



FISS

A photograph of a woman with long, light-colored hair, wearing a dark blue sweater. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful or slightly distressed expression, her right hand resting on her forehead. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

**FISS
ANNUAL
REPORT
2019**



FOSTER CARERS INDEPENDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

FOSTER CARER'S INDEPENDENT SUPPORT SERVICE (FISS) ANNUAL REPORT 2019



FOREWORD

As the Co-ordinator for FISS (Foster Carer's Independent Support Service) provided by FosterTalk, it gives me enormous pleasure to present the 2019 Annual FISS Report. The service has completed some sterling work over the last year and has continued to provide a high standard of support to fostering services and their foster carers. As is in evidence in the statistics, FISS is significant in assisting with carer retention and in resolution of issues and challenges that are faced across the board by fostering services.

FISS is making a positive difference – this is the message that we hear time and time again from foster carers, fostering service workers and managers.

I would like to thank the hard work and dedication of the staff team and of our independent FISS Advisors who are the backbone of the service. Our advisors bring many years of considerable experience of working in fostering at all levels and this undoubtedly has an impact on their understanding, empathy and approach.

Over the coming year, I look forward to continuing to work with and support the carers and fostering services with whom we currently work and to additionally, welcoming those on board who have yet to experience the benefits of the FISS service.



Lesley Greenfield

FISS Coordinator

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the FISS Service annual report 2019. I am really pleased to present this report and review the past year 1st January 2019 to 31st December 2019.

FISS (Foster Carer's Independent Support Service) is a national service delivered by FosterTalk.

FISS offers independent and confidential support to foster carers who have had an allegation made against them, or are in dispute with their fostering service, or have had complaints made about the standard of care they are providing.

FISS has had a number of successes and developments over the past year and is looking forward to working with service users to further development the independent support offered to the fostering sector.

FISS SERVICE

Service Aims

FISS provides face to face independent support for foster parents, commissioned by their fostering service in accordance with National Minimum Standard 22.12. England, National Minimum Standard 29 in Wales and best practice guidance in Scotland. By commissioning this support Fostering Services can be assured that foster parents receive the best possible emotional and practical support, advice and guidance at the time they need it the most. Subject to safeguarding exceptions, the service is underpinned by a commitment to anti-judgmental, impartial and confidential service delivery. Consistency for carers is prioritised through linking them to the support of a dedicated, named local experienced independent advisor.

One of the principle aims of the service is to ameliorate the impact on foster parents of unproven allegations and complaints. Research consistently shows that foster parents experiences of allegations and complaints have a bearing on whether they choose to continue to foster after procedures have concluded. When making this decision foster parents often evaluate the impact upon themselves and their family. Carers who feel well supported, understand the process and have been provided with high quality advice are much more likely to remain within the role of fostering. Conversely foster parents who perceive to have received a poor support experience are more likely to choose to leave foster care. FISS has an essential role to play in managing carer's expectations and therefore an important part to play in improving the retention rates of foster parents.

The service is delivered and designed to dovetail fostering services support given to foster parents. Invariably, the most positive outcomes are achieved when the relationship between foster parents and fostering services are complimented, with additional independent support. In all situations, the FISS service aims to aid communication and support positive relationships.

Service Development

FosterTalk have developed the FISS service for over 10 years and throughout, have always sought to gain feedback and critical evaluation from service users and stakeholders.

As a result of this proactive approach, the service has developed well defined and established boundaries with a robust remit shaping the FISS Advisor role. The outline of the service and role is set out in written practice guidelines provided to the referrer and foster carer respectively at the point of referral into the FISS service.

The underpinning ethos of FISS is that it is impartial and committed to anti-judgmental practice. The service is advocacy based and ensures foster carers are aware of their rights and relevant policies and procedures. Guidance is given by explaining options to a foster carer in any given scenario so that foster carers feel empowered in the process to make decisions from an informed perspective whilst managing expectations.

The FISS service has continued to grow and develop during 2019 against a backdrop of organisational and staffing change and restructure.

Service Development – FISS PLUS

July 2019 saw the launch of FISS PLUS the sister service to FISS.

FISS PLUS has been developed in accordance with customer interest in having a bespoke service which can be tailored to meet broader organisational needs than the FISS remit of allegations and complaints.

The service utilises the skills sets and professional expertise of the existing pool of FISS Advisors who are able to bring a wealth of fostering experience to FISS PLUS.

