



SCOTTISH ADOPTION  
AND FOSTERING

# Annual Report

2023 - 2024

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# CEO Report

I am delighted to report that the Agency has ended the year 2023/24 in very good shape. Like most years there were some ups and downs. Most difficult was the fact that through a combination of voluntary redundancy and staff moving on to new roles, we lost several valued colleagues. As difficult as this was, we have been left with a leaner service which reflects the share of adoption work we believe we are likely to have while ensuring capacity to continue to deliver to exacting standards and to develop additional income streams to spread our financial risks in the coming months and years.

In April of last year, the Care Inspectorate carried out a short notice announced inspection which took place between 24 April and 10 May 2023. We were delighted to gain scores of 5 – very good across the areas inspected. Elements of the service, the Early Days Programme and our work nationally to support transitions scored a 6 – excellent and were described as sector leading.

"The vast majority of caregivers we heard from felt that they had enduring and positive relationships with staff within the service. We were told, "We have found the support offered by our worker to be invaluable."; and "Nothing has ever been too much for them." The service recognised that adoptive parents needed access to flexible and continuous support throughout the journey of their family. Within the last year, the service has rolled out an innovative and sector leading 'early days' programme offering a package of support to all adoptive families in the period immediately after a child or children moved to their new families. Social workers, therapists, support workers and peer practitioners worked well together



to deliver responsive and tailored support to children and their families. It was clear that these relationships and the skilled work undertaken helped families to meet the life-long needs of children in their care." (Inspection Report May 2023)

Building on our strengths as an adoption agency we continued our work towards developing a mainstream fostering service with a soft launch and a change of trading name to Scottish Adoption and Fostering in April 2023. In the end we had a busy year matching children to our waiting adopters and did not therefore make as much progress in developing the fostering service as planned. We were able to have a formal launch of fostering in January 2024 and since then have had a slow but steady number of enquiries from prospective foster carers.

During all of this we celebrated our centenary with several events including a fabulous family fun day, planned for and delivered by our young people.

# CEO Report

Our parliamentary reception was sponsored by Rona MacKay MSP and we were delighted to host a number of our young people and were very proud of Jamie who shared her digital life story at the event.

We were thrilled to be joined by Natalie Don the Children's Minister. Many of our stakeholders shared their adoption stories as part of our 100 Voices campaign. We are grateful to everyone who took part in 100 for 100 fundraiser which helped boost our funds.

There are so many people to thank for the successes of last year and I have tried to capture them all in the body of the report. One of the joys of being the CEO at Scottish Adoption and Fostering is that I get to work with a team who are motivated to always do their best, are open to developing their approaches in response to new research and knowledge and who every day work to improve the lives of children who are unable to live with their birth families.



CEO, Scottish Adoption and Fostering

“Children and young people experienced loving and compassionate care within their adoptive or prospective adoptive families. The service makes use of a range of evidence-based, high quality interventions to support families. The assessment and approval of prospective adopters is of a consistently high quality. The service has taken the lead nationally in developing an evidence-based approach to the transition of children between families and care placements.”  
**Inspection Report May 2023**

# Family Team Service

## Year Summary

Our Family Team Service has had a very busy and successful year. The team recruit, assess prospective adoptive parents and then work with them to be matched to the right child/ren. Family Team senior practitioners work with families until the adoption order is granted.

We saw a slight increase in the numbers of children waiting to be matched for adoption on Linkmaker this year and as a result we were able to match more children with our adopters than we did the previous year. This included matching some adopters who had been approved during the pandemic and had been waiting a while.

We have continued to attract adopters from a wide range of backgrounds and in particular have continued to be successful in approving and matching adoptive parents from the LGBTQ+ community with 32% of children being matched to families who identified as LGBTQ+.

