

**To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board**

**On: 20 January 2022**

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**Report by: Director of Children's Services**

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**Heading: Annual report of the Fostering and Adoption Service 2020/21  
Update on developments for Looked After Children and  
Fostering Service**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report presents the 14th annual report of Renfrewshire's Fostering and Adoption Service.
  - 1.2 The Annual report sets out the work undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Panel and the Fostering and Adoption Service in the year 2020/21 and is set in the context of the broader issues pertaining to Looked After and Accommodated Children. The period covered by the report is August 2020 to July 2021. The reason for this reporting period is that it matches the reporting year used by the Scottish Government for children's social work statistics.
  - 1.3 The report refers to how the service managed and developed during the second year of the pandemic.
  - 1.4 The report considers the future work of the panel, 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 2020/21;
    - b) note the continuing effort to secure foster carers and adoptive parents for Renfrewshire's children who require to an alternative family placement; and
    - c) note how the service continued to develop during the second year of the pandemic.
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### **3. Background**

- 3.1 The Regulations supporting the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 require Social Work in its role as a Fostering and Adoption agency to operate a Fostering Panel and an Adoption Panel. These panels have the responsibility for putting forward recommendations to the agency decision maker regarding the suitability of people to adopt or foster children. In Renfrewshire there are two agency decision makers: the Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice and the Social Work Children's Services Manager. The Adoption 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 an Adoption Panel; each with separate constitutions. The panels will often meet on the same day however each meeting separates out the Fostering panel business from the Adoption panel business to ensure that the appropriate regulations are met regarding a quorum, and for the attendance of the legal and medical adviser. In August 2016 we separated the remit of social work managers to ensure that the chair of the panel doesn't line manage the service. This separation of roles allows arm's length scrutiny and monitoring by the panel chair.
- 3.3 There are currently 19 members of the panel comprising elected members, social work and education staff, a legal adviser, a medical adviser, carers, independent panel members, and an independent member from the Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland (AFA). The panel is chaired by either a social work manager or the independent representative from Adoption and Fostering Alliance Scotland. It meets twice monthly. There are typically 3 panel members at each meeting along with appropriate advisors. The Fostering Panel and the Adoption Panel considered 60 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 Between 1/08/20 and 31/07/2021 we held 2 set of preparation groups and 5 households subsequently applied to be assessed as foster carers. Renfrewshire had 80 active households of foster carers at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021. In the period 1/08/20 and 31/7/2021 an additional 3 households were registered as foster carers, and 5 foster care households left the service.
- 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 application come from people who already have foster carers as friends or family.
- 3.7 In the period 1/08/20 and 31/07/2021 a total of 3 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 May 2017. The Care Inspectorate reports were positive with gradings of 5 (very good) being applied to all domains inspected. The next Inspection

was due to take place in 2020 however has been postponed due to the pandemic. We meet regularly with our inspector about our current practice and developments.

- 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 We currently have 22 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 agreed the "Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together Policy" in May 2020. 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 time that brothers and sisters can't be placed but requires us to report on this.
- 3.13 As of 31.07.2021 Renfrewshire Foster Carers had 19 sets of brothers and/or sisters placed together in their care which was a total of 36 children and 33% percent of children with our foster carers.
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## Implications of this report

### 1. Financial

None.

### 2. HR and Organisational Development

None.

### 3. Community/Council Planning

Our Renfrewshire is thriving	- <i>enter details/ delete if not appropriate</i>
Our Renfrewshire is well	- <i>enter details/ delete if not appropriate</i>
Our Renfrewshire is fair	- <i>enter details/ delete if not appropriate</i>
Our Renfrewshire is safe	- <i>enter details/ delete if not appropriate</i>
Reshaping our place, our economy and our future	- <i>enter details/ delete if not appropriate</i>
Building strong, safe and resilient communities	- <i>enter details/ delete if not appropriate</i>
Tackling inequality, ensuring	- <i>enter details/ delete if not</i>

opportunities for all	<i>appropriate</i>
Creating a sustainable Renfrewshire for all to enjoy	- <i>enter details/ delete if not appropriate</i>
Working together to improve outcomes	- <i>enter details/ delete if not appropriate</i>

**4. Legal**  
None.

**5. Property/Assets**  
None.

**6. Information Technology**  
None.

**7. Equality and Human Rights**

- (a) 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 because it is for noting only.

**8. Health and Safety**  
None.

**9. Procurement**  
None.

**10. Risk**  
None.

**11. Privacy Impact**  
None.

**12. Cosla Policy Position**  
None.

**13. Climate Risk**  
None.

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## 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 618 6650

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# **THE FOSTERING AND ADOPTION PANEL**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021**

## **Foreword**

## **Introduction**

## **Context**

- Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People
- Overview of the work presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel 1.08.20 – 31.07.21
- Panel membership
- Staffing
- Commitment to permanency planning
- National and Local Context – The Care Review

## **Report on the Fostering Service**

- Development of the Fostering Service 2020 – 2021
- Inspection
- Recruitment Activity
- Preparation Groups
- New foster carers and carers deregistration
- Foster carers reviews
- Foster carers training
- NVR Intervention
- Best Trial
- Foster carers support group
- Consultation group
- Break Through group
- Your Voice Your Way Project
- Newsletter
- Future development of fostering service 2021 -2022

## **Report of Supported Carers Service**

- Overview of Supported Carers Service

## **Report on the Adoption and Permanence Service**

- Development within the adoption service 2020 – 2021
- Recruitment of adoptive parents
- Family finding
- Adoption Plans and Links
- Transitions to a Better Future
- Permanent Fostering
- Adoption Support Groups
- Adoption Support to individual families
- Adoption Newsletter
- Birth parent support / Supporting Roots
- Letterbox Contact
- Future development of the adoption service 2021 – 2022

## **Conclusion**

## Foreword

Welcome to the annual report of The Fostering and Adoption Service. As Agency Decision Makers we are delighted to be invited to contribute this forward. The report is written by Cathie O'Donnell, service manager for fostering and adoption, and endorsed by Clare Cuning, Registered Social Work Manager, Fostering and Adoption Services and Joyce Gartshore, Chair of the Fostering and Adoption Panel. It takes a retrospective look at the previous year as well as looking to the future developments. Within Renfrewshire Children's Services we have continued to ensure that the needs of vulnerable children are met consistently and responded to as required. Services within Renfrewshire have continued to work and adapt throughout the pandemic to support children.

