



Fostering Relations

Education Report

Summer 2012



Fostering Relations... with children... with carers... with you!



Introduction



Fostering Relations is an independent, not for profit fostering agency that works with local authorities across Scotland to provide quality, supported, stable and safe family placements for children and young people.

Fostering Relations exists to provide safe and happy family places for children and young people to live whilst they are unable to live with their own family for whatever reason and for whatever length of time. It is important to us that children and young people entrusted to our care are given the highest quality of service our carers and this agency can provide and we will do our utmost to ensure that this is achieved.

Historically, it has been recognised that looked after and accommodated children underachieve due to circumstances beyond their control. Recent legislation and Scottish Government policy emphasise the need for a corporate parenting approach to help compensate for the damage which traumatic life events may have caused. Children fostered by our carers are deemed

to have additional support needs by dint of being looked after and accommodated, and therefore the agency has a responsibility to ensure that everything is done to ensure that these needs are met while children are being cared for by our foster carers. To assist in this effort, Fostering Relations offers additional educational support by providing the professional services of an Education Support Co-ordinator to support carers achieve better educational outcomes for the children in their care.

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Overview



Educationally, this has been a good year for the 28 children and young people (22 boys, 6 girls) we have placed with us in Fostering Relations. 24 of them have been in full time education this year, two on a part time timetable, until their school placement stabilised allowing them to move to full time before the end of the session with the help of local primary support services. One young pre-school boy with complex additional support needs and a co-ordinated support plan, has attended a specialist nursery placement on a part time basis as fully as his health allowed. Sadly, a post 16 girl was assessed as unable to cope with the educational opportunities offered to her due to mental health issues.

Of those in full time education, attendance at school has been excellent (average 97.8%). Eight of our young people have achieved 100% attendance. The lowest attendance rate was 87% for one young boy whose school struggled to meet his additional support needs and opted for frequent suspensions. The other 19 children and young people's attendance ranged between 94% and 99%. There are two co-ordinated support plans in place for two boys with complex needs requiring specialist support from a variety of professionals with another being considered. (See appendix 1)

28 Children and young people in placement

24 Full Time attendance

2 Part Time > FT with Primary Support Service hours

1 Part Time Specialist Nursery

1 Post 16 non-attender

Attendance statistics

8 with 100% attendance

16 with 94% - 99% attendance

1 below 94% (87%)

1 with "excellent" attendance in 6 months

1 pre-school

1 not in education





Stability of Education

School is a positive experience for most of our children. Despite the many issues they bring, which makes the school experience more difficult for them to achieve well, most have had an exceptionally successful year.

One of our most resilient eight year olds had four prior placements before coming to us at the age of four. Despite major attachment issues and very difficult contact circumstances, he achieved 100% attendance on an agreed part time table. From August he has the opportunity to achieve his potential on a full time basis, at his same local school, with the support of local primary support services, psychological services, psychiatric services, play therapy, and an outstanding carer family, soon to become his permanent carers.

School is a positive experience for most of our children. Despite the many issues they bring, which makes the school experience more difficult

Two young boys were placed with us due to severe neglect causing them major difficulties coping with school. Not only did they achieve 98% and 99% attendance this year, they no longer have the same major health issues, both are happily settled in school, and the younger boy has gone from being an elective mute to being well on the road to catching up on his educational milestones with his “best thing” being, “I can read now”.

Two of our older young people are moving on to college places next term from settled foster placements, and one 18 year old has just achieved his HNC qualification and he is

moving on to a more advanced HND course with the on-going support of his foster carer.

One young girl achieved B passes in Standard Grade English and Maths while still in second year.

Another young girl, who has only being with us for six months, has achieved 100% attendance and excellent school reports in all of her secondary school subjects despite English being her third of four languages.

One young boy with considerable additional support needs struggled to cope with the demands of his local school during his six months with one of our foster families. Not only did he manage to achieve full time attendance in school by the end of the session, he won a major safety campaign award in a competition run by the local authority Railway Police for his artwork.

Another young boy with a co-ordinated support plan, despite the many health issues and frustrations he experienced at the demands of school, has achieved a jump in his attendance from less than 50% to 98% and shows signs of becoming a budding photographer.

Sadly, it is not all good news given the level of trauma some of our young people have experienced. Despite the best efforts of a very supportive foster carer, one young person has been unable to take advantage of the post-16 opportunities offered to her due to on-going mental health issues and has been out of education this year. We have also lost one of our young people to residential care despite the efforts of school, agency and social work professionals as his home circumstances worked against us. However, 25 of our 28 children and young people are expected to remain settled in placement and school as we begin a new school year.





