

## Hello again!

Welcome to the fourth edition of SG News – our newsletter for Special Guardians in Milton Keynes.

The school year is almost out! We hope you are looking forward to the upcoming summer holiday and are enjoying the lovely sunshine.

In this edition, we are focusing on family fun – we have included information on supporting attachment and relationships, things to do over the summer holidays, and some lovely activities to bond with your children and have fun!



## Service Update



Alison Miller, Fostering Operations Manager, joined the team in March 2023. Alison has a wealth of experience working in Fostering, Kinship, and Adoption, and will have a big part to play in the future development of the Post-SGO Support Service. Alison will be a part of the Kinship Working Group and hopes to attend the Kinship Support Groups moving forward. Welcome, Alison!

We said goodbye to Jade Teale, Deputy Team Manager, in May 2023. Jade was a huge part in the work that we did to rebuild our Post-SGO Support Service, and she will be missed. We are currently in the process of recruiting a new Deputy Team Manager, updates will follow!

We said hello to Janet Cornell in June 2023, a new Senior Social Worker within the Fostering Team who has a tremendous amount of experience working with Special Guardians and Kinship Carers. Janet will be supervising Khush and Grace with support cases and developing the Post-SGO Support Service. Welcome, Janet!

Khush and Grace will continue to work hard over the summer to support you and keep you in the loop with everything in the world of Special Guardianship!

## SG Drop-In Service

We run a monthly 'drop-in' service for Special Guardians, please come and visit us if you need advice on matters or have questions about what support your family can access.

Location: Pebbles Children's Centre in Fishermead

Time: 10:00am to 11:30am (feel free to pop in at any point within this time)

Upcoming Dates: 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1<sup>st</sup> November, 6<sup>th</sup> December.

We are really proud of the work that we have done so far in rebuilding our Post-SGO Support Service. Over the past few months, we have been working on the following:

Lots of children under Special Guardianship Orders attended the Easter Holiday Activity and Food Programme in April 2023. Don't forget that lots of activities will be running during the summer holiday, find out more on Page 6 of this newsletter.

We have finalised our SG Information Pack, Training Brochure, and Policy. You can check this out on our brand-new website or search on Google for 'SGO Milton Keynes'.  
Website: <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/fostering/special-guardianship>

We have made improvements to our internal systems to ensure that we are recording the fantastic work that we do to support Special Guardians.

We have been busy following up on the feedback provided as part of our Post-SGO Support Survey, and we plan to send out follow-up surveys soon. Your feedback is important to us!

The weekly SGO allowance has been increased in line with the Southeast rates so you may notice an increase to your payments.

Find out more here: <https://www.gov.uk/support-for-foster-parents/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

We are busy planning for Kinship Week in October 2023 and will keep you updated!

### Waiting List for Support

Since our service relaunched, lots of families have reached out to us to request support and share their feedback and experiences as Special Guardians. Our Post-SGO Support Service in Milton Keynes are responsible for lots of families locally and beyond - Special Guardianship Orders are becoming more common and there is high demand for our support.

We recognise the complex situations that Special Guardianship families experience, and we want to ensure that each family and child gets the support that they need to continue to thrive. We are trying to work with as many families as possible, however we do have a waiting list for support due to the current high level of demand for support.

As our service develops further, we hope to make some vital improvements to this area so hopefully we will have some new and exciting news for you all soon.

Don't forget how to reach us!



Post-SGO Support Helpline: 01908 253652



Email: [PostSGOSupport@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:PostSGOSupport@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

We are  
here to  
help.

Our helpline is open from 09:00am to 5:00pm on Mondays to Thursdays and 09:00am to 4:30pm on Fridays (excluding bank holidays). If you cannot reach us and your query is urgent, please call Fostering Duty on 01908 253206.

### Kinship Support Group

Kinship MK are a Support Group for all Family and Friends Carers (anyone who is looking after a family or friends' child that can't live with their birth parents). There's no need to book, just pop in and chat.

The group meet every Thursday during term-time from 09:30am to 11:30am at Morrisons Westcroft District Centre in the Community Room at the rear of the restaurant. Please email [kinshipmk@outlook.com](mailto:kinshipmk@outlook.com) for further details.

*"The people I met were so lovely & made me feel very welcome." "It's great to meet other people in the same situation." "I think the group is great." "Finding the group made me feel stronger in being able to cope." "I don't feel so isolated." "Makes me feel as if I have some support."*

### Tell us about you!

We would love to know what is happening in your lives – your successes, the big or small breakthroughs that you have made with your children, something that made you smile or laugh, or maybe something that you found interesting.

Write to us and we may feature it in the next newsletter!