As at the 31.07.21, Renfrewshire Council had 598 'Looked After' Children. Of these 162 children/young people were looked after at home, 216 were looked after by Kinship carers/friends/relatives and 210 were accommodated with foster carers, pre-adoption or within residential placements.

A significant number of the children looked after in foster care/residential care will be unable to return home to birth parents or to live with relatives. The work of the Fostering and Adoption Service continues to ensure that children are placed appropriately and safely and that children who require permanent placements out with their birth families are moved to an appropriate alternative family at the earliest opportunity.

In March 2021 Renfrewshire Council Education and Children's Services Policy Board approved the policy "Keeping Brothers and Sisters together" which contains a pledge that "When children come into care Renfrewshire Council will place brothers and sisters together".

It is recognised that there will be times when brothers and sisters aren't placed together, and the policy requires Children's Services to report on this. In addition, the policy introduces a clear decision-making process for times when brothers and sisters can't be placed together, a commitment to family time between brothers and sisters and a commitment to regularly reviewing the appropriateness of placements of brothers and sisters placed in separate care settings.

The Fostering and Adoption Panels provide important quality assurance 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 Panels roles are to make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) 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 01.08.20 to 31.07.21, 16 children's permanence plans were approved by the Agency Decision Maker.

The Fostering Service has continued to shift the balance of children's placements being with our own internal foster carers rather than with external fostering providers. On 31.07.20 there were 48 children/young people in external fostering placements as opposed to 60 on 31.07.19. This is a substantial decrease over this period.

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

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

Michelle McCargo  
Social Work Children's Services Manager



## Introduction

This is the 14<sup>th</sup> annual report of Renfrewshire Council's Fostering and the Adoption Panels and Service.

Renfrewshire Council has a statutory duty to operate fostering and adoption panels. These are two separate panels with separate functions.

The Adoption and Fostering Panels have their statutory base in 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 out the basis of the composition of both types of panels, their meetings, the appointment of advisors and their respective functions.

Regulation 17 of the LAC Regulations requires each fostering panel to consist of at least six members. It is good practice for all panels to have regular planned business meetings to review their overall functioning.

Renfrewshire Council has an annual business meeting with panel members, advisors, and the Agency Decision Makers in attendance. The setting of the quorum for individual meetings of the panel at three is a minimum, and we ensure they include enough people with experience and a range of backgrounds to provide robust and independent scrutiny of the business presented.

The Panels provide a 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.

Responsibility for the functions and decisions rest with the Chief Social Work Officer and authority is delegated to a Senior Manager in Children's services to chair the panels with the Head of Service and the Children's Services Manager both holding responsibility as the Agency Decision Maker and alternate this task.

The purpose of the Panel is to consider prospective foster carers, prospective adopters, and supported carers. In addition, they consider individual children's needs for alternative permanent carers (i.e., 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 action to secure this outcome. The Panels also consider the matching of a child with specific foster carers or adoptive parents to ensure that these are of a consistently high standard. The Panels make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Makers for the Fostering and Adoption Panels are John Trainer, Head of Child Care and Criminal Justice/Chief Social Work Officer and Michelle McCargo, Social Work Children's Services Manager.

The Fostering and Adoption panels have continued virtually using Microsoft teams, and this has become a much smoother process since introducing this platform in June 2020. A positive outcome from this way of working has been that it has encouraged some young people to attend their foster carers panel as they have been able to remain at home and 'pop in' to the meeting.

For children unable to return to their birth family, activity within the fostering and adoption team continues to be high and the recruitment of foster carers and adopters is a prime objective, and this is reflected in the amount of permanence planning work within the social work locality teams.

## Context

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

## Accommodated and Looked After Children/Young People

As of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021, Renfrewshire Council had 588 Looked After Children/Young People.

30.09.20    31.07.21

	30.09.20	31.07.21
Independent Sector-Children - Foster Care	60	48
Local Authority-Children - Foster Care	125	110
Local Authority-Children – Houses	14	17
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Schools	13	11
Independent Sector-Children - Residential Special Needs	3	12
Pre-adoption	11	8
Independent Sector-Children - Secure School	3	4
Children looked after by kinship carers/friends/relatives	213	216
Children looked after at home	200	162
<b>Total</b>	<b>642</b>	<b>588</b>

**Overview of the work presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel 1.08.20 – 31.07.21**

<b>Business Item</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Child adoption plans and links	13	This figure included 3 sibling groups of 2
Approval of Renfrewshire adopters (households)	2	
Approval of adopters to increase household	1	
Approval of Adopters with a foreign element	1	
De registration of adopters	1	
Review of Registration (adoption)	1	Couple increased registration to adopt a younger sibling
Request/review of adoption allowance	4	
Children's Permanence Order plans	3	
Links with permanent foster carers	3	
Approval of new foster carers	3	
Approval of Renfrewshire interim foster carers as permanent foster carers (households)	3	
Deregistration of foster carer	5	2 fostering household retired. 3 fostering household resigned due to personal circumstances.
Approval of supported carers (households)	6	6 Renfrewshire Fostering households converted to becoming supported carers
Initial review of foster carer after their 1 <sup>st</sup> year	5	
Foster care reviews out with 1 <sup>st</sup> year	5	
Review of foster carers registration – due to change in registration/circumstances	4	This figure represents 1 fostering household who increased their age range, and 3 fostering households who had a change in personal circumstances
Total number of agenda items	60	

## **Panel Membership**

We are fortunate to have a consistent and committed panel membership over the past year. We currently have 19 voting members of the panel which includes 2 chairs.

Panel membership continues to reflect a wide range of experience and expertise, from social work, education, health, and past and present practitioners from the independent sector. The Panel continues to be well supported by elected members. The Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland also continue to provide an independent panel member who also acts as a second chairperson.

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

We also have ongoing representation from Legal Services who provide written legal advice to the Panel in relation to adoption and permanence work, as well as attendance at the Panel as required.

Panel members attend appraisal meetings with the panel chair and panel advisor. Feedback from panel members is gathered from this meeting and ideas generated are incorporated into the business meeting agenda for consideration.

## **Staffing**

The structure of the Fostering and Adoption Service is: -

Social Work Manager (Operations) Registered manager of the service. (also has responsibility for the kinship care service and the pre and post birth team).

Service Manager (responsible for operational 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)

8 full time social workers

2 job-share social workers

2 job share social work assistants.

