe 'because they come from being out of care'.

In my time working with these youngsters it has become clear to me that the remedy for children being out of care is not simply to work on managing the difficult behaviours that emerge out of needs that have been unmet (Brendtro, 2005) but to engage in relational interventions that build security and overcome the trust dilemmas that problematic experiences have brought to the lives of these young people (Fulcher, 2008).

Lothian Villa

It is a privilege to work with young people in difficulty and an honour to work in a progressive residential childcare resource like Lothian Villa. Lothian Villa is a six-bedded residential childcare service on the outskirts of Musselburgh, East Lothian. The Villa has gained a reputation for innovative and progressive child care practice which seeks to create connection and belonging with young people. This belonging means that we see problematic behaviour as unmet need and it is our duty to meet these needs.

Relationships are the most important component of practice and emotional healing, relationships maintained by staff with residents long after their direct care in the unit has ended. In this context Lothian Villa seeks to create a powerful belonging for its young people. It claims and reclaims the youngsters who do not belong. It responds to needs rather than reacting to troubled or troubling behaviour.

Young people rarely leave Lothian Villa and can be in placement for, on average, four years. When our young people leave to embark on their adult lives the continuity of their care continues. Their keyworker continues active involvement for as long as our young people wish it. Young people are encouraged to continue involvement with the day-to-day life of the unit and are frequently around Lothian Villa. Their photos remain on our walls and we are in constant touch via a closed Facebook book page in which posts, photos of holidays, events and daily life are shared.

To date, all the so-called impediments to permanency outlined in past theories about residential child care have been challenged. We believe it is time to reverse the question on whether residential child care can provide permanence. We now need to ask our politicians, academics and policy makers, 'Why shouldn't residential child care provide permanence?' For it is not an issue of shifts or skills it is an issue of philosophy of care and caring.

Children's Wellbeing Service

Jane Ogden-Smith of East Lothian Council explains why it is important to place as many children as possible close to their friends, families and communities and shares the council's belief that early intervention can reduce the number of children needing permanent placements.

East Lothian Council's Children's Wellbeing Team offers a wide range of support to the children it looks after and their parents and carers, foster carers and kincarers. On 31 December 2012, we had 207 looked-after children, over 73% of whom were accommodated with foster carers, in formal kincare (with friends /relatives) or in residential care, including secure accommodation.

We are committed to trying to place as many children and young people as possible in the county close to their friends, extended families, schools and communities. Helping us to do this is a pool of experienced and highly motivated foster carers. However, we are urgently trying to recruit new foster carers to replace those who are now coming up for retirement and we have involved foster carers and looked after young people in designing the recruitment campaign and campaign materials. They are also actively involved in the delivery of training. East Lothian and Midlothian Council have been sharing information sessions and preparation groups in order to increase flexibility and extend the range of opportunities to recruit new foster carers.

In the longer term, the team is working to achieve a reduction in the total number of looked after children in East Lothian by early intervention and greater use of informal kin care. Our aims are to:

- reduce the number of accommodated children (in residential care, with friends and relatives, and in foster care) in East Lothian.
- increase the numbers of foster carers and residential places so we have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of East Lothian children.
- increase numbers of children placed for adoption through the Adoption Plan
- increase both formal and informal kin care; we are developing our policy and guidance.

- reduce the proportion of children educated outwith East Lothian
- increase the number of young people receiving After Care services while in positive destinations.
- strengthen families and develop strategies and practices that work, in particular effective early intervention, especially in the early years. This links to the work of the Early Years Review.
- have a family-focused and joined-up approach to the problems of drugs, alcohol, domestic violence and neglect.

We have specialist adoption and kincare workers. Our adoption worker supports adoption all year round but does additional awareness-raising around National Adoption Week in November. Our kincare worker supports both formal and informal kincarers and this year has been working with Mentor, who are providing a family support service to kinship carers in East Lothian. We are also working with a number of other local authorities, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and CELCIS PaCT to explore the implementation of concurrency planning for very young children.

The views of looked after children and young people play a key role in shaping the services we provide. We use the online Viewpoint questionnaire and a wide range of other methods, including focus groups, spidergrams and other one-off consultations to ensure that their voices are heard. Their views are fed back to decision-makers in our 'Listen more, assume less' newsletter, which is published twice yearly. Young people played an active role in our corporate parenting event, and the Council Management Team has since agreed that all service plans should demonstrate how the service will contribute to the council's role as a 'Corporate Parent' to looked after children.

Concurrency placement services

East Renfrewshire Council places an emphasis on developing key staff to ensure vulnerable children are identified early. Mary Gallagher, Operations Manager Children & Families, explains the contribution that the CELCIS PaCT has made in identifying areas of permanence practice that could be developed.

East Renfrewshire council continues to work hard to improve their services to looked after children and young people. Learning and development for key staff is a priority and we are rolling out a programme to staff and multi-agency partners to develop and improve skills in early identification of children who are vulnerable, completing assessments that support our planning process, and reducing drift and delay in achieving permanence for children who are unable to live with their parents.

We have a dedicated team developing and delivering programmes of training to our staff, and in addition, in partnership with the Children's Hearing and the CELCIS PaCT, we are providing training on contact and educational outcomes for looked after children and young people to panel members, social work staff and colleagues from health and education. The PaCT has also supported us in identifying areas for development in terms of the pathway to permanence for looked after children that are unable to go home.

There will always be a small number of children in East Renfrewshire who will not be able to return to the care of their birth families. We need adopters to make them part of a new family to give them the love and security that will help them to develop into successful adults. The children will have difficulties related to their early experiences and we wish to support them to gain confidence and become happier people who can start to enjoy a safe and happy childhood.

To this end, and as part of a wider adoption service, along with a number of other local authorities on the west coast, we are exploring the possibility of developing a concurrency placement service. We are committed to working in partnership to deliver value and quality for the children we look after.



Minimising delays

Scott Dunbar, Service Manager for Looked After and Accommodated Children at Edinburgh City Council discusses Edinburgh's approach to minimising delays for children who need permanent care.

In 2012, The City of Edinburgh Council placed 44 children with prospective adopters. Of these children, 18 were under the age of 12 months at the time of placement. A total of 25 children were aged 18 months or less when placed. A combination of process and practice improvements has significantly contributed to this outcome.

Since 2009, when the Council agreed to place children who need permanent care more quickly, a range of resources and practice development activity were implemented to ensure the policy objective was met.

The development of procedures for looked after children and children in need of permanent, alternative, family-based care provided practice team social workers with clear guidance and expectations in relation to care planning responsibilities. Operational procedures were developed which used the council's intranet to ensure staff had a process to follow, easy-to-access forms and guidance. Utilising technology in this way was crucial in supporting staff.

Edinburgh's procedures require children to be referred for Permanence Panel consideration within seven and a half months from the date they became looked after, if no viable rehabilitation plan is achieved. Increases to the staffing of the Children and Young People Review Team ensured that Looked After Children Reviews took place within statutory timescales and robust performance monitoring has virtually eliminated previous high levels of drift in early permanence planning. Further performance monitoring of requirements to hold a Permanence Panel within 12 weeks of a review resulted in a further reduction of delay.

A dedicated Panel Coordinator provides a professional overview and management of the 14 Permanence Panels operated by the Council. This has resulted in a reduction of postponed panels through professional scrutiny of reports presented, full panel membership through targeted recruitment, and an increase in the number of panel slots available at short notice for matching.

The Council's significantly enhanced Permanence Team has contributed to the practice and profile of permanence. Currently four preparation groups per year produce up to 28 sets of prospective adopters. Single adopters are invited to bring along a significant member of their support network to each preparation group session to ensure they have informed support during assessment through to post-placement. Permanence Team workers are assigned to each local neighbourhood practice team to track the family finding for each child registered for permanence. This has helped develop positive working relationships and an understanding of practice.

Detailed processes for linking and co-ordination of permanent placements underpinned by attachment-informed practice have been developed and are continually refined through learning from practice experience.

Improvements in permanence practice

James Ross is a Social Worker within a Children and Families Area Team at Fife Council, where he has been able to progress adoption plans for children within a four- to-six month timescale.

James is supported by Service Manager Theresa Stephenson, who has over 20 years' experience in all aspects of child care practice and is a member of the Early Years Strategy Group. Here James and Theresa share their experiences of permanence practice within the council.

In Fife we are progressing with our permanency practice by continuing to focus on sharing good practice in securing children in caring placements which meet their needs and lead to good outcomes. This involves key opportunities to share good and effective practice with all staff in Fife.

We recently attended the Early Years Collaborative event in Glasgow where we were very encouraged by the improvement methodology presented. At this event we were asked to consider making small changes and improvements and then, through testing and evaluating their impact, amending the improvements and scaling these across larger areas of practice.