### Kinship Working Group

Sharon Godfrey, Head of Corporate Parenting, and Alison Miller, Fostering Operations Manager, are working alongside Special Guardians –selected by you –to ensure that your voices are heard when decisions are made about our Support Service.

The third Working Group meeting will be held on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023. Please speak to your group representatives if you would like something to be added to the agenda and to request updates.

We know that it can be difficult to keep children and young people busy and entertained during the school holidays, so we have collated a list of family-friendly events and activities that you can access in Milton Keynes and other surrounding areas this Summer.

### **The Parks Trust**

Check out the Parks Trust website to explore the activities that they are offering to families over the Summer – <https://www.theparkstrust.com/whats-on-in-your-parks/?cat=0&dt=AllDates&sd=20230627&ed=20240627&pid=0>

Here is an insight into what you could access: Parkland Play, Mini Beasts, Nature Day, Roman Day, Water, Bug Hunting, Fossil Hunting, Tree Tots, Nature Crafts, Stories in the Park, Guided Walks, Discovery Strolls, Community Volunteering, and more!

Most activities are free or a maximum of a few pounds per child.

### **All4Kids UK**

All4Kids UK offer a variety of activities and clubs to children over the school holidays, including Activity Camps, Young Film Academy, Gymnastics Clubs, Coding for Kids, Creative Computing Courses, Cookery School

<https://all4kidsuk.com/holiday-clubs-and-courses-childrens/buckinghamshire/milton-keynes>

There are a list of providers on their website, please contact them directly for prices and booking.

### **Frosts Garden Centre**

Frosts in Woburn Sands host crafting events, summer parties and workshops for children and families. Check out their website to book on!

<https://www.frostsgardencentres.co.uk/activities/location/woburn-sands>

### **Parson's Close Recreation Ground**

The FREE Splash and Play Park in Leighton Buzzard is now open, it includes a beach area, fully inclusive adventure play area, and table tennis tables.

### **Northampton Lego Museum**

There is a free Lego exhibition at Northampton Museum until 3<sup>rd</sup> September. A short drive away from Milton Keynes, this is sure to amaze children!

**July**

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July (2-5pm) – West Bletchley Carnival – Parade begins on Melrose Avenue at Rickley park, food, drink, stalls and entertainment.

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July (11-3pm) - Harry's Rainbow Colour Run and Fun Day 2023. Woburn Avenue, Wolverton MK12 5AZ. Colour run on grass and many fun activities to raise money for charity.

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2pm-7pm – Netherfield fun day + beach party. Lots of things going on, music, games, bouncy castles, face painting, live performances, food and other stalls, and more.

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> – Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July – Cosgrove Canal Festival and Crafts Fair. A colourful display of historic and trade boats with lots of games, fun and entertainment along the Grand Union canal.

Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> July – The BIG Disney Day club – Unit Nine, 9 Bridgeturn Avenue, MK12 5QL. Disney day club for the family for two hours including meeting special Disney characters and sing-alongs!

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> July – ROARsome crafts at the Forest Centre. Dinosaur themed craft activities at the Forest Centre.

**August**

Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> August (1-3pm) – Waterhall Park, Free and fun games at this local park to celebrate Parkland Play week.

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> August – Secret Garden Wolverton. Hunt around the secret garden finding the hidden letters which spell out a dinosaur related word. Along the way look out for a raptor who will be walking around the garden or visit the baby dinosaurs in their den!

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> August –(1-3pm) – MK11 Live Music Venue and Sports Bar, Keller Close, Kiln Farm, MK11 3LH. POPKIDS Milton Keynes Big Summer Bash, includes meeting special characters from well-known shows / books. Past characters have included Iggle Piggle, Olaf and Bugs Bunny.

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August (10-5pm) Tattenhoe Sport Pavillion – Come along to a fun packed day of family entertainment including music and activities for the children including rides, trampoline, and a bouncy castle – all fund raised to go to a good cause.

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> August (1-6pm) – Family Fun Day August – The Galleon, Old Wolverton Road, MK12 5NL. Live music, surf simulator, trampoline bungee, face painting and a bouncy castle. Funds raised to go to Emily's Star and HULA.

Please also don't forget to get in touch with your local library or children's centre as they may also have activities planned for the summer to entertain the children.

**What's planned for Summer 2023?**

The council has been awarded grant funding from the Department of Education to coordinate free activities and food for school-aged children (4- to 16-year-olds).

The purpose of this programme is to offer a diverse range of events to meet the interest and needs of local children and their families and to support them to *eat more healthily, be more active, take part in engaging and enriching activities, be safe, be social, have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition, and be more engaged with school and other local services.*

**Who is eligible?**

This programme is aimed at families who are in receipt of benefit-related Free School Meals, however the Programme Coordinators for Milton Keynes City Council have agreed to release spaces for **children under Special Guardianship Orders. This also includes other children who live in the family home.**

**What can I expect?**

There are lots of providers offering lots of activities across the summer, including dance, sports, and arts and crafts.