### **Where did the Children come from?**

In 2022/23 around two thirds of the children who moved to live with our families were from Local Authorities in Scotland (64%) and this year 46% of children were from LA's in England. Through our membership of the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies we have learned that in England Regional Adoption Agencies are reporting having more children than adopters for the first time in several years. Last year our children came from 14 different LA's/RAA's and the LA's where most children came from were City of Edinburgh Council(5), Dundee City Council (5) and West Lothian Council (3). This year the children came from 25 different LA's/RAA's, we did not place any Edinburgh children, we placed 6 children from Dundee City Council.

### **Adoption Orders Granted/Breakdowns**

Twenty-eight families had their adoption orders granted (same number as last year). There were no adoption breakdowns reported.

# Adoption Support Services

## Year Summary

Like the Family Team our Support Services had a very busy year delivering on our promise to our families to provide support at any stage of their adoption journey. We continued to deliver on our adoption record counselling contracts and information exchange contracts with Edinburgh, Mid, West and East Lothian.

## Individual Therapies

Through our Adoption Therapy Centre, we provided a range of individual therapies. Our adult counsellors provided 288 individual sessions over the year to individuals at various stages in their adoption journey. In addition to adult counselling, we offered Art, Music and Occupational Therapy support, having a range of therapists allows us to provide tailored support to children and their families.

“The support we've received, especially the individual therapies, has been a lifeline for our family.”

In addition to individual work the team delivered several groups. All adoptive parents who had a child/ren move to live with them took part in our sector leading Early Days Programme. The programmeworks with new families to promote attachment using play and music-based activities. Play and music between parent and child are some of the tools which help build connection and strong, safe, and secure attachments.

One parent wrote about her contact with Stevan a support worker in the Early Days Programme "Stevan got in touch, and we arranged a call. This was one of the most important calls we had during our adoption journey, he was kind, caring and listened. There were lots of tears as we realised, we were not alone in this (and not bad parents)."

"With the early day's support we received, we are now a family with great attachment, love, and kindness."

"It is so wonderful being able to have visitors such as grandparents in the home without our daughter becoming so distressed. The Theraplay has really helped build our attachment with both children".

## Family Group Work

We run a range of online support groups for parents: New Families Parent Support; Parents of Primary aged children; Parents of teenagers group. Recognising that transitions can be difficult for some adopted children we offer parents a P1 and an S1 transitions group which combines group support and workshop to help parents ease their adopted children's journey through the education system.

As the only license holders in Scotland we were pleased to deliver Wise Up, an evidence based approach which provides children with skills in whether and how they might respond to questions about their adoption in a way that gives them a sense of control and builds their confidence.

We recognised that some parents were looking to develop skills in connected parenting and the use of non violent resistance. Following the initial group running we reflected on feedback and improved content developing the 'Therapeutic Parenting Through The Tough Times' workshop which launched May 2024.

# Children's Groups

We continued to deliver groupwork for children and young people. Art Venture is run by our Art Therapist and Support Worker. Children meet peers, explore their thoughts and feelings within a safe group whilst carrying out a range of art activities. The Wee Crofters Group is for children in P6/P7 at school. The aim of the group is to meet other adopted young people and to have a positive group. We are aware that many children who have been adopted struggle to socialise within a group setting and our team are skilled at setting activities and achievable goals for young people to work towards together increasing their self-esteem and identity. Thursday Crofters age range is S1+. The group encourages young people to build trust with their peers through team building activities. There are also gentle activities around life history work with the young people. The group offers the young people a safe space to relax and spend time with other adopted young people. Friday Crofters is similar to the Thursday Crofters, but members of this group are generally more comfortable talking about adoption and happy to contribute to projects and plan events at Scottish Adoption and Fostering. The young people in this group have been pivotal to many changes the Agency has made through our work with The Promise.



\* Pictures from our Crofters Classes

“All adoption agencies should have groups and Ambassador Programs. I didn't have the best adoption, but being part of Scottish Adoption and Fostering and teaching other people about adoption means I've re-claimed my story.”

