

Sandwell Foster Carers

SEPTEMBER 2020

Welcome to your newsletter!

I didn't imagine that I would be starting this month's newsletter reflecting on the local lockdowns that have already been introduced in Sandwell, Birmingham and Solihull along with further measures being introduced by the Government to reduce the infection rate. We continue to live in such unprecedented times and I know how difficult it is for us as adults to manage our physical and mental health so the importance of ensuring that the children and young people that we are working with, is a priority for all of us. Later in the newsletter you will read some very helpful information that Balwant Bains from the Virtual School has shared with us but first let's start with a fantastic story from one of our foster carers:

A lockdown story from Tanya Evans

Throughout lockdown I've tried to come up with different ideas to make 'virtual contact' a memorable experience for both children and parents. One of my children - who is 6, has been having WhatsApp video sessions with her Mom and it's been such a beautiful experience, apart from the first session when she showed her Mom around the whole house! However, I think that you will agree that the pandemic has been a real learning experience for all of us. A bit of advice, if a WhatsApp video call is appropriate for your children, encourage them to stay in one room and don't forget to set the boundaries before the call. It might be worth having a discussion with the Social Worker beforehand too.

Lots of video calls have taken place outside in the garden which has been lovely. There's one very memorable session where my six year-old was sitting on the swing in the garden chatting away to Mom – unforgettable for both of them I'm sure. There have been times where they have played games on the camera – the 'matching card game' is a particularly good game to play together on the phone.

I'm conscious that throughout the pandemic, none of us are able to do very much, *everything* is limited so playing games is brilliant and I've found that the children don't want the call to end. In some ways, the calls have been more productive than some face to face sessions.

Next time I'm planning for them to both have a cup of hot chocolate, do some drawing or something creative together that will have lasting memories.

We've also arranged for birthday presents to be delivered via Amazon which has been very effective and keeps a connection with both parents and siblings. Instead of cards we've sent WhatsApp photos and messages (where appropriate to do so). One Mum has said that she intends to keep the recording of her birthday message forever.

I hope that you've enjoyed this story and I look forward to speaking to you again in the near future.

We are always interested in hearing other carer's stories so please do not hesitate to [contact us](#) or your Supervising Social Worker and we will be sure to include your story in a future newsletter.

Balwant Bains, Executive Head of the Virtual School for LAC

It has no doubt been a strange few weeks as our children return to schools. The global pandemic has provided many challenges, and these will continue as we get our children used to the new systems in schools to keep them safe. Please take time to reassure them that it's okay if they forget the odd Covid-19 regime rule, it will take time to learn all the new protocols.

In case anxiety does set in, I can recommend the following websites for excellent resources and advice.

- **UK Safer Internet Centre** - <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/helping-young-people-get-back-school-ready-bbc-own-it>
Has videos and articles on topics including dealing with mean comments, reconnecting with friends, posting photos safely and back-to-school bedtime routines.
- **Barnardo's** have produced some guidance to help with back-to-school anxieties. https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/how-cope-back-school-anxiety?utm_source=email&utm_campaign=aug_enews&utm_medium=referral&source=&dm_i=1K6H,70SMY,U8N437,SBC48,1
- The Prince's Trust – 'Start Somewhere' website provides a list of agencies that you can contact for wellbeing support. <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/who-else/housing-health-wellbeing/wellbeing/mental-health#UK>

COVID-19 Prevent Guidance for Schools and Further Education Providers

The Department for Education has produced a briefing for schools and colleges that has been shared with all Educational settings in Sandwell. I thought that it would be a good idea to share it with you all too. Please find the full brief below that also includes a shortened blog post. Please click on the links below to view each.

The briefing note is written for senior leaders, teachers and safeguarding leads at schools and further education providers on how extremists are using COVID-19 to promote disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories. This non-statutory advice from the Department for Education has been produced to provide a short summary of the extremist response to COVID-19, highlighting the additional radicalisation risks for children and young people and suggested actions for settings to take.

- ✓ [Full Briefing: COVID-19 Prevent Guidance For Schools and Further Education Providers](#)
- ✓ [Short Blog Post: Extremists are targeting young people during the pandemic – so what can you do to tackle this in the classroom?](#)

Important update regarding Health Assessments

Good news - Social Workers can now attend initial health assessment clinic appointments held at Sandwell General Hospital. In addition, appointments are now underway to see children and young people for physical examinations if they previously had their assessment completed virtually.

Learning and Development

We're pleased to let you know that along with our monthly newsletter, you will also be receiving an 'Info Burst' from our Learning and Development Team at the same time. The document will provide you with the most up to date training information available to you all. We hope that you like it!

A Message from Ben Rock, Contact Centre Manager

As you know, the Contact Centre re-opened its doors for face to face contact on 10 August following consultation with SMBC's Health and Safety Team, Public Health Sandwell and the Trade Unions. We completed a robust risk assessment to handle the necessary measures to make contact as safe as reasonably possible for all involved.

Over the lockdown period our service had to adapt to the need to provide virtual contact to families and though this had some initial teething problems this has turned into a great success for the service and is something that we have continued with even after moving back to some face to face contact for families.

As you are aware, contact is extremely important for children and young people and the Contact Centre has kept that as our focus over this difficult period. I wanted to reassure you that we are doing everything possible to facilitate as much contact as we safely can. You have all helped us by making sure that our children and young people have snacks, drinks and something to keep them entertained during face to face contacts and you have also been instrumental in facilitating virtual contact so that parents have still been able to see their children for which we thank you!

If any of you have any comments or suggestions, please [email](#) us. Staff at the Contact Centre will be more than happy to listen, and we can work together to give our children and young people the best opportunity to have contact with their families in a safe and enjoyable way.

A Message from Milli McKetty-Campbell, Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer

Hi everyone, my name is Milli Mcketty-Campbell and I'm one of two Independent Reviewing Officers with a responsibility for co-ordinating and overseeing foster carer reviews. I have worked in Sandwell for nearly twenty years as a Reviewing Officer and I really enjoy it even though it does have its challenges at times!

I have an extensive background in Youth, Community and Social Work and since qualifying as a Social Worker, I have worked within Child Protection, Fostering and Adoption Teams and have managed teams working with under eights (Childminders), women and girls at risk of sexual exploitation and boys with sexually inappropriate behaviours.

I'm passionate about fostering and I (alongside) my family have fostered for 20 years and we have really enjoyed and valued having the young people come to live with us as part of our family. I have always said that whilst my (foster) children benefit from living with us we are also blessed to have them in our life. The Covid-19 pandemic has definitely had an impact on the way I work and also on my role as a foster carer. There have been challenges and opportunities to reflect on practice and I hope to be able to share some of these with you all over the next few months. Keep safe and I look forward to seeing you soon.



Please remember that your Supervising Social Worker is always here to provide any help, support and advice that you may need. Please continue to take care and stay safe. I look forward to speaking to you again in October.



Shanti Eaves

Head of Service, Children in Care, Care Leavers and Fostering

DON'T FORGET TO CONTACT US! IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER!

This is your newsletter, so do you know about any great fostering resources, or perhaps just an article or web link you want to share? Anything that could be useful to fellow foster carers – we'll help you let them know. Or if you have an idea, comment or request about fostering in general or what should be in your newsletter, contact your allocated Supervising Social Worker or email us at

Fostering_Info@sandwellchildrenstrust.org
