

special guardian's newsletter

Foster Wales RCT- working together to build better futures for local children

community sharing shop

Manage Money Wales has created a Community Sharing Shop, where you can find lots of pre-loved items absolutely free! They run on donations made by the local community and offer pre-loved clothing, shoes, toys, books, house and kitchen ware and much more. They also have a community fridge, pantry and café, as well as free advice, support and guidance, workshops, classes, activities and training. They are always looking for good quality donations as well, to help keep the shop well stocked, and these can either be dropped to them or you can arrange for local pick up. You can find them at The Factory on Jenkin Street in Porth, Monday to Friday, 9:30am-2pm. For more information, please contact barbora.managemoneywales@gmail.com or call/text 07751635701.



festive greetings from all of us at foster wales rct

Welcome to the second issue of our SGO Newsletter. This edition includes updates in the sphere of kinship care, training opportunities, events, support available from community groups, and much more! We welcome all your thoughts and feedback of what would be most useful and interesting for you to hear about in each issue, so please send any suggestions to Elin.Black@rctcbc.gov.uk.

I also sometimes send updates or details of upcoming events happening in the community that may be of interest, in between the publication of our newsletters, so if you would like to be added on to our mailing list, you can email your full name and request to the same address as above.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your commitment, love and nurture of our young people as this year draws to a close- always remember the remarkable difference you make to their lives. Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

melanie howells- who i am & what i do



Hello, I am Melanie and from the 17th of January 2025, I will be in the new post of Special Guardian Support Social Worker, within the Kinship and SGO Support Team within RCT council. Within my role, I will be helping to support SGO families by providing information and advice, reviewing SGO support plans, undertaking financial assessments, highlighting relevant training, along with sign posting to other agencies. I have been a qualified Social Worker since 2011, and I have lots of experience working with families, children, and young

people. At the start of my Social Work career, I worked in the field of child sexual exploitation for 5 years, supporting 11–18 year-olds who were either at risk of or who were being sexually exploited. I have been employed within numerous local authorities in both Fostering and Family Placement Teams, supporting both mainstream and kinship carers as a Supervising Social Worker. I have been employed by RCT, working in the Fostering Support Team as Supervising Social Worker since 2021. I always strive to do the very best for the people I work with, and I am excited to be starting my new role and working with you in the future.



new family social- support for lgbtq+ carers

New Family Social are a UK charity, led by LGBTQ+ adopters and foster carers, who are there to help LGBTQ+ families decide if fostering or adoption is right for you and to support you on your journey to becoming parents and carers. With an ever-increasing need for LGBTQ+ people to explore becoming foster carers or adopters, the charity's aim is to try and make the pool of potential parents/carers as wide as possible, to meet the needs of the many children in care. They offer a range of services across the UK, which include peer mentoring, webinars and training, social events, podcasts and summer camps. In addition to this, there is a monthly support group that meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month in Cardiff, where you can connect with others with similar journeys and experiences and build your support network. They also work with fostering and adoption agencies, helping them to develop their services so that they are as inclusive and LGBTQ+ friendly as possible.

You can find out more about what support the charity can offer you and sign up for one of their membership options, by visiting [New Family Social - Home](#).

removing profit from the care of children looked after

The Welsh Government contains a commitment to remove profit from the care of children looked after. It's about fundamentally changing how to provide services to children and their families through community-based services, to safeguard and promote the welfare of the young person. The Welsh Government want to see less people entering care. They want a system-wide approach, so they remain close to home and continue to be a part of the community and stay in care as short as possible.



Removing profit from care is about transitioning to a not-for-profit model of care in Wales. The aim is to ensure that public money invested in accommodation for care experienced children is not extracted out as profit by registered providers of care/Independent Fostering Agencies, but instead is reinvested back into children services to support better outcomes.

The voice of the child and best interests are most important. They have opposed to being cared for by privately owned organisations that make a profit from their experience of being in care, and where interests will affect how they are looked after.