- Adoption Ambassador, Age 21, 2023

# Bluebird Project

## Year Summary

Thanks to extended funding we were able to deliver the Bluebird Project for a second year, providing a range of 121 (First Steps) support, groupwork and counselling. Our First Steps/Support service saw 37 mothers accessing 290 sessions. We have supported birth parents to manage family time with their children, helped with collating information for their child's life story work, creating memory boxes for themselves and their child, supporting farewell visits and improving indirect connections with their child/ren. We also delivered 19 Groupwork Meet Ups each lasting 2 hours. These sessions will often involve a therapeutic craft activity e.g. story stones (i.e. painted stones with important dates/messages and symbols significant to their journey as a birth parent), Sand Jars (i.e. layered coloured sand that represents something significant to each participant), memory tree (i.e. decorating a tree to mark symbolic dates via marking/filling clear plastic baubles). More recently we joined Circle's birth parent group on a Tuesday to provide an additional opportunity to our parents. Our Counsellor has met with 11 birth mothers and the average number of sessions they have attended has been 12 although no limits are set, and the service is very flexible. She provides one-to-one person centred counselling sessions and these have all been delivered virtually but there is the opportunity for face to face if preferred.

In addition, we have partnered with the Scottish Book Trust and a small group of mums are meeting to develop their own digital life story. The work takes place over 18 sessions and the birth parents work closely with the storyteller building relationships and trust to allow them to develop and share their story. In total there are 18 sessions lasting around 90 minutes each.

“Jane states that working alongside Bluebird has allowed her to:

- Feel cared for by another human
- To feel valued as a person
- Share her story without fear of judgement
- To laugh, something she hadn't done in a very long time
- Use her appointments with her CPN more effectively
- To begin to look to the future
- Decrease her self-harming behaviour's
- To be supported before and after contact with her son which has meant less of a mental health dip after these visits
- To allow her to supported to connect with her older two children
- Consider joining Bluebird What Matters to Me programme

# Peer Support

## Year Summary

We recognise how crucial peer support is to both our adoptive families and our adopted children and young people. Each newly matched family was offered the opportunity to be linked in with a Parent Practitioners to provide support in the early days of a child/ren moving in. Parent Practitioners also continued to provide a range of practical and emotional support to adoptive parents and the feedback for this service recognises the value for adoptive parents of having support from someone who understands from a lived experience perspective.

"Being able to speak to a parent practitioner who has been through the same or similar process as you is invaluable and something we hugely appreciated. The practitioners being skilled at Theraplay is an added bonus that we can't thank Scottish Adoption enough for. Seeing the smile on the child's face as they engage and play alongside you helps you to feel they are connecting to you. We were incredibly impressed with the knowledge, support, and advice we received. We continue to play the games now."

*Feedback from Scottish Adoption  
and Fostering adoptive parent*

Our Ambassadors, who are young adoptees, continued to provide support to our children's groups, they co-delivered training as part of the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies and contributed to our Family Fun Day and Parliamentary Reception.

One young ambassador told the Care Inspectorate: **"It is empowering that our voices are being heard. It is such a positive thing. We feel very respected and highly valued."**

# Staffing

## Team Changes

Over the year we said farewell to Trish from admin who retired to look after her grandson. We also saw Angie, Christine and Ciara move on as Senior Practitioners from the Family Team. Mel secured a promoted post with St Andrew's heading up their support services and Dave decided that after 12 years in post heading up our marketing it was time to move to pastures new. Our Medical Advisor Dr Lorna McKay changed jobs and was no longer able to continue with us.

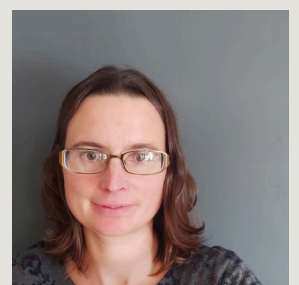
We recruited Tina as our new marketing officer and Niamh and Sharon joined us as Senior Practitioners. Polly was successfully recruited to the permanent Practice Manager post with a focus on fostering, adoption and development work. Dr Patricia Gourlay joined us as our second Medical Advisor. We ended the year a leaner organisation reflecting the lower numbers overall of children with adoption plans and our desire to ensure that we have capacity to provide support to our families every step of the way.

