



The Fostering Communities Programme

Walking Tall: Stage One Evaluation

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1. Acknowledgements

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2. Executive summary

Walking Tall is a three-year project (2020 – 2023) for primary school children in foster care, enabling them to make their voices heard and develop their confidence.

Stage One of the Walking Tall Project sought to facilitate a children's advisory group to assist with trialing and developing activities for later stages of the project. Children in foster care (n=8) aged eight to 11, and foster carers (n=5), participated in Stage One.

Foster families were posted a range of arts-based materials and activities and once these were completed children and foster carers had an online conversation with one of the project team members about their engagement with the project, their evaluations of the materials and activities, and their recommendations for the later stages of the Walking Tall Project. This report sets out details of the activities and consultation sessions, outlines the key points raised by children and foster carers, and offers a series of recommendations for the remaining stages of the Walking Tall Project.

3. Section one: Background

3.1 About The Fostering Network

[The Fostering Network](#) is the UK's leading fostering charity. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice. We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change, so that foster care is the very best it can be.

We have been leading the fostering agenda for more than 40 years, influencing and shaping policy and practice at every level. As a membership organisation we bring together individuals and services involved in providing foster care across the UK. We have approximately 60,000 individual members and nearly 400 organisational members, both local authorities and independent fostering providers, which cover 75 per cent of foster carers in the UK. Our views are informed by our members, as well as through research; in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care.

3.2 The Fostering Communities programme and co-production

[Fostering Communities](#) is a national programme led by The Fostering Network in Wales and funded by the Welsh Government from 2020 – 2023. The programme supports looked after children and their foster families throughout Wales, by improving wellbeing outcomes for children and increasing the competence, confidence, and motivation of the fostering workforce.

The programme is underpinned by a fostering community shared power model, built around workstreams and interventions, which will aim to improve wellbeing in line with the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#).

Embedded within Fostering Communities is a [co-production approach](#), which means working in equal partnership with children, foster carers and fostering services to plan and deliver the programme

This co-production within this programme is not just about children just ‘taking part’ or ‘being present’, but rather about having influence over decisions and actions.

The Fostering Network believes that children and young people should be involved in the whole process of deciding the best services for all. Children and young people should have a say in decisions about their own lives and services should be developed and improved, based on the perspectives of children and young people.

The Walking Tall Project within this programme is one way of engaging with children and providing a platform for them to share their experiences and ideas.

4. Section two: Walking Tall – a project overview

4.1 Introduction

Walking Tall is a three-year project (2020 – 2023) for primary school children (years 4 – 6) in foster care, enabling them to make their voices heard, whilst also learning to develop and to gain in self-confidence and be proud of who they are.

Using interactive activities, the project encourages staff and facilitators to think through how they can adopt a more participative approach when working with children and highlights the importance of co-production – working side by side with children, to empower them to share their views and be heard.

Walking Tall recognises that everyone involved in fostering has a vital contribution to make, in order to improve the quality of life for children and young people in care and their foster families. In this way, the project will help towards ensuring that children are involved in designing and delivering projects that will meet their own needs.

The Walking Tall project was supported by [Dawn Mannay](#) and [Rachael Vaughan](#) from Cardiff University. Drawing on their experience of working creatively with care experienced children, they have assisted The Fostering Network in designing a range of participatory, interactive and co-produced activities. They are also supporting the direct work with children, and to develop these tools based on children's ideas and preferences.

4.2 Children's advisory group

In a preliminary advisory activity, children engaged in a number of creative activities designed by the project team and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of these different approaches. They were also asked to generate ideas about what other activities they would like to see and what they felt is the best way for children to share their perspectives, experiences and ideas.

By producing this report, the accounts and evaluations provided by children will enable opportunities for continuous forms of co-production and reflection throughout the Walking Tall Project. The resources generated will represent what has been learned from engaging with children and how their ideas can be implemented in future practice.

4.3 Creative play-based children's sessions

The purpose of the Stage One workshops was to develop creative play-based sessions and to find out how children like to engage digitally and inviting them to advise on materials and activities for working with children in later stages of the Walking Tall Project. Some of the activities also supported conversations about children's aspirations, their everyday lives and the people and things that they feel make them happy.