The health and social care (Wales) bill introduced in the Senedd on May 20th 2024 sets out the changes that will be required to support delivery of the Government's commitment to remove profit. This bill will restrict the making of profit in the provision of care home services, mainly to children by registered providers of care or IFA's. The bill will require the local authority to secure accommodation provided by not-for-profit entities, either within or near to its area. The local authority will also be required to prepare an annual sufficiency plan setting out the steps forward to reduce and finally remove dependence on for profit providers.

care entry- the legal context in wales



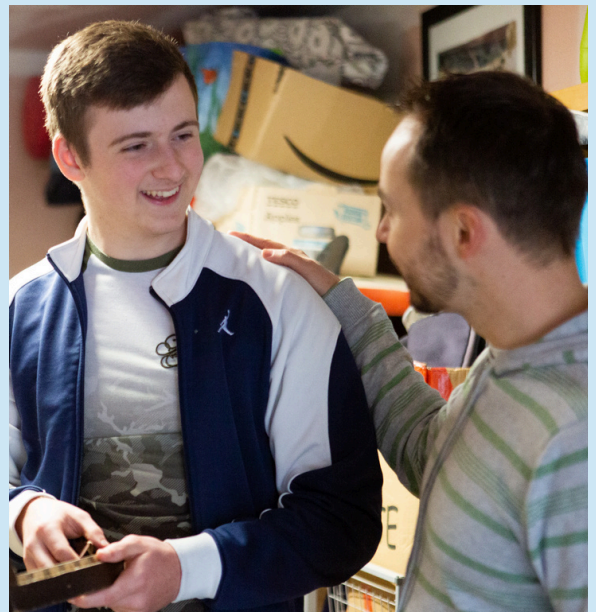
There are two primary routes which are care proceedings and voluntary arrangements. Children in Wales may also be looked after under the legal routes such as: emergency protection orders, police protection, youth justice system and short-term breaks.

Care proceedings- this is when a child is identified as having suffered, or is at risk of suffering, significant harm from a parent or caregiver. This may lead to the local authority initiating care proceedings under Section 31 of the Children act 1989.

Voluntary accommodation- children can enter the care system voluntarily, where those with parental responsibility agree that the child can be accommodated by the local authority under section 76 of the social services and wellbeing act 2014. This act puts a duty on local authorities to provide accommodation to children who have no-one to look after them, or where the carer is prevented from providing them with suitable accommodation and care.

Just over two-thirds of young people entered care for the first time under section 76 voluntary arrangement. Just over a fifth of young people who entered care under section 76 voluntary arrangements subsequently had compulsory legal action.

This shows there has been an increasing rate of young people aged 15-17 entering care for the first time. There are variations across many of the outcomes studied, in the overall rate of people aged 10-17 looked after, the different entry routes and the use of the court following a section 76 voluntary arrangement. Wherever possible, the principle will remain that where they can stay within their family networks, they will remain within their family networks.



life journey work

Life journey work is a narrative of a child's life story, that helps to support them in understanding their past history and the reasons behind why they came to spend their childhood in the care of others. Children can often reflect differently on their past experiences, creating a fragmented and chaotic understanding of their journey, which can negatively impact on their sense of identity, mental health and relationships. They may also struggle to regulate their emotions and experience feelings of self-blame and low self-esteem. By having access to life journey work, a child is supported to make sense of their feelings and experiences, come to terms with their own story and improve stability within the home, by helping them to adjust to their family life.



Life journey work starts at the basic level of life story listening. This involves providing an open space where you actively listen to the child talk about their experiences and encourage discussion without judgement. The aim is not to fix, but to understand the child by interacting on their level and encourage connections by opening up communication and providing comfort and co-regulation. There are also a multitude of creative ways to engage in life journey work, including story books, memory boxes, story jars and journals. These could include photographs, treasured items, important documents, clothes, favourite toys- anything that holds information about their life history and helps them to understand how they are connected to different people and families.

Done well, life journey work will help a child establish their sense of self, giving the child more resilience and a better support network to turn to. It should be recognised that life journey work should never end and be a continuous, ongoing project maintained by the carer/family, to ensure the child develops a strong sense of identity and belonging throughout their childhood.



If you would like support or further information on life journey work, MAPSS has previously delivered a workshop on this topic and a recording of this can be accessed on their portal at <https://www.mapssctm.co.uk/log-in>. You will need to join their email list before you can set up an account with them.

