**FAMILIES IN CARE**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2014**

“Well I am not sure where to begin. My son is home and you have had a huge part to play in that. Without you, I’m not sure I would have my son home, I’m not sure life would be looking hopeful, and full of colour again, and I’m not sure I would have found the strength and courage to get through the dark days. People think I’m strong – well, I’m only strong because of the strength the people closest (and dearest) to me give me. You have given me so much strength, you have taught me an inner peace I didn’t think existed and taught me to believe in myself. You have helped me see that actually I am ok. You have helped me have confidence in myself – something I have never had before. You have been there for me at every turn, with a kind, compassionate word, a hand to hold and a gentle push back on to my feet. When I thought I couldn’t do it you taught me I could. When I thought I couldn’t keep going, you helped me through.

I honestly can’t thank you enough. I can never repay the kindness but I hope I can show you what it means to me.”

Birth mother September 2014

**CEO’s welcome**

The highlight of **2014** was without a doubt the agreement of **Dame** **Esther Rantzen CBE** to become Honorary Patron for Families in Care. Clearly we are privileged and delighted with this; Esther has already shown immense support for the work of the charity, in particular attending our annual ball in September at Slaley Hall in Northumberland. Thanks to the hard work and commitment of **Victoria Malone** this proved to be another enjoyable evening for all who attended and raised much needed funds for the work of Families in Care. Thank you to everyone who gave donations for the auction and raffle and to all who attended on the night.

Despite the limitations and challenges to public funding, **Newcastle City Council** and **North Tyneside Council** have remained loyal to Families in Care making an annual contribution of funding which is not only well spent but provides excellent value for money. We would like to express our appreciation and thanks for this.

We would also struggle to provide the services of Families in Care if it were not for the ongoing support of several **local charitable trusts**. Again we are incredibly grateful that such enlightened trusts continue to ensure that the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in the North East are met. A full list of supporters is available on our website.

**Families in Care at Durham University** is now in its second year and going from strength to strength, thanks in part to the commitment and enthusiasm of **Rebecca Foy.** Having recruited a team of Volunteer Advocates for the academic year 2014/15 we are now in a position to support more parents at professional meetings and court hearings. Feedback from the parents is positive and it is apparent that the Volunteers have already made a valuable contribution supporting parents during very difficult decision making meetings.

There has been a lot of interest in the work of Families in Care this year from individuals and organisations both local and national, including The Law Society and staff from the Department of Mental Health, Social Work and Integrative Medicine  
Middlesex University.

***“I think your service is a jewel.”  
 Senior Lecturer Programme Lead in PG Dip in Evidence Based Parenting Programmes.***

**Families in Care** has been a registered charity since January 1992, some 23 years. It is interesting to note how this organisation that was established as a self-help group by birth parents some years earlier, still recognises the important role that parents have to play in Development, Training and Peer Support work. Parents, grandparents and other family members are the real experts and it is only with their valuable contributions that we can shape our services offer to meet their needs.

On behalf of the parents, staff and Trustees I would like to extend our thanks to **Helen Charnley** and **David Banks** who have resigned from the Board of Trustees due to other commitments; we would like to welcome **Andrew Wraith**, Solicitor to the Board.

Finally we would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to everyone who continues to support the work of Families in Care and wish you all a happy and peaceful 2015.

**Pat Hanley**

**Chief Executive Officer**

**The Team**

**Trustees**

A board of five Trustees responsible for governance have much to offer this charity coming from a range of professional backgrounds:

Chair Jane Woodwark Barrister

Treasurer Kevin Mulgrew Social Worker

Trustee Victoria Malone Social Worker

Trustee Catherine Gibson Social Worker

Trustee Andrew Wraith Solicitor

**Staff**

**Chief Executive Officer** - Pat Hanley B.Sc., CQSW, Dip Social Work (1984)

**Counsellor** – Sue Matthews B.A., B.Sc., Dip in Counselling, MBACP

**Social Worker** - Alicja Walszynska-Jaworska MA Social Work (2013) MA Education (2007) MA Humanities (2003)

**Social Worker/Practice Educator** - Carole Taylor B.Sc Psychology (2000), MA/Dip.SW (2004)

**Trainee Social Workers** from Northumbria and Durham Universities.

**Volunteer Advocates** from Durham University School of Law:

* Rebecca Foy
* William Dunne
* Names ….

