

# Fostering Families

JANUARY 2021

**BLACK LIVES  
MATTER AND  
WHITE PRIVILEGE**



**SHARED  
READING  
AND SECURE  
ATTACHMENTS**



**Healing  
Trauma  
Through  
Love:  
Jerome's  
Story**

**The Six  
Pillars Of  
Mental  
Well-Being**





# 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



**Hello and welcome** to the first Fostering Families magazine of 2021.

We've got another packed issue for you, with some fantastic articles from researchers, volunteers and training providers, as well as compelling stories from care leavers. Amongst the line-up of talented contributors you'll see familiar faces, as well as plenty of brand new ones. I'd like to personally thank all our authors whose insight and experiences have a valuable impact on the Fostering Families community.

Our cover story takes us on an emotional yet inspiring journey as **Jerome Harvey-Agyei** talks about his time in care. In a gripping piece he shares how he is healing his trauma through love, and how he is supporting other care leavers to do the same.

To borrow a common phrase from the world of sport, you need to look after the team behind the team in order to get the best results. 2020 was a tough year and whilst there is hope on the horizon, we've still got a few speedbumps in the road ahead. Positive psychology expert **Emma Coller** takes you to the mind gym and gives you tools to help proactively build your mental well-being and ensure you take the time to look after yourself.

Fostering Families is committed to hearing from diverse voices across the sector, providing a rich tapestry of different perspectives that deepens our understanding, empathy and inclusivity. **Alyson Malach** has written a thought-provoking piece on the Black Lives Matter movement with some practical advice on how we can better engage with it. It's a gripping read that explores the challenges within the care sector and how we can all do our bit to lessen racial inequalities within it.

The article by Alison is complemented beautifully by children's author **Chad Lucus**, who joins us all the way from Canada. Representation in children's books for marginalised groups matter, and Chad brings this message to life through his own personal story and those of the characters in his debut novel. Reading is a great way to learn more about the world around us and, as Anish Harrison from the National Literacy Trust points out, is also a fantastic way to develop secure attachments. She shares the activities that her hub in Swindon has been doing to support foster families, as well as directing us towards some free resources.

At the heart of Fostering Families is our to mission to connect the care sector and hear the people within it. Your voice, story and experience matter and we want to hear from you. As we power through this next (and hopefully last!) lockdown stretch it's more important than ever to stay connected. Wherever you are please remember that our inbox is always open and we've also got a very welcoming community at World Fostering Organisation on Facebook.

January sometimes gets referred to as the 'Monday of months'. Short days and grey skies can make it feel like a tough slog, so find yourself a warm, cosy spot and enjoy.

**Danielle Brown MBE**

Editor

contact@charityworld.com



# Contents

JANUARY 2021



# 20

## Coverstory

Healing Trauma Through Love: **Jerome's story**

# 6

## Health & Lifestyle

The Six Pillars of Mental Wellbeing  
by **Emma Collier**

Growing Your Own Veg In January  
by **Amie McArdle**

New Year, New You?  
by **Danielle Brown**

# 18

## Safeguarding

Removing Stigma And Shame  
From Mental Health  
by **Gary Anderson**

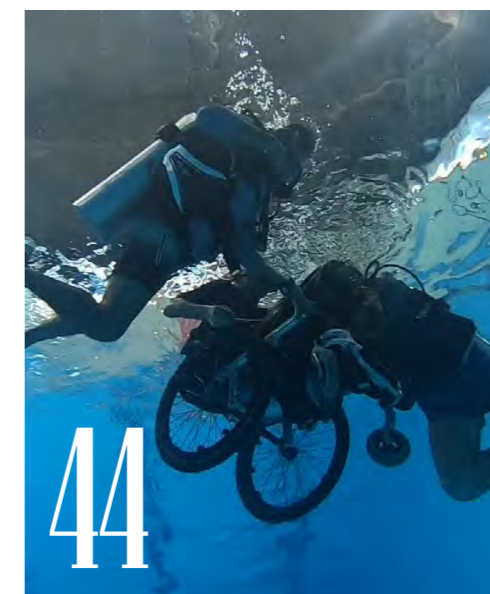
# 24

## Experiences From Care Leavers

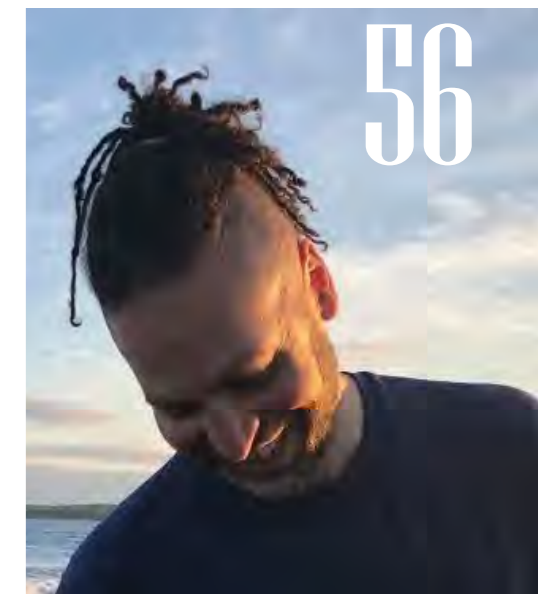
Looking Past The File  
by **Gethin Jones**



# 38



# 44



# 56

# 30

## Training, Development & Legislation

How Beliefs Can Influence Our Attitudes  
by **Colin Majinn**

Review Of Children's Social Care



# 42

## What's Going On

Spotlight – **Susie Hills**

Why I've Signed Up For A World Record  
Challenge – by **Danielle Brown**

Black Lives Matter And White Privilege  
by **Alyson Malach**

# 54

## Disability

Why I Decided To Volunteer  
On A Foster Panel

# 56

## Education

Finding Yourself In The Story:  
by **Chad Lucas**

Shared Reading Promotes  
Secure Attachments  
by **Anish Harrison**



# 60

## Community Questions & Answers

Funniest Moment As A Foster Carer

### DISCLAIMER

This disclaimer is to inform readers that the views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the text belong solely to the author, and not necessarily to the editorial team, organisation, or any member of the publication board or anyone else's. Photographs and graphics are only representational. Copyright for the entire contents of the magazine is held by Fostering Families and no article may, in part or whole, be published elsewhere without giving relevant credit. Information in Fostering Families magazine is from sources Fostering Families believes are reliable. Neither Fostering Families nor its authors and editors guarantee the accuracy of any information published herein. Neither Fostering Families nor its authors and editors will be responsible for omissions, errors or claims for damages including exemplary damages arising out of use or inability to use or the accuracy of information published herein. The authors, publisher, editorial and design teams and Board are not responsible for any injury or accident resulting from use of materials herein.

# THE SIX PILLARS OF MENTAL WELLBEING

By EMMA COLLER



**don't know what** it feels like to foster a child but I do know what it feels like to conduct a child protection investigation and to sit on a child protection hearing and be responsible for the decision to remove a child from a family who, for a myriad of complex reasons, are unable to provide that child their birthright to have a loving and supportive family.

And within that process I also know how it feels to be completely unravelled by it. To lay awake at night traumatised by the horror inflicted and questioning every decision made.

I served as a police officer for 16 years specialising in training before finding myself in child protection, a role that very much chose me and not the other way around. 16 years' service became my end point as a result of brain surgery.

Serving as a police officer was tough on my personal well-being and if I'm honest, my time in child protection broke me into pieces I struggled to put back together.

There is a Japanese word called kintsugi. It's the art of repairing broken pottery with beautiful gold glue. The concept extends to the idea that by showcasing the repair with the beauty of gold, we acknowledge the honesty of the cracks and the journey it's been on.

Kintsugi is a concept that humans can also embrace, every one of us experiences a diverse, sometimes beautiful, and sometimes difficult life. And wherever we are in our journey at this point, every one of us has picked up some cracks, emotionally and physically.

My work is focused on enabling people to understand the concept of well-being, particularly in the leadership space. It feels like well-being is a word banded around a lot, it's the hot potato as they say. If you ask people to define well-being, they struggle to do so.

Our definition is "well-being is being able to understand the impact the natural highs and lows of life have on our ability to be well, and to be armed with the skills to navigate them positively." [Growth Pod]

It's really helpful for us to have a definition but it's the skills that help us navigate well-being that's the most important element of all.

There is a new psychology kid on the block, it's called positive psychology. Whilst psychology is concerned with looking for what makes us mentally unwell, positive psychology is interested in what helps us flourish. Our evolving understanding and interest in happiness has grown from this field and the emerging research is fascinating.

Positive psychology is a concept coined and researched by Professor Martin Seligman. A traditional psychologist by trade, he became frustrated with the purist focus of relieving misery and instead turned his focus to what makes life worth living.

His subsequent research found that well-being is a construct, not an outcome. Being well does not grow from one element but instead a number of elements which he calls pillars.

When we can understand these pillars, we arm ourselves with the skills to navigate those natural highs and lows we all experience.

When someone wants to get physically fit, they might go to a gym. They will be greeted by a qualified trainer who will ask them what their goal is. They will then teach them how to use the equipment they need in order to reach their goal and

write them a bespoke plan of action.

So why is it then, that we are so great when it comes to teaching people about physical training but not when it comes to mental?

I am going to take you to the well-being gym and be your well-being coach. Protein shakes and lycra is optional!

Let's start by understanding that every single one of us is unique. My well-being is different to yours, and yours is different to everyone else's. The trick to well-being is knowing what you need. The other thing to consider here is that self-care is not selfish. So many people equate taking time out for themselves to indulgence. If you have ever been on a plane you will know that the cabin crew tell you to put your own mask on before helping anyone with theirs.

This is not only the best advice should oxygen become an issue but advice we should be putting in our daily lives too. If you don't take care of yourself, how can you take care of others?

Professor Martin Seligman found there are 6 pillars of well-being. Let's take a look at them in a bit more detail.

## Positive Emotions

In early human history, being good at tuning into bad and dangerous situations was quite literally a matter of life and death. Whilst the environmental threats have changed, our brains are still hard wired to this threat detection tendency. This bias can of course still serve us in some circumstances but it's not as useful in the present day as it once was.

The simple fact is that our brain is not aware that the threats we face now are not the same threats we faced historically. Our brain is hard wired to focus on things that are not going well in our lives and that can become our default way of thinking.

Researchers have found that the experience of heartfelt positive emotions - like joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe and love - can make you more optimistic, more resilient, more open, more accepting, and more driven by purpose (Green, et al., 2009).

How? Studies by Professor Barbara Fredrickson have repeatedly demonstrated that positive emotions help you to broaden the way your brain responds to opportunities and challenges helping you to see new opportunities, think more creatively, and work more collaboratively. She has also found that as positive emotions accrue, they also build up your psychological, intellectual, social, and physical resources leaving you more resilient. (Stolen with pride and permission from Michelle McQuaid)

There are many ways we can increase our ability to become in tune with our positive emotions more frequently so we can enjoy these benefits. Expressing gratitude is one of those ways. Using a journal to write down what you are grateful for, creating a family habit, starting or ending your day by asking everyone to share something they are grateful for or even asking everyone over dinner. When we verbalise what we are grateful for, it challenges our negativity bias and tips the balance. The more consistently we consciously engage in positive grateful thoughts, the more we are able to rewire our brain to think this way more frequently without us having to work so hard at it.

Engagement

We all have different neurological super powers and those super powers include our strengths. Most people don't know what their strengths are but there is an easy way to find out. Simply go to <https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register> take the free survey and your 24 strengths will be organised from 1-24.

Strengths are personal qualities which link to our values and they shape how we think, feel and behave. Because we have spent our whole lives practicing these strengths, sometimes without knowing, our brain is wired to perform at its best when we use them, and when we do, we feel good.

Making sure we get to use our strengths regularly (particularly our top 5) is really important for our well-being. Because many people don't know what their true strengths are, it makes it more challenging to embed them in our daily routines.

My top five strengths are, creativity, fairness, love, love of learning and spirituality, and my lowest strength is perseverance. When I have to do tasks I don't enjoy, I try to use my strengths. I hate doing my accounts, so to make it more engaging I get creative, colour code my receipts and spread-sheets, and it brings a little bit of joy to a task I ordinarily struggle with.

Perseverance is my lowest strength. Because I am so creative, I can be distracted easily with new projects and find it difficult to finish ongoing ones. But because I know this, I'm able to treat myself kindly, and not get upset or feel lost when I struggle to finish things. Instead, I have created strategies and tools to get things finished which is better for my well-being.

My husband's top strength is perseverance, and because we know this, it gives us a shared understanding into each other's personalities. He understands why I have a tendency to leave my chores half-finished because I have been distracted by something else and knowing that has helped strengthen our relationship.

Once you know your strengths, you can consciously use them to bring you joy. Get everyone else to map their strengths too and explore how to use them together. Helping young people understand their strengths is a wonderful gift.

Relationships

Some of us are born into families that are unable to serve us and most of us at some point have connected with people who are not so good for our well-being. From toxic relationships to people who are simply not very positive (I like to call them mood hoovers!) we can all find ourselves connected to people that impact our well-being.

Recognising who these people are is the first step to taking action. Being conscious about how others impact you is a great way to protect yourself. Think about those around you, who makes you feel good and who doesn't? We are social creatures who are designed to be connected so spending more time with those who make you feel good and putting boundaries around those that don't will boost your well-being.

We also have a relationship with ourselves, some people talk to themselves in a really negative way, berating themselves for not being good enough, criticising themselves when they get things wrong. Take a check of your internal lan-



guage, how do you speak to yourself, is it with love and kindness, or with criticism and judgement? Test your language - would you say what you say to yourself to another human? If the answer is no, then don't say it. Instead of hurting yourself treat yourself with respect. When you practice this, it changes your internal relationship and positively impacts on your relationship with others.

Role modelling this is super important for those around you, especially if you have a young person who is struggling with their own internal language. Talk openly about relationships and explore how some relationships serve you, and others don't.

Meaning

Meaning is our foundation, our core, our authentic self. Sometimes we can lose our sense of meaning and identity. It's important for our well-being to rediscover it and be mindful of our purpose in our everyday lives. When we know our true meaning it gives us a sense of purpose and direction, and living a meaning-led life is incredible for our well-being. Our meaning can change over time depending on our experiences and circumstances. My meaning and purpose have changed through some of my bigger experiences, like becoming a mum and losing my father.

Your meaning and purpose is embedded in your core values and beliefs. Being conscious of them and how they impact on you, your thoughts, emotions and how you respond to events can help you see their power. We all have a calling. For you, helping others is clearly evident and answering these three questions can further help you to connect with your meaning.

- 1. For what and how do you want to be remembered?
  - 2. Who do you want to be remembered by?
  - 3. What values and strengths do you hope people describe when they talk about you?
- Answering these questions yourself is beneficial. Maybe

encourage the young people in your life to answer them too. When we know the answers, they become our moral compass, guiding our decisions, direction and goals.

Accomplishment

It feels good when we achieve things, even small things. It gives us a sense of satisfaction and pride. Sometimes we forget all the amazing things we do every day and linked with our negativity bias, we can sometimes spend too much time thinking about what we didn't achieve rather than what we did.

Being mindful of our achievements can help increase our well-being. We can do this by getting into the habit of reflecting each day or week on all the things we achieved. We don't have to climb a mountain, just taking the first step is an achievement in its own right.

Helping ourselves and our children think this way is powerful. Equally thinking about where we might have struggled is also a great habit to get into, but doing so in a positive way. When we can explore our struggles, reflect on them and see how we have grown by experiencing them, we grow resilience and develop new skills.

Failing is an important element of growth so if we can learn to be comfortable when we feel uncomfortable, know this is a learning opportunity we are experiencing, we can shift our focus and grow stronger through the inevitable challenges we will all face.

Health

Author Tom Rath states, "sitting is one of the most underrated health threats of modern time". Think about how much time you spend on your bottom. Working at a desk, watching TV, sat in your car. It soon stacks up! Movement in any form is good for us. Our bodies are designed to move and when we do so, we feel energised. Don't worry, I'm not suggesting you start running 10k every morning before breakfast. A simple walk is good enough.

Being in nature is incredible for our well-being and being mindful in nature is even better. Mindfulness just means being present and aware. Many of us miss so much instead of being present we are thinking about the next thing or what happened in the past. We only have control in the present so be present.

Recharging our batteries is important, if we don't take care of ourselves, we can't take care of others. Many people create the false link that self-care is self-ish. Looking after your own health is vital. Yes, health can relate to eating good foods, exercising and sleep but it also relates to more than that.

A recent study of 18,000 people over 135 countries found the following activities were reported the most when it comes to increasing personal well-being; reading, time in nature, being alone, listening to music, doing nothing, walking, taking a bath, daydreaming, watching T.V and practicing mindfulness.

Whatever it is that you need, make sure you carve time out to engage in it, book yourself a rest prescription, ditch the guilt and know by helping yourself you are helping others.

Talk about what you need with your family, get everyone to think about ways that supports their health and factor time in for each other to make sure you all get to invest in your health and well-being.

Final Words

We know that broccoli is a super food and very good for us. If you eat it once a year it won't have much impact. Equally if you put it on your plate now and again, you won't get the maximum benefit. Well-being is the same. In order to get the most impact in your life you have to keep at it.

Each pillar is important, but sometimes you may be high in one area and low in others. Keeping the balance can help you navigate the natural highs and lows. We all have low points; they are an inevitable part of life. The moon doesn't shine brightly 365 days a year. There are times in its cycle that it hides away. Humans also can't be expected to shine all the time, so be honest, lean into your truth and emotions, and when you do shine, shine with pride. Being conscious and understanding which pillars are low and high arms you with a powerful tool, which in turn enables you to take the actions you need.

Caring for others can be draining, emotional and complex. Remember you can't take care of those in your charge if you don't first take care of yourself. You are a gift to the children you are caring for, and you can impact positively on their lives. Teach them about well-being, and role model good practice. Even in a short time you can impact greatly on others, because as WM Paul Young wisely wrote in his book The Shack; "If anything matters, then everything matters. Because you are important, everything you do is important. Every time you forgive, the universe changes; every time you reach out and touch a heart or a life, the world changes; with every kindness and service, seen or unseen purposes are accomplished and nothing will ever be the same again".

