

# Progress, priorities and people

Last year was a busy year for the Looked After Children Unit at the Scottish Government, and, with a number of legislative and practice developments in the field, 2013 is shaping up to be the same. Here, the team set out their priorities for the year ahead



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The looked after children unit at the Scottish Government was established to help ensure all looked after children get the best start in life, are ready to succeed, and that the life chances for children, young people and families at risk are improved. These National Outcomes for the Scottish Government and our overall aims for looked after children and young people are nothing less than those we have for our own children.

**“We recognise that both birth and corporate parents of looked after children need targeted help and support, and early intervention is crucial”**

support for kinship carers in September 2012 with a view to tailoring support and tackling inconsistencies across Scotland. Our aim is to implement the findings of the review by around Autumn 2013.

The Scottish Government's Care and Permanence Plan makes a commitment to improve the timescales and quality of decision making for children looked after by local authorities. We are promoting the need for early decisions to be taken about permanence, so that

a young person is found a safe, stable, nurturing and permanent home with the least additional disruption in their lives and are working with the Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group (LACSIG) to shift care planning towards fewer placements for children, early permanence decisions for every child and a system that puts the child at the very centre.

Part of the Care and Permanence plan also includes a comprehensive review of foster care, to ensure that provision across Scotland is of the standard required to provide children with the stable, nurturing placements they need. A national review of foster care is underway, led by Sandra Paterson, and will undertake a comprehensive survey of foster care arrangements and agencies, with the aim of helping focus how services are structured and delivered and ensuring they are meeting the increasingly complex needs of children requiring alternative family placements.

The new Children and Young People Bill will put Scotland's Adoption Register on a statutory footing and will help speed up the adoption process and promote a consistent approach to matching. The Register is already achieving real success and we intend to develop it further to offer more children, particularly those harder to place, permanent homes.

We are working to secure even earlier interventions so that young people at risk of coming into care are provided with their (preventative) support needed in their

family environment to go on to lead positive lives without coming into care. The new Children and Young People Bill will help to ensure that all children's services have a strong focus on prevention and early intervention and that the child is always placed at the centre. However, the Bill itself will not work alone and it will be everyone's duty to work together to implement these principles in everyday practice.

For children looked after at home our Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group have been asked to formulate proposals for a new type of support, based around providing each child and young person with a volunteer life mentor – a positive, trusted, interested adult role model. This will be someone who will be accessible to the child and who can help promote the child's views.

On 4 December 2012, Aileen Campbell MSP, Minister for Children and Young People hosted the first of a two part summit focusing on improving outcomes for children who are looked after at home. Providing safe, stable, nurturing and permanent homes for children in care, as early as possible, is a priority for this Government and the event is one of a number of commitments to support children looked after at home and their parents. These two events are an opportunity to bring together a range of different services and stakeholders to explore the issues faced by this group of children and agree the priority interventions that are required to better support them.

The Scottish Government will be working with CELCIS, LACSIG, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and other partners to develop a work programme based on the themes that have emerged from the December event and a follow up event is planned for March 2013.

Summary provided by the Scottish Government Looked After Children unit.

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