

Support Line 07659529117

Open 5pm to midnight weekdays and 9am to midnight at weekends

Dial 07659529117, a voice will ask you to enter your numeric code (telephone number). Using your telephone keypad, key in your STD code (area number) followed by your telephone number, you will then hear a voice saying it has been received.

An experienced carer (currently Sheila, Christine, Ariane or Nadine) will call you back within a few minutes.

Reading's Pledge to Children and Young People in Care

Life outside school: we promise to help you to take part in activities out of school.

Being Involved: We promise we will value your opinion on every part of your care.

Your Education: We promise to help you do the best you can at school or in further education.

Permanence: We promise to find you the best available place to live for as long as you need it.

Transition to Independence: We promise to give you all the support and advice you need to help you become independent.

Reading Carers Link operates a policy of non-discriminatory practice. It is our policy that there should be no discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender, marital status or disability.



THE LINK

Supporting Foster Carers in the Reading Area
Read this newsletter online at www.readingcarerslink.org.uk
Reading Carers' Link is a registered charity number 1123675

All Change at Reading Carers' Link



It's that time of year again. Well actually it was that time of year again last month, but we have finally held our delayed Annual General Meeting. Read inside about the historic meeting that immediately preceded it and the implications for your organisation. For those of you who could not make the meeting you can read the reports as well. A huge change for us is the departure of Lynn as Secretary. Goodbye and thank you so much for all your hard work. Welcome and best wishes to Helen Cornwall who was elected as Lynn's replacement.

There are also articles about sons and daughters of foster carers, as well as a special section for foster children from the Children in Care Council. For the slightly more grown up you can read Antoinette Earl's account of what Reading did for Foster Care Fortnight. Finally, if you did not get enough ideas last month for keeping the kids amused during the holidays there is an article about Play Day on August 4th

*Please note no pictures of looked after children ever appear in this newsletter.

Disclaimer: Whilst all contributions are given in good faith, unless otherwise stated the authors are not qualified to give a legal opinion or financial advice. Readers are strongly advised to seek independent advice from a suitably qualified source where appropriate.

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RCL merges with Reading and Wokingham FCA



Our Foster Care Association was founded exclusively to provide support for carers who foster Reading children. When we obtained charitable status we were required by the Charity Commission to be more open. Now, to quote the Charity Commission website, "The association is established for benefiting the community of Berkshire by advancing public knowledge of matters relating to

USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

<u>Emergency Duty Team</u>	01344 786543
Access & Assessment (formerly Referral & Assessment)	0118 9553641
Care Matters (Formerly MAST)	0118 9553600
Children's Rights (Sue Whiteman)	0118 9390836
Complaints Officer (Cath Price)	0118 9390905
Directions	0118 9015222
Fostering Network Helpline	0800 040 7675
Inclusion & Intervention (formerly Disabled Children's team)	0118 9553697
Nurse, Designated for CIC (Pat Barnard-Smith)	07880 796393
Placement Choice & Stability (Formerly Fostering, Adoption, Family Link & Family & Friends)	0118 9553740
Police (Missing Persons)	0845 8505505
Protection and Planning (formerly Family Support Centre)	0118 9015320
Tax Aid	0845 120 3779
Through Care (formerly LAC & Leaving Care)	0118 9015330
Safeguarding & Performance (formerly Child Protection)	0118 9390684
Virtual Head Teacher (Jan Harris)	0118 9015800

RCL COMMITTEE

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I would like to thank all the committee for their work, especially those who have been our support line carers.

Reading Carers. This will in effect be a year's free introductory offer when we can demonstrate to Wokingham the benefits of membership, and buy us time to negotiate funding from Wokingham Council similar to that provided by Reading. The economies of scale brought by such a merger will give us more money to do things such as sponsor individual carers for training or attendance at conferences and seminars, put on more events whilst increasing the subsidy making them even better value for money for carers.

This is likely to make life more complicated for our Treasurer. I would like to thank Patrick for all his work keeping our books in order, and keeping us on the right side of the charity commission. I would like to thank him too for agreeing to continue in this role, and apologise now if in the year ahead the task is more onerous than before.

I would like to thank all the committee for their work, especially those who have been

our support line carers. Lynn has been one of these and has managed the support line since Richard left. This has been the lesser of her duties as she has continued for five years to keep us in order as our Secretary. Her efficiency at keeping minutes and keeping track of who should be doing what has kept us all on task and held us together. If I am honest I do not know how we will manage without her, but manage we will. Jill and Paul's retirement has shown me that life, and our association can go on through change. Paula has already shown herself more than capable of organising events, a task previously ably undertaken by Lynn and her partner Chris. I am delighted that Helen has volunteered to fill the secretarial void so all that remains for me is to thank Lynn again and present her with these small tokens of appreciation for her sterling work.