About Emma Collier

Emma co-owns training and coaching company, Growth Pod. [www.growth-pod.co.uk](http://www.growth-pod.co.uk)

Her vision is to build resilient, inclusive, thriving workplaces by developing leaders who know why and how to take care of the well-being of those they serve. Emma believes that by teaching leaders how to create psychologically safe workplaces employees are able to work in companies where their holistic well-being is served enabling them to reach optimal human flourishing.

Emma's passion is driven from a desire to create a world where every person is valued. When people feel cared for, valued and nourished at work that extends outwards. People leave work feeling good, taking that feeling into their communities creating a ripple effect into the wider world.

Emma works one to one with people helping them grow into their conscious optimal self through coaching and energy psychology.

She believes every person is born to flourish, however on our experiential journey we pick up stories and self-limiting beliefs that can hold us back from bringing our whole selves to the world. Emma blends the latest science of positive psychology and well-being with powerful coaching tools to help people find their authentic self, enabling people to flourish and share their gifts with the world. ♦



Health&Lifestyle

# Growing Your Own Veg In January

By AMIE McARDLE



**H**ello Everyone.

I want to start by introducing myself, and giving a bit of context to why I thought a little Gardening Section may be of use to some people, especially at the moment with the uncertainty of schools returning and the general uncertainty that surrounds us all by the virus that I won't name. I'm sure you've all seen it enough.

My name is Amie McArdle. My working life is a nurse in a department of our local A&E, and the rest of the time I'm mum and wife. Whilst I'm happy with how life is in general, I discovered around 8 years ago that I needed an outlet. I needed my own little space, where I can do something I enjoy, and have some peace and quiet away from the (sometimes) dreary responsibilities of life. So that summer I started my own little allotment in our back garden. I had never grown anything before and my history with plants

wasn't a very positive one, but good old Google helped with my research. That first year I grew so many courgettes that my whole family got sick of them, and my work colleagues got a good few dinners too. The first year I tried to keep things simple and chose easy growers: potatoes, strawberries, courgettes, carrots, peas and beetroot. I wasn't sure I would be able to grow successfully because we have a relatively small garden and I was using giant pots. However, the pots worked a treat and my love of veggie growing developed.

Three years ago my husband surprised me with a Christmas gift of an allotment. My veggie growing was taking over our garden. In my excitement I had started growing pumpkins, which are just no good for small gardens! We had 6 pumpkins - really big ones too! - but pumpkin plants take over and my husband and our daughter wanted our garden back.

I can honestly say that of all the things my husband has given me, the allotment has

*This is a picture of my allotment in February 2019 ready for **the indoor seedlings** to be planted in the coming months.*

*Life gets so busy that sometimes we forget to communicate, we forget to properly talk and hash things out, but a day in the garden or at the allotment doing some physical work with no distractions I find that our daughter starts to talk.*



to be the best. I never go to the allotment for just an hour. One hour can easily turn into four, and my mental health and endorphins are so much greater after a good potter around. Being out in the fresh air doing some physical activity to the sounds of birds just can't be beaten. And then when your children get involved and loving eating the freshly picked veggies and fruit just makes it even better.

Life gets so busy that sometimes we forget to communicate, we forget to properly talk and hash things out, but a day in the garden or at the allotment doing some physical work with no distractions I find that our daughter starts to talk. I can sometimes learn a lot in an hour about how she is feeling and thinking, which would almost certainly never have surfaced had we not had the distraction from the mundane home life.

Summer 2020 was a bit of a shocker. I also managed to injure myself at the beginning of the year, so I had to resort to going back to garden growing last year. It meant that I could do things in small stages, and had a man around to "help" with the heavy things.

This is why I thought it may be nice to have a little gardening section in the Fostering Families magazine. You don't need a big garden, or a big plot of land to grow some veggies and have a "Mental Health Happy Place" (as I like to call it). You just need pots, compost, seeds and water (and a little patience).

For previous growers, a lot of the winter crops will be ready for their final picking: brussel sprouts and winter cabbages will be all big and plump and ready to munch. Winter potatoes will be ready for digging up. But these are all things that needed to be sown back in the summer or autumn months.



A very good thing that can be done in the cold January months is to buy some fruit trees and bushes, and strawberry plants. I used to think it was a funny time of the year to be selling summer fruit plants, but there is a reason for this apparent madness. Strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and fruit trees can take a long time before you start to get a crop from them. These plants are also harder than we may have thought. By planting them in the cooler weather, you give them time to establish and spread their roots which gives you a bigger harvest the following summer. When you plant them in the ground (or giant pots), cover the soil with straw, or hamster type bedding, it keeps some extra warmth in the ground over the icy months.



*A very good thing that can be done in the cold January months is to buy some **fruit trees and bushes, and strawberry plants.***

where you want to grow. I find drawing a picture of how I want things helps me keep on track throughout the year.

Fertile soil is key to having a successful growth. You have two options when it comes to fertilisation:

**1) Buy up some cheap standard compost** (or dehydrated compost blocks) and then speak to local farmers, or stables and offer to take some manure off their hands. Mix it all together in the giant pots and hey presto. Leave until the spring and your compost will be fab.

**2) Pay the extra money and buy fertilised bags** of compost from garden centres or DIY stores. This can, however, be very costly if you are starting from scratch.

During the month of January, you can sow garlic, or you can start your first attempt at growing potatoes. You can also plant rhubarb, but that's where your options for outdoor sowing ends because of the poor weather.

Fresh home grown garlic is amazing. There's something about cracking open that fresh bulb, the smell and liquid that squeezes through your garlic crusher - it's just so much more than the almost dehydrated bulbs you find in the supermarket. And it's so easy to grow. If you have a leftover bulb in your grocery cupboard or fridge, just put it in a dark cupboard that's not too cold and let the garlic sprout its little green tentacles from the top of the bulb. When green shoots appear and are around 1-2cm tall, carefully separate the cloves and put the cloves green shoot upwards into little holes in the compost, around 3 inches deep, and cover them over. And that's literally it. Just let them grow. Should we have a dry winter you may need to water them, but I very much doubt that will happen.

Indoor sowing is a different story altogether. A great head start can be made for spring if you have plenty of windowsills. Peas, beans, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, leeks and onions can all be started off in the warmth of your home, and then the little sproutlings will be strong and ready for the great outdoors in the springtime.

The first few years of my growing journey saw little seedlings all over the house. All the windowsills had pots, and I had big trays full of little pots in the bathroom. The house smelt like compost for ages.

That's all we can really do in January. The winter months in the garden can be long and laborious, but it's well worth all the hard work. If anyone has any tips or wants to share any "growing your own" photos I'd love to hear and see them. Share them on the World Fostering Organisation Facebook Group and then we can all join in and enjoy our hard work.

See you all in two months' time where I'll be talking about grape vines, tunnels, spinach and greenhouses. ♦

**J**anuary can be a good time to start doing all the little jobs around your plot or garden. I use this month (and October, November and December) to get rid of rubbish and start building the little protective cages for the cabbages and broccolis and fruits, and the structures for the summers peas and beans to grow up.

It is also a good time to sort out your compost bin or heap. If you already have a compost heap, stir it all up and dig down the new additions. This will help spread the nutrients, and help to move around the worms, it will help break down the plants and organic matter much more quickly and give you a rich and fertile compost. Remember to water your compost heap because worms don't like dry soil and food.

If you don't have a compost bin, they are very easy to create. A big old kitchen bin would do the trick to start with. I started mine by putting a little compost in the bottom and then topped it up with fruit and veggie peels, and leftover dinners (last season's veggies create great nutrients for compost bins). Just remember if you are scraping leftover dinners into it, don't add gravy or meats as this will attract foxes and they can create a lot of mess!! Once you have started your compost building, keep it watered every so often during dry spells, and remember to mix it up from time to time so it all rots down nicely. You can make it even better by getting the kids to dig up the worms from the garden, and add them to the mix. Worms will help break it up quicker than just leaving to nature.

January is the perfect time to prepare your space. Make a plan early in the month - decide what you want to grow, and

Health & Lifestyle

# NEW YEAR, NEW YOU?

By DANIELLE BROWN

Ask yourself the following three questions:  
.....

**1.**  
What do I want to achieve?  
.....

**2.**  
Where am I now?  
.....

**3.**  
How am I going to get there?



**I**t's that time of year where people come up with resolutions for the new year and reflect on the year just gone.

Last year wasn't exactly filled with sunshine and sparkles, was it? At the beginning of the year when we were thinking about what 2020 might look like I don't think anybody could have predicted what was in store for us. It's been tough. It's been full of heartache, U-turns, limitations, and frustrations. There have been days when staring at the same four walls have been unbearably confining. We saw the plans we made, and perhaps even optimistically started working towards, go up in smoke.

And yet it's important to not write off 2020. We can't sweep it under the carpet and pretend it never happened. There is still value in reflecting on how things went, and look at how we move forwards.

Like everybody else, I imagine, 2020 has been a crazy whirlwind of a year. When I look through an objective lens, I can see that I've made some huge leaps forward. I've set myself challenges, thrown myself out of my comfort zone, and pushed myself further than I realised was possible. I've learned lots, laughed lots and made some fundamental changes to my lifestyle, which has resulted in a happier and healthier me. It's also been incredibly heart-warming to see millions of people - myself included - place greater importance on human connection than material goods.

And yes, there have been some fairly spectacular failures. I too have experienced the setbacks, demoralisation and fatigue that has shaped the backdrop of this year. Whilst these experiences aren't enjoyable, they create a springboard to learn, grow and develop. When things don't go to plan there is only one direction we can move and that's forwards. I picked myself up, dusted myself off and modified the plan – and in doing so I learned that I am more than a match for anything thrown my way.

Still, I am excited for 2021. There is no magic wand and the challenges that have plagued 2020 aren't going to disappear overnight, but my destination has been set, the plans are in place and I am going to continue making big strides forward.

Every year I see people set well intentioned New Year's resolutions. Lose weight. Exercise more. Quit smoking. Get organised. Start a new hobby. Spend less. Read more. Improve relationships. Stop procrastinating.

I don't do New Year's resolutions. I find it's a bit like playing snakes and ladders, where you start off making some impressive strides forward but a few moves later end up plummeting backwards. Good intentions aren't motivating enough to keep lasting momentum, especially if they are not backed up by the right mindset, strategy and action. What I do instead is set goals.

Goal setting isn't the most glamorous part of the job, but it is one of the most important. This is a roadmap to help us get to success as quickly and easily as possible. Coming up with a clear plan allows us to focus our time and attention in the right places and make the best use of the resources available to us. Goals can help us with some of the big decisions we have to make, giving us the confidence to know that we are making the right choices. They are far more motivating than resolutions; this is not just about setting an intention but creating a plan that makes us accountable and provides us with a sense of purpose.

When I work with young people I find goal setting particularly helpful too. Understanding what they want to achieve enables us to provide the best support possible to help them get there. Achieving



a goal requires a change in behaviour – we need to take deliberate action in order to reach the end destination. Helping them map out their ambitions and modify the plan when the landscape inevitably changes provides them with a robust tool they can use time and time again as they move out of childhood and adolescence.

A big part of goal setting is checking in with your progress regularly. No plan will ever go exactly 'to plan' and it needs to be monitored and adapted regularly. The start of the year is a great opportunity to assess where you are in relation to your goals and ask yourself the following three questions:

1. What do I want to achieve?
2. Where am I now?
3. How am I going to get there?

Work through this process and come up with concrete actions that take you closer to achieving your goals. And bring the young people in your care on this journey with you, encouraging them to set their own goals for the upcoming year and work out how they are going to achieve them. These goals may be related to their career aspirations or around learning a new skill and can be as big or as small as they want. Stating the intention is just the start – when we wrap additional details around it by plotting out our current position and the deliberate steps we need to take us from A to B we are far more likely to stick with it.

The concept of New Year, New You is ridiculous. We aren't reborn on the first of January each year, and we certainly don't need a new you because you are already capable and deserving of success. However, there are steps you can take to help you maximise your potential and get the results you want. The aim is to develop those unique characteristics that have got you where you are today and build a more confident, more successful and more resilient you with a really clear plan. And remember, whilst the aim is to get to the destination it's really important to enjoy the journey! Often this is far more rewarding and memorable than crossing the finish line. ♦

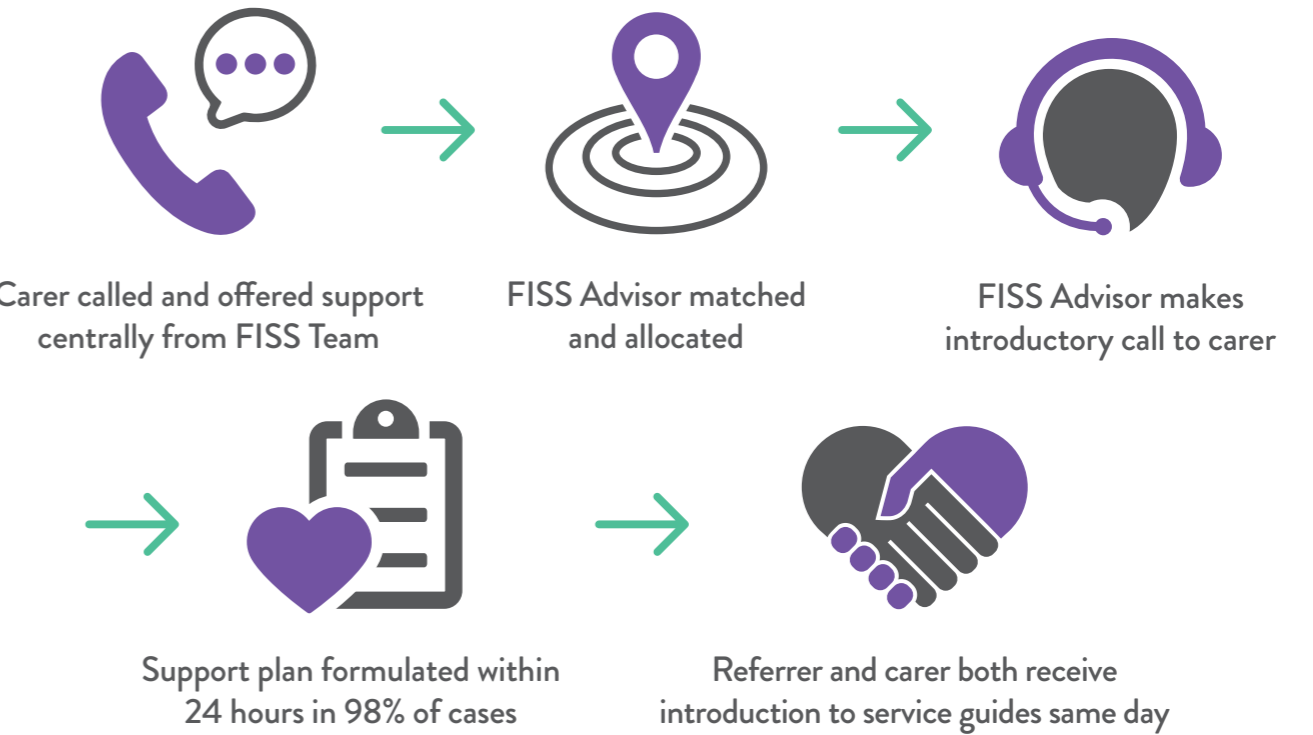


# FISS

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:

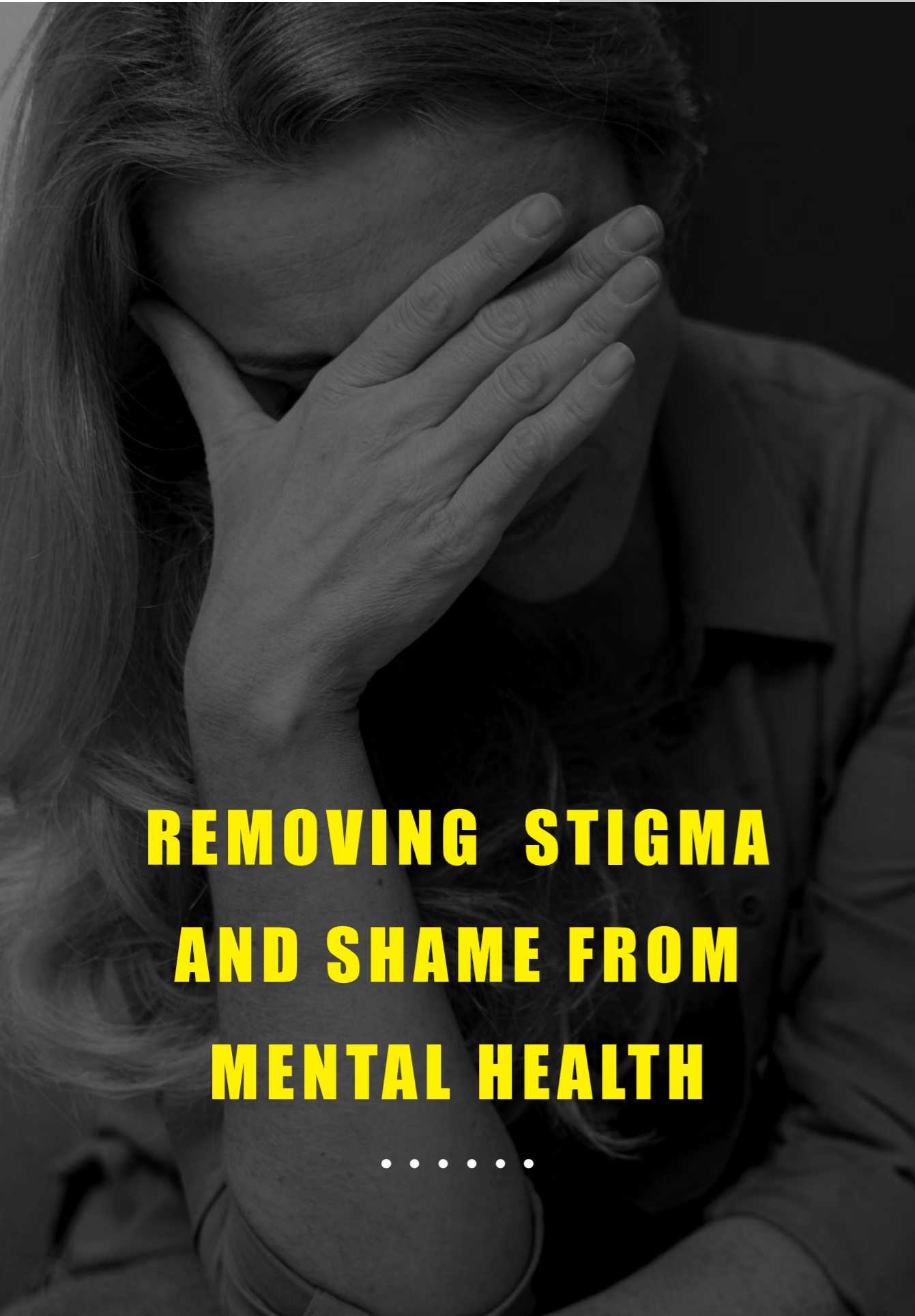


### Referring to FISS is so simple

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)



PART OF THE MARTIN JAMES FOUNDATION



REMOVING STIGMA  
AND SHAME FROM  
MENTAL HEALTH

• • • • •

W

By GARY ANDERSON

**Mental Health** is an important buzz phrase at the moment in lots of circles, so we are making a difference to the many stigmas, fears and worries that are often attached to having poor mental health. Celebrities and high profile people are beginning to share their own personal struggles with poor mental health which tends to generate a lot of publicity and can help start much needed conversations in the media. But there is still a long way to go yet. It's great that people are starting to realise how important mental health is and talking more openly about it but this is really only the beginning of the journey to better mental well-being. It is, however, a crucial step nevertheless.

