

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 18 January 2024

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Annual Report of the Fostering and Adoption Service
2022/23

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides elected members with the opportunity to review the 16th annual report of Renfrewshire's Fostering and Adoption Service (appendix1).
 - 1.2. The annual report sets out the work undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Fostering and Adoption Service in the period 1 August year 2022 to 31 July 2023. The annual report notes that on 31 July 2023 there were 75 fostering households approved by Renfrewshire. During the period covered by this report, 13 children and young people had a permanence plan considered by the panel and approved by the agency decision maker.
 - 1.3. The annual report notes that the Fostering and Adoption Service was inspected by the Care Inspectorate in January 2023. The inspectors reported strengths in the services and awarded grades of good or very good for the services provided.
 - 1.4. The report considers the future work of the panel and the continued work of the fostering and adoption service.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Education and Children's Services Policy Board is asked to:
 - a) note the contents of the Fostering and Adoption Annual Report 2022/23 attached as appendix 1.
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3. Background

- 3.1. The Looked After (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009 require Social Work in its role as a Fostering and Adoption agency to operate a Fostering Panel and an Adoption Panel. This panel has the responsibility for putting forward recommendations to the agency decision makers John Trainer (Head of Child Care and Justice Services) and Michelle McCargo, (Children's Services Manager) regarding the suitability of people to adopt or foster children. Furthermore, the Panel considers and approves plans for children to be adopted or for the Council to apply for Permanence Orders on a child. The Panel also considers and approves the matching of a particular child with a particular family where the plan is for the child to live there permanently.
- 3.2. Renfrewshire operates a Fostering Panel and Adoption Panel with one constitution. The panel separates out the Fostering business from the Adoption business to ensure that the appropriate regulations are met regarding a quorum, and for the attendance of the legal and medical advisers. The panel has two chairpersons who are independent from the work of the service: One is a Social Work manager, and the other is from the Association for Fostering Adoption and Kinship Scotland.
- 3.3. There are currently 12 members of the panel comprising elected members, social work staff, a legal adviser, a medical adviser, carers, independent panel members, and an independent member from the Association for Fostering Adoption and Kinship Scotland. The panel sits at least monthly. There are typically 3 panel members at each meeting along with appropriate advisors. The panel considered 71 agenda items over the course of the year.
- 3.4. The panel has a unique overview of the work being undertaken to assess and approve foster carers and adopters alongside the work being undertaken by social workers to progress plans for children who cannot be cared for within their own family. The annual report has been produced as a means of sharing this work with a wider audience and to assist in the process of service planning.
- 3.5. Renfrewshire had 75 active households of foster carers on 31st July 2022. In the period 1/08/22 and 31/7/2023 an additional 6 households were registered as foster carers, and 4 foster care households left the service, 2 foster care households left the service due to changes in their circumstances, 2 households retired after a lengthy career in fostering.
- 3.6. The report notes the ongoing need to recruit Renfrewshire foster carers and adopters because of children being accommodated and in need of permanent care, and our commitment to reducing the number of children being placed externally. In the past we have had high-profile recruitment activity which only produced 1 or 2 more applications to foster. Most of our fostering applications come from people who already have foster carers as friends or family. There is a national difficulty in recruitment of foster carers. The service continue to work with communication and marketing to consider how best to promote fostering recruitment.

- 3.7. In the period 1/08/22 and 31/07/2023 a total of 6 Renfrewshire households were approved as adopters at the Renfrewshire panel.
- 3.8. The Fostering and Adoption services are subject to regulation and were last inspected by the Care Inspectorate in January 2023. The Care Inspectorate reports were positive with gradings of very good or good being applied to all domains inspected.
- 3.9. The Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 increases the responsibility/ duty of Local Authorities to provide continuing care placements for young adults up to the age of 21. This means that more young people are remaining in the same placement after they are 18. The service continues to assess foster carers to become supported carers wherever this is appropriate.
- 3.10. There are currently 13 young adults living with supported carers. Many of these carers were previously the young adults' foster carers.
- 3.11. The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 became law in 2021 and places new duties on local authorities to place brothers and sisters together in placements and place a new duty on local authorities to promote contact between brothers and sisters who are looked after. This is in keeping with the independent care review report, The Promise.
- 3.12. Renfrewshire approved the "Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together Policy" in May 2021. The policy contains the following pledge "When children come into care Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together". The policy recognises that there will be times that brothers, and sisters can't be placed together but requires us to report on this. The Fostering and Adoption Service operate within this policy.

Implications of this report

1. **Financial**
None
2. **HR and Organisational Development**
None.
3. **Community/Council Planning**

Our Renfrewshire is safe - *The provision of foster care provides Renfrewshire's children with safety and care.*
4. **Legal**
None.
5. **Property/Assets**
None.
6. **Information Technology**
None.

7. Equality and Human Rights

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report.

8. Health and Safety

None.

9. Procurement

None.

10. Risk

None.

11. Privacy Impact

None.

12. Cosla Policy Position

None.

13. Climate Risk

None.

List of Background Papers

(a) Background Paper 1: Fostering and Adoption Annual Report.

The foregoing background papers will be retained within children's services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Clare Cuning 0141 487 4297

Children's Services

CC 6/12/22

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**THE FOSTERING AND
ADOPTION
PANEL AND SERVICE**

ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023

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Foreword

Welcome to the annual report of Renfrewshire's Fostering and Adoption Service and The Fostering and Adoption Panel. This report reviews the previous year and looks to future developments.

