

MEDIA RELEASE

Fostering Appeal Takes to the Road

For immediate release

Wednesday 25th September 2013

With a significant increase in the number of children coming into care in Northern Ireland over the last five years, HSC Trusts are launching a regional bus advertising campaign asking the public the question: **'Could YOU foster?'**

More foster families are urgently required to provide safe, stable and nurturing homes for vulnerable children and young people across Northern Ireland for as long as they need them.

Foster homes are needed for children and young people who are unable to live with their own families. This may be a result of family breakdown, relationship difficulties, neglect, abuse or parental ill health.

Trusts need to recruit and maintain a wide pool of foster carers to keep up with the rising demand and place every child / young person with skilled carers within their own areas who best meet their individual needs.

Fostering teams welcome enquiries from anyone who has a desire to help a child / young person through a difficult time in their lives. Foster carers may be married, single or have a partner, own or rent their home, work or claim benefits, and may or may not have children of their own. There is no upper age limit to who can foster provided a person is healthy and has the energy to devote to a child / young person's needs.

There is a particular need at present for foster families who can offer a child / young person a long term home when they are unable to live with their parents in the immediate or near future.

Launching the campaign, Belfast Lord Mayor, Councillor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir said:

“Unfortunately the number of young people coming into care is on the rise, and it is vitally important that this rise is met head on by an increase in foster carers as well. People who can provide a long term, safe and stable environment are encouraged to come forward and make a positive impact on a child’s life. The work being carried out by the Belfast Health and Social Care Fostering Service is invaluable.”

Chris Crooks (22) from Belfast came into foster care at the age of 14.

“When I was 14 I came to live with my foster carers. They have always been a real support to me. I stayed on in education and now I’m at college and also work in IT support part time.

I’ve had low points in my life but generally it’s been fantastic over the past eight years. I’ve had a lot of good times in my foster home and some great memories. I’ve been able to experience family life and enjoyed other opportunities I probably wouldn’t have otherwise.

My foster carers have put so much effort into fostering. I believe I am a different person as a result of them. In terms of my education and the relationship with my birth family they have given me so much support. It certainly has changed my life.”

All HSC foster carers receive financial allowances, ongoing learning and development opportunities and 24 hour social work support.

The five HSC Trusts are looking to recruit people who are patient, understanding, compassionate and flexible. If you have time and space in your life for fostering call **0800 0720 137**, your local fostering team on

(028) 9504 0057 or enquire online at
www.adoptionandfostering.hscni.net.

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Notes to Editor

- Fostering bus campaign runs across NI from 23 September – 6 October 2013
- In any one day there are approximately 1,920 (March 2012) children and young people living with HSC foster carers across NI
- The five HSC Trusts are the statutory bodies with responsibility for the welfare of all children in care in Northern Ireland. As such, they are in the best position to place children with foster carers
- People may apply to foster irrespective of race, religion, language, culture, gender, disability, age or sexual orientation
- Visit **www.adoptionandfostering.hscni.net** to read profiles of existing HSC foster carers and children currently waiting for a foster home. You can also read about young people's experiences in foster care
- People interested in fostering can request a copy of the new regional fostering DVD, '*Could YOU foster?*', which provides an overview of fostering and features young people who have lived in foster care, foster carers and sons and daughters of foster carers from across NI
- If you would like to interview a foster carer or a young person who has lived in foster care please contact:

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Belfast Lord Mayor, Councillor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, along with Alison Harte (foster carer), baby Frank and Beverley Ringland (right) (senior social worker, Belfast Trust Fostering Service)



Fostering mascots launch the beginning of a regional bus advertising campaign aimed at encouraging more people to become foster carers