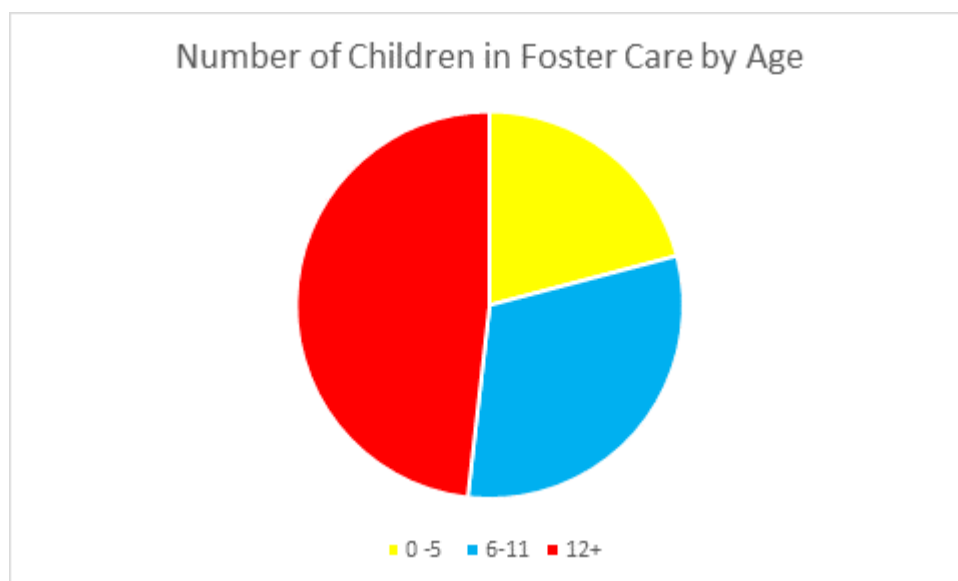
The fostering and adoption service now have a separate fostering team and an adoption and permanence team, this has allowed the development of more specialist skills regarding fostering and adoption. Both teams work closely together and share expertise and learning.

## Commitment to permanence planning 1.08.21 to 31.07.21

Between 01.08.21 and 31.7.21 Renfrewshire has progressed adoption and permanence plans for 16 children. Renfrewshire Council recognises the importance in progressing plans for children within appropriate time scales. 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 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.

The decision to place a child permanently out with their birth family involves a high level of assessment and scrutiny. Throughout the 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 families to care for them throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

The charts below provide a breakdown of ages of children (Chart 1) and those who have a permanence plan in progress or achieved (Chart 2).



Out of 110 children in Renfrewshire's fostering service at 31.07.2021:

There were 23 children (21%) who were 0 to 5 years old.

There were 34 children (31%) who were 6 – 11 years old.

There were 53 children / young people (48%) who were 12 – 18 years old.

Out of the 110 children in Renfrewshire Council foster care 77 children were fully assessed as not returning home and had either long term or permanence plans either in progress or achieved.

33 children had Interim status (30%)

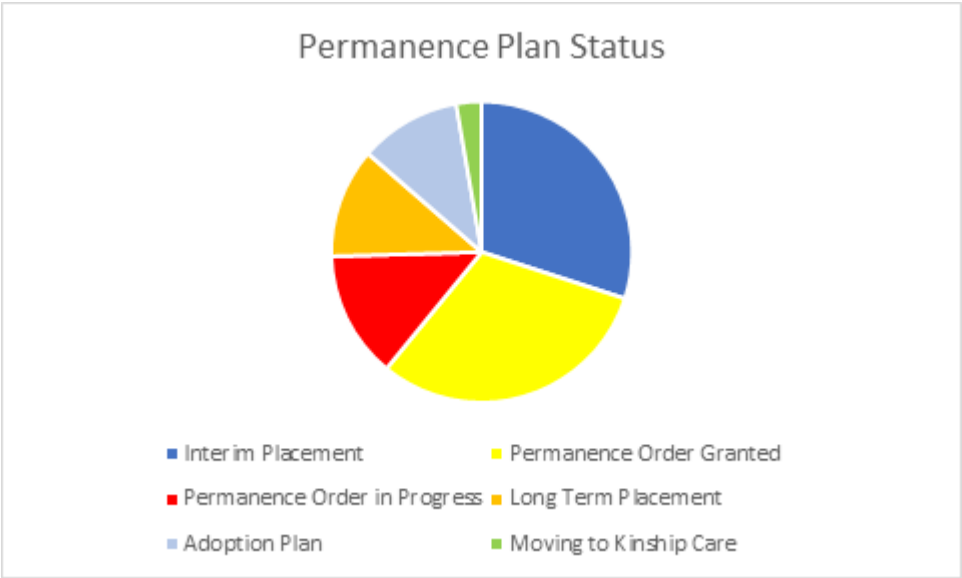
34 children / young people had Permanence Orders (31%) with 25 linked permanently to their foster carers.

15 children / young people had Permanence Plans in progress (13%)

13 young people had long term status (12%)

12 children had adoption plans (11%)

3 children were moving to permanent kinship care placements (3%)





# the promise

The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 became law in 2021 and it places new duties on local authorities to place brothers and sisters together in care and promote contact between brothers and sisters who are looked after.

The issue of children who are accommodated by local authorities being placed in separate placements from their brothers and sisters was identified as an area which required attention by The Independent Care Review. Prior to this law being enacted Renfrewshire's Children's Services agreed to consider improvements in keeping brother and sisters together as part of the response to The Independent Care Review's Stop-Go campaign. The Stop-Go campaign highlighted areas where services would commit to addressing areas of concern identified by care experienced young people and find solutions to these.

The Renfrewshire Children's Champions Board carried out a survey to secure the views of care experienced young people in Renfrewshire and helped produce a policy called, "Keeping Brothers and Sisters Together". The policy contains a pledge "When children come into care Renfrewshire will place brothers and sisters together".

It is recognised that there will be times when brothers and sisters aren't placed together, and the policy requires Children's Services to report on this. In addition, the policy introduces a clear decision-making process for times when brothers and sisters can't be placed together, clear responsibility to make arrangements to maintain family time and a commitment to regularly reviewing brothers and sisters who are placed in separate care settings.

As of 31.07.2021 Renfrewshire Foster Carers had 19 sets of brothers and/or sisters in their care which was a total of 36 children and 33% percent of children in our foster care.