FISS PLUS relies on the geographical bases of our Advisors to support fostering services nationally. FosterTalk are in an ideal position to allocate Advisors to support the needs of fostering services with their out of county commitments. This can be seen in current open FISS PLUS cases where FISS Advisors are carrying out statutory fostering visits to carers who live out of area to the fostering service that they work for.

An additional example of an existing FISS PLUS service is, a FISS Advisor currently carrying out the functions of a Supervising Social Worker to carers whose relationship with their fostering service has broken down.

FISS PLUS has also allocated a FISS Advisor in the role of an independent complaint investigator for an independent fostering agency.

FISS PLUS demonstrates FosterTalk's flexibility and emphasis on providing services that are reactive and responsive to the needs of fostering services. The intension of FISS PLUS is to help reduce the stresses and pressures on the fostering service's own staff and support the retention of valuable social workers.

FISS PLUS is adaptable to provide bespoke services to fostering services to reduce cost in terms of valuable time and resources.

Commissioning Services

FISS can be commissioned in a number of ways so that the fostering service can tailor the package foster carers receive in the most effective way.

FISS can be delivered via an annual contract, as part of a membership for foster carers, spot purchased or set number of hours. Each contract is confirmed by a service level agreement.

FISS PLUS can also be purchased via the same commissioning routes.

At the point of online referral, referring agencies are required to request either FISS or FISS PLUS service and detail their requirements.

Each commissioned service retains statistical data to provide reporting back to fostering services and inform our auditing process. All personal data is dealt with in accordance with FosterTalk Data Protection policy.

FosterTalk have encouraged the self-referral of required support by foster parents. FosterTalk are able to provide support and advice at an earlier stage and manage expectations before the service is commissioned. This highlights additional requirements for the foster parent but not necessarily independent support. Foster parents can either be signposted to a relevant service or FISS can be commissioned with agreement of the fostering service.

Fostering services who permit their foster carers to self- refer for FISS following what is perceived as an allegation or standard of care concern by the foster parent, have seen FosterTalk as an early intervention. Where this is the case, foster carers are made aware of this and directed to an alternative form of support.

Where foster parents do require independent support then confirmation is required from the fostering service.

STAFF STRUCTURE

The FISS service is managed by the FISS coordinator, who reports direct to the Managing Director. The FISS coordinator is the lead for the service, supported by a fostering officer and an administrative officer.

The FISS coordinator centrally manages a team of independent FISS Advisors. FISS provides almost 60 nationally based advisors. All FISS Advisors are required to provide an up to date profile, including CPD and photograph.

During the reporting period more fostering services have requested confirmation and reassurance of the CPD of Advisors. In addition, some fostering services have required FISS Advisors to complete online training to comply with the individual services safeguarding policy. FISS Advisors are required to attend the mandatory FISS Refresher training annually to ensure relevant good practice updates are in place. This is a requisite to practice as a FISS advisor.

FosterTalk provide 3 opportunities to attend Refresher training annually. As a result of non-compliance with this requirement to attend, no further cases are allocated to the Advisor. This has seen the resignation of 2 FISS Advisors out of the FISS Advisor population during the reporting period.

Recruitment of Advisors

The recruitment of FISS Advisors is subject to a rigorous process, including compliance and reference checks on applicants who proceed beyond initial application.

The process commences with completion of an online application which interested individuals send in to FosterTalk along with their up to date CV. These are evaluated for relevance to the post and any possible contra-indications by the FISS Coordinator and those considered appropriate are invited to telephone interview. In considering whether an individual is suitable for interview, relevant experience within the field of fostering and direct work with foster carers is essential. Suitable candidates progress to attend an Induction day, which forms part of the assessment process. Successful candidates are required to sign a contract to comply with the delivery of FISS.

Candidates are identified via advertisement in a national publication for Independent Social Workers, FosterTalk website and recommendations.

Number of FISS Advisors Recruited 2018 - 2019

Year	2018	2019
Number advisors recruited	7	20

Consultation

All FISS Advisors are provided with formal consultation alongside individual case discussions. Formal consultation occurs a minimum of twice annually not exceeding six months. Consultation is conducted on a one to one basis, conducted by the FISS Coordinator. Consultation captures issues such as Advisor well-being and factors affecting availability, CPD and training and discussion around principles of practice, all of which is recorded electronically.

All cases referred to an Advisor are discussed on a regular basis, action points agreed and recorded under the case file to ensure the individual complexities of each case is managed in the best possible way.

