

# Sandwell Foster Carers

**DECEMBER 2020**

Welcome to your newsletter!

I hope that you have all kept safe and well over the last few weeks. I would like to start this month's newsletter with a massive 'thank you' to all of you for your work and commitment this year. It's been a very difficult and challenging year for many people yet you, our foster carers have shone through and this has been recognised not only by managers within the Trust but also by Ofsted during their Assurance Visit last month.

As we end the year, we have said goodbye to Pauline Turner, our Operations Director for the service and have welcomed Steven Gauntley as our new Operations Director. Steven is looking forward to getting to know you all through our fostering forum.

## **A farewell note from Amanda Wallace...**



To all of you that I have had the pleasure of working with over the last 13.5 years whilst in Sandwell, whether this has been through support groups, training or otherwise, I wanted to say a very fond farewell. I've achieved my ambition of becoming a qualified Social Worker and I've now decided that it's time to say goodbye. As many of you know, we have shared some highs (and lows) over this time and my experience of Sandwell will remain with me forever. I wish you all well and that you continue to enjoy many more years of fostering! Sending virtual hugs to you all!

## **A compliment to Shigufta Bahar and Gulnawaz Bahar**



Shigufta and Gulnawaz have been fostering for Sandwell since 2015. During this time they have had many children placed in their care which has enabled them to develop their knowledge and experience in their roles as foster carers. Since October 2019 they have had siblings Leycie and Riley placed with them. Both children have complex needs and the carers have worked hard to settle them into a consistent environment where they can feel safe.

Ongoing assessments have been completed regarding these children and the decision had to be

made on whether they remain together or apart. Shigufta and Gulnawaz were very much part of this assessment and shared information to support the social worker in making an informed decision. At a recent Child in Care review that they participated in the Independent Reviewing Officer was impressed with the progress the children had made in their care and sent the following compliments: *'I have just chaired a review for the children in the care of Shigufta. I just wanted to compliment her on the support she has provided to the children and the progress they have made whilst in her care.'* The child's guardian, Meena Dhillon also sent a compliment and added that *'Shigufta and her husband are "Amazing Foster Carers"'*.

Well done Shigufta and Gulnawaz! You continue to be an asset to the Trust and your commitment and flexibility to the role as foster carers is commendable. Thank you.

### **A marketing and recruitment update from Brian McKinstrie – Marketing and Recruitment Officer**

We've been busy making our recruitment planning 'Covid-secure' so that whatever happens – and however long we have to work from home, we can keep recruiting the new carers we need to give us more flexibility and even more capacity.

The good news is that we are already seeing some really promising new applicants coming forward and we hope that some of them will be joining Sandwell's biggest family soon.

So, what's been changing? Well the big news is that after an equipment refresh we now have computers that are more suitable to remote working and creating and sharing publicity online.

That means lots more activity online, including Facebook advertising in a way we have never really done before as we are focusing more on social media. It's a direction we have been considering for some time, but Covid-19 has brought it into sharper focus. We are now looking to make our online publicity the main strand of our recruitment work. That doesn't mean that all our other channels of communication will cease.

We will still be producing local poster campaigns, providing publicity to local libraries, doctors surgeries and when the time is right attending local community event's but digital marketing will be our main focus. It means we can reach people in their own homes or as they are going about their daily business – the possibilities really are endless.

We are currently testing the format and technicalities of running virtual information sessions – much like the old fostering information events that I know many of you have been to in the past.

If anyone would like to be part of these events, which we are expecting to run as closed meetings by invitation only, on MS Teams platform, please do let me know. We always like to have a foster carer or two at these events and this way you don't have to travel or find a parking space!

Once we have the technology sorted, then I think we'll have to have a virtual coffee morning! It's been good to keep in touch with you all as we send out the newsletters, but I really miss our coffee morning get togethers, so I'd like to try and do something even if in these strange times it has to be via a screen!

I'll keep you posted as things develop. But in the meantime, please stay safe and carry on with your wonderful work!