Fife Council has recognised that a key strength within the Children and Families service is robust assessments of families. This has allowed for early decisions to be made for children regarding adoption. There is recognition that improvement is required to ensure that permanence plans for children are progressed timeously. Children have much brighter futures and fewer long-term emotional difficulties when placed with adoptive families at an early stage. Within Fife, whilst there are examples of excellent practice where adoption plans for children have been progressed quickly and children placed with adoptive parents within a relatively short timescale, this has not been the case for all children.

West Fife has developed a small-scale pilot study of mentoring and support for staff inexperienced in permanence work. The pilot is based on sharing the knowledge, skills, enthusiasm and templates of completed work. The delay in progressing adoptive plans for children is often due to workers' lack of confidence and the perceived extent of the task. For the cases included in the pilot, a timeline for the completion of the necessary tasks to achieve permanence registration and matching was agreed and is monitored through regular meetings with the staff concerned.

Staff are offered additional support, advice and guidance on all aspects of the permanence process to increase their confidence. Fife is not willing to accept the drifting of permanence plans for children. The creation of a timeline to complete permanence tasks through mentoring and supporting social workers should allow plans to be progressed within four to six months from the Looked After Review where the plan for permanence is agreed. Achieving permanence for children can be best achieved through the sharing of knowledge and skills through partnerships between social workers. Within this small scale pilot there is already recognition that plans for children are being progressed more speedily.

We aim to use the learning from this pilot to further develop this mentoring approach to ensure that all children who require permanent alternative care are placed with adopters as soon as possible.

Driving a whole team approach to permanence

Glasgow City Council believes that all staff have a role to play in securing permanency and care planning. Suzanne Millar, Assistant Director, explains the part that the CELCIS PaCT has played in ensuring over 600 staff are informed and supported.

In Glasgow we are determined to continue to improve our permanence practice and outcomes for children and young people. We continue to work hard to ensure that our practice is meeting the needs of this very vulnerable group.

Last year we developed a ground-breaking campaign Be Part of Someone's Memories, to recruit foster carers and adoptive parents. The campaign, which secured wide-ranging coverage across all forms of media, won the support of many prominent Glaswegians and was awarded the Guardian best public sector communications project in the UK and the Municipal Journal top prize for best contender in the Children's Services Category. The campaign was successful because it touched a nerve with people and reminded them of how they were supported and influenced by their own parents. The aim of the campaign was to recruit 35 new foster carers and 45 new adoptive parents over a 12-month period. After sifting through thousands of enquiries from interested parties, Families for Children was able to secure 55 fostering approvals and 58 adoption approvals.

We believe that all staff have a role to play in securing permanency in care planning for children and young people, and to this end we have been offering a range of supported activities to each and every one of our child care staff across Glasgow; a total of 600+ staff have attended Protected Learning Events supported by the CELCIS PaCT and Sally Wassell, Independent Consultant.

The events have focused on improving staff knowledge and confidence in contact practice. The events have helped staff to rise to the challenge of keeping a focus on the child whilst helping parents to understand their rights, focusing on the use of contact contracts as a very effective tool in helping parents to be clear about what is expected of them.

An essential starting point is establishing the purpose of contact and, significantly, what is the purpose for the child. What are we assessing? A key message for staff is that we need to consider the following four elements in contact in permanency work:

- Impact on child's development - does it detract or add to development?
- Impact on child's behaviour - harm, measuring changes, what is behaviour communicating?
- Impact on child's self-esteem and confidence- is it enhanced by contact or not, and is it changing through the contact?
- Impact on attachment and security- does the contact make the child feel more or less confident?

Securing permanence

Highland Council is committed to giving every child and young person in Highland the best possible start in life. They believe that helping children to realise their potential is the key to giving them a sense of self-fulfilment and equipping them well for their future.

Alison Gordon, Resources Manager, Fostering and Adoption, discusses the measures to address drift in the permanence process and ensure a focused approach.

Health and Social Care Services work with families and partner agencies to help ensure that Highland's children are safe, nurtured, healthy, achieving, active, respected and responsible, and included.

In relation to permanence practice, we are in the process of addressing drift through a series of measures, one of which involves a quarterly quality assurance report to our Chief Executive on cases which are in the permanence process, including timescales and progress. This has contributed to ensuring we remain focused on the importance of securing timeous planning and decision making.

The GIRFEC principles and practice are very well developed in Highland. The lead professional role plays a significant part in the permanence journey for children as it provides us with more knowledge about children at the point where they need to be accommodated. This means we are starting from a sound knowledge base of need.

We work to a 12-week period between a decision on permanency being taken at Child's Plan Meetings and the case being presented to our permanence panel. This rigor minimises delays.

During the last year we had a number of staff changes and shifting roles as we implemented plans for the integration of health and social care services in the Highlands. We have identified that we could improve our practice in permanence further through strengthening the links between our fostering and adoption service and our area team child care staff. The CELCIS PaCT is working with us to produce a plan of action to address this area.

Being proactive about planning, recruiting and approving adopters continuously has meant that all children are placed within Highland. Highland has been a 'net receiving authority' with several children from outwith Highland being placed and adopted by families approved by Highland.



Nurturing

Inverclyde Council focuses on nurturing not only its children, but every citizen in the community. Sharon McAlees, Head of Service, tells us how this works in practice.

Nurturing Inverclyde is a pioneering and innovative approach that Inverclyde Council has developed to plan and deliver services across Inverclyde.

Inverclyde Council, in partnership with our community planning partners, has taken Scottish Government's Getting it Right for Every Child framework a step further and has made a commitment to get it right for every child, citizen and community. Our focus is on making Inverclyde a place which nurtures all its citizens, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to have a good quality of life and good mental and physical wellbeing. Inverclyde will nurture the growth and development of its people and its economy.

The challenges faced in Inverclyde require a dedicated effort not only from the Council, but from all partner agencies working within the area. The Nurturing Inverclyde principles are therefore integrated across our community planning processes. We will nurture all our citizens and communities so that there is no poverty of expectation and no poverty of opportunity.

We are using both universal and targeted approaches to address the needs of all our communities. We aspire to ensure that no matter where someone lives in Inverclyde, they will achieve the best possible outcomes in their lives.



Focusing on Improvements

Improvements to services for looked after children have been an important focus for improvement work for Moray Council. Jennifer Gordon, Placement Services Manager, explains the council's partnership approach.

Within the department, which is Education and Social Care, developments are focusing on fine tuning the model of staged intervention; when our restructuring is complete we will have three main service delivery points: early engagement, early intervention and targeted intervention.

The importance of a partnership approach with stakeholders was identified early on as being able to deliver maximum impact on improvements; Locality Management Groups including social work, education, health and police meet regularly to provide early intervention on a multi-agency basis.

For looked after children the Continuous Improvement team has recently concluded a review of educational attainment and achievement for looked after children and made a number of key recommendations.

The Permanence Monitoring and Development Group, made up of staff from area teams, fostering and adoption, and legal services meets with two main purposes. The first is to monitor and if appropriate steer the progression of looked after children into permanent care to prevent drift (or analyse the factors causing drift). The PMDG, through area team workers, seeks to ensure that the team round the child is alert to necessary processes and practice. The second purpose is to ensure that social workers and those who make up the team round the child are competent and confident. A timeline for training is constantly reviewed and

developed to respond to the needs of multi-workers. The legal services department in Moray is proactive and committed to reporting on children's progress through the legal system, and improving timescales to achieve permanence.

Residential children's services are being developed to look at holistic ways to support children in residential care, and advice is being sought from key practitioners in the field of research and from other local authorities who have areas of good practice, to ensure that the evidence base underpins the review of services.

Moray is fully engaged with the Early Years Collaborative and is currently exploring how this work can continue beyond 2013 by re-establishing the Early Years Strategy Group. A conference being held in April will focus upon the impact of neglect in rural areas, with one of the workshops highlighting the work done locally in respect of the 'Before Words' project. This project looks at the development of language in babies with parents and encourages more interaction and stimulation between parents and their babies. This project has been shortlisted for a number of national awards.

Empowering chairs of looked after children panels

Sheila Gordon, Service Manager at North Lanarkshire Council explains how their new approach to Looked After Children Reviews is making the difference.

In 2010 North Lanarkshire Council moved to a new system for chairing Looked After Children Reviews. This involved creating a new 'pool' of chairs for each locality team comprising senior social workers from other teams including intensive services and HQ services, etc.

We have been working very hard to try to improve timescales for all children who are looked after either to return home or move to a permanent placement. It was agreed that the chairs of looked after and accommodated reviews have a key role in this process as they are instrumental in making decisions about the child's plan.

