

# Fostering Families

SEPTEMBER 2020



**FINDING A WAY  
TO BETTER  
UNDERSTAND  
HOW CHILDREN  
FEEL**



**THE  
INVESTIGATION  
PROCESS**

## MY TIME IN CARE

**SONIA TALKS TO US ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES  
GROWING UP IN FOSTER CARE**





# Charity World

Registered in England & Wales  
Charity Number - 1161128

## Introducing Charity World

Charity World is a registered charity in England and Wales developing projects and services for children and families on an international scale.

## Our Mission

Charity World supports children and families living in poverty or hardship through our education and fostering projects, and by collaborating with other charities

doing great work. We believe that supporting families and children through care and education is the best way to support development of a happier, healthier society that is self-sustaining and fairer to all.

## About Us

We aim to be recognised throughout the world as the source of support for thousands of children in need.

Charity World's passion for providing opportunities to children who are experiencing

hardship is the drive behind everything we do. With decades of experience of building and running schools in India and fostering and care services in the UK and Europe, our team has a wealth of skills to ensure the development of this successful charity. We take great pride in the fact that our senior management team are volunteers, ensuring that 90% of funds raised goes directly to our service users. We also take a collaborative approach, recognising the fantastic work of existing

charities and supporting them so together we can have maximum impact.

## Fostering Families Magazine

This magazine is one of many projects Charity World has developed. We hope you enjoy this read and hopefully are inspired to support the publication and the wider work Charity World is doing too.



## EDITOR'S NOTE

A

**SI WRITE** my first welcome message to you, the mother of all thunderstorms has just rolled away, the sun has come out and it's unbearably muggy. It sums this year up perfectly. Unpredictable, a little bit uncomfortable, and I have absolutely no idea what to expect next.

We are all muddling through unfamiliar territory. The Black Lives Matter discussions coming to the forefront, the continuing impact of COVID-19, the rules around distancing, quarantining when

coming back from various countries, localised shut downs and exam grades without exams. But life goes on, and we with it. We are all responding to the situation with remarkable resilience and finding new ways to adapt.

At Fostering Families we want to bring the fostering world together. We are here to celebrate successes, share learning and experiences, and amplify voices from across the sector. This also means responding to the new landscape we find ourselves in. The stories and articles we've brought in this issue speak of challenge, opportunity and hope. Supporting young people when they are at their most vulnerable brings all of these in spades, and the topics we have selected are designed to inspire, inform and provide guidance in the current climate.

Sitting at the heart of this magazine is community. You are all part of our wider 'fostering family', and together we can make a bigger impact and drive change for the better. I want to say a heartfelt thanks to all our contributors whose insight and experiences are extremely valuable. And to you, our wonderful readers, please join in the conversation, whether you'd like to write an article, share feedback, recommend topics you want to read about, or simply want to say hi!

***Danielle Brown MBE***  
***Editor***  
***info@charityworld.com***





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Demystifying Disability



Christina Colmer McHugh

# FINDING A WAY TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW **HOW CHILDREN FEEL**





S

**WHAT DO** you tell a child that's pleading with you to say everything will be OK? Their pink, pinched face etched with tears and eyes welling up at the thought of school on Monday.

That's what I was faced with one evening in October three years ago, when my seven-year-old broke down sobbing, while getting ready for bed. It was such a shock to the system because she was, on the face of it, a happy-go-lucky kid. Yes, she was quite shy and yes, she kept herself to herself but on the whole she seemed happy.

To discover that at the tender age of seven she'd been trying to cope with a tough time at school was a huge kick in the stomach moment and then to realise that I hadn't picked up on it was a double whammy. The guilt, the disbelief, the awful dread

and worry that it brought was monumental.

Because we are 'that family that talk about everything. A problem shared is a problem halved, and all that'. We are the sort of parents who ask how the day has gone and think we're on top of everything that needs knowing about.

But the simple fact was she had to ask for help when it had got too much for her to handle alone. That was too much.

We were lucky that she attends a small, friendly rural primary school and we have a close network of friends whose kids all watched out for one another. So, when the bombshell dropped we met with the school and had the usual chats with teachers and the head, who were really supportive in bringing a bullying issue to a halt, and my daughter was so relieved that it was all out in the open. Disaster averted as it were.

But, for me, a busy working mum with a husband away a lot and family across the Irish sea, the worry didn't leave me. I'd pick the kids up from school and give my eldest a gentle nudge along. "Everything OK today?" I sang out to disguise the butterflies I was feeling as I walked through the playground. It wasn't what she

*Family that  
talk about  
everything.  
A problem  
shared is  
a problem  
halved, and  
all that*



**Christina Colmer  
McHugh**

wanted to hear though, and pretty soon, she'd dodge the hug and jam on the car radio to avoid the questioning.

I was left with a choice. I carry on and hope it had gone away or I do something to stop this happening again without my knowledge.

Being a journalist for the past 20 years, I guess I have a certain amount of ability when it comes to researching 'help for anxious kids' online. But after drawing a blank when it came to finding some method of allowing children to log how they felt on their own terms, I decided - perhaps rather naively - to set about creating one.

Surely it can't be that hard I told myself. You've got apps these days and online self-help groups. What could I create that would capture a mood and then show it plotted throughout a day, so that I could point to it and start a conversation with a loved one on the back of it? This question simply wouldn't leave me alone.

It was after talking to some close mum friends in the village that I realised I could do with some help on the 'bringing ideas to fruition' front. I knew Jonathan through his wife who was a good friend, plus he was a familiar face on family walks



WE ARE THE SORT OF PARENTS  
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and we had children in the same class. It felt a natural next step when I messaged him to explain I had an idea for something that didn't exist and would he give it a look over.

The same day I got a message back inviting me over to their house. Great! All very positive but that didn't stop me feeling a bit of a plumb walking up their drive, armed with an A4 print out of 'my idea' and not much else!

My idea was to create a simple-to-use wearable technology that logs how we feel. This would help children to make sense of how they're feeling, whilst also being able to share how they are feeling with their parent or carer.

When I arrived, we sat down and I proceeded to babble on about my experience, my various ideas, my research and what I thought might be a good idea. I was waiting for him to say it was utter tosh, or "yes, they sell that on Amazon", but no. He listened, put me at ease and said very plainly, "I think it's a great idea, great story, I can see you're passionate about it and have done some digging. But there's only one way to find out - try and try again. You're asking someone to design and make a piece of hardware, connect the software, and make it simple enough for a seven-year-old to use? It's not going to be easy".

I left armed with email introductions to some very clever people at Centres for Digital Innovation in Hull, a spring in my step and the rather crazy notion that it might one day become a reality. "It can't be that hard surely", I thought that day.

That day was four years ago,



*Moodbeam  
has been  
created  
to help  
the world  
visualise  
how we are  
feeling*

can you believe. Moodbeam One is a personal self-care tool worn on the wrist that records how you feel and monitors changing moods. There are two simple buttons, one yellow and one blue. You press the yellow when you feel happy and blue when you feel sad, and this information is sent to the app which records how you are feeling over time. This helps start important conversations between families, allowing them to ask the right questions and better understand how well they are coping. Originally designed with a seven-year-old in mind, it's helping those from seven to ninety-seven recognise the highs and lows of their day, so that they can make subtle changes and do more of what makes them happy.

One element that will always remain at the core of Moodbeam is why it was created in the first place. To give a young person a coping mechanism and give their family or carers a way of sharing their experience.

From speaking to those who devote their lives to fostering

young people, this could well be a fantastic transitional tool that allows everyone involved to embrace the change that's happening in their lives, but on their terms. It's an emotional diary that helps them look back and think about how, when and why an obstacle or success came about. It allows parents and carers to better understand how they are feeling, and it means that worries and concerns can be converted into something positive to work upon. ♦

*Moodbeam has been created to help the world visualise how we are feeling and to support meaningful conversations. The Moodbeam One device and app are not medical devices and do not claim to diagnose, treat or monitor specific health disorders. If you are in any way concerned about your mental health we would always recommend speaking to a healthcare professional. Remember you are not alone. [www.moodbeam.co.uk](http://www.moodbeam.co.uk) and @MoodbeamLife*

# FISS

FOSTER CARERS INDEPENDENT  
SUPPORT SERVICE

## REFERRALS ALLOCATED WITHIN 24 HRS

FISS provides face-to-face support to foster carers facing allegations or standards of care concerns. Did you know that FISS is able to allocate an advisor to support your carer within 24 hours of referral in 98% of cases? Even throughout the challenges of the lockdown period, FISS has been able to get the support to your carers at the time that they need it most. Here is a reminder of our process:



Carer called and offered support centrally from FISS Team



FISS Advisor matched and allocated



FISS Advisor makes introductory call to carer



Support plan formulated within 24 hours in 98% of cases



Referrer and carer both receive introduction to service guides same day

### Referring to FISS is so simple

Simply just [click here](#). Or to get in touch via email:

[FISS@fostertalk.org](mailto:FISS@fostertalk.org) or call us on: 0121 758 5013 (Opt 1)



**FOSTERTALK**

SUPPORTING THOSE WHO CARE

PART OF THE MARTIN JAMES FOUNDATION





SETH ADAMS

There's  
nothing  
more  
important  
in this  
world than  
**caring**  
for a  
**child**





## The Trust Contract

**Fostering is like** free climbing. It's exciting, it can be really great fun and give you a sense of achievement, BUT it can be risky and requires you to be constantly assessing your 'route'.

You don't foster for the money, prestige, or thanks. You do it because you care and are motivated to facilitate a child or young person's development. You welcome the child without reservation and trust that the placement team and local authority social workers are giving you sufficient information to prepare an appropriate care plan, whilst also ensuring that you and your family are 'tuned in' to the needs of the child.

That trust is an important element of the 'contract'.

You are empowered to safeguard the child, but you need to know that you are being safeguarded by the local authority.

1



THE TRUST  
CONTRACT

## The Reality

**Children are** in care for a variety of reasons and unfortunately many have suffered harm, neglect, exploitation, or abuse at the hands of people that they should have been able to trust.

The psychological damage that happens when that trust is broken is immeasurable.

The child may be frightened, wary, anxious, lonely. Their 'normality' will be vastly different to yours, indeed they may feel resentful and 'lash' out as a means of self-preservation.

They may make an allegation against the one person who is trying to help - you - and that can be a devastating blow to your values and confidence.

You may find yourself subject to an 'investigation'.

2



THE  
REALITY

## An allegation

**An allegation**, minor or otherwise, will require an investigation - that is a given. Ultimately the local authority has a statutory duty to safeguard a child and that is non-negotiable.

No matter how scary the word investigation sounds, it's simply a process that is designed to gather information that will support, or negate, further action. It is an integral part of the safeguarding process designed to protect all parties. The word investigation creates a nightmare vision of sombre people asking challenging, often intimate questions. You may question yourself; you feel alone.

You might feel scared, anxious, resentful perhaps even angry. You feel that trust has been betrayed, that contract broken - you feel maybe how the child does.

The SSWs will tell you 'not to worry'.

These words will, I think, fall upon deaf ears.

3



AN  
ALLEGATION

## What The Law Says

**When you** become a foster carer, you do not relinquish your legal rights as a UK citizen. You are still fully protected by the laws that protect every citizen from harm, accusations and threats. Additionally, you have powerful overarching 'human' rights that protect the security and privacy of your family and, in addition, a right to not face 'a punishment' without due process.

It is not my intention to list the legislation that is relevant to 'investigations', rather to highlight some of the more relevant rights you will have. The legal process in the UK and Northern Ireland has inbuilt checks and balances to protect the rights of everyone. Your rights can be interfered with when it is deemed necessary, but it is imperative that those rights are not violated without good reason and due process. Those rights are not designed to hinder any investigation; they are there to ensure barriers are not crossed and rights are not infringed.

4



WHAT THE  
LAW SAYS



## LEGAL RIGHTS

### Legal Rights

#### Protection rights include:

- ☑ The right to access information and no more so when it comes to the management of the safeguarding process
- ☑ The right to have access to information regarding risks that you or your family may face
- ☑ The right to independent legal advice
- ☑ The right to a legally compliant and professionally managed investigation
- ☑ The right to a legally compliant and professionally conducted 'interview'
- ☑ The right to have the investigation conducted in a timely and professional manner
- ☑ Your right not to be 'punished' without a lawful reason

# 5

# 6

## The Principles of an Investigation

#### The investigation itself **MUST** follow recognised principles:

- ☑ That all the available facts are collected from all parties accurately and without bias
- ☑ The process is both ethical and transparent
- ☑ Questioning will be rigorous and often challenging but never intimidatory
- ☑ The investigators must be trained and competent to conduct/manage an investigation
- ☑ The investigation team must have an 'investigation' mindset - they are simply collating information to be tested

Investigations, and any recommendations/sanctions during or afterwards, must follow a process known within legal circles as the PLAN model.



