We are a multidisciplinary foster care organization set up specifically to meet the needs of CYP whom the LAs struggle to place. We currently have 160 of the most complex and challenging CYP placed with SWIIS across Scotland. Our education support service was evaluated within the model and I have attached a synopsis of the research project which Dr Graham Connelly from Strathclyde University conducted with our organization and was published in January of 2010. We have used the document to frame the work we do and to continuously improve the service offered. The full Evaluation Document can be seen on our website [minus the toolkits used] www.swiisfostercarescotland.com

**STRENGTHS**

There is evidence to support SWIIS’s contention that they are providing foster placements for Looked After Children who could be regarded as otherwise ‘hard to place.

Despite typically having challenging behaviour and additional support needs, once children are placed with SWIIS they tend to become settled in the same school.

The young people had better than average attendance for their stage and status in comparison with government data for looked after children in Scotland and with foster children in research reported by the University of Strathclyde and Scottish Government in 2008.

The type of education support SWIIS provides is not only likely to lead to enhanced attainment by young people but is also a vital component of placement stability for challenging and troubled young people.

A particular strength in SWIIS's work is its multi-disciplinary approach, which is supported by effective communication across the agency.

Education workers help carers and young people to derive benefit from participation in schemes run by schools to encourage wider achievements.

The SWIIS education support is implemented in ways that help to mitigate exclusions and when they do occur reduce the impact on children and carers.

The broad picture that emerges is of placements that offer educationally rich home environments and of carers able to collaborate with SWIIS in resolving difficulties in schooling.
Evidence of SWIIS’s careful recruitment of carers who were committed to the SWIIS emphasis on promoting educational achievement and who had the personal resources to co-operate effectively with SWIIS towards this end.

SWIIS foster carers involved children in decisions and took account of their preferences.

Most SWIIS carers reported that they were involved in decision-making about educational matters as equal members of the care team.

Carers endeavoured to establish regular and supportive communication with the children’s birth parents.

SWIIS carers have a clear understanding of agency roles, agency expectations and they feel they can work effectively with SWIIS staff.

SWIIS carers rated highly the communication with SWIIS staff and thought the quality of support about educational matters was excellent.

Most carers participated in further training and were positive about the experience but perhaps more needs to be done to help carers to gain formal qualifications [now in place 2011]

SWIIS has considerable strengths in providing professional development. This is particularly important since SWIIS staff have a key role in developing carers’ understanding of how to support schooling and how to manage behaviours that might jeopardise the child’s or young person’s placement.

SWIIS appears to be adept not only in developing their social work and education staff but also in designing training events and one-to-one coaching for foster carers.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

A higher proportion of SWIIS placements are with older children compared to the numbers present in the wider foster care population in Scotland. (78%) were adolescents.

The mean age was just over 13.5 years - National statistics show that 45% of all LAC are teenagers.

SWIIS are placing a higher than average proportion of boys.

Fifty-six (93%) of the group were White-Scottish (compared with 86% nationally), while four were Scottish-Asian or mixed ethnicity

Fifteen local authorities placed children with SWIIS, with Fife (13), Aberdeen City (10) and Edinburgh (9) having the highest number of children placed. The placements
locations were within 12 authorities, with Fife (23) and Dundee (11) receiving most children.

Seventeen (28%) of the young people were in placements within their home authority while the remaining 43 (72%) were placed in local authorities that were different to their home authority.

Forty-one (68%) of the young people had been placed with SWIIS carers for between one and two years.

- Less than one year 4 (7%)
- From one to under 2 years 41 (68%)
- From two to under 3 years 10 (17%)
- Three years and more 5 (8%)

The most common reason for the children placed with SWIIS becoming looked after was given as the lack of parental care. This was the sole reason for 32 (53%) of the young people.

Other reasons were:
- beyond parental control (11)
- offences against child (2)
- death of parent and drug or alcohol abuse (2)
- offences by child (1)
- drug or alcohol misuse by parents (1)
- other (no explanation) (2)

The local authority commissioning managers interviewed indicated that the most common reason for seeking placements with independent agencies like SWIIS was lack of capacity within the local authority’s own resources. SWIIS explicitly offers a service for children who are particularly challenging and troubled and who are therefore regarded as ‘difficult to place’.

Twenty-five (42%) of the young people were identified as having additional support needs, all but one attending mainstream school. There was a broad range of needs noted with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties being recorded either solely or in combination for more than half of these, including 10 noted as having mental health difficulties.

The data from SWIIS indicate that a substantially higher proportion of the children in their care are recognised as having considerable additional support needs than is reported in the wider looked after children population in Scotland.

SWIIS carers believed that 79% of the children and young people they looked after had social emotional or behavioural needs.
Additional support needs of the children placed with SWIIS carers were recorded by their various schools in the following ways:

- Individual support plans (9)
- Individual education plans (5)
- Education review minutes (4)
- Co-ordinated support plan (3)
- Staged intervention action plan (3)
- Individual Training Plan (1)

**Questions to ask**

- Is it clear what the different terms for plans in use mean but are they used similarly for similar needs between local authorities and schools?
- Will this potentially confusing situation be improved as a result of the provisions of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act? Broadly this means that a looked after child is assumed to have additional support needs by default, unless the requirement has been specifically excluded in respect of an individual
- Would it be useful to encourage schools to use only two forms of report: Individual Education Plan and Co-ordinated Support Plan?