We recently held training sessions for these chairs, which focused on care planning; these training sessions allowed chairs to identify current hurdles and blocks to

progress and to come up with solutions to overcome these. Prior to the training days we collated feedback from young people, foster carers and the chairs themselves about the reviewing system. Feedback was generally very positive and was used to inform the sessions. Action Learning Sets were used during the training as a way for chairs to support one another and were so popular that they will become a regular feature, which we hope will continue to benefit and improve practice.

The head of social work/chief social work officer was keen to be involved in the training and attended both sessions to reiterate the message about the importance of avoiding delay for children. She added to the training by empowering chairs to act on her behalf to ensure plans were progressed as effectively as possible.

OUT	IN
Waiting three months for the next looked after and accommodated children review	Holding reviews, particularly for young babies, within a few weeks
Waiting for the review to find out what has happened	Review chair chases up between reviews to make sure things are progressing
Chair feels unable to challenge practice which is causing delays	Chairs feel empowered and more confident to tackle issues which are causing delay in planning

Permanence and Care planning

Orkney Health and Care Children's Services provide quality health and care services for NHS Orkney and Orkney Islands Council.

Working together as one partnership they aim to improve social care, health and well-being, reduce inequalities and provide high quality care for children, young people and their families in Orkney. Here, Peter Connolly, principal social worker, tells us more.

Within Orkney we are working to ensure that our child care planning processes are effective at delivering timely decision making, providing stability and permanence for children who can no longer be looked after at home. We are striving to ensure that our decisions are transparent, with the basis for all decisions being clear for all parties, including the children and young people concerned, their families and those with responsibility for overseeing their planning.

Our assessment and planning processes aim to be child-centred, with active plans being developed in partnership by all relevant agencies across Orkney.

We provide services in a rural and islands community, which demands that we understand family support arrangements, including key family relationships, siblings, kinship networks and wider community links and supports available to families and their children.

The Getting it Right approach is the benchmark used to guide our practice. This has allowed significant developments in partnership working across Orkney, with, for example, the 'My World' integrated assessment framework being used to underpin our assessment practice with children and young people.

We have an exciting pedagogy project on Orkney and we intend that this approach will strengthen the range and quality of our fostering provision. It has a clear link with permanence planning, as our ultimate vision is to improve outcomes for our looked after children.

We are now working closely with the CELCIS PaCT to continue to focus on improvements in our permanence practice and we are optimistic that we will continue to deliver effective outcomes for children and young people in Orkney.



Putting Research into Practice

Caroline Mackie, Service Manager - Looked After Services, Planning, Performance and Partnership at Perth and Kinross Council talks here about using research to inform planning and increase the focus on permanence planning.

Within Perth and Kinross Council Looked After Services there is a Permanence Team and a Family Placement Team. Through Care and After Care services are overseen by the Team Leader of Wellbank, which is a supported living facility.

There has been increased focus on permanence planning as a result of research about the impact of delay in decision making, increase in accommodated children (especially those under five) and the requirement for improved evidenced-based assessments.

To address this, Perth and Kinross Council developed a permanence planning framework which introduced rigour and structure to the care planning process. At the heart of this framework is work with parents to ensure they are fully involved and informed but also empowered to participate in the assessments.

The Framework for Perth and Kinross is built around four key headings:

- Assessment Tools
- Decision-Making and Implementation – Management of the Permanence Process
- Decision-Making and Implementation – Placements
- Research and Development

Perth and Kinross has implemented an Integrated Assessment across all agencies, which is undertaken at the earliest opportunity. For some children this will be pre-birth. This assessment framework looks at historical information as well as recent events and focuses on the child's future needs.

The process may identify a need for a further specialist assessment, such as a parenting capacity or psychological assessment. Prior to either of these being undertaken, legal advice is sought to ensure we are clear, in legal terms, about the evidence that is required for any future action.

Part of the success of the framework is the recognition of the need for robust, well-evidenced parenting capacity assessments. The model for the assessments has been developed through the multi-agency team Change Is A Must. The model was based on research findings (Ward et al, 2010) and designed to achieve effective interventions, engagement of parents of children deemed to be at significant risk, and to ensure earlier decision making.

This approach draws on adult attachment theory including assessment of parenting capacity within time-limited, contract-based interventions involving the whole family. This approach is also designed to ensure that the work with families affected by parental substance use which is identified as good practice is rolled out across all agencies.

Evaluation of the team's work has already highlighted how adult attachment theory can provide a framework to inform how parents' own life experiences and relationships affect on their parenting capacity. This has shown the importance of focusing on a relationship-based approach when working with parents.

Further work has been carried out around management of the permanence process and placements and examples of some of the work are:

- Looked After Reviews occur every six weeks until a decision regarding permanence is made;

- The use of Parenting Agreements has been standardised ;
- Greater emphasis continues to be given to parenting capacity assessments. This was highlighted as an area of good practice as part of the Perth and Kinross Child Protection Inspection in 2011. Dedicated staffing resources have been made available for the completion of parenting capacity assessments and further resources are being identified;
- Work continues with Adult Services to ensure that joint work is focused on outcomes for the child;
- Review of children awaiting permanence by Improvement Officers/Managers to ensure that there is no drift between decision making at the Looked After Children Review and actions being taken;
- The involvement of the Permanence Team Leader at an early stage to ensure there is no delay in the transfer of children who are moving on to adoption;
- Ongoing training for staff in the completion of reports;
- Recruitment of foster carers who are able and willing to provide long-term care for children;
- Recruitment of adopters who are able to look after children who may have complex needs;
- Ensuring that placements for children who remain with their current carers are recognised as permanent;
- Implementing Small Test of Change (through the Early Years Collaborative) to reduce drift in production of completed assessment documents for Fostering and Permanence Panel (Form E).



Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents (MTFC-A) and Concurrency Planning Across Four Councils

Michelle Brydon, Assistant Principal Officer, Child Care, Fostering and Adoption at Renfrewshire Council discusses the partnership of four councils, coming together to develop a whole systems approach to help the most vulnerable young people in our communities.

Renfrewshire is joining with partners in West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire Councils to develop a multi-dimensional treatment foster care for adolescents (MTFC-A) service. This service development is supported by Scottish Government in recognition of its potential contribution to the Whole Systems Approach by helping some of our most vulnerable young people to change high-risk and offending behaviours. The Government is keen to support collaboration between local authorities and it is hoped that this model will become a template for others in the future.

MTFC-A is an evidence-based treatment programme based on social learning principles and systemic theory. It uses a skills-based behavioural approach and provides 'wraparound' care to the young person, the foster carers and the birth family to bring about a change in the young person's difficult behaviours and attitudes.

MTFC-A placements are intensive and are tailored to individual needs. The multi-disciplinary treatment team consists of seven distinct professional roles. During placement, the young person's behaviour is closely monitored and good behaviour is rewarded using a points-based system. The programme emphasises the importance of emotional regulation in the context of behavioural change and skills acquisition.

MTFC-A has been researched and evaluated and has been proven to deliver statistically significant improvements in young people's functioning.

Renfrewshire and partners have already commenced service development activities and hope to begin offering placements early in 2014.

Renfrewshire is also working with its partners,

supported by the CELCIS PaCT, to commission a concurrency planning service. The service would provide early permanency placements for babies from high-risk families. The concurrency model places babies with carers who are dual-registered as foster carers and adopters. The birth family then undergo a comprehensive and time-limited assessment of their capacity to safely parent the child. If permanency outwith the family is required, the foster carers can then apply to adopt, meaning that the baby does not have to move placements. As with MTFC, research has demonstrated that children placed with a concurrency plan experience fewer placement moves and achieve permanence more quickly.

Improving Social Work Assessment and the Family Assessment and Contact Team (FACT) in Renfrewshire

Supporting decision making for Reunification or Permanence

In 2010 Renfrewshire Council piloted a new approach to decision making for young children from birth to three who had been accommodated. This was in recognition that 'drift' in decision making for such young children had a major impact on their right to be placed in life-long family settings, either birth, kinship or adoption.

The criteria for referral to the FACT team are:

- A previous child has been permanently removed from one/both parents' care
- The child is under three years old
- The child is accommodated with a foster or kinship carer

Once a FACT assessment has been agreed the parent/s sign(s) a contract agreeing to attend three observed contact sessions per week. Contact is observed through a one-way mirror with audio equipment. The parent/s also agree(s) to undertake a minimum of six individual

sessions to explore their childhood experience, for example their own attachment experiences, addiction, domestic violence and mental health. Family and community relationships are also explored. The parent/s attitude to parenting and potential for change are assessed.

The FACT team consists of two experienced, qualified social workers and a family support worker, supervised by a senior social worker. The social workers do not hold cases or carry out any other assessments.