Additionally, the Fostering, Kinship & SGO Team at RCT Council have been developing information booklets on a variety of topics, which includes one on life journey work. If you are interested in receiving a copy of this booklet, please email your request, along with your name, to Sophie.Smith@rctcbc.gov.uk.

eye to eye counselling

Eye to Eye is a free and confidential counselling service, offering support to all young people aged between 10 and 30 years old who live within RCT. Founded over 30 years ago, the service was born out of close participation with young people, who were asked what they needed and answered with “we want someone to talk to”. Eye

to Eye was created from these conversations to support

and be there for young people when they felt they had nowhere else to turn. The service has developed over the years, with a growing team to meet the demands of the service, and adapting to offer virtual calls and online chats alongside their face-to-face counselling, as well as providing sessions in the evenings and at weekends. They also have a multitude of information on their website, including a section of fact sheets on a variety of topics, for both young people and parents/carers.



There are three ways that you can access this counselling service:

- **Through school:** counselling is available for everyone in Year 6 of primary school and they also have a counsellor based in each secondary school in RCT. You can enquire by reaching out to your Head of Year, your school's designated link worker or directly to the counsellor based at your school. An updated list for each school can found using the contact details listed below.
- **In the community:** counselling is available across RCT so they will be able to offer you setting that is close to home.
- **Online:** you can sign up to receive online counselling and they will then send out information that tells you everything you need to know about this service. Their online counsellors use Zoom and will send out an invitation link to join either a text or voice chat.

You can find out more about Eye to Eye counselling using the following link <https://www.eyetoeye.wales>, and contact them either via email info@eyetoeye.wales or phone 01443 202940.



money springboard- teaching young people money skills

The Quaker Social Action charity has worked together with Made of Money, to put together a host of resources, helping to provide money-learning experiences for care-experienced young people, through informal and everyday situations. They have created a mix of videos, booklets, interactive tools and training courses, that have been developed in partnership with young people and foster carers and are designed for carers to be able to dip in to as and when they are needed.



They have resources on how to work sensitively with young people when broaching the subject of money, with tools to overcome barriers to these conversations; 'Ten Things to Know About Money' that is broken down into age groups and shares tips, activities and conversation starters for important information; how to maximise the benefit of pocket money to support children to learn money skills; and helping young people to take responsibility of handling their money and making their first budget, in preparation for living independently. They also have fully funded spaces on their training courses, that supports carers to offer bite-sized learning for the child in their care at relevant points in everyday life. You can find out more about this, access the resources and book onto the training through the following link: [Building the Money Springboard | quakersocialaction.org.uk](https://buildingthemoneyspringboard.quakersocialaction.org.uk)

benefits support

Need help or support with applying for benefits? Not sure if you are claiming everything you're entitled to? Citizen's Advice Bureau have a whole host of resources on their website where you can check your eligibility and find out more information about the different types of support and benefits you can claim. They can also undertake a Welfare Rights check to offer advice and guidance on the benefits system, and to determine whether you are receiving the benefits you are entitled to, to help you claim these benefits and to appeal against a decision where they have said you cannot receive a benefit to which you are entitled. For more information and details on how to get in touch, please visit [Citizens Advice Rhondda Cynon Taff - Cyngor ar Bopeth Rhondda Cynon Taff](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/cynon-taff/).



afternoon tea event celebrates kinship carers

by Kinship Cymru



As part of Kinship Care Week from 7th-10th October, an Afternoon Tea event was held at the Heritage Park Hotel, organised by Emma Bennett, Kinship Family worker from Kinship the Charity. The event brought together 24 dedicated kinship carers, alongside three members of the Kinship staff, to share experiences, stories, and a sense of community. Among the attendees were Heledd Fychan MS for Plaid Cymru - South Wales Central, two Welsh Government officials, Tracey Dunning and Clare Diamond, and Amanda De Leon Capdesuner, the Fostering and Kinship Team Manager from the RCT Fostering service.

Kinship Care week give us the opportunity to show our thanks and gratitude to all carers for their unwavering dedication. love and resilience they show to the children and young people they care for. One of the most moving moments of the event was when a young person who grew up in kinship care shared her personal story. She spoke about her experience of being raised by her grandmother, giving a raw and heartfelt perspective on life as a kinship child. Her words deeply resonated with everyone in attendance, highlighting the strength and resilience of kinship families. Reflecting on the experience, Heledd Fychan MS said, "It's an honour to be invited, so moving and raw to hear first hand." The event also allowed carers to express their thoughts and feelings. Mary, a kinship carer who attended, shared, "Now I have broken the ice and attended the event, I will come to another one. I found it very emotional and wish this support was there 5/6 years ago when I was going through it all."