### THE PRINCIPLES OF AN INVESTIGATION



#### Proportionate



#### Legal



#### Accountable



#### Necessary

That means that the investigators and the LA must be in a position to show that they acted in a way that was proportionate to the circumstances, that there is a law allowing them to do so, be in a position to account for why they acted that way, and finally demonstrate that their actions were necessary.



### GUIDELINES ARE NOT TRAMLINES

## Guidelines Are Not Tramlines

# 7

**Local authorities**, in my opinion, place great confidence in their own internal policies and procedures, yet many historical enquiries have shown that these policies are not always compliant with current legislation, nor balanced, or indeed fairly implemented. In addition, there is not a standardised 'process' across local authorities, and this in itself adds concerns. Finally, many local authorities do not 'pressure test' their policies. That is to say they test review and amend. Therefore, they are often unaware of the 'weaknesses'.

During an investigation, a birth family may be spilt up, and that could include your own birth children. This is allowed under safeguarding legislation BUT only in extreme circumstances where 'there is a risk of significant harm' to others. Yet I have heard first-hand from carers that they have been denied access to their partners and birth children even though no evidence of 'significant risk of harm' was forthcoming.



Thank  
you for  
all the  
good  
you  
do  
and will  
continue  
to do



## Being Interviewed

### **You, and indeed**

others, will be subject to an interview. This interview is simply part of the 'investigation' process and is designed to gather facts. In simple terms the interview

must be conducted lawfully and ethically, and you are not being subjected to a 'inquisition'.

As I highlighted earlier; you will be questioned BUT that

questioning must never be intimidatory or accusatory.

### **During an interview you have certain rights**

- ☑ You have the right to a legal representative

being present - I strongly advocate that you do have one with you

- ☑ You may in addition have a supporter present
- ☑ The interview has

MOVING  
FORWARD

9

## Moving Forward

**How can** you be in a better position should you find yourself subject to an investigation?

- ☑ You are not alone; Some agencies offer automatic membership to 'Fostertalk' which can be a very valuable source of advice and support during an investigation
- ☑ If you are a member of a support organisation, then you should contact them immediately when you are made aware of an allegation
- ☑ Remember that a child in care has a quite different frame of reference than you may have – your duty is primarily to provide a high level of safeguarding to that child
- ☑ Allegations can happen. So, consider that as a risk element to the role and behave accordingly
- ☑ Your daily logs MUST be accurate and contain sufficient information to show a reader the full picture of the day to day activities of the placement
- ☑ Your safer care plan MUST reflect the placement and must be reviewed at least 3 times per year. It cannot be 'generic'
- ☑ If the placement calls for a higher level of intimate care, then your safer care plan MUST reflect exactly what you do and why
- ☑ You must ensure that your SSW is aware of any 'triggers' or alterations to the day to day behaviour of the child in your care
- ☑ Ensure that if you are noticing patterns of behaviour that were not 'included' in the referral information that you immediately contact your SSW and they will liaise with the LA
- ☑ Be mindful of significant milestones in a child's life that may trigger a change in their attitude or behaviour
- ☑ Be particularly vigilant after 'contact'
- ☑ Never engage in 'unsupervised' contact with the placement child's family (unless already risk assessed and appropriate).
- ☑ Unless authorised by your SSW do not form any social relationship with the placement child's family
- ☑ Never forget that the child in your care may be traumatised and extremely emotionally fragile
- ☑ Remember that your standards of language and behaviour will always be subject to 'scrutiny' so never act in a way that others could question - no matter how innocent it may seem to you



BE PROUD

## Be Proud

**The vast** majority of allegations are found to be unproven- therefore that suggests the 'system' works. Remember that any allegation must be investigated for the safety and wellbeing of the child. Never lose sight of the fact that you are making a positive impact on a young person's life and that your intervention is giving that individual a chance to become the best version of themselves.

Your SSW is there to support you, BUT they can only do so if they are aware of any changes in the relationship or placement that could be a pre-trigger to an allegation. Never think that something is too trivial to discuss with your SSW - they are highly experienced professionals who can see the bigger picture. It is all too easy to miss these when you are involved in it.

Finally, thank you for all the good you do and will continue to do. Take great pride in the fact that you and your families are providing a safe and secure environment for a vulnerable young person.

10

to follow certain guidelines and you, or your legal advisor can ask for it to be suspended or terminated at any time

- ☑ You will be treated fairly and respectfully

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BEING  
INTERVIEWED

Jim is the managing director of a training company, JRC Training. His training portfolio is extensive and covers investigation skills, legal workshops, safeguarding, exploitation, leadership and managing behaviours.

He works across all 3 sectors.

He spent 30 years as a police officer and has extensive experience of the investigation process. In addition, he is involved in designing and delivering bespoke training workshops for foster carers across the UK.

He and his wife Karen are experienced foster carers.

He can be contacted at [jf@jrctraining.co.uk](mailto:jf@jrctraining.co.uk)





# MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

Those involved in Foster Care are amazing. I genuinely believe that you are making such a difference to the world. Every child deserves a great start to their life - and you are helping to make that happen.

Tori Edwards



O

VER MY sixteen years as a police officer I have seen the sad truth of what goes on behind some doors.

I remember visiting one address that absolutely broke my heart. The cupboards were bare, the floors and walls covered in faeces, there were no beds to sleep on or food in the cupboards. Needles were being used as ornaments, there were open bottles of methadone in the fridge next to the milk, and the clothes were filthy. You don't forget something like that.

I believed that the children at this address were at risk of significant harm and I wanted to evoke section 46 of the Children's Act 1989. This allows the police to remove children from the address to a place of safety. I explained the environment to Social Services who didn't agree that the risk posed was significant. They thought that the children were best left with their mum.

I genuinely couldn't get my head around it and I felt so angry. I felt as though I was letting those children down.

However, the decision for police to evoke s46 has to be made in conjunction with Social Services. This is so they can have a strategy discussion, including whether they



C H I L D R E N  
E N W A N T C H  
R T H E I R D  
P A R E N T S  
N T S T O P A R  
E N L O V E C H  
N T A N D A R  
**PROTECT THEM**

have a suitable place for the children to go to. This is why you provide such a wonderful service. When we do evoke s46 often the children don't want to leave their home and their families, and they have to be removed by force.

Children want their parents to love and protect them. It's understandable that they don't want to be taken out of their 'comfortable' environment - despite everything - and placed into somebody else's care. A complete stranger, not their parents.





A small percentage will feel like they are cheating on or betraying their parents if they like you. Some may feel that if they are seen to engage with you then they will never be allowed to go back to their parents. Some may be so thankful they have been removed from their home, but still feel incredibly confused. They may feel as though they have no control of the situation they are in and any rebellion against you may be their attempt to regain some form of control.

Their early experiences



If a child is struggling to cope with their emotions, they will often try to find other ways to cope

may also contribute to them feeling that they don't deserve any better than the way they had previously been treated. It may be that they are so emotionally and physically downtrodden they believe they don't have the right to be happy if their parents can't be - and this can be hardwired into their self-beliefs.

If a child is struggling to cope with their emotions, they will often try to find other ways to cope. They may see self-harm as a way to release tensions, such as cutting, drinking, drugs, sex, food deprivation and much more.

It is important to remember that if you recognise any of those traits, they may feel as though they have lost control of their life. The last thing they will want from you is being told what to do and have that control further removed.

Taking a step back and ensuring they know you are there if and when they are ready to talk to you helps give them back some of that control - unless, of course, immediate action is required. Don't judge; you may not agree with how they are behaving and with their choice of coping, but it's unlikely you will have experienced the exact set of circumstances that they have. Even if you have experienced something similar, we are all individuals and deal with things differently.

There are so many reasons why that child may be feeling and behaving the way they are, particularly if they have had a traumatic or abusive

start in life. The one thing we all need to remember is that children crave love, attention, affection, and boundaries. They may not realise it at that moment - and you may very well be the one on the receiving end of their internal demons - but what you are doing is such an amazing and incredible thing.

Never underestimate the impact that you can and will have on them by providing these things each day they are with you.

Just remember they may not be in a great place at that time, but if you stay true to your values and do your best, they will look back on their time with you and realise how thankful they are for having you in their life at that time.

Just be you - amazing, incredible, you. ♦

*Tori Edwards is the founder of Protect Training Solutions, which provides advice, guidance and support to parents and professionals who share her vision to give every young person the childhood they deserve.*

*Drawing on her expertise built on a successful sixteen-year career as a police officer, Tori helps parents and professionals understand and safeguard children from the dangers they face in this rapidly evolving world.*

*Tori welcomes you to join her Facebook community 'Parents Protect' to learn more about the challenges children face and how we can better protect young people. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ParentsProtect>*







# WOULDN'T CHANGE IT FOR THE WORLD

**THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT ROUTES INTO BECOMING A FOSTER CARER. FOR HARRY, IT WAS A CHANCE MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF A FOSTERING AGENCY WHEN THEY VISITED THE COMPANY WHERE HE WORKED. THAT WAS TWO YEARS AGO.**

**HARRY, 44, ADMITS HE HAD NEVER CONSIDERED THE IDEA OF CARING FOR CHILDREN BEFORE THAT DAY. AS A SINGLE MAN WITH NO BIRTH CHILDREN OF HIS OWN, FOSTER CARING WAS NOT ON HIS RADAR. SO WHAT CONVINCED HIM TO APPLY?**

**Harry's Story**

## I COULD CHANGE A CHILD'S LIFE

**“I** **T** WAS HEARING them talk about how difficult it is to recruit foster carers. I thought ‘I have a spare room, I could either rent it out or maybe I could use it to help change a child’s life’. Once I’d made the decision to apply, the process was pretty quick as I was already sitting on a Children’s Hearings Scotland panel and had undergone lots of training. That meant I was approved within two months rather than three.”



## ONGOING CHALLENGE

**S**OCIETY'S ATTITUDES and assumptions present an ongoing challenge, as Harry explained:

"If they see us together, people naturally assume I'm dad, or they assume that you have a wife somewhere who is 'mum'. People don't naturally make allowances for different family set-ups. It concerns me the impact this has on looked after children as they are already having to deal with so many different dynamics."

## SELF-BELIEF

**H**ARRY'S FIRST looked after child was a six-year-old boy, who still lives with him. Later, he also cared for a 17-year old boy. One of the biggest challenges initially was self-belief. He said:

"Like many single men, I thought I wouldn't be suitable as a foster carer. I thought the fact that I had no partner would count against me, and the fact that I am a man. The trainer was the first person to say to me how successful single male foster carers can be and that gave me confidence. You don't need maternal instincts, you don't need a partner. What you need are things like empathy, patience, an ability to listen and think on your feet, and the flexibility to adjust to changing circumstances. The child probably won't slot neatly into your home so you need to be able to work with them to understand their worries, needs, and experiences."

## SUPPORT

**H**ARRY FINDS that the support he receives from his agency helps him to overcome challenges and gives him valuable help and encouragement. He said:

"They are brilliant. My supervising social worker is only ever a text or an email away, and I have ongoing training which helps me develop the skills and knowledge I need. And then there is the support from other carers, too. As a single person, you don't have someone at home saying well done so it's great when you meet up with other foster carers and realise you're doing really well."

Harry has found his experience of the Children's Hearings Scotland panel has been helpful, although he finds it frustrating sometimes to experience the panels from the family side. "The system is supposed to be child-friendly, but it isn't always and that can be a struggle."

I WOULDN'T  
CHANGE YOU FOR  
THE WORLD,  
  
BUT  
I WOULD  
CHANGE  
THE WORLD  
FOR YOU

## PHENOMENAL REWARDS

**A**FTER TWO years as a foster carer, Harry says he can't imagine life without it. "The children become part of you and your life, everything you do revolves around them. The rewards are phenomenal. You see the children start to trust you and care about you, you see their personalities begin to emerge. And you start to see the changes you make in their life. You can't put a price on that. It is amazing to see them settling down, building friendships, doing well at school because of the support and care you're giving them. You may not immediately realise it but they are doing something great because of you. You've changed someone's life for the better and that's incredible. I wouldn't change it for the world."

### JUST DO IT

**T**O ANY SINGLE men who may be considering foster caring and to those who, like him, may never have given it a second thought, he said: "Fostering gives you a real sense of purpose. The challenges are fast and furious, particularly at first, but you learn to overcome them and it's incredibly rewarding to see a child develop and grow. You change, too. I've seen a massive change in myself. I think a lot of single men maybe think 'I haven't got the confidence or the strength to do that' but I always say 'yes you do'. You will become more confident because you are responsible for another person and you will change and become a better person. If you're thinking about it, forget the gender stereotypes and your perceptions about caring for children and just do it."

