



The  
Fostering  
Network



# State of the Nation's Foster Care

Impact Report 2020



# Foreword

Our State of the Nation's Foster Care survey is the largest survey of foster carers in the UK. The Fostering Network conduct this vital piece of research every three years to make foster carers' voices heard, use the evidence gathered to influence and track change at national and local levels, and to raise the profile of fostering.

The latest State of the Nation report was published in February 2019. The report was based on survey responses from 4,037 foster carers – the largest number of respondents to date – which provided us with a unique insight into the issues facing foster carers at the time. The survey covered key practice and workforce issues such as training and support for carers and status and authority of the workforce.

The Fostering Network has used the report's findings to set their organisational policy, campaigns and practice priorities. We have worked with key stakeholders to advocate for the report's recommendations to be implemented in all four countries of the UK, with the ultimate aim of ensuring all fostered children are given the best possible care.

In this impact report we list the positive changes that have happened in the world of fostering since the publication of the State of the Nation 2019 report to the end of 2020. We also highlight some aspects of fostering where vital change is still to happen.

Over the years our State of the Nation survey has become recognised as the most comprehensive insight into foster carers' views of fostering in the UK. This report clearly demonstrates the impact the survey findings have on policy and practice change.

It is vital that our State of the Nation survey acts as a bridge between foster carers and local and national decision makers in order to continue to drive forward improvements in foster care that will benefit children and young people.

**Kevin Williams, Chief Executive**

# 1. Status and authority

Then<sup>1</sup> → Now<sup>2</sup>

**32 per cent**  
of foster carers felt that children's social workers did not treat them as an equal

**29 per cent**  
of foster carers feel that children's social workers do not treat them as an equal

**62 per cent**  
of long-term foster carers felt that they were usually or always allowed to make appropriate decisions



**79 per cent**  
of long-term foster carers feel that they are usually or always allowed to make appropriate decisions

**Summary:**

- Year on year, foster carers report not being treated as equal members by the whole team around the child. This needs to change.
- While we have seen a positive growth in foster carers' ability to make day-to-day decisions about the child, important work is yet to be done to ensure greater consistency.

# 2. Training and support

Then → Now

**46 per cent**  
of foster carers had an agreed annual training plan in place



**59 per cent**  
of foster carers have an agreed annual training plan in place

**27 per cent**  
of foster carers described short break support as excellent or good

**37 per cent**  
of foster carers describe short break support as excellent or good

**36 per cent**  
of foster carers described out of hours support as excellent or good

**37 per cent**  
of foster carers describe out of hours support as excellent or good

**Summary:**

- Overall, we have seen some positive change but work still needs to be done.
- We are pleased to see a more structured approach developing around training, but more needs to be done to improve the complete package of support for foster carers.

<sup>1</sup> According to the 2,530 foster carer respondents to our State of the Nation 2016 survey. [Read the full report here.](#)

<sup>2</sup> According to the 4,037 foster carer respondents to our State of the Nation 2019 survey. [Read the full report here.](#)

### 3. Post-18

Then → Now

**Only 25 per cent** of care leavers aged 19 to 20 remained living with their former foster carers in England<sup>3 4</sup>

Still, across the UK, **only 26 per cent** of care leavers aged 19 and 20 remain with their former foster carers<sup>5</sup>

**Summary:**

- Too many young people across the UK are missing out on the opportunity to stay with their foster family until age 21.

### 4. Maintaining relationships

Then → Now

**40 per cent** of foster carers always or usually keep connected with a former foster child

**45 per cent** of foster carers always or usually keep connected with a former foster child

**Summary:**

- These statistics reveal a prevailing system that does not fully value children's relationships with those significant to them.

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education Children looked after in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Comparable statistics were not available for the rest of the UK in 2016.

<sup>5</sup> This is an average of the numbers provided by the devolved UK governments for the year 2018/19.

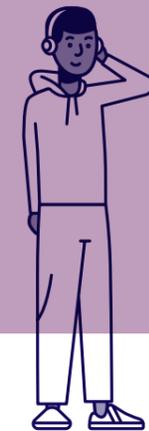
### 5. Remuneration

Then → Now

**In Scotland** there was no national minimum foster care allowance

**In Scotland** there is still no national minimum foster care allowance

**42 per cent** of foster carers felt that their allowance met the full cost of looking after a child



**41 per cent** of foster carers feel that their allowance meets the full cost of looking after a child

**Summary:**

- There is still no national minimum fostering allowance in Scotland even though it is four years since the Scottish National Party's (SNP) Manifesto promise – The Fostering Network is campaigning to change this!
- The majority of foster carers continue to feel that allowances do not reflect the true cost of looking after a child.

