

Help us to help you!

As you all know, every year we ask all foster carers to assist us in making changes to the services we provide to you. Once again we will be putting the questionnaire on line for 2 weeks from 6th January 2014, and then a copy will be posted out to anyone who has not completed it. This means if you complete the questionnaire online we **have** to have your name, so that a copy is not sent out in the post to you.

We will be sending an email out to remind you when it goes online.



Junior ISA's for Caerphilly's children

The Junior ISA scheme for looked after children replaces Child Trust Funds, which the UK Government launched in 2005. Child Trust Funds or CTF's were set up to ensure that every child had savings at the age of 18 and helped children get into the habit of saving. From January 2011 no new funds could be set up and Government payments into them ceased.

We are working together with the Share Foundation to set up and manage accounts for all eligible Caerphilly looked after children, and an initial government contribution of £200 has been invested in each one. Anyone can pay money into the accounts, (up to the value of £3,600 per tax year) but the funds cannot be accessed by the account holder until their 18th birthday. At this age, the account will mature into a standard (adult) ISA.

The scheme aims to support looked after children in learning about finances to help them make the most of their account so that on reaching the age of 18, they will have access to a reasonable sum of money to assist them in securing their future.

There is much more information available on The Share Foundation website www.sharefound.org or if you are unaware whether a child you are currently looking after has an account please do not hesitate to contact your link worker and/or the child's social worker.

Merry Christmas from the Fostering Team!

We would like to wish all our foster carers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

The office is open until 12pm on Tuesday 24th December. We are then open between Christmas and New Year (usual office hours) on Monday 30th and Tuesday 31st December. We will then re-open as usual from Thursday 2nd January.

The usual out of hours cover will be available EVERY evening between 6pm and 10pm and the number for this is: 01495 233251.

If you need assistance outside these hours,
please contact EDT on
0800 328 4432

What's happened to the 'Leaving Care Team' and what is a 'personal advisor'?



As of 29th September 2013 the Leaving Care Team became the '**16 Plus Team**'. This means that when a child reaches 16 years of age, the case will transfer from the Children's Services Teams to the 16 Plus Team. If you are looking after and children who are already 16, you will start to see a gradual transition at LAC reviews or planning meetings.

Legally when a child reaches 16 they must also have a 'personal advisor' who is someone separate from the social worker who works with the young person to ensure all the actions in their Pathway plan are being followed up and will act as an advocate for the young person and negotiate with the local authority if needed.

Feedback from young people was that they did not always want another person in their life, and they asked if they could nominate their foster carers to be their 'personal advisor'. Senior management have discussed this and have agreed that young people can nominate who should be their own personal advisor.

Sometimes it may not be appropriate for foster carers to be personal advisors or the foster carer may not want this role, in these circumstances your link worker will need to have a discussion with you prior to the LAC review which will take place before the child's 16th Birthday.

As this will be a new role for foster carers information and support will be available via the 16 plus team and your link workers.

Attention all Smokers!!

Please can we bring your attention to the new smoking policy, which is available via the Foster Carer's website, under 'policies, procedures and guidance'.



For any carers considering taking up the challenge of giving up smoking in the new year and would like additional support please contact your link worker and we will endeavour to signpost you to cessation services available locally.

Want an extra £500?

Don't forget our 'Suggest the Best' scheme. All career carers have now been given a 'recruitment pack' which includes business cards for you to hand out to people who may want to be a foster carer. If those people are approved, we pay our carers £500 (as long as the new carer can take children over the age of 10).

If you want more business cards please contact Ceri Martin on 01495 233249 or email martic2@caerphilly.gov.uk



Foster Carer Retainer payments

You will recall that earlier in the year that there was a proposal to amend retainer payments paid to carers when they have no placements. We would like to thank all foster carers who provided feedback on the proposals.

The themes of the feedback were:

- The proposals will result in an inconsistency of income leading to increased difficulties of budgeting within a difficult financial climate.
- That lost monies could not be recouped through taking on additional part time work as foster care responsibilities preclude the ability to commit to taking on employment.
- There would be an impact on carers willing to accept a placement but through no fault of their own are unable to have a placement – as a result of lack of demand, matching implications, ongoing investigations follow an allegation, delays in planned placements.
- That the proposed level of fee was not enough.
- That there was an alternative agenda to the policy of phasing out carers who are no longer attractive to the local authority.
- Queries whether the change of fees will be with immediate effect or phased in – carers will need time to readjust their budget in response to a potentially reduced income.
- Having a lower retainer/no retainer after 3 months will increase pressure on carers to accept unsuitable placements.

The feedback received has led to some amendments being made to the proposal to address some of the concerns and these have been taken forward with the senior management team.

Caerphilly County Borough Council is currently in the process of examining budgets across all departments to consider where cost savings can be made as a result of the recently announced budget cuts which impact on all local authorities in Wales. As a result there has been a delay in making final decisions on foster carer retainer payments. For which we can only apologise.



As senior management make decisions on retainer payments we will ensure that you are kept up to date and advised on how any changes will be put in place. Should you have a concerns please do not hesitate to speak to your link workers or contact team managers, Lyndsey Hipsley or Sarah Skuse.