On completion of the assessment, a recommendation is made to pursue either a rehabilitation plan or permanence, usually adoption. Where adoption is the recommendation, and this is accepted at a Legal Advice Meeting and Looked After Review, the FACT worker completes the Form E based on information gathered throughout the process.

This has been a very successful pilot and the FACT team is now a mainline resource. Assessments have helped panel members in their decision-making about reducing contact. Figures for adoption have increased, with a reduction in the length of time this takes; some babies have been adopted within their first year of life. Children who have returned home have remained in their parents' care without any further child protection referral.

The FACT team is also working in partnership to deliver learning and development to family support workers and social workers in Renfrewshire. All family support workers have received training in the purpose of contact and their role in making contact meaningful in the analysis included in assessment.

Over the next three months, Renfrewshire Council, along with the PaCT team at CELCIS and local representatives from the Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration will be providing learning and development to all social work staff to improve identification, assessment and pathways to permanence for children in Renfrewshire.

Partnership working to drive improvement

From a very early stage, the Children's Panel in Renfrewshire expressed their desire to work in partnership with Renfrewshire Council and the CELCIS PaCT, to support their continuing drive for the improvement and development of strategy, policy and procedures in relation to looked after children. Derek Brama, Chair of the Children's Panel in Renfrewshire explains how they are working together on an improvement agenda.

The Children's Hearing system recognises the importance of positive professional relationships in making timely and robust decisions for children, and over the last few months CELCIS has been involved in local training for Renfrewshire Children's panel members, which has been well received.

Permanence has long been a tricky issue for panel members and there is always a desire for them to be fully skilled in their understanding of current best practice in this field. The training delivered by CELCIS improved and enhanced the knowledge base of panel members and up-skilled them in the fields of permanence and contact.

Renfrewshire Council and SCRA, in partnership with the PaCT, will be working together in the coming months to improve and develop the ability of panel members to deliver robust, child-centred decisions, while supporting our partners to understand what it is that panel members need to help them make the best decision for children.

From Bumps to Babies: Early assessment and support for families in the Borders

Linda Davidson, Senior Social Worker, Early Years Assessment Team, Scottish Borders talks here about multi-agency teams delivering antenatal and postnatal care and support and the research work that the CELCIS PaCT is developing to assess the impact on families.

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It has long been recognised that the best way to support families in need is by providing early intervention within a multi-agency approach that can cater for the different needs of family members.

There are not many examples of multi-agency teams delivering antenatal and postnatal care and support, in addition to carrying out comprehensive parenting assessments, but the Scottish Borders Council's Early Years Assessment Team use this practice.

The family support approach to the delivery of antenatal and postnatal care began in 2004 with the appointment of the first Sure Start midwife in Scotland and in 2010 the co-located Early Years Assessment Team was established, consisting of family support workers, infant mental health workers, midwives and social workers. Professionals from social work and health work closely together in order to identify at an early stage those families who may need extra support during pregnancy and to develop and provide one-to-one personalised support to these families.

Once families are identified as being in need of extra support, the Team meets with them in order to discuss and plan the support they need during pregnancy, to prepare for the baby's arrival and after the baby has been born. Additionally, where early antenatal assessments of family circumstances indicate that the safest option for the baby is adoption, the Team are able to hold the child within the team to support families through this process and to move children through the adoption process at a much earlier stage, or to place children with kinship carers. The early intervention approach with families aims to ensure that they are supported during pregnancy and that children get the best start in life.

This model of early intervention has been successful in reducing the number of inappropriate admissions to hospital, attendance at antenatal clinics and in moving children through the adoption process at a much earlier stage than previously (<http://bit.ly/WOdaPI>). In recognition of its success, the team was awarded third place in 2012 for Team of the Year at the prestigious

BMJ Midwifery Practice Awards, alongside the Knowledge Community Midwifery Team (St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust).

Considering the success of this model, the CELCIS PaCT is now developing a research study to document and assess its impact on families. This work is due to start later this year.

Transforming children's services in South Lanarkshire

South Lanarkshire has undertaken a change programme to transform its children's services to achieve better outcomes for Looked After Children. Here Sandra Sage, Change Manager, tells us more about the programme and the support the CELCIS PaCT is giving.

Within South Lanarkshire there has been clear strategic planning for looked after children since 2009. Using existing resources, specialist teams were disaggregated with more front line social workers providing effective and early intervention for children and families. This has resulted in fewer professionals being involved with individual families and their children, enabling clearer planning and improved support with less overlap and duplication of work.

The Alternative to Care Service has been extended to deliver a seven-day Intensive Family Support Service which will provide closer support to young people to help them remain at home and prevent them becoming accommodated.

There has been a significant increase in the number and range of foster carers and a reduction in external foster placements. The number of children placed with South Lanarkshire foster carers has risen from 78 to 166 since 2005. The number of children in external residential care has fallen from 27 to 16 between 2006 and 2012 and the number in South Lanarkshire children's houses has fallen from 69 to 51 in the same period. The Family Placement Team is being increased to continue with a programme to change the balance of care.

South Lanarkshire successfully applied for grant funding from the Scottish Government for a short-term project which will recruit resilient carers who will be able to care for children with a view to adoption, where there may be a risk that the child will be unable to return to their parent. The additional staffing resource will also support rigorous, time-limited assessment with a view to reducing timescales for those children placed. The implementation of this project is being supported by the CELCIS PaCT, who are on the implementation steering group, and are supporting South Lanarkshire Council to produce its project plan.

Work is ongoing to further develop family support services to ensure flexible support over seven days for vulnerable young children and their families to prevent accommodation.

Linked to the earlier intervention at a local level and the effective use of additional community-based supports, to enable children and young people to remain at home, there is a reduction in demand for residential placements. There is an expectation that this trend will continue with better community supports and enhanced family placement options. In view of this, the indications are that the number of children's houses could be reduced.

However, there is also a need to consider the development of the residential service so that it can provide more intensive support to young people. This involves an examination of staffing levels, skills mix and a programme of training and development.

The results of work undertaken to explore the approach used in residential care by other local authorities and voluntary organisations and the learning from research confirm that:

- Effective leadership is key: staff coherence and consistency are important and that these can be enhanced by a common philosophy or theory.

- Homes providing higher levels of care tend to be smaller: not to take short-term emergencies and to have better qualified heads of homes.

CELCIS is supporting South Lanarkshire to develop the overall change programme which we will deliver, underpinned by a philosophy of care and vision for children's services which is built from a solid foundation of attachment-based practice and development of a robust workforce development strategy.

We worked with the CELCIS PaCT to present a session for other local authority staff on our experience of good practice in permanence at a Practice Exchange Workshop during the summer.