### **Fostering Forum update**

Our Fostering Forum was set up during the initial period of lockdown and has already become well established as an information sharing and consultation forum, with representatives from health, education, and Quality Assurance as well as Fostering. We also have two foster carer representatives - Tanya Evans and Yvonne Gisbourne and would love to have more of you join the forum. If you are interested, the forum dates for next year are:

15th Jan 2021 – 10:30-12:00

19th Feb 2021 – 10:30-12:00

19th March 2021 – 10:30-12:00

16th April 2021 – 10:30-12:00

21st May 2021 – 10:30-12:00

18th June 2021 – 10:30-12:00

16th July 2021 – 10:30-12:00

20th August 2021 – 10:30-12:00

17th September 2021 – 10:30-12:00

15th October 2021 – 10:30-12:00

19th November 2021 – 10:30-12:00

17th December 2021 – 10:30-12:00

### **Foster Carer Support Groups**

The Fostering Service are re-introducing Foster Carer Support Groups in the New Year! Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and face to face restrictions, we will initially hold the Foster Carer's Support Groups through Microsoft Teams.

Connected Foster Carers are invited to the Foster Carers Support Group on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 from 10:00 until 12:00 and Mainstream Foster Carers are invited to the Foster Carers Support Group on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021 from 10:00 until 12:00. Please contact Lynn Jones on 0121 569 3101 or [lynn\\_jones@sandwellchildrenstrust.org](mailto:lynn_jones@sandwellchildrenstrust.org) to book your place.

## **Learning and Development**

The latest edition of the 'Info Burst' from our Learning and Development Team is attached to this newsletter and is also available on the internet. The document will provide you with the most up to date training information available to you all.

## **A Message from Sharon Storrod, Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer**

First of all, I wish to commend you all for your continued hard work and dedication to the children and young people of Sandwell, especially during this difficult year. We have all had to adapt and meet new challenges and I am pleased to hear from so many of you as to the different ways you have faced these changing developments and continue to provide care and support to the children in your care.

I have worked in Sandwell for 25 years and as a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer for the past 4 years. I continue to work with very committed and hardworking foster carers who ensure that the children of Sandwell continue to be well cared for and remain safe in their care, therefore supporting me to continue to enjoy my role as an IRO. I remain committed to working with adults and children and young people in Sandwell whom I have come to know very well over the years.

I have listened to many creative ways in which you have all had to adapt to achieve your goal of ensuring children and young people are still supported to achieve their full potential given your support, care and commitment following the experience of the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020. The purpose of my update is to ensure that we continue to support our foster carers so myself and colleague Milli McKetty-Campbell Fostering IRO wish to do this by sharing information and updates to support with your role.

I have attended a course recently in respect of Parenting Early Years and Learning – Helping Children aged 2 to 4 year to learn at home during Covid-19 and this was very informative. To access any of the resources available from this training please contact [Saaeda\\_butt@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:Saaeda_butt@sandwell.gov.uk) (07769 283285) or [Sharon\\_osmond@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:Sharon_osmond@sandwell.gov.uk) (07880 295021). I am sure some of you will find the information and resources helpful. I am aware

that this material relates to a specific age range at the present time but any other information Milli or I receive which would be helpful to you all in the future we will provide you with relevant information when received. We will continue to share any updates in future newsletters and meet with you at a future virtual Coffee Morning as Brian has mentioned when it is possible for the Fostering team to reschedule these.

Again, I commend you all for all your hard work and achievement so far, it has not gone unnoticed given the many conversations I have had with you all during Annual Reviews. It has continued to be enlightening and rewarding reading feedback for Carers Reviews from children and young people in your care which shows a reflection of your continued engagement and stimulation required to build on their self-esteem and confidence.

Thank you for your continued hard work and commitment to the children and young people in your care as well as your own children also.



Please remember that your Supervising Social Worker is always here to provide any help, support and advice that you may need. I hope that you all have a lovely Christmas and best wishes for the New Year. Please take care and stay safe.



**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](mailto:Info@sandwellchildrenstrust.org)

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