For me, looking back on where I was to where I am today, I can see that my desire to become a counsellor, support others, write the successful mental well-being programme 'Safeguarding Me' for children and become an author, comes from my own story of ill mental health. Without the support of therapy myself, my life would have been lost many years ago. No exaggeration. I totally understand that there is still a stigma around seeking out therapy for many - I get that because I, too, was once a cynic - the strongest cynic out there, probably. But reflecting back on where I was and looking forward to where I am now in terms of my mental health, therapy truly helped to save my life.

Many clients who come to me have an underlying sense of shame and this includes shame about having a mental illness itself and/or shame attached to not being able to 'sort themselves out'. I know in years gone by that I was so ashamed of the state of my own mental health, I did whatever I could to hide it from others. I'd do anything to distract from it, act out to try and keep it hidden, rebel against it, cover it up using whatever means done the job. Carrying shame was exhausting and painful (to myself and others) and led to a constant stream of negative, deep rooted thoughts and behaviours, repeated like a scratched record, in my sub-conscience.

For me, it began as far back as when I was a little boy although I would not have understood anything about mental illness back then. It wasn't until I was referred to a mental health hospital to be assessed at the age of 17 that it came into my awareness and, by then,

I had already caused enough damage to myself and others. I didn't stick with the therapy that was recommended to me when I was a teenager, the shame of needing it too much to process, the stigma I attached to it overwhelming - how weak I must be to need someone else to 'sort me out'. What would other people think of me? They'd surely think I was weak, too. Starting the therapy had been because others had said I should, not because of what I thought I wanted or needed. I soon gave up and thought it hadn't worked and hadn't helped. Of course, looking back now, I just hadn't given it a chance. I thought I knew better. I didn't. It wasn't until I was in my thirties that I eventually sought out help again.

There are plenty of children out there just like me, who do not know what to do or how to do anything about it. So, who is telling them that there are many positive ways forward that are freely available to them if they are willing to take up the offer?

What is urgently needed is for young people to have the facilities and the avenue to go down if they are feeling mentally unwell. They need to know that being mentally unwell is not a weakness or something to be ashamed or embarrassed about. It's common place. But even before all of this, they need to be made aware of the many different facets that mental health presents itself as so that they can spot the signs in themselves and others. It needs to be taught and discussed in line with how we talk and discuss our physical health. If we were suffering with a common physical condition, we'd visit a doctor or buy a remedy. Do we always do the same when it is our mental health that is suffering in some way?

More often than not, young people, particularly those in the care system, come with multiple, unresolved trauma or circumstances - many of whom won't even recognise that their behaviour is an outcome of these. What supports them is you - your empathy, your acceptance of who they are and your time in recognising that they are still valued and respected even when things aren't perfect. Unwanted behaviour does not have to be accepted. Looking behind the unwanted behaviour, to the vulnerable young people themselves, is essential. This will support the building of trust and with trust comes a sense of safety. This then gives a direction and pathway for the young people to explore their mental health more openly. Like I said at the beginning, the stigma and silence around mental health awareness is slowly dissolving but there is still plenty that can be done.

Encourage them not to hide from what is happening inside their head. Teach them to recognise the signs in themselves and in those around them. Support them to open a conversation with someone they trust, or a health professional. Take time to take care for your own mental health, and encourage them to do the same. Explain that it is worth the effort to 'sort it out' and give yourself healthier mental well-being.

I know, because I did it. ♦

*Gary Anderson is a counsellor, whose passion to help others comes from his own experiences of trauma and mental health. He works with young people, and has created the 'Safeguarding Me' programmes, which give children the awareness and confidence to discuss mental health openly.*

*Email: [gary@securemindsolutions.com](mailto:gary@securemindsolutions.com)  
Website: [www.securemindsolutions.com](http://www.securemindsolutions.com)*

Experiences From Care Leavers

# Healing Trauma Through Love: Jerome's Story

**M**

y earliest memories were pretty traumatic. There were a lot of drugs and alcohol in my area, and my house was bare. We didn't have carpets and the rooms were very empty. We went into care after my mum had been attacked. She'd been raped in an alley and stabbed in the eyebrow. At nursery we were told that our Mum was ill and we wouldn't see her again. I already knew that was a lie because I saw what had happened to her, but I obviously couldn't verbalise it as a 4-year-old.

We went into a foster home where it was a completely different culture – the smells were different, the tastes were different, the environment was completely different, and the family were a different colour to us. We didn't understand what was happening because nobody really explained what was going on so we stayed quiet. When we became a bit more like our normal selves we used to jump up at the door to open it and go out onto the streets. We were used to that freedom, but the family kept bringing us back and locking the doors. Because we weren't listening they ended up beating us and locking us in the cellar. We weren't allowed to sit on the sofa, we had to sit on the floor. We wouldn't eat at the same time as the family, we'd eat afterwards and be given bowls of what looked like dog food. It wasn't nice, and it was the emotional abuse rather than the beatings that left the scars.

I began to remove the layers and started to understand that by going through all this trauma I wasn't weak but incredibly strong. It was a completely new concept to me. That's when the Topé Project began.



# Experiences From Care Leavers

In school I recognised people talking about family, but I didn't really understand what a family was. I used to do the Tracey Beaker thing, making up ideas of where I thought my family was and incorporating it into conversations. I used to tell people that my Mum was flying around the world. Lots of different people would pick me up and my friends would ask me who my Mum was. One year we were in the local newspaper - my brother, sister and I had an article written about us to see if anybody wanted to adopt us - and then it was out in the open and everyone knew we were in care.

We got moved into another home with a lady from Trinidad. She was very loud and this was where my life changed for the positive. We had somebody who genuinely cared for us, showed us love, and didn't beat us. It was very strange at first and we used to run away. We'd break glass, break all the toys, and she recognised that something wasn't right. Once she dug a bit deeper she realised that we'd been abused in our previous home. With the other family we were the Mum and Dad's job, but in this new home the whole family accepted us and we were part of it. It was really nice and natural, and a beautiful way to feel like you were loved and respected.

She took us on holiday to Trinidad and Tobago, which was amazing. It was the first time I'd ever seen clear blue water. Trinidad was lovely but Tobago was beautiful on another level - the tranquillity and calm was just so healing. I've never forgotten what it looks like; the sun coming down, being on the shore for hours just chilling and eating good food. It was magical and it made me understand that the world is bigger than where we lived. There was so much beauty, but there was also a level of poverty. The people didn't have much in terms of physical stuff, but they had a lot of spirit and they were happy. This is where I began my journey of discovery, learning about myself and about the world around me.

At the age of 13 I started to work with Barnardo's around children's rights. We campaigned for sleepovers - if you wanted to stay over at your friend's house they would have to do a police check on the family which could take up to 6 months. This means your friends know you're in care, and their life is being intruded in by police which can be really uncomfortable. We campaigned to get that changed and we did. Foster carers can now make the decision like parents would do, making a judgement call if they feel it's safe.

We were there for quite a while, but then the house got shot at. There was a lot of violence in the area and our house got mistaken for somebody else's. The shooting happened on the Friday and they moved us on Monday after school, saying it wasn't safe. This hurt a bit. It gave me a message that our lives are cared about 9-5 Monday through to Friday. These people claim they care about you and want to keep you safe, just not on the weekend. It was also done with no consideration about how I felt about my carer and the bonds we'd formed.

I went through a depressive state, going through a few months of not wanting to be here. I was 15 at the time and they moved me into another foster home but I didn't stay long. The carer didn't want me there. She was new to the job and she'd taken on me and my sister, and I heard her telling the social workers that she didn't have space for me, even though we all had our own rooms. I didn't want to be somewhere I wasn't wanted and I moved into a hostel, which was crazy. On the first day they had to stop one guy stabbing his friend. My clothes got stolen from the washing machine and it was the worst part of care because it was so unsafe. There was a lot of violence, theft, isolation, not feeling safe which was really tough. At the same time I was doing my GCSEs, and finding it difficult to



*We ran our first Christmas day in 2012 and this was the first time I'd ever cried with love.*

manage my emotions.

After a couple of months I went to another carer. She was okay, but it wasn't home. There were funny rules that I didn't understand. They had a fridge filled with lots of lovely food and I had my own which was empty. I was expected to fend for myself to help prepare me for moving into my own place at 18. Actually we need to be less independent because we need to deal with our trauma first. When you have so much change, you can start to get self-sabotaging thoughts and start thinking that everything that goes wrong in your life is your fault - or you might blame the world for your problems. When you flow in victimhood you stay a victim.

One of my friends was killed and I felt I needed answers. I needed to speak to my Mum to find meaning and understand 'why'. My carer advised me to talk to her, but not to judge her. I went to her house and she explained that without support she was alone with her trauma. I found out that she wrote poems about us - about how she cared for us and how the system had caused her so much pain - and they're beautiful.

Later that week she jumped off a roof. I was at work - I'd just started as a Participation Officer at the Children's Rights Service - and I got a call from my friend to say the road had been blocked off and I knew something had happened. I jumped on my bike and got to the scene where paramedics were pressing her chest. Time slowed down. I ran through the tape, the police tried to stop me and I asked whether I could see her out. The paramedics let me hold her head and I told her I loved her. The doctors massaged her heart and it started beating again. She was drunk, which was the one good thing about the situation because it meant her body was relaxed when she jumped so the impact didn't go straight to her brain.

**A year later I got stabbed.** I share this because it's part of my journey through care and wanting to be around people to feel part of a family. I was smart and I never liked causing trouble, but I used to hang around people who did and I'd try and stop them. This meant



*Through my Participation and Advocacy work I learned how to create a space for people to grow.*

that I got associated with certain areas and certain people, and the same people who killed my friend tried to kill me. This gave me a wake up call. My goals were trapped in my head but I never acted on them because I didn't have the confidence or the motivation. I didn't understand the blocks I'd got in place and the emotional trauma that I'd never spoken about.

**A turning point** was when my friend Topé committed suicide. He was an amazing man, but he couldn't look in the mirror and tell himself he was amazing. It was harder than having friends killed; with that you have closure because you know it was because of somebody else's hatred towards them. With suicide there's no real closure because there's always something that could have been done. I helped another friend who was suicidal and took her to an Empowerment Seminar, but it ended up helping me. I realised there was so much stuff I hadn't dealt with and this was where my journey of self-discovery started. I began to remove the layers and started to understand that by going through all this trauma I wasn't weak but incredibly strong. It was a completely new concept to me. That's when the Topé Project began.

We are a volunteer run, youth led project who help combat loneliness for care experienced young people. Each year we come together for a Christmas celebration, which can be an isolating time when you're living in independent accommodation. We ran our first Christmas day in 2012 and this was the first time I'd ever cried with love. It was so beautiful. We can't bring our friend back, but we can save many others.

We decided to create a 'how to' guide. We couldn't do this alone and we didn't want to make the event too big because with children in care there's bound to be something that happens. We gave the idea to Lemn Sissay and he's taken it far and wide. He's been doing Christmas dinners all over and it's been nice to see how it's grown nationally.

My campaigning used to be about fighting for rights and now it's about flowing in love. I realised that you don't need to fight to get people to listen; actually they

don't often listen when you're trying to fight for something. You can get noticed, but whether they hear you is another matter. I now create experiences, so instead of telling people how we feel we put them through a process so they live it. We do an exercise called Three Hearts, getting people to name a person, a place and a thing close to their heart and talk about why it's important to them. I share my three hearts and then I rip them up. I say that's what happens when you go into care. You lose all the things that are important to you. How would it feel if you lost one of those hearts? Children in care lose these consistently, and they can lose them multiple times.

Through my Participation and Advocacy work I learned how to create a space for people to grow. We delivered a service but young people owned it; they would come up with an idea and we would work with them to make it happen, applying for funding together, doing the interviews together, and delivering the work together. That's how participation should be. I then moved to work for the Mayor of London. I started in the Educational Youth Team which looks at how we can incorporate young people's voices in decisions that affect London. The Violence Reduction team spotted me bringing a group of young lads in who they call 'hard to reach'. They're not hard to reach, you just have to go out and speak to them. I got an offer from them to help with their youth action group and I've been there ever since.

**Outside of this** I've been involved in knife crime campaigns. I ran for local councillor in 2015 and came third. I started to deliver training sessions, although I consider myself a growth facilitator not a teacher. I plant seeds and people get to choose whether they want to grow them. Last year we went to Moldova and helped them set up their first care leaver service in the country. We went to the Czech Republic with JK Rowling's charity Lumos - they're all about ending child exploitation and we were doing work in orphanages which are poorly regulated in some countries. It was really interesting to get a global perspective - in the UK children go into care because of trauma and abuse. Outside of the UK many children go into care because of poverty and get abused in the system. Some orphanages have over 300 children and volunteers come and go every six months which causes disruption emotionally and it means they struggle to develop meaningful connections.

Through the Topé project we've branched out and founded the Happy Heart Company. You use senses to interrupt trauma and connect with the present, so we sell candles and other products that help people heal. A lot of my healing required different senses - smells, sounds, light, fire, earthy elements - and we're using this to help others.

Through all of this it's about learning about me too, unravelling the layers and understanding who I am. Everything I do internally starts to reflect externally. Opportunities come my way because I am opening myself up to them, rather than closing myself to them and the people around me. ♦

Please check out Jerome's website: [www.happyheartcompany.co.uk](http://www.happyheartcompany.co.uk)  
IG: @thetopeproject

## Experiences From Care Leavers

# Looking Past The File

By GETHIN JONES



**M**y name is Gethin Jones and I run a company called Unlocking Potential. The main purpose of my work is to break down the 'them and us' narrative between the professional and the client. I work within prisons, local authorities and charities. I deliver my work through inspirational talks, training and coaching, and my main focus is on how we can create Human to Human (H2H) relationships.

If you are a professional, remember this. Every morning you wake up as a human being. You then put on your professional identity, you wear your pass, go into a public office and start your day. When a client wakes up, they too wake up as a human being. They then put on then put on their identity, trauma and dysfunction and it's only then that you both meet. The thing you both have in common is that you are both human beings, and it is this connection that will support change.

I managed large teams within both adult care and children's social care. I always had staff moaning about the client. I always listened and thought 'yes you are right, but you are also wrong.' I also listened to complaints from clients (adults and children) again I thought 'yes you are right, but you are also wrong.'

I gained this perspective due to my own personal experience and this has helped me to get professionals to look past the file and to truly understand the person. I use the same concept when working with clients.

Let me tell you my story.

I always say that I was born into the system. Social care was there from the day I was born. My mum was a care leaver, a single parent and she had some learning difficulties. This meant that my home life was not great, and my mum was not able to give me the love, care and nurture I needed to develop and grow. My early years were filled with trauma, abandonment and neglect. These experiences came out in my behaviour and this was punished from a young age and made me believe that I was bad, naughty and everything was my fault. This led me to create a self-fulfilling prophecy and I acted out what people said.

I went to court for the first time when I was 11-years-old, and at the same time was given a full care order. This didn't deter me, it made me rebel more and I struggled to build relationships with adults and professionals. I viewed all these people as my enemy, and life continued to spiral out of control. I went to many children's homes which I was always running away from. I started to drink, smoke cannabis and sniff glue (it was the early 80s').

This led to a lot more appearances in court. At the age of 14 (1985), I was old enough to be locked up and two weeks after my birthday I was sent to a Detention Centre. For those

who remember this time you will know that these places were brutal. When I was there something inside of me broke and I started to live by these rules:

- I was no longer going to play your game
- The only person I could depend upon was me
- I was never going to trust another living soul

When I left the detention centre, I went to a home that had open units, secure units and education on site. I ended up in secure units at 14 and 15 and I got my second prison sentence at 15, and I call this the full stop on my childhood.

My early years led to 20 years of self-destruction, which meant I was expelled from schools and had no qualifications. I spent 8 years behind the door, I became a dependent heroin user and destroyed all my relationships. I also was not able to be the father I wanted to be to my children.

