

# Fostering, Adoption and Kincares Annual Report 2023



**East Lothian**  
Council

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

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## Help us to Improve

We welcome your ideas to help make our Adoption and Fostering Services even better, so whether you're an adoptive parent (or hope to be soon), a foster carer or prospective carer, panel member or other stakeholder please feel free to email us with your ideas on:

[fostering@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@eastlothian.gov.uk) or [adoption@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@eastlothian.gov.uk)

if you would prefer to phone, please contact

Paul Lawley, Team Leader, Fostering Services

01620 827613 (direct line) or email: [plawley@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:plawley@eastlothian.gov.uk)

## **Welcome to the 2023 annual report for the Fostering, Adoption and Kinship care teams.**

This report will provide an overview of the work that each team has undertaken throughout 2023 and provides information and figures which highlight the challenges we have faced.

Our duty service has been as busy as ever in 2023. One area of noticeable improvement has been the reduction of external foster placements used for our children and young people which has dropped significantly from previous years. This means that we have been able to keep young people in their own communities, close to family and friends and also represents a significant financial saving. This report will provide a comprehensive overview of all our work on duty.

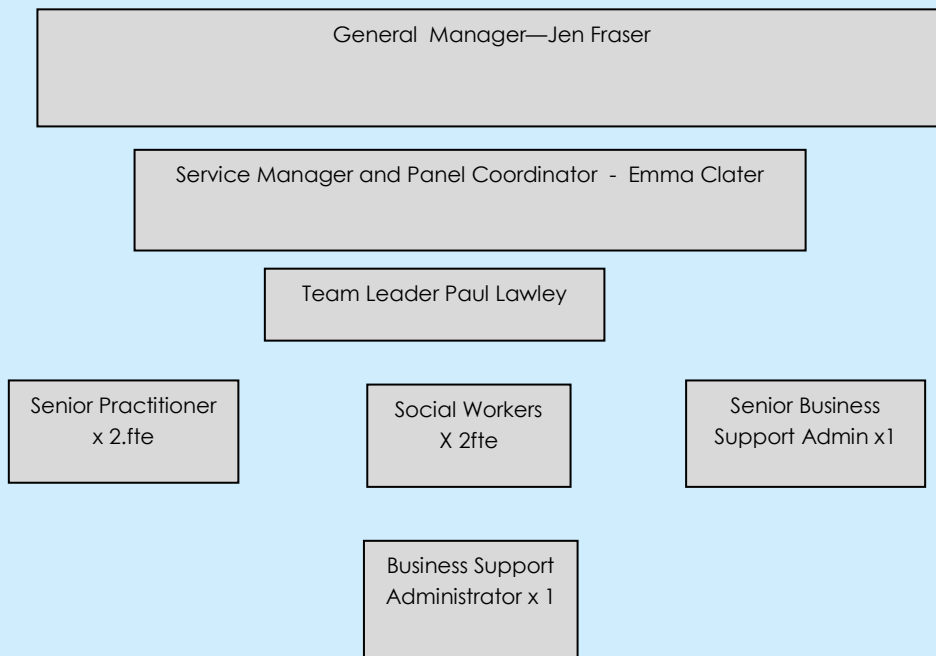
Later on in the report, Robyn Elliot, Team Leader for the Adoption and Kinship team, will share information around the approach we are taking in the area of Life Story Work and our ambition to roll out this approach with foster carers, adopters, and kinship carers.

Towards the end of the year, our services were inspected by the Care Inspectorate. This was a detailed and rigorous inspection that looked into a number of key areas of our work. The inspection covered Fostering, Continuing Care and Adoption. Despite being rated as very good in almost all areas, the Care Inspectorate base their final scores on the lowest rating and so both Fostering and Adoption were ultimately rated as good, with Continuing Care being rated very good. The inspection was helpful in identifying a number of areas for development which will be worked on in 2024.

# Fostering Services



# Fostering Services



## Meet the team

Paul Lawley —Team Leader

Gillian Warren—Senior Practitioner (Carer Training lead)

Clare Tarnawska —Senior Practitioner (Continuing Care lead)

Jackie McIlroy—Senior Practitioner (Duty and referrals lead)

Alec Robertson—Social Worker

Gilliam Malcolm—Social Worker

Caroline McCorkindale—Senior Business Support Administrator

Vicky Ferguson—Business Support Administrator

## Fostering 2023

Fostering/Adoption Services	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Foster Care Placements achieved	35	32	33	35	32	12	19	19
Foster Care Placement Moves (carer– carer)	5	5	6	18	20	17	19	5
Emergency respite foster care achieved	10	7	0	0	0	5	0	2
Placed with External Foster Carers (out with East Lothian)	2	11	6	10	15	5	14	6
Carer holiday respite/carers emergency respite	98	67	74	92	30	19	74	59
Recurring respite (for a child in foster care)	8	5	4	0	4	0	3	2
Recurring respite (for a child living with family)	1	5	0	3	3	7	6	0
Outreach (family supported by a foster carer during day time).	0	4	5	6	6	7	10	8
Residential Placements	13	10	16	18	11	12	11	13

