

Sandwell Foster Carers

JANUARY 2021

Welcome to your newsletter!

I would like to start by wishing you all a very Happy New Year and best wishes for the year ahead. I know that the year hasn't started exactly how any of us would have wanted, but staying safe is our only option at the moment. I hope you find the information that we've included this month helpful and informative.

Welcome to Pascelle Grewall and Charmain Lewis!



Hi all, my name is Pascelle Grewall and I joined Sandwell Children's Trust as an agency Social Worker in June 2020 to provide temporary support for Special Guardians during Covid-19. I moved to my permanent role as Team Manager of the Connected Persons Fostering Team in December 2020. I'm really enjoying my new role, and everyone has made me feel very welcome - thank you! My social care background covers disability, youth work, care management, fostering and adoption. I hope this has given me a well-rounded understanding of the families we are working with. I am passionate about supporting children to remain within their birth families and looking forward to working with you all in this new role. Hopefully see you all soon (virtually) and hopefully one day soon in person!



Hello everyone, I'm Charmain Lewis and I'm the new Fostering Panel Advisor for Sandwell Children's Trust. My background is Fostering at Shropshire Council and Safeguarding Children at Stoke-on-Trent City Council. However, I have recently worked with four Local Authorities, supporting them in the development of practice and their transformation into a Regional Adoption Agency. I look forward to my future here at Sandwell Children's Trust and I look forward to meeting all of you very soon!

Discount cards – an update from Brian McKinstrie, Marketing Officer:

We told you we would be looking into discount cards and we have made enquiries to see if we could get you the Blue Light emergency services card for you as key workers. Unfortunately, membership is limited to current armed services personnel, NHS staff, the Fire Service and the Police – but we did try!

The next best option appears to be the Max discount card, which some of you have had before. But because there would be cost attached, we wanted to ask you first, is this something you want and think you could make use of.

The Max Card is UK wide discount card for foster families and families of children with additional needs. Max Cards can be used at venues across the UK to get free or discounted admissions, places it includes are Alton Towers, Legoland and Thorpe Park, as well as for Haven and Butlins holidays.

Clearly, it's not going to be as useful during the current Covid restrictions! But in principle, what do you think? Is it going to be something you will use, or is there another discount or membership card that you would like us to look into?

Let us know what you think, by dropping us an [email](#). We look forward to hearing from you.

Return of our coffee mornings!

One of the things I've missed most about the last year has been having to cancel our foster carers coffee mornings. So, we're bringing them back. Of course, in the current situation it will have to be virtual, but we'd love you to join us.

Just like the old coffee mornings, there is no agenda. We'll just have to make our own tea or coffee... and maybe a sneaky bit of cake...

Other than that, let's get together, to say hello and maybe share a story or too about what's keeping us going. I'm betting you won't be short of things to say – just like always!

After that we want to get in the habit of having regular virtual coffee mornings on first Friday of the month, just to keep in touch.

All you need to do to join is request the Teams meeting link from Lynn Jones by emailing her at lynn_jones@sandwellchildrenstrust.org to join in.

We'll send out a reminder nearer the time. It will be lovely to see you!

A message from Mike Tomkinson – Marketing and Recruitment Manager:

I'm sure that you will join me in giving a very warm welcome to Norah Waters who has joined us in the Recruitment and Assessment Team. Norah joins us from the Peripatetic Team and will be an Assessing Social Worker for new mainstream foster carers.

January has seen a promising start in terms of enquiries. Despite a national lockdown, it hasn't stopped 20 enquiries in 2 weeks coming through the door.

We have also launched our first 'Virtual' Information event on Microsoft Teams, to welcome new applications and answer all of those questions about becoming a foster carer.

A huge thank you to Pamela Williams who has done a fantastic job of supporting us with the information sessions and sharing some amazing stories about fostering.

We have some exciting things planned this month and moving forward including the virtual carer support groups and as Brian has already mentioned, our first ever 'Virtual' coffee morning. Be sure to attend where you can!

A message from Balwant Bains, Head Teacher Sandwell Virtual School:

As the Government announced another national lockdown that will last until at least February half-term, this has meant that most children have moved to remote learning organised by the school.

As you are aware, schools are required to be open for key worker and vulnerable pupils (Children in Care, Care Leavers or those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)); I strongly urge you to send your child to school, a risk assessment may determine the level of support they need.

