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To all foster carers in Scotland

May 2019

Dear Foster Carers and families

As Minister for Children and Young People I have the privilege of meeting a wide range of people from all parts of the care sector, many of whom are people like you who make it their priority every day to support our fostered children. I am always really impressed by the devotion and commitment.

For our part, I am very proud to say the Scottish Government's new national outcome, 'we grow up feeling loved, respected and included', is a genuine and important demonstration of our commitment to positive culture change. This also very much reflects the continuing ambition of last year's Year of Young People.

As we move towards this year's 'Foster Care Fortnight' in Scotland I know the ongoing challenges remain; encouraging dedicated and energetic people like yourselves is on many of our minds.

Children and young people who have experience of foster care have talked to me at length about their foster families and taken time to explain how you make them feel loved, valued and supported particularly when they are facing big life decisions such as considering opportunities in further education and employment. Fostering is no doubt demanding and rewarding in different measures at different times.

This year I was glad to be invited to speak at the Fostering Network's conference in March, where I had the opportunity to update on a number of policy developments being taken forward by this Government. I also had the pleasure of meeting the Fostering Network's Young Champions, Amy, Sophie and Adam who have been involved in sharing their positive experiences of foster care and helping to reduce the stigma that can sometimes be associated with living in care. Their enthusiasm for sharing their experiences of care and doing what they can to support others too is so encouraging to hear about.

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Listening to what our care experienced young people say and acting on it is at the heart of our policy development. You will be aware of all the work that has been underway through the independent review of care who are now into their Journey phase with a number of workgroups taking forward deep dives into different aspects of the care system in Scotland. If you have not already had the opportunity to share your views on any issue you have concerns about, may I take this chance to encourage you to make contact with them? There are a variety of ways you can do this on their website at <https://www.carereview.scot/> and you will also find an update on the workgroups that are now underway as part of their Journey phase.

I would like to update you on some activity that has been underway to support you and also help us improve outcomes for the children and young people we care about:

National Review of Care Allowances

Many of you will by now be aware that the Review published its report and also a report of its consultation findings in September last year. The recommendations are themed on improving consistency and transparency in delivering foster and kinship allowances and also the information that's available for families and carers. We are committed to working in partnership with CoSLA to develop a joint response, building on the voices of the many foster carers who participated in the consultation. If you have not yet had the chance to read the reports, they are available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/final-report-recommendations-national-review-care-allowances-9781787812109/> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/consultation-report-national-review-care-allowances/>

A Central Register of Foster Carers in Scotland

A central register is something that we have considered previously but it was not considered to be a viable option because of the practical difficulties of setting it up, maintaining it and the costs that would be involved. We have however recently been involved in some further discussions about the benefits a central register might bring and we know that these have been presented to the independent care review. If you have views on this, I encourage you to write to the Independent Review of Care to share them.

Continuing Care Implementation

We are also aware of some of the difficulties young people, carers and practitioners have been experiencing regarding implementing Continuing Care. We have been working with key partners like the Fostering Network and others and listening to the feedback on what these are. We have committed resources to exploring what more we can do to support a much smoother implementation. We want to do what we can to help more young people exercise their right to stay with their foster carer and benefit from a much more supported transition into independent living. If you have a young person in your care who wants to know more about this Who Cares? Scotland and the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland have a useful booklet explaining young people's rights to continuing care and after care support.

<https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/young-peoples-resources/continuing-care-and-aftercare-booklet>

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Support for young people in education into more independent living

The Deputy First Minister announced in June last year that £33 million will be made available via the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund to target and support the specific needs of care experienced children and young people, helping to improve their educational outcomes.

This funding is being distributed to local authorities to allow them, as corporate parents to make the best decisions in regards to improving the educational outcomes of care experienced children and young people from birth, right through to age 26.

Other examples of practical help to support care-experienced young people have been the introduction of council tax exemption and the care-experienced bursary. These measures will support them if they choose to live independently or move into further or higher education.

Learning and Development Standard for Foster Carers

A National Learning and Development Standard has been developed and was published by the Scottish Social Service Council in 2017. Not long after that the First Minister announced the Independent Review of the Care system which was to be root and branch, and would identify and deliver lasting change in all areas of the care system and leave a legacy that would transform the wellbeing of children and young people. We thought it would be prudent at that time, not to move ahead with implementing the learning and development Standard to wait and see what the findings of the review, particularly in relation to the workforce might be. I understand that the review as part of their Journey phase are now taking forward a work stream to focus on the workforce and I look forward to hearing about their findings. Which will inform how we move forward on this.

Improvements for siblings

You might also be aware that I recently announced that we are going to be strengthening the law through the Family Law Bill that is due to be introduced in parliament in the autumn so that maintaining sibling relationships and contact for children and young people in care will become a much greater priority for care services.

I know there is more work to be done to help improve outcomes for children and young people in care, but I do hope you are encouraged by some of the work we are doing to introduce improvements and we look forward to the findings of the independent Care Review.

I am more and more conscious that what matters most to the children and young people you look after 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.

I applaud you and your families for all that you do every day to make that happen and encourage others to consider caring for a vulnerable child. The Fostering Network's Foster Care Fortnight campaign [web page https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fcf19](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fcf19) provides some helpful suggestions and information on how you can help.

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Thank you for so many inspiring conversations over the past year and I hope to meet with many more of you in the future.



MAREE TODD

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