

Families for Children
Annual Report
2020-2021



Foreword and introduction

Service delivery during the COVID 19 pandemic

The past year has been challenging for our service as it has been for the wider community. We have gone from having regular face to face contact with our foster carers and adopters and the children and young people who live with them to developing new techniques to offer arms-length support and supervision.

Staff within our service have risen to this challenge by supporting carers to engage virtually, learning and development has gone online and our social workers have adapted to a more arms-length approach to engaging with colleagues they had seen on a regular basis both within Families for Children and in locality social work teams.

Our Fostering and Adoption panels have moved to a virtual format and have run weekly. This has allowed approvals of foster carers and adopters to continue and has allowed children to be matched with their permanent families.

Our carers have had to cope with the challenge of living with the impact of the pandemic and the disruption to their lives that this has brought. In some cases this has impacted on their health and the health of family members while they supported the young people in their care to cope with a significant change in their routine, disruption to relationships, home schooling and much more.

While we do not underestimate how difficult this has been they have risen to the challenge admirably and we are very grateful for this.



Service developments

In February 2020 the Promise was published which reflected the findings of the Independent Care Review in Scotland and outlines Scotland's ambitions for all children and young people to be nurtured and loved throughout their childhood.

There will be significant developments in our service and across all services Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership delivers to children and young people and their families over the 10 year implementation of the Promise Plan (embedded link to Glasgow Plan).

Therefore, we have adopted the five foundations of Scotland's ambition below to provide a framework to outline our service developments over the last year and as we go forward.

“ ... we feel in person panels are definitely better than via teams ”



Care



Families for children continues to provide interim, long term and permanent foster carers, as well as short breaks carers and adopters for the children of Glasgow.

There were 610 children who experienced some time living with our foster carers from April 2020 to March 2021, this includes children living with their permanent fostering families and those living with interim foster carers on a short or a long term basis.

Over this period 73 children moved from their families to live for a time with families for children foster carers.

At the end of March 2021 551 children remained living within our fostering households.

Although in the initial weeks approval panels were not able to take place, once these were re-established in May 2020 we were able to achieve the following approvals:

Adoption Approvals	12
Adoption matches	11
Permanent approval and match	11
Fostering approvals	9
New partner approval	1

Initially panels were convened utilising telephone conferencing until we gained access to Microsoft teams, we made all efforts to set up these different ways of running panels expeditiously and reduce any delays for our carers adopters and our children.

Future developments

In recognition of the aspirations of the Promise and the new legal duties to support brothers and sisters' relationships efforts will be concentrated on assessing and supporting foster carers and adopters to allow more brothers and sisters to live together and/or maintain closer relationships.

Family

Glasgow's Promise Plan reflects commitment to keeping families together and if this is not possible maintaining familial bonds.

Our Family Assessment and Contact Service has resumed face to face work with parents and children where an assessment of parenting capacity is needed to inform the children's plan. A pilot of Glasgow Parenting Assessment framework also took place this year. This will allow a consistent approach by a broader range of social workers across the City assessing parent's capacity to care for their children and the supports they need to allow their children to live with them.

If this is not possible it will support decision making to develop a plan to secure the child or young person and consider how to support future relationships.

Our current sibling assessment is under review and in partnership with our colleagues in the wider service we will develop a Family Connections Assessment which will assess whether brothers and sisters can be supported to live together and if not, how their relationship can be supported. It will also consider 'sibling like' relationships children and young people have which are also important to them.

A model for Intensive Family Support has been developed to help children be looked after in the community by their parents or wider family. Tendering for service providers is underway and the Glasgow Intensive Support Service will be in place in 2021.

Our short breaks service continues to support children who live with parents and extended family to stay together. During lockdowns many carers provided phone calls to families supporting routines and keeping in touch with children to maintain relationships and connections for often isolated families. In addition, short breaks were able to be re-established for some of the most vulnerable children and their families during lockdown with new guidance and risk assessments reducing the risks to our cares and children from Covid 19.



Future developments

The new Family Connections assessment will be piloted at the end of 2021. A model of placement support will be developed.

“ Everything worked smoothly on Microsoft teams and although the experience was unusual we were quite happy with how it turned out ”

Voice

During the pandemic and the pressures on our carers and workers alike, with home working home schooling, isolations and family fears and illness, consultation and participation needed to be considered in a different way.

We welcomed carers sharing ideas with us and with other carers on how to entertain children, educate children and manage their questions and fears.

Our Senior Officer for Communications and Recruitment was able to facilitate sharing of ideas through newsletters that were vibrant and full of inspiration. This allowed both children and their carers to share their art work and what they were doing in lockdown.

Important information about service developments like the roles of the Independent reviewing officer, and the implementation of the Promise were also able to be shared through the newsletter.

This became an important communication tool and way of carers getting their ideas expressed.

One of our foster carers was able to help staff the training support line for carers which allowed carers to speak to another carer for advice as well as the training staff or their supervising workers.