Resource requested not available	14	7	1	2	0	5	1	5
Resource requested not available (supervised contact)	Not counted	4	0	0	0	n/a	1	2
Resource requested not available (childcare for kincarers)								1
Requests for placement/service withdrawn	98	111	130	94	101	54	86	66

## **Fostering 2023**

If we contrast the figures for 2023 with those for 2022 a couple of things stand out. There is a marked drop in the use of placements with independent fostering agencies, and also a drop in the number of placement moves.

Of the six placements made with independent fostering agencies in 2023, two of these were short break placements, one was a move out of a residential placement to a foster care placement, one was a move from one external provider placement to another and two were moves from East Lothian foster carers. We are keen to limit our use of independent fostering agencies because often children have to be placed many miles from their locality and may need to move school. Recognising that it is usually in a child's best interests to remain in their local community we are keen to attract more East Lothian families to fostering, and we have reviewed our fees and recruitment practices as a result of an ongoing drive to keep our children local.

As well as keeping our number of independent agency fostering placements low, we have been analysing the reasons for placement breakdowns and hope that this work, together with our improvements to matching processes, is bearing fruit by leading to a reduced number of placement moves (5 in 2023 as opposed to 19 in the previous year). Sometimes moves can be for positive reasons – i.e. a child moving from a temporary placement to a permanent placement – but more often than not, placement moves are difficult for children and can damage their trust in the adults who are caring for them.

Our number of 'new placements' – i.e. placement for children coming from home into foster care – has remained for the third year in a row lower than for the previous several years. We made 19 new placements in 2023 – the same figure as in 2022 (between 2016 and 2020 this figure was consistently above 30). As stated in last year's report the reasons for this are not entirely clear but may be reflective of increased efforts to support families to keep children at home (or within the extended family), in keeping with the aims of 'The Promise'.

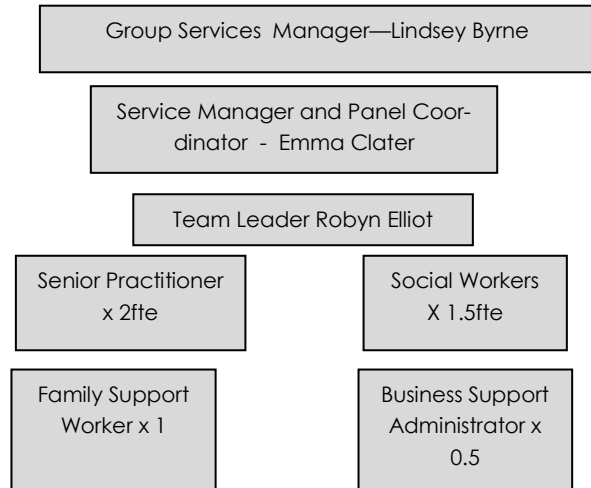
This low number of placements made may give the impression that there isn't a lot to do when covering duty. However, much of our time on duty is taken up by referrals that eventually don't require a fostering placement – this was 66 referrals over the year. These are all referrals where we would gather information about the children, look for possible matches in our resources, and keep in touch with placing social workers for updates.

The other area that has probably been the most time-consuming is residential searches. Whilst we now have a comprehensive database with contact details for residential units around Scotland and the North of England, finding the right residential placements is extremely challenging due to a lack of suitable residential resources.

**Jackie McIlroy, duty and referrals lead senior practitioner.**



# Adoption and Kinship Services



## Meet the team

Robyn Elliot —Team Leader

Ian Burdett—Senior Practitioner (Adoption lead)

Ros McClements—Senior Practitioner (Post adoption lead)

Patricia Tulley—Social Worker

East Lothian Council is committed to keeping families together, and we work to improve the long-term outcomes for all children. Therefore, kinship care is considered the first option when parents cannot provide the care that a child requires. We work as a Council in partnership with other agencies to support kinship carers because we want to keep children safely together with their families wherever possible. We know that providing care can be challenging and exhausting and that we must scaffold our kinship families with support as much as possible.

## Kinship

16 assessments completed.

4 closed before assessment completed.

And we have 111 kinship carers.

## Adoption and Kinship 2023

The Kinship Support contract with Children 1st works exceptionally well, and it has been an invaluable part of the support we have offered kinship carers over the past two years. This has allowed the in-house kinship team to undertake formal kinship assessments, as well as working in partnership with Children 1st, providing some additional support. The Children 1st team have two support workers who support around 63 kinship carers at any one time for as long as it is needed. They facilitate three support groups across the county where they do activities in the holidays, as well as individual work and group work and support to address early trauma.