# Feeling recognised and supported



## 1. Status and authority

The findings of the State of the Nation survey have provided us with a strong evidence base to consistently raise the issue of foster carer status and authority at a national level by responding to consultations across the UK.

### For example:

- in our Independent Care Review Scotland submission,
- and our various submissions on the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people across the UK.

### As a result:

- We were members of Scotland's Independent Care Review's working groups. We now look forward to being actively involved in the planning and implementation of The Promise, published in February 2020.
- Foster carers' value and importance in the team around the child was noted in the Department for Education in England's Fostering Better Outcomes report: 'It is imperative that foster [carers] are treated properly to reflect their importance in the system. Foster [carers] need to be respected and valued.'
- Through presenting State of the Nation's findings widely across the UK we have promoted the foster carer role to social workers, national regulators and other professionals in the children's social care sector.



**What matters most to children and young people is that they feel loved, cared for and supported through all the challenges they may face. I can see clearly that meeting these needs are what foster carers do best.**

Minister for Children and Young People in Scotland



### Foster Carers' Charter

- We re-launched our Foster Carers' Charter in 2019. The Foster Carers' Charter represents a commitment on behalf of the placing authority in its role as the corporate parent, the fostering service and the foster carer to work in partnership in the best interests of the children for whom they care.
- Since its launch, 56 fostering services have signed up across England and Wales. If you need support to implement the charter or want to get your fostering service added to the list of signatories on our website, please email [campaigns@fostering.net](mailto:campaigns@fostering.net).
- We have also developed a [checklist](#) for fostering services and local authorities to use to assess how effectively their charter has been implemented and to support improvements.

## 2. Training and support

We have seen a positive increase (of 13 per cent) in the number of foster carers who now have an agreed annual training plan across the UK.

In Wales, as part of the National Fostering Framework, all local authority foster carers should now have an agreed annual training plan. Through working with Welsh Government and colleagues from across the fostering sector we have effectively been able to address some of the key challenges that were threatening to undermine the delivery of fostering in Wales.

Foster carers were calling for more specialist training to support them in their role. The Fostering Network is working towards making more specialist training available across the UK, including: PACE (a set of principles based around playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) informed parenting, the role of the supervising social worker, safer caring and attachment focused parenting.

The Independent Care Review in Scotland echoed our view that foster carers should have peer support. In addition, it states a need to rethink learning and development in Scotland to create a well-supported fostering workforce.

Foster care associations, and other representative groups, give foster carers a voice within their fostering service. Often, they also provide vital peer-support and create a community of foster carers. The Fostering Network has helped support over 30 foster care associations. If you would like to set one up in your area please contact [campaigns@fostering.net](mailto:campaigns@fostering.net).



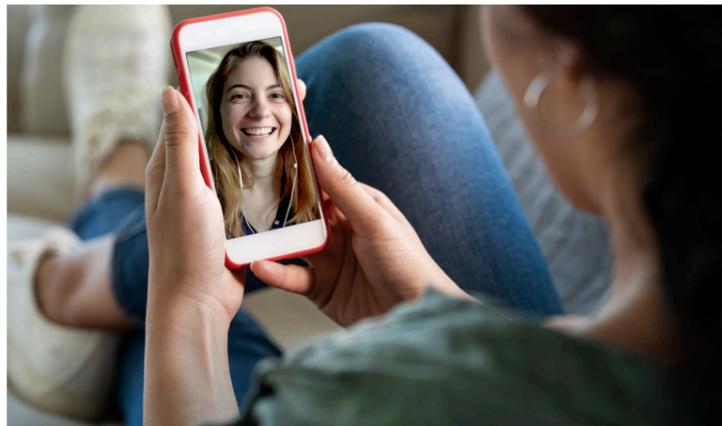
**1,953**

**foster family members supported by Mockingbird**

### The Mockingbird Family Model

The Fostering Network's award winning [Mockingbird programme](#) holds relationships at the heart and increases the opportunity and availability for peer support. Mockingbird constellations currently support nearly 2,000 children and adults in around 500 hub and satellite homes, with more constellations launching every month.

