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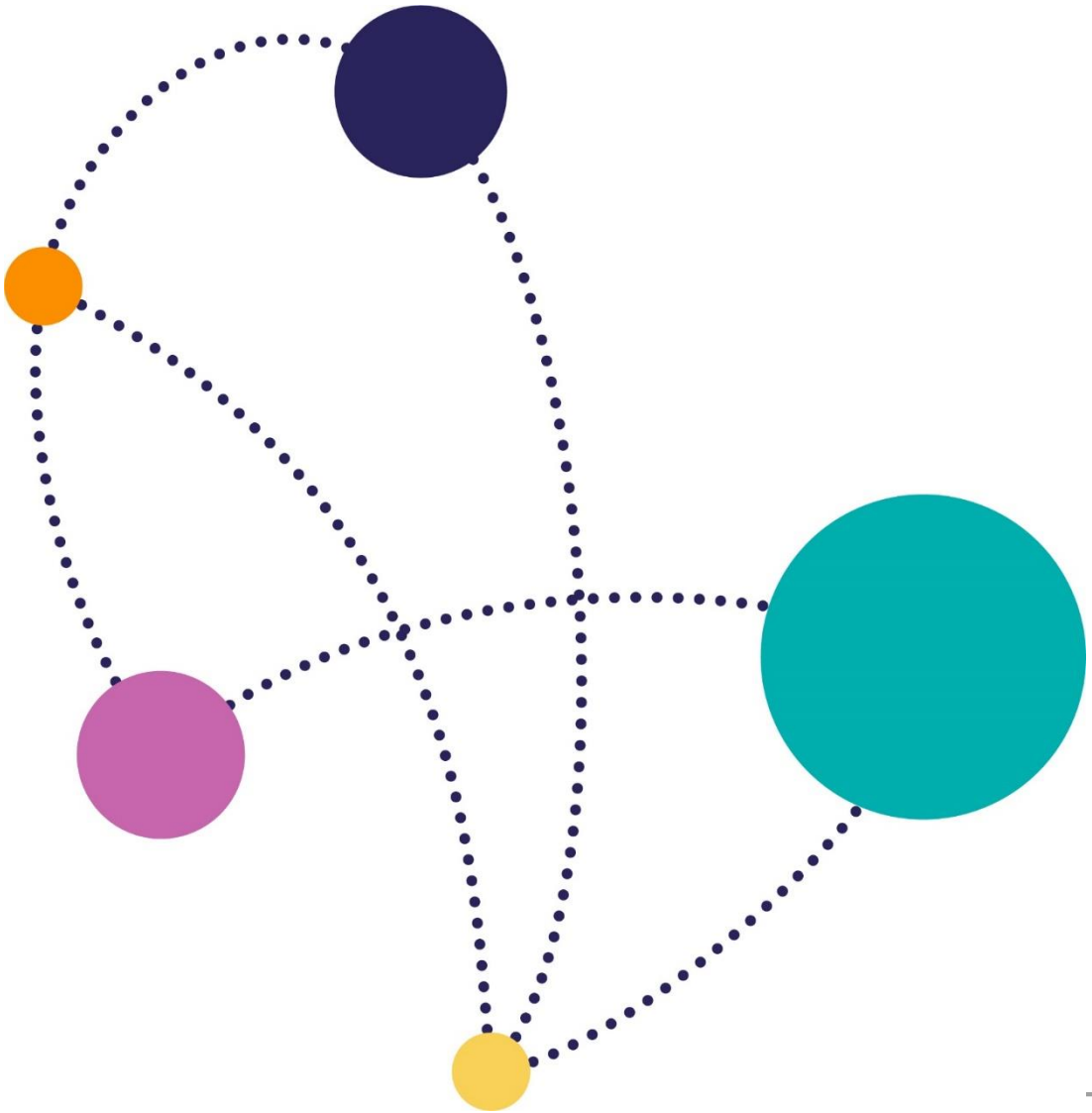
Association for Fostering, Kinship & Adoption Scotland

Annual Report 2024-2025



ABOUT US

AFKA Scotland is an independent charity that promotes and facilitates evidence-informed best practice in Kinship Care, Fostering and Adoption, through advising, training, and influencing practitioners and policymakers, and supporting them to improve outcomes for children and families.

