Western Trust Celebrates Foster Carers as local heroes

Foster carers from across the Western Trust area have been praised for their invaluable service to children and young people during a Celebration for Foster Carers Awards Ceremony.

Hosted this week at the Everglades, Londonderry, the event, celebrated the outstanding continued commitment and dedication of carers and the profound difference they make to young people’s lives. Foster carers attending were from the Strabane, Londonderry and Limavady localities.

Most of the carers commended at the event have been providing care to children for many years; some had committed over 20 and 25 years of their life to fostering children.

Describing them as going ‘above and beyond their duty’ to provide loving and stable environments for children and young people, guest speaker at the event, Mr Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women and Children’s Services at the Western Trust, said: “This event aims to recognise the achievements of all of our foster carers. Foster carers are local heroes for us all and we owe them a tremendous gratitude for the job they do in often difficult circumstances.”

“The thought of welcoming a child into your home can be daunting at first, but the fact we’re able to celebrate carers who have been fostering for up to 20 and even 25 years shows how incredibly rewarding it can be. These awards are the least we can do to thank all of these special people who have given their time to support children who needed a new home. I congratulate and thank all who are receiving awards”

Awards were presented under the following categories to the foster carers.

- Carers with 20 years of fostering
- Carers with 25 years of fostering
- Carers who have retired
- Foster carers who assist with training
- Award for commitment to training and personal development

Pat Armstrong, Western Trust Head of service for Adoption, Fostering, Family Support and Early Years, added: "At a time when the need for foster carers is at an all-time high, it is more important than ever to thank these exceptional foster carers who do exceptional things for young people who have had difficult starts. This is why the importance of ongoing training is so important and it is great to also launch the Western Trust training booklet during the awards ceremony. We are committed to supporting our foster carers and preparing them for whatever they may have to deal with as part of their role."

He added: “We are always in need of more carers to help provide this valuable and essential service, whether it is for long-term placements or weekend breaks, so we would urge anyone interested in fostering to come forward.”
Anyone who would like details on how to become a foster carer is asked to contact the Western Trust’s Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team on 028 7131 4244 or go to: www.adoptionandfostering.hscni.net.

Photos from the event

a) Carers with 20 years of fostering

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women’s and Children’s Services, Western Trust are Florence and Noel Goudie, Strabane. Noel and Florence were praised for the care and love they give to children, as well as their sense of humour and most importantly their commitment.

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women’s and Children’s Services, Western Trust are Mandy and Malcolm Mc Aleese, Dungiven. They have been carers since September 1990 and have shown great commitment and dedication to all the children who have been placed with them through the years.
Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women's and Children's Services, Western Trust is Mary McCafferty, Strabane. Mary has been a Foster Carer since April 1989 and has provided a cherished and loving environment, always focusing on the best interests of the children. She is presently providing children with long term placements.

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women's and Children's Services, Western Trust are Willie and Carmel Nelson, Strabane. They have been Foster Carers since October 1989 and provide a warm and stable environment in a very child centred household.

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women’s and Children’s Services, Western Trust is Alison Pollock. Victor and Alison Pollock, Strabane have been caring since 1992, they really enjoy fostering and have valuable skills and experience which they bring to the children in their home.
Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women’s and Children’s Services, Western Trust is Elizabeth Porter. Elizabeth and Mervin Porter from Co.Tyrone have been caring for children for over 20 years. They were praised for the high standard of care and support they provide for children.

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women's and Children's Services, Western Trust is Josephine Sharkey from Co.Tyrone. Josephine and Raymond have shown great commitment and understanding towards the children in their care throughout all the years they have been fostering.

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women's and Children's Services, Western Trust is Bernie Tracey, Derry who along with her husband Raymond have been caring since 1990, and have cared for around 33 children throughout the years.
b) Carers with 25 years of fostering

Pictured is Elizabeth Doherty, Derry with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women’s and Children’s Services, Western Trust. Jackie and Elizabeth Doherty began foster caring on 20 March 1986, and have offered placements from birth to 18 years, caring for over 50 children, they are extremely committed, and continue to provide this high level of care to children today.