Chris Cutler, Chair
21st July 2010

substitute care of children & the education & training of foster carers; to relieve the need of foster children their carers & carers families, by the provision of advice, support & services; protection & preservation of good health of carers of foster children."

What I did not realize when I first became involved with RCL was that another foster care association, Reading and Wokingham FCA, had operated for a while in this area, but had become inactive before the advent of Reading Carers' Link. One of our current trustees, Philip Bowcock was a member of the original organization. He has been instrumental in pushing forward the delicate negotiations to bring about a resolution to the difficulties in which R&WFCA found themselves. Being a registered charity, and having been inactive, they failed to make the necessary returns to the charity commission. The charity was consequently in danger of being forcibly closed with a consequent loss of its funds. To prevent this from happening those members of Reading Carers

Link who were also members of R&WFCA held a special meeting immediately before Reading Carers' Link AGM. It was resolved at that meeting 1) To transfer all funds to Reading Carers' Link, and 2) to close the organization.

These resolutions open the way for RCL to apply to the Charity Commission for the receipt of these funds. Approval is required since the Charity Commission must decide that the area of benefit of the two charities are sufficiently similar to allow the funds of the former charity to be used by us.

This may all sound rather technical but the result is simple. In due course we hope to receive a windfall and have to decide on the appropriate way to use this. Since the original organization was for the benefit of Wokingham carers as well we would like to extend membership to this group. Additional costs such as extended newsletter circulation, employment of an additional support line carer, and wider subsidy of events and individual training will be covered by this fund. In due

course however it is only right that Wokingham contribute financially to the support of its carers in the same way that Reading does. We shall be approaching Wokingham with a view to securing a second source of income from them which will enable us to continue to serve Wokingham carers. If you like this initial period is a “free introductory offer which Wokingham can judge for themselves the benefits to their carers.

Wokingham’s motto is *E glande quercus* ("from the acorn, the oak") I think it is appropriate as it symbolizes steady progress to great strength. Let us hope that is what we will achieve together.

Sons and Daughters Evening



Norma met with a small group of youngsters whose parents foster to

talk about some of the issues that are raised by their parents’ decision. They listed the positives about having other people’s children, babies or young people living with them. Many described them as cute (presumably referring to the little ones!) They talked about smiley faces, that they were interesting and fun. They liked keeping in touch after the children had moved on. They found them interesting having different life experiences, and gave them an opportunity to make new friends. They liked having more people in their family and described them as “sibling like” They liked the ‘laid back’ atmosphere needed in a house open to others. Amongst all these positives there was also an acknowledgement that there is a financial benefit.

On the minus side they often found the fostering experience stressful. Having strangers living in their house was often a negative as well as positive, especially when they found the fostered children “strange”, “different”, and mostly “demanding”. The biggest thing seemed to be that mum (or dad) had less time for them because of the demands of looked-after children. There were specific grumbles too. They did not like it when their things were stolen, and one said she did not

I prefer it here. You see I like to keep an eye on the place.”

I am delighted to welcome Paul and Jill back this evening. The nomadic lifestyle seems to be altogether more attractive and comfortable than the one led by the lady in the story. I hope however that if they have come back to “keep an eye on the place” they will approve of our efforts to fill their shoes.

Last year I reported that Reading has been going through changes. Change it seems is a permanent state. We have worked with Reading as they faced the challenges brought about by Baby Peter. Not only are far more cases being brought before the courts, more children, particularly babies are being placed in care. This has placed new pressures on children’s services which have been felt by carers. Philip has highlighted the problems that Contact Orders can cause when carers of babies have to comply with very high levels of contact.

Reading has continued to develop a more equitable form of payment for carers. The Skills and Levels scheme was first

shown to carers after Christmas. The feedback from carers was very valuable to managers who realised, if nothing else, that the whole thing was a lot more complex than they originally imagined. They have continued to liaise with a working group of carers to fine tune the scheme which will reward carer competence and experience whilst adhering to the principle that no carer should be disadvantaged by the changes.

You will have seen from the meeting immediately preceding this that our continuing efforts to work with Wokingham have taken an important step forward. Whilst we welcome all carers to our association, it is clear that a large increase in membership without a commensurate increase in receipts will significantly reduce the benefit to existing members. Until now Reading has been overwhelmingly our principle source of funds. The merger of our association with Reading and Wokingham will provide us with a windfall that will enable us to extend our services to Wokingham carers without reducing the benefit to

Over the past year Chris Cutler has worked really hard to bring you up-to-date information via the 'Link' new sletter. The subjects covered are both local and national and always relevant and interesting! All the dates and information for RCL's events are published as well as RBC's training schedule. If you know someone who isn't receiving the new sletter please let Chris know their details, as they are definitely missing out!