My Meetings taking place on Microsoft teams allowed our children to have a voice and be involved in their own meetings. CELCIS research showed that use of Microsoft teams for children's meetings had led to nearly 100% attendance and children told CELCIS that it felt less daunting attending in this way so it allowed more children to feel included and involved.

💬 The conversations on Microsoft teams have been good and so was the information. 💬



Meeting regularly with Children's rights share rights issues, participation opportunities and to share children and young people's voices to influence change.

PAC

Families for children are part of the PAC steering group

For the majority of 2020 almost all PAC events took place on line with engagement through weekly video calls via Zoom. This included quizzes, a workout video, a list of activities for young people via other corporate parents and agencies including apps to learn music, singing, exercise, cooking platforms, food ideas and other free activities that were easily accessible.

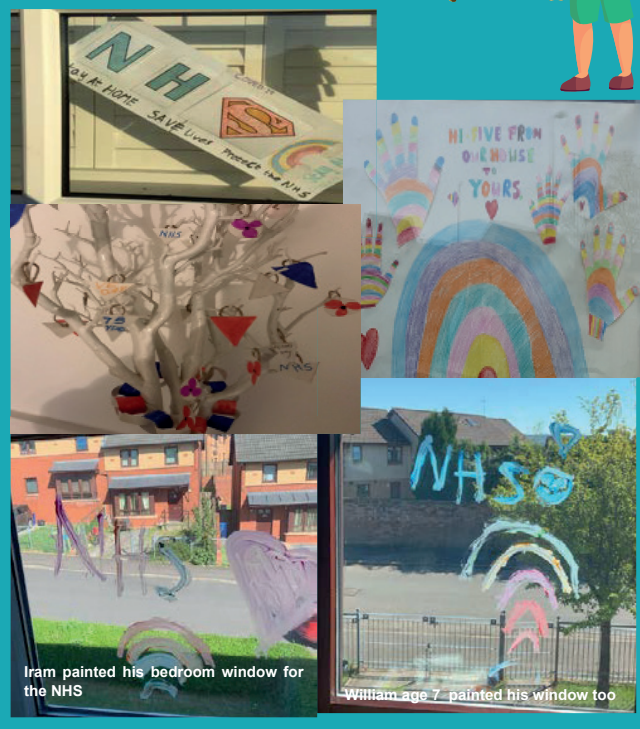
As lockdown reduced, one-to-one meetings while socially distanced took place, with links being maintained via Facebook, Twitter and TikTok.

The funding for PAC ended in November 2020 with the future of the group still to be decided.

During the first lockdown PAC had the idea to create PACkages for care experienced people and raised over £2000 to create these. They were delivered across the Glasgow area. Corporate parents from Universities, SQA and housing associations contributed to this along with the general public. Toiletries, art products, food and sweets were some of the many items gifted.

We also know that you have been 'celebrating' the heroes in your lives with some amazing art work to display in your windows.....let us see some of those too.

Like these excellent examples from Kelsey and Lauren, Andrew and Tegan and Lexi and Georgia



“ I got loads of really great stuff from PAC, I think my favourite thing is the Nutella. ”

“ There was so much stuff in the bag, I was really touched. ”

The Children's Rights Service began working from home on 20.03.2020.

The team continued to offer a service to children and young people keeping in touch initially by phone and email and then also via WhatsApp and Teams. Visits were undertaken when this was considered essential.

The team continued to provide rights information and support as well as responding to enquiries. A flyer called ways to stay connected was sent out and amended as changes occurred.

Many of the meetings the team supported children and young people to attend took place via conference call, Teams or via the Children's Hearing digital arrangements.

Some children and young people have said that they have valued the opportunity to attend meetings online and not in person while others have stated that they would rather attend in person. One of our young people in foster care was involved in interviews for the new children's rights officers.

Future developments

We will look at how we can consult young people better and learn from what worked well for them during lockdown. Look at how we can better support young people to have relationships with people who are significant to them.

Review the language that we use as a service in light of the promise and children's views.



Scaffolding

The onset of the pandemic, the national guidance and numerous lockdowns meant that as a service we needed to rethink how to support our carers and children during a very difficult time.

To begin with this meant a halt to face to face visits and our staff keeping in weekly telephone contact with the carers for advice and support. As our access to technology developed, we were able to utilise Microsoft teams to speak to carers weekly and this was positively received by carers once support with accessing the technology was received.

As well as supervising social worker support changing and adapting to meet our carers needs safely so did our training department. Our training team spent some time rewriting some of our courses for virtual delivery and were able to run 5 evening groups all with the full quota of 10 participants for Adopters and 4 evening groups and 2 daytime groups also with 8 to 10 participants for Foster Carers.

We also managed to run some face to face training when guidance allowed and delivered two face to face Life Story programmes for Social workers and residential staff (10 each session) and a Permanence Prep Course for 9 carers.

Our training team also ran a learning and development helpline from April 2020 until March 21 which was accessed by both staff and carers. There was generally good take up of the helpline, with carers using it to reflect on a range of issues, home schooling, feelings of isolation, internet safety, managing children and young people's anxiety, understanding behaviour and agreeing strategies for supporting children.