I know from speaking directly to the kinship carers who use these groups that they are valued and that having this ready and responsive support when needed has assisted them in managing their daily challenges. This contract works well for our service and offers a foundation that our children in kinship care need to thrive.



# Kinship Care in Partnership with Children 1st

## Children 1st – East Lothian Kinship Service

During 2023 the Children 1st Kinship Team worked with 122 service users and offered regular support to 116 children and young people. The Team also offered regular support to 68 adults.

Children 1st believe that all children have the right to be cared for and loved in their own families and communities, where they are safe. We believe that the best way to achieve this right is to provide early help and support, working together alongside families to ensure that children feel safe, happy, secure, and nurtured at home. We build trusting relationships with families because we believe this is what supports families to be stronger, makes children safer and communities more resilient. We provide both practical and emotional help and all our support is embedded in children's rights. We work with the whole family, we listen and take time to build relationships, we are compassionate, trauma informed, recovery focused, and we are hopeful. During 2023 we arranged family trips to: Dunbar swimming pool, Musselburgh and North Berwick beach, Jump In trampolines and Ninja Warriors.

### **Aims of the service:**

To help children and young people at risk of being removed from home and accommodated to remain safely in the care of family members.

To support Kinship Carers in crisis to build resilience and strength within the family to allow them to keep their children safe and within the family system.

To promote community - based support to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and trauma.

To support Kinship carers emotionally, financially, and. This reduces the stresses they experience in being a kinship carer and allows them to care better for their children; to build their resilience to manage traumatised children in their care, this strengthens kinship placements, making them more likely to succeed.

To support Kinship Carers to understand the trauma that the child or young person has been through and equip them with the resources and skills they need to help their children recover from trauma. This also strengthens the kinship placement making it less likely to breakdown and cause further trauma.

The core of our work is the relationship, building trusting relationships with families, which forms the basis of any supportive or therapeutic work.

To build relationships with other agencies in particular social workers so that we can join up work, while maintaining a boundary so that we can be independent, and challenge practice and decision making on behalf of our families.

An open ended at the point of need support service: to provide support for the duration of kinship care placements.

To provide tiered, tailored, flexible support to families from light touch, group work to more intensive and regular support.

Support families - to prevent breakdown within the family.

# Changes in 2023

In 2023 we said goodbye to Randal House and moved our fostering and adoption teams along with our children services colleagues, into East Lothian Councils Head Office in John Muir House Haddington . We have now adopted a hybrid working policy working both in the office and at home.



2023 saw three members of the fostering team move on:

Clare Tarnawska left the team in August. Clare had a lead role in Continuing Care. After many years working for Children's services in a variety of roles, Clare decided to retire from social work.

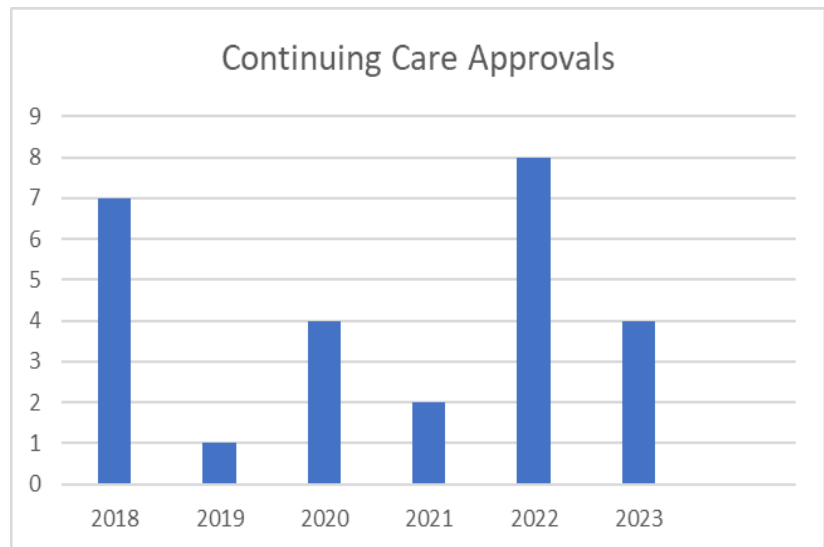
Tanya Gray left the team in November. Tanya was with the team for around 6 years. She had a lead role in foster carer recruitment. Tanya made the decision to move back to England for family reasons.

Lynsey Fletcher who moved on in July to pursue new challenges.

# Continuing Care

## Continuing Care Placement Approvals

During 2023 the placements of 4 young people were converted to continuing care placements with their East Lothian foster carers. Although remaining in their care placement is the best outcome for these young people, it does impact on the number of fostering placements we have available for other children.