Our staff group has continued to go above and beyond working in a skilled and reflective way. We continued our commitment to professional development by undertaking training in mentalisation, an approach which we believe will enhance our assessment skills and provide a new way of framing our work with adoptive parents. Our annual safeguarding day provided an

opportunity to reflect on learning as part of commitment to continuous improvement, we refreshed our GDPR training and individual staff members enhanced their knowledge and offer through a range of individual learning and development opportunities. We recently undertook training on the UNCRC which is about to become part of Scot's law.



**Tina**  
Marketing Coordinator



**Niamh**  
Senior Practitioner



**Sharon**  
Senior Practitioner

# Panel Report

## Adoption Panel (composition and membership including arrangements for ADM)

The composition of the Panel:

- Two Independent Chairpersons
- Two Medical Advisers
- 10 other Panel Members, five of whom have personal experience of adoption.

Ravinder Kaur is our Agency Decision Maker (ADM), she works for AFKA (Association for Fostering, Kinship and Adoption) and brings 28 years of social work experience including a role with several other adoption and fostering panels across Scotland.

## Panel Development

Panel members came together for two development sessions over the year. The first provided opportunities to reflect on learning from cases where there had been a 'near miss' in relation to child safeguarding. The learning from these sessions have been incorporated into practice.

The second session was led by Sara Smith from the Fostering Network and was an opportunity for Panel members to explore themes around the role of a Fostering Panel as we continue to develop our mainstream fostering service.

We are lucky to have a Panel with members who are experienced in adoption whether through their own lived experience, their professional backgrounds or in some cases a combination of the two.

“The adoption and fostering panel acted as a strong quality assurance mechanism, and panel chairs, panel members and medical advisors were knowledgeable, confident and skilled in their role”

# Governance

## Board and Sub Groups

Quarterly Board meetings have taken place and we welcomed one new Board member in March 2024. The new Director is a retired social worker who most recently was employed as a senior manager in adoption services. Two Board members stepped down. We have had two sub groups running over the year:

# 1

### Finance Sub Group

Regular group members include the CEO, Finance Manager, Chair of the Board and the Treasurer and meets the month before a Board meeting to provide additional scrutiny of the budget. The group numbers were augmented for the February meeting to include interested Board members who provided input to budget setting for 2023/24.

# 2

### Practice Sub Group

Practice sub group continued to meet on a quarterly basis. Membership of the group continued to reflect our key personnel and include an Ambassador, two parent practitioners, two Board members and staff representative. The group had oversight and scrutiny of key areas of operations including our work to keep the Promise and ensuring services are shaped through lived experience.

## OUR BOARD



Hugo Allan



Paul Brennan



ANNESS BROWN



Ariane Critchley



Alastair Graham



SUE GRANT



NEIL GOLIGHTLY



EWAN KERR



NEIL MACKAY



JAMES O'BRIEN

# Innovations

## New Developments During 2023/24

### Art Venture

Our groupwork programme has traditionally been available to children and young people aged 8 years and above. In response to families saying that children would like an introduction to group work that would provide a 'soft landing' into the service, we developed the Art Venture Club (ages 7- 8). The club runs monthly in our studio and is facilitated by a qualified and experienced Art Therapist and a support worker. The group involves therapeutic Art activities where children meet other adopted children and offers a safe shared space to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences creatively in a relaxed and fun environment.



### Mentalisation

Senior Practitioners who work in the Family Team have this year had training in Mentalisation, also known as Therapeutic Parenting, approaches. There is extensive evidence about the importance of understanding the intentions behind a child's behaviour and getting a greater sense of your own mind as a parent in relation to them. Research also suggests that understanding the thoughts, feelings and intentions behind a child's behaviour and your own reaction can act as a buffer against difficult behaviour and can help a child regulate their emotions better. This can then lead to improved relationships and enhanced understanding of self and others.