On 31 July 2023, Renfrewshire Council had 627 Looked After Children. Of these, 170 children and young people were looked after at home, 270 were looked after by kinship carers or friends/relatives and 167 were accommodated with foster carers, in pre-adoption arrangements or within residential placements. Renfrewshire Council had 75 Fostering households at this time.

Children who are looked after in foster care, can either be with Renfrewshire foster carers or with foster carers approved by an external agency or charity. Wherever possible we try to have children live with Renfrewshire foster carers. On 31 July 2023 there were 21 children/young people living with foster carers from external fostering agencies compared to 39 in 2022. This is a substantial decrease over this period and is in line with Renfrewshire's strategy to ensure children are cared for by their own family, in kinship or with Renfrewshire's internal services. The number of children placed with external foster care has also reduced as they reach the age of 18 and are no longer reported as children.

The work of the Fostering and Adoption Service continues to ensure that children are living in the best and safest environments to meet their individual needs, and that children who require to live permanently in foster care are matched with an appropriate foster family at the earliest opportunity.

The Fostering and Adoption Service remains committed to ensuring that the principles of Renfrewshire's 'Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together' policy are embedded in all aspects of its practice. Where we cannot place brothers and sisters together, the service supports natural family time between brothers and sisters outwith formal arrangements wherever possible.

The Fostering and Adoption Panel provides an important quality assurance role in ensuring that the work undertaken to assess children's long-term care needs, and the assessment of their potential carers, is carried out to the highest standards. The Panel's role is to make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who ultimately approves children's permanence plans or confirms that a household can adopt or become foster carers.

The Panels continue to be busy. Between 1 August 2022 and 31 July 2023, 14 children's permanence plans were approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

We hope that you enjoy reading this year's annual report.

John Trainer
Head of Child Care and Justice
Chief Social Work Officer

Michelle McCargo
Social Work Children's Services Manager

Introduction

This is the 16th annual report of Renfrewshire Council's Fostering and Adoption Panel and Service.

Renfrewshire Council has a statutory duty to operate fostering and adoption panels. In Renfrewshire we have one panel which carries out both functions.

The Adoption and Fostering Panel operates within the statutory framework of the Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009 (Part II) (AAS Regulations) and the Looked After (Scotland) Regulations 2009 (Part VI) (the LAC Regulations).

These regulations set the basis for the membership of the panel, the frequency of meetings, the appointment of advisors and the different functions of the panel.

The Renfrewshire Fostering and Adoption Panel has at least one business meeting with panel members, advisors, and the Agency Decision Makers in attendance on an annual basis. It is good practice for all panels to have regular planned business meetings to review their overall functioning. The quorum for individual meetings of the panel is three members, and we ensure this number includes people with relevant experience and a range of backgrounds to provide robust and independent scrutiny of the business presented.

Responsibility for the functions and decisions of the panel rests with the Chief Social Work Officer. Authority is delegated to a Senior Manager in Children's services to chair the panel. We have a second chair from the Association of Fostering and Kinship Adoption Scotland. The Head of Child Care and Justice and the Social Work Children's Services Manager, act as Agency Decision Makers for the panel.

The purpose of the Panel is to consider prospective foster carers, prospective adopters, and supported/continuing carers. In addition, the Panel considers individual children's needs for alternative permanent carers (where the care plan for the child is that they do not return home to their birth family), this includes considering the most appropriate legal route to secure this outcome. The Panel also considers the matching of a child with specific foster carers or adoptive parents.

The fostering and adoption team is responsible for the recruitment, training, supervision and support of suitable foster carers and prospective adopters. Ensuring we have sufficient carers with the skills and experience necessary to meet the needs of the diverse range of babies, children and young people who need care away from their birth families is the over-arching objective of the team.

Context

The work of the Fostering and Adoption Panel should be viewed in the context of the overall numbers of Renfrewshire Council's Looked After and Accommodated children.

Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People

As of 31st July 2023, Renfrewshire Council had 627 Looked After Children/Young People. The number of children living in Kinship arrangements has increased from the previous year *. The number of children living with Renfrewshire Council's foster carers remained the same whilst those residing with independent/charity sector foster carers reduced. The number of children residing in independent sector foster carers decreased again in the reporting year continuing a trend of steadily decreasing each year over the past 10 years.

	31/07/2022	31/07/2023
Local Authority – Children in Children's Houses	17	20
Local Authority – Children in Foster Carer	110	112
Independent Sector Children in Foster Care	39	21
Independent Sector Children in Residential School	13	11
Independent Sector Children in Residential Special Needs	18	18
Pre – Adoption	8	2
Independent Sector Children – Secure School	3	3
Children Looked After by Kinship carers/friends/relatives	230	270 *
Children Looked After at home	143	170
TOTAL	581	627

*This figure includes 25 young people who have been with kinship carers for a number of years but were previously considered not to be looked after and accommodated. Following review in April of 2023 of the circumstances of these children it was decided they should be included in the reporting of looked after children. Over the 12 months there has therefore been an increase of 15 young people in new kinship placements.

Cases presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel	August 2022 –	July 2023
Business Item	Previous Year	Aug 22 - July 23
Child adoption plans and links	6	4
Approval of Renfrewshire adopters (households)	2	6
Approval of adopters to increase registration	1	0
Conversion of Foster carers to Adopters	1	0
Approval of Adopters for children from overseas.	0	0
De registration of adopters	1	0
Review of Registration (Adoption)	1	1
Request/Review of Adoption Allowance	3	2
Children's Permanence Order plans	9	9
Links with Permanent Foster Carer	6	4
Approval of new Foster Carer	2	6
Approval of Foster Carer – change from interim to permanent status	6	4
De registration of foster carers	9	4
Approval of Supported Carers	8	5
Initial review of Foster Carers after 1 year	3	2
Foster Carer Reviews (after year 3)	20	24
Review/Change of Foster Carer Registration	1	0
Total Number of Agenda Items	70	71

There were a total of 16 Fostering and Adoption Panels held between 1st August 2022 and 31st July 2023.