More broadly, the 2 Senior Learning and Development Officers were able to offer some additional bespoke pieces of work and support to a few households, both to foster carers and adopters where it was considered this would be beneficial.

💬 Support from my social worker has never changed through the pandemic. My worker visits every 4 weeks without fail and will answer the phone or get back to me right away when I called before the pandemic. Through the pandemic was exactly the same only we had to adapt it a little with the visits so changed to Microsoft teams and weekly or daily phone calls depending on the support I needed. 💬



Our supervising workers were able to offer carers support with home learning and even share resources they were using as many of us faced this new challenge in our homes. We supported some of our children to gain access to education hubs who required the extra support and who were not able to cope with home schooling.

In addition our newsletter over the period was a very useful resource for sharing widely websites and tools that foster carers could access to help with home schooling and entertaining preschool children who had no nursery provision.

We were able to look at how we supported children differently in moves to adoption and technology was used creatively with adopters creating videos of themselves reading and speaking to the children and were able to send these to the children via their foster carers.

Adopters and children were able to speak and see each other over Microsoft teams and outside areas were able to be used for children to meet their adoptive parents.

Our Supervising social workers at times created “bubbles” with their adoptive families so that they could support them at key points.

Lockdown also meant that once children moved into their new homes they were isolating at home with little interference from the outside world including extended family and some families and supervising workers have reflected that this made initial time to bond and get to know each other so much easier to protect and simple activities in the home really improved this experience.

Our Service managers established several liaison groups with Children’s rights, residential services and locality service managers so that we could all stay updated to the developments, and needs of each service and work in partnership through the difficulties we were all encountering.

Future developments

Our training team hope to be able to increase face to face training opportunities for social workers and foster carers in the year ahead. Including delivering well established courses and new training.

People

As a service we value our relationships, be they our relationships as a staff team, with our carers and children or with area team social worker and other services. This was a challenge in the pandemic as often we were aware of the pressure, fears and illness that many of our families and colleagues were experiencing. We had to find new ways to come together to support each other as best we could.

As a service team leader, I began weekly catch ups with staff individually and setting up team meetings firstly via phone conferencing and then via Microsoft teams. Some sub teams also set up virtual coffee breaks, out of work team quizzes and out of work group chats on social media to keep in touch with colleagues and support each other.

Our supervising workers contacted their carers weekly via telephone and then via Microsoft teams, which allowed carers and supervising workers to see each other and also for children to see the supervising workers they are used to seeing around their home, and our staff were able to set eyes on our children. Locality social workers for the children were also important relationships for many children and their foster carers over this period.

For some of our more isolated carers this was a very important point in their week of regular contact with someone and for others a useful opportunity to gain support and feedback.

“ we have a fantastic relationship with our two older kids social worker from Area teams North West Drumchapel.

The kids feel safe and supported with their worker who's went above and beyond for the kids and us as a family.

This worker apart from us, has been the only permanent person in their life since they have being accommodated 7 years ago, which means now the kids are older and asking questions.

The worker is there to answer their questions and guide them through the bits I don't know or can't answer. As the kids trust her so much, the kids relied on her a lot during the pandemic.”

For some of our more isolated carers this was a very important point in their week of regular contact with someone and for others a useful opportunity to gain support and feedback.

With the wider council using Microsoft teams, attending multidisciplinary meetings became easier and in some cases staff were able to attend meetings they may not have been able to physically due to travel time between offices etc.

When it became possible to do so our supervising workers were able to return to visiting carers while using lateral flow testing and visiting one household per day.

This allowed some face to face support to return for carers but has still left open the opportunity to meet with some carers virtually when this is better suited.

We were able to consider each child's needs individually when it came to offering short breaks for children who lived with their families but needed extra support.

Some of our children have very important and established relationships with the families they go to for a short break and some of the families depend upon this support.

At the start of lockdown we asked that only where it was detrimental to the child to not go to their short breaks carer would we consider this and we outlined clear criteria and planning to keep all involved safe.

Our carers in the short breaks service who were able to continue to support families they knew were eager to help.

💬 In tough times it is natural to lean on each other and pull your loved ones closer. We know how much our young people and their families depend on us, so it was a very scary time for everyone. We were fortunate enough to offer additional support throughout the pandemic and help out our respite family. Dealing with a whole new world of lockdowns, isolation, health anxieties and blended learning wasn't always easy but it was so important to help and support one another and create some stability where possible. Respite had never been so important for our young person and their family and as a result a stronger relationship has been created. 💬

Claire, Short Breaks carer

Conclusion

2020/2021 was a year like no other we had experienced in families for children but as a service we start a new year with new ideas, better use of technology and an open mind about trying things in very different ways.

The Promise inspires us to do things better for our children and this difficult year has facilitated us trying some things differently.

We have many things which still challenge us and areas of the service to focus on for the coming year includes increasing our training opportunities, increasing our recruitment and finding better ways of listening to and hearing our children's views.