Welcome to our summer edition of the fostering newsletter.

It is one year since we launched our campaign ‘Foster Carers come from all walks of life’ and in the past year lots of work has taken place and many of you have helped us as Foster Carer Ambassadors to promote fostering and the valuable difference it can make. This work really does make a difference. Over the past year we have had over 200 enquiries from people interested in fostering, this is great news and I would like to personally thank those of you who have worked as Foster Carer Ambassadors at various events throughout the year. Your first-hand experience is vital to encourage people who are considering becoming Foster Carers, you can also help to dispel some of the myths that make some people believe they would not be suitable, such as qualifications or relationship status.

We have another exciting year ahead and I hope many of you can get involved with us, as we still need more Foster Carers, specifically for older children. We are looking to build up our pool of carers for teenagers and siblings, if you are interested in expanding your remit, particularly to look after teenagers or siblings, please speak to your Supervising Social Worker.

Keep sharing your ideas with us about what you’d like to see in the newsletter or want to know more about in future edition and as always if you would like to write an article please send them in.

Best wishes
Diane Burns
Team Manager, Fostering team

Time to Foster Time to Care

Did you know that every 20 minutes across the UK, a child comes into care in need of a foster family? Initiatives like Foster Care Fortnight are so important in raising awareness of fostering and this year we joined in with the national campaign. This year the theme was ‘Time to Foster, Time to Care’.

During the two weeks of Foster Care Fortnight, it is estimated 13 new children could come into Wirral’s fostering service, needing a foster family, so it’s essential we keep up the momentum to attract new families.

To mark national Foster Care Fortnight, we launched our media campaign which was supported with events focusing on finding foster families for teenagers, who are often more difficult to place.

We also took part on social media in the national campaign which asked people to share their favourite 20 minutes of the last year. This highlighted the every 20 minute statistic and showed support for Foster Care Fortnight.

Foster families, children and young people all took part sharing their most significant 20 minutes of the past year, and by backing the campaign on Facebook and Twitter. Wirral’s fostering ambassadors were also out and about at a series of roadshows.

Thank you to everyone who supported the campaign through promotional events, online activity and fundraising. It really does make a difference and your support is really appreciated! During fostering fortnight we received over 40 enquiries from people wanting to know more about fostering.
Our journey as connected foster carers

Our journey began almost seven years ago. Returning from our dream holiday our eldest Grandson came to stay with us. What we thought would be temporary turned into permanent with his younger brother also coming to stay.

Our initial thoughts were we are too old for all this! As we had just started living life again after our own children had grown up and we enjoyed the Grand children coming a few times a week. After the initial shock of our Grandsons coming to stay with us we put our own thoughts and feelings to one side. We gave ourselves a kick up the back side and attended the skills to foster course. The course brought home to roost that we were quite happy plodding along in our own little bubble oblivious to other people’s lives and the impact on children.

At first we seemed to be firefighting on all fronts from battling with our own son, running to and from contacts, learning new skills through training and writing diary sheets. It felt like there were not enough hours in the day. But with great team work, perseverance, and firm but fair boundaries we settled into our new role. Our constant training has given us a basic platform to work with and we have built on this. Meaning we have been able to share our knowledge by becoming peer mentors, attending skills to foster courses as experienced carers and giving a speech at the launch of the new recruitment campaign.

Our journey hasn’t always been plain sailing more like a roller coaster with challenges and rewards. Challenging in the respect of trying to guide teenage children and rewarding seeing them blossoming into fine young men. We now also have the boys sister come to live with us and have quickly learnt that what works one day doesn’t work the next. You have to be prepared to constantly think outside the box whilst putting yourself in a child’s shoes.

Becoming a foster carer is something that we would never ever have considered as our lives were just ticking along until it touched our family! We were not aware how many children are in need and need our help! We are now and if someone had said to us seven years ago you would be foster carers we would have laughed at them.

It has enriched our lives and helped us to see things differently; we always put ourselves in the child’s shoes and look at things through a child’s eyes. It has helped us help our grandchildren to become fine young people and have a future!

So if we can do it YOU CAN DO IT.

Les & Cindy

Making a difference

As the weather is starting to hot up for the Summer, with all the expectations this season brings, I am reminded of how busy life can be as a Foster Carer through the Summer months. Yes, the pressure of the school run will cease, along with the lists of things to remember, P.E. kit, homework, after school clubs to name a few, but also those quiet moments for reflection during the day will also cease.

With this in mind I want you to each congratulate yourself for the amazing difference you are making to the life of a child (even when you don’t feel like you are), which might not seem significant to them until they themselves become parents.

On my office wall I have these two quotes which are reminders of why I do my job, but I first took them to my heart when I was a Foster Carer many years ago and I hope they help you to pause for a moment and reflect.

What does a child need?
“Every child needs at least one adult who is crazy about him, and never gives up on him, who believes in him.”

“Every child needs at least one adult who can’t resist the urge to kiss his dirty face, hug, hold and snuggle him for no reason.”

“Comfort him when he is sad or afraid: respond immediately when there is a problem.”

“We all want someone to love us as we are.”

“The most basic need of a child is to be loved for what he is, not for what he can or cannot do.”

Priorities
“A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in or the kind of car I drove, but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.”