Panel Membership

The service has continued to have a consistent and committed panel membership over the past year. However, the number of panel members has reduced to 12 including 2 chairpersons – one of whom is independent and commissioned from the Association of Fostering, Kinship and Adoption Scotland. Over recent months there has been an active recruitment of panel members to ensure that the panel membership continues to reflect a wide range of experience from a range of areas including social work, education, health, independent sector, and those with lived experience of fostering and adoption. As such we have five new panel members going through the induction process.

The medical advisers continue to offer a valuable service and support to the panel in respect of provision and interpretation of medical information in relation to the children and adults being presented to panel. The medical adviser provides up-to-date written information regarding any health issues in relation to a child or a prospective foster carer or adoptive parent.

The panel has a representative from the council's legal services who acts as legal advisor and provides written legal advice to the Panel in relation to adoption and permanence work. The legal advisor attends the Panel whenever permanence is being considered, and on other occasions where the chairperson feels their advice is required.

The Senior Social Worker for Adoption acts as the professional panel advisor.

Panel members attend appraisal meetings with the panel chair and panel professional advisor. Feedback from panel members is gathered from this meeting and ideas generated are incorporated into the business meeting agenda for consideration on how to improve the functioning and participation at panel.

Staffing

The structure of the Fostering and Adoption Service is: -

Social Work Manager (operations) - Registered manager of the service.

Service Manager (responsible for overall management of the fostering and adoption service).

1 Senior Social Worker (responsible for adoption and permanence service, and management of staff)

1 Senior Social Worker (responsible for the fostering service and management of staff)

9 full time Social Workers

1 part time social worker

2 social work assistants

The fostering and adoption service now has a separate fostering team and an adoption and permanence team. This separation allowed the development of more specialist skills regarding fostering and adoption. Both teams work closely together and share expertise and learning.

Commitment to permanence planning 01/08/2022 to 31/07/2023

Between 01.08.21 and 31.7.22, Renfrewshire has progressed adoption and permanence plans for 13 children. This is fewer than last year with more Permanence Order Plans being approved than Adoption Plans. Renfrewshire Council recognises the importance in progressing plans for children within appropriate timescales. There are different initiatives being implemented by senior management to support and enable social work staff involved in permanence work to undertake both the direct work with the child and family and to complete the necessary reports. These initiatives include training for social workers and carers on issues specifically relevant to permanence, working closely with social work staff with regards to the needs of the child and planning for adoption or permanency.

In line with our commitment to keeping children with their birth families where it is safe to do so, we are working to improve identification of potential alternative care arrangements within parents' wider family network at the earliest possible stage. This important work with parents occurs before presentation to the permanence panel, however, even where permanence outwith the family becomes necessary, it can provide the child with important life-long links with their family and contribute to more positive long-term outcomes for children.

The decision to place a child permanently outwith their birth family rightly involves a high level of assessment to ensure the plan is in the best interests of the child and will meet their needs throughout their childhood. During the permanence process, checks and balances are in place to ensure the best possible outcome for the child. Permanence planning work is complex however, it is also highly rewarding when children find new 'forever' families and have the opportunity to thrive into adulthood.

Inspection

The Fostering and Adoption Service is a regulated service, which is registered and subject to inspection by the Care Inspectorate. The last inspection took place in January 2023. This inspection included the Supported carers Service Inspection at the same time.

The Services were inspected using the following quality Indicators (QI):

QI 1 How well do we support people's wellbeing and

QI 5 How well is our care and support planned?

The care Inspectorate grade services from unsatisfactory, weak, adequate, good and very good.

The Fostering Service received grades of good for QI 1 and QI 5.

The Adoptions Service received grades of good for QI 1 and very good for QI 5.

The Supported carers service received grades of good for QI1 and very good for QI 5.

The inspection was using a new QI framework and we have scored highly in comparison with other Local Authorities. The Inspections recognised the very good work that all services provide.

Report on Fostering Service

The fostering service continues to offer a high standard of care to children in our care. All supervision and unannounced visits have continued face to face. The Fostering and Adoption Panel and Foster Carer Reviews have also returned to being face to face in the office. There continues to be some training and other related meetings offered in a hybrid format.

Developments within the Fostering Service 2022 – 2023

- During Fostering Fortnight in May 2023, the service made use of social media, offering virtual and in person drop in opportunities for anyone interested in fostering and also articles from our foster carers were shared.
- The Service continued to work with neighbouring authorities regarding shared services.
- We continued the introduction of a “Letter to the Child” from Foster Carers to Children in their care which form part of their life story.
- Children in foster care continued to be involved in participation strategies through the Breakthrough group with Who Cares? Scotland.
- Managers within the Fostering Service continued to attend Social Work Scotland meetings and liaise with neighbouring authorities.
- We have encouraged birth families to contribute to foster care reviews.
- We have continued to try to increase the number of Continuing Carers and Supported Carers
- The service began embedding Egress which is an electronic communication system to allow us to communicate electronically and securely with our foster carers.