Transitions

A major issue for carers is the child's readiness for transition from primary school to secondary school, or from secondary school to further education. Most worry about this as, in general, looked after children have had so many other issues to contend with, they do not have the energy or focus to do as well at school as their peers. While we do our best to support their efforts to help children feel safe, secure, settled at school, and begin to catch up, some carers do have unrealistic expectations of how quickly children in foster care can catch up. This is a major development issue for many carers. Some children do make surprisingly good ground in their education but for some it is a slower journey to regain confidence, build self esteem, and for professionals to be able to accurately assess their developmental impairments while helping them with their developmental delay. It can be hard for carers to come to terms with the limitations some young people face due to the lasting effects of a less than easy start in life.

All but four of our children and young people were placed with foster carers living in a different local authority from their home area. This usually required moving school and presented the additional difficulties involved in cross boundary negotiations of assessment

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of additional support needs, funding of support, sourcing and then later reviewing this support. While government policy makes this an ostensibly straightforward matter, whereby the home authority provides the additional support information and funds the additional support required for the child or young person in the host authority school, in practice this can cause delays, misunderstandings and potential disagreement as all local authorities have different protocols for this. In some cases this can cause major stress for the foster carer and young person while the matter drags on and the young person can be out of school, or be without much needed support while these matters are resolved. It remains the most contentious and vexing issue for those trying to establish foster children in a new school and has been the cause of placement breakdowns in the past.





Feedback



For the purposes of this report I invited carers, agency supervising social workers, local authority social workers, and the young people themselves to contribute their views by means of a questionnaire. All of our carers and supervising social workers responded and 17 children and young people, along with five local authority social workers also gave feedback. I am grateful to all of them for taking the time to enrich this report by adding their viewpoints to my own. Their submissions can be seen at the end of this report in appendix two.

Children and Young People

The young people themselves all said that school was OK or better now they were with their foster family. All but two of them felt they had achieved well or very well in placement. The two young people who assessed how well they had achieved what they wanted from school this year as “very bad”, were the two whose school had experienced great difficulty in providing the necessary support to meet their needs. Unsurprisingly, there was

quite a range of “best things” about school in the past year. Strong contenders were “pals” and “helpful teachers”, with activity projects, awards, choosing subjects, improving knowledge, spelling and cookery also featuring. There was one cryptic comment of “leaving” from a young person moving on from high school to college.

When they were asked what was the worst thing about school this year, eight responded “nothing” but there were some worries about bullying, work being too hard, needing more help, high school being “stricter” – again from the boy whose school struggled to meet his needs, and one opting for PE. The hopes for the coming year ranged from passing exams, getting more help in class, doing better and putting more effort into work, to staying at school for a full day. When asked what else we as an agency could do to help, most said “nothing”, with one young person asking for more English language help and another for help with work and behaviour.

Local authority social workers

Five local authority social workers provided responses to the questionnaire and they tended to be from those whose children’s school experience had been very difficult for various reasons. It was interesting to compare their take on their seven young people’s educational experience with the views of the supervising social workers and foster carers also supporting them. All felt it was helpful to have an educational professional as part of the agency’s support team. Their answers varied, but in a pattern, when asked how big an issue school is for the young person. Both sets of social workers tended to be close in their assessment of how major a factor it was, with foster carers having a more optimistic take.



SSWs

For 12 of the 28 young people, their supervising social workers felt that school was a major issue in the overall assessment of the young person's needs. For ten of the children, supervising social work staff felt there were some areas where they would like to have seen more done. Concerns tended to be around a need for better communication between school and other agencies, or lack of assessment of some area of need the young person may require support with.

Carers

When carers were asked to assess how good a school year the young person had had, compared to their experience prior to coming to live with them, they felt things had improved, some markedly so, except for four children. These were children who had experienced difficulties with loss of classroom support, bullying, mental health issues and a combination of work pressure and placement difficulties. Most carers felt the child's school was meeting their needs well or very well. Of those who expressed concern, two felt that the school let them down by not providing adequate support, and the other felt that the young person's needs were still not properly assessed and understood.

Carers were happy to list lots of positive highlights: national certificate awards; sports successes; improved attendance and routine; improvements in reading and writing; getting a college place; learning to swim; gaining independence; triumphs for some with major health issues.