Each session will be four hours long.

A healthy meal will be provided to the children during each session.

**How do I sign up?**

For 2023, the council has implemented an online booking platform. Families will be able to create an online account and book onto sessions on a first-come first-serve basis.

The Post-SGO Support Services will distribute a code for Special Guardianship families to use. Keep an eye out for an email confirming your code!

**The booking system for the summer goes live on 3<sup>rd</sup> July.**

**For further information on the HAF Programme, please visit:**

<https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2023>



## **Kinship Care Bill 2023**

As you may already be aware, Kinship Care is moving fast and appears to be high on the government agenda. It was particularly good to see the commitments made by the government in the Spring budget announcement which was part of the Children's Social Care implementation strategy called – Stable Homes, Built on Love. The strategy was published in February 2023 in response to the recommendations made by the independent's review of Children's Social Care.

The current government has recognised the importance of children cared and supported by their family members and they have placed emphasis on this at the heart of their Children's Social Care National Framework. The government have also proposed a new working definition of Kinship Care which will be published within the new statutory guidance of the national framework hopefully by the end of 2023.

The government will also issue a new national Kinship Care strategy by the end of this year. The intention of delivering this strategy is to clarify the government's position on kinship care and how to better support the carers and the children in their care. The government will set out a dashboard with certain objectives to be met by local authorities to give an indication on progress within existing reform in addition to decision on specific commitments, this will be reviewed in a year to see how the strategy is starting to take shape.

It is a very big change in the way of children social care, as many previous policies and statutory guidance has placed little emphasis on kinship care and has in the past been seen as an add-on rather an individual strategy on its own. We welcome to see how these strategies will come to support our special guardians and will endeavour to keep you updated!

## **Family Legal Aid**

Recently we have received a lot of queries in relation to going to court and seeking legal aid to support with this and this is the information we have in relation to this:

Special Guardians can apply for Legal Aid to be represented in court, however the LASPO evidence remains Means and Merits tested. They would need to speak to a Legal Aid Lawyer as to whether they have the LASPO evidence for Merits, that the child is at risk of harm from the applicant, or the other respondent AND they would need to be under the Means threshold for income and capital. This also hasn't changed. I believe there is an eligibility calculator online, however it is easier for the Special Guardians to speak to a legal aid lawyer as there are special disregards (such as pension disregard – age dependent).

# TRAINING SPOTLIGHT: Internet Safety

As technology develops at a frighteningly fast speed, so does the curiosity of the young people and children in your care where technology is now available at their fingertips. It is important in this current climate as a carer and special guardian to understand the potential concerns of online safety and the practical steps you can take as a carer to stay informed. Please see below of our courses dedicated to online safety which you may find useful:



- Online Safety
- Internet Safety
- Internet Safety Advanced Level
- Gaming and Social Media Addiction
- Social Media and Young People
- Social Media, Sexting and Selfies
- Mental Health – The effect of social media on the mental health of children and young people

- Lots of useful resources around keeping children safe online, including cyberbullying, pornography, grooming, sexting, keeping information safe/secure.
- Guide on the latest apps, social media, and games that children access online, including the age ratings, key terminology, and any risks, including how to enable parental controls and safety settings and how to report online abuse.
- Webinars – Internet Safety, how to talk to your child about Pornography, Online Safety

### Citizens Advice

Free Digital Skills Service

<https://www.miltonkeynescab.org.uk/get-advice/digital-skills-service/>

### AgeUK

Free one-to-one computer support for those aged over 55.

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/it-training/> or call 01908 550700

### U3A (University at a Third Age)

Training and Events for developing IT skills.

Call 020 8566 6139 to sign up to be a member.

### NSPCC

The NSPCC have a range of resources on online safety.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

Please let us know if you need support with accessing any of these resources.



Theraplay is an approach to child/family therapy that supports the attachment and relationship between a child and their caregiver. The focus is on play, healthy interactions, enjoying being together, and simply having fun.

Theraplay was developed over 50 years ago and is based on the natural patterns of interaction between adult and child. Theraplay involves engaging in a range of games and activities, specifically intended to establish trust between the adult and child, deepen the attachment relationship, and create an empathetic connection. Theraplay can support to resolve behavioural problems such as excessive tantrums, anger, hitting, biting, clinginess, fearfulness, controlling behaviours, self-harm, and attachment disturbances.