Recruitment activity/ Preparation groups

The Service Manager and the Fostering Senior Social Worker work with Renfrewshire Council’s Communication team to continue to develop and refine our recruitment strategy. It is recognised nationally that there is a shortage of foster carers. We know that fear of the unknown and concerns about managing complex behaviours often get in the way of people coming forward to foster. For these reasons, our recruitment strategy will focus on the excellent wraparound support we provide to our carers.

If the person who has enquired wishes to take the next step, an initial visit is completed by a social worker from the fostering team. After the initial visit, a discussion takes place between the visiting social worker and the senior social worker to consider whether the enquirers should be invited to preparation groups. (See appendix 1 for fostering criteria). The usual process is that applications to be assessed as a foster carer are not submitted by applicants until after they have completed the preparation groups.

Between 1 August 2022 - 31 July 2023 the service assessed 6 households to become foster carers. Of these, four were assessed as short break carers, and two as interim carers.

The preparation groups are the start of the assessment process and an opportunity for the participants to receive more in-depth information and to discuss the implications of fostering and as such it is important that all enquirers attend. Experienced foster carers come along to talk to the group about their different experiences of caring for foster children. The preparation groups cover a range of topics including managing challenging behaviour, brain development, attachment issues, safer care and working with birth parents.

Preparation groups run for five or six evening sessions. The facilitators from the fostering team make use of the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' materials, as well as up-to-date research and our own training materials.

There were no preparation groups held within the reporting period due to a shortage of interest.

New foster carers and carers deregistered

In the period August 2022 – July 2023, an additional six fostering households were approved as new foster carers. Two households were approved as interim and four households as short break foster carers. During this period there were also four fostering households deregistered. The reasons for the deregistration of fostering households were that two fostering household resigned due to a change in their personal circumstances and two fostering households retired after many years and coming to the end of their fostering career.

Foster Carer Reviews

Foster Carers have a review by the Fostering Panel at the end of their first year of fostering and every three years thereafter. Outwith this timescale, foster carers will also return to Panel if their registration requires a review due to a change in registration, consideration of a complaint or allegation, breakdown, or a significant change in circumstances.

Between 1 August 2022 and 31 July 2023 the Fostering and Adoption Panel reviewed 26 foster care households.

Foster Carer Reviews are an opportunity for foster carers to talk about their experience, training, and support etc. Renfrewshire Council's foster carers, in the main expressed satisfaction with their experiences of fostering and their learning and remain enthusiastic and committed. They have found the support provided by their social worker to be beneficial and available as required. Foster carers have attended less training during this period as many have stated that the training program on offer currently is courses many have attended previously. We will continue to encourage foster carers to attend this training because even if it is a course they have attended before no two training sessions are identical, and they will always get something different out of each training as it is always updated.

Foster carers registration is internally reviewed on an annual basis by Social Work Managers. The foster carers provide written and verbal contribution to the review process, as well as written reports from their birth children. Reports by their supervising social worker and child's social worker are all part of the review process. Foster children are encouraged to contribute to the review process and there has also been a development which has seen more response with regards to birth parents being encouraged to submit a report for the Foster Carer Review regarding the care their child/children is receiving.

Within the reporting period, 55 foster carer household reviews took place in total including those at panel.

The duties of the supervising social workers from the fostering team are to keep regular contact with the foster carers, this includes home visits and telephone contact. Home visits generally take place on a four to six-weekly basis, depending on the issues arising. Home visits consist of supervision, training, and development, as well as performing a range of duties including ensuring health and safety checks are carried out annually, annual medical information is received and PVG checks are up to date. Safer caring policies are in place for each fostering household which include a minimum of two unannounced visits annually. Supervising social

workers will also attend Looked After Children review meetings. Joint visits by the child's social worker and the social worker from the fostering team takes places when a child first moves to live with a foster carer and routinely thereafter.

Permanent Foster Carers

Nine children's plans for Permanence Orders were approved between 1 August 2022 – 31 July 2023, four of these children were linked to their current foster carers for the purpose of permanent fostering. These children remained with their carers who were re-assessed as permanent carers by the fostering team.

Foster Carer Training

A Training program designed specifically for foster carers has been reintroduced in the reporting period with the support provided to foster carers by their supervising social worker continued to address training needs and the development of skills.

The fostering service continues to provide mandatory training on fire safety, first aid and safer caring. Some of this training was disrupted by the pandemic. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service resumed fire safety training in June 2022 which will be offered on an ongoing basis and all carers will be expected to attend. West of Scotland College is to restart first aid training. Mandatory training should be attended by foster carers every three years.

Social workers and foster carers can also attend external training courses. The Fostering Network and Association of Fostering and Kinship Adoption Scotland have provided training to new social workers within the Fostering and Adoption Team including Skills to Foster, the Role of the Supervising Social Worker and Assessment of foster carers and adopters. Staff have also attended other training relevant to their role.

Staying Connected Toolkit

From July 2022 to July 2023, one social worker in the Fostering and Adoption Service undertook a year's secondment opportunity with Association of Fostering and Kinship Adoption Scotland, in the role of Staying Connected Project Co-ordinator. During this year she developed a new Toolkit for practitioners who support children to transition to permanent fostering, to adoption, and to kinship care. The Toolkit is informed by the most up to date research and policy guidance, to help practitioners support children and young people make successful moves, and to stay connected to the people important to them during these transitions and beyond. The Toolkit is not procedural; there are no forms, and it's not a 'how to' and 'when' approach. Instead, it encourages individualised and trauma informed practice that is guided by listening to children and young people. As such, it is fully congruent with the principles of The Promise.

