

January 2009

Action for Children Scotland policy briefing

Looked-after and accommodated children and young people

Looked-after and accommodated children and young people have some of the poorest outcomes of all young people in Scotland. They are less likely to do well at school and more likely to be jobless, become homeless and face problems such as alcohol and drug abuse.

How well governments treat these 'children of the state' is a good measure of how seriously they take child welfare and parenting issues more generally. Some progress has been made in recent years, but a lot more remains to be done.



What Action for Children Scotland wants to see

We believe the highest possible priority should be given to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children and young people in care. We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase employment, education and training opportunities for these young people, and to ensure that more of them are able to fulfil their potential and make the most of their lives. In this respect, Action for Children Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's generous support for the Reading Rich project, which we developed in partnership with the Scottish Book Trust. This project encouraged looked-after children and their carers to develop an interest in reading and in literature. It has already had a positive impact at a number of Action for Children Scotland projects.

We welcome the Scottish Government's publication of *Getting it right for every child in foster care and kinship care – A national strategy*. We believe the strategy could make a significant contribution to improving outcomes for looked-after and

accommodated children by strengthening and increasing the capacity of foster carers and kinship carers to provide high-quality care and support to this particularly vulnerable group of young people.

We believe that foster carers and kinship carers are the most important contributors to improving the wellbeing of and outcomes for the vast majority of the children in public care. The National Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy is long overdue, given that these carers are the least supported, well trained, well paid and inspected, and the most isolated, of all childcare workers. We believe that the success of this strategy will rely upon a number of factors, including the level of resources to be made available to support its key proposals. Other significant factors are likely to be whether or not the strategy increases public confidence in fostering services, and ensures consistent standards across the many agencies and providers involved in this field.

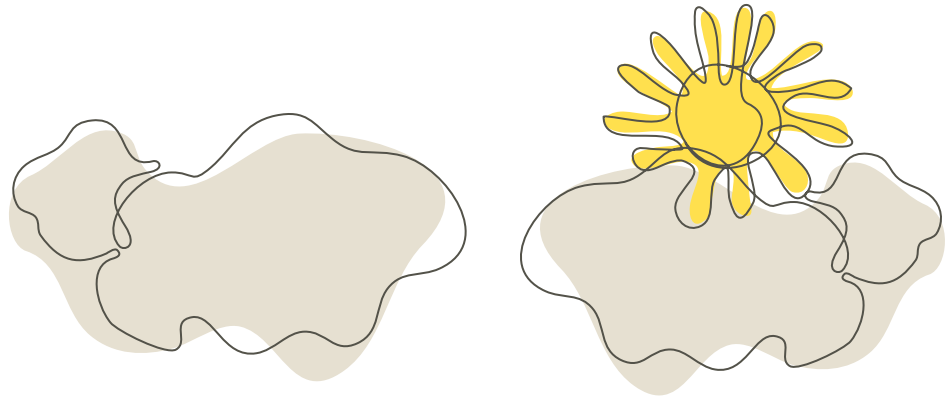
What we would also like to see

Action for Children Scotland believes that in order to improve outcomes for children in foster care and kinship care it is vital to introduce a maximum number of placements. Many of these children and young people have been placed in care in the most traumatic circumstances. To give them the chance to turn their lives around they require a safe, stable and secure environment and emotional support, which foster care and kinship care can provide. Unfortunately, for a significant number of these young people the trauma of the circumstances that led to their being placed in care is often exacerbated by the number of placements throughout their childhood in care. To put this in perspective, figures produced by the Fostering Network indicate that almost one in three (30%)

children and young people in foster care in Scotland are moved more than three times in their first year in foster care, compared to one in eight (13%) in England (*Factfile Scotland 2006–07*, Action for Children Scotland).

Action for Children Scotland is aware that the upheaval caused by successive placements can have an adverse impact on the lives of these children and young people. We believe that introducing a maximum number of placements would help to provide a greater level of stability in their lives. We consider that the placement level should depend upon each child or young person's needs. Placements should also give full recognition to sibling placement requirements.





Greater focus on the importance of early intervention work

Family-based respite care services already provide support that meets this objective in a number of areas. Action for Children Scotland considers that, as with mainstream fostering, the key to making these services more available is increasing funding and capacity. In our view, foster carers and kinship carers could, with proper preparation, support and funding, provide an additional service at the prevention and early intervention stages of our work. We believe, however, that given the overcrowding in Scotland's foster homes, local authorities currently lack the capacity to assist with the development of these additional roles on a wider and more consistent basis. Action for Children Scotland urges the Scottish Government to seek urgent talks with local authorities to address this issue.