Exclusion might be expected to be high as being consistent in children who typically have challenging behaviour - too difficult an area to evaluate using present cohort and information SWIIS staff and carers highlighted concerns about instances of exclusion taking place without proper consultation and without following the local authority’s own procedures – a national issue?

This needs to be set against the generally high level of attendance achieved with SWIIS.

**THEMES**

Analysis found that SWIIS’s support for education is broadly consistent with the ‘Indicators of Good Practice’.

The SWIIS social workers were generally supportive of having an education team in SWIIS because it makes a difference and means that the education support for young people is effective.

The agency’s multi-disciplinary approach is central to maintaining the stability of quality placements for children with more than usually challenging issues, and that the absence of any of the components is likely to weaken the agency’s ability to meet this goal.

An agency is much more likely to be able to attend properly to the children’s education if workers are employed who specialise in this aspect of provision.
When the high cost of placements in relation to the intensive support offered by SWIIS was explored in interview, a social work manager provided a very straightforward answer:

“Not if you count the cost of failed placements.”

SWIIS provision costs around one-third of the cost of a typical residential care placement.

The type of education support SWIIS provides is not only likely to lead to enhanced attainment by young people but is also a vital component of placement stability for challenging and troubled young people.

Placements are more likely to break down if SWIIS deploy fewer staff to carer and young people ratio.

SWIIS add value through intensive initial and ongoing coaching for carers, plus supportive, effective review and monitoring procedures, carried out in a context of shared values.

Carers’ perceptions of SWIIS support for education were benchmarked with the Indicators of Good Practice’ - SWIIS support fully met each of the criteria

SWIIS staff support was consistent with values that underpin care, as described in the benchmarking sources listed.

In interviews carers reported being trusted by the agency staff, treated as equal partners, encouraged to involve the children and birth parents in decisions, to share high expectations with the children, and to operate in a non-judgemental way.

SWIIS are able to identify and recruit carers who hold or can develop values that ought to underpin care.

Carers reported in questionnaires that the training workshops they had attended were good or excellent in helping them to support children.

Carers believed that the monthly monitoring and review procedures were very well designed to promote open dialogue problems. Carers believed that their daily written logs, the focus of monthly about any difficulties with the children and encouraged a joint approach to addressing extended discussion with SWIIS education staff, contributed effectively to the monitoring and review procedures

The issue with lack of clarity between the roles of ECW and ESW was tempered by the swift response to difficulties experienced and was valued by carers much more highly than clear demarcation of roles.
‘The education case workers were eager to help regardless of time of day’

**Evaluations by the children of SWIIS carers** suggested that the children engaged enthusiastically in the activities offered by SWIIS and perceived the provision as a benefit of fostering.

Some older children helped to run the activities and believed that they learned useful skills from this voluntary work.

The children’s comments on evaluation sheets suggested that the provision enabled them to develop understandings that helped them to be supportive to the foster children.

Role modelling processes are complex and the family’s own child can only be expected to function as an effective role model if the young person placed perceives the family’s goals as effective.

**Views of carers who previously fostered with other agencies and LA in comparison with SWIIS**

Effective communication systems at SWIIS allowed a very fast, reassuring, effective response when carers asked for help.

Carers were encouraged to collaborate with SWIIS staff in constructing and implementing the response.

Frequent opportunities to participate in training workshops, Effective, ongoing, pro-active monitoring and review of carers.

SWIIS staff gave more time to addressing their concerns than their counterparts in local authorities.

**Expectation of SWIIS on carers promoting education:**

“That’s a very, very big part of SWIIS. That was one of the major reasons I went in to it, because they were so big on education. They’re very passionate about it”.

Communication systems with school designated managers and school teachers were well established and school staff knew that they should negotiate and plan with carers as well as with SWIIS staff.

SWIIS carers reported that at least as much, if not more, account was taken of interactions with the school than was the case with their own children.

SWIIS enables carers to support children strongly in relation to formal school provision and that it provides support tailored to the situation and the people in it.

SWIIS support is flexible, depending on the carer’s experience of school liaison and advocacy.
SWIIS workers helped to improve school attendance by ensuring that schools would notify carers immediately if children failed to turn up at a class. SWIIS help with addressing bullying was particularly appreciated.

Carers who had few formal educational qualifications themselves were imaginative in their provision of informal learning activities at home and most of the interviewees tried out interesting techniques similar to those used by primary teachers for helping younger children with reading and writing.

While carers seemed to learn much from training only a small minority of carers currently had opportunities to acquire qualifications that are required for employment outside SWIIS. With the establishment of an internal SQA Centre in 2011 carers now have the opportunity to gain formal qualifications.

**CONCLUSION**

“We therefore concluded that SWIIS, through its education support service, is indeed adding value to the care experience of children and young people placed with its foster carers. It appears that potentially difficult placements are made sustainable as a result of this additional support.”

“The extra support provided by education workers allows social work and placement support staff in SWIIS to concentrate on specifically ‘social work’ aspects of the placement support task, in the knowledge that the educational aspects are being addressed.”