

**Families in Care**

**Registered Charity Number 1007596**

**familiesincare@gmail.com
www.familiesincare.com**

 Families in Care Service Overview

# Contents

Our Project ………………………………………………………………….2

People we support ………………………………………………………3

Practitioners ………………………………………………………………..4

Partners ……………………………………………………………………….4

Activities involved ………………………………………………………..5

The needs …………………………………………………………………..10

The Outcomes …………………………………………………………….11

Who benefits ………………………………………………………………12

How do we know that there is a need? ……………………….14

#

#

# Our Project

# Families in Care (FIC) provides a unique and independent support, advocacy and counselling service to birth parents involved with Child Protection Services. Established by a group of parents, FIC has been a registered charity for over 20 years and is recognised as a specialist organisation by child care professionals across Tyneside.

***“What can I say about Families in Care?***

***In short, this is a rare gem, a beacon of hope to parents faced with the most horrifying of times.”***

 **A mother**

# People

**Families in Care supports people who are in need because:**

* They have multiple and complex needs, such as mental health problems, learning disabilities and / or difficulties. They are victims of domestic violence and abuse, childhood trauma and sexual exploitation. Many of them are affected by substance misuse. Most of parents accessing our service live in poverty, have no education, are lonely and isolated.
* Their children may be placed, or have already been placed, in care.
* As a consequence of these factors parents experience high level of stress, they do not trust professionals and refuse to accept support.

**We help parents to:**

* Actively participate in decision making process in respect of their children.
* Overcome isolation and build positive support networks.
* Positively contribute to the lives of others.
* Influence service providers and educators.

# Practitioners

The support is provided by experienced, qualified and registered social workers, counsellors, family law solicitors, adequately trained and supervised family law and social work students, and parents peer mentors.

# Partners

The project is delivered in partnership with Durham University Pro Bono Society, who actively participates in recruiting and training family law students.

***Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice.***

***If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.***

    William Faulkner

**Activities involved and ways we deliver them:**

**Parents receive the following independent, confidential and non-judgemental services: Advice and Information, Advocacy, Court Hearing Support, Counselling, Post Adoption, Support Groups and Training.**

1. **Advice and information:**
* information and advice about child protection and care proceedings
* information about child welfare law and procedures
* information and advice about further support available

 **How**:

* weekly two hour drop-in groups
* individual one to one appointments
* telephone and e-mail support
* brochures, website information and advice sessions
1. **Independent advocacy:**
* support in accessing, reading, understanding and responding to professional documents, such as social work and psychological reports
* support during professional meetings, such as child protection conferences and looked after child reviews
* support in keeping a diary of meetings, phone calls, conversations and information about child contact visits
* support in communicating with professionals, particularly when parents face communication barriers due to learning disabilities and/or difficulties, fear and anxiety, lack of trust and/or lack of means to communicate (such as lack of access to telephone or internet)
* help in accessing other support available

 **How**:

* one to one appointments before and after meetings
* attending meetings with parents
* contacting professionals on behalf of parents
1. **Court hearing support:**
* support in contacting and working with solicitors, making sure parents understand what their lawyer is advising
* care / adoption hearing preparation
* support during and after court hearings

 **How:**

* contacting solicitors on behalf of parents, when necessary
* assisting parents in meetings with solicitors and barristers
* visiting court with parents prior to Care/Adoption hearings
* Practical and emotional assistance during court hearings both inside and outside of the court room
* one to one and group post hearing support for the parents when final court decisions have been made.
1. **Post Adoption Support:**
* offering peer support
* support in contributing to Life Story Work
* support in writing letters to children
* emotional support in dealing with loss, loneliness and finding meaning in life

 **How:**

* one to one appointments
* group work
* working in partnership with child’s social workers and post adoption team
1. **Support groups:**
* mindfulness, therapeutic writing, arts and crafts, relaxation, developing strategies helpful in managing particular difficulties and other activities accordingly to parents’ needs

 **How:**

* for birth mothers of children placed in care meeting every fortnight for two hours
* post-adoption support meeting every four weeks for two hours
* mindfulness offered every fortnight for two hours
* therapeutic writing once a month for two hours
* drop-ins sessions where advice, information and peer support is offered on a weekly basis – two hours
* individual appointments with practitioners are offered for parents needing additional help before and after the groups

6. **Professional counselling:**

* One to one confidential sessions provided by qualified and registered counsellor with an extensive experience of supporting parents following child protection process and / or adoption
* Frequency and length of the sessions depend on an individual agreement made between a counsellor and a parent

7. **Training**:

* Practice placement opportunities for Durham University and Northumbria University social work students
* Advocacy training opportunities for family law students developed in partnership with Durham University Pro Bono Society
* Training packages for social work practitioners and prospective adopters
* Peer mentoring programme for parents

**Parents are actively involved in training by:**

* Actively participating in training of social work students on practice placement with Families in Care
* Designing, delivering and evaluating training sessions for social work and family law students and practitioners, as well as for prospective adoptive parents
* Taking active part in raising awareness campaigns and activities
* Training and acting as peer mentors

**The needs:**

**The main problems identified by Families in Care are social exclusion of birth parents involved in child protection and care proceedings and their lack of involvement in the decision making process in relation to their children.**

**The underlying reasons for this are that:**

* There are no independent advocacy, advice and information services offering meaningful and effective support, which takes into account complex difficulties of these parents and which have long term goals giving parents better chances in future.
* Parents do not engage with the support offered because of fear, stress and lack of trust. Parents often do not understand their rights, the process, how and why decisions are made. These parents often have very low self-esteem, therefore they do not believe that anything could change in their lives.
* Parents do not benefit from support provided, because it doesn’t respond to their complex needs such as mental health problems, learning disabilities and experience of abuse
* There is general lack of awareness in society and practitioners of issues affecting this group of parents, resulting in stigma and social exclusion

**The needs addressed by our project are:**

* Access to independent advice, information and advocacy service.
* People have greater ability to be involved in the decision making process.
* People are given an opportunity to develop positive support networks, confidence and self-esteem, as well as positive and achievable goals for the future.
* Parents receive training and support to be able to influence service providers and education of social work and family law practitioners.
* Practitioners receive adequate training to increase their awareness of issues affecting this particular group of people and to increase their abilities to respond effectively to people’s needs.