A national campaign to recruit carers

Action for Children Scotland considers that a national campaign, supported by an increased level of funding, would help to increase the carer pool throughout Scotland, given the current shortage of foster carers. To maximise its impact, we believe that any such campaign should publicise the range of fostering career opportunities available for interested people and highlight that there is a career path for foster carers who can provide a service to statutory, voluntary and independent fostering providers, outlining the benefits of each area.

The publicity campaign should also highlight the tax benefits for carers, and the type of standards required by the Care Commission, to raise the profile of fostering as a credible career choice, or as an introduction to social care work.

Improving outcomes for looked-after and accommodated children

Action for Children Scotland believes the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament must continue to give priority to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of looked-after and accommodated children. We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to take forward the key messages in *Looked-after children and young people: we can and must do better*.

To help improve outcomes for these children, Action for Children Scotland considers that urgent action should be taken to increase their opportunities in employment, education and training, to ensure that greater numbers of these vulnerable and difficult to reach children fulfil their potential.

Further action must also be taken to ensure young people have an appropriate care package to meet their needs when they leave care, including suitable accommodation, improved access to key services such as healthcare provision, and increased support to access education, training or employment.

Who we are

Action for Children Scotland is one of the leading children's charities in Scotland, working in partnership to run more than 65 services for more than 7,000 of Scotland's most vulnerable children and young people and their families. Across the UK, we run nearly 450 services. Action for Children Scotland's services include family centres and services for care leavers and young people who are homeless. We also support children and young people who act as carers and those with additional support for learning needs, and we offer alternatives to custody for those in trouble with the law.

Our services

Action for Children Scotland runs a number of projects that provide support for looked-after and accommodated children and young people.

Action for Children Scotland Fostering – CAPS Glasgow

Action for Children Scotland Fostering– CAPS Glasgow offers community-based family placements as an alternative to secure accommodation. It also provides placements to children and young people who do not meet this criterion but do present significant behavioural challenges that mean they are unlikely to be placed within mainstream fostering provision. The service provides 40 special family placements for boys and girls aged between eight and 18, as an alternative option to secure accommodation or residential schooling. Care packages are tailored to individual needs, including identifying a network of appropriate community supports. Self-employed carers work with the young people and assume responsibility for specific plans and programmes relating to the children in their care.

Action for Children Scotland – Gael Og Fostering

Action for Children Scotland Gael Og Fostering provides a range of foster care services across the north of Scotland (Moray and Highland) to young people aged six to 16 who are at

risk of being placed in secure or residential accommodation, or whose challenging behaviour would make it difficult to find them placements within mainstream foster care services delivered by local authorities. Support to placements is maintained through a senior practitioner who supervises the carer and meets with the young person on a monthly basis. Placements are reviewed on a regular basis with placing authorities. Carers are reviewed six months after approval, and subsequently on an annual basis. Action for Children foster care provides a 24-hour support service to all carers.

ISSC, Ayrshire

The ISSC (intensive supervised structured care) service offers intensive supervised structured care for young people who are at risk of going into, or are ready to leave, secure or specialist residential care. ISSC offers a robust alternative based on offence-focused intervention, individual and group work programmes of social care, life skills and education. Staff work in partnership with local authorities to implement robust care plans for vulnerable and difficult to reach young people. The support ISSC provides is designed to reduce levels of offending and prevent young people absconding and placing themselves at serious risk.



Our services (continued)

Moray Residential Units – Buckie and Elgin

The Action for Children Scotland Moray Residential Units provide personal care to children and young people who are not living with their parents because their usual living situation is unsafe, severely inhibits their personal development, or because the young person presents an unacceptable risk to others and the required change cannot be achieved while they live with their parents. In these circumstances, living in a residential unit is considered the best means of providing care while enabling intervention to take place.