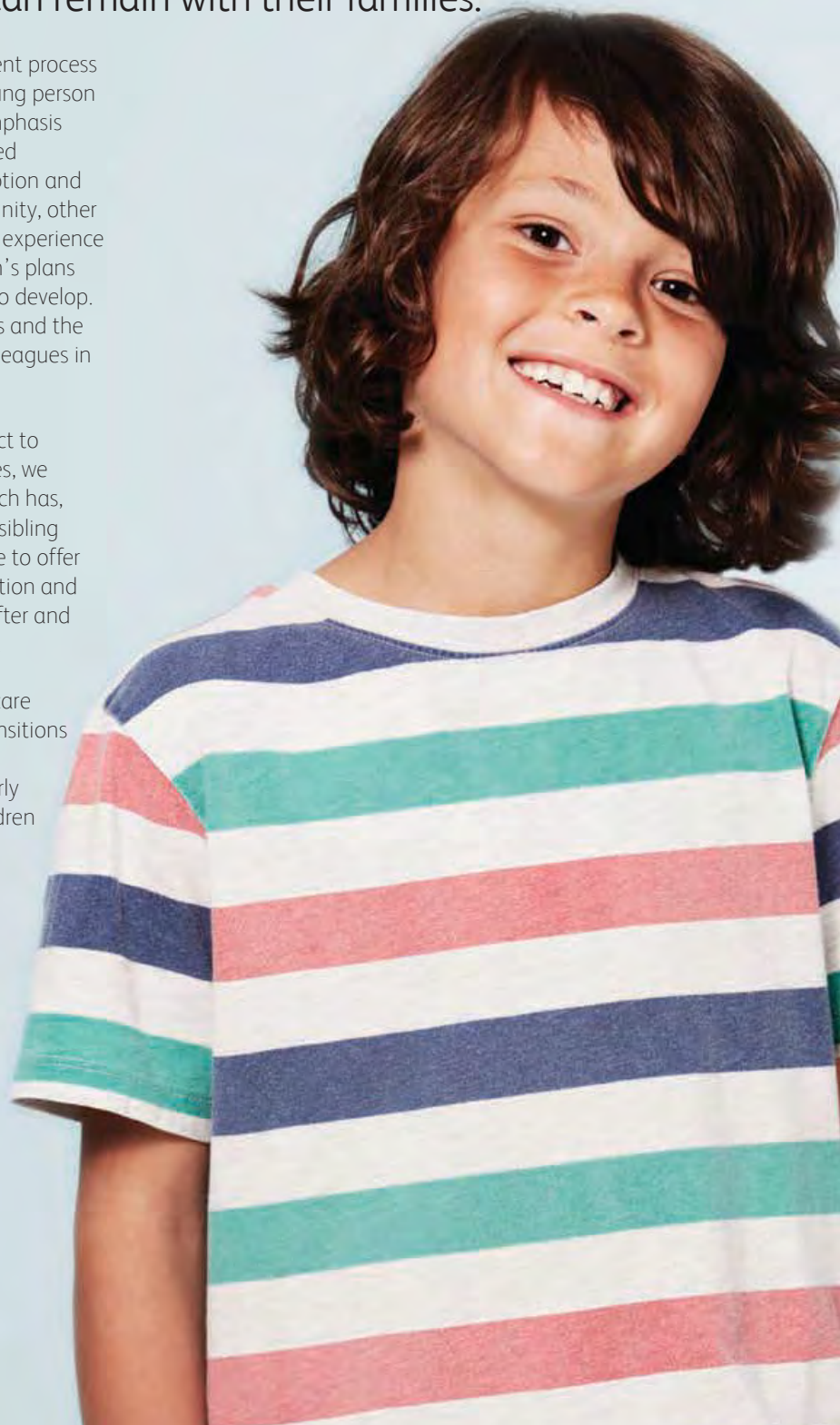


Martha Nicolson, Executive Manager, Children's Services Children's Resources, discusses the early intervention approach at Shetland Islands Council and the commitment to ensuring, where possible, children can remain with their families.

At Shetland we have an integrated assessment process (GIRFEC) designed to keep the child and young person at the heart of the process and move the emphasis to an outcomes focus. We have an established permanency process which includes an adoption and fostering panel representative of the community, other key agencies and individuals with significant experience which meets monthly to ensure that children's plans are progressed and best practice continues to develop. Children's views are important to the process and the family placement team work closely with colleagues in facilitating the matching process.

In terms of residential resources, while subject to resource constraints and competing pressures, we have maintained a very flexible resource which has, for example, enabled us to accommodate a sibling group in one placement as well as being able to offer this resource as a venue for the accommodation and parenting support/assessment of a looked after and accommodated young person and her baby.

Having established a throughcare and aftercare service (based on staying put, graduated transitions and quality post-care accommodation) we have made a commitment to develop an early intervention approach to ensure that all children in Shetland have the opportunity to remain within their families, where it is safe to do so.



Developing a local model of concurrency planning

South Lanarkshire Council has secured funding to implement a concurrency planning approach and develop a model which is suited to their local needs. Ada Nidrie, Manager, Family Placement Team, tells us more.

The number of young children (under four years old) who are looked after in Scotland has increased year-on-year since 2002 (Scottish Government, 2012). At 31 July 2011, 39% of the total looked after population were aged four or under (ibid). This upward trend is due to a number of factors, such as better awareness and detection of neglect, as well as increased number of parents misusing alcohol and other drugs.

In line with this national trend, the number of babies accommodated at birth or shortly after birth in South Lanarkshire has increased significantly in the past two years. For many of these children, rehabilitation with birth parents is highly unlikely due to parental substance misuse and/or the child's complex health needs associated with their exposure to drugs and alcohol. In examining how best to achieve permanence for these children the Family Placement Service team has concluded that concurrency planning could improve children's experiences of the looked after system by placing them with a 'forever family' from the time when a decision for permanence has been made.

Concurrency planning aims to reduce the time it takes to achieve permanence for children who cannot be returned home by pursuing parallel plans for rehabilitation and permanence. The notion of twin planning is key in this process, whereby a child is placed with a carer who is dual-registered as a foster and adoptive parent. By placing a child with a foster parent who, depending on the outcome of the rehabilitation plan, may become the child's adoptive parent, concurrency planning minimises the risks of children being further traumatised by placement moves and

drift in the Looked After system. In this model, it is the adults who take the risk and have to deal with uncertainty, rather than the child.

In order to implement a concurrency planning approach, South Lanarkshire Council has secured funding for three years to develop a model which is suited to their local needs. The funding for one social worker post and one therapist post has been made available through the Early Years Partnership Change Fund, and the Scottish Government has provided funding for one social worker post. This group of staff will be involved in recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective adopters to undertake elements of the temporary foster care tasks in order that they can care for a child at an earlier stage in the process. The workers will also be involved in a range of other tasks such as the assessment of parents' capacity and children's needs.

South Lanarkshire is working with the CELCIS PaCT on the development and evaluation of this model. As part of this work, the PaCT's research team is carrying out a documentary analysis of ten cases that achieved permanence through an Adoption or Permanence Order between 2011 and 2012. The aim is to identify what the barriers and facilitators are to achieving permanence for looked after children. Additionally, one of the PaCT's consultants is supporting staff in the Family Placement Service team in the development and implementation of a concurrency model which is suited to local needs.

In-house training tackles ‘drift’ and builds confidence

Michelle Brydon, Assistant Principal Officer, Child Care, Fostering and Adoption at West Dunbartonshire Council discusses how the training of staff has resulted in a significant reduction in the length of time taken for permanence decisions and the positive impact this has had in the drift in care planning for children.

West Dunbartonshire Council has delivered in-house training workshops which have focused on practice issues surrounding drift and workers’ confidence and skills in permanence planning. Their most recent workshop was delivered jointly with the Principal Reporter to the Children’s Hearing. These workshops focus on the permanence planning process in the past, parenting assessments, early permanence decision making, and extending some of these principles when working with families in the community.

The workshops question what it is they are asking birth families to demonstrate once a child is looked after that they have not already been given the opportunity to do, the level and quality of contact issues and what this means for the child, and recording and evidencing contact and parenting assessments. There is feedback from each workshop and this drives future areas of practice focus, highlighting gaps and areas for staff development. The Reporter constructively feeds back directly to senior social workers and Social Workers and they are able to connect this to active cases and learn from each other.

Up-to-date research is also explored and disseminated to staff by the PaCT in relation to what works in assessment and best practice in working to protect and safeguard children and young people. The research is used to support ongoing practice. This, alongside regular one-to-one discussions with senior social workers and social workers, has raised the profile of the permanence agenda and brought it very much to the forefront of workers’ minds.

Quarterly meetings also take place to discuss the care plan for every child in foster care, offering advice in order to reduce delay and drift. Decisions from these

meetings form deadlines set at legal advice meetings, and dates of adoption/permanence panels are then tracked which allows an overview of progress. This information and a summary of progress also provides transparency to senior social workers and senior managers within the area teams and encourages joint ownership of the permanence work.

West Dunbartonshire Council plans to provide a training workshop to family support staff working with families in the community to enable them to record consistently, keeping in mind the need for evidence within reports. The next workshop will also invite Children’s Hearing panel members to engage in practice discussions around permanence planning, and the Principal Reporter is supportive of this.

Training was also provided recently to panel members on West Dunbartonshire’s permanence planning processes and some practice issues/dilemmas around Children’s Hearing decision making. There was positive feedback from panel members that this will enable them to make more informed decisions. This will continue to be a regular feature.

West Dunbartonshire Council’s aim is to share practice and experiences across the authority and deliver and disseminate some of the wider concepts and debates surrounding parenting/contact assessment and permanence planning, with a consistent message and approach.

Improving outcomes for older children

Jennifer Scott, Head of Social Policy at West Lothian Council outlines the Council's commitment to improving services for looked after young people and highlights the work in partnership with the CELCIS PaCT to improve outcomes.

A recent restructuring in West Lothian has brought improvements to services, with new staff taking a critical look at strategy, policy and procedure. There is investment in early intervention with children and families. In common with other local authorities there has also been recognition that corporate parenting and looked after children have not been given the prominence of child protection and we are working hard to address that.

A key current focus of our work is improving outcomes for our older children who have been accommodated. With the CELCIS Throughcare Consultant, we are undertaking a scoping exercise and a process mapping activity to identify and detail care journeys, pathways to support and transitions for looked after young people with the primary focus on those in/requiring external placements, and care leavers. In doing this we will establish and evaluate current operating models, identify strengths and weaknesses, identify areas for improvement and development, and explore and identify target operating models.

Along with the CELCIS PaCT we are revisiting our permanence processes, from earliest assessment and support and assessment in kinship care, through to reducing placement moves and time taken to achieve permanence for all of our children.