People talk about how I rehabilitated, and this is a word I struggle with. Rehabilitation means that we take something back to its former self. I don't believe I had a previous self and what I actually went through was an identity shift. I heard about a barrister once who was representing a 15-year-old in care. The judge wanted to lock him up and said he had come off the rails. The barrister said, "Your honour I hear what you are saying but what if there were no rails?"

My message to you is if you are working or looking after a child with complex behaviours what you may need to ask is: what has happened to this child to make them act in this way? A child is a child, and they respond to their environment. I always tell people it is not the system that changes people it is individuals that work within it. You are those individuals

I once heard this quote

What we see we learn

What we learn we practice

What we practice we become

But what we become is not what we were meant to be

It is us as professionals who are the ones that can change the outcomes of those that we support, and we do this through creating Human to Human relationships. ♦

*If you want to get in touch, please contact Gethin through [www.unlockingthepotential.co.uk](http://www.unlockingthepotential.co.uk). You can also follow me on Twitter @GethinUnlocks, LinkedIn – Gethin Jones Unlocking Potential, and my H2HRelationships group on Facebook.*

*What we see we learn  
What we learn we practice  
What we practice we become  
But what we become is not  
what we were meant to be*



# What TO Watch

**Stuck for something to watch on TV? Here are some great TV shows and films that we feel would be interesting to Social Workers, Care Givers and those who are involved in Fostering & Adoption. In each issue we share some highlights of programmes and films we have watched and found funny, educational, enlightening, frightening, heartbreaking and heart-warming.**

## BRITAIN'S REFUGEE CHILDREN

CHANNEL 4

**T**his documentary follows six refugee children as they adapt to new lives in South Wales, seeking sanctuary from violence and destruction at home. It explores the daily challenges that come with being a young refugee in Britain today, having to learn a new language and adapting to life in a different country.

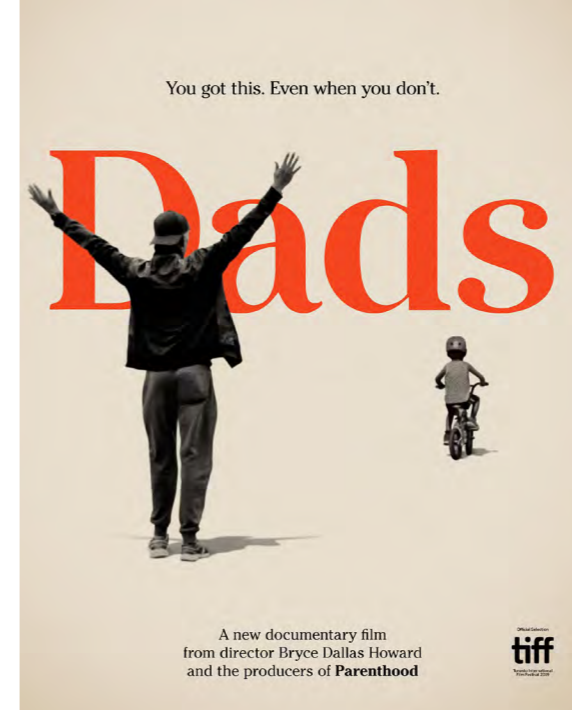
"The simple format and structure offer a heart-warming and compelling narrative that resonates in today's political environment" AIB Awards

"This documentary feels like it was made in a time before "fake news", forced jeopardy and emotional manipulation became the means by which television created impact, and it is all the better for it." The Sunday Times

"At a time when the way the Home Office treats immigrants and asylum seekers is under fresh scrutiny, here's a way to ground the debate. It's straight reporting of the stories of refugees from Syria and Somalia hoping to start a new life in Wales." Radio Times

One World Media WINNER - Refugee Reporting Awards - in 2019

Highly Commended - AIB Domestic Current Affairs - in 2018



## DADS

APPLE TV

**D**ads is a heartfelt and humorous documentary film that celebrates the joys and challenges of parenting in today's world. Featuring six extraordinary fathers from across the globe, this film offers a firsthand glimpse into the trials and tribulations of modern-day parenting through revealing interviews, rare home-movie footage, viral videos, and hilarious and thoughtful testimonials from some of Hollywood's celebrities, including Judd Apatow, Jimmy Fallon, Neil Patrick Harris, Ron Howard, Ken Jeong, Jimmy Kimmel, Hasan Minhaj, Conan O'Brien, Patton Oswalt, Will Smith and more. Making her feature directorial debut, Bryce Dallas Howard also offers an intimate look at the dads in her own family, including remarkable interviews with her late grandfather Rance, her father Ron and her brother Reed.



## BRITAIN'S CHILD DRUG RUNNERS

CHANNEL 4

**F**orget inter city estates. Children as young as 7 are being groomed to sell drugs for 'county lines' drugs gangs in towns and villages all over the UK. Trafficking offences in Oxfordshire have increased by 50% in the last two years, and this chilling documentary follows four young people trapped in this world.

"Britain's Child Drug Runners pulled no punches. Ostensibly a documentary about the notorious county lines, in reality this special Dispatches report was a tightly-argued case against the careless way we view drugs in the UK. It was impossible to watch without feeling both angry and incredibly sad." Sarah Hughes, The i

"What a dismal, depressing but vital documentary this was. They should show this in schools so that children can see the gulf between the social-media videos in which gang leaders gloat with their cash wads and bling, and the reality that some young runners, if they survive, become constipated for weeks and sometimes vomit their stools." Carol Midgley, The Times

## Training, Development & Legislation

### THE CHILDREN ACT

BBC iPlayer

**H**igh Court judge Fiona Maye is given the case of a 17-year-old Jehovah's Witness with leukemia who refuses to undergo a blood transfusion that could save his life. Her decision is to have a profound impact on both of their lives

This film poses important moral and legal questions, but it's also a personal story in which a diligent woman, who regularly faces intense criticism, has to confront several deeply troubling personal problems.



### RESPONSIBLE CHILD

BBC iPLAYER

**F**actual drama following the story of Ray, a young boy on the cusp of adolescence who finds himself standing trial for murder.

When does a child become fully responsible for their actions? Can they ever be responsible? And what if those actions include something deadly serious? Something like murder?

Ray (played by Billy Barratt) is an apparently sweet-tempered 12-year-old boy who has endured a tumultuous childhood. He may look like an angel, his lawyer muses, but he and his adult brother have both just been charged with brutally murdering their abusive step-father while he slept — and Ray will be put on trial in an adult court. Does the crime justify the trial (and potential punishment) that he faces?

That's one of the questions posed by documentary-maker Nick Holt's new factual drama Responsible Child, examining how in England and Wales, children as young as ten can be put on trial for murder. ♦



# 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.

# WHY WE NEED TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHS

How beliefs can influence our attitudes and behaviour towards children in care.

by COLIN MAJINN

**T**here is a high bar to reach for a child to end up in foster care. Local authorities have limited resources and will only take a child into care to ensure that the child is safe. By then, the child will likely have endured prolonged neglect or abuse, often leading to developmental trauma. In many cases, the child's adaptive strategies to cope, lead to labelling them as a problem child. Yet, we can see from the pie chart below in Figure 1, that 'socially unacceptable behaviour' (in red) explains only 1% of the children received into care. In other words, 'problem adults' are responsible for over 90% of care placements.

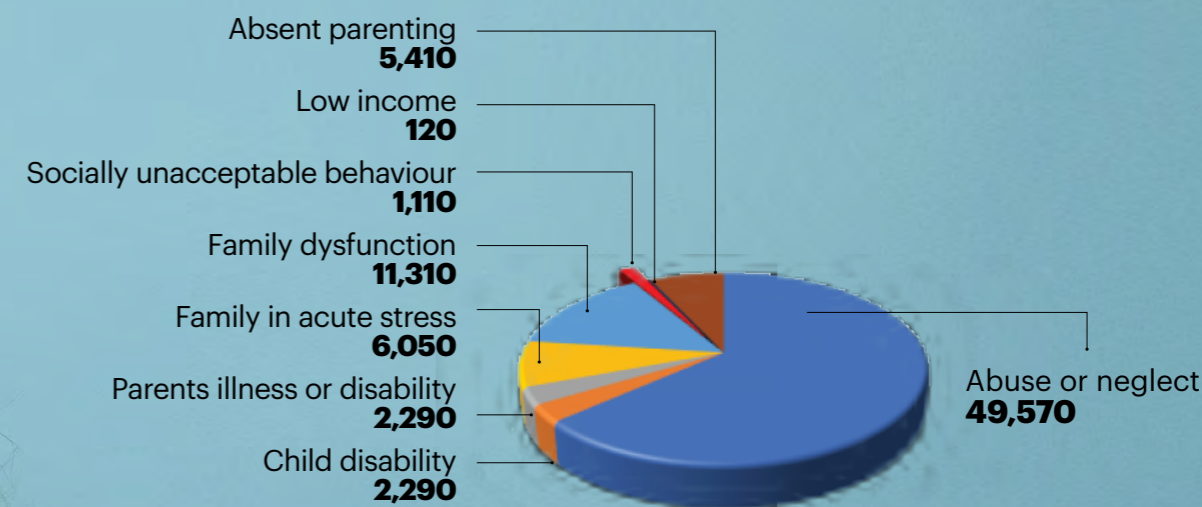
While enlightened, sensitive, kind and emotionally warm foster parents will understand that multiple traumas cause harm to any child, most government and local authority policymakers, the media, and the general public do not appear to share that insight. Indeed, the usual view is that children are resilient and can quickly bounce back. For many children, the opposite is true, as explained by Dr Bruce Perry, 'It is an ultimate irony that at the time when the human is most vulnerable to the effects of trauma – during infancy and childhood – adults generally presume the most resilience'. (Perry, 1995, p. 272).

## A triple whammy

Most children who end up in care have to deal with many emotional hurdles:

- 1) They have endured abuse and neglect instead of love and protection.
- 2) They have emotional turmoil coping with and trusting new adults and new situations.
- 3) The child's strategies to cope with the original abuse and neglect are often viewed by the adults as 'problem behaviours'.

FIGURE 1- Category of need for looked after children from March 2018 to 31 March 2019 (Total 78,150)



National Statistics: Children looked after in England including adoption: 2018 to 2019 (accessed 04/12/20)

The responsiveness and capacity for a child to adapt to change in, or form new relationships, was the starting point for Patricia Crittenden's (2015) Dynamic Maturation Model of attachment (DMM). She described how resourceful children use, develop and perfect strategies to survive in hostile situations, such as rejecting, neglectful or abusive parents.

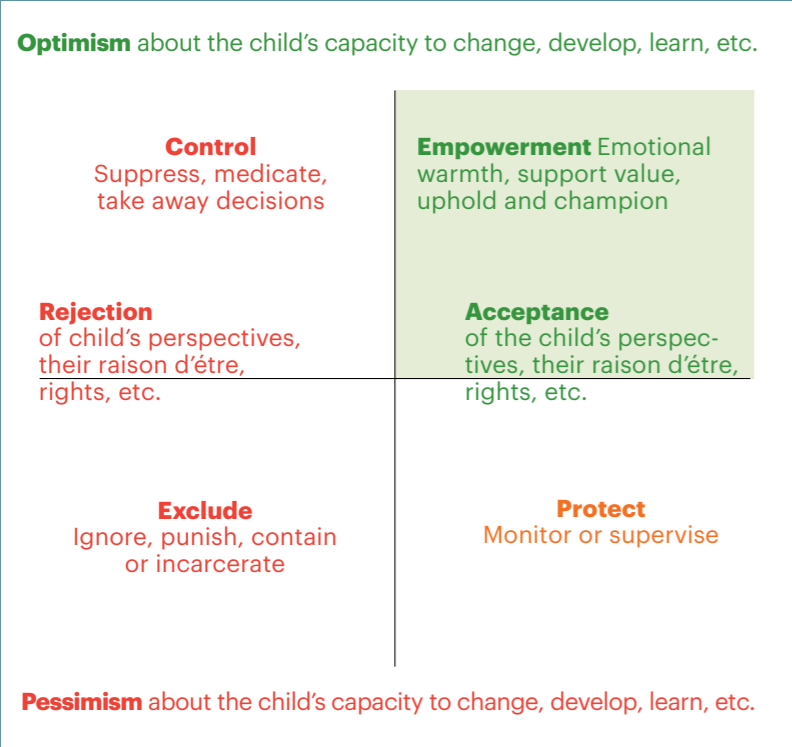
These tried and tested survival strategies have taken time and effort for the child to perfect, so an emotionally traumatised child will likely want to hold on to their tactics even when they are obstructive in their new home. Your job as a kind and informed foster parent is to keep the child safe, to spot stress, and to help the child to be calm and regulated. To build attachments which are fun, protective, strength seeking and reassuring. With time, you can teach the child new strategies which are more adaptive to their new safe and caring home, but don't view their old strategies as 'problem behaviours' to be changed, modified or taken away. They may need them again in a future unfriendly situation.

## How attitudes influence our beliefs and behaviour

Using published government statistics to show that so few children come into care because of their anti-social behaviour challenges the negative attitudes towards looked after children. When children pick up on negative attitudes, they can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

A study and diagram by Nunkoosing and Haydon-Laurelut (2013) which looked at how attitudes and beliefs influence how people behave towards disabled people, has been adapted by us and applied to the attitudes and beliefs towards children in public care. We have used the same two dimensions - Relationships, with Rejection or Acceptance and Hope with Optimism or Pessimism, to illustrate how the views of people can change their attitudes and treatment towards the children in their care. In our training workshops, we use this model (Figure 2) to demonstrate the impact that different beliefs have on the behaviour of those in the parenting role, and the likely outcomes for children (negative in red, positive in green). The green area, 'Empowerment' is the best outcome for children. Rejection leading to exclusion or control are the

FIGURE 2- **How attitudes and beliefs influence our work with children**



Adapted from Nunkoosing and Haydon-Laurelut (2013)

attitudes and beliefs to be avoided as they harm children.

**Young people's strengths**

Using that optimism about the child's capacity to change, develop and learn can open so many possibilities and opportunities. A positive relationship with hope, emotional warmth, kindness and a drive to encourage the young person to find and use their strengths will not only be empowering but will also introduce fun and excitement into the child's life.

Young people using their strengths is not just about feeling good; a study by Wood, et al. (2010), found that using personal and psychological strengths resulted in increases in well-being over time: '... people who reported greater use of their strengths developed greater levels of well-being over time. Specifically, at both three- and six-month follow-up, greater strengths use was related to greater self-esteem, vitality, and positive affect, and lower perceived stress.'

A practical method to find and use strengths is to focus on your own strengths. Although modesty might stop you from sharing these, they are usually the things that you enjoy doing most. Your strengths give you energy, and you

are likely to be successful when you use them. Using Figure 3 below, scan the list of strengths and note your strengths, then get a trusted friend or partner to add their assessment of your strengths (they are likely to find more than you did). While this exercise will help you to identify many of your strengths, it is a stepping stone to turn your strength-seeking focus onto the young person in your care. Involve them, empower and delight them with your insights (based on your direct observations).

**Learning about and helping your child to find 'Flow'**

Flow is that great feeling we get when we are doing something we love, an activity that is challenging and involves using our strengths and skills. Often referred to as being 'in the zone' as when you experience it, negative thoughts melt away and your sense of time gets lost in your concentration as you attend fully to the task in hand.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) introduced the concept of 'Flow' in his book, 'Flow:-

The Psychology of Optimal Experi-

ence' in which he says: 'Contrary to what we usually believe... the best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile' (page 3).

In the parenting role, helping a young person to use their strengths and find 'flow' is not only empowering, it also generates positive energy and replaces negative thoughts and feelings. This involves finding the balance between the young person's skills and the level of the challenge. If the challenge is above the child's skill level, it will cause the child to be anxious, below their skill level will result in boredom. This is a dynamic process, as skill improves the challenge must increase to avoid boredom. If the challenge becomes too great, anxiety increases which may lead to the young person giving up. Getting the right balance results in 'flow' leading to growth and discovery.

**Learning from your child**

Two of the many strengths that even young children possess is creativity and ability to innovate (for an enlightening insight into these phenomena, watch the TEDx talk by Alison Gopnik or read her book, Gopnik, A. (2016) 'The Gardener and the Carpenter'). Younger children may not have the skills to articulate their hypothesis-testing analysis of their detailed observations, but intelligent adaptation involves understanding new people and situations. It also includes developing and testing strategies to keep themselves safe.