4.4 Walking Tall project outputs

Walking Tall will deliver the following outputs by the end of year three in 2023:

- Deliver six creative play-based children's sessions, two in each year of the project.
- Develop a children's resource to reach every fostering household on Wales in year three of the project.
- Collate information from the workshops and develop an evaluation report in each year of the project.
- Develop a paper exploring the facilitation tools used for engaging children.
- Themes and issues raised by the children will feed directly into [CASCADE](#) research priorities, with possibility for further exploratory work.

5. Section three: Report aims

The aim of this Stage One report is to share:

- the collaborative work in the advisory group session to inform the design, structure, and content of future creative play-based children's sessions.
- the findings of the creative, play-based children's sessions, to enable them to discuss their views on taking part, which again will feed into further developments.
- the resources generated to represent what has been learned from engaging with children and how their ideas can be implemented in future practice.

5.1 Stage One - Methodology

5.1.1 Project design

Childhood is frequently presented as a state of becoming. These everyday constructions of children engender a climate where policies and practices often omit the subjective lived experiences of children themselves (Mannay et al. 2017a).

However, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and writers in the sociology of childhood, have argued for a shift where children and young people are viewed as the experts in their own lives (James et al. 2007; James and Prout 2015). This position aligns with the Welsh Government's formal commitment to children's rights, which has strengthened the national basis for children's and young people's direct participation in evaluations and research studies (Welsh Assembly Government 2004).

Accordingly, Stage One of the Walking Tall Project sought to facilitate a children's advisory group, positioning children in foster care as 'experts by experience' (Clark and Statham 2005; Preston-Shoot 2007; Staples et al. 2019). It is important to involve participants in all elements of the research process (Children's Commissioner for Wales 2017) and Stage One was designed to enable children in foster care to take part in and evaluate engagement activities and to offer recommendations for future stages of the Walking Tall Project. Additionally, given their central role in the lives of these children (Rees 2019), it was also necessary to consider the views of foster carers.

5.1.2 Participants

Children in foster care (n=8) aged eight to 11, and foster carers (n=5) participated in Stage One as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Designation	Age of Child	Area
Rosie	Child	9	South Wales West
Rhian	Child	8	South Wales West
Rebecca	Foster carer		South Wales West
Bella	Child	9	South Wales West
Beverley	Foster carer		South Wales West
Richard	Child	9	West Wales
Rees	Child	8	West Wales
Robert	Foster carer		West Wales
Dean	Child	11	South Wales Central
Daniel	Child	9	South Wales Central
David	Foster carer		South Wales Central
Erin	Child	10	North Wales
Edward	Foster carer		North Wales

5.1.3 Project activities

Face-to-face activities and interviews have been used successfully in previous studies and evaluations involving care experienced children and young people (Rees 2019; Roberts 2017). Accordingly, the activities and feedback discussions in this project were initially intended to be embedded in a series of face-to-face workshops with children. However, the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic required that activities needed to take place in participants' homes. Accordingly, interactions with children and foster carers were conducted remotely, aligning with other studies of family life during the pandemic (Power et al. 2020).

Foster families were sent a package through the post containing activity instructions (see Appendix 1) and the relevant materials for each of the four activities. The project activities were designed on the premise that children should be supported to have a voice about their everyday lives and experiences (Groundwater-Smith et al. 2015; Lomax 2015) and drew on earlier studies that utilised creative and visual approaches with care experienced children and young people (Mannay et al. 2015, 2017b, 2019; Wilson and Milne 2016).

The Rockstar Activity invited children to paint up to 10 stones to represent people or things in their lives that make them feel happy. The Message in a Bottle Activity provided an opportunity for children to decorate a water bottle

with a range of stickers. Once the bottle was completed, children were asked to imagine they were going to put their water bottle into the sea and that it would float to a different country and be found by another child. The activity instructions noted that children could create a message on a piece of paper to put inside their water bottle with three questions that they would like to ask the child in a different country and three statements about themselves. The Wishes and Dreams Activity encouraged children to make up to four dreamcatchers and think about the dream that they would like to catch, considering their hopes and wishes for now or for the future. The Star Rating Activity offered an evaluative summary of the three creative activities. It was also an opportunity for children to generate new ideas for future sessions in the Walking Tall Project.