**Volunteer Support Worker**

* Jan Kilpatrick

**The Services**

**Advocacy**

FIC provides specialist independent advocacy for parents, grandparents occasionally older siblings of children involved in child protection proceedings. We receive referrals from social workers, mental health workers, solicitors, children’s Guardians and other advocacy services. Our skilled and experienced advocates provide information in an accessible way that parents can understand and respond to, providing invaluable emotional support throughout the child protection process.

We understand from parents that the intervention of an FIC Advocate:

* Helps them to communicate with child care professionals in an appropriate manner ensuring that their voice is heard during the child protection process;
* Improves co-operation between parents and child care professionals;
* Encourages their inclusion and active participation in the child protection process;
* Ensures their human rights are respected and promoted;
* Prevents further deterioration of their mental health;
* Ensures parents have accurate knowledge about the child protection process
* Helps parents to improve their social skills and their ability to cope with stress;
* Encourages them to reflect on the professional concerns about their children;
* Ensures they identify and have access to appropriate support on a longer term basis.

***Comment from parent about FIC Advocate,***

***“She talked me through things; she was able to explain things to me. She helped me to say lots more; she helped me build up my confidence and helped me to say things that I needed to say.”***

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**Families in Care at Durham University** is one of several Durham University Pro Bono Society projects (DUPS). DUPS, which was established in 2010, encourages students to engage skills learnt within the lecture halls for the benefit of the local community.

As an umbrella organisation DUPS seeks to include and strengthen the existing student-run projects whilst providing a platform of resources and guidance to new Pro Bono projects. The projects provide an opportunity for students to interact with fellow students and the community whilst gaining important research skills that contribute to their academic and professional work.

The local community benefits from access to practical knowledge and information regarding a range of legal services through each of the projects. The **Volunteer Advocates** bring knowledge, skill and some experience of the difficulties facing the parents who seek support from Families in Care. They are able to provide information and advocacy support for parents attending child protection meetings and court hearings. In return the students, who are all studying Family Law, are offered the opportunity to work alongside professionals within the child protection arena thus gaining valuable experience of the application of family law in practice.

**Support**

Professionally qualified workers together with trainee social workers continue to provide a much needed outreach support service for birth families in Newcastle and North Tyneside. In particular we:

* Provide information and advice about the Child Protection process and Care/Adoption Proceedings.
* Read and explain the contents of social work, health and other professional reports; making sure that parents understand all areas of concern.
* Act as advocates for parents at professional meetings, ensuring they receive adequate notice of meetings; are able to travel to and from meetings; have their views shared/heard and decisions explained, including the consequences if they do not follow the advice of child care professionals.
* Attend and provide emotional support at Care and Adoption Hearings helping parents to understand what their solicitors and barristers are advising.
* Act as mediators between parents and professionals, encouraging parents to work in partnership in the interests of their children.
* Undertake parenting/relationship skills work, helping parents learn and understand about the physical, emotional, educational and social needs of their children.
* Assist with funding applications when families experience hardship.
* Offer confidential counselling.

In addition to individual casework we provide the following **Support Groups**:

* Therapeutic writing for mothers – monthly at Families in Care.
* Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction – weekly at Tyneside Women’s Health.
* Art therapy sessions for parents who are separated from their children – bi weekly at Families in Care.
* Drop in advice & support – weekly at Families in Care.

***Comment from birth mother,***

***'The group is amazing. They help you to cope with tears, and you can talk safely about everything you went through. This is the only place I have when I feel really safe to talk about my emotions and what happened in my life.'***

**Counselling**

Sue Matthews continues to provide a much needed professional counselling service for birth families, during the last year she has worked with mothers, fathers and grandparents providing many hours of individual counselling.

Sue’s work complements the work of the social work staff, providing the skills and expertise essential to meet the often complex emotional and mental health needs of vulnerable service users.

In practice there are rarely sufficient publicly funded counselling resources to provide this service immediately or with the necessary levels of expertise to achieve effective outcomes. Under the circumstances we are delighted to be able to offer this counselling service for birth families where we can closely link this with the work of social workers to best meet the unique needs of each family.

