



Cornerstone

because foundations matter.

Annual Review 2020/21



Cornerstone (North East) Adoption and Fostering Service
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Cornerstone (North East) Adoption and Fostering Service, trading as Cornerstone UK, is registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee no: 5663749 and as a charity no: 1114213 and in Scotland as a charity no: SC050836

Overview from the chair

St Paul encourages the persecuted Christians in Rome to remain steadfast, for, he says: “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5: 3-5). It has felt like a long year, for children and families, for staff and for partners – a year full of uncertainty and yet filled with abundant acts of loving service, and evidence of God’s upholding, healing and peace.

Cornerstone as an organisation has not been immune to the challenges of COVID, and we are still discerning new ways of working, receiving strong encouragement to establish ‘Foundations Matter’ in Scotland (there is already a Scottish ‘Cornerstone’ engaged in fostering), welcoming new children and young people, families, volunteers, staff and trustees, and delighting in others taking on new challenges and responsibilities.

This has been a challenging year and our amazing Cornerstone family has risen to the challenge with faithful endurance, emerging stronger in faith and purpose. Above all we are hopeful because God’s love has been poured into our hearts. As I come to the end of my time as Chair I am thankful to God for all that has been, and I pray God’s blessing for all that is to come for the children and young people who are at the heart of everything we do.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.L. Craxford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeremy Craxford
Acting Chair of Trustees

Core values

Cornerstone turned 22 years old in 2021, and we are bigger and busier than ever. Our core values help us to stay on track and never lose sight of why we do this: to bless the children in the care system with loving Christian families.

UNITY - We are Christians who love God, and we work together in a faith community.

CHILDREN - We put vulnerable children at the centre of all that we do to change their stories within the context of a loving family.

DEVELOPMENT - We provide holistic support to children, carers, and staff to reach their full potential.

STEWARDSHIP - We strive to be good stewards of God's gifts in our lives and God's creation by using our resources in a smart and ecologically friendly way.

REVERENCE - We listen and communicate with respect and care.

INTEGRITY - We work diligently and from the soul as for the Lord to manifest our life in Christ throughout our personal lives and the entire organisation.

By their very name they are CORE, not only to who we are as an organisation, but what inspires us as individuals in a motivated and Christ-centred team. They influence our decision making at every level, the practical day to day, the strategic and the environmental.

Unity

Cornerstone is a family orientated organisation and together we are members of the worldwide family of God.

We are individuals within the Cornerstone family – Trustees; Staff; Contractors; Volunteers, and at the heart of everything we do are the Family members who provide loving homes for the children and young people placed within their care.

We are also part of the wider community, working with Local Authorities; Government Agencies and Regulatory Bodies to ensure the provision of a safe and loving environment in which children can grow and develop.

Despite COVID restrictions in 2020 we continued to get referrals from Local Authorities we had not worked with before (e.g. Doncaster MBC) which reflects both increased attention in Cornerstone as a service provider and the satisfaction and confidence in the quality of service we provide.



Children

Children are at the centre of everything we do and hope to achieve.

The children coming into the Cornerstone Family are with us because, for one reason or another, they have been affected by circumstances way beyond their control. We are mindful of the direction given throughout the Gospel that we should look after children; particularly those in society who are most vulnerable and at risk of abuse.

The table below shows the numbers of families and children who are part of our fostering and post adoption support services:

	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Families	17	20	23
Children placed	40	35	33

This table includes all families who were a part of Cornerstone at any point in the given period, including families who retired or resigned part way through a year and those who were approved to adopt part way through the year. The table also shows all children in placements at any point during the given period, including short-term and emergency placements. A high percentage of children cared for by Cornerstone are in long-term placements, many of whom go on to be adopted by their Foster Carers. Plans are in place to recruit more families to offer an increase in the number of placements available. Whilst, sadly, the recruitment of new families was affected by the COVID pandemic in 2020/21, plans are in place to recruit more families in 2021/22. This in turn will increase the number of placements available.

Development

We are always looking for ways to improve all aspects of our work and deliver a high standard of care and support for all our families.

Cornerstone's development is separated into four major areas:

1 People – We believe in developing our own people through internal and external training. One staff member completed a 2-year Level 7 Leadership and Management course and now supports the Senior Management Team in operational matters.

Succession planning is at the heart of our development. Our current Panel Chair has retired and we recruited a new Chair with exceptional skills and knowledge in the sector who is committed to further develop our Panel and the important job they do.