West Lothian is also an active participant in the Concurrency Planning Implementation Partnership along with a number of other local authorities, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies, and the CELCIS PaCT to explore ways that we can provide placements to very young vulnerable children to reduce placement moves and decrease the time it takes to achieve permanence.



Decades of supporting Adopters at Adoption UK

Adoption UK in Scotland supports adoptive families at every stage of their adoption journey.

Through their adoptive parents they help vulnerable children who are no longer able to live with their birth families to overcome the trauma they have experienced in their early years and to experience the childhoods they deserve in the care of stable, supportive, life-long, loving families. Fiona Lettuce, Development Manager (Scotland) tells us more.

Adoption UK in Scotland has for over 40 years, run a successful family-finding service 'Children Who Wait', bringing together children and parents. This much-needed service profiles in the region of 200 children waiting for adoption each month.

As an organisation founded and run by adopters, Adoption UK in Scotland draws on over 40 years of experience and evidence-based practice to provide a range of services to help promote, establish and maintain the close family relationships that are so fundamentally important to adopted children's life chances. We better equip and enable parents to understand these particularly vulnerable children's unique needs and to respond to them in the most effective way so that they can make a fundamental and enduring difference to their lives.

Our vision is that all adoptive families in Scotland have access to support, information and training. This can make the vital difference to adoptive families and we are passionate in promoting the need for ongoing support for adoptive families.

From our office base in Edinburgh we provide:

- A dedicated Scottish Helpline that is open to all
- A specialist Family Support Service
- A range of innovative support group activities
- Facilitated family events that enable adoptive families to meet up and develop ongoing friendships
- Conferences and training for both parents and professionals

We have recently recruited a new member of staff and throughout 2013 we will be working to provide more support to families throughout Scotland particularly in the North East and South West of Scotland.

For more information please see our website: www.adoptionuk.org



Barnardos

Stephanie Stone, Assistant Director for Fostering and Adoption, at Barnardo's Fostering Scotland talks about the tools they use in Edinburgh to help children form secure attachments to their foster families.

Barnardo's Edinburgh service provides permanent substitute family care to children who are unable to remain in the care of their birth families. A high number have experienced severe neglect or trauma in their early lives, plus the loss of significant adult figures. For these children the development of positive attachments to their new caregivers is a key factor for future emotional health.

The service currently uses two assessment tools which are grounded in attachment theory: the adult attachment interview (AAI) which is used to assess the applicant foster carer's early attachment experiences, and the MacArthur Story Stem Assessment Profile, a play-based assessment for children aged eight and under, which assesses their expectations and perceptions of attachment figures. For older children the Child Attachment interview (CAI) replaces the Story Stem (SS) model.

These assessments provide a here-and-now analysis of the child's expectations of adults and help foster carers to 'make sense of' and to accept behaviours that may otherwise be seen as hurtful, self-destructive or simply bizarre.

The foster carer has to find ways to help the child develop a more trusting, secure set of expectations of adults. Without this, placements can develop tensions and conflict that can lead to disruption and further damage to the child – and sometimes also to the foster family. The child then risks being unable to form healthy and secure relationships in adulthood. Understanding as much as possible about how the

foster carer operates helps both staff and carers formulate ways of 'parenting' that fit both the child's needs and the carer's parenting style.

The AAI is used for this reason. It is NOT a selection tool but instead provides an in-depth analysis of the carer's beliefs and expectations, facilitating open discussion about how they may or may not manage the child's attachment needs. It provides a shared language and an open acknowledgement of strengths and limitations that can be referred back to over the course of a child's placement.

We are evaluating the impact of these tools in permanent placements. Barnardo's research team has analysed current practice and is now assisting in the formulation of interventions which aim to integrate the AAI and the Story Stem data in a model of support that enables the carer to respond in ways that nurture the development of positive attachments and, in time, give the child a new set of expectations of adults that is more trusting and 'secure'.

We are evaluating these interventions and hope to have conclusions within the next 18 months.

Family Group Conferencing

Children 1st in partnership with the CELCIS PaCT are exploring new initiatives to support Local Authorities to implement Family Group Conferencing. Alison Todd, Children and Family Services Director, tells us more about their pioneering work.

This year Scottish Government will legislate, through the Children and Young People Bill, for families to be involved in decision-making. However, it is less clear how agencies will be expected to make this happen. Children 1ST believes that Family Group Conferencing (FGC) can provide the solution. Why? Because FGC offers an opportunity for professionals and public agencies to truly take a child-centred approach, to provide stable and secure care arrangements for children which provide them with safety and protection and which provide real and lasting change in shifting the balance of power away from professionals and state agencies, putting the decision making power in the hands of those who are directly affected.

FGC gives impetus to a range of Scottish Government policy intentions: the implementation of the GIRFEC model, the Christie recommendations on public service reform in terms of building capacity in the families and community, and emerging practice models such as 'Signs of Safety'. Children 1ST believes that finding ways to support families to look after their own is the way forward.

Children 1ST has pioneered the use of FGCs in Scotland since 1998. FGCs are based on the principle that families have a right to participate in decisions which affect them. They ensure that a child's needs in terms of protection and safety are at the heart of the decision-making process. And crucially, we know from our long experience in this field, that decisions made involving the family are more likely to succeed.

In partnership with Robert Gordon University, Children 1ST has developed training for FGC coordinators. FGC works best where there is an independent co-ordinator – someone with skills and experience who manages the process as well as engaging with all the appropriate family members.

It is radical and represents a whole new way of working, but if we are to involve families in decision-making, to be more child-centred in our practice and to act earlier in order to avoid more expensive, crisis-oriented intervention with vulnerable families, then Family Group Conferencing provides the ideal model to achieve these objectives.

Children 1st have also been engaged by Scottish Government to redesign the Safeguarder system in Scotland, and we have had discussions with the PaCT on future areas of collaboration to support our work in this area.

For more information on Family Group Conferences, visit www.children1st.org.uk

Supporting prospective adopters

St. Andrew's Children's Society is an adoption and foster care agency operating in the East of Scotland. Their core business is the provision of high quality adoptive and foster care placements to Local Authorities.

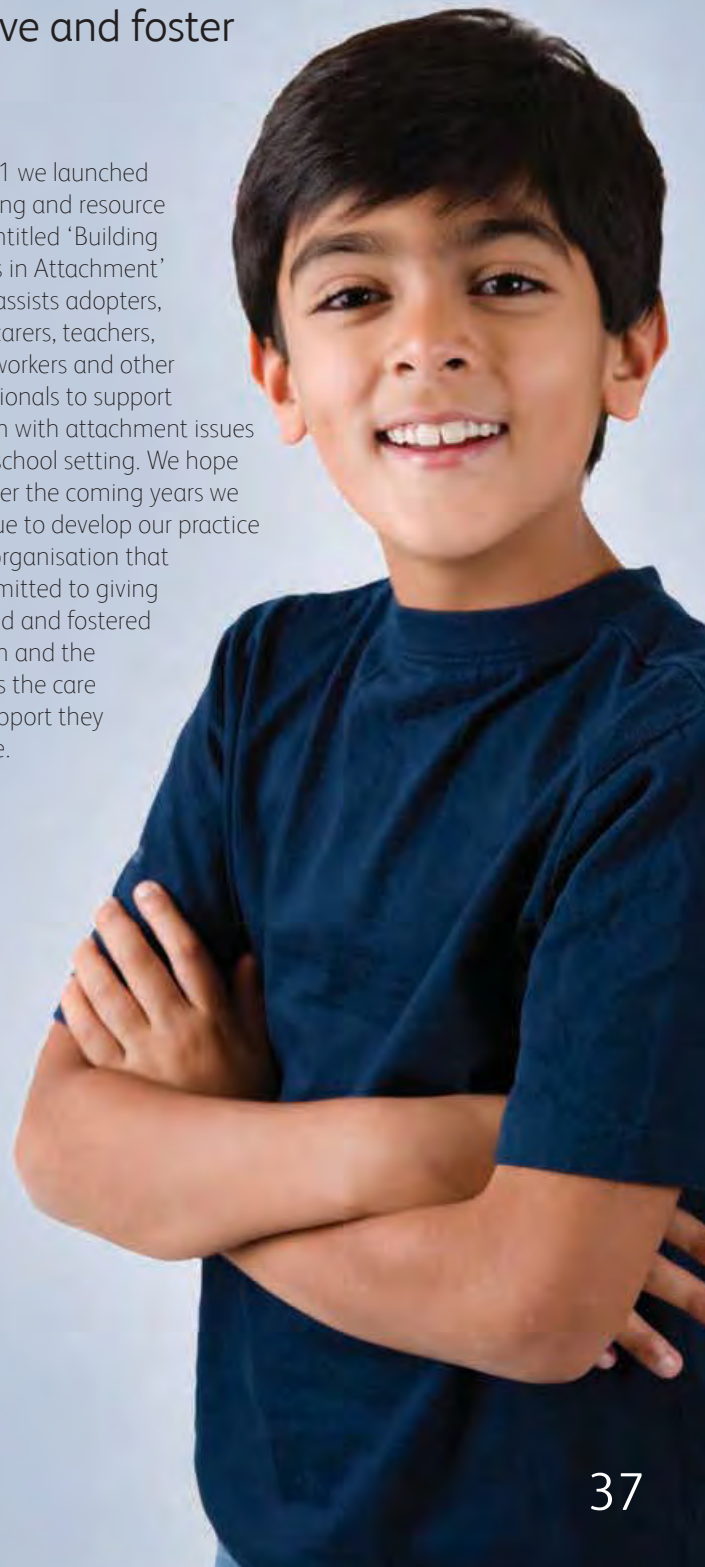
Stephen Small, Director at St Andrew's talks about offering continuing adoption support and counselling services to adopters, adoptees and birth family members.

