



Barnardo's Scotland - In This Together

COVID – 19 - Responding to the needs of children,
young people and families

6th July – Fostering and Adoption

**Believe in
children**
 **Barnardo's
Scotland**

Barnardo's Registered Charity
Nos. 216250 and SC037605

Our In This Together report this week looks at the work of our fostering and adoption services across Scotland and how they have been able to continue to support children, young people, birth families, adoptive parents, adult adoptees and siblings throughout the challenges of the last few months.

SPOTLIGHT: Barnardo's Scotland Adoption Service

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about the fastest change in work patterns ever. We have been confronted with the challenges of working from home and we have surprised ourselves with how quickly and successfully we have adjusted. Some of the adaptations we have made include:

- When we have phone calls with service users, we prepare more structure to appointments to ensure we ease in and out of intense conversations, ensuring our service users don't feel rushed into difficult topics and can manage the world around them after our session.
- We ensure that we offer shorter appointments, especially with children who cannot manage a long period of focused work.
- We have been playing shared games with young people over video chat such as Battleships which can be drawn out on paper.
- We make sure we send text reminders to service users so they are ready for our meetings and to remind them to bring a paper and pen to their next appointment.
- We use text-chat to remind families of video links being sent via e-mail so that appointments can be kept on a regular basis.
- We support our service users to practice using online platforms to ensure that everyone is familiar and confident before any virtual meetings take place.
- We have offered access to worksheets and other valuable parenting resources via our Barnardo's Google Drive.
- Our teams schedule time to chat and debrief with colleagues about intense appointments, which doesn't happen naturally now as we are not sharing an office space.



Supporting Parents

We have continued to provide information and best practice guidance to adopters from organisations including Adoption UK Scotland, Parenting Across Scotland, Parent Club, National Parent Forum Scotland, Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, and Enquire. We have also signposted families to various other resources to assist them in caring for children during this challenging time.

In recognition of the importance of children's mental health and wellbeing, all of our children received an activity pack which consisted of imaginative activities to aid their development and keep them entertained.

New Adopters

Over the past three months the number of enquiries about adoption has risen. In April, we received 67 enquiries, an increase of 30 from the same period the previous year. Enquirers have told us that their time at home has provided them an opportunity for reflection and highlighted the importance of family life.

In response to the enquiries the team developed Preparation Training virtually for prospective adopters. With the help of our adopters who provided video footage of their experience, we have been able to use creative means to deliver this to two prep groups.



This has been a steep learning curve for all involved, and we are currently making changes and adaptations based on feedback from participants and workers. Participants have shared that the experience has been valuable, enjoyable and they are pleased that there has been no delay and in fact they have been able to progress to the next stage of their adoption journey. They have made connections with other adopters, forming a virtual support network.

Families in assessment pre-lockdown were thankful that we were able to continue their assessments virtually as they shared a concern "that everything would come to a standstill".

We provided a workshop to prospective adopters' family and friends, who often have questions and anxieties about the adoption process. We are able to share information about the realities of the early stages of adoption and how best to offer support to their loved one. These groups previously have been from different families and large in number. During lockdown we have provided a virtual workshop to each prospective adopter's network. This has offered a new opportunity tailored to individual family needs which has allowed for their unique situation and circumstances to be taken account of. This approach may be useful in moving forward to our new normal, particularly where geographical considerations come into play.

Adult Adoptees Group

Our adult adoptees group has been meeting for over 20 years and we recently held our first virtual group for those who felt this to be beneficial. The adoptees group brought benefit to those who attended as they shared feelings of being more isolated during lockdown and appreciated the connection that was afforded by virtual attendance at the group. One participant commented: "I was so glad I joined the group as I now realise the way I have felt for a long time, I'm actually not alone."

Supporting Our Teams

In recognition that our staff are our most valuable resource, our managers sent handmade cards and soap, hand wash and hand creams at key points throughout lockdown as a way of spreading kindness and keeping in touch during this time which has been different and difficult for everyone to adjust to.



SPOTLIGHT: Glasgow Fostering Service

Our fostering service offers holistic support to children and families, and while lockdown has thrown up many new challenges for those we work with, we have been able to use creative methods of keeping families in touch and responding to their needs. We have been sharing support, tips, ideas and good news through our weekly e-newsletter.