This year we were able to further strengthen our Board of Directors by recruiting highly skilled professionals including two new Agency Decision Makers.

Our Foster Carers and Adopters continue to receive monthly training on all core subjects and the specialised topics they require for their own development. We utilised high quality training videos to meet the legal requirements and best use of the trainers' time. Some of these resources were developed in house.

2 Systems – Despite the massive challenges of the pandemic we were able to change from an office-based to home and remote working-based operating model. We were able to do so thanks to well-established structures and procedures.



Development

Our IT volunteers worked tirelessly so that our systems now fully support online access to all our families and other professionals. We made full use of the available technology during this time. Meetings, training and family support continued without disruption and feedback from all stakeholders suggested that our level of service improved in this period.

As part of our 'Forever Family' policy, The Jubilee Fund was established during the year. This aims to provide support to adults, formerly in the care of Cornerstone, who have come of age and who have one-off financial needs. This is a grant-based system which is overseen by a sub-committee of the Board of Trustees. One grant of £750 was approved during the year.

3 Staff Policies and Procedures received a major overhaul by an external professional to ensure they were fit for purpose for an ever-growing organisation.

4 Marketing - We developed an active social media presence and used it for stronger brand recognition and targeted recruitment. We developed excellent new videos and animations, which we intend to use once live events happen again



@CornerstoneUK.Adoption.Fostering



@CNE_FandA



Stewardship

In relative terms, Cornerstone is a small Charity with a big heart.

We have a carefully managed budgeting and financial control system, as we are well aware of the need to utilise our resources carefully. The annual budget is approved by the trustees in January each year. Monthly management accounts measuring activity against budget are prepared for the Senior Management Team and Treasurer with quarterly reports being presented to the Board of Trustees.

We have been blessed by having a team of volunteers who give considerable time and energy to providing their services voluntarily as trustees and professional advisors bringing significant skills and experience to the management of the Cornerstone organisation. However, as our organisation grows, we recognise that we cannot continue to rely on volunteers. With this in mind, we are pursuing the possibility of engaging both IT consultants and a PR professional.

Most of our income is generated by services funded by Local Authorities.

As can be seen from the Financial Statement (Page 11) the majority of our funds were spent on charitable activities or facilitating their provision.

Of our total costs, approximately 50% goes directly to foster families. The remainder is spent on staffing costs (whose function is to underpin the operation and organisation of Cornerstone), as well as premises, insurances, registration fees and activities.



Reverence

As a Christian Organisation, we listen carefully to God and to one another, striving to communicate with respect and care.

We are keenly aware of the diverse nature of beliefs and lifestyles within our society, some of which may be different from our own. Reverence towards, and respect for, others is fundamental to our beliefs. We seek to show this in our practice and to teach our children and young people by word and example the importance of caring for all our neighbours.

Our policies and procedures demonstrate our determination to apply the basic principles of acceptance throughout our Cornerstone family.

Some of the key Policies which underscore our operations include:

Working Together to Safeguard Children

Harassment and Bullying

Equal Opportunities and Diversity

Information Handling and Data Protection

Quality Assurance

Historical Abuse Policy

Disciplinary Procedure

Mental Wellbeing

Health & Safety

Conflict of Interest

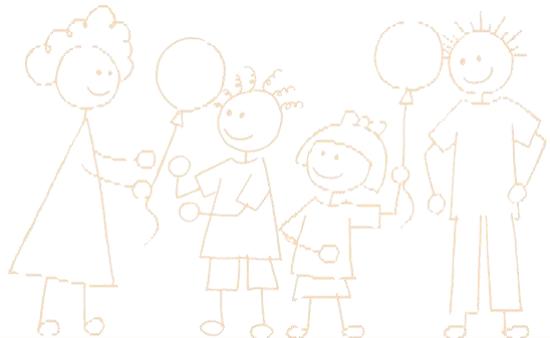
Integrity

As a Christian charity we feel that we should reflect the character of Jesus Christ in all that we do. This includes our performance as individuals and as an organisation.

Feedback from families and professional partners about our services continues to be consistently high, but we are by no means complacent and during this year we have reviewed our services and professional practice and strengthened our operational structure to ensure that we continue to provide responsive services of the highest quality.