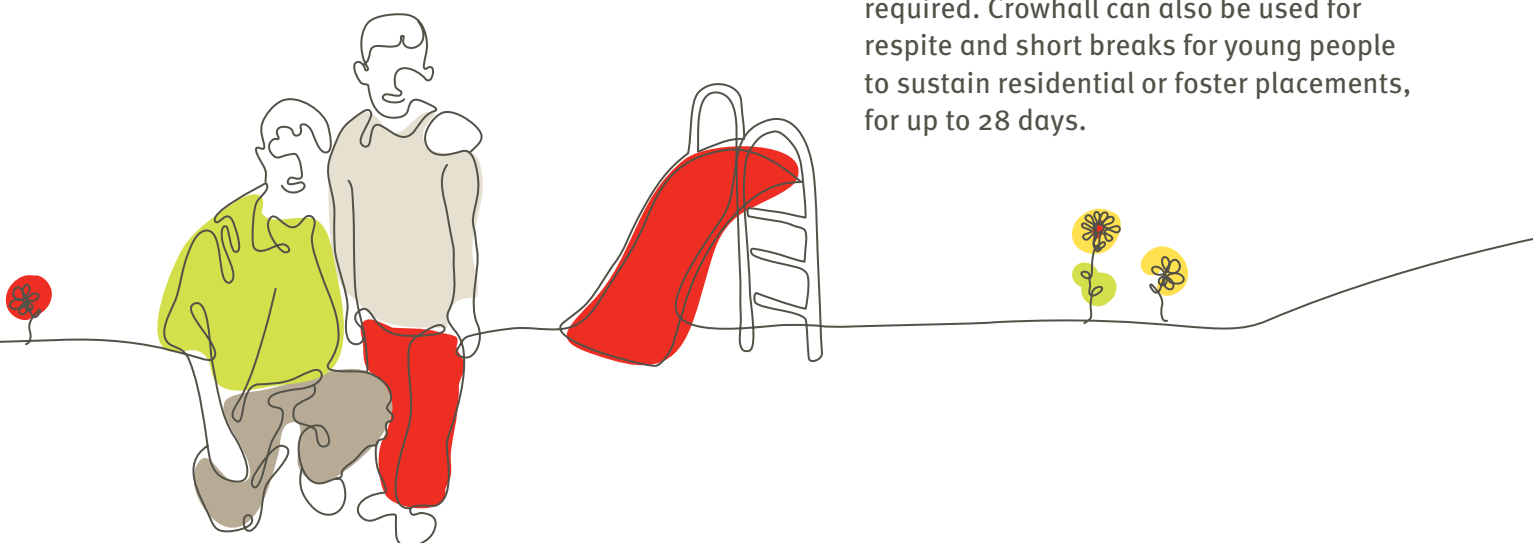
Moray Residential Unit – Forres

The Moray Residential Unit provides short-term residential, intensive structured care for one or two individuals aged 12 to 16 who are ready to leave secure or specialist residential care, or who are at risk of being placed out of the area. The project aims to provide a structured service to respond to each young person's individual needs in a safe and nurturing environment, which promotes and supports all aspects of the young person's development.

Emergency accommodation for young people in need of refuge or in crisis is also available within the residential unit in Forres. The 72-hour facility offers a high level of support to young people to enable a planned transition to an appropriate care placement after this period.

Moray Residential Unit – Crowhall

Crowhall is a flexible, multi-use resource for children, young people and families. Individual, parenting and family assessments can be provided within a residential environment, with one-to-one support if required. Crowhall can also be used for respite and short breaks for young people to sustain residential or foster placements, for up to 28 days.



Our services (continued)

North Lanarkshire Youth Justice Fostering

The North Lanarkshire Youth Justice Fostering service aims to reduce the number of young people being remanded in custody or in secure accommodation. It offers accommodation and support through a youth justice fostering placement for young people appearing before the youth court as an alternative to the young person being remanded in custody, or placed in secure accommodation.

During the placement in foster care, each young person is provided with an individual daytime activity programme to help their development and support their youth justice fostering placement.

Western Isles Residential Unit

The Western Isles Residential Unit offers looked-after and accommodated children and young people from the Western Isles a residential service that provides personal care and support within a flexible residential setting.

The project assesses, plans for and effectively addresses the care needs of children and young people as both individuals and members of a family in the community. The service is developed and monitored in partnership with the young people, their families and other departments and agencies.



Please contact either Andrew Girvan, Action for Children Scotland's Director of Children's Services, Moira Luccock, Operational Director of Children's Services, or Lesley Moodie, Action for Children Scotland's Assistant Director, on **0141 550 9010**, or Ann Darlington, Action for Children Scotland's Assistant Director, on **01463 710965** if you require more information, or if you would like to discuss any of the issues we have raised.

www.actionforchildren.org.uk

as long as it takes