# The Adoption Panel

## **The Adoption Panel 2023**

### **Panel 1**

Charlie Egan, Panel Chair, St. Andrew's Children's Society

Stewart Meikle, Retired Children's Hearing

Sarah Leighton, Social Worker, (Midlothian Council)

Penny Racket, Educational Psychologist

Rachel Hill, Educational Psychologist

Sam Mitchell, Senior Practitioner (Children's Services)

### **Panel 2**

Diane Watt, Panel Chair, Retired Children's Hearing Chair

Mike Lloyd, Adoptive Parent

Liz Ritchie, Sheltered Housing Team Leader, ELC

Scott Rintoul, Senior Practitioner, Children's Services

Sue Spence / Nick Roberts—Children 1st

### **Panel Advisors**

Jillian Dawson, Panel Medical Advisor – children

Christine Heron– Panel Medical Advisor – adults

Keren Conway, Legal Advisor to the Panel

### **Panel Coordinator**

Emma Clater, Service Manager, Long Term Care & Support

### **Agency Decision Maker**

Lindsey Byrne— Head of Children's Services

Membership is made up of practitioners from the Practice Team, service provision units, the voluntary sector, health, education, adopters, adopted people, service users and foster carers.

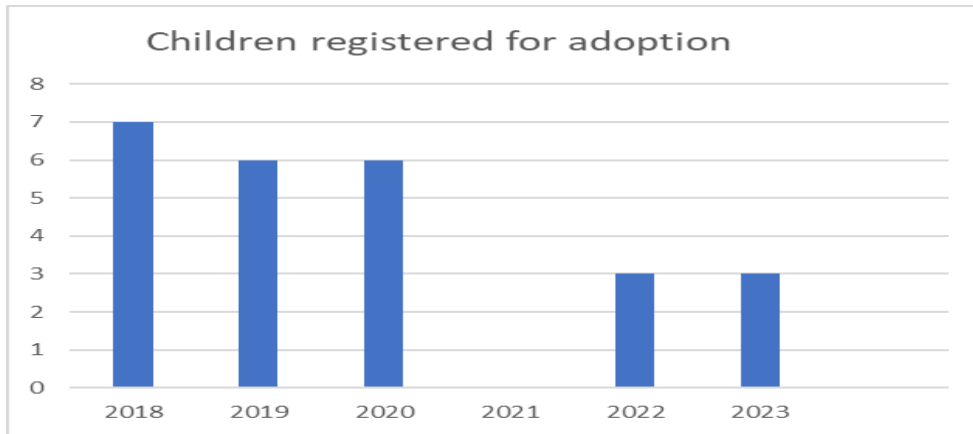
Panel members are given access to children's services protected learning opportunities . We also arranged Theraplay training which was presented by our Play Therapist ,Jude Hallewell.

New panel chairs are encouraged to attend the Coram Baaf panel chair training course.

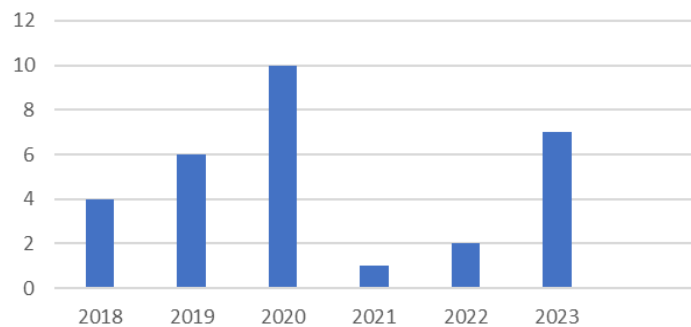
Our adoption panel pack was updated during 2023 and re circulated to all panel members.

During 2023 it was agreed that adoptive carers who are caring for children on a fostering basis prior to permanence orders being granted should have their fostering approval reviewed annually and this practice is now in place.