THIS YEAR IN SUMMARY

This year we have again been honoured to work with our members including all 32 of Scotland's Local Authorities, now 5 Voluntary Adoption Agencies and 11 Voluntary and Independent Fostering Agencies. We benefit from the knowledge and contributions from all of our Associate members including other childcare organisations, legal firms, and independent Panel Chairs and from our colleagues in health who form the Medical Advisors Forum.

We would like to thank our Board of Trustees who give their own time to ensure that AFKA is effectively governed. Our Board is drawn from legal, social work, health, research and finance. Meet them here: https://afkascotland.org/about/our-board/

Through hosting the Kinship Care Advice Service Scotland, we have built an active Forum of Kinship Practitioners supporting Kinship families and with Scotland's Adoption Register, the Practitioners involved in direct services to children requiring an adoptive family and to prospective adopters. These hosted services add to the value of AFKA for our members and also the expertise and experience of our members greatly benefit from these services in return.

Membership of AFKA includes membership of CoramBAAF where a wide range of practice resources and free learning events can be accessed. Members also benefit from a significant reduction on the cost of CoramBAAF licenced forms. On behalf of our Scottish members, AFKA attends the CoramBAAF Advisory and Practice Groups on Fostering, Kinship and Adoption bringing our voice to a wider UK discussion and the Directors of AFKA Scotland, AFKA Cymru and CoramBAAF discuss key themes across the three nations.

We were delighted in January 2025 to support the celebration by Scotland's Adoption Register of the 1000th child being matched with their adoptive family.

We were happy to share with our members the findings of **Permanently Progressing** Phase 2; Middle Childhood at a conference at University of Stirling in September 2024 and via an online Webinar and our Kinship Forum. This important longitudinal study is gathering information on the experiences, routes and timeframes to permanence of all 1836 children who became looked after in Scotland when they were aged five or under in 2012-2013. It is tracking children's progress at key stages of life, focusing on children who do not live with their 'birth' parents. Reports and summaries are available here: https://permanentlyprogressing.stir.ac.uk/

AFKA has continued to host Adoption Week Scotland on behalf of Scottish Government alongside Adoption UK. In November 2024, this continued to highlight the need for lifetime support for all those involved in adoption. We co-hosted a 'conversation café' event with people with adoption experience, The Promise and with attendance of the Minister for Children, Young People. We discussed what matters in adoption and this has informed the direction of The Promise as we plan for 2024-30.
https://afkascotland.org/2025/01/21/adoption-week-scotland-conversation-cafe/

Kinship Practitioners came together in March 2025 during Kinship Care Week to share what works when planning for and supporting Kinship Families in permanence.

Of particular focus this year has been our continued work to produce 'Good Practice in Permanence' Guides. Funded by Scottish Government with the aim of providing contemporary practice guidance for Social Work Practitioners and others involved in care planning for children. We fully appreciate the support of 22 Scottish Local Authorities who have contributed practitioners and solicitors to this work alongside CELCIS, SCRA, University of Stirling, Scottish Government and Health and Third sector colleagues including those working with birth parents. The work of the Fostering, Adoption and Kinship subgroups have supported the content of the guide and external peer practice, and legal reviewers have been helpful on sense checking the drafts of the guides. The Guides

- Building & Nurturing Connections
- Supporting Birth Families
- Supporting Families Providing Permanent Care

Will be piloted by 3 local authorities through August 2025 to October 2025.