### LIFE-CHANGING

**H**ARRY BELIEVES the reason there are not many single male foster carers is down to their misconception that they may not have what it takes, or that fostering agencies may not want them because they're single men. He also thinks that some men may have reservations about the demands it will place on their life. He said: "It will change your life, there's no doubt about it, but in really positive ways. I think men worry that they won't be able to see their friends or socialise but this isn't true. You will still socialise but your social circle will broaden out and you may find yourself doing things with other families."

## WELL-ORGANISED

**H**ARRY BALANCES foster caring with a part-time job as a youth co-ordinator for a voluntary organisation and studying for a Diploma. It can be a difficult juggling act sometimes but he says the secret is being well-organised, with breakfast clubs and after school clubs when necessary.



## OUR FOSTERING

# JOUR







# NEY

# A

**SI WRITE THIS**, we have just under four weeks to go until we attend panel to become foster carers.

Our decision to play a part in improving the life chances of young people was cemented in our minds ten years ago. We knew we didn't want to have our own children, not when there were so many in the world who needed a safe space to play, make mistakes and grow. Initially the journey felt like a casual walk, living our lives as a couple, exploring far-flung destinations such as India, New York and Tokyo, while mentally preparing ourselves. It then became a sprint over the past six months as we manoeuvred through the assessment process. Pretty soon we expect the marathon will start!

When we were on our Skills to Foster course - a 3-day course where we sat in a circle with other potential foster carers, social

workers and a guest foster carer - one of the other couples was surprised when they heard we'd recently bought a 5-bedroom house. They weren't the only ones. Our neighbours were also surprised. A large family home for just the two of us. When we saw it, we fell in love and knew it was the perfect environment to raise a family...and when you have a goal you've got to go for it.

The house has played a large part in preparing us emotionally. Until then we'd only ever rented 2-bedroom apartments in the city centre. When we moved into our new home it seemed full of empty rooms, and in a way placed our lives into perspective.

Over the past two years, we've been 'preparing the nest'. I did some research into children's bedrooms, which resulted in several trips to the store. We'd read that children could come to us with few or no belongings, and that anything we can do to help them feel like the home was theirs would be a positive step. So we chose open-storage shelving systems, with a few drawers so they could see all of their stuff. I resisted the urge to theme every room. After all, it's important that young people can place their own stamp on their space, so we kept things neutral.



We also spent a year gaining invaluable experience of being around children who weren't related to us. We became Cub Scout Leaders at our local hut, and suddenly had seventeen pairs of eyes looking to us for guidance. It was a fantastic experience, and we now feel we have many tools and activities up our sleeves to keep most children engaged. It was also great doing this as a couple because we were able to see how we both interacted with young people, and could later talk about what we'd done well and what we needed to work on.

With our nest properly feathered and a couple of Scout badges under our belt, it was time to reach out to some fostering agencies. We started by reading the 'Fostering in England' Report. This told us about the industry we were planning to move into, because, as we kept reading, "foster carers are professionals". This gave us a balanced view of the reality of looking after children in care, and of working with other professionals. It also offered an unbiased look at fostering via a Local Authority (LA) and via an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA).

We reached out to a couple of IFAs for a quick chat. Some didn't respond at all, which we had come to expect after reading the 'Fostering in England' report. That made our decision easier. They were struck off our list. It's clear that some agencies still have some work to do in following up potential leads.

In the end we chose an agency that was warm, communicative and had positive reviews online.

The day the agency came to see us I was nervously pacing the floor, fluffing the cushions and checking the window

every two minutes. Thankfully, my husband was as cool as a cucumber. He always is; one of his defining attributes. They came to look at our home and spent around three hours having a chat and getting to know us.

They left and we looked at each other. This was it! We'd officially started the assessment process to becoming foster carers.

Many people are surprised when they hear how in-depth the assessment process is. Some are shocked that applicants have to "jump through hoops" when clearly we would make amazing parents. But the thing is, our friends and family have known us for years or for our whole lives. Social workers haven't. On one hand they have children who have already experienced varying levels of trauma. On the other, they have people eager to make a difference. They've got to make sure that applicants are mentally prepared to deal with the challenges that can come with looking after children in care.

We went into our assessment period feeling positive and I have to say, came out of it even more enthused. We haven't found it 'intrusive'. That's not the word we would use. It's been rigorous and no stone has been left unturned. It does feel a little odd that our social worker knows everything about us, but we know next to nothing about her. However, she built rapport with us quickly and put us at ease from the first conversation. Which was just as well, because another 30 hours of conversations would await us.

Oh I forgot to mention... We've never actually met our social worker. You see, the whole world went into

lockdown.

We were able to get a couple of face-to-face workshops in; the first two days of our Skills to Foster course. Our third day had to be postponed because the UK experienced severe flooding and many people were evacuated from their homes. I'd almost forgotten about that. It was then eventually cancelled because everyone had to 'stay at home, save lives and protect the NHS'.

There's a level of anxiety that is normal when anyone goes through an assessment process. Now add to this mass unemployment and the very real risk of people you love contracting the virus and dying, and you start to place things into perspective. In a way, it helped with our process. We took a more relaxed approach to it all, and basically went with the flow. Just as we had to do

with every other aspect of our lives. To gain control, we had to give it up.

There were initial worries about our jobs. Would we still have one? How would this impact our plans to foster? Fortunately, they were quickly put to rest as we were both informed we were 'key workers'. We've been busy working throughout lockdown and will continue to do so. Once we are approved, my husband will become the primary foster carer leaving his job to do this full-time. That will be an interesting time, as not only may we have children, but we'll both see more of each other as I work from home. I'm sure he'll have gourmet lunches prepared every day for me... at least until the first of many meetings are booked in. He's actually an amazing chef, so I'm very lucky in that respect.





# YOU WERE BORN WITH THE ABILITY TO **CHANGE** SOMEONE'S **LIFE**

Would our social worker really get a feel for who we are if she can't meet us? That was our next concern. This is where we can be thankful for video conferencing technology! We had many face-to-face conversations, although every so often one of us would freeze-frame on screen...usually me! Not so great when your lockdown hair looks out of control.

We recorded a video tour of our home, inspired by many of the ones you find online. This was well received and we hear it has been showcased across the agency as a good example of how to adapt to a more digital way of working. We put together a trailer, and then two individual videos of our cats. I mean, who doesn't love cat videos? They went down a treat!

With lockdown suddenly in place, very little to do and nowhere to go, we've had a good three months to expand our reading on trauma in children and therapeutic parenting. This has been invaluable. Books from authors such as Sarah Naish, Sarah Dillon, Dr Amber Elliott, Kim Golding and Betsy de Thierry come with my fullest recommendation. We feel like we have a good understanding of trauma, how they can manifest certain behaviours in children and we feel like we have a toolkit of parenting strategies. Of course, we may very well forget them all when we are in the midst of a challenging situation. However, it's good to know we have them to refer to and once we've put into practice what they suggest, I'm sure those strategies will become second nature for us.

As I wrap up this article, our social worker is writing up our 'Form F'. We feel like it's the big red book from the old

TV show 'This is your life'. It will be presented to the panel members before we meet with them (which may be face-to-face or digitally) and it will help them get to know us.

If you're thinking of becoming a foster carer and have space in your home and a place in your heart to look after a young person, then definitely do some research and give your LA or a couple of IFAs a call. Start reading some of the authors I've suggested so you can find out about some of the challenges these young people have faced, and how you might respond. Absolutely read the latest 'Fostering in England' report to take an honest look at the industry you'd be stepping into. As a 'corporate parent' there's responsibilities and a lot of teamwork involved, which is great as it means the young people you look after will have a good chance of getting the support they need. That being said, be ready to put your diplomatic hat on because teamwork usually means compromise.

If you're already a foster carer, then again I recommend the authors. It would also be great if you could share your own stories. It will be really interesting to read about them.

One last thought... I've just realised I didn't mention that we are a gay male couple. I guess that's a good indicator of how important a role it plays when applying to become a foster carer. I was recently asked if we'd faced any discrimination for wanting to foster, either from our agency or anyone else. I'm glad to report that we haven't. In fact, it's been a 'non-issue'. What's important is that you are able to provide a loving and supporting home, which is exactly the way it should be. ♦





Remember  
on this  
rollercoaster as a  
foster carer, your  
child is your  
co-pilot, however  
kamikaze they  
may be!!!

# LIFE AS A







# FOSTER CARER



Have a home?

Have a heart?

**Change a life,**

**Become a**

**foster parent**





## Hello Carers,

**W**ELCOME TO another day, another week and another month of ups and downs. It's always a fun-filled, head-twirling rollercoaster of feelings and emotions - and I always try and remember this as I live through the harder days!

When I became a foster carer I was already a mother to three boys. If I'm honest, I thought I knew what I was doing. I thought that adding another child to the hectic, busy, funny and wonderful little family I have would be a walk in the park!

I was naturally nervous. After cleaning the house top to bottom, for some unknown reason, I was completely ready to take on the task in hand. We (my husband and I) had agreed to take on one child below the age of ten, so they'd fit the dynamics of our household.

What I agreed to, in sheer excitement and delight, was two girls aged 14 and 15 - much to my husband's surprise, shock and horror. After a very quick room change, some brand-new bedding and pinkish accessories, at 4:30pm

on Tuesday 30th September 2014 I walked two sisters with a Tesco bag of belongings. My heart broke and popped at the same time.

It became very apparent from that moment I knew nothing. I was suddenly a parent of teen girls - and even if they'd been boys aged 7 and 8 I still would have been clueless! Raising other people's children is like nothing else on this earth. You build bonds with the child(ren). Sometimes the parents are pleased, sometimes angry, always embarrassed and sometimes bitter. Every emotion is understandable and rising above your human instinct to judge their situation is important because you have no idea of their past and that judgement won't help you bond with their child, which has now become your child.

You have a social worker to work with you. Often this is harmonious and you have a great working relationship, but it can also be a struggle and pulling teeth would be more fun! However, you plough on because they link you to education, health,

extra funding and medical requirements needed to support the child(ren). So you breathe deeply and carry on.

Sometimes the child is hurting, angry, grateful, annoyed, happy, a bottle of pop, a bundle of joy, a chat show host, or a void on mute! However, the child presents they are braver than most. They come into your home and are told that's where they now live, amid strangers and often in an unfamiliar area, and yet they still put one foot in front of the other and come inside! I know if I was faced with the same situation I'd be stuck to the pavement with no functioning body parts and a wash of tears. What's asked of them is impossible to imagine!

Throughout the process there's good days and bad days, and this feeling is shared by us all. Often the children settle in and then out the blue they feel overwhelmed and go off track, and you're left wondering what happened. Often they'll show an emotion you're not expecting or ready for and it blows your mind and your heart glows. One moment you might be sitting with your head in your hands

questioning everything, and the next crying with joy.

It's an emotional rollercoaster and at every loop and twist there's an eye opener, a learning curve, a memory, a tear jerk, a laugh out loud moment or a head bang against the wall situation. And for every tummy turning moment on the roller-coaster it's addictive, because you see the changes, you watch your new child unfold, fit in and adapt far more than you could hope for...

in most cases!

When it's a tough day and you're exhausted from the emotional battle - the battle with the system, the child, the school, a report, or your own expectations, or just the day in general, always remember the next day will be ok! It may not be sorted fully, but as you ride the funfair that being a foster carer entails life goes on. Everything will be sorted, slowed down, sped up, hugged, laughed at or learnt from! So, ride the ups and hang on during the downs... ♦

## TIPS

☑ Think about what you want to say before saying it. The words you use are powerful and may not always be understood or received as you'd hoped. I find with teens a text can be a good icebreaker as they'd rather text than speak to you. It also gives them time to digest what you are saying by re-reading your texts. I have learnt to say, 'I need to think about this', and 'we'll talk later'. The solution doesn't need to come straightaway if you can't find

the words, if you're angry or upset or unsure. Be honest and explain you need to work out the best way to sort it, fix it, do it, or be it!

☑ Be one step ahead. If there's a consequence that will cause a reaction, brace yourself, remain calm and send them a back-up text to explain you're here for them but not here to argue. Take the charger if they won't hand over the phone, turn off the Wi-Fi if needed, bring snacks if it's a big chat, ask for receipts when

giving out money, explain the process before they leave with a curfew set, and always explain the obvious.

☑ Plan their day/night, ask what they'd like for tea and what film they want to watch. Make the rule of no mobiles during these times, connect, get them involved with making food, talk to them whilst they're busy. No eye-contact often leads to the truth!