## **Inspection**

The Fostering Service and Adoption Service continue to be inspected by the regulatory body, the Care Inspectorate. The last inspection took place in May 2017 where all aspects of service delivery in both the Fostering and Adoption Service remained Grade 5 which is 'very good' across all domains inspected. Whilst there has not been a full inspection since 2017 regular meetings have taken place between the Inspector and both the Registered Manager and Service Manager of the Fostering and Adoption Service to ensure robust communication between both parties about how our practice continues to function and any changes or improvements that we make. It is expected that the Service will be subject to a full inspection within this calendar year.

## **Update on Fostering Service**

We currently have 80 active fostering households. The fostering service continues to offer a high standard of care to children in our care. Despite still working through the Covid pandemic we have over the reporting period worked through the issues that the pandemic presented. The fostering team has used a hybrid approach to visiting carers due to restrictions however by May 2021 all home visits announced and unannounced were taking place face to face. Foster carer reviews, panels, training, and other related meetings have continued to be online with regular review.

During the first lockdown at the start of the covid pandemic in March 2020, children's face to face time with their families was stopped by Renfrewshire Children's services. This was in line with government guidance and in keeping with other local authorities at this time. In these extreme circumstances some children were supported by their foster carers to keep in touch with their families using electronic means, such as video calls. In most situations each call was for a short amount of time and was to keep people in touch with each other where there was no other (covid) safe way to do this.

In June 2020 children and their birth families were able to meet face to face again and although this started off in a limited way, all supervised face to face contact is now able to resume.

The fostering service, along with locality teams was instrumental in creating a virtual contact guidance to be used by all staff teams reinstating contact with children and their families. This recognised the value of face-to-face contact as opposed to virtual and one of our foster carers was part of this working group

## **Developments within the Fostering Service 2020 – 2021**

- Fostering service participation with Fostering Fortnight in May 2021, where the service made use of local media, social media, and articles from our foster carers
- We have continued to encourage participation with foster carers in service development e.g., being part of working group.
- Children in foster care continue to be involved in participation strategies through our own Break Through group, Who Cares? Scotland and the Champions Board
- The Managers within the Fostering Service continue to attend Social Work Scotland meetings and liaise with neighboring authorities
- We have raised the profile of the fostering team to ensure locality teams have a clear understanding of the work undertaken to develop the service and to ensure better outcomes for the children referred and placed in foster care
- We have held regular consultations with Foster carers using Microsoft teams.
- We have held foster carer reviews and Fostering and Adoption panels using Microsoft teams.
- We have identified Egress which is an electronic communication system to allow us to communicate electronically and securely with our foster carers



## **Recruitment activity**

The Fostering Network report that in Scotland.

- Approx. 4,750 children were living with foster families on 31 July 2020.
- This is roughly three-quarters of children in care looked after away from home and family.
- There are approximately 3,620 approved foster care households in Scotland.
- Every year hundreds of new foster families are needed in Scotland.

The Service Manager and the fostering Senior Social Worker meet regularly with Renfrewshire Council's Communication team to continue to develop their recruitment strategy. It is recognised nationally that there is a shortage of foster carers and this strategy promotes the support that is needed and will be offered by a skilled fostering service.

From 01.08.2020 to 31.07.21 we have continued to receive enquiries in relation to fostering, although these have been fewer than the previous year.

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). Applications to be assessed as a foster carer are not submitted by applicants until after they have completed the preparation groups.

During the period 01.08.20 – 31.07.21 the service was assessing 6 households to become foster carers. 1 of these households wanted to be considered as interim carers while the other 5 wished to offer short breaks. While short breaks can be an extremely useful resource, this is often dependent on the carer's availability i.e., many short break foster carers work full time and matching a child with them can prove difficult. However, in the service there are several examples of carers who started off as short break carers and then became interim carers. The service will continue to monitor this trend.

## **Preparation groups**

The Fostering Service ran two sets of preparation groups in the reporting period. The first set ran between September and November 2020 and included 4 households. This was particularly challenging as due to COVID restrictions they were run entirely virtually and were a steep learning curve for all. Despite this the participants did feedback that although they would have preferred face to face groups, they had found them useful and 3 out of the 4 households have since progressed to the next stage. In May 2021 the service ran another set of preparation groups and this time used a hybrid model of some sessions face to face and some virtual. The feedback was positive and 2 households out of four have progressed to the next stage.

This is the start of the assessment process and an opportunity for the participants to receive more in-depth information and discussion about the implications of fostering; 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.

Our preparation groups cover a range of topics including managing challenging behaviour, brain development, attachment issues, safer care and working with birth parents. Participants

are asked to give written feedback on each of the sessions and on any issues that the discussions may have raised for them. At the end of the preparation groups the workers leading the group will also complete written reports on each of the participants and their contributions over the previous weeks. They will also highlight areas of concern or where further consideration may be necessary regarding the participants suitability to proceed to the formal application and assessment stage.

Preparation groups run for 5 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 recently developed training materials. Our social workers are skilled at leading these groups and current foster carers provide input regarding their experiences. There is also input by the senior social worker/service manager at the final session.

### **New foster carers and carers deregistered**

In the period 01.08.20 – 31.07.21 an additional 3 fostering households were approved. 2 households were approved as interim foster carers and 1 household as a short break foster carer.

Between 01.08.20 – 31.07.21, 5 fostering households were deregistered for the following reasons:

3 fostering household resigned due to a change in their personal circumstances,  
2 fostering household retired after being a fostering household for many years.

### **Foster carer reviews**

Foster Carers are reviewed by the Fostering Panel at the end of their first year of fostering and every three years thereafter. Foster carers will also return to Panel if their registration has to be reviewed with regards to a change in registration.

Between 1.08.20 and 31.07.21 the Fostering and Adoption Panel reviewed 10 foster care households in total, 5 of these were first year reviews

5 fostering households were de registered due to the households either retiring or due to a change in personal circumstances.

Foster carer reviews are an opportunity for foster carers to talk about their experience, training, and support etc. Renfrewshire Council's foster carers 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 during covid times to be beneficial and available as required, as well as finding the training offered informative and beneficial to the fostering task.

Foster carers are internally reviewed on an annual basis, by Social Work Managers (Operations). The foster carers provide written as well as 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 this year there has been a development with regards to birth parents being encouraged to submit a report for the Foster Care Review regarding the care their child/children is receiving. To date we have had 1 birth parent report returned.