Theraplay is best used for children up until the age of 12, but the games and activities can be adapted for all ages. The purpose of Theraplay is to have fun together and enjoy being together, rather than the goal of the game.

There are four essential qualities found in parent-child relationships, which Theraplay focuses on:

**Structure** – The games are adult-led, the child is encouraged to engage with the adult and accept their lead. This helps to model the adult being in charge in a safe way, rather than the child controlling the interaction. Some children have not experienced safe or appropriate relationships with adults, so the structure element can develop a sense of security and safety within the relationship.

**Engagement** – Theraplay creates opportunities for the adult and child to have fun together and create a sense of playfulness and joy within the relationship. Relationships are a crucial part of family life, allocating time to spend with your child to play games and simply have fun together can make a huge difference to family life.

**Nurture** - Theraplay involves the use of touch in a playful, safe, and nurturing way. It is important for the child to experience interactions with adults that are fun and playful as well as caring and sensitive to their needs and difficulties.

**Challenge** – The games are developmentally challenging to the right degree for the child, to help develop their ability and self-esteem. All interactions are positive, and the child is continuously praised for their efforts and ability.

Grace recently completed a Level 1 Theraplay training course and enjoyed it very much, below are some practical games to consider playing with the children in your care to support in building that close connection.

**Balloon Tennis** – Blow up a balloon and work together to try and keep it off the floor by batting it back up in the air! This is a great example of an engagement exercise. How long can you keep it off the floor (10, 20, 30 times)? Use different body parts (hands, feet, elbows, heads) to give yourself more of a challenge.

**Animal Walks** – Direct your child to walk like an animal across the room! Hop like a frog, star jump like a starfish, shuffle like a crab, run fast like a cheetah, slide like a snake, stomp like an elephant. This is a great example of a structure activity.

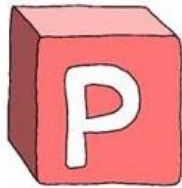
**Nursery Rhymes** – Safely wrap your child in a blanket and snuggle them, rock them back and forth and sing a nursery rhyme to them such as twinkle star. It can help if you feed the child a snack or drink at the same time, which can be a lovely nurturing activity.

**Bubble Pop** – Blow some bubbles and work together to pop them all! How many bubbles can you pop? Use different body parts (fingers, elbows) to give yourself more of a challenge. You could take turns blowing the bubbles, blowing out air is a great way to regulate.

Dr Daniel Hughes and P.A.C.E

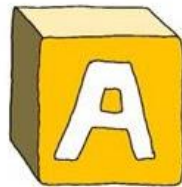
Many of the children that have had to be removed from their birth parents have suffered some adverse childhood experience such as trauma, neglect, abuse, and other frightening and worrying events. It is understood that these early experiences have a much longer lasting impact than once thought.

Dr Daniel Hughes is a renowned psychologist who has been interested in the work of traumatised children and how to support their move to another home and building long lasting, trusting relationships with their care givers.



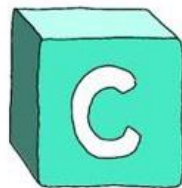
## Playfulness

- Playfulness in interactions can diffuse conflict and promote connection  
e.g. Maintaining a relaxed 'lightness' and can involve making a joke (though this has to be done carefully)



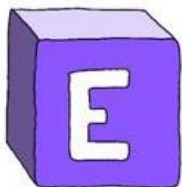
## Acceptance

- Accepting needs and emotions that drive behaviour (not necessarily the behaviour) without judgement



## Curiosity

- Being curious to where a behaviour has come from (in your head or out loud..)



## Empathy

- Really connecting with how they are feeling and showing compassion



Juliet Young

Dr Hughes developed P.A.C.E (the acronyms stand for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy). P.A.C.E is 'A Way of Thinking' for carers to support the children in their care. It includes a way of optimising the way as a carer we would communicate, think, and feel, and the overall aim is to make the child feel safe and to encourage a connected relationship between carer and the children in their care.

P.A.C.E looks at the child as a whole rather than just the behaviour displayed by them. For adults, using P.A.C.E most of the time, they can reduce the level of conflict, defensiveness and withdrawal that tends to be ever present in the lives of troubled children. Using P.A.C.E enables the adult to see the strengths and positive features that lie underneath more negative and challenging behaviour.

Fortunately, we have access to CATCH.org which is a training website that can be accessed by professionals working within social care and for carers working with children who have had some difficult and traumatic experiences growing up. There is an e-learning course on CATCH.org which has been developed by experienced Foster Carers and Social Workers. course provides you with practical examples of how to use P.A.C.E in daily life, and ideal for anyone who is keen to improve their interpersonal skills.

Please let the Post-SGO Support Service if this is something you are interested in, and we will be able to provide you with access codes.