WORKING ON BEHALF OF OUR MEMBERS

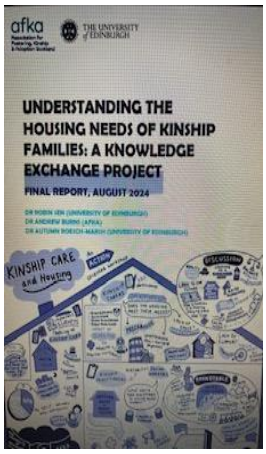
AFKA continues to support our members to share innovative and changing practice towards realising ***our vison of a future where every practitioner working with children, young people and their families is knowledgeable, skilled, confident, and empowered to support the safe, secure, and loving care to which every child has a right***. In our work, our focus is on achieving a good childhood for all children and young people so they can reach their fullest potential whether this be in fostering families, kinship families or adoptive families. We are committed to building the capacity of our workforce by providing informed advice on legal and practice issues having responded to 141 enquiries this year.

We have continued to support The Promise and Scottish Government with the delivery of a vibrant community of practice for siblings where practitioners can come together to

value and promote the Staying Together and Connected agenda and to enable our Practice Manager of Scotland's Adoption Register to continue to Chair Stand up for Siblings. https://www.standupforsiblings.co.uk/professionals/community-of-practice-for-siblings/

This year we have collaborated with the University of Edinburgh on a pilot study exploring how the digital world impacts on Kinship Carers and the challenges they face in caring for children and young people. Little is known about how these are navigated by kinship carers, and what supports they receive or would find useful. A roundtable knowledge exchange event drawing on findings from the study informed the addition of a section on Digital Inclusion within the Scottish Government's Kinship Care Assessment Framework.

Also, with the University of Edinburgh we collaborated to find out about the housing needs of children living in kinship care and their families/carers in Scotland. Robin Sen (Lecturer in Social Work, UoE), Autumn Roesch-Marsh (Senior Lecturer in Social Work, UoE) and Andrew Burns (Lead Researcher, AFKA) worked together to organise and facilitate two roundtable discussions involving those with lived, practice, policy, and research experience in kinship and/or housing to discuss the issues and potential solutions. Reports can be accessed here: https://afkascotland.org/kinship-and-housing-knowledge-exchange-project



With the support of The Promise Partnership, we worked with Health, Education and Social Work colleagues in Aberdeenshire Council and NHS Grampian. We know that social workers are not the only professionals who have a crucial role in supporting children and young people during moves in their care. Health and Education are key universal services that have a huge impact on the lives of the care-experienced population and an important role in children and young people's experience of transitions. Working with our colleagues we have produced briefing papers for Health and Education and full information on the design and engagement work undertaken. Health and Education Transitions : Association for Fostering, Kinship & Adoption Scotland

This work builds on the Staying Connected Transitions Toolkit completed in July 2023 which continues to be a useful resource, and the community of practice supports an active group of practitioners engaged in this work and has continued beyond the project's completion. The Toolkit continues to be downloadable for use at Staying Connected Toolkit : Association for Fostering, Kinship & Adoption Scotland

SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE TO CARE

National Forums and Consortia

Quarterly AFKA forums include Family Placement, Independent Panel Chairs Development, Legal Advisors, Medical Advisors, Fostering, Intercountry Adoption and Transitions. In 2024-25 there were 357 attendees at our Forums and Consortia. Our full list of national forums can be viewed here: https://afkascotland.org/events-calendar/

Consortia local membership groups in the West and North East of Scotland bring together local networks to share practice and resources with each other and provide support on local issues. In 2024-25, Forums and Consortia have discussed:

- Foster Carer Learning and Development plans
- Making recommendations at Fostering and Adoption Panels
- Foster Carer Wellbeing
- Legal overview of intercountry adoption.

Training

For our members, AFKA offers discounted opportunities to attend open workshops and to commission training specific to the needs of the agency. This training is delivered by AFKA Trainer Consultants, and some examples are:

- **Making Good Assessments**
- **Effective Fostering and Adoption Panels**
- **Brothers and Sisters: *Our responsibilities in maintaining connections and undertaking together/apart assessments***
- **The Role of the Supervising Social Worker**
- **Updated Approach to Safer Caring Plans**

Between open workshops, commissioned training and our lunch and learn micro skills sessions, AFKA has informed the learning and development of 318 practitioners this year.