Within the reporting period 51 Foster carer 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. Between January and May 2021 home visits were again suspended and all communication was virtual (in most cases by Microsoft teams). Visits or (supervision would) normally take place on a 4 to 6-week basis, depending on the placements and any issues arising. In reality contact and support has been much more frequent during the pandemic. 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 and Children's Hearings with the carers. Joint visits by the child's social worker and the social worker from the fostering team takes places when a new placement is established and routinely thereafter.

## Foster carer training

Changes to training provided to Renfrewshire Council foster carers had to be addressed due to the pandemic. The support provided to foster carers by their supervising social worker continued to address training needs and the development of skills etc.

Social workers and foster carers could also attend external training courses. The Fostering Network and AFA has 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 training relevant to their role. All training has been delivered virtually.

The fostering service also provided mandatory training on fire safety, first aid and safer caring. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are looking to provide training on fire safety, online at this time, however, have offered home visit to provide advice, to foster carers. West of Scotland College provides first aid training; however, this has continued to be on hold due to the pandemic. Mandatory training should be updated every three years.

**The table below shows webinars between 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

Webinar Title	Content	No Dates of	Total No of Registrations
Safer Care: Internet Safety	Keeping children safe online	2	11
Can you keep a promise?	Briefing on the Independent Care Review	1	3
Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act	The legislation protecting children, the workings of the Children's Hearing and the implications for carers	1	3
HRT for Kids	Stimulating helpful hormone production for wellbeing	1	6
Ask, Tell	Promoting good mental health and wellbeing	1	7
Autism Awareness	What autism is, how it might present and what carers can do to support children on the spectrum	4	22
Life Story Work	Helping children develop a coherent narrative	1	3
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>55</b>

Carers were slow to embrace the webinar format when first piloted in the summer. Reasons given for this included:  
being too stressed by the pandemic to concentrate on learning,  
being too busy with home schooling and  
not feeling comfortable/competent in using the technology.

Interest and engagement have since improved and the overall feedback has been very good. Several carers have stated said that the format is more convenient for them than face to face training. Another advantage has been that several carers who would not normally be able to attend face to face training have engaged with the webinars. The format has been especially useful for newly registered carers who have been able to meet other carers. This being said however, carers look forward to the day face to face direct training can resume. The training programme is constantly under review and additional dates will be arranged in line with demand.

## **Non-Violent Resistance Intervention**

Non-Violent Resistance, (NVR) is an approach to address children and young people's violent or controlling behaviours. It was developed by Haim Omer, a psychotherapist, academic researcher, and tenured professor of Psychology at Tel Aviv University. NVR is grounded in attachment theory and an understanding of the impact of early trauma. It builds on these theories by suggesting concrete actions carers can take in response to children's challenging behaviours. These responses, or techniques, include making 'announcements', relational gestures, and seeking support (Van Hollen and Vanderfaeillie, 2019). In announcements, carers clearly state they will no longer accept specific challenging behaviours from children. This differs from telling the child they can no longer do this as the locus of control is the carer, not the child. This is expressed in a supportive rather than shaming manner, acknowledges the child's positives, and recognises the difficulties the child faces. It occurs alongside relational gestures – small gifts or actions of love made regardless of the child's behaviour, without expectation of reciprocation (Heismann et al, 2019). This resistance coupled with relationship building increases 'parental presence'; a child's, "sense that their parent is there for them...can be relied upon...knows their whereabouts and cares what they are doing," (Heismann et al, 2019). Within NVR, the target for change is the carer rather than the child. It is anticipated that helping the carer change will help the child change, but the intervention is clearly aimed at the carer. Therefore, the child does not need to engage with this. It can take time for the child to change, but as the carer can change - by no longer accepting or accommodating the child's behaviour - long before that, the approach can be effective even without significant change in the child, as the carer is more able to cope. A carer using NVR is in control of whether or not it 'works', because it is about them changing, not them changing someone else. As such, it is also acknowledged within NVR that the model is not a quick fix; "changes happen over-time rather than over-night," (Brown, 2019).

The fostering service has heavily invested in this specialised training and now has a social worker who trained in NVR to Level 3 accreditation in 2019. We then co-facilitated a group with 10 foster carers (from 8 households) in January 2020; A key aim of NVR is to increase carers' sense of agency (Hicks et al, 2020). Moreover, many carers who experience coercive behaviours from children can have feelings of shame or reduced confidence (Lauster et al, 2014). Therefore, carers had a choice about participating in the group, as being 'made' to attend could reinforce these feelings. In keeping with NVR's non-judgemental approach, carers were also advised that the opportunity to attend the group was not criticism of the care they provided, but an attempt to recognise the challenging task they had as carers and to offer support. Therefore, significant work took place prior to the group commencing, to share information with carers and reassure them that their existing skills were recognised and valued. This is a vital element of the programme and it is unlikely the group would have been successful without it. Children's challenging behaviours can be a significant factor increasing the likelihood of foster placement breakdown (Oosterman, 2007). Therefore, only carers of children with particularly challenging behaviours were invited. This is an important aspect of NVR. NVR is not 'training', it is a targeted intervention – conducted in a group setting - which needs real time, practical application to be effective. It is not useful for carers to attend this with the idea that they may learn techniques for future use – participants need a specific child

in mind. Techniques are then applied and reflected and built on in each session. The group setting provides opportunity for carers to discuss their experiences in a way that reduces feelings of inadequacy or isolation – by learning they are not the only people having these challenges – and helping develop a network of ‘supporters’, which is another key component of NVR (Hicks et al, 2020). The group was successful. Carers’ verbal feedback was consistently positive in relation to peer support, new knowledge, and increased confidence. The group aimed to reduce placement breakdown, and this was achieved during the group and in the period immediately following it. NVR will remain a feature in the fostering service’s role in supporting young people and their carers sustain stable family life and, in many cases, prevent breakdown.

## **Best Trial**

The BeST? trial is a research trial owned by Glasgow University which has been running in Glasgow since 2011. The trial had been increased to include involvement from four London boroughs and Renfrewshire Children’s Services. The trial purpose is to evaluate whether an infant mental health service offers improved outcomes for Looked After and Accommodated Children when compared to the mainstream social work services in each of the areas.

Glasgow Infant and Families Team (GIFT) derives from a model developed in New Orleans. It utilises a multi-disciplinary team of psychologists, psychiatrists and social work staff seconded or funded by the NHS GGC, Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (GCHSCP) and NSPCC and is run by the NSPCC. It uses an infant mental health perspective to assess and, where possible, offer treatment to parents and children who are looked after and accommodated or in kinship care to strengthen the parent/child interaction and caregiving.