The Toolkit has been launched across Scotland and has two main intended uses. Firstly, it can be used by those who deliver training to others. It includes PowerPoint slides and trainers notes for 4 sessions: Key Principles in Permanence Transitions, Transitions to Adoption, Transitions to Permanent Foster Care and Transitions to Kinship Care. Secondly, the Toolkit supports individual learning through a series of Briefing Papers and video presentations. Finally, there are also a series of case examples to support reflective learning in individual or group settings.

The worker has now returned to the Fostering and Adoption Service with a new network of resources, information and expertise which will support the team on an ongoing basis.

Foster Carers' Support Group

The foster carers have their own informal support group where they can share information/experiences and any issues raised within the group are fed back to the fostering team via the carers supervising social worker or the foster carers consultation group. This group had to become a "WhatsApp" group during the pandemic with active and ongoing communication. Some carers were keen to get back to a face-to-face group, and while the WhatsApp group has continued and is used frequently, the Foster Carers restarted the monthly face to face group in December 2022.

The Fostering Service has facilitated 2 Foster Carer Coffee Mornings over the last year, these have been an informal opportunity, where all fostering households are invited along as well as all the fostering and adoption staff and managers. This is particularly beneficial for new carers and building networks of support. These have been highly attended events and it is hoped they will continue to be offered a few times per year.

The Foster Carers come along, tea/coffee and cakes are provided people can have a chat in a very informal setting, it is also an opportunity for foster carers to put a face to the names of staff members whom they may never have met in other circumstances.

Consultation Group

The Carers Consultation Group met four times between August 2022 and July 2023. These have all been offered face to face in the office environment. All Foster Carers are invited to this group, and it is attended by the Senior Social Worker Fostering, the Service Manager/or Operations Manager and on one occasion the Head of Service. This provides an opportunity for foster carers to be kept updated with any changes within the service and discuss any issues that have arisen for them or other carers. It is also the opportunity for more informal discussion. Feedback to carers who do not attend is through the newsletter, minutes, or discussion with their own Supervising Social Worker.

Breakthrough Group

The Breakthrough group is now in its 8th year and has been running on a monthly basis since 2015. This is a semi structured participation group for children and young people in foster care. This group is facilitated by Renfrewshire Council Children's Services and Who Cares? Scotland.

The group was originally set up to give children/young people a safe space with other children who may be experiencing similar issues whilst living in fostering families. The focus of the group was to support and facilitate the young peoples' voices on issues important to them. These voices and stories were then put in a newsletter, written, and produced by the young people. This was then sent out to all of Renfrewshire's young people currently in foster carer. We have around 9 regular group members, some of whom are original members from 2015.

Over the years the focus of the group has naturally evolved. During 2020 and 2021 the group had to move online with occasional face to face meet ups when it was safe to do so. In March 2022, the group were able to resume our monthly face to face group setting. At this point the young people felt a need for change and made the decision to embark on a different project as they felt their voices could be better heard in a different form other than and newsletter. They also decided to try and complete a project as a group as opposed to their individual stories being included in a newsletter.

The theme of their project was called 'Moving relationships' addressing the importance of maintaining significant relationships throughout their care journey. The young people wanted a different platform to share their views, initially thinking of doing something online or web based. We liaised with Duncan Wilson coordinator of The Promise Arts and Culture Programme, who after speaking with the young people and their thoughts of creating an animation, accessed funding from Future Paisley. Through these links, Duncan arranged for us to meet with an animation company called Toads Caravan, specifically Joanne Susskind. Joanna has, over the past 2 months, met with the young people and on 6 occasions, taking their thoughts and ideas and helping them create a short animation entitled 'Moving Relationship'. This animation is still in its editing stage and is hoped to be completed by December 2023.

The young people appear to have enjoyed this experience, learning new skills. Moving forward they are in discussion of potentially doing more art-based projects in the coming months.

Newsletter for Foster Carers

The fostering newsletter is produced in Spring, Summer and Winter editions and distributed to all foster carers by e-mail. The focus of the newsletter is about providing the carers with updates on legal or practice changes that affect them or the children they care for, providing some thought-provoking articles about issues that affect fostered children, keeping them informed of changes within the child care team, and advertising training opportunities. Topics covered in the last year include updates on the implications of 'The Promise', protocols for children who go missing from placement, preparing children for children's hearings, therapeutic life story work, the importance of play in child development and the meaning of care records for young people. Much of the inspiration for the topic choice comes from the Carers' Consultation Group, the CELCIS website and Council's Children's Services 'Learning gone viral' newsletter. The fostering quarterly newsletter continues to go out to all fostering households. Foster carers are encouraged to contribute to the newsletter in relation to their learning and experiences.

Future developments of the fostering service 2023 – 2024

1. Relaunch Book Group for foster carers.
2. Breakthrough Group supporting care experienced young people to continue monthly, with feedback from young people to inform service development.
3. Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) groups to be offered more frequently.
4. Review and provide training programme to carers, including evening training and training to support carers.
5. Produce professional development plan for carers.
6. Provide Sleep Scotland Programme to carers where required.
7. Support group for foster carers of teenagers.
8. Continue roll out implementation of the Letter to the Child.
9. Social event calendar for Carers and their families.
10. Feedback from Foster Carer Support Group monthly.
11. Convene Foster Carer Consultation Group at least 4 times per year including senior management. Feedback to inform service development.
12. Quarterly newsletter for foster carers.
13. Fostering Network membership for all carers.
14. Review Transition Planning and to include move to permanence including home.
15. Digitisation of records/communication by rolling out Egress to Carers.
16. Recording Policy for Carers.
17. Review Safer Care Practice.
18. Embed principles of The Promise by encouraging carers to become promise keepers.
19. Review paperwork to ensure is compliant with #keepthepromise.