**The outcomes:**

1. More birth **parents actively** **participate in decision making process** in regards to their children as a result of access to independent advice, information and advocacy service.
2. **Families are less isolated** as a result of parents participating in a range of positive activities and having access to peer support.
3. **Practitioners**, for example social workers and family law solicitors, have greater skills and ability to **provide effective support to birth families** as a result of training received directly from birth parents.
4. A section of the **community is able to influence services** as a result of parents receiving adequate training and delivering training to others.

**Who benefits and how:**

**Families in Care project benefits people, communities and organisations in the North East.**

**The birth parents have:**

* a greater awareness and understanding of the child protection and care proceedings
* an increased awareness the range of agencies and services provided to the community
* an increased confidence to access services
* better health and welfare as such access would increase resulting from support and guidance
* improved emotional wellbeing and reduction of stress
* increased access to informal and formal support networks
* support from peers when accessing services
* access to information and guidance from peers

**Parents who train with Families in Care** benefit in the same way as all birth parents, plus they:

* develop a relationship with agencies and service providers
* gain a qualification
* have increased employability
* develop as peer mentors and active citizens

**Children benefit as:**

* They have regular, positive direct or indirect contact with their birth parents
* They receive good quality Life Story Work and can build better sense of their identity
* They receive better support from their parents
* Some children have better chances to stay in the care of their parents

**Social work and family law students and practitioners have:**

* an increased awareness and understanding of issues affecting families involved
* an increased awareness of support services available for families
* improved skills and confidence in the area of child protection and care proceedings
* better ability to work in a non-judgemental way and in partnership with families

**Service providers and agencies are able to:**

* provide services to all sections of the community
* understand the issues involved
* increase ability to engage with parents due to support given
* apply effective model of support to families involved in child protection process and care proceedings

**The community benefits as:**

* a section of the community is supported effectively and in a meaningful way
* peer mentors are active and independent in their communities
* parents are confident and empowered to influence services

**How do we know that there is a need for our service?**

**We know this from our experience, from parents accessing our service, from guidance documents and from research.**

1. **From our own experience**
* Rising number of referrals from professionals, concerned members of families and parents themselves.
* Rising number of enquiries from practitioners and parents living outside of Tyne and Wear area about similar services.
* Consistent positive feedback from practitioners and families outlining demand for our service.
* Discussions with parents, members of their families, students, practitioners and agencies in both informal and formal settings. Recent formal discussions include:
* 2014 ‘Family Matters’ conference in London, where Families in Care discussed issues affecting very young and vulnerable parents
* 2014 Family Rights Group Initiative ‘Your Families, Your Voice’, practitioners, students and parents from Families in Care took part in discussions about issues impacting on families involved with children’s social services
* 2014 Social Work Action Network Conference in Durham discussing family in the context of social work in the climate of austerity.

 **Examples of feedback:**

* ‘*This service should be available nationwide*.’ Comment from a barrister.
* ‘*Every parent involved in child protection process should have a right to have an independent advocate. I really don’t understand why this is not the case everywhere*.’ From a student
* ‘*We need people like you so much, everywhere, for every parent going through child protection out there’* From a parent
1. **From parents accessing our service and from their families**
* We gather regular individual feedback
* We arrange discussions in groups
* We organise panel meetings
1. **Guidance and recommendations**
* The need for this service was highlighted in Newcastle’s Children’s Safeguarding Board, which states that parents should be helped to participate fully in conferences
* Working Together to Safeguard Children Guidance states that involving birth parents in the process is beneficial for children
* Good Practice Guidance on Working with Parents with a Learning Disability recognises parents’ right to independent advocacy
1. **Research** - examples
* Brigid Featherstone and Kate Morris research papers on advocacy in the context of child protection, available on <http://www.frg.org.uk>
* Evidence of benefits of independent advocacy – research by Townsley, Marriott and Ward, 2009, ‘Access to Independent Advocacy: An Evidence Review.’
* Research supported by The Northern Rock Foundation/Newcastle City Council confirms that FIC addresses a significant gap in provision, 'being the only organisation in Newcastle that offers specialist advocacy for parents with learning disabilities whose children are involved in Child Protection Proceedings (…) A high proportion of parents with learning disabilities find themselves involved with the Child Protection process and a significant proportion of these will have their children removed permanently either into foster care or through adoption.' (2012).
* Extensive body of research on need for independent support for parents with learning disabilities involved with child protection system provided by Booth and Booth.
* Baum and Burns (2007) and Mayes and Llewellyn (2012) research on grief and loss experienced by birth mothers of adopted children gave evidence long term, devastating effects of adoption on mothers.
* In house research carried out over many years by social work students from Durham University.

**Find out more about Families in Care**

**Contact:**

**E-mail:   familiesincare@gmail.com**

**Tel:          0191 252 4400**

**Fax:         0191 252 4410**

**Post: PO BOX 678**

**Whitley Bay**

**NE26 9AW**

***“We have a responsibility to try and make sure that people are helped to either challenge the decisions made about themselves or their families or find ways to move on in their lives, whatever that might look like”***

 **Bridget Robb, BASW’s chief executive**

Interview for Community Care (2014)