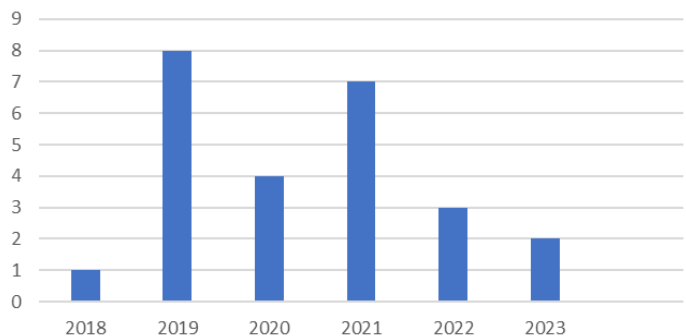
# Adoption Panel Business



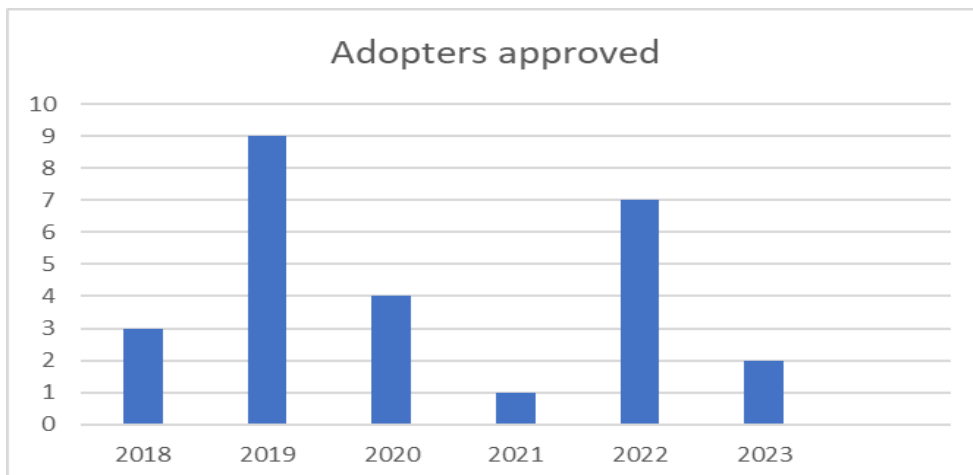
Children matched for adoption/long-term foster care



Children registered for long-term foster care



Adopters approved



# Share the Care

Share the Care is East Lothian Council's Short Break Service for young people with disabilities and is managed by the Disability Team in Children's Services.

## Meet the Team

*Fiona Gemmell, Team Leader*

*Leann Robinson, full-time Senior Practitioner*

*Shelley McNaughton, part-time Social Worker, Stacey Cross Business Support*

*Lynsey Fletcher, Business Support*

We successfully ran a number of family activity days over Easter, Summer and October holiday periods supported by our Share the Carers. We were supported by East Lothian Play Association and also our colleagues in Active Schools to provide inclusive activities for all the family. We also had input from our Arts Service colleagues – we had dance and drama tutors and a drums tutor. Both were a huge success with our children and families. The activity days are an opportunity for young people and their families to meet up during the holiday periods and the feedback we have received has been very positive. Our activity days would not be possible without the support of our Share the Carers, a big thank you is extended to everyone involved in supporting them.

Our Tesco Community Grant has allowed us to offer a free hot meal to each person attending the activity days.

Some of the parents who attended the Family activity days created a WhatsApp group for parents/carers only and this is maintained by them and independent from Share the Care. We are delighted, as an aim of the family activity days is to promote connections between families and reduce feelings of isolation.

The number of enquiries and subsequent approval of Share the Carers continues to be very low however we continue to have a dedicated community of Share the Carers who support five young people throughout the year but also provide emergency support and holiday support to a number of other young people.

At the time of writing this report our Share the Care lead, Leann Robinson, has left us for pastures new and we welcome on board Gillian McFadyen. Gillian is going to have a renewed focus on recruitment, having already attended a recruitment fair at Queen Margaret University with success.

We would like to thank each Share the Carer for their continued commitment to our children and their families.

Feedback from families:

“Amazing holiday group”

“Activity days have been a godsend”

“Staff are all so helpful and understanding of the children's needs and supportive to the carers”

# Adoption & Post Adoption Support

Our adoption team continues to be committed to providing and supporting safe and nurturing adoptive families for children for whom adoption has been identified and supporting all others affected by adoption, treating everyone with dignity, respect, and compassion. Our Kinship team continues to be committed to keeping families together and working to improve the long-term outcomes for all children. We know that providing care can be challenging and exhausting and that we must scaffold our kinship families with support as much as possible.

2023 was another busy year for the team, reflecting a year of commitment, growth, and impactful service to families and children in our community. We aim to provide stable and nurturing environments for children through kinship care and adoption, ensuring they have the support and love they need to thrive. We continue to work in partnership with Children 1st, which provides a fantastic kinship support service, and Adoption UK, which offers invaluable (and often free) training for adopters, kinship carers, and foster carers. In 2023, we also partnered with Foundations for Families, an Adoption UK service offering support for kinship carers. These collaborative efforts have driven our progress over the past year.

## Post-Adoption Support Overview

The demand for post-adoption support has continued to rise, reflecting the ongoing needs of families in our community. Families have greatly benefited from the resources provided by Adoption UK's Pathways service, the FASD Hub, and an extensive range of training programs. Feedback from families using these services has been overwhelmingly positive, affirming their effectiveness and value. Additionally, some families have required more intensive support through the ADAPT program. Many have secured adoption allowances, enabling them to access essential services such as play therapy, which has seen increased use as an early intervention tool over the past year.