20. Increase understanding of role of foster carer to child's social worker by attending locality team meetings with a carer.
21. Meeting with Corporate Communications to discuss Recruitment Strategy- focus on older children and children with disabilities.
22. Continue to increase social media exposure.
23. Reach out to LGBT+ during Fostering and Adoption week.
24. Continue to review process of preparation groups depending on numbers.
25. Introduce Assessment Agreement at start of assessment process.
26. Introduce support network meeting for new applicant during assessment process.
27. New Carers Support Group if numbers allow.
28. Continue to offer a mother and baby placement.

Report on Supported & Continuing Care Service 2023.

Current carers and outcomes for young people;

We currently have 12 continuing carers and 1 supported carer supporting 13 of Renfrewshire's young adults. Of the 13 young people, 9 attend college placements fulltime or University, 4 have an apprenticeship or are in fulltime employment.

We are currently assessing a further supported care for another young person.

Additional Outcomes for our young people;

1 young person, moved onto independent living and secured their own tenancy, whilst attending college and working parttime.

Inspection process was mentioned earlier in this report.

Developments:

Staff have been trained in being able to deliver innovative training with use of Virtual reality headsets, providing powerful and informative scenarios and case studies to enhance carers learning experiences. One session has been delivered to carers with further opportunities to be rolled out in 2024.

Report on the Adoption Service

Developments within the adoption service in Renfrewshire 2022- 2023

1. Recruitment of new Fostering and Adoption Panel Members.
2. Significantly developed work with birth families by offering direct support to all birth parents and birth family members including birth brothers and sisters who have been affected by the loss of a child through adoption.
3. Further developed extended family members' participation in the assessment process through work with individual families.
4. Developed joint work and training opportunities with neighbouring local authorities to share expertise.

5. Reviewed the criteria, process and procedures for adoption support needs assessment, adoption support plans and reviews.
6. Ongoing development of support to birth parents with regards to understanding the plan for their child and supporting birth parents with letter box contact.
7. Further supporting children's transitions from foster care to adoption through the use of Child Appreciation Day where required.
8. Continued work with Scottish Adoption Support Services (SAAS - Barnardo's) for young people, birth parents and adopters requiring additional support, where appropriate.
9. Continued work with Scottish Adoption Register/Link maker.

Recruitment, Preparation & Assessment of Adoptive Parents

Within the reporting period the Adoption Service received 26 initial enquiries which is two more than the figure of the previous year. Some of these did not progress due to a range of issues, and others continue to progress with their adoption journey. There were 4 preparation groups held, between March and September 2023. The feedback received was extremely positive, particularly in relation to guest speakers with lived experience. As a service we plan to review our preparation group materials with a focus on co-facilitation with adoptive parents going forward.

The Adoption Service has progressed 6 adoption applications (households) to the Adoption panel during the reporting period, and all were approved. Feedback received about the adoption assessment has highlighted that although the process is lengthy there is recognition that the content and discussions although at times difficult are necessary in preparing for the next stages of the adoption journey. Our work with support network meetings has received positive feedback about the value of these.

Renfrewshire Council's Adoption Service has continued to use Scotland's Adoption Register. Once applicants are approved as adopters their information and what age of child they have been approved for is added to the Register. Adoption social workers across Scotland can access this information should they be trying to place a child for adoption.

Family Finding

There continues to be a need for adoptive parents for children of all ages particularly for brother and sister groups and older children. Nationally, there has been a reduction in the number of children being placed for adoption which has seen the average wait for a child identified for adoptive families' significantly increase. Consequently, there are a large number of adoptive parents on Scotland's Adoption Register.

Scotland's Adoption Register has reintroduced face to face Adoption Exchange days and Adoption Activity Days. The Register has continued to support practitioners in achieving permanence for children Scotland.

During the recording period, there has been active family finding for 4 children in Renfrewshire. Each has an adoptive family link identified, and 3 of these children have been placed with their adoptive family. These figures represent the same numbers as last year.

The Adoption Register (Scotland) - National Position

Scotland's Adoption Register continues to be a statutory service fully funded by the Scottish Government which provides a free service to support local authorities and voluntary agencies with family finding activity. The Adoption Register is where Adoptive families once approved have their approval details registered. The Adoption Register is committed to facilitating social workers' overall goal of securing children's futures through moves to permanent families.

A total of 61 children were matched with adoptive families through the Scottish Adoption Register in 22/23.

The Register played an active role alongside Association of Fostering and Kinship Adoption Scotland and Adoption UK in Scotland in the delivery of Adoption Week Scotland 2022 which explored 'The connection with past, present, and future family'. The week's events included input from research projects, providing the opportunity for professionals, prospective adopters and adoptive parents to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the importance of maintaining links with birth families and paying careful attention to the planning of transitions for children moving to their adoptive homes.

The Adoption Register continues to improve the process and to support adoption agencies in reducing delays in matching children with adoptive families.