# Beyond fostering



### 3. Post-18 care

The Fostering Network, alongside Action for Children, led the successful campaign in England, Scotland and Wales to ensure young people in foster care could continue to live with their foster family until age 21. The policies (Staying Put, Continuing Care and When I am Ready respectively) have the potential to transform how thousands of young people start adulthood. However, the State of the Nation 2019 survey findings and national statistics show that too many young people are still missing out. We continue to campaign for post-18 arrangements to be made better for both young people and foster carers.

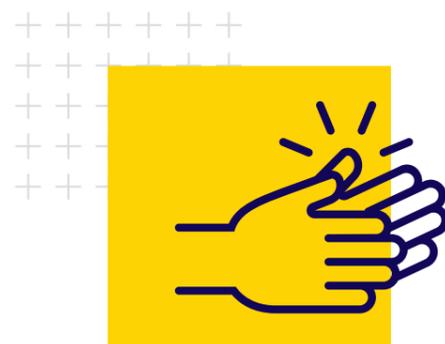
#### What The Fostering Network has done to change this:

- In England we successfully campaigned for an extra £10 million for Staying Put to enable more young people to benefit from the policy.
- We wrote to the Education Secretary and Children's Minister in England to ensure the forthcoming Care Review includes Staying Put. Read the briefing [here](#).
- We surveyed local authorities in England and Wales to monitor the rates being paid to post-18 carers.
- We participated in the Independent Care Review in Scotland to make sure Continuing Care was included in the brief. Recommendations relating to removing regulatory barriers for Continuing Care were included in The Promise.

### Going the Extra Mile Scheme in Northern Ireland

Young people in education, employment and training in Northern Ireland have had the right to stay with former foster carers beyond the age of 18 as part of the Going the Extra Mile (GEM) scheme since 2010. However, it remains non-statutory.

The Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill when instated, will place the GEM scheme on a statutory basis ensuring entitlement for all eligible children. The Bill was originally consulted on in 2017 and we are continuing to campaign to get the GEM scheme enshrined in law.



**Extra £10 million**

for Staying Put

### 4. Maintaining relationships

The new statistic, from the latest State of the Nation, that one in four foster carers had been prevented in some way from keeping connected with former foster children gave the campaign greater impetus. Although in some cases there may be a good reason to cease contact, the high number of people losing touch suggests a culture that fails to value children's relationships.

#### The Keep Connected Principles

- We brought together the leading organisations in foster care in England – including the Department for Education, Ofsted, academic researchers, fostering services and foster carers – to create a set of principles that would improve practice, policy and regulation to maintain relationships.
- Action for Children, Become, National Association of Fostering Providers, National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers, Article 39 and British Association of Social Workers endorsed the principles.
- The principles were shared widely across the UK and we offer tailored advice on embedding the Keep Connected Principles in practice and have visited fostering services to talk about how this can be done. For more information on how to access this advice, please email [campaigns@fostering.net](mailto:campaigns@fostering.net).



**One in four**

foster carers had been prevented in some way from keeping connected with former foster children

#### In government

- In a debate in the House of Commons, the Children's Minister in England spoke of updating the fostering regulations to recognise children's relationships.
- In Scotland, we are working with a number of MSPs to amend the Children (Scotland) Bill's associated guidance to give local authorities a duty to promote contact between a child and their former foster carers.

**I also want to put on record my support for The Fostering Network's campaign, Keep Connected, which promotes maintaining relationships for children and young people through and beyond periods of transition.**

Children's Minister in England

# The cost of caring

## 5. Remuneration

In 2019, we successfully campaigned so that all local authorities in Wales and almost all local authorities in England who had been previously giving below the national minimum fostering allowance raised the allowance to at or above the minimum. We continue to monitor and campaign for 100 per cent of fostering providers across the UK to pay at or above the national minimum allowance for foster carers.

The National Fostering Framework in Wales, with our support, is looking into the harmonisation of allowances and fees across the country.

We discussed the issue of foster carer finances on the [BBC Radio 4 show Money Box](#) in December 2019.



## Allowances in Scotland

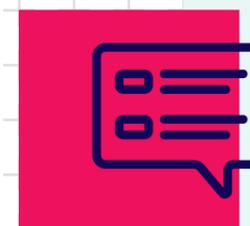
The Fostering Network has been campaigning for over a decade for the introduction of a national minimum allowance in Scotland.