☑ Choose your battles. Your standards, morals and thought process will never

pair with theirs. Ever! Often a gentle reminder and sometimes just letting it go will do you far more favours long-term than you can imagine. This is hard as you pick up the wet towels again or re-stack the dishwasher properly for the 28763764th time, but believe me, pick your battles wisely!

☑ Always thank them for the little things. Praise them for the most obvious of things and empathise and sympathise accordingly.



## FOSTERTALK'S MEMBERSHIP OFFERINGS

If you are already fostering you will be aware that fostering children & young people can be both challenging & rewarding, & FosterTalk believes that all foster carers should have access to effective support networks & resources to help them in their fostering role.



**FOSTERTALK CARER  
MEMBERSHIP**



**ORGANISATIONAL  
MEMBERSHIP**



**PRE-APPROVAL  
MEMBERSHIP**



**SPECIAL  
GUARDIANSHIP  
MEMBERSHIP**



**RETIRED  
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To enquire about membership, just email us on [enquiries@fostertalk.org](mailto:enquiries@fostertalk.org) or give us a call on **0121 758 5013**! To find out more about our memberships, visit [fostertalk.org](http://fostertalk.org)





# I 'LAC'

*Apparently I'm known as 'Lac', was 'CIN' and then 'CP'.  
There's many different ways that people try defining me.*

***They say I could be challenging 'cos often I'd "kick-off"  
But you don't feel the pain I feel or know how much I've lost.***

*My life's a rollercoaster and that's how it's always been,  
You'd never understand the loss and sadness that I've seen.*

***Yes my mum enjoyed a smoke, she also liked her booze,  
But I say "how dare all of you for asking her to choose!"***

*I know now that I'm older she had stuff to deal with too,  
She needed help to keep us but instead you let her loose.*

***Dad left when she was pregnant; I don't even know his name,  
Then Mike arrived and from that day things never were the same.***

*My mum was beaten black and blue; she said the drink would help.  
It blocked out just a little pain; she tried to save herself.*

***No-one even noticed 'till the day I crossed his path,  
I went to school with blackened eyes - you saw the aftermath.***

*Then all at once, a broken heart when intervention came,  
Our family was torn apart and I was left with shame.*

***My name was changed to 'CIN' and then it soon became 'CP'.  
Apparently my mum was "not prioritising" me?***

*They said she had to leave him, stop all contact right away,  
But never did they know the evil things that he would say.*

***Mum felt that she was doing right; to deal with it alone,  
As he said he'd kill us all the day she kicked him out our home.***

*But then one day I lost it all; my home, my name, my life,  
I changed to 'LAC', no going back, the pain cut like a knife.*

***A black bag of belongings, that was all that I could take,  
Never in my years had I imagined this was fate.***

*I wonder if you've ever lost your family, your home,  
Had to live with total strangers, left to deal with it alone?*



# nothing!

*Of course they just expect that you will settle right away,  
You'll be polite, you'll sleep at night and go to school each day!*

*Well I'd love to see you do that and pretend it's all alright,  
I have to say, I coped my way; I'd cry, I'd scream, I'd fight!*

*When I ran away, or punched a wall, or broke a thing or two,  
Never once did someone ask me 'why d'yo do the things you do'?*

*Of course I got expelled a lot ("too challenging to teach")  
I'm sure that people felt success was not within my reach.*

*When other children bullied me, I smacked them - that is true!  
But when you live with violence then it's what you learn to do.*

*If only they had questioned why I fought - (it wasn't pride!)  
It's 'cos every single bully triggered memories inside.*

*But seven placements later, and I feel I am ok.  
It's still not always easy but I make it through the day.*

*I haven't mentioned yet that I was not an only child,  
On my long line list of losses was my baby brother Miles.*

*Apparently no carer would accept to take us both,  
So he's somewhere in the country and that loss, it hurts the most!*

*But I want to give the message that I do deserve respect,  
I may have made mistakes at times when life was such a mess.*

*So help me be the person that I know I can become,  
My future's not defined by my mistakes, or by my mum.*

*I am not just a 'LAC' child, or a 'Care Leaver' to be,  
I have a name, a history, I have a family.*

*I've made it through the trauma, and I'm never going back,  
So I ask you now to tell me please, what is it that I 'LAC'?*

## AIMEE WILLIAMS

Consultant Social Worker and owner of A Way With Words poetry  
(inspired by Children in Care and Care Leavers) January 2019



Sonia



# MY TIME IN CARE

SONIA IS A TWENTY-NINE-YEAR-OLD CARE LEAVER. SHE IS OF PAKISTANI HERITAGE AND IS MUSLIM. SONIA TALKS TO US ABOUT HER EXPERIENCES GROWING UP IN FOSTER CARE AND HOW HER LIFE HAS BEEN SINCE LEAVING THE CARE SYSTEM.

## MY FAMILY

**I** WAS PLACED into foster care when I was two-years-old because my mum suffered with poor mental health and severe depression. My mum had been a victim of domestic violence from my father, which led to her having a mental breakdown. An incident led to intervention; my father was deported to Pakistan, my mother was hospitalised, and I was placed into the care of the local authority.

My mum has several siblings. Some of them were estranged and others had their own mental health issues so I couldn't live with them. My grandfather was in his 70's. He is a retired pensioner and is separated from my grandmother (who also suffered from depression), meaning there was no extended family to take me in.

Due to the ups and downs with my mum's illness, I kept being returned to her and then returning back to foster care between the

ages of two and fourteen. As I'm sure you can imagine, this was very unsettling. As a young child it was a lot for me to process. It was often overwhelming and it was always distressing to experience another move back into foster care. Inevitably I did everything I could to prevent returning to foster care, whether that was by trying to support my mum with her health, trying to prevent my social worker from finding out that my mum had a relapse, or when I was older I would try to evade my social worker altogether. I recall walking to school on my own as a young child, hoping that the teachers would not find out that my mum was too unwell to bring me in. They always figured it out though, and it would mean a visit from my social worker by the end of the day, leading to yet another move to a new foster home.

My earliest memory is when

I was very young and the social worker came to collect me. I remember packing a backpack and waiting in the hallway, knowing that I was about to be moved again. It is a defining memory from my childhood and I expect it has formed a core aspect of my identity. This was consolidated by a childhood of instability and uncertainty, moving to countless foster homes. Another vivid memory was a time when my mum became very unwell, put a knife to my neck, took me onto the street and shouted out that she would kill me. Thankfully our neighbours intervened and again I was placed back into foster care. I understand that this only happened because my mum was so unwell and I don't hold any resentment towards her at all - in fact I think she knew deep down that she didn't want to hurt me, hence she went onto the street and shouted out for help. As an adult I also reflect on the gaps in mental health services and how far some people have to go in order to get the support that they need.

I had regular contact with my mum when I was in foster placements and I hold on to very fond memories of contact. I remember that my mum would overcompensate for her absence in my life and she would buy me the latest Gameboy, PlayStation games and pretty much anything else I asked for. My mum had two sides to her personality - a great big heart, funny, confident and so loving, but then when she was not well she could become the opposite. This is something I've had to learn to live with, but this has never decreased my love and support for her as a mother and I respect her journey and all the effort she has made to be the best she can be and to give me the best she has to offer.





## MY FOSTER HOMES

**D**

**UE TO THE** constant changing of foster homes it becomes quite blurry how many different homes I have lived in. All I know is that until around age fourteen nothing was stable and I was in constant fear of being picked up and moved again - either back to my mum's home, or back into foster care.

I know there were good foster homes and there are some good memories, like birthday parties at the foster homes and at mum's home. However, I recall more bad memories than good. For example, in one placement the birth children would be given better presents than me, the foster parents wouldn't support me when I missed my mum, and it was clear to me that they didn't value me like they valued their own children. In another placement I was bullied by the children and I remember hoping that my social worker would speak to the family about it, but they never did and the bullying continued.

At around age eleven I was placed with a strict Christian African Caribbean family, who would take me to church with them on Sunday. Overall it was a good placement and I would say I was settled, but I was spending time with friends who were not a good influence on me. I would always get into trouble and miss curfew. I

eventually started to abscond, running away to live with friends and missing school for nearly seven months, which led to an appeal to search for me on the news. During this time I would meet mum randomly,

**I WAS IN  
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BACK INTO  
FOSTER  
CARE**



but on one occasion I told her in advance and she contacted the social workers. As I arrived to meet her at her home the social workers were there with the police and they escorted me to my new foster home. This was the shortest but grandest placement. It was a posh area and the foster carer was a white single mother. I arrived around 6pm, had dinner, went shopping for new clothes and then by midnight I had sneaked out the window, jumped off the roof and got some friends to pick me up, leaving an apologetic note to the carer.

After a while I was found again and placed into a semi-secure unit in Buxton. The staff there had more control and our shoes were taken from us to prevent us from absconding. Although I did try once and I walked for two hours across a field - with no shoes - only to be picked up by the staff who were waiting

in the car for me!!! These times were good as we had a sense of routine and loyalty to each other; however, I was placed with some very disruptive children. There was one girl who self-harmed and would cut herself so deep to the vein that blood would pour like flowing water into the rooms. I remember one occasion when staff couldn't remove glass from her (due to health and safety), so I casually walked around them and took the glass off her, thereby stopping her from bleeding to death. Since the unit was secure I had to be educated in-house, which meant there was no education as we never got past a few minutes before one of the kids would kick off and become disruptive. It was manic at times, but take-out night and supervised bowling and pool were the highlights of my time there.

Eventually I was moved on

to a children's home. These were the more fun times where I really built bonds with other kids and staff who became like family to me. I went back to school and my teachers allowed me to stay in the top sets as I was gifted and talented, meaning that despite everything I was still achieving high grades. However, at the care home my behaviour was poor. I snuck out of windows, copied the staff keys, hid my friend in the house, set off a food fight, and the list goes on. That said, I had structure here. We had weekly meetings about our behaviour, education, cooking etc, which was all rewarded with money. This, of course, motivated all the children. We had a one-to-one staff member who was our key worker. They would look out for us and I can honestly say I had the best out the bunch. He understood me and advocated for me, so I felt comfortable speaking to him about my plans for the future and how I could improve myself.

As I turned eighteen I was ready to leave care and go into a supported lodgings placement, where I would pay rent but learn the skills I needed to live alone. This carer took me to China, taught me how to cook and it was here that I benefited from having a stable woman role model in my life. The relationships I built have lasted and I class them as my family and visit often, especially on special occasions. Unfortunately, this placement broke down due to my poor choice in friends who caused a few issues, but even then we left on good terms. I then went to a hostel before successfully enrolling into university to complete a Law and Psychology degree and lived in dorms.

## WHAT NOW?

A

AS AN ADULT looking back on my childhood, I can see that I had no sense of belonging or stability, which is why I wasn't motivated to behave myself. Since leaving care I have worked hard to rediscover my culture and faith, which helps me form a sense of identity and belonging.

Ten years after leaving foster care, I now have two degrees - one in Psychology and another in Law, as well as completing the postgraduate Legal Practice Course. I have worked with the Police on an advisory board, with the local council in encouraging education for looked after children, and I have even been a panel member to assess foster careers for an independent fostering agency. I have worked in three law firms, covering personal injury and child abuse law, and I'm now one step away from my dream of becoming a solicitor. I continue to face challenges and obstacles,

such as my mother's health and also religious discrimination at a previous place of work.

Currently I work for an international charity as an Executive Assistant, dealing with legal aspects pertaining to governance and compliance. I am also currently supporting my mother and preparing to welcome one of my sisters back home as she has also been in foster care and is now turning eighteen. My future ambition is to ensure both my sisters are settled after leaving care, whilst pursuing my career in law and one day having a family of my own.

I want social workers to know how important it is to match children according to religious and cultural identities whenever this is possible, and even if matching is not possible, to support a child to develop their cultural and ethnic identity. Not knowing who you are, or your origins can and does have a detrimental effect on your confidence, interaction with the community, and can make children feel isolated - as I did at times. This can make children turn to drugs, negative influences and display challenging behaviour. Social workers really need to listen to what children say and at times what they don't say. A lot can be learned by spending time and giving them the space and confidence to open up and explore who they want to be.

I hope that by sharing my experience everyone who works with looked after children will take more time to listen to the children, be patient when children misbehave and also that extra effort is made to support the child's ethnic and religious identity.