In addition, informal consultation is available to all Advisors as and when required.

Advisor consultation is monitored under FISS KPIs in terms of numbers booked and numbers carried out on a monthly basis with positive outcomes.

Quality Assurance

The FISS Coordinator and officer quality assure every case on a monthly basis to ensure that Advisors are working within the policies and procedures of the service and are fulfilling the role requirements.

In addition, checks are made to ensure that Advisors are operating in a manner which supports and promotes best practice.

Having this quality assurance process in place provides FosterTalk with the necessary oversight of every case to ensure commissioners of the service and foster carers get a professional valued high quality service.

Case Audits

2019 has seen the introduction of a Case Audit protocol to build upon the existing quality assurance process. This has been put in place in line with policy and practice guidance developed by the FISS Coordinator. Audits are triggered when cases reach an amount of hours spent of time period surpassed as well as a number selected randomly. Audits are carried out by the FISS coordinator and FISS officer having cases identified by the FISS administrator.

Any open cases approaching 12 months or cases approaching 20 hours automatically trigger an audit.

Case audits are subject to critical evaluation against the following ;-

- Check that pre-authorised time has not been exceeded without request for additional time
- Check that all spent is one appropriate activity
- Ensure that case is not drifting
- Check that FISS Advisor is staying in touch appropriately with the carer/s
- Check that all advice and guidance given is accurate and objective
- Check that (where appropriate) the FISS Advisor has sought advice from FISS Coordinator
- Check that consultation has taken place and recorded (if scheduled)
- Monitor the quality of recording and that it has taken place within the specified time frame (within 24 hours of activity)
- Ensure that the FISS Advisor is acting as required by the Foster Carer and with their specific permission
- Ensure that Foster Carer's rights are respected at all times
- Ensure that the FISS Advisor is working within the boundaries of the role
- Ensure that the FISS Advisor is working in an independent and non-adversarial way

At the end of the process, feedback on the audit's findings are discussed with the FISS Advisor who worked / is working the case for their continued learning and development.

Evaluations

FISS is committed to ongoing measurement of the efficacy and quality of the service and values the input from those commissioning and using the service. With this aim, feedback & evaluation of the FISS service is gathered from referrers and foster carers at the point of case closure.

This information is gathered on a rating scale, with opportunity for narrative feedback. Scores are consistently high **over 90% satisfaction** in all areas.

Where there are low scores or issues raised, the FISS coordinator will make contact with the carer and /or fostering service to gain further feedback. Any action points are noted and taken forward.

Feedback is also gained as part of the case audit process, wherein contact is made by telephone and email to the foster carers and fostering services of any cases being audited and their views gained on the service to date.

CAMPAIGNS

During 2019 four successful FISS campaigns have been delivered. These have reminded fostering services of the process for referring to FISS and of how the service can be utilised. In addition, fostering services have recently (October 2019) received a campaign detailing the FISS PLUS service and to contracted fostering services whose carers can self-refer to recommend that they maximise their contracts through promoting self-referral.

SERVICE REVIEWS

The FISS administrator regularly compiles data sets for the service reviews of contracted services. This information is fed into service reviews which are attended by the FosterTalk Managing Director and representation from the FISS department. Service reviews of this kind enable discussion at a senior manager level and bespoke requests and recommendations are then fed back into the FISS service by the Managing Director.