In collaboration with University of Strathclyde, AFKA provides two **post qualifying awards** 'Securing Children's Futures; Good Practice in Permanence Planning and Family Placement' and 'Relative Matters: Good Practice in Permanence Planning in Kinship Care'. In 2024, 9 students from 5 local authorities engaged in the Securing Children's Futures course. The course receives positive feedback with one delegate saying. '*This course needs to be made available to a wider audience especially those involved in early intervention and often the accommodation of children on an emergency basis. If we can get better at engaging with children and their carers at an early stage, have the knowledge, get better at recording and have an understanding that permanence decisions do include the child remain; then the delay could be reduced and the lived experience of children improved*'

AFKA facilitated our **Annual Legal Conference in November 2024** which is always a popular event attracting local authority and private practice solicitors, advocates and social work practitioners. This year's conference focused on Children's Rights, Our Responsibilities with our Key Speakers including Sheriff Principal Anwar KC, Fraser

McKinlay, Chief Executive, The Promise, Alistair Hogg, Head of Practice and Policy, SCRA, Jamie Spiers, Senior Solicitor, Scottish Child Law Centre and Marie H Clark, KC with a focus on Permanently Progressing by Dr Helen Whincup and Dr Maggie Grant and all carefully ordered by our wonderful Chairperson, Lynda Brabender KC.

One delegate said, "***I enjoyed Linking policy and practice – and keeping the voice of the child in the room.***'

Commissioned Consultancy

AFKA offers reduced rates for consultancy for our member agencies and throughout 2024-25 our Trainer Consultants, Associate Consultants and Researchers have engaged in some key practice areas including:

- Producing unplanned ending reports
- Providing independent panel members and chairs for appeals
- Helped Local Authorities to explore children's needs and permanence options appraisal

Independent Panel Chair and Agency Decision Making

Our Trainer Consultants and Associate Consultants continue to provide the role of independent panel chair for 9 local authorities across Scotland and as agency decision maker for one voluntary adoption and fostering agency. This role ensures our Trainer Consultants remain involved at the forefront of practice and can bring our knowledge to inform permanence decisions for children and contribute to the development of a resilient fostering community while ensuring that the views of care experienced children are heard in decisions that affect them.

AFKA have provided panel chairs for 150 panels this year, engaging with 1043 children, young people, parents and carers.

Policy Influence

Throughout the year, AFKA has continued to listen to our members and to communicate their experience of delivering services, developing practice and issues that are creating dilemmas with our colleagues with responsibility for policy progression in Scotland. This includes:

- Kinship Care Collaborative
- Social Work Scotland Community Placement Subgroup
- Adoption Task Force
- Scottish Government Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Working Group
- National Research Forums

We provide feedback to our members on the progress of these meetings at all forums and consortia meetings and seek views on the development of policy.

Conclusion and Looking Forward

We would like to thank our members for their continued support throughout the year, we exist to support them in their daily practice and to promote and facilitate evidence informed best practice in Fostering, Kinship Care and Adoption and improve outcomes for children and their families We look forward to continuing to advise, train and influence our colleagues through all of our forums, communities of practice, consortia, conferences and events and to listen to what they need to enable them to engage.