Overall, the Afternoon Tea was a heartwarming and impactful gathering, fostering a sense of community among kinship carers and shedding light on the ongoing need for support and resources. Special thanks to Emma Bennett for organising such a memorable and meaningful event.



care options for kinship carers



Kinship care is when a relative, friend or someone with a connection to a child, steps in to care for them when they are not able to return to the care of their parents. In these instances, there are a number of different permanence options available in Wales, but what ultimately matters is the wellbeing of the child and choosing the option that best suits their needs, whilst also ensuring that it is the right fit for the carer and their family. These are a summary of the different legal options available to kinship carers:

Option	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Family arrangements	These are private arrangements, based on the parent's wishes, where a child lives with a close relative and it is decided informally between the family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Independence• Child is not looked after• Access to same services as all families in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No specific support• Only parents hold PR- they can take the child back at any time
Private fostering	This is a private arrangement for people who are not a direct family member, caring for a child for longer than 28 days. However the LA must be informed within a certain timeframe if the child is under 16, so that they can carry out checks and make regular visits. Social workers will visit once every 6 weeks for the first year and every 12 weeks thereafter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimal supervision• Child is not looked after	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited support• Only parents hold PR- they can take the child back at any time
Kinship foster care	This arrangement is when a child becomes looked after, either under a voluntary agreement or Care Order. A full assessment will be undertaken before being considered for approval by Foster Panel. Once approved, a Supervising Social Worker will be allocated as a point of contact and to supervise and offer support to the carer for the duration of their approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to support and training through LA• Fostering allowance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual review of approval• No legal security• PR is shared between parents and LA- carer unable to make decisions around care• Child is looked after

care options for kinship carers continued..

Option	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Child Arrangements Order	A Child Arrangements Order decides who a child should live with, when they will spend time with certain family members and what that contact will look like. Under this arrangement, carers share equal PR with parents until the child turns 18. Support and allowances are discretionary, as LAs do not have any statutory obligations under this Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR is shared equally with parents • Security for the child until they turn 18 • Child is not looked after • May have access to financial support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal security ends at 18 • Support, including financial, is discretionary • Parents can apply to Court to end the order
Special Guardianship	A Special Guardianship Order appoints a person(s) as the Special Guardian for the child, until they turn 18. It offers the child greater security and permanency, without the complete legal break with birth parents. As the Special Guardian(s) hold enhanced PR, they are able to make most decisions around the child's upbringing. Special Guardians also have access to similar support services through the LA as kinship foster carers, and may be entitled to an allowance. Once an Order is granted, a social worker will be allocated as a point of contact and offer support to the carer for the duration of their order.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR shared with parents, but carer's is enhanced • Child is not looked after • Access to LA support and training • Financial support available • Legal security and offers child permanency • Parents can only challenge/discharge the Order through Court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Means-tested allowance that is reviewed annually • Order ceases when the child turns 18 • Annual review of support plan and of financial support
Adoption	This replaces the adopters as the child's parents, meaning that all legal ties are cut permanently and irreversibly between the child and their birth parents, and lasts for the remainder of the child's life. This can confuse family dynamics if the adopters are family members of the child. Families can request to be assessed for support services if there is a need and this includes financial support. Given the nature of the cut from birth parents, this is agreed in very few cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full PR • Child is not looked after • Legal security for the remainder of the child's life • Support available for carer and child • Order is permanent and cannot be discharged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Means-tested allowance that is reviewed annually • Complete legal break with child's birth family • Child can become confused around family relationships

family support with generation rhondda



Generation Rhondda is a community organisation that strives to educate and inspire change to better the lives of those in the Rhondda. They utilise local community leaders and residents with local skillsets to give back the knowledge they have developed and share this within their communities. They have developed 4 main programmes of support:

- **Technology**- they offer digital advice and support with a range of devices, free device loans and donations, free SIM cards to those who need them, and a range of digital workshops that are informed by community members.
- **Employment**- this programme operates under a person-centred, flexible, zero-criteria, casual approach, that can be accessed both in person and online. They cover CV writing, interview preparation, job searching and general job advice, support with applications and benefits, workshops and linking people with local employers.
- **Education**- their Reading Rhondda Programme supports families with reading and literacy skills, through sessions with caregivers and children with the emphasis on encouraging reading and demonstrating how literacy can be incorporated into day to day life and activities.
- **Wellbeing**- they have partnered with several community groups to offer a range of groups and clubs for residents to meet new people and find a community with similar interests. They offer walking and running groups, gaming club, reading café, holiday provisions during school holidays and much more.



If you are interested in finding out how they can support you and what clubs/groups they have available to join, you can visit their website at <https://generationrhondda.org.uk/>, or contact James via email at James.watts-rees@peopleandwork.org.uk or phone on 07725 076817.



kinship connected

Kinship Connected is a support programme for kinship carers, commissioned by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, and available to all carers regardless of their legal order. It uses an asset-based approach, focusing on the skills and resources of carers and communities to address challenges. Through a Needs Assessment, a Family Worker helps carers set three main goals, creating a plan to achieve them over a 26-week period, with support adjusted as needed. The programme also promotes peer-to-peer support, volunteering, and local resilience. Services include emotional support, advocacy, assistance with child behaviour, and help with accessing grants. If you think that Emma Bennett our Family Worker in RCT could help you and your family, or you would like more information on joining our support group, then please complete the link below, call 07985680981 or email emma.bennett@kinship.org.uk

Referrals can be made using these links:

- Kinship Connected Wales: Kinship Carer Self-Referral Form - <http://kinship.tfaforms.net/4874932>
- Kinship Connected Wales: Professionals Referral Form - <http://kinship.tfaforms.net/4878849>

training opportunities

You can access the training calendar via your RCT Source account and book yourself onto any of the courses available. If you do not have an account, please email Ellie.Powell@rctcbc.gov.uk, who will be able to get you set up. Here are some of the upcoming training courses available, though there are more to access via Source:

course	date/time	venue
Understanding and responding to distressed behaviour in children.	20/1/25 10am - 1pm	Microsoft Teams
Understanding children and young people's Mental Health	29/1/25 10am - 2pm	Ty Elai, Heol Dinas Isaf East, Tonypandy. CF40 1NY.
Emotion Coaching	30/1/25 9.30am - 12.30pm	Zoom
Working with birth families and contact	5/3/25 10am - 2pm	Ty Elai, Heol Dinas Isaf East, Tonypandy. CF40 1NY.

free workshops with afka cymru

AFKA Cymru are delighted to share that they are offering two free workshops, created specifically for Special Guardians. There are two dates available for each workshop, so you can book onto the date that suits you best. Both of the following training courses have been funded by the Welsh Government and will be facilitated online via Zoom:



- **Family Time/Contact – 28th January 2025 OR 24th March 2025**

“This workshop will provide insights into the complexities of planning and managing family time with birth families. The training will offer valuable perspectives on the emotional and practical aspects of family time...and will guide Special Guardians in effectively promoting and enhancing the meaningfulness of family time.”

Book here: <https://afkacymru.org.uk/product/family-time-contact/>

- **Life Journey Work – 18th February 2025 OR 18th March 2025**

“This interactive course will consider the benefits and challenges of supporting children to better understand their story and will include action planning.”

Book here: <https://afkacymru.org.uk/product/life-journey-work-2/>



compliments, comments and suggestions:

Our aim is to deliver high quality services to the people who use them. If you have a suggestion about how our services could be improved, we would welcome your comments.

To contact the Service improvement Team and speak to a Complaints Officer please contact:

The Service Improvement Team

Ty Elai, Dinas Isaf, East Williamstown,

Tonypandy,

Rhondda Cynon Taf, CF40 1NY

Telephone: (01443) 425003

Email: welisten.complaints@rctcbc.gov.uk

sgo team

Ty Catrin

Unit 1, Maritime Industrial Estate

Pontypridd

CF37 1NY

Phone: 01443 425007

E-mail: SGOteam@rctcbc.gov.uk