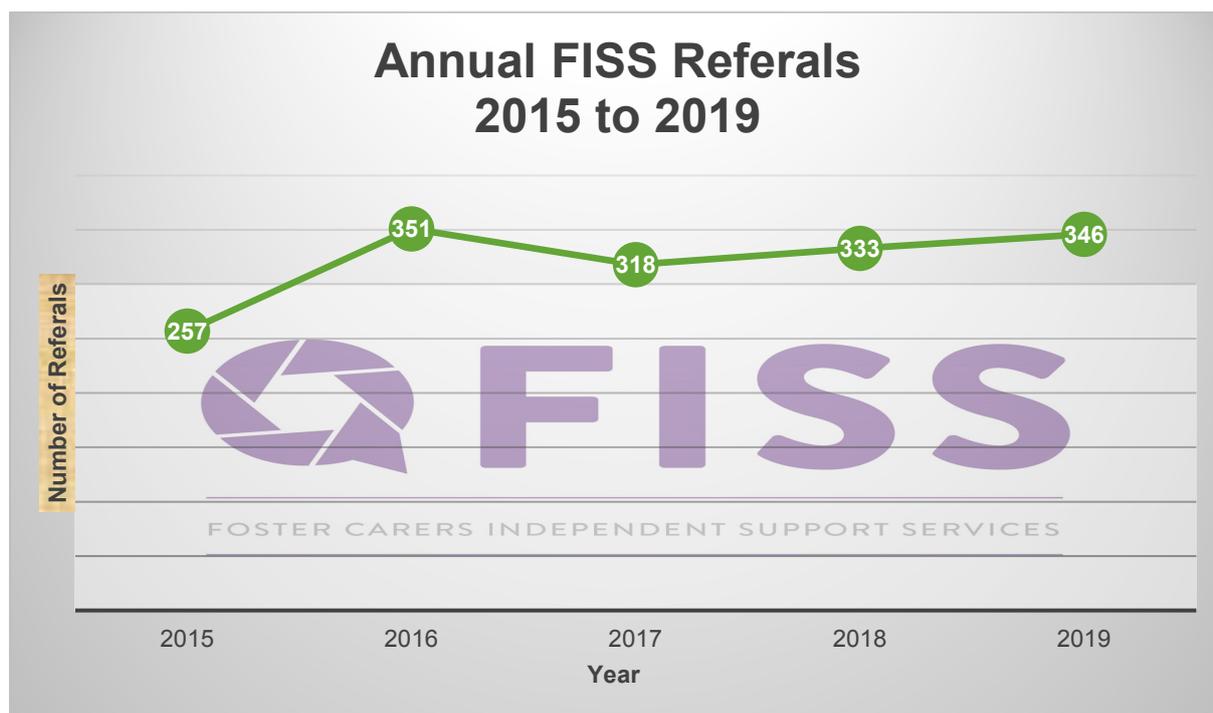
ALLEGATIONS

The FISS coordinator and FISS officer also take allegations telephone calls directly from foster carers. Often this is when carers have been advised that an allegation has been made against them, but are not aware of the detail. Carers often describe feeling that their usual sources of support and advice, namely their SSW are less readily available to them and tend to feel isolated.

Generally, FISS will offer both emotional support and guidance on what carers can potentially expect to happen next, the investigations process and also advise on policies that may be useful to them.

If appropriate, FISS will talk to callers about the possibility of independent support in accordance with NMS 22.12 or relevant standards within Wales and Scotland. FosterTalk enable foster parents to understand the process and expectations, along with other plans that their fostering service may have in place or wish to use.

Early intervention at this stage can lead to referrals being made to FISS by the fostering service or foster parents being signposted to relevant advice and support.



REVIEW OF FISS KPI

Number of Referrals

Year	Quarter	Referrals
2018	Q1	95
2018	Q2	97
2018	Q3	62
2018	Q4	79

Total 2018 : 333

Year	Quarter	Referrals
2019	Q1	92
2019	Q2	80
2019	Q3	90
2019	Q4	84

Total 2019: 346

Case Closures

Number of Case Closures

2018	2019
355	258 (to date)

Reasons for Referral

Reason	Number	%
Allegations	209	70.84
Complaints	14	0.47
Standards of care concerns	54	18.3
Dispute over review / approval criteria	11	3.72
ISSW role / breakdown in relationship	2	0.67
Mediation	5	1.69

Allegations remain overwhelmingly the main reason for referrals for FISS support. This is the picture nationally and reflects the expectations to provide independent support at the time of an allegation. It is often less clear procedurally and in the mind set of fostering services whether independent support is required for, for example, standards of care issues.

FosterTalk see the provision of independent support under the strict procedures of FISS as a way to improve the retention of valuable foster parents.

OUTCOMES

Standardised Case Outcomes

Cases are recorded as closed on our database through a process of a summary of the issues leading to closure recorded in free text by the FISS Advisor. Advisors must then categorise the outcome from standardised selections. This provides clarity for the commissioning services and aids our reporting process.

Data for 2018 outcomes not accessible.