Supporting Home Learning:

1) The national on-line **learning resources** at the Oak National Academy offers access to a broad range of subjects from maths to art to languages, for every year group from Reception through to Year 10. <https://www.thenational.academy/online-classroom>

2) The BBC have also launched its own education package across TV and online, featuring celebrities and some of the best teachers – <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/dailylessons>

3) You and your child will also have access to **Encyclopedia Britannica resources**, where there is a wealth of information that young people can use to complete homework and research without having to trawl through volumes of books. To access Britannica go to:

https://register.britannica.co.uk/Sandwell_Virtual_School/ (ID number: Sandwell1).

4) In case **anxiety** does set in over this uncertain period, I can recommend the following websites for excellent resources and advice.

- 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>

5) Sandwell Virtual School will play its part in **bridging the digital divide** for our vulnerable children so that learning is personalised and relevant. So, during the period including 5th January 2021 to 1st April 2021; **If during the Personal Educating Plan (PEP) meeting it becomes apparent that the child needs a computer to research or complete school work then the PP+ can be directed into the purchase of a device for the child.**

Lastly Sandwell Virtual School expects that the Spring Term PEPs to be completed virtually, in the same way as in the Autumn term. It is paramount that all CIC are tracked termly as this information is fed into the wider CIC Care Plan and reviewed by Education, Social Care and Independent Reviewing Officers.

This is a rapidly changing situation and I will continue to write to you once further guidance is published.

Save the Date: West Midlands Virtual Schools – Everyday Heroes with Jaz Ampaw-Farr:

Date: Wednesday 27 January 2021

Time: 15:30 to 16:30

Click here for registration: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/everyday-heroes-with-jaz-ampaw-farr-tickets-136936471673>

It will be recorded for anyone who registers but cannot make the published time.

Free webinar for designated teachers, social workers, personal advisors, carers, virtual school teams – any one supporting our children in care in Key Stage 4 and Post 16 education through a pandemic!

During lockdown everyday heroes designated teachers, post 16 educators, social workers, carers and all of the others supporting our children in care have demonstrated their invincibility. When facing adversity, some organisations set their sights on simply *surviving*, others aim for *thriving*. That's no small feat - even without the continuing challenge and impact of navigating a global pandemic. Spend

some time for yourselves to be motivated and refreshed for the challenges ahead so we can be our best for the children that we support and help them to excel and thrive in the next few months.

Come and take some time to hear the inspiring Jaz Ampaw-Farr and find out about the exciting plans we have to set up a You Tube channel with Jaz, so we can deliver weekly messages to support our children in key stage 4 and 5 over the next two terms.

If you have not seen her work check out her Ted Talk on You Tube – really inspirational

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3xoZXS5yc>

An important message from Connexions – careers advice and guidance continues to be available during Covid-19 lockdown:

Sandwell Connexions recognises that it's a difficult time for many Sandwell young people who are in care/former care and are anxious about how COVID-19 could affect their career opportunities. We would like to reassure you that we are operating a full 'Careers' service for your young person aged between 12 and 18 during the current Covid 19 lockdown.

The free service includes:

- Impartial careers information, advice and guidance virtual interviews
- Help with reviewing and updating their CV's
- Job search and interview techniques
- Help with changing career path and identifying skills and strengths
- Liaison with colleges and training providers who are offering online training/apprenticeships throughout this period of lockdown
- Exploring virtual work experience within the council

In addition, during January you and your young person are invited to attend one or both of the following events:

- The annual **New Year New Start careers show** which offers a wealth of advice, information on Post 16 Education and employment opportunities from a wide range of Colleges/training providers. It runs from **Monday, 25th January until Saturday, 30th January**.

<https://www.connexionssandwell.co.uk/> Each evening there will be a different showcase highlighting training, traineeships, apprenticeships, further/higher education and employers. It also features live chats with careers advisers, ready to discuss next steps.

- The Black Country Wide Careers Expo which is running from now until **14th February 2021** and includes a 'live jobs/apprenticeships' section.

To find out more about our lockdown services or future events please call our main office number **0121 569-2955 between 9.30-4.30pm Monday to Friday** or email us via our website <https://www.connexionssandwell.co.uk/> at any time. Alternatively, please contact you assigned Sandwell Connexions Adviser – if known.



**Free E-safety
for Parents
Online Workshop
2 February 2021
10am - 12pm**

Email: Contact_SAFL@Sandwell.gov.uk



Sandwell Adult and Family Learning Service



matrix



West Midlands
Combined Authority



Sandwell
Metropolitan Borough Council



@SandwellAdultEd



@learnsafl



Ofsted
Good
Provider

The above event is aimed at helping parents understand the importance of E-safety and includes how to set up secure passwords, parental controls and how to know and spot the dangers online for young people. It starts on 2 February 2021 10:00 – 12:00 and is free to everyone aged 19+ who has been an EU/UK resident for at least 3 years.