So, be in no doubt that your behaviour as their foster parent will be closely studied, analysed and subjected to numerous tests as part of the attachments process. Over time, if you respond consistently with an open mind, warmth, fun, sensitivity, responsiveness and kindness, the child will learn that you are safe and will start to enjoy their time with you. When that happens, consider yourself privileged as with mutual respect, trust and empathy your brain and the child's brain produce the hormone oxytocin making each of you more responsive to the other and more aware of each other's subtle social cues. ♦

FIGURE 3- **Our collection of 36 strengths – can you add more?**

<b>Adaptable</b> (blends into new situations)	<b>Attention to detail</b> (meticulous and careful)
<b>Active listener</b> (listening with both ears and eyes)	<b>Advocate</b> (supports others, defends their rights)
<b>Balanced</b> (can see both sides)	<b>Broadminded</b> (recognising differences and similarities)
<b>Calm and unflappable</b> (keeps a cool head in stressful situations)	<b>Committed</b> (dedicated, will stay the course)
<b>Cheerful</b> (pleasant and bright)	<b>Charismatic</b> (charming and inspires devotion in others)
<b>Completer/ finisher</b> (makes sure tasks have been completed)	<b>Communicator</b> (provides clear explanations and requests)
<b>Dependable</b> (reliable)	<b>Empathetic</b> (respond to others' feelings and emotions)
<b>Goes the extra mile</b> (does more than expected)	<b>Fair-minded</b> (tries to treat people equally)
<b>Forward-thinking</b> (planning ahead)	<b>Flexible</b> (responds to change and new situations)
<b>Forgiving</b> (doesn't hold grudges)	<b>Faithful</b> (loyal, consistent and devoted)
<b>Good humoured</b> (can laugh at self)	<b>Generous</b> (ready to give more than expected)
<b>Honest</b> (truthful and does not conceal information)	<b>Hopeful</b> (believes that things can be better)
<b>Insightful</b> (provides a deeper reason)	<b>Ingenious</b> (inventive, creative, imaginative & original)
<b>Light-hearted</b> (fun-loving)	<b>Optimistic</b> (thinks positively)
<b>Practical</b> (hands-on skills and knowledge)	<b>Self-aware</b> (recognises own strengths and weaknesses)
<b>Tension breaker</b> (deals with stressful events)	<b>Tenuous</b> (hangs on for a positive outcome)
<b>Thoughtful</b> (thinks about others and other situations)	<b>Trustworthy</b> (someone you can rely upon)
<b>Understanding</b> (considers the needs and hopes of others)	<b>Willing</b> (is always prepared to help)

References:  
Crittenden, P. (2015). *Understanding children: Assessing school-aged children's self-protective attachment strategies. Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 20 (3), 241-347.  
Gopnik, A. (2016) *The Gardener and the Carpenter: What the new science of child development tell us about the relationship between parents and children*. New York, NY: Farran, Strauss and Giroux.  
National Statistics: Department for Education (2019) *Children Looked after in England (including adoption): 2018 – 2019*. London: DfE.  
Nunkoosing, K. and Haydon-Laurelut, M. (2013) 'The relationship basis of empowerment'. In: J. O'Brien & S. Duffy (eds) *The Needs for Roots*. University of Portsmouth.  
Perry, B. D. (1995) 'Childhood Trauma, the Neurobiology of Adaptation, and "Use-dependent" Development of the Brain: How "States" Become "Traits"', *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 16 (4), 271-291.  
Wood, A. M., Linley, P. K., Maltby, J., Kashdan, P. B., and Hurling, R. (2010). 'Using personal and psychological strengths leads to increases in well-being over time: a longitudinal study and the development of the case'. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 50, 15–19.

About the author:  
Colin Maginn is a director of the Pillars of Parenting ([www.pillarsofparenting.co.uk](http://www.pillarsofparenting.co.uk)) an organisation formed to improve the lives of children in public care by empowering adults in the parent role. You can find more of his articles, as well as peer-reviewed research studies and lots of interesting links and articles in their 'Library page' on their website. Colin has recently co-authored a book (with Dr Seán Cameron) *It's a privilege when a child in care is delighted it's you*. It is due to be published in early 2021.



# Training, Development & Legislation

## The First Family Should Be The Right Family

by LISA ANGUS



**W**e all know that children and young people do well when they are supported by people who demonstrate love and acceptance. My role as Lead for Learning, Development and Wellbeing for an independent foster care agency, prompted me to explore how that needed to look for individuals.

The outcomes for children and young people across our agency are good. Despite feedback from our fostering families telling us that they receive excellent support, there is always room for improvement. Across the UK, children and young people who are unable to live with their own families often experience multiple placement moves. This can be for many reasons, including placement breakdowns, all of which have a negative impact on their wellbeing and future outcomes. When placement breakdowns happen, this can have a long-term detrimental impact on fostering families, and many decide to end their fostering journey.

I work at a small not-for-profit agency based in Scotland. We pride ourselves on the therapeutic support that we provide for all members of the fostering household. We know this has a positive impact on placement stability. I wanted to explore and find out more about why this approach was successful but also understand more about why, across Scotland, children and young people found themselves having to move on.

My research, entitled 'The first family should be the right family', explored the ideal. Although this statement is ideal, knowing it supports stability, acceptance and love, we must ask whether it is realistic. There are many other factors that impact on the well-being of members of fostering families, some of which we have little control over.

Interviews with young people, foster carers, adoptive parents and professionals across Scotland provided valuable information. The research identified four key themes that are important for us to consider:

- **The importance of rigorous processes for assessment and matching**

It is important to understand the reasons and motives around why people

want to foster. Quality assessments, of both the child/young person's needs and the fostering family are essential, guiding a needs-led approach to matching. Foster carers need to feel comfortable asking for support, knowing that the support is there when needed.

- **The value of creating therapeutic environments**

Environments that support the development of trust, meeting the child's need for love, kindness and reliability, go a long way in supporting the healing process, supporting children and young people to overcome early adversity. Love is important but it is only one piece of the jigsaw. Households should be flexible, adapting as needs change. Foster carers who are emotionally available are a top priority for children and young people. Having realistic expectations and boundaries are also deemed important. Play-based interventions happening in the everyday, help children to go back and fill in the gaps. Fostering families who can receive emotional communication, and respond in a way that demonstrates understanding, are essential in restoring a child's capacity to think and generate new thinking. Young people valued relationships with others who could act as mediators between them and their fostering families.

- **What support should look like in those environments**

When placements begin, intensive support is important. Every fostering family must be treated as an individual set of circumstances with individual needs. Each one has their own experiences and strengths and we must appreciate where they are in the lifespan. Support for the birth children of foster carers is essential. The fostering families use of a shared language to tell their story was important too.

# Training, Development & Legislation

Young people talked about the power of being accepted for who they are. They also wished that they had one consistent professional in their life, someone who carried their story for them. When life transitions were due to take place, these must be well planned and supported.

Foster carers valued long-term relationships with knowledgeable professionals who they could trust. Professionals need to make time to receive emotional communication from foster carers, understand and respond, promoting a foster carers' capacity to think. To support foster carers' knowledge and understanding, igniting their desire to learn is important in creating stability. Learning needs to be with other foster carers to allow time to make sense of the learning. It is important

and affect the stability of placements too.

One of the most significant points was that relationships were a key factor in determining success in all areas.

In my setting, we continue to learn every day. This research has been useful learning, helping us to develop the excellent level of support that we offer. The small-scale nature of this research means it can only offer suggestive findings, useful observations, and insights into what may support better outcomes for children and young people. Scotland's Care Review concluded in 2020 and the vision for those who are care experienced has been set out in 'The Promise'. This vision echoes many of the findings highlighted by this study.

The recommendations from the

**Foster carers must be supported to have sufficient knowledge to feel empowered and promote access to support and equality of opportunity for children and young people.**

to provide opportunities to refresh, go back and learn again, to be provided as part of ongoing support where there is opportunity to 'wonder' about things.

## • An awareness of the impact of external factors on the stability of placements

The home environment doesn't exist in isolation. Society is made up of many factors that could influence the outcomes of children and young people. Schools and other educational settings need to become more trauma-informed and more understanding of the needs of children and young people who have experienced early adversity. Caring for the foster carers is important, supporting their wellbeing. How others view fostering often had an impact on continued relationships for both the fostering family and the child/young person. Families shared their experiences of losing friends, and sometimes extended family members, as a result of their negative perceptions. Systems and statutory processes can often complicate

study are:

- We must improve the assessment and support of everyone involved in the process and become more effective in finding ways that allow children/young people to participate in every aspect.
- Once children/young people are placed with fostering families it is important to monitor their wellbeing and act on what that assessment highlights.
- When developing plans for children/young people, we need to be aware of the impact of risk-averse cultures in creating barriers to supporting children/young people to reach their full potential.
- Every child should have an advocate who is able to work with the fostering family, to support them to get through difficult times and help their voice be heard.
- Foster carers must be supported to have sufficient knowledge to feel empowered and promote access to support and equality of opportunity for children and young people.
- We should make use of assessment

tools to assist our awareness of both strengths and vulnerabilities and reassess as needs change.

- We must be mindful that relationships are key to providing information and an understanding of situations. Relationships that are identified as being protective factors should be maintained.
- Learning for fostering families must be relevant and specific to their situations and link theory to practice.
- All educational establishments need to be trauma-informed and staff need to be aware of the needs of children and how their experiences may affect their ability to learn.
- The need to create a buddy system of support for fostering families so that they have access to less invasive support that is more natural and in keeping with family life. Buddies can be extended family, friends or other fostering families who have the knowledge they need to be able to meet the needs of the child/young person.

Looking to the future, these recommendations and 'The Promise' will guide developments within our agency. My aim is to share the study findings across the sector.

This research has illuminated, once again, the importance of relationships. It is through relationships that we begin to understand the complex interactions between children, young people, their fostering families, and their environment. Children and young people do well when they are safe and have relationships in which they feel accepted and loved.

The statement about whether the first family should be the right family is perhaps too idealistic and not reflective of the complexities of the situation. We must also be mindful that not every child is able to live with a family as a result of the trauma caused by past experiences. Relationships though can be established in many settings and, where individuals work from a premise of relational therapeutic care, the impact can be life changing. ♦

*If you would like to comment or feedback on any aspect of this information, or indeed carry on the conversation, please feel free to contact Lisa at [contact@charityworld.com](mailto:contact@charityworld.com) Lisa Angus, Lead for Learning, Development and Wellbeing  
This research was carried out as part of the MSc Child and Youth Care Studies at the University of Strathclyde.*



## 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 MEMBERSHIP**



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](https://www.fostertalk.org)

Training, Development & Legislation

# EDUCATION SECRETARY LAUNCHES REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

***n the 15th January the Government released a statement regarding their intention to conduct an independent review of children's social care:***

A wholesale independent review of children's social care will set out to radically reform the system, improving the lives of England's most vulnerable children so they experience the benefits of a stable, loving home.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson will today (Friday 15 January) launch the review which aims to raise the bar for vulnerable children across the country, delivering on a 2019 manifesto commitment that pledged to look at the care system to make sure children and young adults get the support they need.

In a speech to children's charities and sector organisations, the Education Secretary will also announce that he has appointed Josh MacAlister to lead the review.

A former teacher, Mr MacAlister founded the social work charity Frontline in 2013. He will step down from his role as Chief Executive to lead the review.

- The review will reshape how children interact with the care system, looking at the process from referral through to becoming looked after. It will address major challenges such as the increase in numbers of looked after children, the inconsistencies in children's social care practice, outcomes across the country, and the failure of the system to provide enough stable homes for children.
- Running throughout the review will be the voices and experiences of children, young people or adults who have been looked-after, or who have received help or support from a social worker. Their experiences will be considered and reflected sensitively and appropriately, with their views included in full in the work.
- **Education Secretary Gavin Williamson will say:** We have known for some time that despite the best efforts of hardworking and dedicated social workers, the children's social care system is not delivering a better quality of life



and improved outcomes for those it is designed to help.

This review will be bold, wide-ranging and will not shy away from exposing problems where they exist. Under Josh MacAlister's leadership, it will benefit from his understanding of the challenges facing the system and his experience of improving outcomes for children and young people.

It is part of the golden thread that runs through everything we are doing to level up society, especially for those who are too often forgotten or marginalised. It is going to help us raise the bar for these vulnerable children, it's going to help us improve their life prospects and most importantly, it's going to help give them the chance to achieve their potential and not be held back from the futures they deserve.

During the virtual launch event today (Friday), Josh MacAlister will launch a 'Call for Advice' to help shape the early work of the review and invite applications for an 'Experts by Experience' group to advise him on how to include the voices of people with a 'lived experience' of the children's social care system. The review will consult widely and bring in a broad range of expertise.

**CHILDREN WHO  
HAVE BEEN IN CARE  
COMPRISE 25%  
OF THE HOMELESS  
AND 24% OF  
THE PRISON  
POPULATION.**

## Chair of the Review Josh MacAlister will say:

If 2020 showed us the grit, commitment and creativity of social workers, teachers and other professionals, then 2021 is our chance to think afresh about how we support children without the safety, stability and love that many of us take for granted.

This review will listen deeply and think boldly. That is why I am recruiting for an 'Experts by Experience' Group that will direct an ambitious effort to hear the diverse experiences of children and families who have had social workers. I also need advice and challenge as we start this review, which is why I'm launching a Call for Advice.

Deep down I think many of those working in the children's social care system and certainly many of those who have experience of it, know that radical change is needed. My commitment is that this review will deliver a wide-ranging plan to extend the joy, growth and safety of childhood and the esteem, love and security of family life to all children.

The Review will address the clear need for change that supports children to achieve their potential. Children who have been in care comprise 25% of the homeless and 24% of the prison population. Over a third of care leavers (39%) are not in education, employment or training, compared to 13% of all 19-21-year-olds and just 13% progressed to Higher Education by age 19 compared to 43% of all other pupils.

In addition, statistics published today revealed the number of serious incident notifications between April and September 2020. Every death or harm of a child is tragic and we are working to understand the impact of COVID on the nature of serious incidents. This data will provide important information to the care review to help address major challenges.

The Department for Education will publish terms of reference for the review, setting out the themes and questions that will be addressed and how it will respond to the changing needs of children in care or at risk of going into care, especially given the impact of the pandemic.

These will include how to improve accountability for those responsible for children's outcomes, how to ensure children have a positive experience of care, and how to support and strengthen families – helping children stay safely with their families where possible.

The Education Secretary will also announce today that the Adoption Support Fund will continue beyond March 2021, helping new adoptive and special guardianship families overcome challenges through therapies like family support sessions, or music and play activities. Nearly 64,000 families have benefitted from the fund since it was launched in 2015.

It builds on the government's commitment to levelling up across the country, starting with children and families – particularly the most vulnerable – to reduce the impacts and costs to both the children themselves and society.

The review of children's social care builds on recent work from the Department of Education to support the most vulnerable children in society, including an investment of almost £4.4 million to extend Covid-19 response programmes run by major children's charities aimed at reaching 'hidden' children, as well as setting out plans to create a National



Centre for Family Hubs that will improve families' access to vital services across the country.

There was also confirmation in November's Spending Review of an additional £24 million investment in 2021-22 to expand capacity within secure children's homes, as well as £165 million funding for the Government's Troubled Families programme.

The Government will also respond to the consultation on unregulated provision, where the views of the sector and care-experienced young people were sought on banning the placement of children under the age of 16 in this provision and introducing national standards for provision for 16 and 17-year-olds.

*DfE enquiries*

*Central newsdesk - for journalists 020 7783 8300*

*General enquiries - for members of the public 0370 000 2288*

## Charity World Statement

Charity World welcomes the news that the Education Secretary is launching a review of children's social care.

**Charity  
World**

Whilst previous reviews have come and gone, each tainted with accusations of not going far enough in enacting real change, we hope that this one will achieve its aim to 'radically reform the system', but only if that reform genuinely makes the difference to the lives of children on the ground. Too many previous governmental reforms have resulted in restructure, change without improvement, the painting on a façade that hides the same problems underneath. This should not be about politics, or winning or losing, except if we recognise the winners and losers in this situation are squarely those children who receive, or not, the state protection they require.

Charity World implores those within this review to work looking from the bottom up. Listen to those who understand the sector and its many associated facets. Listen to the Directors, Managers, social workers, care workers, foster carers, teachers, care leavers and others. Do not review from the point of a financial position. Do not do so from the position of logistical challenge. Do not do so from the position of political advantage. Conduct the review from a position looking through the eyes of a child and young person in need and understand-

ing the human being who is impacted by every decision made. Too many decisions in the recent past are made by people too distanced to know the real implications of what they do. A radical reform requires a radical perspective. What more radical a perspective than through eyes of the child?

## The Role of Foster Carers in the Review

Charity World recognises the fundamental role foster carers play in the support and development of some of the most poorly treated members of society. This includes children who have suffered from lack of opportunity all the way through to those who have suffered the most abhorrent abuse and neglect. Many children will not reach their potential and overcome their early trauma without the dedication, support and love of foster carers.

Unfortunately, it is fair to say that many foster carers do not feel appreciated and valued in the way that they should. Despite often knowing the most about the needs of the children who have joined their family, they often feel unheard and unappreciated. They must be listened to! In many ways, foster carers are able to project the voice of the child when the child is unable to, and are arguably one of the most, if not the most important voices in Fostering within this wider review of children's social care.

## Fostering Network Statement

Josh MacAlister, Founder & CEO of Frontline, has today been appointed chair of the Review of Social Care in England. Chief executive of The Fostering Network, Kevin Williams, said: 'We look forward to working with Josh MacAlister as part of a broad, evidence-based review that is supported by the Government and funded appropriately.'

**The  
Fostering  
Network**

'We believe that any meaningful review of the care system must put fostering at its heart. Foster carers are currently holding up the weight of the care system, looking after almost three quarters of the children in care in England, often without the resources, support and recognition that their vital role warrants.'

'The Review must recognise the social context in which the care system operates and why certain children are more likely to be taken into care. As part of this, the Review must explore the societal impact of poverty, systemic inequality, structural racism and discrimination on families. In doing so, we would expect the Review to come up with a series of far-reaching recommendations to address the structural issues that have led to record numbers of children in the care system.'

'As a result of the Review we also want to see a range of issues addressed to improve recognition of and support for foster carers and the children they care for, including a national register and standards for foster care.'

'We know foster care transforms children's lives, but foster carers, and the system in which they work, are, now more than ever, under immense and increasing pressure.'

'Good foster care is reliant on a workforce that is fully supported, appreciated, trained and equipped to meet children's needs. Confident, capable foster carers are better able to advocate for the children in their care.'

'This review is a fantastic opportunity to drive positive change within the children's care system, and an opportunity that must not be missed. We look forward to working with Josh and his team and ensuring the voice of foster carers and the children they care for are at the heart of the review.'

## Daniel Croft - CEO Foster Talk

**“We** cannot afford to lose a once in a generation opportunity to help inspire such a positive change to children's lives.”

We now have the official launch of the children's social care review headed up by Frontline's ex CEO Josh MacAlister, this truly is a once in a generation opportunity to reform systems and services, to implement major challenges and inconsistencies in practice as well as outcomes for children.

## We need to play our part

I've seen multiple posts and comments in recent days questioning the appointment of Josh MacAlister and the potential outcome of this review, essentially before it has even started. I just don't think we have the luxury to sit and bemoan the situation, many of you may have seen the blog written by Martin James foundations new CEO Dr Justin Rogers about the growing use of unregulated accommodation for children in care, in answer to Anne Longfield's (the children's commissioner for England) article in the Guardian in recent weeks and ultimately this shows we are in a situation whereas we cannot dwell. We must move together as one into an environment for positive change.