Some carers were looking for extra help to gain better assessment of the child's needs, and more tailored support for learning. Some felt counselling was needed for children who were stuck, unable to progress as they should. One heartfelt plea came from the carer of a boy with physical disabilities and complex learning needs. She hoped that,

“he's able to take up a place at a local school, enabling him to attend more, and that all the professionals work together to that end.”

When asked about their hopes and fears for the coming year there were many varied responses. A common theme was the fear of how they will cope at transition to high school or college. They worry that their child might not settle into their new school, or have problems making friends. Some worried about possible bullying. Some worry about their foster child not making up enough ground before transition to high school or college. Their hopes for them are for good friends, understanding teachers and good exam results, and that they get enough learning support.





Final thoughts

These are a few of their stories but we're proud of the many achievements of all of our young people as the battle to overcome the adversities that life has thrown at them. We will continue to celebrate their achievements with them, their carers, families, social workers and teachers as we all continue to support them in their amazing journey to achieve their true potential. We have many people who support us in our efforts to help our children achieve the best possible educational outcomes. We have some incredibly dedicated foster carers who daily provide love, care and encouragement, and advocate fiercely when necessary to ensure the young people in their care get the support they are entitled to, to grow, develop and recover from the severely traumatic circumstances which have brought them into their family. Sometimes it is the unswerving dedication of one teacher who

comes back again and again in the face of the behaviour which frightens even the young person himself and then draws others into providing the secure base where he can feel he belongs, and begin to learn. We rely on the dedication of local authority social workers and our own supervising social work staff to maintain communication and make the links with families in distress and hold it all together.

There are many others who help us but it is the children themselves who are the constant inspiration as they struggle to grow in the face of extreme adversity into the young people they have a right to be.

Roberta Shields

Education Support Co-ordinator
Fostering Relations Ltd.

We have many people who support us in our efforts to help our children achieve the best possible educational outcomes.



Appendix 1

Attendance in Education – 2011/2012

Initials	Sector	Full or Part time	Attendance
LA	Primary	FT	98%
RD	Secondary	FT	94%
J Br	Secondary	FT	99%
J Be	Primary / Primary Support Service	FT from August	100%
Lo A	Secondary	FT	99%
GK	Secondary / Transition to next sector August 2012	FT	95%
CW	Primary	FT	98%
SA	Primary	FT	98%
SN	Primary	FT	98%
MN	Special School / Nursery / Transition to next sector August 2012	PT	****
SH	Secondary	FT	87%
DMM	Primary	FT	100%
CT	Secondary	FT-> Residential	97%
RA	Special School Secondary	FT	99%
RBo	Secondary	FT	98%
JD	Primary / Transition to next sector August 2012	FT	100%
JM	Primary / Transition to next sector August 2012	FT	100%
CC	Primary	FT	98%
JH	Primary	FT	99%
NH	Primary	FT	98%
RBa	Further Education *	Not currently in education	
AW	Secondary	FT	95%
DML	Secondary	FT	100%
AL	Secondary	FT	100%
YN	Secondary	FT	100%
MB	Primary / Primary Support Service	FT	“excellent”
JD	Secondary / Transition to next sector August 2012	FT	97%
AM	Further Education	FT	100%
		Average	97.8%



Appendix 2

Education questionnaires

Please Note: 1 equals a major issue through to 5 equals no issue.

Carer Q.	
FT or PT this year?	Before?
Attendance stats?	
How big an issue was school for him/her before placement? Comment:	1 – 5
How good a year do you feel s/he has had?	1 – 5
How well has school met his/her needs? Comments:	1 – 5 Comments
Is it helpful to have ESC as part of agency support?	
Highlights?	Comment
Anything else you would like to have seen done for him/her?	Comment
Anything you hope/fear for this coming year?	Comment
Any help you need to help him/her achieve more?	Comment

Young Person Q.	
How do you find school?	1 – 5
How well do feel you have achieved what you wanted from school this year?	1 – 5 Comments
Is school better or worse for you now you live with carer?	
Best thing about school this past year?	
Worst thing?	
What would you like to see happen at school this year?	
Anything FR can do to help?	





SSW Q.	
How big an issue is school for him/her?	1 – 5
Is it helpful to have ESC as part of agency support?	
Anything else you would like to have seen done for him/her re school?	

LA SW Q.	
How big an issue is school for him/her?	1 – 5
Is it helpful to have ESC as part of agency support?	
Anything else you would like to have seen done for him/her re school?	

ESC viewpoint



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