Renfrewshire continued to be part of the Best trial until it stopped taking new referrals in June 2021. The trial was put on hold during the early part of the pandemic, but when it was resumed, until Renfrewshire’s input was completed, a further 6 children were referred to the trial.

## **Foster Carers Support Group**

Our foster carers have their own support group which is an informal support group where foster carers can drop in as they wish, and issues raised within the group are fed back to the fostering team via the carers supervising social worker or the foster carers consultation group. Prior to the pandemic this was attended by approximately 12 households on a monthly basis which they suspended due to restrictions. This has been replaced by a social media group chat with currently over 40 members and the communications is now much more active. Carers report this as a very good support particularly during children’s transitions. It is hoped that the direct meetings will resume in the next calendar year.

## **Consultation Group**

The Carers Consultation Group has met four times- November 2020, January 2021, March 2021, and June 2021. All Foster Carers are invited to this group and is attended by the Senior Social Worker Fostering, the Service Manager and on two occasions the Registered Manager. This provides an opportunity for foster carers to be kept updated with any changes within the service and discuss any issue that has arisen for them or other carers.

Again, this has been run virtually and although numbers are small, feedback has been positive. In a change to the process, questions are submitted in advance which allows for a timely response. There is also the opportunity for a more informal discussion. Feedback to carers who do not attend is through the newsletter, email, or discussion with their own Supervising Social Worker.

## **Breakthrough Group ( group of children who live in foster care who create a newsletter, taking up issues and campaigns on matters that affect them)**

The Breakthrough group has been running now for 6 years and over that time has seen many different young people participate, experience, and enjoy being involved. We continue to have a consistent core group of 8 young people who attend, 4 of whom are founding members of the original group that first met back in November 2015. This hints at how much the young people value this group.

Due to the continuing impact of Covid-19, the focus of the group over this past year has been about connection and ensuring that the young people meet together and have fun. During the early part of 2021, Covid-19 restrictions meant that the group had to continue to meet virtually. So, in anticipation of Spring and of all that it brings, the group enjoyed a bulb planting activity which they all really got into and enjoyed. This served as our last virtual get together for 2021 following the relaxing of the restrictions around youth work.

In April 2021, the Breakthrough group enjoyed their first face to face activity in line with the Scottish Government's Youth link Scotland guidance. They enjoyed a walk up and around the Gleniffer Braes before enjoying a picnic together. The group quickly picked up where they had left off and the sound of laughter and chat amongst the young people as they walked was lovely to hear. They have since enjoyed catch ups at Barshaw Park and Pollok Park as well as an activity together over the October break (tenpin bowling and lunch).

For some of the group they come because they enjoy the activities and have fun, for some it's about friendships and meeting new people, for others they get to see a brother or a sister, but they all have a shared sense of belonging and connectedness together. They are a fantastic group of young people.

## **Your Voice Your Way Project**

The Your Voice, Your Way project was commissioned to improve communication between children and young people and practitioners in Renfrewshire Children's Social Work. The project commenced in early 2019 with the aim of ensuring that care experienced young people have their voices heard in the care they receive in ways, and at times, that work for them. Over two years, Renfrewshire Council worked with service designers to understand how to achieve this aim. Human-centred design was at the heart of the work, with the views of young people informing decisions and of output development. 20 Renfrewshire foster carers and 4 young people in foster were involved in the consultation. The research found that making conversations more meaningful was a key step to ensuring young people are active participants in the care they receive; by increasing their understanding of what's happening, autonomy to speak their views and ensuring respect for their opinions within formal review processes.

The final output from the project was a series of tools, called 'Your Voice Your Way', which support workers to have meaningful conversations with children and young people. Sitting alongside these are tools to support training, printed posters and flyers for practitioners and young people, and a young person friendly framework. This framework is designed to ensure service users know what they can expect from practitioners and have the necessary information to hold practitioners to account.

The implementation of the tools is being overseen by our 'Voice' Promise Pillar group and their impact will be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

## **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 Carer's Consultation Group, the CELCIS website and the Council's '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 2021 – 2022**

1. To continue to recruit foster carers on an annual basis.
2. To continue to develop specific training for foster carers and peer led workshops.
3. To continue to develop participation of young people in foster carers reviews.
4. To continue to work with neighbouring authorities regarding shared services and development days.
5. To support the Breakthrough Group in relation to increasing their membership.
6. To consult with children/young people of foster carers in relation to future support, groups etc.
7. To improve the quality of information to children and their families about foster care.
8. Move towards electronic communication with carers by introduction of egress.
9. To involve carers in induction process for new social workers
10. NVR groups to be offered
11. Increase the number of support carers
12. Offer evening training again which also includes support carers

## **REPORT ON SUPPORTED CARERS SERVICE**

### **Supported carers**

Supported carers are carers who look after young adults (aged 18-21) who have remained in a continuing care placement. Most of our supported carers were previously the fosters carers for the child and transitioned to Supported Carers when the young person reached the age of 18.

Supported carer assessments are completed in advance of the young person turning 18 and are presented to Renfrewshire Council's Fostering Panel. Within the period 01.08.20 to 31.07.21 the Fostering Panel has approved 6 supported carers, all of whom were previously foster carers for Renfrewshire Council.

All young adults whose plan is presented at the Fostering Panel have Pathway Plans completed and a Throughcare Worker allocated to them. The outcome for young adults involved in the Supported Carers Service is reported to the Scottish Government twice a year. The outcomes for young people who are in these placements remain overwhelmingly positive and are evidenced below.

At present there are 22 young adults in supported carer placements with a further 2 expected to be presented to panel before the year end. All are in positive destinations. These range from university, college, training, and employment. There are 12 young people at college, 5 at University, 1 on a training programme and 4 who are working. The courses studied range from Law, Nursing, Geology to Social Care.

The service has continued to support carers during the pandemic. In addition to Microsoft Teams home visits have continued to take place in line with government guidelines. As part of a communication strategy newsletters are now regularly produced and sent out to carers. These provide an opportunity to detail service developments within the supported carers service and the wider Throughcare Service, detail upcoming training and detail young people's experience of supported care.

Other development for the service this year include the establishment of a supported carers forum and a bespoke training programme. Carer's forums are held quarterly and provide an opportunity for carers to have peer support and contribute to service development. A three-year training programme has been designed to allow for the different developmental needs of care leavers over the three years of the placement. This will be rolled out over the next year.