## Foster carers are pivotal to this review and to positive change within the sector

Foster Carers are experts by experience, no other party has the breadth or wealth of knowledge that foster carers do in this scenario, and I implore you all to sign up to be part of the experts by experience group.

## By working together we can create a huge change for good within this review.

I'm supporting Mr MacAlister and this review by signing up to the experts by experience group, growing up in a family that fostered and later working within social care for 20 years (and counting) I want to give my view's, thoughts and ideas to push forward and give this the review the best possible chance at being able to 'Listen deeply and think boldly'.

## Contributing to the review

Children and families with past or present experience of the children's social care system can contribute by joining the Experts by experience group here. ♦

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care>  
\*applications close on 5th February 2021.

# What's Going On Spotlight

**SUSIE HILLS**

**Shining a light on role models in our community. This issue we have been joined by #teamkind founder Susie Hills, who shares her motivations, challenges, and mission to change the world through kindness.**

## Tell us a little about yourself:

**I'm nearly 50....** Not sure how that happened, those who say that time goes faster as you get older are absolutely right. I have two teenage sons and my partner has two grown up sons. This means our house is a pretty busy place. We also have a couple of dogs and six chickens! I grew up in Devon, moved away and then came back when my sons were little. My mum died two years ago and my dad died in November so its been a pretty sad couple of years, like it has for many. I am the co-founder and joint CEO of a management consultancy Halpin Partnership and I am the founder of teamkind. Teamkind is a community interest company which exists to celebrate and encourage kindness. We organised our first major event, kindfest2020 for world kindness day in 2020.

## What do you consider your greatest achievement to be?

Bringing up two compassionate young men.

## Have you faced any challenges on the way?

My oldest son has suffered from severe mental health problems. He spent a year in bed not really communicating. He expressed suicidal thoughts often and felt that the world was a dark, dark place. He still suffers from anxiety but has learnt how to manage it. Supporting a child who is so unwell is a frightening thing. I was a single parent at the time and without my mum's support I would have not coped. The lack of support for young people with mental health problems and their families is terrifying. It was incredibly lonely. I often felt that I could not cope and was really quite desperate at times.

## Who inspired you to pursue your goals, and why?

I think my drive comes from deep inside me, a sense that life is short and precious and that you should get on and do what you can to make the world a better place. I hate the idea of having regrets. I am impatient to change things that could be better. I have always felt like this. My parents split up when I was 11 and I lived alone with my mum who was incredibly unhappy. I spent a lot of time on my own thinking about how I could make things better.

## How do you stay motivated through tough times?

I make a list of all the things I could do to try and make things better even if they are tiny things then I get up and do one of them. When my son was ill it was as small a thing as get up and go and sit by his closed door and tell him that I love him and was here for him even if he didn't want to talk.

## What's your go to healthy food choice?

I am not very good at healthy eating.... I wish I was.

## How do you handle stress and pressure?

I am lucky to be pretty calm under pressure, the more serious the situation the more calm I am. I think I should have worked in some kind of crisis service. Day to day low level stress is harder, I am trying to spot when I have got too tired and need to take a break. To sit somewhere quietly with a notebook and cuppa and have a good 'think'.

## What do you do to unwind?

Watch tv, listen to music, walk the dogs, clean the house, clean the chickens out, bake cakes... I have such a wild and exciting life!



## What's the best piece of advice you've been given?

'Have an opinion'. I used to be so interested in listening to others and bringing together their points of view that I would lose sight of what I thought and believed. We need people to listen, learn and then have an opinion. As long as you are prepared to learn and adjust your views as required having an opinion is vital to changing things for the better.

## What's your next challenge and what are you hoping to achieve in the future?

I would love kindfest2021 to be even more impactful than kindfest2020. I hope we can build a platform for all those who are interested in the power of kindness. To play our part in encouraging people to be kinder to themselves, to their families, their community and to the planet. ♦

**I THINK MY DRIVE COMES FROM DEEP INSIDE ME, A SENSE THAT LIFE IS SHORT AND PRECIOUS AND THAT YOU SHOULD GET ON AND DO WHAT YOU CAN TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.**

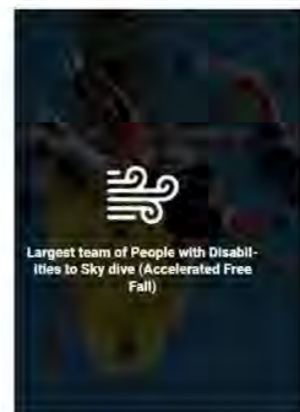
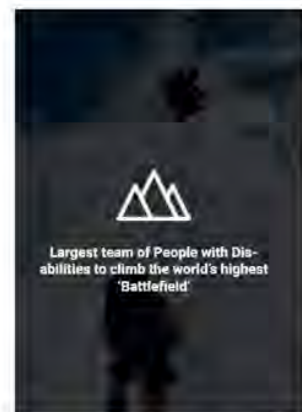
# What's Going On WHY I'VE SIGNED UP FOR A WORLD RECORD CHALLENGE

By DANIELLE BROWN



## TRIPLE WORLDRECORD

People with Disabilities will be trained in Sky Diving, Scuba Diving and Mountaineering by the former Special Forces instructors and civilian volunteers. Post training the Teams will proceed to create the Triple Elemental World Records as under:



**2020. A year that started** with so much promise and under-delivered in the most epic way possible. As physical barriers were thrown up for our protection, I looked for ways to connect with the new world we were living in.

It began with a new follower on Instagram. @claw\_global stumbled across my account on a Tuesday morning so I fired off a quick message to introduce myself and say “hello”. Within minutes they got back to me and it became clear that we had very similar beliefs around sport’s potential to inspire change.

“It’s always worth a cup of coffee,” is the advice I was given by one of my great mentors and all round good guy Ian Braid, something I like to repeat to myself especially in times when my schedule is jammed or my motivation is running low. So over my lunchtime coffee I found myself speaking to the team at CLAW Global.

By the end of the phone call I had signed myself up for a World Record attempt.

I am going to be part of the largest team of disabled people to scuba dive in the open sea.

This is just one small step in a much larger journey.



CLAW Global is bringing people together from across the globe to break three world records. The purpose is to shatter perceptions around disability by conquering the elements of land, sea and air.

It started, as many good ideas do, with a chance encounter. Special Forces operator, Major Vivek Jacob had a parachute malfunction which resulted in a spinal cord injury. While he recovered in hospital he met an Airforce officer who had been permanently paralysed in an accident. As their friendship developed the Airforce officer asked him whether he would ever be able to scuba dive, and Jacob made a promise that he would find a way to make it happen. This conversation changed the direction of his life. Jacob retired from the army shortly after this and formed a team of likeminded people with an important mission:

- To change the perceptions of disability, getting people to focus on what a human being can do rather than what they can’t
- To create employment opportunities for people with disabilities supported by suitable adapted ecosystems

Jacob and his team took no money and self-funded this cause. They travelled the length of India and trained over 100 disabled people in scuba diving, including the Airforce officer Jacob met in hospital. They also created opportunities for some of these people to gain meaningful employment. But to get the world to wake up and drive change on a much larger scale they had to think bigger. They had to act bolder. And this is where the idea of the triple world record was born.

### So why did I decide to team up with CLAW?

Sport is a powerful vehicle for change, and the world badly needs changing. Disability is still one of the most marginalised population in the world. Barriers touch all aspects of disabled people’s lives, which are propped up by grossly outdated stereotypes and misunderstanding. All that truly matters is ability - what a person can do - but the sad reality is that this often gets overlooked. Instead people focus on the wrong thing, judging disabled people by what they can’t.

A shift in perception, a change in thinking lays a solid foundation in breaking down some of these barriers. Without changing our attitudes towards and understanding of disability we cannot hope to challenge the stigma, prejudice and isolation that still thrives in the world.

The World Records are just a start, one piece in a complex jigsaw. They are a catalyst for change, a chance to see disability as it truly is.

In March I will be joining the team in the Maldives where I will receive training before heading out to the open sea. I’ve never been scuba diving in my life, so this is a big step out of my comfort zone, as is travelling in the current climate. I’m excited, and nervous, and determined to see it through.

I may be a tiny cog in a very large wheel, but it quickly gains momentum when more players join forces. We all have the capacity to make a difference and together we can change the world.

As the Editor of this magazine I will of course report back in the May Edition about how we fared! ♦



# What's Going On **BLACK LIVES MATTER & WHITE PRIVILEGE**

By **ALYSON MALACH**

If you're a parent, carer,  
grandparent or guardian:

## **DO**

- Be open to start the conversation with others who are interested and willing to learn, even if they don't understand.
- Share fact-checked resources, examples, information and statistics with others.
- Look after your mental health and take breaks where needed.
- Keep cool. Stick to the facts and show some patience.
- Pause the conversation with someone refusing to listen and suggest they continue their research.

## **DON'T**

- Make assumptions - just because someone is white, it doesn't mean they haven't faced challenges.
- Entertain heated arguments.
- Tolerate racial slurs or abuse.



### **What is BLM about?**

**B**lack Lives Matter, to me, is number one accepting there have been many injustices against the Black community based purely on the colour of their skin. This can be from being bullied at work or school, sacked from a job, not getting a job, missing out on that promotion, followed around a shop, stopped in an airport, experiencing monkey chants at a football game, only allowed to play certain roles on television as a black actor, abused online or in the street, or more fatally killed as we saw with the murder of George Floyd.

Before George Floyd's murder there have been many more fatal killings including those of Eric Garner and Trayvon Martin, and here in the UK with Stephen Lawrence and Anthony Walker. Black Lives Matter was birthed from the killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old black man murdered in the US in 2012. His murderer was acquitted, and the Black Lives Matter statement was created.

Once an individual accepts that these injustices are very much the lived experience of every single black person in society every single day, then it is time for them to help end the suffering of black people within society, and within systems such as education, the arts, social care, the police force, criminal justice, sport, and office culture to mention but a few.

### **How it affected me**

The death of George Floyd affected me in a way I never had imagined. The emotions I have been feeling since the day I saw that video and that I'm still feeling eight months later is emptiness, sadness, anger, hurt and hope.

Before this my conversations about racism, which happened nearly every week, were with a select group of people. Then suddenly more people wanted to join the conversation

or, even worse, stay silent. Many of the conversations I had were a train wreck which led to friendships ending and having to create boundaries with who I now speak to about the Black Lives Matter movement and racism, so it does not increase my feelings of anger and hurt, and lose my dream of there being hope.

I could not believe I was friends with people who were racist, ill informed, not informed at all, or continued to stay silent. To add insult to injury some even posted a black square on Instagram and have not continued with that pledge of action, or continued learning so they can help make important changes.

Although there were many painful conversations and horrendous comments online from Twitter and Facebook trolls there were some moments and conversations that came like a breath of fresh air. Some people just got it and speaking to them would infuse me with a small boost of positivity and conformation that not everyone is racist, and some people really





do have my back.

One of those friends called me in April and simply asked what she could do to help. I went through several things as I do with everyone who asks. She simply listened without minimising my experience, without challenge or gaslighting, like I had experienced with other friends.

The conversation left me feeling hopeful and grateful for our friendship. Then only last week she called to tell me she had challenged the organisation she works for to stop using the word BAME and wanted my input on an email she had written to them explaining why this word should be banned. It did not need much of my input as she had explained it in such a well-informed, articulate way which echoed the voice of the black community. After the phone call I felt relieved that some people practiced what they preached - she simply asked what she could do to help and did it. It really is that simple.

It is important to educate (or re-educate) ourselves around terminology and stand up to what offends or oppresses us. The term BAME was not chosen by us, but given to us and used to describe us. It does not take into account cultural differences, nor does it reflect how

individuals prefer to be identified. Different communities that fall under the umbrella term of BAME experience different challenges. For example, the Black community experience higher police brutality and struggle to access higher education opportunities in comparison to other ethnicities. It is important to reflect and to speak up against its continued use for convenience’s sake. Please explore this issue for yourself to better understand why BAME is not fit for purpose.

The devastation of George Floyd’s death and the affect it has had on my life, emotions and friendships has been life changing. However, out of this painful time I have gained so much clarity.

I have clarity on how much work needs to be done, how I can continue to use my voice to help individuals within the Black community, and what people I allow in my circle of friends.

Most importantly I have learnt that regardless of the backlash and the negativity surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement we can still fight for change and not be silenced.

Within our workspaces and homes we have been having our own discussions about racial inequalities. We focused on the experiences of our grandchildren and adult children, and ourselves as parents and grandparents. We wanted to know what conversations around race and inequality might look like within other households, and to ensure that children, young people, parents, grandparents, relatives and foster carers felt safe to approach the topic.

We hope that a positive outcome of our discussions will be an increase in our collective ability to better recognise and understand the experiences of our staff, family members and carers. Through understanding lived experiences of racism, we hope we can begin to explore practical ways to provide better support in our everyday practice.

As an organisation committed to promoting equality, tackling all

forms of discrimination, and fostering good relationships between diverse groups of people, we acknowledge our responsibility to work hard towards ensuring people and communities experiencing racial inequalities feel safe and hopeful in a stable environment where they are not treated any less because of the colour of their skin.

We realise and understand how emotive and sometimes difficult this conversation is for many of us. This is an ongoing conversation and one which we are encouraging staff and families to have to ensure we all work together to create a safe, hopeful, and stable environment for the children and young people in our family bubble.

minority groups have particular emotional and behavioural needs in addition to those of other children”.

However, research suggests the social care system is hugely failing to meet those needs.

Dr. Sinclair Coward, from Buckinghamshire New University, conducted the research by interviewing black and mixed heritage LACAYP as well as Black social workers, and identified a range of challenges.

According to his research, three issues need immediate attention: the first is the lack of genuinely warm relationships that Black and racially diverse children experience with foster carers and social workers, which negatively impacts their emotional well-being.

The second is the “horrible” school experiences they experience, especially their relationships with teachers who are described as being “insensitive”, “prejudicial” and “judgmental”.

Finally, there is a lack of attention paid to the cultural and ethnic back-

**WHEN YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT THE NEEDS OF BLACK AND RACIALLY DIVERSE CHILDREN, IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO JUST PROVIDE THE RIGHT FOODS, SKIN CARE OR HAIR CARE. YOU SHOULD THINK ABOUT THE ‘WHOLE’ CHILD YOU ARE CARING FOR.**

**Black Lives Matter: Black Children in the UK Care System**

Statistics taken from the Department for Education suggest that black and racially diverse children are hugely overrepresented in the care system, making up just over 16% of all looked after children and young people (LACAYP), even though people of African and Caribbean descent make up 3% of the population as a whole.

Children often enter the care system because of family breakdowns, abuse, neglect, alcoholism, domestic violence, or refugee status. Due to the difficulties of accessing culturally sensitive and inclusive services, Black and racially diverse families can experience the escalation of minor problems which cause family breakdowns. Single parenthood and an unstable home environment are likely to bring Black and racially diverse families into contact with children’s services more often than families from other groups.

Studies have shown that when children and young people enter the care system, they often contend with racial and cultural stereotypes, which in turn feeds into institutional racism.

According to the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE): "Foster children from ethnic

ground of these children and young people by the social work professionals whose job it is to care for the ‘whole’ child, and not just their physical needs.

These issues have come about because of the system’s inability to focus on the particular needs of different groups under its care and protection. This universalising of experience treats all LACAYP as homogenous, not taking into account that some groups have specific needs that need addressing.

Why is it that some foster carers – irrespective of ethnic background – fail to provide genuine care to Black children? The young people themselves suspect that foster carers are motivated more by the money available for the job than a wish to genuinely care for them. It also raises the question of how keen caregivers are to form emotional bonds and have young people feel that they belong to their substitute family?

Carers urgently need to find culturally acceptable ways to communicate warmth and affection to black LACAYP. There are many actions social workers can take in their everyday interactions with looked-after children to make a difference.

Professional policy makers and social workers don’t put enough emphasis on the emotional damage caused by separation and loss. Black children need therapeutic input from the day they go into care. Social workers, their managers and foster carers need to be trained in a way that they are constantly working in a culturally sensitive, therapeutic way. There is a lack of culturally sensitive education and lack of recognition that it is needed which is why this training is not happening.

Black and racially diverse children and young people, if they are lucky, get referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for therapy, which is another story altogether as that service is described as being in a state of ‘crisis’ and is struggling to meet the needs of the large numbers of young people now presenting with mental health issues, let alone meeting the needs of black and racially diverse children.



Having a strong sense of identity helps children and young people to grow into happy and healthy adults. Black and racially diverse children should be placed in environments where they can develop an understanding of their own culture and receive support in dealing with racism and discrimination. They need living and learning spaces where they can make sense of their history and be able to express pride in their heritage. They need to know about their history, to learn about black and racially diverse achievers and to have positive black and racially diverse role models. They should be allowed to keep ties with their families and communities, and to feel secure and comfortable in their skins and in the company of other black and racially diverse children and adults. Sadly, for many young people, the realities of living in care is damaging, stressful and can lead to lack of self-worth and value.

I understand that it is difficult for some children and young people to know about their background, and this can be even more confusing when their carer has a different ethnic background to them.

As a carer, there is much you can do to help a child become more confident and prouder of who they are. Think about the positive experiences you already have as a family to help you socialise with black and racially diverse communities. For example, in your social life, people you meet, newspapers you read, social spaces you frequent, food you eat, and films or music you like.

Think about the similarities you have with a young person before you look at the differences. Write a list of things you have in common, for example interests, emotional, psychological, physical needs, the shared interests, friendship circles, need for family and for praise, recognition, and value.

Take time to think about the language you choose to use, for example the word 'immigrant'. Think about your feelings towards the many British people who leave to make a new home in Spain or the USA, and how the word 'immigrant' relates to them.