Direct support from the Adoption Team has remained a cornerstone of our work with families. We focus on therapeutic parenting, life story work, and maintaining robust and relationship-based engagement with adopted children and young people. We have continued to support families during education and health-related meetings, ensuring their needs are met across all aspects of their children's development.

Post-adoption contact remains a significant area of our efforts. The team has worked extensively to help adoptive families maintain meaningful links with birth families through letterbox exchanges and, in some cases, face-to-face meetings. The intensity of this work varies based on each family's needs. We have also supported birth families who have sought emotional assistance due to the impact adoption has had on them.

Our regular support groups for adopters have thrived, with particular success in our new Under 5s group, which participating families have warmly received. This year's residential weekend at Wiston Lodge was another highlight, bringing together many East Lothian families as weekend or day guests for a valuable shared experience.

In 2023, we ran two 'Preparing to Adopt' groups, successfully increasing the number of approved adopters waiting for a match. We concluded the year with a robust pool of potential adopters ready to be matched.

This year's achievements underscore the importance of continued support for adoptive families, ensuring they receive the resources and guidance needed to thrive.

2023 (refs)	Closed	Moved to direct work	Direct work with families
7	2	5	18

Post Adoption Support



# Fostering Recruitment Report

## Recruitment

2023 was another challenging year in terms of recruitment of foster carers. Despite having a significant number of enquiries, we were only able to get four of these through Skills to Foster training and, although they all moved on to be assessed as foster carers, the assessments won't be completed until 2024. We were though able to complete three assessments that were started in 2022, which did provide a much needed boost to the numbers of our foster carer community. For the first time, we used radio campaigns to generate interest in fostering with East Lothian. Indeed, two campaigns were run this year. This is a costly method of recruitment, which did not perhaps yield the numbers of enquiries we had hoped for but did nevertheless raise the profile of foster care with us. 2023 saw us launch a new initiative to recruit host families for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). Like all local authorities, East Lothian has a responsibility to take a number of UASC young people via the National Transfer Scheme run by the Home Office. It remains to be seen whether there is interest within East Lothian to take on this role.

## Life Story Therapy works!

One of our aims is to make life story work an integral component of our fostering, adoption, and kinship care service, providing invaluable support to children navigating complex emotional landscapes. Life story work can be a therapeutic approach that helps children make sense of their past experiences, understand their identity, and develop a coherent narrative of their lives. All care-experienced children and young people should have access to some form of life story work, and we are looking at ways to help carers and parents collect information each day to help the child build their story. Some children and young people who have experienced challenges and adversity may need a more intensive piece of work, and this is what we refer to as the Richard Rose Model of Therapeutic Life Story Work (TLSW). Through carefully guided sessions, children are encouraged to explore their personal histories in a safe and supportive environment, enabling them to process trauma, build resilience, and foster a sense of belonging. This year, we have one team member, Ros McClements, undertaking the Diploma in TLSW, and there are plans for other team members to follow in her footsteps. This is because we believe that implementing life story therapy and TLSW will facilitate deeper healing and connection for many children and empower caregivers with the tools to understand better and support the emotional needs of the children and young people in their care. The positive outcomes demonstrated from this evidence-based therapy suggests it promotes long-term emotional well-being and stability for children in foster, adoptive, and kinship

# Kinship Care Panel

## **Kincare Panel** **The Kincare Panel Membership 2023**

### **Panel 1**

Phil Brown, Panel Chair, Team Leader Duty Team

Roisin McMillan, Senior Practitioner, Practice Team

Shelley McNaughton, Social Worker, Disability Team

### **Panel Advisors**

Christine Heron, Medical Advisor /Adults

### **Panel 2**

Paul Lawley Panel Chair, Team Leader

Jackie McIlroy, Senior Practitioner, Fostering Team

Pat Thomson, Senior Practitioner Practice Team

Steph Gilchrist, Social Worker, Practice Team

### **Panel Co-ordinator**

Emma Clater, Service Manager,

The Panel continued to meet virtually, and were able to approve 7 Kincarers at panel in 2023.

The panel said goodbye to Marni Foxtan at the end of the year.