The service has also been working on a recruitment campaign with Queue Advertising and our internal communication team. This campaign will be launched early 2022.



## **REPORT ON THE ADOPTION SERVICE**

### **Developments within the adoption service 2020- 2021**

1. Continued training for adopters using Microsoft teams on thematic issues recognised by the families as priority areas
2. Distribution and development of a quarterly newsletter.
3. Continued development of the adoption support group by creating a new men's group.
4. Develop extended family member's participation in the adoption assessment process.
5. Development of support to birth parents with regards to understanding the plan for their child and supporting a birth parent with letter box contact.
6. Developing further the skillset within the fostering and adoption service to work with foster carers and adopters using Thera play strategies to assist a child with the transition from foster carer to an adoptive family.
7. Continued work with Scottish Adoption Support Services (SAAS - Barnardos) for young people, birth parents and adopters requiring additional support, where appropriate
8. Continued work with Scottish Adoption Register/Link maker.
9. Continue to work with colleagues in locality teams to raise the profile of the adoption service and to provide a clear understanding of the work being undertaken to ensure positive outcomes for children.
10. Develop specialist practice in the adoption service by working with our neighbouring authorities and Social work services.

### **Recruitment of Adoptive Parents**

There continues to be a need for both adoptive parents and permanent foster carers for children of all ages who meet our adoption criteria. Nationally there is recognition that more adopters are also required for sibling groups and older children. Within the reporting period the Adoption team facilitated 3 sets of preparation groups to 8 households.

Renfrewshire Council's adoption service has continued to use the Scottish Adoption Register/Link maker. Once applicants are approved as adopters their information and what age of child, they have been approved for is added to this register. Adoption Social workers across Scotland are able to access this information should they be trying to place a child for adoption.

### **Family Finding**

The year of 2020/21 has been a remarkable year dominated by Covid-19 restrictions. Scotland's Adoption Register has continued to support practitioners who have continued working hard to achieve permanence for children in Scotland in difficult circumstances. Despite such there was a small increase in matches for the year 20/21 with a total of 81 children

matched with adoptive families. Each and every one of these matches is a story of loss and change accompanied by love and hope for the future.

As face-to-face events could not proceed in the usual formats of Adoption Exchange Days and Adoption Activity Days the Register facilitated family finding through the delivery of online webinars where prospective adopters had the opportunity to see video profiles of children waiting for permanent homes and hear from their foster carers.

In February 2021, the Register celebrated its 700th match of a child through one of these events.

The number of families approved for three children or more continues to be extremely low – in the year 2020/2021 only two prospective adoptive families in Scotland were looking to adopt larger sibling groups (1 approved for 3 children, 1 approved for 4 children). This continues to have serious implications for children being enabled to stay together. The Register continues to have an overview of this issue and frequently asks questions of local authorities and voluntary agencies as to their focus on recruitment and approval remits.

The publication of The Promise and the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 highlights the importance of maintaining family relationships, with an emphasis on siblings. The Register, an active member of Stand Up for Siblings, continues to ensure this is a priority in all aspects of its work. We are pleased to report that in the reporting period Renfrewshire Council worked closely with another Local Authority to place a fourth full sibling with his three adopted brother and sisters through our Adoption Panel in March 2021.

The Service Manager meets approximately 4 times throughout the calendar year to update the recruitment portfolio for both the fostering and adoption service. Participation from adopters is key within our recruitment and we have examples of live case studies where adopters have allowed us to use their adoption story to encourage other families in the public domain to think about adoption but specifically so of older children and family groups. The Adoption service offered a range of training opportunities and events albeit online during adoption week in November 2020.

## **Adoption Plans and Links**

During the period 01.08.2020 to 31.07.21, 13 children were presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration of their adoption plans and links. This was a significant rise from the previous year, and it included 4 sets of brothers and sisters' groups and 1 child who was joining his 3 siblings already in an adoption family. 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.

## **Transitions to a Better Future**

Across the UK, adoption and fostering agencies have traditionally followed a similar formula for moving children from foster care to permanent families. The "traditional" transition model is based on practice wisdom and seems to have persisted on the basis that "we do it this way because we've always done it this way" rather than because it is research and/or evidenced based practice.

We have become much better informed by research about the impact of early years, experience on child development and what makes children cope in stressful situations. Making a transition from one family to another is probably the biggest transition a child will experience

and using a more child development, attachment and trauma focussed approach is likely to result in a better start for children moving to a new family.

To take this approach we help children. This involves drawing on attachment theory, the neuroscience behind how children can be helped to regulate their stress and fear response with evidence-based techniques for helping children form better relationships. The fostering and adoption team of social workers use this approach with social workers of the children, foster carers and adopters when transitioning children to adoption.

This involves integrating Thera play into the plan. Foster carers and adopters will consistently play Thera play games encouraging a sense of safety and care. Both sets of carers will use rhythm to help regulation. Everyone involved will attend planning meetings facilitated by a social worker from the fostering and adoption service to work out the right plan for that child. The joined-up approach continues throughout the transition and beyond and often becomes the routine for adopters well into the child's transition.

### **Permanent Foster Carers**

3 children's plans for Permanence Orders were approved in the time period 1.08.20 - 31.07.21 all of whom were liked 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.

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.

In the Independent Review of the Register by Thomas and Blackmore – one of the key messages for policy makers was to “explore the potential for the Register's services to be extended to other kinds of permanent placements in Scotland.” (2019 p29). Since the demise of 'Be My Parent' there has been no resource for workers seeking families for children registered for a Permanence Order. There is a continued struggle to find permanent foster placements for children. The Register has reached an agreement with the SAR Advisory Group and Scottish Government to develop a proposal for expanding the Register's role to incorporate permanent fostering. We look forward as a Council in this development as this is a key area of vulnerability within Renfrewshire although we do have a significant number of fostering households linked to children as permanent families.

### **Adoption Support Group**

Our adoption support group had developed over the past few years and varies between a drop-in facility which the children can also attend with play activities available to the children, while their parents talk with other adopters and staff, drop in evenings for adopters only, to training events for adopters only. Whilst the past couple of years have been more challenging in reaching out to families, we have managed to provide a strong support to our adopters via groups using a hybrid model of both electronic and safely offering direct group support out with the office.