Between two and three weeks after the activity pack was delivered, children took part in an online conversation with their foster carer and a member of the project team. Meetings were scheduled at a time that best suited foster families. All foster carers selected the online platform Zoom. This online video conferencing service was suggested by The Fostering Network based on previous feedback from foster carers involved in other programs, where foster carers expressed a preference for Zoom rather than collaboration platform Microsoft Teams. Foster carers had reported that they were familiar with Zoom because of its use in work settings and for social contacts. They also stated that it was easy to navigate and had useful interactive features. All online conversations were conducted on Zoom between 19 November 2020 and 9 December 2020 and these were between 29:15 and 56:36 minutes in length.

In the online conversations, children discussed each activity and evaluated them in terms of enjoyment, skills needed in the making process, what they did with the items they made, whether they thought that other children their age would like the activities, and what other activities could be introduced going forward with the Walking Tall Project. This evaluative process was important to ensure that children's views could inform and guide future work (Hart 1992). Children also reflected on aspects of their lives in relation to the activity themes of what makes them happy, how they describe themselves, and their dreams and aspirations.

Given that foster carers, rather than members of the project team, had facilitated children to take part in the activities, it was also useful to gain an understanding of foster carers' perspectives on this process. Accordingly, foster carers were asked about the strengths and limitations of the activities, the extent to which assistance from an adult was needed, and their suggestions for the development of the Walking Tall Project.

The online conversations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim and foster carers photographed the outputs from the activities and sent them to The Fostering Network, with permission for them to be used in the study.

5.1.4 Ethical practice

The potential vulnerability of children in foster care informed the project design (Shaw and Holland 2014). For example, children were recruited via The Fostering Network, to ensure both the suitability of the children to take part in the project and continued access to support for children and foster carers. Additionally, children and foster carers were provided with options for participation, which accounted for individual preferences and access to technology. All participants were provided with details of the project, informed that their participation was voluntary and notified of intended efforts to protect and anonymise data (see Appendix 1) and online conversations were audio recorded only, rather than utilising the Zoom platform option of recording video images and sound.

The Fostering Network developed a Digital Risk Assessment for Children and Young People, which was used for the Walking Tall Project. The digital risk assessment considered a number of points including safeguarding issues, the online view of rooms used by facilitators, the introduction of inappropriate or explicit material, restricting access to invited participants, and adult to child ratios. The project team all had experience working with children in care and the associated sensitivities and best practice ethical protocols.

As in previous studies, it was important that the participants received something tangible as an appreciation for their time and involvement (see also Mannay et al. 2015; Grant et al. 2019). Children kept the materials they created in the activities. Children were also sent a gift voucher as a thank you for their contribution to the project, after the online conversations. Additionally, children and foster carers were provided with a summary of the key findings from Stage One and how they would inform later stages of the Walking Tall Project, as well as a copy of the full report.

5.1.5 Data analysis

The project generated a nuanced data set with photographic documentation of the activities and 22,771 words of transcribed conversations as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Data produced

Children and Foster Carers	Activities Completed	Conversation Length	Words Transcribed
Rosie, Rhian and Rebecca	4	42:51	4,520
Bella and Beverley	4	29:26	3,449
Richard, Rees and Robert	4	46:12	4,792
Dean, Daniel and David	4	29:15	3,537
Erin and Edward	4	56:36	6,473

Conversation transcripts were analysed using an inductive and deductive approach, creating overarching thematic categories. The photographs of the materials produced in the activities were considered in the analysis, to clarify and extend the associated conversation transcripts. Analysis was undertaken by two members of the project team and involved an iterative process of reviewing and cross-checking emerging themes and interpretations. The key findings from Stage One of the Walking Tall Project are outlined in the following section.

5.2 Stage One – Consultation outcomes

Consultation findings

The key learning points from Stage One of the Walking Tall Project will be discussed in relation to the individual activities, Rockstar, Message in a Bottle, Wishes and Dreams and Star Rating. The activities will be examined in relation to how well they engaged young people, the practicalities of the making process and the extent to which the accompanying reflective activities supported children to talk about their everyday lives and experiences, and their ideas for their futures. This will be followed by a reflection on completing the activities remotely and hosting the conversations online, and an overview of the perspectives of foster carers who facilitated children's involvement with the Stage One of the Walking Tall Project.

5.2.1 Rockstar activity

As discussed in the Methodology, in the Rockstar Activity children to painted up to 10 stones, to represent people or things in their lives that make them feel happy, as illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2.



Figure 1: Selection of rockstars - Erin



Figure 2: Complete set of rockstars – Rhian and Rosie

All of the children enjoyed taking part in this activity. Part of this enjoyment related to their mastery of the activity and ability to create the stone paintings unaided.