Finally, I would like to thank all the committee members for their continued hard work and especially to Chris, as Chair for his commitment to RCL.

Lynn Brown, Secretary
21st July 2010

Chairs' Report



Good afternoon and welcome to our 11th Annual General Meeting. It is my second as Chair

which means it must be two years since we said goodbye to Jill and Paul having bestowed honorary life membership on them in recognition of their tireless work for our association. In a former incarnation I lived and worked in Hong Kong where a bank manager relayed the following story: His bank was in the Wan Chai district which those of you familiar with the city is an area roughly equivalent to our Oxford Road. The prosperous banking district was transformed at night as the bars opened. The banker leaving work late found an old lady sleeping rough and about to bed down in the entrance to his bank. Concerned for the reputation of his establishment he asked her if she would not be more comfortable sleeping elsewhere. It seemed that in her prime she had been a working girl and had risen to become the "Madam" of the establishment opposite the bank. As passing years and a certain lifestyle continued to take its toll she gradually declined to the state in which the bank manager now found her. He repeated his offer to find her more comfortable accommodation. "Thank you, no.

like filling in long forms about fostering. The next article is a blog written by a foster carer's daughter (not from Reading) which follows her experience for a week

A week in the life of a foster carer's daughter



Monday
Woke up at 7:30am: "must be time for the kids to be up for school. If only they could be a bit quieter but never mind at least they're attending".

Get up at 9am, glad to see that Michael's remembered to screw the toothpaste lid on - that's considerate of everyone else - hope Ellie's remembered her P.E kit and has a good day today.

Out to college at 10am.

In from dancing at 7pm, lovely to *Read more next month...*

oh no, that means I don't have my free time with my mam anymore.

hear about Michael's good day at school and that he's excited about starting Youth Club tonight. Hope he has a nice night, he'll make some nice friends.

Ellie's off to Girls Group tonight although she's not too keen tonight, one of the girls gave her a "funny look" last week. Hope it works out - she's in a routine now and she enjoyed it before that happened.

Michael comes back from Youth Club about 8.30pm full of news about who was there and what they did. Glad he enjoyed it but now he's constantly looking for distractions when he should be having a shower/bath and getting ready to settle in bed to sleep at 9:30pm. He'll be in a funny mood tomorrow if he's tired.

Ellie comes back from Girls group at 8pm - she's "never going there again" - oh no, that means I don't have my free time with my mam anymore. How disappointing, maybe we can find something else of interest but then again Ellie's a tricky character.

Play Day



Playday is the annual celebration of children's right to play.

Wednesday 4 August is Playday - the national day for play.

On Playday and throughout the summer, thousands of children, young people and communities will get out to play at hundreds of locally organised events across the UK.

As well as a celebration of children's right to play, Playday is also a campaign that raises awareness about some serious issues affecting children's play.

If your little darlings are anything like mine they will be bored with the holidays already. Why not take them along to Prospect Park on 4th August? This is Reading's contribution to national Play Day. It is from 10 - 4 with lots of free activities. Entry is free but if you drive there they will charge you £1 to park.

Foster Care Fortnight



This year's recruitment drive for Foster Care Fortnight was a resounding success. As a direct result of the campaign, the Family Placements Team received a total of 71 enquiries from people interested in fostering, or in becoming a Family Link short breaks carer. Expressions of Interest forms are now coming in, and initial home

Secretary's report:



The last year was my fifth as secretary and as many of you know will be my last. The time has come after 9 busy and enjoyable years on the committee to hand over to someone else. I'm continuing in my role as Family Link Carer so you will still see me at the great events that RCL put on for all carers.

The AGM last year was an attempt to try something different and we offered a half day conference with a speaker from the Fostering Network. The turn out of carers wasn't great but those that were there gained a fantastic insight into what it's actually like to be a looked after child. A care leaver talked about her life in care and what she has achieved since, it was very uplifting and motivational.

Our first event of the year was our annual summer outing. On the 5th July a packed coach of carers and children set off for Chessington

world of Adventures. A great time was had by all! Next in September there was the first rugby home game of the season at the Madjeski stadium. London Irish won and the children enjoyed the free fun fair, face painting and of course Eek the Leprechaun! Rivermead was the venue for two great pool parties, one in November and one in February. About 20 carers and children enjoyed the pool, hot drinks and chocolate afterwards - all for free! The Christmas party was once again a huge success; Tricardo the Wizard entertained us all with party games and a disco. There was lots of party food which again I have to thank Chris Baker for getting organised in the kitchen with his band of helpers and thank you to everyone who attended, we all had a great time and Father Christmas put in an appearance too!

Four carers have over the last year manned the phone lines for Reading Carers Link' support line. These were Ariane Cutler, Christine Viney, Sheila Bowcock and myself. I have now stepped down from this role so Family Link Carers should now get a call from Nadine Hinton. The support line gives carers the opportunity to chat to other carers in confidence, be listened to and if necessary be pointed in the right direction for more advice.