# The Fostering Panel

## **FOSTERING PANEL**

### **The Fostering Panel Membership 2023**

#### **Panel 1**

Rosie Thomson, Team leader  
Shona Yule, Retired Social Worker  
Carole Lesenger, Retired Reviewing Officer  
Nicola Mackie, Housing Officer  
Katherine Purvis, Response officer

#### **Panel 2**

Gillian Neil, Service Manager Adult Services  
Fiona Whitelock, Social Worker  
Jennifer Rodger, Midlothian Social Worker  
Shaun Thomas, Margo Irvine, Children1st

#### **Panel Advisors**

Christine Heron, Medical Advisor /Adults

#### **Panel Co-ordinator**

Emma Clater, Service Manager, Long Term Care & Support

Membership is made up of practitioners from across Children's Services, Supervising Social Workers from other agencies, service provision units, the voluntary sector, health, education, and foster carers. A gender balance is desired when the Fostering Panels meet.

Fostering panel members are given access to the children's services protected learning events and they are also invited to panel business meetings where statistics and trends, panel feedback and training needs are reviewed.

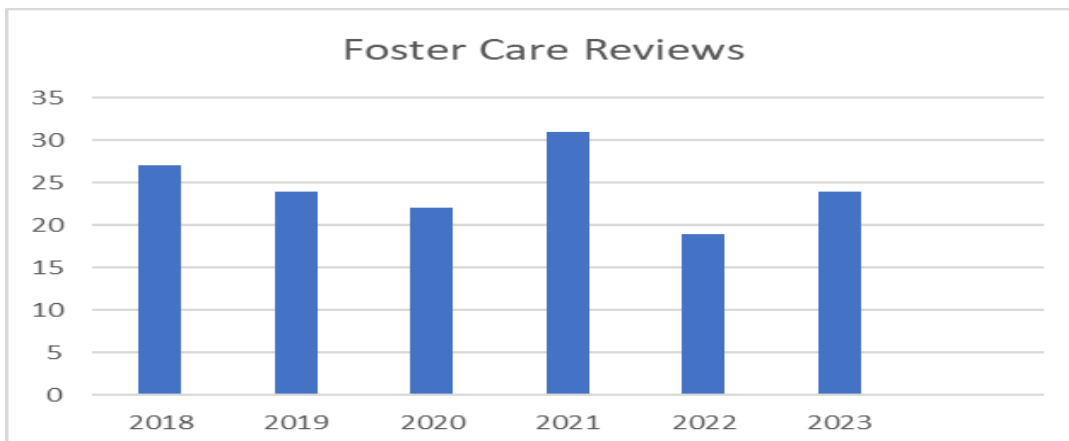
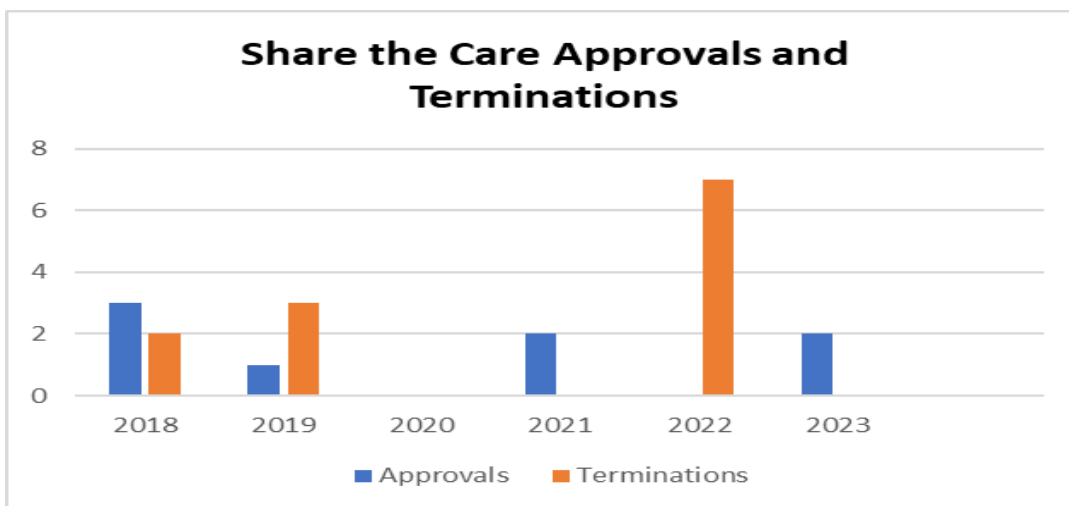
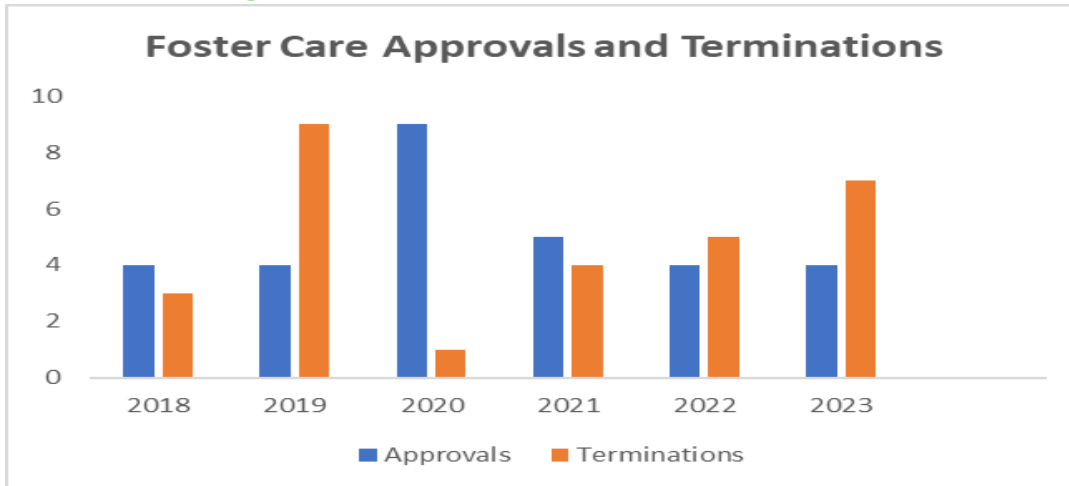
In 2023 we recruited our first Host Family for Un-accompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) who are some of the most vulnerable young people in the country. They are often alone, in an unfamiliar place and are likely to be surrounded by people who don't speak their first language.