In line with everyone across the world, Covid-19 has already had a significant impact on our operations, and our staff are to be congratulated in their capacity to adapt to working from home, delivering support and training to our present families, recruiting and assessing new carers and making placements. Policies and procedures have been rapidly adapted and are continually under review as we seek to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the whole Cornerstone family. All our new flexible approaches are being evaluated and we expect them to continue and develop into the future.

Our families have been faithful and resilient, adapting to new demands and challenges in family life and continuing to show outstanding commitment to the well-being of the young people in their care.



Financial summary for the year to 31st March 2021

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Unrestricted funds 20/21 £'000	Restricted funds 20/21 £'000	Total funds 20/21 £'000	Total funds 19/20 £'000
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Income

Donations	9	—	9	16
Fees from Local Authorities	799	—	799	595
Other	1	—	1	4
TOTAL INCOME	809	—	809	615

Expenditure

Costs of generating voluntary income	6	5
Charitable activities	743	660
Governance	19	17
TOTAL COSTS	768	682
Net Income / (Expenditure)	41	(67)

Balance sheet for the year to March 2021

FIXED ASSETS	—	2
CURRENT ASSETS	382	340
CURRENT LIABILITIES	(17)	(18)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	365	323

Capital

Unrestricted general funds	345	318
Unrestricted designated funds	20	5
Restricted funds	—	—
TOTAL	365	323

What does the future hold for Cornerstone?

Cornerstone is facing the challenges of this present time with an ambitious vision, confidence and resilience, holding fast to our core values and beliefs, whilst providing the very best life chances we can for the children and young people in the care of our families.

We are undertaking a whole organisational review, which when complete will assist us to move forward, learning from the positive, however unintended, outcomes of the past 12 months, to use technology better and continue to take good care of all our people.

Our Legacy Fund is now operational with a designated fund where our young people can apply for assistance to meet their needs after they turn 18.

The future still looks uncertain, yet the demand for our services continues as the number of looked after children rises whilst the number of carers falls.

We are growing our level of provision in areas we currently serve and breaking ground into new areas. The Trustees have approved a new post specifically for foster carer recruitment for 2021/22, and our ultimate goal is to provide a Fostering and Adoption Agency Service to all areas of the UK, through regional clusters for local support.

Whilst our application to become a VAA was finally refused in April 2020, we have lodged an appeal as the grounds for refusal are related to matters that are the subject of the awaited legal judgement. We have a number of scenarios for the future in development; all of these involve a continuation of our work but many of them involve difficult operational decisions. The Trustees are committed to reapplying to become a VAA once the court decisions are finalised.

What does the future hold for Cornerstone?

Having registered as a cross border charity we are now working hard with the Care Inspectorate to register a completely new service in Scotland: **Foundations Matter...for Caledonian Children.** We have recruited our first Trustee in Scotland and an excellent Social Worker to support the two families we already have there. We continue to recruit more staff and Panel Members, a Trustee who will be our Agency Decision Maker there and hosting Information Events from this summer.

In addition, we are looking to enhance our online presence. Plans are in hand to recruit a professional to undertake targeted promotional work. We are also cognisant of the need to continue to bolster the work in the East Midlands and Yorkshire. We are fully aware of our dependence on families becoming foster carers. As such the provision of 'Skills to Foster Training' will continue in 2021/22, although it is understood that this is a very demand driven activity.

It is recognised that development always has cost implications. The Trustees recognised this in the approval of a budgeted overspend for 2021/22. However, this will have no impact on our ability to successfully continue our operations and meet our regulatory responsibilities.



Pam Birtle
Founder and CEO



Key information

Cornerstone (North East) Adoption and Fostering Service

GF2, Oxford House, Sixth Avenue, Doncaster, DN9 3GG

Telephone: 0191 5656423 email: info@cornerstoneuk.org

Company Registration Number: 05663749

Charity Registration Number: 1114213

Charity Registration Number in Scotland: SC050836



Officers and Trustees

Chair of Trustees	Sheila Bamber
Trustees in post during 2020/21	Jeremy Craxford Gillian Horner Michael Horner Janet Lancefield Nadine Parker Hazael Hornsby Jen Frampton (ADM) Dr Jenny Simpson (ADM) Charles Thomson
Company Secretary	Réka Goodson

CEO and PAS Manager	Pam Birtle
Fostering Manager	Linda Roets

Independent Examiner	Judith Summerfield
Management Accountant	Andrew Church