Outcomes 2019

Recorded Outcome	Number	%
Bespoke support provided continuation not required	7	2.71
Carer chose to be supported by the union	2	0.78
Carer declined the service	5	1.94
Carers chose to disengage outcome unknown	27	10.47
Carers chose to end support	5	1.94
Continue to foster following panel recommendation	54	20.93
Continue to foster no panel required	51	19.77
Continue to foster with recommended conditions	22	8.53
Deregistered no appeal	17	6.59
IRM Appeal recommendation continue to foster ADM concurs	3	1.16
IRM Appeal recommendation continue to foster ADM upholds original decision	3	1.16
IRM Appeal recommendation deregistration	12	4.65
Other	8	3.1
Resigned during process outcome expected deregistration	14	5.43
Resigned during process outcome undefined	28	10.85

EMERGING THEMES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The outcomes indicate that **FISS support is having an impact on foster carer retention**. The majority of carers continue to foster following a panel recommendation and ADM decision.

FISS Advisors work to support carers to prepare for post allegation review and panel processes and are in attendance on the day at both of these. In addition, Advisors read fostering reports given to the foster carers and help carers to process the information. This usually involves providing emotional containment for carers as well as discussion around the issues presented. FISS Advisors invariably provide support to carers to prepare their own written responses, guiding carers to appreciate the need to be non-inflammatory in language and approach. Advisors will not write carer's responses for them, but will assist carers to reflect and consider learning and development issues.

If carers do not receive a positive ADM decision and wish to appeal, FISS Advisors will ensure that carers are aware of their appeal options, including having their approval considered at IRM. It is a requirement of FISS Advisors that they demonstrate through

their case recordings that they have appropriately managed foster carers expectations around appeal, which is important when the IRM negative recommendation figure is considered, as above.

The figure for carers continuing to foster with no panel required is also high, which reflects on the support provided by FISS to assist carers to maintain positive working relationships through investigation processes.

TRAINING

As reported, FISS Advisors are required to attend both induction and annual refresher training. In addition, FISS Advisors are becoming increasingly involved, where appropriate, in the delivery of specific FosterTalk training. Subjects that Advisors have been involved in delivering are:

Allegations briefings / workshops for foster carers

Allegations training for supervising social workers

Supervision Skills for supervising social workers

SGO

Black culture and identity

Life Story

JOURNEY 2 FOSTER

Several Advisors put themselves forward as being interested in delivering Journey 2 Foster assessment training and underwent a rigorous recruitment process. Advisors had to attend Train the Trainer and subsequently deliver a pre-selected module of the training to a selected cohort, observed and appraised by a panel. All who underwent the process were provided with feedback.

Successful individuals are now in a position to assist with the delivery of Journey 2 Foster.

SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

There have been 5 safeguarding issues over the course of 2018 – 2019. These have been dealt with in a robust way and in accordance with FosterTalk Safeguarding procedures. It is never easy for foster carers to continue to work with FISS and in particular with their existing FISS Advisor after a safeguarding issue has been raised and on all but one occasion, relationship with the Advisor ceased.

COMPLAINTS

There have been 2 complaints in 2019. One of these related to the conduct of a FISS Advisor at panel and was upheld and resolved at stage one. The second was from a FISS Advisor regarding an issue over payment and was resolved (upheld) at stage two.

We also had an issue raised about advice given by a FISS Advisor in the role of trainer at a training workshop for foster carers which seemed to relate to an increase in the numbers of subject access requests (SARS) being made within a particular local authority. Upon investigation, it transpired that the trainer had been talking to one individual about their specific circumstances, however FosterTalk did conclude that ;-

‘It is our opinion at FosterTalk that the message being expressed by the trainer could be misinterpreted. We have spoken to the trainer and expressed that this could be taken as instruction’.

The Advisor in question subsequently attended a good practice group relating to FosterTalk training at the office.

CONCLUSION

The FISS service at FosterTalk has shown positive results over the 2019 period. It has maintained steady progress in terms of numbers of referrals and case closure outcomes. Service development over the course of the year has been particularly positive with the increased emphasis on quality assurance and an outcome based approach.

Additionally, 2019 has seen the ‘professionalism’ of FISS Advisors being highlighted, with measures taken to address instances of non-compliance with required training. Advisors have also been expected to meet selection criteria and standards in relation to delivery of FosterTalk training.

The launch of the FISS PLUS service is a further very positive development and it is early to report at this stage on the success of this venture. Bi-monthly marketing campaigns of the FISS and FISS PLUS services is planned going forward and the effective working relationships with marketing at FosterTalk are to be consolidated.

FISS is staffed by a cohesive and committed group of individuals who have the best interests of the FISS service at heart and this is undoubtedly an excellent basis for the service moving into 2020.



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If you have any further enquires or to make a referral then email fiss@fostertalk.org or call us on 0121 758 5013!