They are unlikely to have had a settled childhood. Some may have experienced racial abuse, been involved in trafficking, child sexual exploitation, been exposed to war or other turmoil, all of which can lead to serious psychological and emotional issues.

We hope to recruit further family's in the coming months .

The number of foster carers withdrawing from the service again outweighed the number of foster carers recruited.

# Fostering Panel Business



# Carer Training Calendar 2023

**Online resources and written advice passed on throughout the year:**

2023 was a busy year in terms of the number of mandatory and other training opportunities offered to carers either by the team or arranged through third party providers. Whilst the turn out for the RAP Training and Team Teach was high, the same cannot be said for any of the other training that was offered and resulted in many courses having to be cancelled. Attempts to gather feedback were also made via a survey and the bulletin to look at causes for the low numbers attending or for suggestions as to what training would be beneficial, however again, the number of responses was extremely low and we were unable to make any meaningful changes.

**In person or online presentations/workshops provided by ELC or external agencies:**

Date	Training
January	Child Protection Level 1
February	Depression: Identifying and Supporting Children and Young People
March	Discussion and Information on FAS(D) Child Protection Level 1 RAP Training
April	Child Protection Level 1 Team Teach
May	Presentation on recording Information Child Protection Level 1 Team Teach
June	Harmful Sexual Behaviour Trauma, Domestic Abuse, and how it impacts children and Young People Blended Paediatric first aid (0-18)
August	First Aid at work Briefing from MYPAS re services and referrals
September	Face to Face Paediatric First Aid (0-18) Alcohol and Cannabis Education Trust Vulnerability of babies Child Protection Level 1
October	ASIST
November	LGBTQ+ and gender identity Child Protection Level 1
December	In addition to the training above, the following courses were also offered to carers via links in the weekly bulletin: Explosive and non-compliant children Story telling through case notes Webinar. The Big 3, stealing, lying and raging Webinar Connective Parenting: Using the principles of NVR Helping Sleep Happen (FASD Focus) Connective Parenting: Using the principles of NVR (FASD Focus) Carers also advised of courses available via Learnpro

To find out more about fostering and adoption, please contact East Lothian Council's **Fostering & Adoption Services Team:**

**Call:** 01620 827643

**Email us at:** [fostering@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@eastlothian.gov.uk) / [adoption@eastlothian.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@eastlothian.gov.uk)

**Or visit:** [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/fostering) / [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/adoption](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/adoption)

East Lothian Council is both an Adoption Agency and a Fostering Agency. You can find out more about our duties and responsibilities in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and related Regulations. The Adoption & Fostering Alliance Scotland website ([www.afascotland.com](http://www.afascotland.com)) is a good source of information about fostering and adoption legislation and also the Fostering Network website ([www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)).

### Complaints

You can get a Feedback Form from your worker or local council office. This tells you about the Council's complaint procedures. Please note that you should make a complaint within 6 months of the date that you first noticed the problem that you are complaining about.

If you are not satisfied with the Council's response, you can also take your complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. However, you must make a complaint through the Council's Complaints Handling Procedure first.

Please write to: The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

4 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS

tel: 0800 377 7330

email: [ask@spsso.org.uk](mailto:ask@spsso.org.uk)

### The Care Inspectorate

**The Council's Fostering and Adoption Services are registered with the Care Inspectorate and different aspects of our services are inspected each year.**

**You can read these on the Care Inspectorate website [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com)**

**Or phone- 0345 600 9527**