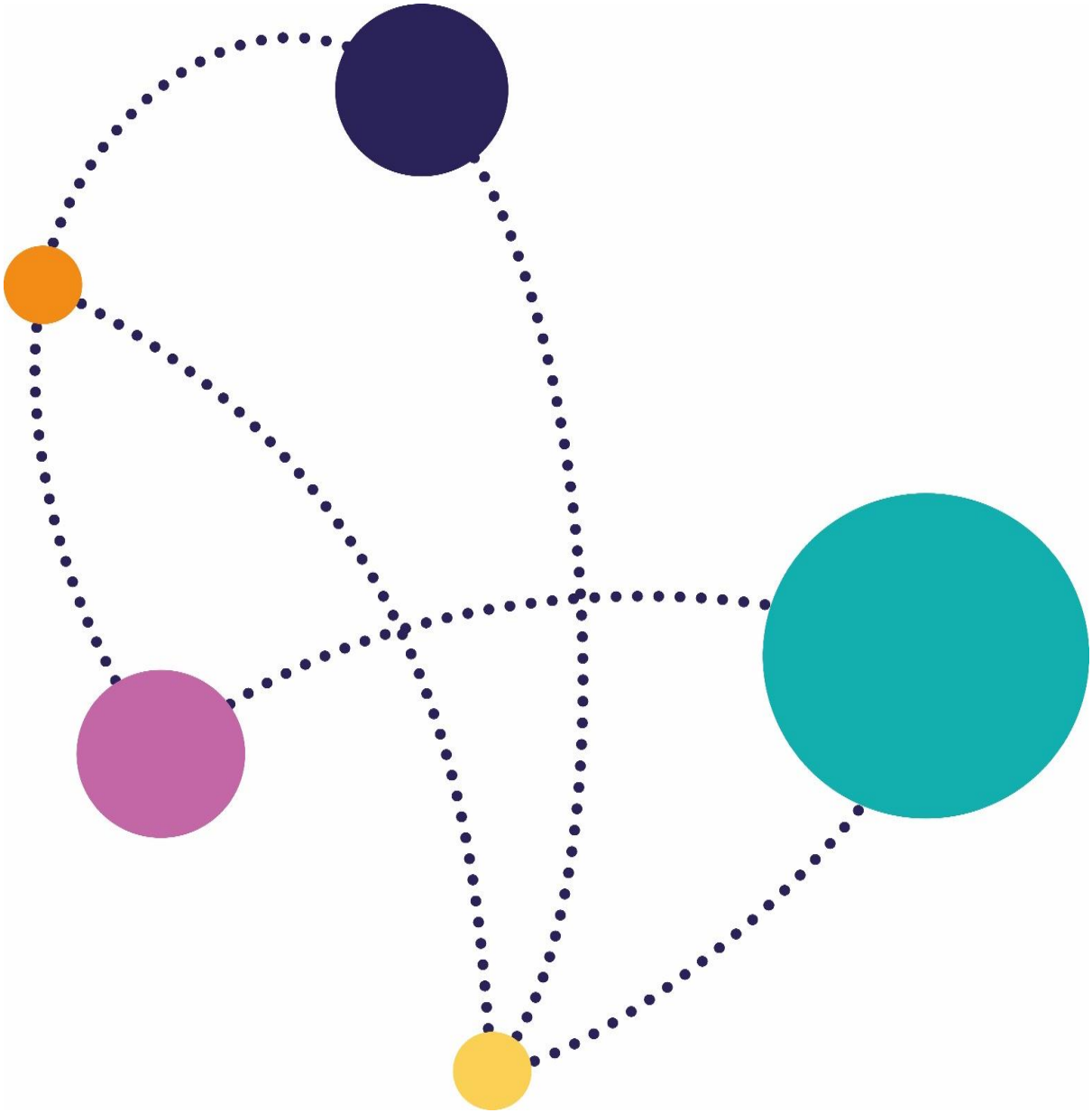
We look forward to celebrating with our members, 10 years of AFKA as a Charity in March 2026. Stay in touch to mark this occasion with us.

In January 2026 we will begin disseminating the Good Practice in Permanence Guides and look forward to engaging with practitioners and moving towards consistency in practice across Scotland.

We are also hopeful that the Permanently Progressing research study will be funded to continue into phase 3 and follow the children's journeys into adolescence and early adulthood. We are learning so much from their experiences.

We will continue to host Scotland's Adoption Register and its adaption to the changing landscape of adoption across Scotland and the UK. We hope to continue to provide the Kinship Care Advice Service Scotland in partnership with Adoption UK, continuing our work to support practitioners working with Kinship Families.

We hold on to our vision of a future where every practitioner working with children, young people and their families is knowledgeable, skilled, confident, and empowered to support the safe, secure, and loving care to which every child has a right.



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