A message from Kevin Smith, Social Worker – Family Solutions Team:

Hello everyone, my name is Kevin Smith and I'm a Social Worker in the Family Solutions Team. We work with families where relationships and behaviours are difficult and challenging.

Here is a short description of the work that is carried out in the Family Solutions Team:

The Family Solutions Team offer a crisis response service when needed. This is offered when a young person, their parent or main care giver has requested that their child be accommodated by the Local Authority (Trust). Where it has been identified that there are no safeguarding risks for the child to remain at home, FST will provide a crisis response within 24 hours, but usually this response is immediate.

As someone who has also been a foster carer for many years, I am aware of the situations that many of you deal with. On behalf of the Trust, I would like to say that we really appreciate the great job that you do for the children and young people in your care.

We are here as part of the support available to you to help you to continue the great job that you do. We look forward to working with you to help to make sure that the children and young people in your care are able to have the positive lives that we are all entitled to.

Keep up the good work!

A word about Life Work...

Did you know that we've now got 2 Life Work Development Officers in post? They are Deannie Harris and Trish Cox.

They have kindly sent us a flyer to explain their roles and the work that they are doing. You will see it as an attachment to this newsletter. Any questions, please get in touch with [Deannie](#) or [Trish](#).

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.

Free training on Rights & Entitlements of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children - 15 & 25 February

West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) has arranged for Coram Children's Legal Centre to provide an introductory training course on 15 and 25 February covering the following topics:

- What is meant by the term 'UASC'
- Which countries UASC tend to come from, why they leave & typical journeys to the UK
- The UK asylum process & potential outcomes for UASC
- Roles & responsibilities of key organisations towards UASC (Home Office, children's services, legal representatives, health, education, police, third sector)
- Why age may be disputed & an introduction to the age assessment process
- The issues UASC tend to face when they turn 18 e.g. changes to immigration status & support from local authorities
- Why some UASC are trafficked to the UK &/or within the UK
- Where to access support for UASC & former UASC care leavers

It is designed for anyone caring for, working with or otherwise supporting UASC within social care, health, education, community safety and the third sector, particularly within the West Midlands.

The same course is scheduled to run on two separate occasions:

- Monday 15 February 13.00-16.30 – register on Eventbrite here <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/rights-entitlements-of-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-tickets-137285142557>
- Thursday 25 February 10.00-13.30 – register on Eventbrite here <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/rights-entitlements-of-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-tickets-137422760175>

If tickets sell out please do add your name to the waiting list as, even if you don't get a ticket on either of these dates, that information will help WMSMP gauge the demand for additional courses. If you get a ticket but can't attend, please do cancel it so that tickets can be released to people on the waiting list.



Adoption@Heart are kick starting the new year by once again, calling all those who are considering adoption, or would like some more information, to take the next step and get in touch.

Last year, the Regional Adoption Agency for the Black Country saw an increase in adoption enquiries during the coronavirus pandemic, with more people contacting the adoption agency to find out what the process involves and how they could start their adoption journey.

The team are as passionate as ever about delivering the best support to children awaiting adoption and to all adopters starting their journey.

Carol Moses, Recruitment and Assessment Team Manager said: "During the pandemic, we definitely saw more of an interest in adoption as families started to think about what was important to them.

"We also credit last year's national 'You Can Adopt' campaign which helped bust myths around adoption, particularly around who is eligible to adopt.

"However, it's a new year and our aims are the same. The need to recruit adopters remains and we are once again putting out a message for people to come forward and find out more about the adoption process.

"We will continue to do all we can to provide those considering adoption with all the information they need to make an informed decision.

"Being an adoptive parent can be challenging but it also brings great rewards. If you're interested in finding out more, please contact Adoption@Heart today."

Anyone can adopt, whether they are single, living together, married, a same sex couple, in employment or not working, or already have children or not. Potential adopters must legally be a UK resident and have been so for at least 12 months, as well as being aged 21 or over.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, Adoption@Heart have moved all their information events online. The virtual information events take place every two weeks and are the perfect place for those who are ready to start their adoption journey or would like more information. Future event dates are available at www.adoptionatheart.org.uk/events.

Adoption@Heart is the Regional Adoption Agency for the Black Country, providing adoption services for City of Wolverhampton Council, Walsall Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and Sandwell Children's Trust.

For more information, please visit www.adoptionatheart.org.uk, call 01902 553818 or email info@adoptionatheart.org.uk.



Please remember that your Supervising Social Worker is always here to provide any help, support and advice that you may need. Please take care, stay safe and I'll speak to you all again next month.



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)