Pictured is Olive Boyle, Derry with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women’s and Children’s Services, Western Trust. Desmond and Olive Boyle fostering since 1987 and have been providing a loving and nurturing home for numerous children throughout the years.

Pictured is Anne McIvor, Derry with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women’s and Children’s Services, Western Trust. Anna has been caring since 1991 along with her late husband Paddy. Anna’s dedication has been demonstrated by her ongoing involvement in the lives of children long after they leave her home.
c) Retiring Carers

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women's and Children's Services is Kathleen Marbury, Derry. Kathleen now retired has had fifteen girls placed with her over the years. She is a reliable and committed carer and was a specialist carer for girls aged sixteen plus.

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women’s and Children’s Services is Laura Donaghy, Limavady. Laura’s parents were foster carers whilst she was growing up and she acted like a big sister for many children. Laura began fostering in 2003, she still has a lot of contact with those that she has cared for who are now over the age of 18.

d) Foster Carers who assist with training

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women's and Children's Services is Mandy McAleeese, who won a football jersey in the ‘Train to Win' draw held by the Regional Adoption and Fostering Service, due to her attendance at Foster Care Training.
Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women's and Children's Services is Paul Bassett, Limavady who assisted with the training program for Foster Carers, and along with his wife Diane continues to foster.

Pictured with Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women's and Children’s Services is Jacqueline Sharkey Derry. Jacqueline is passionate about foster care training, and shares her extensive experience with other carers, Jacqueline is also dedicated to the foster care support group.

e) Other photos

Pictured are all those in attendance who have been foster carers for 25 years plus, from left to right: Ann Mc Duff, Head of Service for Looked After Children, Western Trust; Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women and Children’s Services, Western Trust; Anna McIvor, Olive Boyle, Elizabeth Doherty, Pat Armstrong, Head of Service – Adoption, Fostering, Family Support and Early Years, Western Trust and Lorraine Doyle Social Work Manager.
Pictured are all those in attendance who have been foster carers for 20 years, from left to right: back row - Malcolm McAleese; Noel Goudie, Ann Mc Duff, Head of Service for Looked After Children, Western Trust; Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women and Children's Services, Western Trust; Florence Goudie, Elizabeth Porter, Pat Armstrong, Head of Service – Adoption, Fostering, Family Support and Early Years, Western Trust and Willie Nelson. Front row - Josephine Sharkey; Mary Mc Cafferty, Bernie Tracey, Alison Pollock; Carmel Nelson, Mandy McAleese and Lorraine Doyle.

Pictured receiving thanks are Foster Carers who this year will be retiring, from left to right is: Tom Cassidy, Assistant Director of Women and Children’s Services, Western Trust; retiring foster carers Laura Donaghy and Kathleen Marbury, and far right Pat Armstrong, Head of Service – Adoption, Fostering, Family Support and Early Years, Western Trust.

Pictured launching the new Western Trust training booklet for foster carers are from left to right: Helen Browne, Training Co-ordinator, Regional Adoption & Fostering Service; Sharon Robb, Senior Practitioner, Training Coordinator, Western Trust Fostering Service, Jacqueline Sharkey and Paul Bassett, local Foster Carers, and Pat Armstrong, Head of Service – Adoption, Fostering, Family Support and Early Years, Western Trust.
Pictured are members of Western Trust staff who work in the Fostering Support & Development Team. back row – Michael Keenan, Fostering Recruitment & Assessment Team, Sharon Robb, Senior Practitioner, Training Coordinator, Western Fostering Service; Mia Mc Daid, Charlene O’Connor, Jo Morrison & Ellen Curran and front row – Jackie Mc Laughlin and Lorraine Doyle.

The Regional Fostering and Adoption campaign has been promoting incentives to Foster Carers to reward them for their attendance at training. Pictured left to right are: Helen Browne, Regional Fostering and Adoption Service; Sharon Robb, Senior Practitioner, Training Coordinator, Western Fostering Services, Western Trust and Mandy Mc Aleese, Dungiven one of the Foster Carers who was successful in winning one of the incentives on offer.