Thank you for reading and a special thanks to Tay who has always believed in me and empowered me to tell my story! ♦



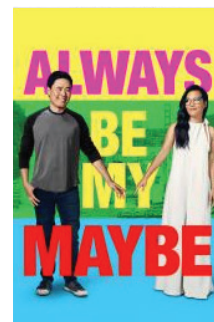


COMMON SENSE MEDIA REVIEW

# HELPING PARENTS EVERYWHERE VET



Movie  
✓ age 11+ ★★★★★



Movie  
✓ age 13+ ★★★★★



Movie  
✓ age 6+ ★★★★★



Movie  
✓ age 11+ ★★★★★  
common sense selection  
FAMILIES



Movie  
✓ age 13+ ★★★★★



Movie  
✓ age 6+ ★★★★★



# IN ADVANCE

Tim McArdle ★★★★★

★★★★★

I

**USED TO WONDER** why people had a problem with sex in films. I saw it as a good way of representing the sexual chemistry between characters (or something like that).

I don't think that anymore.

I currently have a fourteen-year-old daughter who I want to share good films with and who wants to share good films with us. We want to sit down as a family and enjoy an epic action film of any genre - a science fiction, a romance (Mum and daughter more so!). But boy, have we been caught out a number of times lately watching nice films that all of a sudden feel the need to take us to the bedroom of the main characters. Highly unnecessary, I shout out in my head like some sort of reformed being. Mum starts slinking in her chair trying to throw a glance at Dad as if to say "Oh

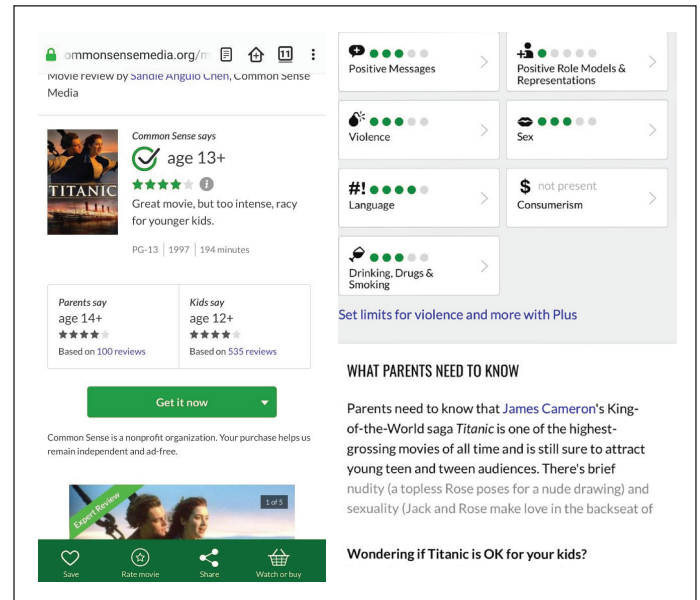
dear no", and daughter is picking up on the signals thinking it's hilarious that Mum and Dad are feeling so awkward.

I can't tell you how many times I've had to go and check on the chips to see they are not burning, or suddenly need go to the toilet, or get something from my car, or find myself compelled to engross myself on my phone pretending nothing else is happening around me.

In the time preceding my daughter's teenage years we had to think about how scary something might be or how violent. We had to constantly assess her maturity levels because age ratings on programmes only tell you so much. You, as the parent or carer have to make a decision.

It's even harder for foster carers as you may also have to factor in trauma triggers such as domestic violence or drinking alcohol to name a couple of obvious ones. Sometimes you may not know enough about the child in your care to feel able to make a solid assessment on this. It can be a real minefield.

I've got something to help you. The website I've been using for the last five



years is called Common Sense Media: [www.common sensemedia.org](http://www.common sensemedia.org)

I have found the website invaluable in almost all of my decision making when I don't know much about a particular film, programme or book in advance. (Clearly I haven't always used it well).

Here's a visual example of the information the site provides you when you look up the film Titanic:

As you can see, both adults and children have submitted reviews for the film and

decided what they think is the correct age rating. You, as the user of the site, benefit from seeing the assessment of the film from the perspective of both adults and children. You can also further explore aspects of violence, sex, language etc to better understand the prospective content.

Next time you find yourself unsure about what you are about to watch, see what Common Sense Media has to tell you and sit a little more comfortably in your chair (or quickly turn off the TV)! ♦

## THIS IS HOW THEY DESCRIBE WHAT THEY DO:

Common Sense Media rates movies, TV shows, books, and more so parents can feel good about the entertainment choices they make for their kids. We offer the largest, most trusted library of independent age-based ratings and reviews. Our timely parenting advice supports families as they navigate the challenges and possibilities of raising kids in the digital age.







SECTION 31 TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY

# RESHAPING SECTOR THINKING

## CARE EXPERIENCED TRAINING

A

**T** SECTION 31 Training and Consultancy we provide “feelings focussed” training. We want to stop children being moved from home to home by standing as an advocate for the “naughty kids”, promote a new perspective of care and give a new, deeper level of understanding. We are passionate and professional trainers with a range of experiences, and our goal is to promote the importance of stability and consistency in care.

We provide a wide range of training sessions to foster carers and social workers. Our focus is on the inner child - the feelings and thoughts that drive children’s actions throughout their care journey. Sometimes it’s easy for care givers and providers to overlook the emotional impact of the decisions they make, instead just seeing the external shells of those around them and reacting accordingly. Therefore, we carry a blame free ethos.



## OUR APPROACH



**WE PROVIDE AN** extensive insight into the mindset of those who have grown up in care. Our founder Scott is an experienced care leaver, and we continuously consult with children in care to ensure we are championing current issues. We teach people how to feel and empathise, using real stories and real experiences of care.

Social care staff receive training throughout their career and they have heard many harrowing stories about what children have had to endure. However, this doesn't always change their actions because they do not

feel the effects of their daily decisions on the children in their care. We can see this because regardless of how the care system has improved over the years, poor decisions are still being made and the care system remains, in the child's eyes, very much like a conveyor belt. Children are moved from home to home and by the time they have left care many of them have moved twenty times or more.

This issue remains current, but what is the cause of this is? Placements often break down when children are viewed as being "too naughty". Their

behaviours drive carers to give up and they are moved along, one out, one in. We believe this is unintentional, indirect emotional abuse. When they leave care they are left to fend for themselves, in low cost housing with nothing. Is that not neglect? The care system often systematically abuses children over the course of their time spent in care.

So does this mean the care system is full of bad people? No, we believe that people focus their efforts on the shell of the child rather than caring for the inner child. People look at what children do wrong and penalise them for it. Caregivers are good people with good intentions, but their focus is often in the wrong place.

Caregivers and social care staff often fail to understand that these children want unconditional love and a sense of belonging. It is the fear of being rejected that causes them to express challenging behaviours, which conflicts with their internal needs and often confuses caregivers.



An excellent and powerful course which *really highlights* the complex journey of a child through the care system & how decisions made by professionals, foster carers & educators can have a profound affect on an individuals life.



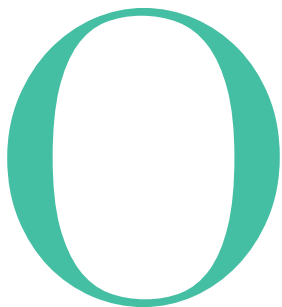
**REGISTER TODAY**

[www.section31training.co.uk/register](http://www.section31training.co.uk/register)

SECTION  
31  
TRAINING



## SCOTT KING



**UR FOUNDER** Scott King brings uniqueness to the company as he lived the entirety of his youth in care. However, his experience wasn't exactly great. He lived in twenty-three foster homes, two children's

homes, three supported lodgings placements, two hostels, two B&B's, and four flats. In total he had thirty-six addresses.

For him, life in care was an emotional rollercoaster and a battle with his inner-self. He did not achieve any real academic success during his teens and his behaviour was always very challenging. As he matured he began to understand his "inner-self" - in other words the powerful emotions that controlled him and prevented him from developing and moving forwards. He began to reason with his conscience and become self-aware. He



understood why he felt this way when he was a child and linked that to how he was feeling as an adult. This self-awareness allowed him to realise that throughout his life he was a puppet. He reacted this way because he had a deep subconscious mistrust of the world around him and thought that the people close to him would let him down.

He realised that his brain was hard-wired to expect the worst,

leading him into situations where the worst was all he could expect. He understood that he used to attack his foster carers because he was starting to like them and his conscience had learned that attachment goes like this:

Like  
=  
Love  
=  
Rejection  
=  
Pain

As a child he did not understand this. He just felt anger and didn't know why. He felt the need to hurt people, but when he was questioned he didn't know what he was feeling. He realised that just as emotions were the puppeteer of his own childhood actions, those same emotions became the puppeteer of his adult life. He also saw adults working with people like the child he used to be, dancing to the same tune and tangled up by the same strings. Now he can recognise the impact of his past without being a victim of it. He can share his experiences without blame or judgement to help adults make better carers for today's angry and scared children.

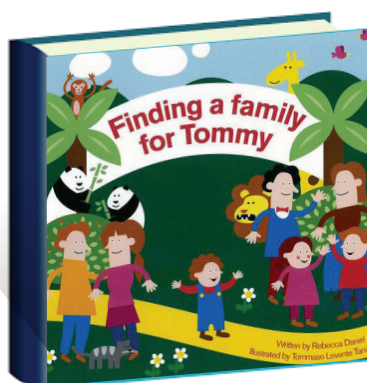
Section 31 Training has been running for over eight years now, and over 500 face to face courses have been delivered. In order to reach a wider audience we have begun to move some courses online. Our first course "Growing Up In Care: Lived Experience" is now available online. ♦

Email: [courses@section31training.co.uk](mailto:courses@section31training.co.uk)  
Website: [www.section31training.co.uk](http://www.section31training.co.uk)



# BOOK

THANK YOU TO ALL THE COMMENTERS ON THE WORLD FOSTERING ORGANISATION FACEBOOK PAGE FOR RECOMMENDING BOOKS YOU THINK FOSTER CARERS MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER



## FINDING A FAMILY FOR TOMMY

**Rebecca  
Daniel**  
Age Range:  
18 months – 5 years

**TOMMY NEEDS** a new family to give him lots and lots of love. Where will he find one? On a farm? In the pond? At the zoo? Open the flaps in this charming picture book to help him find out!

Finding a Family for Tommy is primarily aimed at pre-school children. The simple picture book with repetitive text and interactive pages gives carers and social workers an opportunity to discuss the meaning of family and belonging.

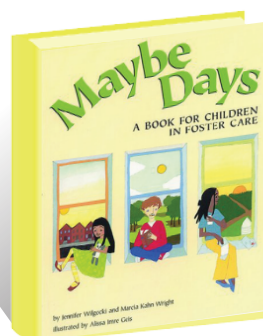
Repetition is the best form of learning for this age group and the gentle nature of the story should encourage children to ask for it often without being overwhelmed by it.

The book can be read in preparation for a move from foster care and during introductions to permanent

carers or adopters. Children can struggle to articulate the complex emotions that arise during times of change, and very young children may not even be able to acknowledge their anxieties. This book can help to reassure them at every stage of the transition.

Carers can use it to discuss why the child needs a new family and what kind of families there are. The book is also designed to be used post-adoption to remind children that they were chosen for a family, and that their family was specially chosen for them.

This book will gradually introduce children to the concepts of adoption and fostering. However, it has been mainly devised as a tool to help carers raise emotional issues and to give children opportunities to ask questions and seek answers.



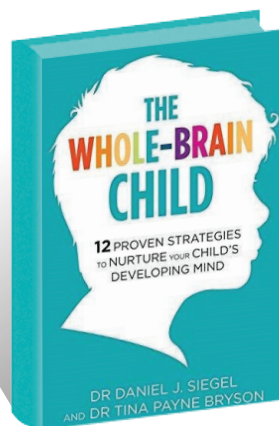
## MAYBE DAYS

**Jennifer  
Wilgocki &  
Marcia Khan  
Wright**  
Age Range:  
14-7 years

**FOR MANY** children in foster care, the answer to many questions is often "maybe".

Maybe Days is a straightforward look at the issues of foster care, the questions that children ask, and the feelings that they confront. A primer for children

going into foster care, the book also explains in children's terms the responsibilities of everyone involved - parents, social workers, lawyers and judges. As for the children themselves, their job is to be a kid - and there's no maybe about that.