When you are thinking about the needs of Black and racially diverse children, it is not enough to just provide the right foods, skin care or hair care. You should think about the 'whole' child you are caring for. You can do this by looking at their social and emotional needs, including self-awareness, respect, identity and taking part in community activities and cultural events.



## What is 'White Privilege'?

One of the many things 'White Privilege' means is that there are issues and topics that white carers and parents often don't have to think about, including the realities of racism. We can't control our ethnicity, but being more conscious of how racism does and does not affect the children in our care system, schools and communities helps us make things fairer for children and young people across the board.

Talking about white privilege means looking at how our own actions maintain and support racist systems and structures - regardless of intent - and that's going to be uncomfortable. Sit with that discomfort. White privilege is reinforced in all aspects of everyday life, and acknowledging, understanding, and unravelling it is a constant process of learning and changing your behaviours.

You'll likely make mistakes and that's okay. But it's important to do - it's the right thing to do. Systemic racism affects children and young people across the UK. Black Caribbean children are more likely to be

## CONCRETE STEPS

Knowing what white privilege is is only the first step - now it's time to think about what you can do to lessen or end it.

- Continue to educate yourself - unlearning takes time and dedication

- Listen to and amplify Black voices and experiences

- Teach your white friends, family, and colleagues about their privilege

- Campaign for change - sign petitions and open letters

- Confront racial injustices, even when it's uncomfortable

- Let your cash do the talking - take part in Black Pound Day and support organisations doing the work

disciplined, young carers can struggle to access support, and Black children are disproportionately likely to be arrested.

But it's crucial that we look at the flip side of this. While some people are clearly suffering because of institutional failures, this means there are others who benefit from these oppressive systems. We're asking: 'what is white privilege and how can you use your privilege for good?'

Racism is very real in the UK education, criminal justice systems, NHS, and other areas of society. It's not always as visible and obvious as physical or verbal abuse - it exists in our institutions, and it affects people from childhood to adulthood.

White privilege is the multiple social advantages, benefits and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race.

This doesn't mean that a white person hasn't worked hard for what they have, or that they haven't suffered. In reality, society was designed by, and to benefit, the small subsection of people already in power. Because of the intersectional nature of society, this means that it's incredibly likely you have experienced some form of oppression

- While white British women are paid on aver-

age £11.21 per hour, Pakistani women make £10.10.

- Black and racially diverse young carers and their families identified language barriers as one of the key reasons they're unable to access support.

- 12% of Black and racially diverse LGBT employees lost a job because of being LGBT, compared to 4% of white LGBT staff.

- In the justice system, 94% of police officers are white. There are 2,564 court judges, but only 30 are Black. The rates of prosecution and sentencing for Black people are three times higher than for white people.

- In education, 92% of teachers are white. White children see plenty of examples of people like them achieving great things in history and literature, are more likely to avoid being excluded, achieve better results at GCSE and A-Levels, and go to a Russell Group University compared to their Black or Asian peers.

- Only 1% of children's books feature leading characters from Black and racially diverse backgrounds.

- White staff are paid on average 23.1% more than Black workers with the same qualifications.

- It's likely that your manager, director, and senior officials are white.

- If you work in a FTSE 350 company, it's likely that you won't have any ethnic minority representation on your board at all.

- White people feel safer at home and in their local area - unlike 37.4% of Black people and 44.8% of Asian people. When a white person is on public transport, they probably won't experience a hate crime because of their skin colour, but they might witness one against a person who is racially diverse, because hate crimes on railway networks increased by 37% in England after Brexit.

- Ethnic background also plays a role in health and life expectancy. Black African women not only have a mortality rate four times higher than white women in the UK, they're also seven times more likely to be detained under mental health legislation in hospitals in England and Wales.

- The rates of infant mortality are also up to twice as high among Pakistani, Black Caribbean and Black African babies.

- When a white person applies for a job we can generally assume that they will be treated fairly, and their name won't mean that they won't be considered for the role - or if they get into a job, they won't have to work much harder to get recognition.

- A white person is more likely to get promoted, and less likely to face disciplinary action. When a white person interacts with institutions like the police, the private sector, or the Government, they are more likely to be treated with respect too.

These are just a few of the experiences that people and communities experiencing racial inequalities have to deal with regularly. You may have failed to notice - until now - that you don't have to deal with the same barriers.

It's important to be aware that being born with a certain skin tone affords people certain advantages in life that people of another skin colour are not afforded. By creating greater awareness and understanding we help to build a fairer and more equitable society for future generations.

It's important to do your homework, and not to expect people and communities experiencing racial inequalities to educate you on this. Asking them to explain how institutions disadvantage them and relive often traumatic, experiences can be painful and time-consuming.

Our hope for a better future for all children is the source of our inspiration. But we can't achieve this ambition if Black and racially diverse children and young people continue to be held back by systemic racism.

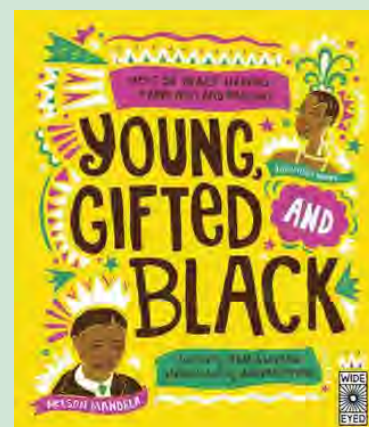
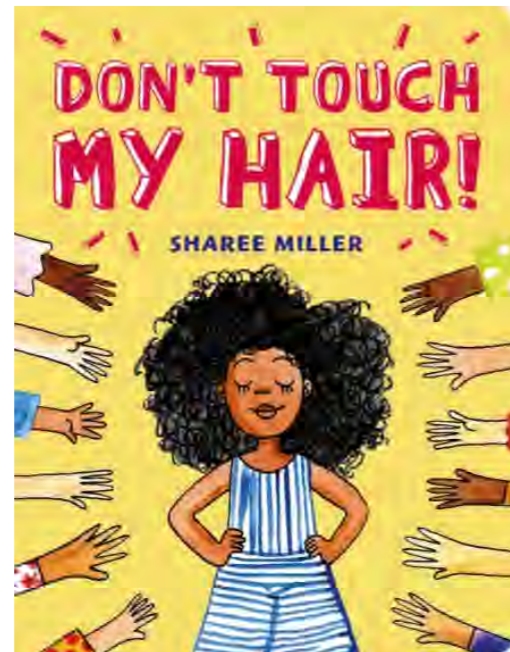
*Alyson Malach was a foster carer for 12 years. She is the Managing Director of Equality and Diversity UK which provides training and consultancy services in the social care sector, amongst others. ♦ [www.equalityanddiversity.co.uk](http://www.equalityanddiversity.co.uk)*

# What's Going On Book Corner

One of the key themes that came from the Black Lives Matter piece by Alyson Malach was the need for continuous learning around Black history and the impact of racial inequality in society. We are recommending six books by Black writers to further this education piece and better understand the experiences of the Black community.

## Don't Touch My Hair Sharee Miller

**An entertaining** picture book that teaches the importance of asking for permission first as a young girl attempts to escape the curious hands that want to touch her hair. In the street, strangers reach for her fluffy curls; and even under the sea, in the jungle, and in space, she's chased by a mermaid, monkeys, and poked by aliens...until, finally, Aria has had enough! Author-illustrator Sharee Miller takes the tradition of appreciation of black hair to a new, fresh, level as she doesn't seek to convince or remind young readers that their curls are beautiful--she simply acknowledges black beauty while telling a fun, imaginative story.

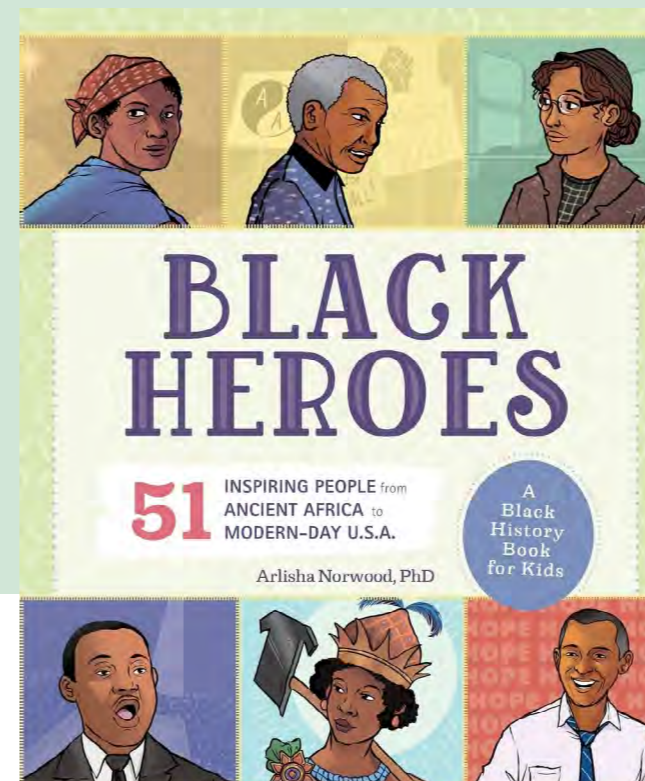


## Young, Gifted and Black Jamia Wilson

**Young Gifted** and Black: Meet 52 Black Heroes from Past and Present' by Jamia Wilson with illustrations by Andrea Pippins gets its title from the song by Nina Simone. It's colourful and creative and inspiring. In a short foreword, the author explains where the title came from and the inspiration for writing this book.

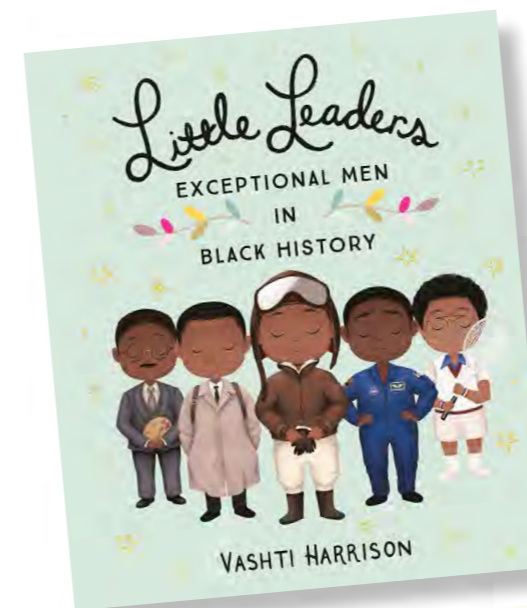
## Black Heroes Arlisha Norwood

**A Black History** Book for Kids is packed with tons of awesome biographies from Africa, the United States, and around the world. Explore the trail-blazing stories of well-known standouts like Rosa Parks and Barack Obama, and lesser-known luminaries like Rebecca Lee Crumpler, the first African American doctor, and Benjamin Banneker, an astronomer and mathematician.



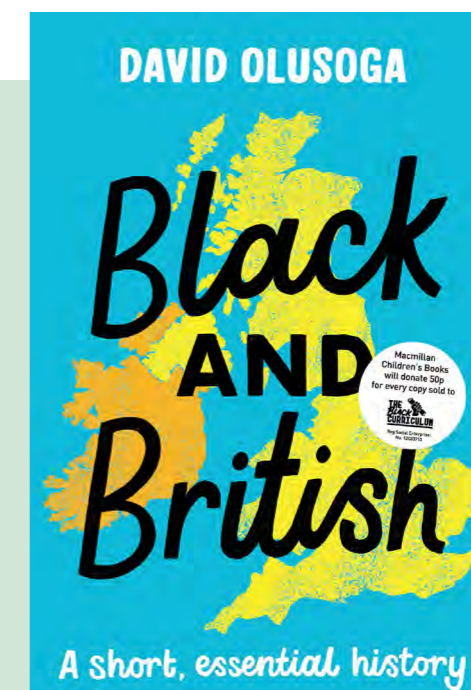
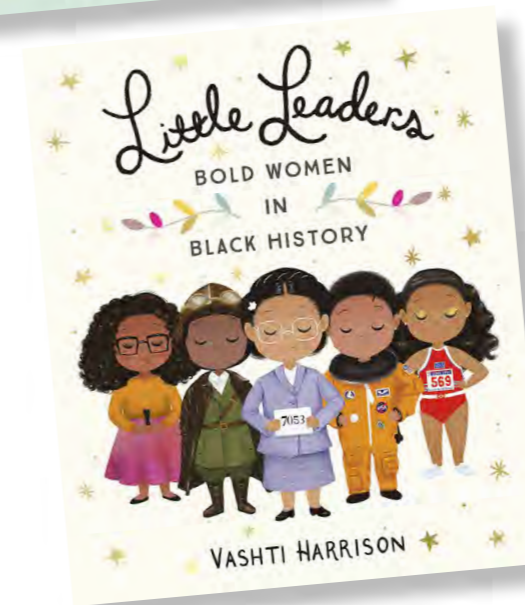
## Little Leaders, Exceptional Men in Black History Vashiti Harrison

**Learn all about** the exceptional black men who broke barriers and fought injustice to realise their dreams and make the world a better place. With Vashti Harrison's beautiful illustrations and illuminating writing, discover the stories of black men from all walks of life, including; Doctor Harold Moody, Diplomat Kofi Annan, Activist Paul Stephenson



## Little Leaders, Bold Women in Black History Vashiti Harrison

**Featuring forty trailblazing** black women in American history, Little Leaders educates and inspires as it relates true stories of breaking boundaries and achieving beyond expectations. Illuminating text paired with irresistible illustrations bring to life both iconic and lesser-known female figures of Black history such as abolitionist Sojourner Truth, pilot Bessie Coleman, chemist Alice Ball, politician Shirley Chisholm, mathematician Katherine Johnson, poet Maya Angelou, and filmmaker Julie Dash. Among these biographies, readers will find heroes, role models, and everyday women who did extraordinary things - bold women whose actions and beliefs contributed to making the world better for generations of girls and women to come. Whether they were putting pen to paper, soaring through the air or speaking up for the rights of others, the women profiled in these pages were all taking a stand against a world that didn't always accept them. The leaders in this book may be little, but they all did something big and amazing, inspiring generations to come.



## Black and British David Olusoga

**A Forgotten History** by David Olusoga. In this vital re-examination of a shared history, historian and broadcaster David Olusoga tells the rich and revealing story of the long relationship between the British Isles and the people of Africa and the Caribbean.

(Please note that we have lifted the reviews from the internet)



## Disability

# Why I Decided To Volunteer On A Foster Panel

We catch up with **Hamid Saber** who volunteers as a foster panel member. He shares his experiences of being a visually impaired person on a panel and talks about the important role that diversity plays in helping ensure children receive the best possible support.

### How did you get involved with volunteering for your local fostering panel?

**S**omebody who works for a fostering agency knew me and my experience in health and social care and they suggested I went for the role as a panel member. I met the criteria, sent my CV off and they took me on. The panel I'm part of is very diverse – we've got a member from every community which is important because we have to understand the needs of the applicants, what they are capable of taking on and their limitations so we can give a child the best match possible.

We've assessed a number of applicants for becoming foster parents. All of them have been accepted on our recommendations and have children with them now. It's great to hear the success stories. A couple came to the agency; one was from an Asian and one from an African background and they took on a child from Poland. They were from different religions, different races and they had such a good experience that the child decided to stay with them long-term until they were old enough to leave.

Volunteering for me comes from the heart. Many people helped me on my journey and I like being able to put something back.

### Can you tell us about your background story and where this enthusiasm to help others comes from?

My mother was a victim of domestic violence and we had to

### I WAS ABLE TO BRING AN AWARENESS OF THE SCOPE AND DEPTH OF WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE A DISABILITY AND THE RANGE OF DIFFERENT DISABILITIES.

flee our home. I guess that made me a bit more resilient. We faced homelessness and had to hide away from our Dad. As a family we stuck by each other and motivated each other, and we've all had levels of success despite the barriers we faced. My Mum didn't speak the language, she had no family to support her, and people thought she would lose us and wouldn't be able to cope.

As I grew older I fell into the wrong crowd and started using drugs. I was still doing really well in school, but my eyesight was getting worse. At sixteen I had a couple of accidents and when I got hit by a bus somebody pointed out to my Mum that I had a problem. I was referred to Moorfields Eye hospital who eventually diagnosed me and I was registered blind. Things got worse from there. I wasn't doing well at college anymore because I wasn't able to see, and they weren't able to give me adequate support. The materials they gave me were too small for me to see. My eyesight rapidly got much worse and I developed a condition called Nystagmus which causes wobbly eyes. All the words on the pages wobbled around vigorously, which gave me headaches and demotivated me from studying. I ended up flopping from college.

A guidance councillor reached out to me and told me about this residential college for people with visual impairments. She contacted the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and a lady came out to see me and said they could help me. I went down to Kent and met another visually impaired person for the first time. This blind girl made a three-course meal, and made a cup of tea and carried it to the table without spilling it. This gave me hope that I could have a future despite my visual impairment.

I left the bad crowd behind and started a new life at college. I wanted to give back to the community. The people who reached out and helped me discover myself and these opportunities made me want to help others so I studied Health and Social Care and Early Years. After this I got into counselling and became a support worker, and I've worked at a residential care home for blind people. I taught myself to read English braille and I travelled overseas where I learned how to read Arabic in braille. When I came home I taught other people how to read Arabic braille on a voluntary basis. I've also run youth clubs and delivered motivational speeches.

It hasn't always been easy. In between this I worked in a factory making toiletries. After the 7/7 bombings I was fired because during my breaks I used to pray. In my interview I asked whether this was okay and I was told that I could do what I wanted with my time in my breaks. My supervisor was really happy with me and gave me my own production line to work on, but when she was on annual leave I got pulled in a meeting and told that the company didn't like me praying. I was then dismissed from my job. I was advised I could take them to tribunal, but I didn't want to work at a place with that kind of resentment towards me. I got depression after this and it was hard – that's why I decided to travel and learn Arabic and get involved with other disability organisations and voluntary opportunities.