## Support Groups during reporting period

Virtual book bug (Adoption week)	16.11.21
Family fun day (Adoption week)	18.11.21
Scavenger Hunt (Adoption week)	19.11.21
Coffee drop in (adoption week)	20.11.21
Drop in (virtual)	16.02.21
Family Fun Day (Rouken Glen)	19.06.21

The Adoption service has continued to offer meaningful learning workshops which has been specifically tailored to the needs of our adoption service. These continue to be delivered on Microsoft teams however were felt to be beneficial to those who attended

FASD Training/Support Group	6.10.20
FASD – Q&A (Adoption week)	17.11.20
Telling Workshop (Adoption week)	17.11.20
Attachment/Thera play (Adoption week)	19.11.21
Telling Workshop	28.01.21
Life story work	15.02.21
Autism awareness	11.05.21

Most adopters who attend the group meet other adopters in similar situations and hear about strategies and tips for managing different situations. The group has also been the starting point for the development of friendships and informal supports. Unfortunately, virtual groups do not always allow for the development of friendships in the same way as face-to-face groups.

There are over 30 adoptive families who have attended the Support Group in November and December 2020, and the feedback was very positive. The number attending the group can vary as it is a drop in, with some families choosing to attend at different times.

### **Introduction of Men's group**

In July 2021, the service developed a new men's adoption support group as additional strand to the main support group. This was an idea generated by a couple of male adopters with whom there had been discussion about online sessions; activities with or without children, and that the sessions should be independently led by adopters, for adopters. We have a range of circumstances within our adoption pool such as single; married; heterosexual, same sex, and widowed males. The idea developed from discussions around reaching out to those adopters who may feel excluded from the regular adoption support groups. Our adoption support groups are predominately attended by females and children.

It is anticipated that moving forward, the men's group will now, grow and develop and become independently managed, as they have taken the first step towards building a supportive network of other male adopters.

### **Adoption Support to individual families**

Throughout the year the adoption team have provided adoption support on an individual basis to 20 adoptive families who have approached the service for support.

Within Renfrewshire we have 100 adoptive families on our mailing list who receive our quarterly newsletter and notification of all support groups and training events.

## **Adoption Newsletter**

The adoption newsletter is produced 4 times per year – Christmas, Spring, Summer and Autumn. Within this newsletter we include useful articles for national adoption websites and organisations. We encourage stories 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, we have 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.

During the pandemic we shared a lot of useful articles on adoption/parenting and young people's mental health which were current issues for many families.

## **Birth parent support**

Birth parent support to families whose children were being progressed to adoption was significantly affected by the pandemic due to difficulties in offering therapeutic support to individual families. The approach to this work is building direct relationships to birth parents over time to work together on maintaining a meaningful role to their children or with their own recovery of losing a child through adoption. The service has maintained this practise however this was reduced due to restrictions. We continue to offer support to birth families once the plan is made for their child/children to be adopted and to offer support to birth parents to reflect on why adoption has been recommended and to understand the legal process.

We have continued to engage with birth families where their child has been adopted and they now feel that they are at a place in their own lives where they would like to contribute information to the child's life work. Support to birth parents may be required at different stages of the adoption process. Our commitment to birth parents work will be a key development in the adoption service in the forthcoming year as we offer much more direct support to families.

## **Supporting Roots**

The Scottish Government are funding a research project called 'Supporting Roots' which aims to improve the support available across Scotland for parents who have lost child(ren) to care. This project involves two distinct parts. First, AFA Scotland is working with the Scottish Government, supported by a practice group representing a range of organisations, to begin to map where and what support is available throughout Scotland. The aim is to address the current gap in knowledge about the services these mothers and fathers can access throughout Scotland from a range of statutory and third sector organisations. The second part of this project, led by Dr Ariane Critchley, aims to gather the views of mothers, fathers and wider family members who have been impacted by permanent separation from their child(ren) to care in Scotland. There is scope to link with the second part of this project in order to review and develop support offered to birth parents affected by adoption in Renfrewshire. This would ensure that Renfrewshire are in the position to lead on taking forward the learning from this research project and pilot good practice ideas which can then be monitored and evaluated as the service develops

## **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 107 which 65 are operational. Letterbox

contact varies on an individual case basis, mostly contacts are annual however we have some which are twice, three time or quarterly.

During the first months of COVID we were unable to exchange letters due to the risks posed. However, the service quickly picked up the backlog of letters and reintroduced normal running order of letterbox contact. We have now introduced 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 – 2020 - 2021**

Over the next year we intend to strengthen our adoption service by developing the following:

1. A focussed recruitment drive for adopters who may consider assessment for brothers and sisters as opposed to one child
2. Further recruitment of new Fostering and Adoption Panel Members as required.
3. Increase opportunities to have more face to face, support groups to adoptive families and their children including the facilitation of the new men's group recently formulated.
4. Develop work with birth families work by offering direct support to all parents and family members where needed included brothers and sisters who are affected by adoption.
- 5 Development of extended family member's participation in the adoption assessment process.
5. Development of work with our linking process using the Adoption register
6. Support for Adoption Exchange days and Adoption Activity Days to maximise linking opportunities for adopters and children.
7. Development of joint work and training opportunities with neighbouring local authorities to share expertise.
8. Development of a training program regarding adoption support plans for social work staff to ensure all adopted children have a support plan in place and a later life letter.
9. 'Blocked Care' training to be offered to all staff in the Adoption Service and to Adopters commissioned by Adoption UK.

### **Conclusion**

This report has highlighted the work of the Fostering, Adoption and Supported Carers Services and the work of the Fostering and Adoption Panels. The activity of the Fostering and Adoption Panel reflects the high number of children unable to return to live with their birth families within Renfrewshire.

The Report highlights recovery measures that are in placed using a hybrid model of both electronic platforms and direct work with foster carers and adopters, to ensure that children's plans are progressed by the Fostering and Adoption Panels and that children's needs have been met.

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

As Chair of the Adoption and Fostering Panel and the Registered Manager for the we would like to take this opportunity to thank our Panel members for their commitment to Renfrewshire's most vulnerable children.

Our Foster Carers dedication to the children in their care means that we can ensure the best outcomes for them to a consistently high standard. 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.

Cathie O Donnell  
Service Manager Fostering and Adoption.

Joyce Gartshore  
Chairperson of the Adoption Panel and Fostering Panel.

Clare Cuning  
Social Work Manager (Registered Manager of both services).

## **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
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 unemployed
4. Be of any religious background or sexual orientation

#### **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.



## **Appendix 2**

### **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 available for 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.