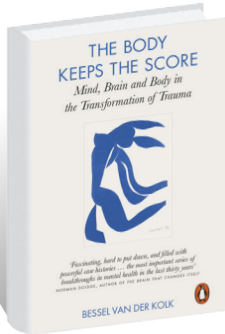


## THE WHOLE BRAIN CHILD

**Dr Daniel  
J. Siegel &  
Dr Tina  
Payne Bryson**

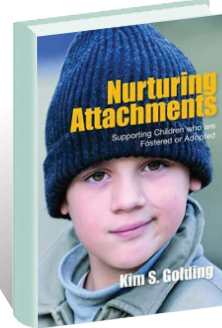
# CORNER

*Note all descriptions are lifted from the respective online selling descriptions*



## THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE

**Bessel Van  
Der Kolk**



## NURTURING ATTACHMENTS

**Kim  
S. Golding**

**DR. VAN DER KOLK'S** masterpiece combines the boundless curiosity of the scientist, the erudition of the scholar, and the passion of the truth teller' Judith Herman, author of 'Trauma and Recovery

The effects of trauma can be devastating for sufferers, their families and future generations. Here one of the world's experts on traumatic stress offers a bold new

paradigm for treatment, moving away from standard talking and drug therapies and towards an alternative approach that heals mind, brain and body.

'Van der Kolk draws on thirty years of experience to argue powerfully that trauma is one of the West's most urgent public health issues ... Packed with science and human stories' New Scientist

**NURTURING Attachments** combines the experience and wisdom of parents and carers with that of professionals to provide support and practical guidance for foster and adoptive parents looking after children with insecure attachment relationships.

It gives an overview of attachment theory and a step-by-step model of parenting which provides the reader with a tried-and-tested framework for developing resilience and emotional growth. Featuring throughout are the stories of Catherine, Zoe, Marcus and Luke, four fictional children in foster

care or adoptive homes, who are used to illustrate the ideas and strategies described. The book offers sound advice and provides exercises for parents and their children, as well as useful tools that supervising social workers can use both in individual support of carers as well as in training exercises.

This is an essential guide for adoptive and foster parents, professionals including health and social care practitioners, clinical psychologists, child care professionals, and lecturers and students in this field.

**IN THIS PIONEERING,** practical book for parents, neuroscientist Daniel J. Siegel and parenting expert Tina Payne Bryson explain the new science of how a child's brain is wired and how it matures. Different parts of a child's brain develop at different speeds and understanding these differences can help you turn any outburst, argument, or fear into a chance to integrate

your child's brain and raise calmer, happier children. Featuring clear explanations, age-appropriate strategies and illustrations that will help you explain these concepts to your child, The Whole-Brain Child will help your children lead balanced, meaningful, and connected lives using twelve key strategies, including:

Name It to Tame It: corral raging right-brain behaviour

through left-brain storytelling, appealing to the left brain's affinity for words and reasoning to calm emotional storms and bodily tension.

Engage, Don't Enrage: keep your child thinking and listening, instead of purely reacting.

Move It or Lose It: use physical activities to shift your child's emotional state.

Let the Clouds of Emotion Roll By: guide your children

when they are stuck on a negative emotion, and help them understand that feelings come and go.

**SIFT:** help children pay attention to the Sensations, Images, Feelings, and Thoughts within them so that they can make better decisions and be more flexible.

**CONNECT THROUGH CONFLICT:** use discord to encourage empathy and greater social success.



# WHAT TO WATCH

## 1 *13th*

**THE FILM** explores the intersection of race, justice, and mass incarceration in the United States. It is named after the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, adopted in 1865, which abolished slavery throughout the United States and ended involuntary servitude except as a punishment for conviction of a crime. The issues of incarceration from 1865 up to the modern day may astound you. Something seems seriously broken in the country.

*When you watch "13th," you feel that you're seeing an essential dimension of America with new vision. That's what a cathartically clear-eyed work of documentary art can do.*

Variety

WHERE? *Netflix*

**Stuck for something to watch on TV? Here are some great TV films and shows that may be interesting to anyone involved in the fostering and adoption sector. Each month we will share with you an eclectic mix to keep you entertained whether it be documentaries, comedies or just good family films**

## 2 *Three Identical Strangers*

**THIS REAL-LIFE** documentary tells the extraordinary story of three identical brothers brought up in separate adoptive households with no knowledge of each other as part of a covert experiment of 'nature versus nurture'. At 19 years of age their lives changed forever. *Although it's sometimes a little slow and predictable, this intriguing documentary excels in its relentless attention to detail, which will keep viewers watching and waiting for more.*

Common Sense Media

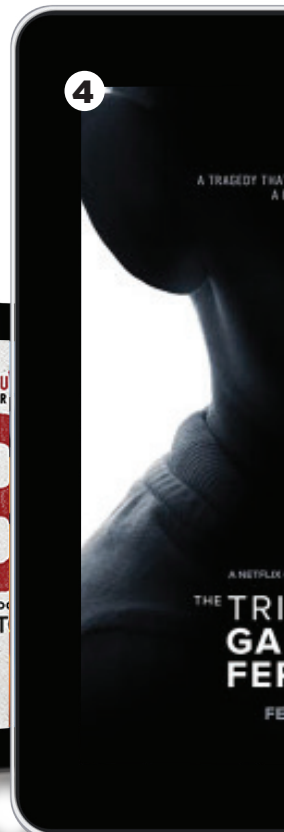
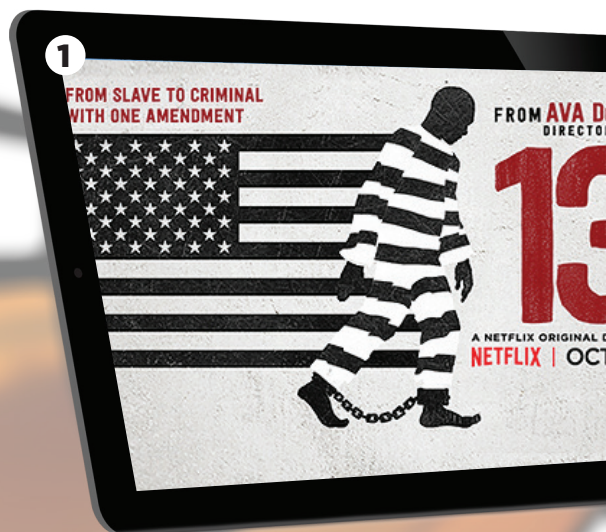
WHERE? *Netflix*

## 3 *Atypical*

**ATYPICAL IS** A coming of age TV series focussing on the life of 18-year-old Sam Gardner who has autism spectrum disorder and is trying to find his way in the world. It is both funny and moving in equal measure, and extremely well-acted. No one programme can represent every child or person with autism and there is an element of artistic license, but those with experience of autism and even those without will enjoy this programme. Don't miss this!

**WARNING:** there are some adult themes involved so probably one for age 14 +

WHERE? *Netflix*



#### 4 *The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez*

**THIS REAL-LIFE** series shows the horrific murder case of Gabriel at the hands of his parents and the systematic failure of all agencies including education, police, and social services who should have protected him (US). It is not for the faint hearted and it is heartbreaking.

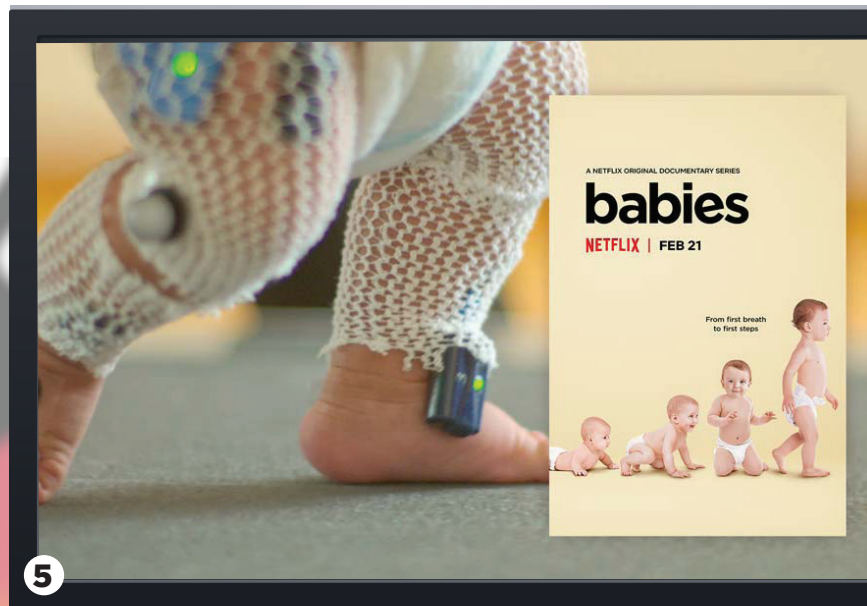
**WARNING:** Expect to see graphic photographs of the injuries the boy sustained over a prolonged period of abuse and hear detailed descriptions of what he endured. There's also cursing (including "f-k," "bulls-t," and more), references to sexuality and sexual gratification, references to drug use, and discussions of sexual assault

WHERE? *Netflix*

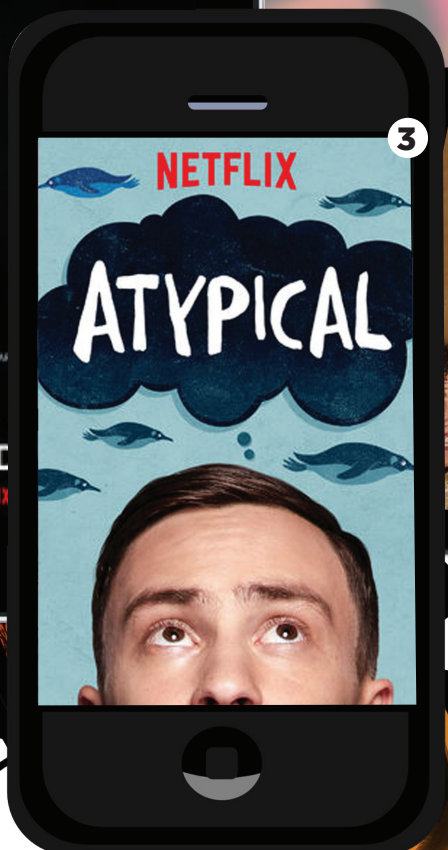
#### 5 *Babies*

**BABIES IS** A documentary series that looks at child development from birth and explores different scenarios affecting brain development and why care giving is so important. It also looks at how important a primary care giver is, irrespective of the biological relationship. Most of you should find the content interesting and created with significant investment in the production, albeit not necessarily groundbreaking for those of you up to date with aspects of attachment theory.

WHERE? *Netflix*



5



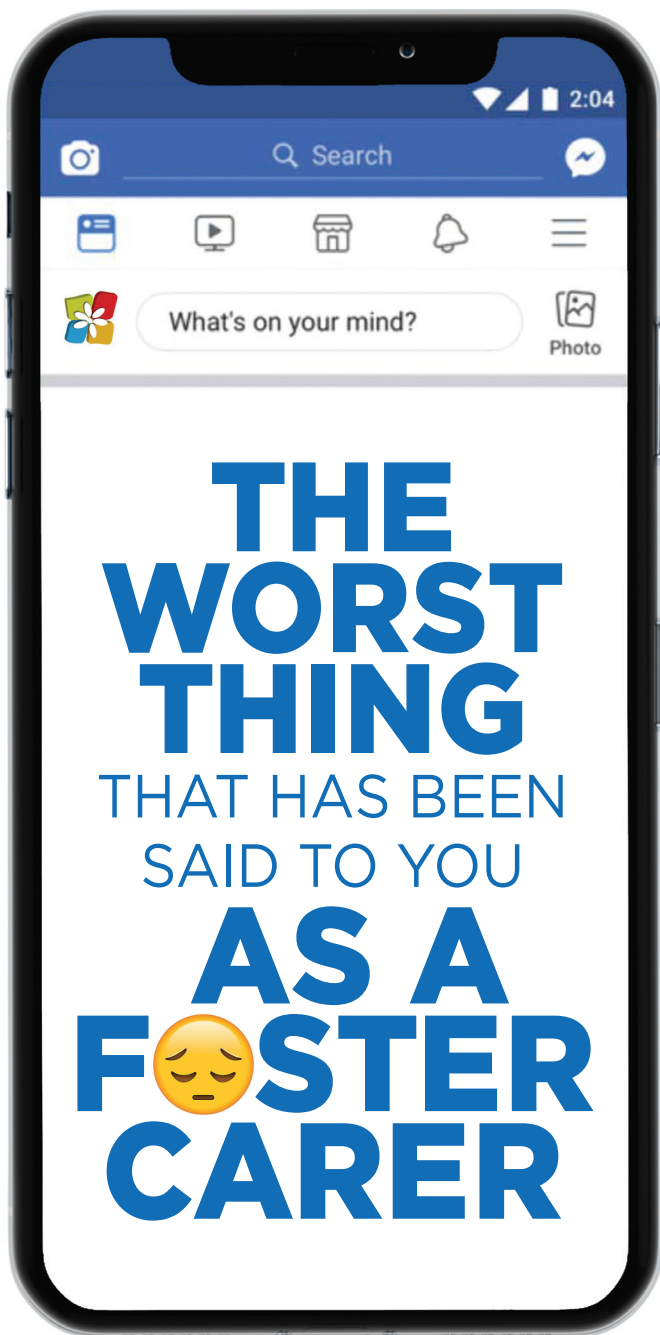
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2

*Feel free to send in your recommendations and reasons why you think we should be showcasing in the next edition.*





Working as a foster carer can sometimes feel like a thankless task. Not only do you do the job that you do, sacrificing your time, energy and sanity, but at times you have to deal with people who have no idea what it's like to foster, be a child in care, or simply understand what the fostering sector is all about.