Thank you for the work you have done and are about to do for our children. We are very fortunate to have such excellent Foster Carers in Wirral.

Sue Leedham
Group Manager
Fostering & Adoption
The developing brain

There is a massive amount of social care information on the Research in Practice website. Wirral are members of Research in Practice and this gives staff and carers free access to the site. Below is a part example of what could be found on the site:

**Topic 4: Early brain development and maltreatment**
- Early childhood neglect and abuse can have an impact on brain development.
- Not all children respond to maltreatment in the same way – individual children have different susceptibilities and resilience.
- Changes to the way in which the brain functions can be seen as adaptations to adverse experiences in the environment.
- The plasticity of the brain means that recovery is possible - this requires sensitive nurturing care interacting with other influences and resources.

The brain is genetically predisposed to expect certain experiences and forms neural pathways to respond to them. The more a child is exposed to those experiences, the stronger the connections will be. For example, babies are genetically predisposed to respond to voices and faces. When a baby is spoken to, the neural systems that are responsible for speech and language are stimulated and strengthened. Without this stimulation, the pre-programmed pathways that have developed in anticipation of the exposure will be discarded (Brown and Ward, 2013).

Let your SSW know if you need a link to the site. There will be training on 8th June at Hamilton Building 11 am to 1 pm to help people navigate their way around the site.

To book a place, please email janmckinley@wirral.gov.uk

Social works links

It has been very much appreciated that we have had links with staff from the Children Looked After service – Carole Nixon, Chris Pentecost and Jo Spender have all spoken to carers at the Drop Ins.

This has been useful in explaining the changes in the Department and also in building a better dialogue and understanding between fostering and the CLA teams.

They have also confirmed that carers should have e mail addresses for the social worker of each child placed, and also have the land line and mobile number of the social worker.

If a Foster Carer cannot get hold of the social worker in an emergency then contact the general office number and speak to the team support officer who will put you through to the Duty Officer or Team manager or Advanced Social Work Practitioner.

Thanks to our Fostering Ambassadors

Throughout the year many of our Foster Carers take part in events to promote fostering and letting those interested in fostering know what it is all about.

This work is really valuable and of those who have enquired about fostering in the last year 47 people have said they have heard about fostering through a Foster Carer, word of mouth and at an event.

If you are interested in taking part let us know, it doesn’t have to be all the time, it can be a one off event, a couple of hours or joining us at one of Wirral’s festivals such as the Transport Festival in September.

During Fostering Fortnight we were at Arrowe Park Hospital, Civic Centres, local supermarkets and shopping centres. We have also been at school and church fayres, businesses and schools. If you have an idea for a new location or event we could attend please let us know.

Letter, email JanetLatham@Wirral.gov.uk
**Fantastic Achievements**

**WE HAVE SO MANY talented children and young people in foster care. We have one extremely talented young female footballer - Ellie.**

Ellie is the team captain of her school team. She has led the team to a recent victory. They have won the Merseyside school cup and have brought the cup to Wirral for the first time. Well done Ellie, well done team. We are all very proud of your achievements – particularly your foster carers who have supported you all of the way.

‘Factoid’ - Girl’s football is a growing and serious sport, the largest female team sport in the country with more than 2.89 million players. There are more than 5,900 women and girls teams playing affiliated football.

**Kids for Caring**

To support Fostering fortnight our Kids for Caring group decorated cakes and then sold them to raise funds for the Kids for Caring group.

**Wirral Safeguarding website**

**THE NEW WEBSITE for the Wirral Safeguarding Children and Safeguarding Adults Boards launched on the 1st April 2016.**

The website brings together a range of safeguarding information, news and resources for Wirral’s children, young people, parents and carers, professionals and adults into one place for the first time.

The website allows professionals to access the latest safeguarding news and the policies, procedures and guidance for safeguarding practice across the children’s and adults workforces. For the first time professionals will be able to access and book a wide range of safeguarding training from a single website as well as keep up with the latest safeguarding news including a live twitter feed.

There are pages on the website specifically for children and young people, parents and cares and adults who may be concerned about themselves or about someone else. The site contains a lot of downloadable resources as well as links to local and national organisations who can offer safeguarding advice and support. [www.wirral safeguarding.co.uk](http://www.wirral safeguarding.co.uk)

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**Congratuations**

To Rachael who has had a baby girl, Carys and also to Helen who has had twin girls – Maggie and Matilda. They are beautiful and doing well.

**GOOD LUCK!** We have waved goodbye and wished good luck to Elwyn Jones. **WELCOME!** to Judith, Jenni, Mags, Tom, Kathryn and Emma.

**Training**

Please note the training booklet is being updated all of the time so please continue to look at it on the Foster Carers area of the Council website. New courses are being added as they are confirmed. There is also a link to the safeguarding site from which you can book a range of courses online. [www.wirral.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.wirral.gov.uk/fostering)

**Champions**

We are looking for Foster Carers who are willing to put themselves forward to work with us on a couple of important issues. We want Foster Carers who can be Champions for tackling Child Sexual Exploitation and for Children Missing from care. The idea is for the Champions to highlight and profile these areas with other Foster Carers. They can spread information and promote training for example. If you are interested Contact Diane Burns dianeburns@wirral.gov.uk or call 666 4449.