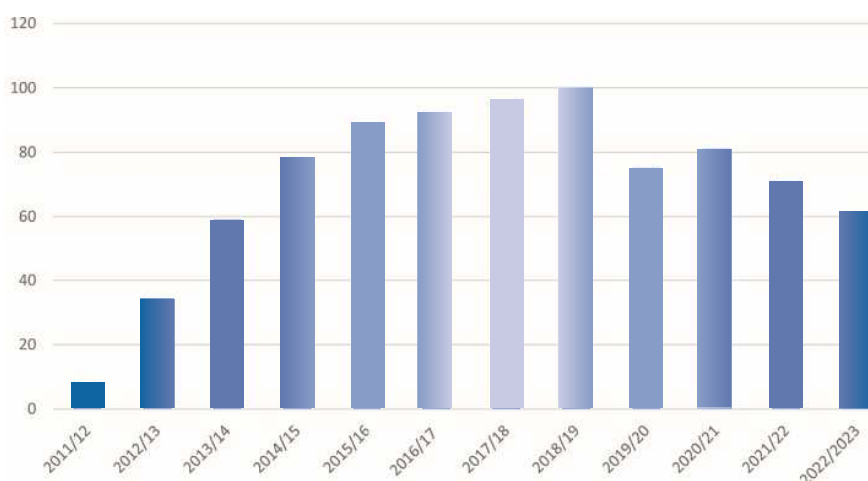
The end of year total of matches is a decrease on the previous year, down from 71 to 61 despite the increase in numbers of children being referred in the latter quarter of 22/23. Matches take time to explore and progress but that alone does not explain the lower figure.

There is greater evidence of children's plans being progressed following the delays caused by the impact of Covid on the completion of assessments and panel decisions. The Register continues to support Social Work Practitioners to ensure referrals are made in line with their statutory responsibilities and to offer practical support to colleagues and carers, whilst at the same time recognising the current pressures on Local Authorities due to staff recruitment and retention issues and delays caused by legal processes.

It should be noted that the trend for fewer adoptions in Scotland continues to reflect the UK wide experience of lower numbers of children moving to adoptive families. Despite this, there continues to be a vital role played by the Adoption Registers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

GENDER

Of the 96 children referred to the Register in 22/23, 38 (40%) were girls and 58 (60%) were boys. This sees a return to the previous recordings of more boys than girls following a change in 21/22 where more girls than boys were referred to the Register since its inception in 2011.

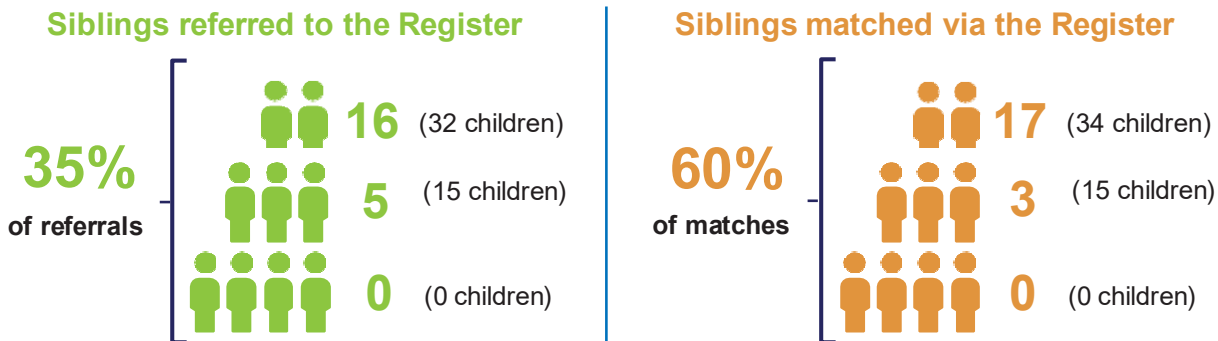


ETHNICITY

89 (92%) were white (82 White Scottish) and (7 White European). 2 (2%) were from an Asian background. 2 (2%) were from a multi-ethnic background. 1 (1%) were from Black African background. 2 (2%) were from other Ethnic background

SIBLINGS

35% of the children referred to the Register in 2022/23 were part of a sibling group. This is a small decrease from 37% last year.



Renfrewshire Adoption Plans and Links

During the period 01.08.2022 to 31.07.23, 4 children were presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration of their adoption plans and links. This is a slight decrease on the 6 adoption plans considered in the previous year. In all cases the Agency Decision Maker accepted the panel's recommendations to approve the adoption plan and links between the child and their prospective adopters.

Renfrewshire Council make good use of the Scottish Adoption Register by way of Link maker and Adoption Exchange days. The Scottish Government's GIRFEC strategy for Looked After Children and Young People (November 2015) identifies the achievement of 'early permanence' as one of its key strategic priorities. Legislation and guidance introduced in 2016 support that goal and reinforced the role of the Adoption Register for the relatively small number of children who are unable to stay with their own family and require an adoptive placement.

Adoption Support Group

The pandemic significantly impacted on our opportunities to reach out to adoptive families through the adoption support group, which previously led to a reduction in the number of adoptive families engaging in this support. This year, we have continued to build on last year's efforts to re-engage our families, with real success. The support group met in November 2022, March 2023 and June 2023, with positive responses each time from the families who attended. Each session gave adopted children opportunities to connect with one another, and adopters time to catch up with each other and with workers in a relaxed environment.

Our adoptive parents previously advised they value support groups and training. Therefore, this year we have continued to offer all adoptive families access to training through Barnardo's, and plan to further develop the training opportunities offered here.

Adoption Support to Individual Families

Throughout the year the adoption team have provided adoption support on an individual basis to 21 adoptive families. Barnardo's Scottish Adoption Advice Service (SAAS) also continues to offer support, including counselling, to Renfrewshire families. A total of 43 children in 34 families received an adoptive allowance during the reporting period.

Post Adoption Support Planning meetings are held for all children when an adoption order is granted to consider their support needs. We continue to allocate an adoption social worker to adoptive parents for 1 year following the granting of an adoption order at which point the adoptive family are invited to a review meeting to consider any further adoption supports required.