We are working with Dr Alice Loving and plan to further embed Reflective Parenting into the work that we do. Watch this space for development of a Mentalisation Handbook for staff and a staff supervision tool that utilizes Mentalisation techniques. Once these tools are developed we will look at how we can make them more widely available to partners across the sector.

### Bluebird Flock

In 2023/24 we began working with parents who had previously lost permanent care of child/ren and were now successfully parent subsequent child/ren. Many of these families were on the edge of care and parents told us that their history of trauma and fear of losing the child/ren in their care severely undermined their confidence as parents. In response to this we have developed a model of intervention called the Flock. This has involved having staff trained to deliver the Circle of Security Parenting Programme and making applications for funding so work could start 2024/25.

# Financials

## Financial Activities for the year 2023/24

Below is a summary of our financial activities over the last 12 months.

INCOME	
Charitable activities (Adoption)	£1,454,168
Voluntary grants and donations	£175,230
Investment income	£43,377
Other income	£0
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£1,672,775</b>

EXPENDITURE	
Charitable expenditure	£1,438,065
Costs of generating funds	£15,600
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£1,453,665</b>

N.B. these figures may be subject to review following external audit of accounts

# Fundraising

## Securing funding

We started to work with a new freelance fundraiser, Karon Phillips, in January 2023 and set a high bar as much of our therapy centre funding was due to end last financial year and securing further funds was crucial to our ability to continue to deliver our adoption support services.

Karon worked relentlessly getting to know and understand the organisation and it is to her credit that through the award of three large grants we have been able to secure funding for the next three years.

In addition, we had the good news that the Government were going to provide another year's funding for Bluebird. Allowing us to continue to deliver services to birth parents who have lost permanent care of a child/ren.



**THANK YOU**

# Thank you!

The Agency would like to record their grateful thanks for the support of the following trusts and organisations who have supported our work over the year:



**THE MEIKLE FOUNDATION**

In addition to the organisations above we would like to thank Andrew Paton's Charitable Trust, and the Jeremy Alexander Settlement.

## **We would also like to thank the following volunteers:**

- Our Board of trustees for oversight and governance
- Our Panel members who provide independent scrutiny of our professional standards
- Jenny who has been a regular weekly contributor to our records work and has been tenacious and thorough in her work
- Noah who is completing his Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award and helping us with admin tasks
- Sue Grant for also helping out with records

Last but not least we are grateful to all our adoptive families and their children without whom this agency would not exist

# Marketing

## Celebrating 100 Years of Scottish Adoption and Fostering

We celebrated this incredible milestone at the Scottish Parliament



Sue Brunton, CEO, with Natalie Don Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise and Rona Mackay MSP



It has been an action packed and very exciting 12 months at Scottish Adoption and Fostering. Below are just some of the very many highlights:

- We celebrated our **100 year anniversary** with a Parliamentary Reception at the Scottish Parliament. We were joined by friends, families, colleagues and partners of both past and present to celebrate our past successes. It was a wonderful evening.
- At the start of the year we formally **launched our foster care services** and have been excited to receive our first fostering enquiries over the last few weeks.
- We had a prominent presence within Scotland during **LGBTQ+ Adoption and Fostering Awareness Week** in February. In 2023/24, 1 in 2 of our adopters were part of a same sex couple. Something we are really proud off!
- Throughout the year we **hosted a mix of 15 in-person and virtual recruitment events**. A record for us. It is important to us that potential adopters and foster carers have the opportunities to ask questions about our agency and meet some of our brilliant team before submitting an application.

# Thank you for your interest in Scottish Adoption and Fostering

## Contact Us

Please reach out to us via phone or email if you have any questions. We would be delighted to help!

To make an initial enquiry about becoming a foster carer please visit our website.

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**#Keep  
The  
Promise**