- In 2014, the Scottish Government published research into core child allowances for foster carers where it was stated that discussion should be had about the setting of a national minimum allowance for foster carers.
- In 2016, the SNP pledged to introduce a new national allowance for kinship care and foster care.
- In 2017, a group of experts began a review of the feasibility of introducing a national approach to care allowances for children living in foster, kinship and adoptive care.
- In 2018, the review of foster care allowances concluded that the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities should consider a Scottish Recommended Allowance.
- In 2020, The Promise stated that to provide the care that children require, foster carers must be sufficiently financially maintained.

Despite committing repeatedly to resolving the disparity in foster carer allowances across Scotland, the Scottish Government has made no progress on introducing a national minimum allowance.

**We continue to campaign for a national minimum foster care allowance to be introduced in Scotland.**

# Building awareness



## The report's reach

- National news coverage including the front page of the Observer.
- Over 2,000 engagements across social media.
- Conferences across the UK for our members and the wider sector.
- Over 7,500 downloads.
- Promotion by other sector organisations such as the Association of Directors of Children's Services and Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection.



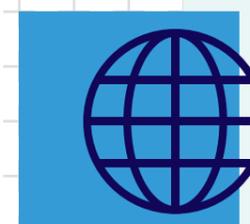
## Fostering service regulators

We were asked to present the State of the Nation findings at an Ofsted training event which gave us a valuable opportunity to raise key issues for foster carers direct to Ofsted inspectors.



## In parliament

Due to the strong evidence base of the State of the Nation report we often feed directly into the Westminster Education Select Committee consultations and evidence sessions including their inquiries into the impact of Covid-19 on education and children's services in 2020 and the children's social care workforce in 2019.



## On an international level

Acting for the Promotion of Fostering at European Level is a network association working together and exchanging information relating to foster care between countries in Europe. We are active members of this group and shared our State of the Nation findings at the 2019 Edinburgh conference 'Foster care transforming lives'.



## United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Together Scotland's The State of Children's Rights report 2019 used our State of the Nation 2019 findings throughout to offer a baseline against which progress is measured. We have also used State of the Nation to feed into consultations about the state of children in foster care's rights across the UK, ensuring that they are afforded the same rights as all children and are properly supported.

# What next?



## Independent Care Review England

The Government has committed to undertaking an independent review of the care system in England. We will be ensuring the key issues for fostering are addressed by the care review. Read our key asks and find out the latest information [here](#).

## Independent Care Review Scotland

We continue to influence the review by working with the oversight board and other stakeholders to develop a plan and make The Promise a reality.

## Influencing in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Executive reformed in December 2019. Although an elected Assembly is still absent, we have continued to bring issues of concern to foster carers and kinship foster carers to the attention of policy makers. We are members of several regional forums providing us with opportunities to influence the fostering agenda.

We are calling for:

- regulations for foster carers
- the introduction of standards for foster care
- the introduction of the Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Act
- the implementation of the looked after children strategy.

## A national register of foster carers

We are calling for a register of foster carers to be established in each nation of the UK. Read more about our position [here](#).

Steps so far:

- We are working with Welsh Government officials to influence the development of a national register in Wales.
- We influenced the Scottish Independent Care Review such that a register was proposed in The Promise.



**Scotland should consider a national register for foster carers recognising that they care for children within their own home. That must operate in a supportive way that is aligned to the underlying values of how Scotland must care.**

Independent Care Review



- A national register of foster carers was also mentioned in the Fostering Better Outcomes report by the Department for Education in England.

# Conclusion

Thanks to the engagement of foster carers with State of the Nation we were able to produce a comprehensive picture of the state of fostering across the UK.

This has underpinned The Fostering Network's campaigning, policy and practice work with empirical evidence and influenced change that has made a positive difference to fostering and children in foster care.



## The next State of the Nation's Foster Care

The next State of the Nation's Foster Care survey will be launched at the beginning of 2021!

For the first time we will also be asking fostering service staff what they think about the state of the nation's foster care.

Look out for the link to the survey and more information at [thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sotn](https://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sotn).



**Thank you to all the committed foster carers who take the time to complete our State of the Nation's Foster Care survey. By sharing your experiences and providing feedback on the issues you are facing, you are making a real difference and helping to inform and influence the fostering agenda, create change and ensure that foster care has the opportunity to be the very best it can be.**

Nigel McCartney, Chair of the Board of Trustees





**The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children.**

We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice.

We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

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