***Comment from parent,***

***“The counselling service at Families in Care has been a lifeline to me. It provides me with a safe, non-judgmental space to work through the painful feelings I have being separated from my son. It has taught me how to put one foot in front of another and keep going through the most difficult times.”***

**Training**

**Social Work Practice Placements**

With 15 years’ experience of social work practice teaching FIC is a training resource for Northumbria and Durham Universities offering 70 and 100 day practice placements for first and second year students studying for the BSc (Hons) and Masters Award in Social Work. Offering such practice placements FIC plays an important role in promoting, developing and strengthening good social work practice. As a professionally qualified Practice Educator Carole Taylor supervises trainee social workers to ensure they demonstrate sufficient and consistent evidence to the meet professional standards. The students, who are closely supervised, benefit not only from the experience of direct work with mothers, fathers and grandparents but also gain an understanding of the Child Protection process working with local authority social workers, mental health practitioners, solicitors and barristers.

Comment – Lucy?

**Different Perspectives Training**

Different Perspectives Training has been developed and is delivered by birth mothers who have been involved in the child protection process. Working with a qualified social worker the mothers draw from their personal experience of the safeguarding process to present an interesting training package for a wide range of trainees and professionals involved in the field of Child Protection.

The training which is delivered by the women together with a qualified social worker from Families in Care has been presented to trainee social workers at local universities, prospective adopters at a North East Adoption Agency and lawyers attending an event at The Law Society in London.

During the training participants learn about:

* About mother’s experience of the child protection process, including court proceedings.
* How to improve communication skills when working with mothers involved in the child protection process.
* How to work with mothers affected by loss of their children when they have been removed from their care on a permanent basis i.e. care/adoption.
* How to provide the best support for mothers during the child protection and court process.

The training is strengthened by relevant social work theory and research.

**Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction**

Trained to teach Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and currently completing an MSc in Mindfulness the CEO has been running a pilot project with Tyneside Women’s Health offering introductory sessions of mindfulness based stress reduction for women who attend both Tyneside Women’s Health and Families in Care. The sessions provide: an introduction to the principles and aims of mindfulness, guided instruction with an opportunity to experience mindfulness practice, assistance for home practice. Given the very positive feedback the weekly sessions will continue to be offered to women from both projects.

In an effort to raise funds for Families in Care however the CEO will be offering Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction sessions to outside organisations at a reasonable cost.

**Comments from women attending the group:**

*Mindfulness helps me to relax and feel more in touch*

*It makes me feel more energised*

*I feel more calm and focused*

*I feel mentally refreshed*

*It helps me to sleep*

**Partnership Working**

Given our responsibility to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable adults we work closely with and promote working partnerships with other professionals including social workers, health visitors, community midwives, GP’s, mental health workers and many workers from the voluntary sector who are involved in health, learning disability, addiction, and family support. Workers from FIC are often invited to provide support for parents as members of multi-disciplinary groups.

As many of the parents experience multiple disadvantage we seek to work with organisations that can help parents meet their longer term needs, especially when faced with enduring social harms such as mental and physical illness, learning disability, substance misuse, poverty, violence and abuse. Experience demonstrates that parents grow to discover that help is available from their wider community and once appreciated begin to access services on a longer term basis.

FIC is committed to working in partnership and is constantly seeking to develop and establish new working relationships with other professionals and organisations in both the voluntary and statutory sector. We do this on a local and national level, for example FIC’s membership of Working Together Parents Network and more locally Advocacy Network Newcastle.

We are keen to encourage parent participation in the work of FIC and are delighted by the willingness of parents to engage and promote the work of this charity in a number of different ways despite the personal challenges they experience.

***Comment from parents,***

***‘I guess I received a lot of support through my life, but practitioners were always coming and going. Families in Care has been most consistent. They have been there for me for years, every time when I needed them. They didn't pack up when others gave up on me.'***

***'They were with me when everybody just gave up on me. When court decided that my child would be adopted nobody came. I felt like they all just didn't care if I lived or jumped from the bridge. Families in Care didn't give up. They called me, came to my house, and helped me to move. I don't know if I would be here without them. All others can talk the talk, but Families in Care can walk the walk.'***

For more information:

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All donations welcome

Via the website

Families in Care

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