Extracted from the World Fostering Organisation Facebook page, here are some of the things foster carers have shared with us about the worst things they have heard in their role as a carer.

I have had said to me whilst going through a difficult period with foster child, well maybe you should just get rid of them then if they are that difficult. My response is, well maybe I should get rid of you for being so rude! Children are not disposable. Just because they are struggling doesn't mean I am going to give up on them. I have fought for the help child needs rather than deciding to give up on them.

### Leave it to the professionals"

like we're not a professional too. Rude and out of order since no amount of professionalism gives you the experience of living with a child 24/7

It's not the worst thing, but its constant and really thoughtless when people say it, professionals included. **"I couldn't do it, I would get too attached"**. Like I don't, and it makes me think they believe I'm some kind of heartless dragon. Always seeking a good reply.

**"I think I know what's best for the child, you're just there to give a roof over their heads"** - said CSW after only meeting them once. I'd had them for two years.

**"You're paid enough, deal with it"**  
- police officer after runaway located.

**"They just need tough love, restrictions and authority. You need to toughen up."**

**"Why don't you adopt them if you love them as much as you say. I couldn't give them up."**

When I first started out, a meeting/review was arranged at my home without me being asked. The CSW was late and she walked in, looked at me, and said **"coffee with one sugar."** I did not move. I was shocked and she asked again. I replied **"£3.20 please."** She smirked and said **"I'm thirsty"** and I replied calmly **"You're in my home not a cafe!"** I did not make it and she never asked again 🙄🙄

He can't be yours, he is black!  
At crisis point: Oh sorry no one will come out to see you now. I suggest you email your SW and ride it out.  
Surely you don't love them like your own, do you?  
Oh I couldn't do that job, they are all feral.  
Go to hand in notice after a six-year placement went rocky for well over a year. SW: **"I didn't see that coming. What happened?"** 🙄  
On the positive of my moans I'm still in contact with LAC with an amazing relationship despite all the negatives and the "professionals" getting in the way

**"They aren't your children, don't get too involved."**

**'So you don't have a real job...'**

**"Your role is to provide accommodation."**

**"It's ok for you, you don't work" is one. Another that grates me is, "a professional's meeting is happening, I'll let you know the outcome."**

**"I know you foster babies, but do you have a job?"**





Mine is **“I wish I had your job, being a lady of leisure and still getting paid.”**



**“At least now you don’t have to get a proper job”**

said by a female retiree who has previously sat on fostering approval panel



I hate it when people don’t understand it and say, **“Awww it’s a shame isn’t it. How could their parents not want them?”** Really irritates me as the parents love them so much, and sometimes it’s just unfortunate circumstances or they just don’t know how to be a parent. Doesn’t mean the children are not loved by them.



When you don’t have any biological children, someone saying **“because you don’t have your own, you wouldn’t understand, Foster children will never be the same.”**

I have since had a little girl myself. Yes, it’s not exactly the same. It’s a different kind of love yet I see them all the same ❤️



That although it was obvious the child I looked after was loved, I had to remember that they belonged to the local authority! The child was there, but fortunately wasn’t old enough to understand.



**“Well you only do it for the money!!”**



**“There’s a professionals meeting but you aren’t invited”**

🗣️ So... I’m not a professional then?

**2. “So you don’t work now then?”**

🗣️ So... I don’t do any work as a foster carer then?

**3. “I’d get too attached so I could never foster - you are so brave!”**

🗣️ So... because you might end up liking the kids, we shouldn’t bother helping them? And I’m not brave, I just want to help!

**4. “I couldn’t foster, I couldn’t do that to my own birth children”**

🗣️ So... my daughter isn’t going to get anything positive out of being a foster sister then?



**I beg to differ with all of the above! 😊**




We are an Indian family. Where we live not many babies or children who are an ethnic minority come into the system. But as foster carers we do get attached and over 16 years of doing this there have been many children we have thought about keeping. The social workers always say because they are not Indian they won’t be a cultural match for a forever home, but we are good enough to have and look after them sometimes for over a couple of years. In this day and age I wouldn’t have thought it would have been a problem, but it is. I find it really hurtful.

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A great thanks to those that contributed to this article. I imagine there might be a few “I’ve had that said to me” moments there. We work in a sector that many people struggle to understand - and even sometimes those within it don’t get it right. Comments vary from the thoughtless to the malicious, but regardless of the motivation behind them they can be immeasurably frustrating and hurtful. Remember, you are not alone and we hope that through better education and more resources people will start to understand what you do and the impact it has on children’s lives.

In our next edition, we will ask for the nicest things a foster carer has ever heard or experienced. If you want to join in the conversation please email your thoughts to [info@charityworld.com](mailto:info@charityworld.com).

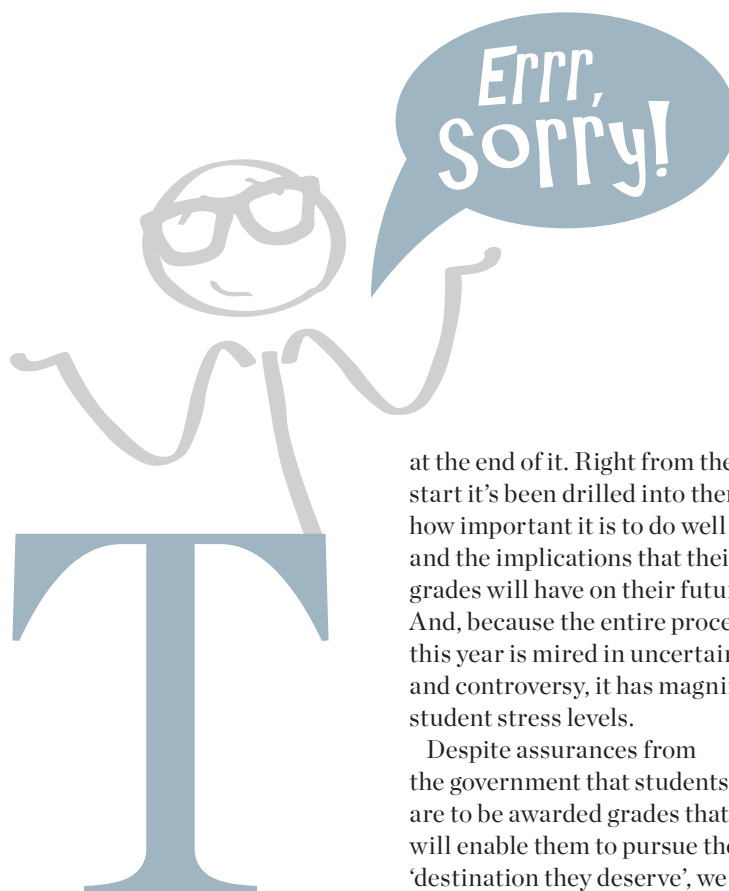


A group of four diverse teenagers (three girls and one boy) are standing in front of a white brick wall. They are all smiling and holding a large white sign that spans across the middle of the image. The sign contains the text 'MOVING ON FROM RESULTS DAY' in large, bold, black capital letters. Below the sign, the lower legs and feet of the four teenagers are visible, showing they are wearing various styles of jeans and sneakers. The overall mood is positive and hopeful.

# MOVING ON FROM RESULTS DAY

Danielle Brown





**THE RECENT** headlines around exam results haven't exactly been encouraging.

This year has presented its own set of unique challenges. The examination process has undergone a very big and very quick overhaul in response to the global pandemic. Standard procedures have been thrown out the window and students, teachers, parents and carers are still trying to figure out where the goalposts have ended up. With apologies from the Education Secretary before students even collected their results, warnings from teachers that the new system is unfair, and Scotland's First Minister acknowledging that they bungled their approach does not fill us with confidence. The affect this has on young people, both on their prospects for the future and their emotional state, is profound.

Results Day can be a very stressful experience for young people. Their entire education is geared up towards the exams

at the end of it. Right from the start it's been drilled into them how important it is to do well and the implications that their grades will have on their future. And, because the entire process this year is mired in uncertainty and controversy, it has magnified student stress levels.

Despite assurances from the government that students are to be awarded grades that will enable them to pursue the 'destination they deserve', we have been left with a system that favours those from privilege and disproportionately affects those from disadvantaged areas. This leaves students in a state of uncertainty and it isn't something that simply affects them on Results Day, but filters down as they move forwards with their lives. For those in care who already face high levels of disruption this can be particularly challenging.

This backdrop is something you're well versed in by now if you're caring for a young person going through this process. For those who do well on Results Day (and hopefully this includes those in your family!) it's a time of celebration. Nestled alongside their success might be concerns about 'what comes next'. For those who haven't got the grades they were hoping for, it can feel like the end of the world. In both cases, it's helpful to draw out the positives and get them to focus on actions that will take them forward.



F

AILING AN exam is a hard life lesson for any young person. Nobody likes to think that they haven't done well at something – but once they've received that envelope the proof is there in black and white. It's important to not rush into any decision and weigh the pros and cons carefully, so encourage them to take some breathing space and thinking time to better understand how they are feeling. The emotional backlash

that comes with any kind of disappointment often changes the lens we look through and can make it hard to view a situation with clarity or perspective. If a young person is struggling to do this then it can be helpful to have an external pair of eyes assess the situation and help them map out another route forwards.

The option to appeal remains open until the 18th September, although those applying for university will have to move a little more quickly as UCAS admissions are open until the 7th September. Due to the nature of the current circumstances it is worth talking to the school about this, if you haven't already done so. The average remarking period is usually 22 days, but

with the unprecedented disruption this year we might see some delays to this. There is also the option to resit; these will be held in October for A Levels and November for GCSEs.

At all stages it is important to prioritise the emotional wellbeing of your young person. When we fail it's hard not to take it personally! We see both ourselves and our failure as being one and the same, which can fracture self-esteem. The reality, of course, is very different. Just because we have failed does not make us a failure. Moving to this point is tricky and conversations about failure, what they can learn from it, and how they can get themselves back on track can be very powerful.

**'I DIDN'T GET THE GRADES I WANTED'**

**'I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO DO NEXT'**

U

**UNCERTAINTY DOESN'T** stop on exam day. Young people are set to be the worst affected by the global pandemic. They aren't oblivious to the fact that we are heading towards another recession, nor are they unaware of the unpredictability of the current jobs market. For many children in care, being



in education has been the one 'known' that has provided routine and consistency.

Reaching this crossroads in their life often raises more questions than answers. Taking that step into the unknown, whether that's continuing with education or entering the world of work, throws us out of our comfort zone. Even those who have achieved great grades and have plans in place can question what their future looks like, whether they are making the right choices, and where they go from here. And when the goalposts get changed, when we're thrown a curveball or have to fight for every resource and opportunity, we often see a correlating lack of motivation.

## SO WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?



Remind them that they don't have to figure out their entire future right now. Nobody knows what's coming next, and any experience or qualification they gain helps build a strong portfolio which they can fall back on in the future.



Life isn't always comfortable – young people in care know this better than anybody. Trying to find the opportunity in uncertainty turns it on its head. Sometimes it can be difficult to see this, so talking it through with them can help uncover blind spots.



Encourage them to set goals in the areas that they control.

Things like their learning, managing their time, and their attitude are all in their control. This puts them back in the driver's seat.



Trust the process. Change is a constant in life, and sometimes we don't want to take the step forwards because we don't know what life will look like on the other side. Clinging to fear creates inaction. Encourage them to explore different possibilities and passions and to take small steps forward. They don't need to take a flying leap out of their comfort zone, but move at a pace that suits them.

Whatever grade your young person gets there is always going to be uncertainty over the next steps. You know they are not the sum of their grades. They are a wonderful person with so much value to give, and it's important to help them recognise this, and make them aware that they do not have to make this journey alone. ♦









**SUCCESSFULLY  
SUPPORTING  
LOOKED AFTER  
CHILDREN**

BACK  
INTO  
SCHOOL

**IN SEPTEMBER**

Anne Heavey



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**HIS SEPTEMBER** schools return in unprecedented circumstances. The global pandemic has undoubtedly disrupted education services right across the country and, in many cases, made many sudden and drastic changes to children and young people's learning. Many pupils will have been out of full-time school since March and, even for those who have attended over the summer, the start to the academic year will look very different to previous years. Schools are expected to open to all pupils from September and to ensure that this is done as safely as possible, it is extremely likely that new routines and expectations will be introduced, and changes will be made to the physical environment.