Within Renfrewshire we have 83 adoptive families on our mailing list who receive our quarterly newsletter and notification of all support groups and training events.

Birth Connections

Birth Connections is a new service, in Renfrewshire, funded by the CORRA Foundation, that supports birth family members who are affected by adoption. The support offers both individual supports, tailored to the individual's specific needs, and group support every two weeks, providing a therapeutic environment to meet with other people who have had similar experience. The individual support we have provided since the service launched in March 2023 have ranged from supporting people to fill in housing applications, attend appointments, building up confidence out in the community, letterbox exchange, engaging in community opportunities, and much more. The Group support launched in May 2023. Birth Connections aim is to provide lifelong support so that service users can access the support at any time when they feel able to and can choose when they do or do not wish to engage.

Birth Connections run the fortnightly Group out of Station 7 in Johnstone (Active Communities) and are liaising closely with them and the community opportunities that they can provide. Currently, we are organising Cooking/Baking classes, Women's Health information sessions, and Barista training for the birth family members engaged with Birth Connections, through Station 7.

The Birth Connections service is provided by Kirstin Harvey, who has been in post since December 2022, alongside Renfrewshire Council's Adoption Team. Kirstin is currently seconded for a year as the CORRA Foundation provided 12 months of funding to start up a Birth Family Support service and we are fortunate that we have received extended funding until 30th March 2024.

Birth Connections currently supports around 25 birth family members with individual support and there are currently 4 birth family members involved in the Group Support. These numbers are growing.

Adoption Newsletter

The adoption newsletter is produced 4 times per year. Within this newsletter useful articles for national adoption websites and organisations are included. Stories are encouraged from adopters on any issues they have experienced. The feedback received is that the recipients benefit from reading about other adopter's stories.

Also, as the adoption support service has increased over the years, the service has brought out various new leaflets, have summer activities with the children and support group feedback is

usually included to encourage others to join. Each newsletter has an update on training information.

Letter Box Contact

Letterbox contact provides contact between birth families and the adoptive parents or contact between siblings. The letterbox service can provide support in writing and replying to letters. Currently the letterbox service has a caseload of 121 which 75 are operational. Letterbox contact varies on an individual case basis, mostly contacts are annual, however we have some which are twice, three times or quarterly.

The service has now introduced individual support and offered electronic methods of letterbox to support some participants to engage via email. This has encouraged a high uptake of participants.

Future developments of the adoption service

Over the next year the service intends to strengthen the adoption service by developing the following:

1. Introduction of Co-Facilitation of Preparation Group with an Adoptive Parent.
2. Further recruitment of new Fostering and Adoption Panel Members as required, including non-voting members such as additional Legal Advisors.
3. Increase opportunities of support groups to adoptive families and their children.
4. Highlight the importance of maintaining links through adoption during Adoption Week Scotland.
5. Develop a post approval training programme for prospective adopters, promoting learning whilst awaiting matching and the Adoption Order.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted the work of the Fostering, Adoption and Supported Carers Services and the work of the Fostering and Adoption Panel during August 2022 - July 2023. The activity of the Fostering and Adoption Panel reflects the number of children unable to live with their birth families within Renfrewshire.

The Fostering, Adoption and Supported Carers Services are committed to safeguarding children's lives in Renfrewshire and to continual improvement.

As the Registered Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our panel members for their commitment to Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children.

Our Foster Carers and Adopters have continued to show their commitment and love to the children they look after, and adopt. They help us to ensure that the children receive the best outcomes that they can.

As always, we look forward to the coming year and to progressing our work with all partner agencies to continue to improve the outcomes and secure the future of Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children.

Clare Cunning
Social Work Manager
(Registered Manager of Fostering and Adoption Service)

Appendix 1 Renfrewshire Council Fostering Criteria

Who Can Foster?

Renfrewshire Council accepts applications from different backgrounds as everyone has their own individual experience to offer.

Requirements to foster:

1. Are over 21 years,
2. Are in good health and
3. Have a spare bedroom.

You can be:

1. Single, married, cohabiting or in a civil partnership.
2. Own or rent the property you live in
3. Be employed or not employed.
4. Be of any religious background or sexuality.

Preparation Groups

Enquirers will be required to attend preparation groups before making a formal application. The purpose of these groups is to provide the opportunity to learn more about fostering, and the children who require to be in a foster placement.

If preparation groups are not available other means will be considered to provide and share information with enquirers.

Local Authority, Health, and Police Checks

All applicants will be subject to stringent local authority, health, and police checks. These will extend to any other resident in the household over 16 years of age and to anyone who will have care of the child.

Renfrewshire Council Adoption Criteria

Age

All applicants must be over 21 years of age.

Status

Applications will be considered from couples or single applicants irrespective of their sexuality.

A couple may be the same sex or unmarried. Same sex couples are not required to be in a Civil Partnership.

Joint applicants must be in an enduring family relationship.

Preparation Groups

Enquirers will be required to attend preparation groups, if groups are available, prior to making a formal application. The purpose of these groups is to provide enquiries with the opportunity to learn more about the children needing adoption, their backgrounds and the genetic factors adopters may have to consider when parenting adopted children.

If preparation groups are not available other means will be considered to provide and share information with enquiries.

Infertility

Prospective adopters should have completed infertility investigations at least 6 months prior to application.

Local Authority Health and Police Checks

All applicants will be subject to stringent local authority health and police checks. These will extend to any other resident in the household over 16 years of age and to anyone who will have care of the child.