



**Scottish Government Debate: National Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy
Wednesday 5 December 2007**

Key Issues for NCH Scotland:

- **NCH Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to implement a fundamental and long-term transformation of fostering services, and kinship care arrangements;**
- **We believe that the success of the National Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy will depend upon a number of factors, particularly the level of resources available to support its key proposals;**
- **NCH Scotland also welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people in care, and to ensure that greater numbers fulfil their potential;**
- **To improve outcomes for children in foster care and in kinship care, a maximum level of placements should be introduced;**
- **NCH Scotland considers that the matching process could be improved by significantly increasing the number of foster carers, and by raising the recognition, and level of support available, to kinship carers; and**
- **A national campaign, supported by increased funding, would help to increase the carer pool throughout Scotland**

General

NCH is one of the leading children's charities in Scotland, working in partnership to run more than 65 services for more than 7000 of Scotland's most vulnerable children, young people and their families. Across the UK it runs nearly 500 services. NCH Scotland projects work with a number of looked after and accommodated children and young people in foster care and in residential care. We welcome the Scottish Government's proposed National Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy. NCH Scotland believes 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 also welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase opportunities for looked after and accommodated children in employment, education and training, and to ensure that greater numbers of these young people are able to fulfil their potential, and to make the most of their lives. In this respect, NCH Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's generous support for the Reading Rich project which we have been progressing in partnership with the Scottish Book Trust. This project seeks to encourage looked after and accommodated children and their carers to develop an interest in reading and in literature. It has already had a positive impact at a number of NCH Scotland projects.

Need for a national strategy

We believe that foster carers and kinship carers are the most important contributors to improving the well-being of, and outcomes for, the vast majority of the children in

public care. The need for the National Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy is long overdue, given that these carers are the least supported, least well-trained, least well paid, least inspected and the most isolated of all child care 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 consistency of standards across the many agencies and providers involved in this field.

Number of foster care placements

NCH Scotland believes it is vital that, in order to improve outcomes for children in foster care and in kinship care, a maximum level of placements should be introduced. Many of these children and young people have been placed in care in the most traumatic circumstances. They require the safe, stable and secure environment, and emotional support, which foster care and kinship care can provide to give them the chance to turn their lives around. Unfortunately, for a significant number of these children and young people the risk is that any trauma around the circumstances leading to their being placed in care is often exacerbated by the number of successive placements they will require throughout their childhood in care. **To put this in perspective, figures produced by the Fostering Network indicate that almost one in three (30%) of children and young people in foster care in Scotland are moved more than 3 times in their first year in foster care, compared to one in eight in England (13%); NCH Scotland, Factfile Scotland 2006 – 2007, <http://www.nch.org.uk/uploads/documents/569.pdf>. [Lesley/Ann, I could not find more up-to-date figures. Has there been any change or are these figures still the most accurate? If there is any doubt the text in bold should be deleted].** NCH Scotland is aware that the upheaval caused by successive placements can have an adverse impact upon the lives of these children and young people. We believe that introducing a maximum level of placements would help to provide a greater level of stability in their lives. We believe that the placement level should depend upon the needs of the individual children or young people, and be set up to a maximum of 3 unrelated children in any one foster home. Placements should also give full recognition to sibling placement requirements.

The importance of early intervention work

Family based respite care services already provide support which meets this objective in a number of areas. NCH Scotland considers that, as with mainstream fostering, the key to increasing these services is increasing funding and capacity. Against this background, NCH Scotland takes the view that 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. NCH Scotland takes the view that the Scottish Government should seek urgent talks with the local authority community to address this issue.

Need for a national campaign to recruit carers

NCH 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. We believe that any such campaign should, to maximise its impact, publicise the range of fostering career opportunities available for those interested, 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 all. The publicity campaign should also highlight the tax benefits for carers,

and the minimum 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.

Please do not hesitate to contact either Andrew Girvan, NCH Scotland's Director of Children's Services, or Lesley Moodie, NCH Scotland Assistant Director, on 0141-550-9010, or Ann Darlington, NCH Scotland Assistant Director, on 01463-710965 if you require more information, or would like to discuss any of the issues we have raised further.