### How important do you think it is for someone on a fostering panel to have lived experience of disability?

It's definitely important. We had an applicant who was considering taking on a child with a disability and I was the only one on the panel who was able to question her on whether she fully understood the needs of a disabled child, what measures would she put in place in order to support that child, what levels of disability, what kinds of disability. Are we talking about sensory issues, learning difficulties, or physical disabilities? The applicant was a little taken aback as she hadn't considered all of this. I was able to bring an awareness of the scope and depth of what it means to have a disability and the range of different disabilities. Others on the panel said they hadn't thought about that.

### How have you found volunteering on a panel with a visual impairment?

It was difficult in the beginning and changes had to be made for me. Last year before COVID we went for training sessions and they had a PowerPoint presentation. I remember the trainer saying "I want you to look at this list, have a think about it and then we can have a discussion about it." I had made him aware of my blindness at the beginning, but I had to keep reminding people that I need things reading out to me.

Things have got much better since then – I get information sent to me in text format not .pdf so my screen reader can access it. It took a little while for me to adapt to the Form F – it's a massive form and I've got to rely on audio to assess it. I get one device to read it out whilst I make notes on another device which helps me to section it out. I've also done some courses and training on MS Word so I can use it a bit more efficiently.

### What do you enjoy most about being on a panel?

The most enjoyable thing is getting to share my knowledge and experiences, and I benefit from the knowledge and experiences of the others on the panel. I feel happy that I can contribute and play an active part in the decision-making.

### What is the most rewarding part of it?

We as a panel are trying our best to ensure that children and young people are given the same choices and opportunities of having a good life in a safe environment, along with love and care just as we would give our own children those rights. Knowing that we are helping to do this is very rewarding.

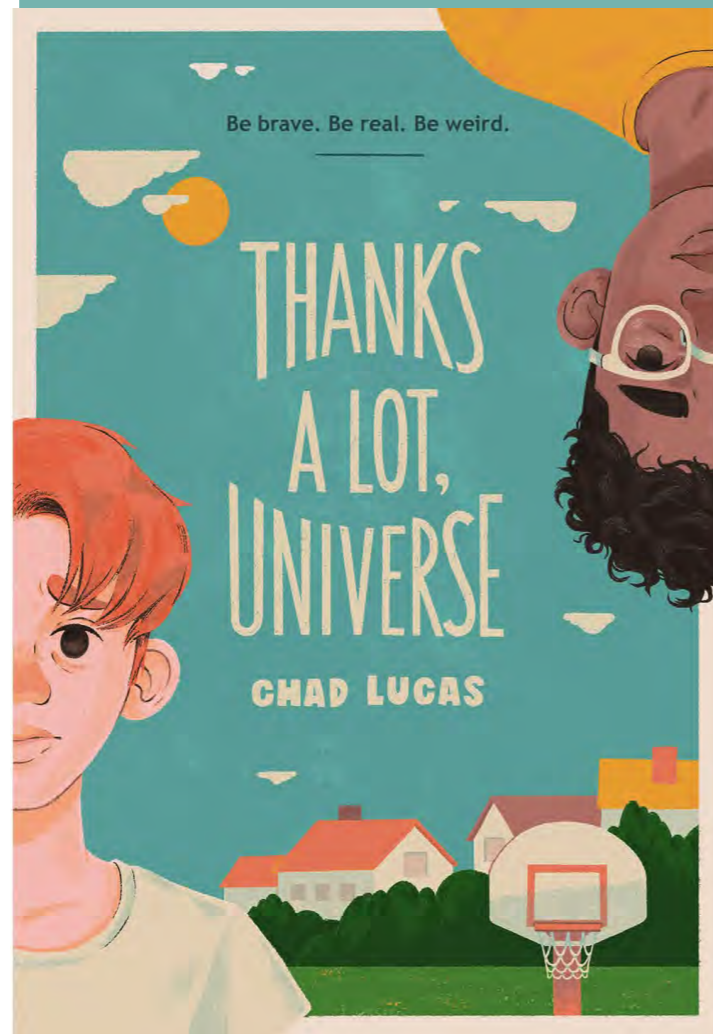
### How do you think we can encourage more disabled panellists and foster carers?

Creating more awareness by advertising disabled people sharing their experiences as I am doing here, and making it more visual and audible. We need to address the need for people to step up and show that our disability does not hinder us from being productive members of society especially when it will make somebody's life better. ♦

# Education FINDING YOURSELF IN THE STORY

## Why Representation Matters In Children's Books.

By CHAD LUCAS



**A**s a children's author with a debut middle grade novel, *Thanks a Lot, Universe*, coming to bookstores in May, I've celebrated lots of highlights on the path to publication. But none stands out more than the first time I saw my book's cover.

My two main characters grace the cover: Brian, an anxious boy from a loving but struggling family who spends much of the story in foster care; and his friend Ezra, a biracial boy who's harbouring a secret crush on Brian.

I love how cover artist Nick Blanchard illustrated both boys. But I sat and stared at Ezra for a while, taking him in: Brown skin. Curly hair. Glasses. That's how I wrote him, and pictured him in my mind, but seeing him in colour meant more to me than I realized.

He looks a lot like me when I was his age.

**Children's books were eight times more likely to feature an animal as a main character than a child of colour.**

I read voraciously as a child, and I returned to my favourites repeatedly: *The Hardy Boys*, *Encyclopedia Brown*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the books of Judy Blume and Gordon Korman. I daydreamed myself into their worlds, solving mysteries and having adventures. But I didn't own any books with kids like me on the cover. And as much as I loved escaping to fictional worlds, in retrospect I would have loved to read about more characters whose lives were like mine.

Now that I'm a father of four, and an adoptive parent of an autistic child, I'm glad it's slightly easier to find books that reflect my family's experience. Initiatives like *We Need Diverse Books* have helped shift the landscape. But there's still a long way to go.

A 2020 survey from the National Literacy Trust found that a third of UK children don't see themselves in what they read. That number increases to 46 per cent for Black kids, and 44.3 per cent for non-binary kids. Kids from lower-income families also feel underrepresented (37.3 per cent).

Another study found that only five per cent of children's books in the UK published in 2019 featured a main character who was Black, Asian or minority ethnic—an improvement over a paltry one per cent in 2017, but still a stark figure. Children's books were eight times more likely to feature an animal as a main character than a child of colour.

The landscape is similar in North American publishing. A 2018 study on diversity in children's books found more books published with animals or objects as main characters (27 per cent) than all ethnic minorities combined (23 per cent). It's still easier for Black children to find books about tigers or robots than characters who look like them.

Unfortunately, the same kids who are underrepresented in books are often overrepresented in the care system. In Canada, where I live, more than half of kids in care are Indigenous, even though they make up less than eight per cent of the population.

Black children are also disproportionately represented in Canadian care. And in the UK, government data from 2019 show that Black children are more likely to be in care, yet less likely to be adopted, than white children.

It matters that these kids—and all kids—get to see themselves reflected in movies and books. Fiction can build empathy and expand imaginations. Good books can help kids who are struggling feel less alone when they read about characters in similar situations. Reluctant readers are often more likely to stick with books if they relate to the characters. And good representation can help kids dream of bigger and brighter futures for themselves and the world around them.

I started writing my own stories when I was still a kid. But as strange as it may sound, it took years before I gave myself permission to write a queer biracial character like Ezra—and like me. I didn't read about kids like us, so I didn't assume I could write about them. But that's changing.

I hope kids who are still figuring out where they fit might pick up *Thanks a Lot, Universe* and connect with Brian and Ezra. I hope kids who are or have been in care might be reassured that their stories matter and deserve to be told. Who knows, maybe it will inspire a young reader to write their own story someday.

But beyond just seeing themselves on the page, I hope readers come away with a spark of hope. There are heavy topics in my book, but lots of humour and joy too. That's

**Kids of all ethnicities, family situations, backgrounds, and abilities deserve to see themselves in a full range of stories: exploring their worlds, practising magic, foiling dastardly villains—or conquering even more frightening challenges, like their first crush.**

on purpose.

When marginalized kids do show up in children's books, sometimes we've done them the disservice of reducing them to "issues." In the award-winning graphic novel *New Kid*, main character Jordan bristles at a book being promoted at his school called *The Mean Streets of South Uptown* – author Jerry Craft's clever dig at how "acclaimed" books about Black characters often dwell on oppression, poverty and trauma.

Good representation in fiction requires showing more than the struggle. Kids of all ethnicities, family situations, backgrounds, and abilities deserve to see themselves in a full range of stories: exploring their worlds, practising magic, foiling dastardly villains—or conquering even more frightening challenges, like their first crush.

For families and professionals in the care system looking to provide children with support and a sense of belonging, helping them find inclusive books is one way to make a difference. It may seem small, but for the right kid at the right time, the right story can mean the world. ♦

*Chad Lucas has been in love with words since he attempted his first novel on a typewriter in the sixth grade. He has worked as a newspaper reporter, communications advisor, freelance writer, part-time journalism instructor, and parenting columnist. A proud descendant of the historic African Nova Scotian community of Lucasville, he lives with his family in Nova Scotia. In his spare time, he enjoys coaching basketball, and he's rarely far from a cup of tea. His debut middle-grade novel THANKS A LOT, UNIVERSE (Amulet Books/Abrams Kids) releases in May 2021.*

Sources:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/dec/02/third-of-uk-children-do-not-see-themselves-reflected-in-books-national-literary-trust-survey>  
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/nov/11/childrens-books-eight-times-as-likely-to-feature-animal-main-characters-than-bame-people>  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/diversity-kids-books-statistics\\_ca\\_5d0bb0f8e4b0859fc3db38c3](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/diversity-kids-books-statistics_ca_5d0bb0f8e4b0859fc3db38c3)  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/black-indigenous-children-child-welfare-ontario-report-1.4616956>  
<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/health/social-care/adopted-and-looked-after-children/latest#by-ethnicity-looked-after-and-adopted-children>



# Education

# Shared Reading Promotes Secure Attachments

*We caught up with Anish Harrison, the Swindon Hub Manager at the National Literacy Trust. Anish has run a number of training programmes and events for foster families to support the development of both literacy skills and secure attachments.*

**M**y background is in early years, then in social work, before I started working in libraries and became a chartered librarian. Going to libraries and getting into the research on how books and reading for pleasure can support children and young people with their health and well-being created a fantastic synergy when I moved to the National Literacy Trust and started working as the Swindon Hub Manager.

There's a wealth of research to show that shared reading promotes bonding and secure attachments. It's something that the National Literacy Trust and the Bookstart programme promote, and we try to get parents reading from the word go. This isn't just for a child's early literacy skills, but because it creates that emotional support and well-being that parents, and carers, and the child need. Reading for pleasure as a way to promote bonding and secure attachments is even more important than the literacy side of things. Without that, children aren't as ready to go into that academic sphere.

There are some fantastic pieces of international research which shows that reading can support disruptive behaviours, as well as supporting the parent-child or carer-child dynamic. Bookstart have recently done a piece of research focusing on foster families and reading for pleasure, and found that it really supported the bonding process. What came out of this research is that foster carers need a bit more support around how to access books, what books to access, and some upskilling around shared reading for both older and younger children.

I've focused on this and produced a training package for foster carers in Swindon around how reading for pleasure supports children and young people and linking them up with services like the library service. I also recommend books that focus on the read-

ing for pleasure aspect, but also focuses on things like emotional well-being, dealing with anxiety, dealing with difficult issues, talking around issues. There are some fantastic books, including picture books, that deal with how to discuss sensitive issues with children, and can be very helpful resources for foster families.

Alongside the training I run an annual summer story session with families, as well as putting on things for older children. We work with the library service on bringing augmented reality books in, get story tellers in, get Lego out to develop fine motor skills, and have things that encourage early literacy. We have an annual celebration with our foster families as well. It's been a bit more difficult this year for obvious reasons, but we managed to do some online story telling sessions.

## Practical Advice For Accessing Reading Materials

Go to your local library. I know it's more difficult at the moment, but a lot of library services have an online offer and are making it easier to join. There have been an awful lot of online author events and the National Literacy Trust run a weekly story and rhyme session. In many areas library services are still running click and collect schemes so you can see if you can access books and stories this way. In more normal times, a lot of libraries do a special foster carer card so you can access more books if you need to. There will

be different offers depending on the library, but many run weekly story and rhyme sessions which are absolutely free and a great way to access peer support. If you're feeling a bit uncomfortable about the stories and singing you can get some peer training in a very nice, relaxed atmosphere.

There is also some fantastic resources on the National Literacy Trust, which again are free for all families: [wordsforlife.org.uk](http://wordsforlife.org.uk)

## Supporting Reluctant Readers

The National Literacy Trust is very much research based and we look at how we reengage with reluctant readers. Audio books are a fantastic resource; they are great for health and well-being, and for low literacy levels. Via the National Literacy Trust site you can access Audible for free. Gaming is another great method. Obviously, they have to be age appropriate, but a lot of authors go into gaming now and there are some great stories that run alongside games. My son loves Minecraft, so as well as the games he will start looking at the books. Augmented reality books are very popular – you put your tablet over the pages and it brings out characters from the book in 3D. Sport can also engage children and young people in reading. At the minute Marcus Rashford is spear-heading this which is fantastic. The National Literacy Trust runs specific sports and literacy programmes because we know it's a great way to engage reluctant readers, and we work with the Premier League and Premier Stars. Locally we work with the Ice Hockey team in Swindon.

Reading for pleasure should be the basis for it – that's the intrinsic motivator for why we read and write. Psychology studies have shown that this motivates children far more than extrinsic motivators like rewards. We have to remember that 1 in 11 children in the UK still do not own a book of their own, so books might be a very new thing for them – or they might have had bad experiences. We can be put off books by those experiences, and so trying to introduce things gently and slowly, and working out their interests is definitely the way to go. There are some brilliant ways to read and access stories and we've found this approach works particularly well for reluctant readers and boys.

## Support From The National Literacy Trust

The National Literacy Trust has set up hubs across the country to tackle low literacy levels. This means we can respond locally to local needs and during COVID we've been giving out books and resources. Not everybody has access to a computer or a laptop, which is something we're hearing more and more about at the moment. The National Literacy Trust are trying to respond by giving physical resources for families.

The Words For Life resource is a good starter for ten. It's split by age category and has got videos alongside the text. If you want additional support have a look at the National Literacy Trust website – there are a list of hubs and the hub managers are very approachable. Most of the local hubs have a Facebook page which promotes their local activities and offers. ♦

For live story times and other talks, visit the National Literacy Trust's Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/nationalliteracytrust](http://www.facebook.com/nationalliteracytrust)  
Websites: [wordsforlife.org.uk](http://wordsforlife.org.uk) & [literacytrust.org.uk](http://literacytrust.org.uk)

## Community Questions & Answers

# Funniest Moment as a Foster Carer

### Helen

My mother in law walked in with a stack of gift cards and said "how many kiddos do you have today?" and counted out 8 gift cards.



### Monique

One of my foster children once asked me: "Mum, what is your job?", to which I replied: "I am a foster carer." "Oh,"... was his response... "I didn't know that." LOL. I guess he was truly feeling part of the family!!!

### Janet

*On a day out to a local National Trust property we were taking part in a magic show and the magician asked for our names. One of our children shouted out 'We're the foster family' and so, in the blink of an eye, we became Mr & Mrs Foster!*

### Laura

"I can't keep track of your revolving door of kids, so here are a bunch of presents without name tags. Just give them to whoever needs one." My Aunt is adorable.

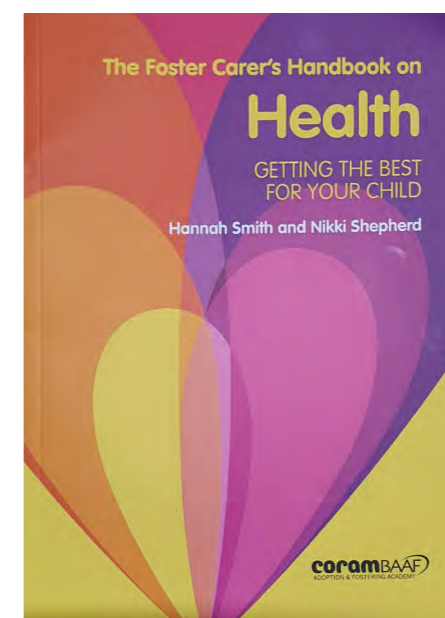
### Alex

*Our foster baby (6 months old) had more gifts than our daughters. Everyone got him extra in case someone else forgot him. I had to put stuff up for his birthday.*

### Barbara

**Our little foster boy hung his 'ornamental' underpants on the tree this Xmas only to be discovered when I took tree down.**

# The Foster Carer's Handbook on Health



**"A comprehensive step by step guide designed to support foster carers with all aspects of the child's health."**

Health care is important for all children and young people, and for their parents or carers. But fostered children can experience extra health challenges. Children frequently enter the care system with a worse level of health than others, in part due to the impact of early abuse or neglect. Evidence suggests that they often experience common health risks to a higher degree than their peers. They may also have higher rates of disabilities or mental health needs.

As a foster carer, you have a vital role in supporting the health of the children in your care. But how best can you do this? What do you need to know about fostered children's specific health needs, and how to manage them? How can you help children to understand their own health, and encourage them to live healthier lives, now and in the future? This handbook will support you to navigate through the health service, to ensure that children's needs are met, and to be a role model for their health choices. It also provides advice on self-care, to help you ensure that you safeguard your own health in this demanding role.

### WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS BOOK

This straightforward guide includes information and advice on:

- The particular health needs of looked after children and young people
- Registering children with a GP, dentist and optician
- Statutory health assessments
- Delegated authority and parental responsibility
- Record-keeping and confidentiality
- Health needs surrounding issues such as bed wetting, and difficulties with food or sleep
- Emotional and mental health
- Sexual health and relationships
- Use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs

AVAILABLE AT CORAM BAAF:

<https://corambaaf.org.uk/books/foster-carers-handbook-health> and all other major retailers.



## 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



[www.charityworld.com](http://www.charityworld.com)



[info@charityworld.com](mailto:info@charityworld.com)