In January 2013, it was announced that Scottish Government would support St Andrew's Children's Society to extend adoption services to the north east of Scotland. We are in the process of creating a new base in Aberdeen City which will employ two full-time members of staff dedicated to recruiting, approving and supporting prospective adopters. We are very excited about collaborating closely with Local Authorities in the area and developing ways to work together to benefit adoption service provision for children and prospective adopters.

Along with a number of Local Authorities on the east coast, other voluntary adoption agencies and the PaCT, we are looking at the potential to develop a concurrency placement service, allowing Local Authorities to place the most vulnerable children with carers who wish to adopt them should reunification fail. We will explore ways that we can contribute to the assessment and support that is required by birth families.

As always, post-adoption support services are a key priority for us at St Andrew's. As a complement to our long-established support services, we have developed new services and resources to assist us to support adopters and foster carers. In 2009 we became the only agency in Scotland providing the Safebase© Parenting programme that we hope will eventually be available to any adopters in Scotland who might benefit from it.

In 2011 we launched a training and resource pack entitled 'Building Bridges in Attachment' which assists adopters, foster carers, teachers, social workers and other professionals to support children with attachment issues in the school setting. We hope that over the coming years we continue to develop our practice as an organisation that is committed to giving adopted and fostered children and the families the care and support they deserve.



Intensive Fostering Service

Kay Gibson of Kibble Education and Care Centre talks about the foster service it provides for difficult-to-place teenagers and the success the intensive Fostering Service is having.

In the early 2000s, it was increasingly clear that there were young people who had been living in care for many years who would benefit from some experience of a family environment. But there are few organisations capable of providing foster care for young people with more complex problems.

This was the gap in service provision that Kibble Education and Care Centre's Intensive Fostering Service (IFS) set about bridging, and since 2004, it has been operating a foster service for teenagers deemed 'difficult to place'. Due to its success it has now expanded to include children (5 – 18 years) and Supported Care Services for young adults (18 – 21 years).

From the outset, IFS differed from other foster agencies. Crucially, it provides wraparound care for the young person. While enjoying a regular family life, the young person benefits from comprehensive support offered by highly-trained foster carers and expert social work staff. Combining this with the delivery of the young person's education at Kibble's primary or secondary school – and the wider range of services on offer at Kibble - creates a community in which the young person can thrive.

Operations Manager Kay Gibson explained: "It allows us to take a community approach - if a child is having a bad day at school, then the staff here can deal with it. They don't just automatically send the youngster home to the foster carers.

"Some Local Authorities look at the bottom line and think we're expensive until we explain that we're not a regular foster placement. You're paying for the services of a foster carer trained to residential social worker level, an expert support team, psychological services delivered by our Specialist Intervention Services, the child's education and our Day Services provision in which youth workers support teaching staff and foster carers offering individual key time, group work, leisure activities, and residential trips."

Another key element of the IFS approach is the level of support and training given to each carer. Foster carers also receive some of the highest fees in the sector and benefit from a network of 24/7 peer and professional support.

These measures add up to a service recognised by the Care Inspectorate as delivering the highest quality of care. More importantly, it is a service that delivers visible results for the young people it looks after as their educational attainment continues to outstrip the national average for looked after children. Some young people have gone on to attend university, become a child and youth care worker, join the cabin crew of a national airline, or work in the retail sector.

Children and Family Care Society

St Margaret's is a voluntary adoption agency founded in 1955 has placed many thousands of children for adoption. Here Michael Mesarowicz, Director, tells us more about their work.

Historically St Margaret's has placed many thousands of children for adoption. We were founded by the Catholic Church in the West of Scotland as a response to the need for adoption in fact, many who were adopted in the West of Scotland will approach St Margaret's in the first instance for information about their origins as there is a strong possibility that they will have been placed through us.

We maintain an archive of adoption records and have made significant investment in converting the information we hold on paper files into an electronic format. We now maintain a modern electronic record in addition to the original paper records.

St Margaret's offers an Origins Counselling Service to adopted people who wish to have access to their adoption file. We also receive enquiries from birth parents, and while this is a very rewarding area of work, it is also an area which greatly informs our practice. Our social workers gain first-hand experience of the importance of historical information and experience of birth families for adopted people. We transfer this awareness into the preparation and assessment of adopters, highlighting the importance of early history, life story work and life story books.

St Margaret's has developed a reputation for the recruitment and assessment of adoption applicants and we have a very low rate of placement disruption. We have developed strong links and partnerships with Local Authorities throughout Scotland to find families for older and harder-to-place children. We have developed a significant expertise in adoption work and we offer a number of post-placement supports to adopters including workshops, access to visiting lecturers, social work support and assistance in seeking specialised support services. Adoptive families also value our Annual Gathering and Christmas events.

St Margaret's continues to receive a small number of referrals from pregnant women who wish to consider adoption as an option for their unborn child. While such referrals are relatively infrequent, we can offer an independent option for a pregnant woman to receive specialist advice and, if appropriate, an adoption service.

St Margaret's contributes to the development of adoption policy and practice in partnership with other voluntary adoption agencies in Scotland as well as the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), and the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA). Over 10% of adoption placements in Scotland are made in partnership with St Margaret's.

Frazer's story

21-year-old Frazer Molyneux has been in and out of the care system since he was 11. Here he tells his story.

I really struggled throughout my time at primary school and I was finally placed in a referral unit for half days but this did not really work out for me. Around the same time I was diagnosed with ADHD. At the age of 11 I was voluntarily placed in a residential school where I stayed for three years. There was a lot of disruption in classes there and I did not make any real progress.

At the age of 14 this placement broke down and I returned home to my family, with social work support. I was told by my local authority around the age of 14 that I was only entitled to a few hours of education a week and this took place in a local library. I really could have used being in school.

I became involved with Spark of Genius and was eventually, with their help, diagnosed as dyslexic. Now that I had some support, I went on to get some qualifications at Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2 levels. At 17 I was placed in emergency accommodation and I am glad to say I now have my own place.

In what should have been my 5th year, arrangements were made for me to go to a school after hours where I studied chemistry and biology and the head teacher at Lenzie Academy decided to take a chance on me and offered me a 6th year place. I was very upfront with my English teacher and explained that I had never really 'got' English. This teacher took an interest and gave me strategies and worked with me and it all began to fall into place. I achieved an A in Intermediate 2 with her help.

Now that I had some qualifications, I went on to complete an NQ in Social Sciences at Central College of Commerce in Glasgow and I am about to finish an HND in Legal Services. I have recently been offered conditional places to study Law at University. Student Services have been a great support, helping me to access a disabled student's allowance to get a laptop with specialist dyslexia software.

Throughout the years I have had a high turnover of social workers and with the exception of one, I felt they really did not care about me. The transition from child to adult services both in social work and mental health was difficult as adult services 'don't get' corporate parent services. When you move to adult services you hardly ever see the CAMS service.

I was never placed in care through children's panels, it was always voluntary, with the support of my family and social work, and sometimes my parents found it hard to be involved as doors were closed on them. It would have been so much better for me and my family if my placements had been closer to home.

An adopter's view

Recruiting higher numbers of adoptive parents for sibling groups and older children is a key objective of many adoption teams around the country. Here, one adoptive parent shares her adoption story.

It took us a while to be matched with our kids. The wait is really tough. We came through a long process that had taken a year from our initial phone call, and now we were just waiting – waiting for all of the talking to turn into real children, for us to become a family. Finally our social worker presented us with the details of two siblings, with some reservations, because one was older than we'd anticipated. But their details (and those of the older child in particular) really spoke to us, in a way I hadn't expected. We were discovering that the details of older children convey more of their personalities and interests, obviously because they have had time to develop these, but it made us think more and more positively about adopting an older child.