Ensuring that all pupils with additional needs and vulnerabilities have a positive and successful return to school is a key priority for school leaders and teachers. Children who have been adopted or are going through the care system may face additional, hidden challenges adjusting to changes and uncertainty during the pandemic. In July, the Whole School SEND Consortium hosted a roundtable to discuss securing a successful transition for looked after children returning to school in September. A free video recording and supporting

resource pack is available on the SEND gateway.

This discussion featured a range of parents, educators, and experts, and included a recorded interview with Lewis\*, a young person, who shared his experience of COVID-19.

Throughout the discussion several key themes emerged that educators need to be mindful of and look out for in looked after children:

- They may have high levels of anxiety, which effects engagement with learning – for example they may not be

**Dave Roberts from the Mulberry Bush School reminded us of the pre-existing context that educators need to be aware of when supporting pupils who are looked after or have experience of the care system**

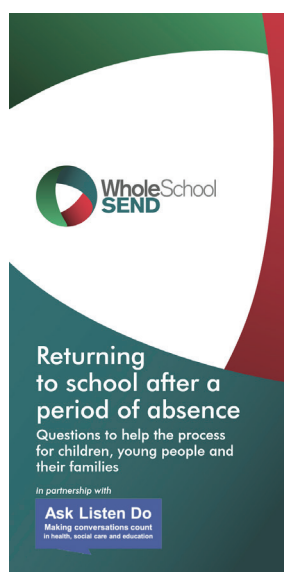
Permanent exclusion rate for these pupils is

**20 times** higher

They are up to **four times** as likely to have emotional or health concerns

At the end of Primary school **49%** of looked after children reach expected attainment levels as opposed **75%** of all pupils





able to concentrate or actively listen to instructions

- They may not be proactive in asking for help and may reject offers of help, as they may wish to avoid feelings of helplessness
- Certain topics within the curriculum might cause stress, for example ancestry, family trees and evacuees

To pre-empt issues arising from these areas, teachers should proactively reach out to looked after children and their carers to share and explain any changes to the routine or

environment. As part of these discussions sharing videos and images can help to create a picture of the “new normal.” Conducting these conversations and information exchanges in an open and positive way is vital. Emphasising what will stay the same as well as what will change will also be helpful. Keeping children informed at all stages will reduce anxiety, uncertainty and help them adjust to their new routines.

One important factor to be mindful of is that some children who are looked after may have had a positive time during the COVID-19 summer. They may have had longer to build relationships with their carers and flourished in the new routines. Assuming that all experiences will have been negative is not helpful. Teachers should address lockdown openly and inclusively, allowing children to share any experiences they had during this time. For example, Lewis\* shared his experience of lockdown:

It affected me in a very good way. I have been finding organisation better and my work has been due and there has been no background noise or shouting... I've managed to get more friends but because I'm not had to worry about homework I've had more time to do things I enjoy. I've just set up a Minecraft club.

When asked about how Lewis felt about “going back” and seeing his friends “in real life” Lewis responded:

I'm happy that I'll actually get to see them, but then anxious that the relationship might change.

When asked how the school could help him return, Lewis stated:

I'm hoping that they will help me with my online planner that I started using, and I'm hoping that they will help with people taunting me.

Continuing to have a member of staff who he could speak to about issues and the continuity of existing support systems were also very important to Lewis. As Lewis demonstrates, children and young people can articulate their unique and nuanced experiences and feelings. Understanding, welcoming, and responding to these is vital.

Teachers should ask with genuine interest about how the period has been and seek to understand how the young person feels about coming back to school.

To support parents and carers to have constructive discussions with educators after a period of absence, whether related to COVID-19 or other circumstances, the Whole School SEND Consortium has also co-produced a leaflet with carers, young people and families to provide a framework for discussion around the transition back into school. You can find this under the ‘Resource’ page on the SEND Gateway website: [www.sendgateway.org.uk](http://www.sendgateway.org.uk)

What we heard from the roundtable was that, for looked after pupils and those who had been adopted, there are increased risks around securing a successful return, which compound existing known risks. However, by proactively engaging with young people and their carers as equal partners, teachers can mitigate against these and support all pupils to return successfully. ♦

\*name changed





# DEMYSTIFYING DISABILITY

Danielle Brown



**DISABILITY DOES** not stop anyone from living a meaningful life or achieving success in many fields. It doesn't define who a person is, or what they are capable of. We all have strengths, we all have weaknesses, and we all require varying degrees of support to achieve goals.

Yet disability is one of those topics that many people don't like talking about. It's often the cause of stifling silences, hushed whispers and pointed stares – all reactions that are very much rooted in fear. It's one of those things where we worry we'll say or do the wrong thing, and cause offence.

The reality is that disability is a complex topic. There are thousands of different conditions – many wrapped up in horribly complicated medical jargon – and even people with the same condition respond to it differently. Some disabilities are obvious, some are not, and some take a long time to get diagnosed.

I have Complex Regional Pain Syndrome, or CRPS for short. Thanks to faulty wiring in my nervous system I am in chronic pain in both my feet all the time, which affects and limits my ability to walk. My condition started at the age of eleven, got much worse at thirteen, and was finally diagnosed at sixteen.

And it was terrifying.

In a world which prizes perfection I was frightened that my disability would be the defining thing about me. That other people wouldn't be able to see past my crutches and wheelchair to the person that lay underneath and the value I had to offer.

What made this a million times worse was that people like me weren't represented in the world around me. Very few high achieving, successful disabled people made it onto the pages of books or were pictured in illustrations. I couldn't find them on the TV, in magazines or other forms of media. Instead people with

disabilities were embroiled in stories around ethical dilemmas, victimised, pitied, misunderstood – or left off completely.

These messages have huge implications.

Underrepresentation and misrepresentation of disability have a profound effect on how we value and identify it. These messages – or lack of them – changed the way I saw myself and the big ambitions I held for my future. I was different, and different is sometimes a very lonely place to be.

It also changes how others see disability. It gives people a skewed vision of a hidden world that paints disability as a problem. Of course, disability does raise additional challenges. Children with disabilities need extra support in certain areas, which can be more demanding on your time or require further training.

It might even get you questioning whether you're up to the task of fostering a child with additional needs.

The only way to break down this fear is through education. Starting conversations that challenge outdated stereotypes and misunderstandings are essential to this. And please remember, it's okay not to have all the answers. It's okay to feel uncomfortable, and it's okay to get it wrong. Only by doing this can we start to learn and grow.







Understanding starts with an openness to learn.

At Fostering Families we want to explore, inspire and educate, giving you first-hand insight into the world of disability and how you can best support children and young people with additional needs. Today we're going to start that conversation with three tips to demystify disability.

- Don't get bogged down by the jargon! The important thing to remember – in fact, the only thing to remember – is that there is a human behind each one of those words, with very human reactions, emotions and needs. A child's capabilities do not begin and end at the label they have been given. Of course, we need to understand the medical implications of any condition that a child has in order to properly meet their needs, but you are not expected to be an expert. Taking your time to get to grips with this, asking questions, and being honest if you haven't quite got your head around it is all part of the learning process. There are also a tonne of support communities out there offering guidance. I recommend that you look for the solution-based ones, which offer positive, practical advice.

- Always focus on ability. Any impairment adds another dimension into the mix and our focus is often drawn to the difficulties that the individual faces. The theory makes sense. If we try to fix whatever is causing the issue then hopefully we will see an improvement in functionality. This approach might work for broken kitchen appliances, but not for human beings. The problem with this is it highlights our limitations, which quite frankly feels rubbish. It also creates blind

spots. If I had to use one word to describe people with disabilities it would be innovative. There are so many things that a person with a disability can do and the way that so many adapt to their circumstances is nothing short of incredible. However, it is much more difficult to explore the world of possibility if you're constantly brought back to your shortfalls and comparisons to 'normal'. Remember, success doesn't come from the absence of weakness, but by making our strengths stronger.

- All children are different and therefore require different

levels of support. The more time you spend with a child the better you will understand their requirements – and their strengths. Encourage independence where possible, even if this requires more time and patience. It can be easy to jump in and tie those shoelaces when you're in a rush. In fact, it often feels like this is the right thing to do. Nobody likes to see somebody struggling, after all. Teaching, guiding, supporting where necessary, and praising achievements will have a far bigger impact on confidence and resilience levels, and help

children develop the skills they need to thrive.

Disability is like any topic – the more you engage with it the more you understand it, and therefore the less scary it becomes. And this learning process is a journey. I've had a disability for over two decades and I run a training company in this sphere, and I'm still learning, exploring, and discovering new things about disability. Remember, even small steps take us forwards and this starts with being open to learn. ♦





# Charity World

Registered in England & Wales  
Charity Number - 1161128



## ONE HUNDRED SCHOOLS

The 100 Schools project is an ambitious endeavour that started with one school and created a blueprint for 99 more

### Education

The Charity World Education Project provides schooling to street children and families living in slums or poor rural regions in India. These families have no financial means to afford good quality education. By supporting

schools and sponsoring children in full-time education we break the cycle of poverty that many have lived in for generations.

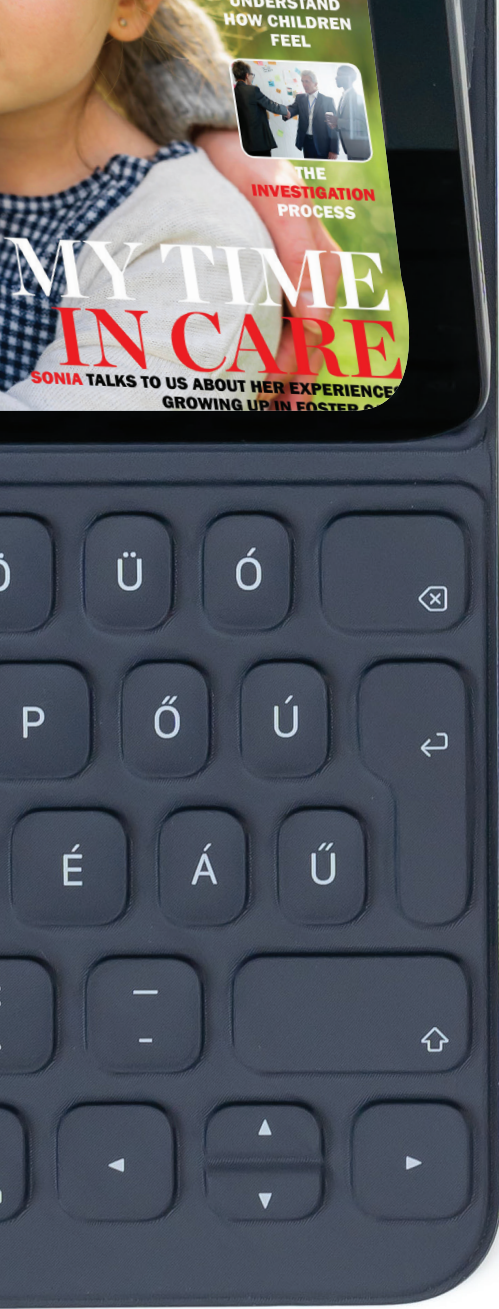
### One Hundred Schools

We have embarked on an ambitious journey to adopt 100 schools across India. We will finance and ensure that these schools have a good infrastructure

and quality education in line with any good school. This includes repairing existing buildings, building new classrooms, toilets, libraries, sports facilities and providing all the necessary teaching equipment. All schools under this project will be supported on a long-term basis. Our first adopted school is the Ajaib School, which opened in 2015. This is a rural school in Rohtak, the village where Amar

Dhull, the Founder of Charity World was born and grew up. It lacked the basic infrastructure that children deserve, furniture, books, and had no toilets or running water. Our second school opened in January 2016, and between them they currently support 100 children in full-time education. We are in the final stages of opening our next schools in Noida, Delhi and Gurgaon.





## We hope you enjoyed reading this latest edition of Fostering Families magazine.

We'd love to hear what you thought about the magazine and what other topics you'd like us to cover. We also want you to be part of our next edition. Our mission is to make sure that every voice from the fostering sector is heard and we'd like to share your experiences, pictures, stories, recipes, poems, or even a thank you note to someone.

Please send your ideas to [info@charityworld.com](mailto:info@charityworld.com)

# Fostering Families



charityworld



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