**Brothers and Sisters Update March 2022**

Summary

In February 2022 Angus Council was awarded CORRA Foundation Funding of £100,000 from A Good Childhood fund to focus on Relationships and Brothers and Sisters as part of our second promise “Your Family and Relationships”. The grant has supported us to develop our 3 workstreams: training and whole system learning; child’s planning and quality relationships and developing nurturing and supportive environments.

We have a working group of passionate individuals from our locality social work teams, fostering, kinship and permanence teams, alongside partner agencies such as Who Cares, Angus Independent Advocacy and Active Schools and Children’s Hearing Scotland meeting regularly and are excited to progress our plans.

We want to keep our first promise “Your Voice” by have a team of our current looked after children and young people helping us focus on the issues important to them while we work to progress our plans. We will build on earlier work on engagement to encourage fun and innovative opportunities using competition reward to acknowledge our future participants for their time – we want to be creative, and look at awards or qualifications, paying into their savings accounts and having days out.

**Training and Staff Awareness**:

Joint approaches to learning with the Children’s Panels are being discussed, and work has begun on designing a training event programme which aims to include bitsize “lunchtime” learning and E-Learning resources. We want this to be relatable and have engaged with several young adults on their experiences of being looked after and the impact this had and continues to have on their relationships with their brothers and sisters. It is powerful and emotional, and they want their stories to be used to help us shape our efforts moving forward. We will ensure this learning will be available to all professionals with a role to play in keeping the promise – frontline staff, carers, and partnership agencies.

A Practitioners Development Forum is planned which will be a place for frontline social workers to engage with key identified topics- looking at barriers to improving practice and how we overcome these in a safe and supportive environment.

An ongoing pilot project with a local secondary school includes a “Twilight Learning” session to ensure education staff understand their role in the Promise and how to support it, alongside our work to design a Social Education module with the aim all children will know what it means to be care experiences, their rights, and begin to develop a shared language which is no stigmatised and increases community support and understanding for our young people.

We are developing “Promise Packs”– to be given to all children and young people currently in or coming in to our looked after system, to ensure everyone has the same information. This includes our plan to write a book explaining our process, their rights and expectations especially in relation to their brothers and sisters (and family) and make sure they know how to tell us if something is not working for them. We have commissioned advocacy services for our children – and our partners - Who Cares and Angus Independent Advocacy are both part of our working group feeding back current views and issues. Our new Protecting People Website will ensure children, families and professionals can access all key information in one easily accessible place.

**Child's Plans and Quality of Relationships**

Our Children’s Plans will prioritise relationships, being clear on supports in place to support and develop existing relationships and to re-engage with lost relationships.

Involving Dads is a new working group being set up to ensure we actively engage fathers in our work as we know this is something we need to improve on. Very often parental separation can be a barrier to quality time with brothers and sisters.

Focussing on 2021 the Quality and Improvement Team are going to review the experiences of children coming into care- and this will include their relationships, to ensure we understand how this *feels* currently. Our young persons team will also feed in to helping us understand what our current processes mean for them in respect of quality time with the people important to them.

Our Review Officers have recently agreed all Care Plans will have a box focussing on these key relationships ensuring this is reviewed on an ongoing basis. We have changed our assessments to ensure all practitioners focus on key relationships for the individual child and developed a new Quality Assurance Framework which will include reflective evaluations of our reports, a key focus of which will be ensuring we capture the child’s voice and key relationships.

We are meeting with research partners to ensure we understand the best practice evidence base to make informed decisions, with an IRISS commissioned literature review, and liaison with Stand Up For Siblings. We are exploring Family Group Decision Making and Lifelong Links as potential ways to maintain, strengthen and re-establish these relationships for our children and young people.

**Nurturing Environments to Support Relationships**

A key thing our young people asked us to think about is “opportunities and environments” for contact in everything we do.

We want to improve our current family time spaces and take children and family views in to account about what they need from these spaces. We want to make links with our local community and for our children and young people to be embraced by their “village”. We have made contact with the local Rotary Club who have invited us along to educate them on the Promise and plan to strengthen this link to progress our plans either through funding or opportunities. We want to begin to look at local community resources for quality family time- A local pottery studio has offered us use of their premises for some of our work, where children would be able to create something really special and have fun for a minimal cost. Our aim is to develop an options book identifying resources across the county (Prices, availability, accessibility) as a guide to practitioners on venue options and where possible allowing children to pick activities they would like to do!

Wider service re-design work is looking at how we structure our services to best meet the needs of our children and families and we will keep relationships at the heart of this in terms of when this quality time occurs.

We want our children to have quality time with the people important to them – and to make memories! Recent feedback from our Horizon’s team noted how powerful having family photographs taken at Christmas time was for their parent and baby group, and looking forward this something we would wish to replicate as an option. Watch this space- more to come!