We met the kids' social worker and her line manager and a few days later the news came back that the children's social worker wanted to proceed with the match. Hooray!!! We went to 'Matching Panel' and the match was unanimously approved.

The next part was so surreal. We cleared the decks and took ourselves off to meet the kids. The moment when we knocked on the door of our daughter's foster home and this little girl opened it will forever be etched into our minds. She looked so different from photographs, and yet it was her – and so lovely. Our son-to-be was so over-excited, he barely sat still and his foster carer kept apologising for him. Our daughter-to-be was very quiet, just watching and taking it all in.

It was a shock to the system for all of us when they finally came home. Life changed forever, as we got on with the practicalities of being a parent to two children that we had written information about but very little practical experience of. Things settle down – but they take time. Both children had night terrors or nightmares for a long time, and still do if there's any sense of unsettledness. I learned that I could sleep when the kids were in bed and that they would still be there in the morning! A sense of humour is essential to parenting our kids – for example, their responses to any event was way over the top at first (whether that was excitement at a present or denial of a wrongdoing), but they have become calmer and we talk through appropriate responses to them, or laugh about it!

There is a definite sense of 're-parenting' our wee boy, now six. He has gone through the emotional stages of a much younger child with us, from tantrums (he'd never had them before he came to us, but they're an essential part of development) to 'playing' at being a baby. It really helps to know that he's just revisiting the baby stages he never got to have. He was quite angry for a while. He couldn't remember his birth parents and didn't want to be taken from his foster carers. But although he likes to try and be in control, he's becoming such a happy, contended and clever wee boy who loves us to bits and he pushes boundaries in much the same way as all his friends. We're discovering that as well as love, consistency, empathy and all those other therapeutic parenting essentials, strong (but generally kind) boundaries are also necessary.

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Real life experiences

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Holly van Gulden said in a workshop that I attended that children who push boundaries are actually trying to find them and needing to find them.

Our daughter, now almost eleven (wow, I can't believe that), had learned to cope with life in her birth home remarkably well. But she came to us very over-compliant and absolutely terrified of any hint of trouble. She had no opinion of her own and her get-up-and-go had got up and gone. She also had some eating issues – although not as bad as some I've read about. She was incredibly behind at school. All of these have improved hugely, although they've not disappeared and we're still finding things out about her that are legacies of life with her birth family. She desperately wanted a new family and a new life and we hope that she has what she dreamed of (although sadly, we can't provide the dog, horses, or skiing holidays!). It has been so rewarding to adopt an older child and to begin to see her real personality shine through now she's in a loving and stable home. Just the other day, my daughter said to me "I think I might adopt an older child when I grow up. Or maybe an older child and a younger one. It's harder for older children to get adopted and that's not fair, because older children should have nice families too."

We got our adoption order nine months after they came to live with us. It was a special day, especially for our daughter – I think she began to feel that everything would be all right after that day. Mind you, they were our children long before a piece of paper said that they were!

The fuller version of this story is available at www.scottishadoption.org/adoption-stories/adoptive-parents/Sibling-Adoption

Children with disability: a foster carer's story

Helen Hunter, Head of Service Innovation at Quarriers introduces us to Elana Monaghan, foster carer to William.

Elena Monaghan became a foster carer to William when all her children had left home. For some, this decision can often be driven by the desire to be a parent all over again. This wasn't the case for Elena though.

William, who is wheelchair bound and has cerebral palsy as well as complex health needs, was an adult when he was fostered by Elena. He had lived in long-stay hospitals for the first 17 years of his life before the adult placement team at Quarriers matched him with the Monaghan family in Dumbarton.

More than 20 years later and the placement is rock solid. "I wish I was 40 years younger – and I would be taking someone else to foster too," admits Elena, who is now 66. "I never think of William as being fostered. He's just my son."

Elena and William are just one of many stable placements secured by the Quarriers adult disability placement team. The building blocks to these success stories have meant ensuring foster carers have the right support structures in place. Caring for a disabled person can be extremely challenging and tiring, so Quarriers has ensured adequate respite is in place to help carers get time to recharge their batteries.

Stories like William and Elena were also the driving force behind Quarriers launching a new fostering service aimed at securing disabled children a stable placement. The thinking behind the new service was that if Quarriers could find a stable match for a disabled child, the charity could support them and their carers through to adulthood, ensuring minimal disruption during a critical transition in a young person's life.

To coincide with the launch of the new service, Quarriers commissioned a YouGov survey which found just a quarter of potential foster carers in Scotland would consider a child with multiple disabilities and complex needs. The main reasons given for not wanting to foster a disabled child was the fear that it would be exhausting and there would be insufficient support – similar concerns Quarriers successfully addressed to ensure stable placements for adults.

However, the survey highlighted the fact disabled children continue to face significant obstacles to finding a secure placement. Studies have found it can take up to six years to find a permanent placement for a disabled child – around three times longer than for a non-disabled child.

Drawing on Quarriers' extensive experience in providing short breaks for parents of disabled children, the aim has been to build a support structure around the foster carers, offering them opportunities to recharge their batteries, just like we have done in the adult placement service.

So far we have had numerous enquiries and the approach is starting to bear fruit. Soon we are hoping to have many stories about successful, stable placements that started at a much younger age than William, with carers every bit as dedicated and enthusiastic as Elena.

The story of a Birth Parent

When you're young you take for granted what your life will be like when your older, the life you'll lead and the family you'll have, you never stop to consider that the life choices you may make might jeopardise that future life.

I became an addict at 16 years old, at that stage I hadn't considered having children but by the time I fell pregnant I had been a chaotic addict for four years. I assumed everything would be ok and my child would come home with me.

I attended all antenatal appointments and did everything that was asked of me except stay clean, workers gave me advice and held meetings, but due to my life style I was never honest and held lots back believing this was for the best, when I should have realised if I was open and honest I could have received the help and support I needed. All this resulted in me having to leave the hospital without my son after his birth.

For years I tried, I tried to get clean, I tried to get my son home but I could not abstain from illicit drugs. I was given chances and my son did return home briefly as a toddler but I could not maintain the stability or abstinence needed to care for him properly, so after six months at home my son was returned to foster care where he remained until he was five years old.

When he was five years old I gave birth to my daughter. I never believed my daughter would be allowed to live with me as I had continued to be chaotic and use throughout my pregnancy, I really loved my children but the hold the drugs had over me was too great to break.

To my surprise and delight my daughter was allowed to return home monitored by social work, with added support of living with my aunt until I could cope on my own. From the day she was born I managed to remain clean which allowed me to gain increased contact with my son, which evolved into a rehabilitation plan. It was made clear if this plan failed permanency would be sought in respect of my son.

For a while everything went well, I only had a week to go and my son would be home full time when myself and my ex-partner were involved in an incident which involved the police and both my children were taken into care, as my daughter hadn't been in care before she was returned the next day but my son was returned to his carers.

Over the next year my addiction got worse as did my criminal behaviour and my daughter was also put into care. For six months I continued my chaotic lifestyle knowing I should change just not knowing how to, until I eventually put myself into rehab and got clean, and I thought that meant I could have my children home, but I was wrong.

My contacts with both my children were reduced, I couldn't understand why as I was maintaining stability and had enrolled at college, but a decision was made to seek permanency orders for both my children. I felt like giving in, I could have relapsed but I didn't I held on and in for my daughter it paid off when a rehabilitation plan was put in place after a particularly good panel. The result of this is that my daughter has been back in my full time care for just over a year.

My son is still in care and had moved to pre-adoption placement and social work asked for my parental rights to be removed. Unfortunately, this placement broke down, this was hard for my son but for me it was a silver lining because social work decided it is not in my son's best interest to remove my parental rights or to seek permanency for him, he will stay in care for the foreseeable future but I'll still be entitled to my contact and have the hope that this maybe increased in the future.

If I had not received the last minute reprieve that I did both my children would have been adopted and I would have been lucky to get letter box contact once a year, but I learned how to change my lifestyle and be open and honest with my worker. This honesty came from the help and support my worker gave me to remain clean and the understanding they gave me of my past which I could access any time, I didn't have to wait for an appointment which helped a lot as things don't happen on an appointment basis. This has helped me become the parent I need to be, but it is an on-going process and it helps to take the help and support available.

With thanks to Renfrewshire Council



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CEL CIS is the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. Together with partners, we are working to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland. We do so by providing a focal point for the sharing of knowledge and the development of best practice, by providing a wide range of services to improve the skills of those working with looked after children, and by placing the interests of children at the heart of our work.