Barnardo's Scotland is very lucky to have Children's Work Teams based in each office. These workers are uniquely placed to offer less formal support to our children and young people and frequently develop strong relationships with those they see regularly. Recently we had a young person who was a bit lost and confused by a lot of change in his life, who had run away from a foster home late at night. Fortunately he reached out to his Children's Worker for advice and she was able to help him return safely and support his carer on the best way to make him feel welcome.

One of our family placement social workers became aware during lockdown that a child who enjoyed regular family contact was going to be unable to see his family. In agreement with the Local Authority, the worker made arrangements with the carer, birth family and child and set up a weekly virtual get together where the child was able to show off all the things he had been making and be assured his family were well and thinking about him. The carers have fed back that this really helped the child manage the restrictions of lockdown and he looked forward to his weekly "visits".



Jane is fostered through our service in Edinburgh, and this is her story...

Jane is 8-years-old and has been fostered for 4 ½ years. She is physically disabled and relies on a wheelchair for her mobility. She requires full support from the carers with her mobility and transfers as well as all her personal care needs. Despite these challenges Jane and her carers have done an amazing job throughout this lockdown in supporting her educational, socialising and learning and development needs.

They have maintained an input of physiotherapy exercises to ensure her muscle strength is maintained. They sourced a comfy chair from their local Occupational Therapist to assist Jane in being able to sit in the lounge with them to enjoy family game nights and watching films. This has been a great support and allows her the comfort of having her own chair rather than needing support from the carers to sit.

They have also expanded their daily exercise to include walks in the local area near farmland so that Jane can interact with animals, with daily visits to the horses, cows and pigs. There is always a wee treat in her chair for the animals and she loves to see them coming up to sniff out what she may have brought along for them.



Jane had her 8th birthday in lockdown and the carers' gift was a swing in the back garden for her! This has been well used and is a great source of joy and excitement for her. She also enjoys picnics in the back garden, helping her carers in the greenhouse, and having a fabulous cool down in her paddling pool. With the carers' eldest daughter at home at the moment, she also enjoys spending time with her doing baking, face painting and having story time.

Jane has also been supported to maintain contact with her extended family with weekly Skype calls with her grandparents. This allows them to have a chance to share their experiences with her, but also keep in touch and up to date with how everyone is doing. They have included her cousin in some of these chats and Jane has really enjoyed this. She has also kept in touch with the carers' two other children via video call. This ensures that she is aware of what is happening with significant people in her life and maintains that bond and connection with them.

One of the families we support has decided to give back to Barnardo's Scotland through fundraising...

This little lion, who was adopted through Barnardo's Scotland services, has been preparing for her Big Toddle with lots of fun and games at her local park. She's already raised an incredible £835!

"With the support of Barnardo's, we were able to bring this precious child to a forever home. During Covid-19, our family and friends have overwhelmed us with their generosity towards our fundraising for a cause which is so special to us, and our original target was beaten within a few hours. We are looking forward to toddling, we are sure that our brave girl will have a ROAR of a time. We will be forever thankful for the gift that Barnardo's has given us, and this opportunity to fundraise allows us to give a little in return. Happy toddling everyone!"



One young person who has been seeking information about her early life history and birth family has been able to focus sessions during lockdown on building a greater support network to share feelings around adoption with family and friends. Through regular discussions she has developed skills to create more comfort in the adoptive family home to discuss difficult subjects. She has also taken time to reflect on her own feelings about the "real" birth father she has become aware of compared to the fantasy birth father she has dreamt of.

These successes have been achieved through regular video calls over Google Meet and text support. The worker has sent photos of adoption specific resources to spark thoughts and encourage reflection on specific topics. As lockdown eases and as this young person anticipates further progress in accessing her adoption file, she has shared that lockdown has afforded her a place to work through some difficult feelings in a controlled way with a diminished risk of making rash decisions.

"The guidance and support Barnardo's has given us during lockdown has been incredible. Whilst most companies have scaled back services, Barnardo's has been there every step of the way. With video calls twice a week and lots of emails, we feel confident we chose the best people to help us on this journey."

Family Placement Social Worker

"We are delighted with the support and ingenuity of Barnardo's during our family finding and placement with our son. Despite lockdown the service has done everything they can to put his needs first and we are so happy to be starting our family."



“ The young people I befriend have been so positive about their experiences being out with me. It's been so rewarding watching them grow and just having a bit of fun which at times can be tough in today's society.

When I first put myself forward I thought I would do it for a year or two and now I couldn't imagine not being involved with Barnardo's.

Neil, Volunteer Befriender
Barnardo's Scotland Fostering Glasgow Service