Treasurer's report



The Charity's funds support the general work of RCL which provides events for carers and their families including days out and the Christmas party, together with training and conferences. In parallel to these, the largest items of expenditure are for staffing the support line and providing the newsletter.

Following discussions in the previous twelve months with Reading Borough Council, grant funds for the 2009-10 year were provided as a single source of income. As a consequence, one of the bank accounts was closed and has reduced the overheads in maintaining the accounts.

INCOME & EXPENDITURE

Total income (£13,709) for the year was in line with expectation,

and almost identical to the previous year. The main source of income was a grant from Reading Borough Council, together with contributions from carers for the summer outing to Chessington World of Adventures. Expenditure (total £12,259) was higher than the previous year (£10,805) with the main increases from expenditure on training courses, Norma Howes' surgery sessions and a small increase in the cost of producing the newsletter. Spending on other items was similar to previous. As a result funds at the end of the year (£13,071) were in a strong position.

AUDIT

The accounts have been examined and approved by a qualified auditor and will be submitted to the Charities' Commission in the near future.

SUMMARY

The charity finished the year to 31 March 2010 in a sound financial position with good levels of reserves.

Patrick Stonehewer, Treasurer
21 July 2010

visits are already being arranged. We had good support from the local press and radio in Reading, and from community groups, who displayed our posters and leaflets to promote the information evening.

We also had great support from carers and young people, who helped in many different ways, including writing an article for

the local paper, attending the information evening, helping out at the recruitment stand at community events, and helping to send out leaflets. I am very grateful for your support, and I would like to say a big Thank You to you all!

Antoinette Earl, Family Placements Recruitment Officer, Reading Borough Council.



Specially for Children in Care



A message from the Children in Care Council:
A big thank you to Naomi, Josh & Kiarni who came to our last meeting on the 17th June.

The Children in Care Council is a group of young people and children in care or have been in care who meet every 6 weeks.

Shakira and Barbara run our meetings with the help of Nick who is our youth worker.

We think it is good to have a Children in Care Council because young people are having a say about what they are going through and have the opportunity to get things changed. Since we last met Shakira and Barbara have been busy.

They met with Amar Dave and his team who run the Culture and Arts Department in Reading Borough Council. They are the people who look after the theatres and put on shows as well as organize sports in Reading. They really want to

support the CiCC and help us find things for children in care to do. They have offered us some tickets to go and see a show—we will have more news about this later on so watch this space!

If you would like to get involved with the CiCC why not come to our next meeting?

The last meeting was 15th July at 5pm at Western Elms. To find out when the next meeting is contact nick.johnson@reading.gov.uk or tel 077 36 66 05 37

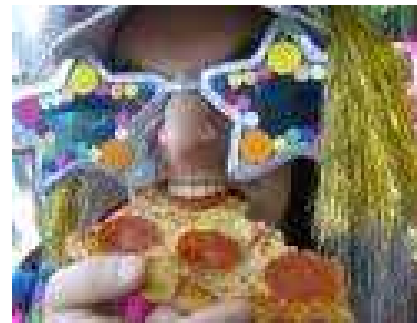
Theatre Workshop



The Hexagon Summer Youth Project ran a 2 week course from 27th July to 7th August. This 2 week course was for young people aged 8-18 and was a great way to find out more about the theatre and gave young people the chance to perform at the Hexagon.

The children in care council were given 10 free places for children and young people in care to take part. If you missed this and would have liked to have been involved why not join the Children in Care Council and be the first to find out about these opportunities? Contact nick.johnson@reading.gov.uk or tel 077 36 66 05 37

AGM



For those of you who did not attend our Annual General Meeting:

YOU MISSED THE PIZZA!

Ok nobody wore those glasses, but our Annual General Meeting was a lot more fun than it sounds. Before we started there was an important meeting that is reported elsewhere about links with Wokingham. There is a reason we

have an AGM. As a membership organisation and a registered charity it is a chance for you all to say if you are not happy with who is running YOUR organisation or how they are running it.

This year there is an important change as Lynn who has been secretary for five years, and a member of the committee for longer than I can remember, stood down. We are lucky that Helen Cornwall has volunteered to fill Lynn's shoes and she was duly elected to the committee. All other members of the committee agreed to stand for another year and were re-elected. That is the statutory bit. If you are not happy with your committee that was your opportunity to say so and propose someone else. We hope that because nobody did so you are reasonably happy with what we have been doing and so we propose to go on doing it.

If you thought you were going to miss the speeches by not turning up, hard luck, here they are. There will be a short test afterwards.

So what was with the Pizza? I ordered a load of Pizza before the meeting with the objective of getting through all the business before they were delivered. We managed!