'I did all the painting' (Erin age 10)

'I had no help, but my brother [Daniel] did have help' (Dean age 11)

Some children, such as Daniel (age 9) and Rees (aged 8) who said, 'it was a little tricky', had assistance from foster carers. However, the Rockstar Activity facilitated opportunities for autonomy for some children and opportunities to create something collaboratively for other participants. Beverley, a foster carer, noted that the instructions for this activity were good and easy to follow.

'The little books that came with it, like the rocks, were good. You could see how and what to paint on the rocks' (Beverly – foster carer)

Overall, foster carers generally agreed that the activity was suitable. However, one foster carer noted.

'We just found the paint was quite hard to get the detail, like the Minecraft one, it was quite intricate. So, if there was some sort of pen that would be great' (Robert – foster carer)

Accordingly, providing pens or finer point brushes may be something to consider when offering the Rockstar Activity in a group setting or completing packs for individual home use. It was important for children that they made something that represented their ideas and had aesthetic value. Erin made Rockstars for her foster carers, with their names written across the stones, and other foster carers and children discussed how they planned to share their creations with others in the local community.

'In lockdown a lot of local villages made rock snakes. Someone started off a snake and children were adding to the snake... so she said she would take them and add them to the snake over there' (Beverly – foster carer)

'We could try and hide some rocks and some poor children can come and find the rocks' (Rhian age 8)

'I just remembered go outside and if the weather is dry enough and it's bright enough, go to the patch and hide your rocks once you have finished with them. In my school in Year 3 or Year 4 we were hiding rocks' (Richard age 9)

The activity Richard refers to here is one where you hide painted stones for others to find and photograph them and then hide the stones again for the next person to find. This element of altruism, sharing and caring for others has been a feature of previous studies with children in foster care (Mannay et al. 2015). These reports of sharing and displaying the Rockstars emphasise the need to ensure that the materials provided are of good quality. This enables children to both create items that they are invested in and to feel comfortable with others viewing their completed artworks.

Children were asked to paint their stones to represent people or things in their lives that made them happy. They interpreted the task in different ways. For example, Bella used her imagination when drawing her rocks with some representing stories and Dean moved away from the 'happiness' remit of the activity and was influenced by the shape of the stones.

'Because I like the shape of this rock and it looks like a sheep'
(Dean age 11)

The Rockstar activity also offered some children a way to voice aspects of their everyday lives and experiences (Groundwater-Smith et al. 2015; Lomax 2015). For example, Richard (aged 9) and Rees (aged 8) filled their stones with images of their favourite foods and games, including Minecraft and football. Children also featured people and pets, and the importance of pets in the lives of children in foster care has been documented in previous studies (Briheim-Crookall 2016; Mannay and Hodges 2020).

'I painted [Name]. It's one of my maltese dogs. And she is very [caring] for us and I went out with her because she needed an injection. My other two dogs, [Name] and [Name]. My dog [Name] is very helpful and she also had some pups' (Rosie age 9).

'We have alpacas and my favourite alpaca is Coco and she is a baby' (Erin age 10)

There were also representations of the natural environment.

'I like if it's a sunny day, it makes me feel happy' (Erin age 10)

'I saw one when I went to a park and I went on a kind of slide and the ladybird flew onto me, onto my finger. I was kind of frightened and I didn't move. My daddy came and he said it was a ladybird' (Bella age 9)

The emphasis on nature as something that brings happiness supports earlier work by Gordon (2019) about the benefits of the natural environment for foster families. Bella's creation of the ladybird stone is reflective of nature, but it also links with a memory of an interaction with her father. Accordingly, in the associative task of painting things that make you happy, children also made links with birth parents who often remain central figures in children's lives despite the change in living circumstances (Pye and Rees 2019).

Overall, children enjoyed the Rockstar activity and were able to use it as a tool to discuss what made them happy. The open nature of the task meant that children had different lenses of focus, but to some extent all of the children made connections with their subjective views on happiness and wellbeing. As the Rockstar activity was led by children's ideas and perspectives, they were positioned as 'experts by experience' (Clark and Statham 2005; Preston-Shoot 2007; Staples et al. 2019). However, the open nature of the task also means that children could potentially raise issues that trigger negative associations and memories (Mannay 2020). This did not occur with this activity; however, it is important that the project team is suitably experienced and has knowledge of and access to support services, which was a feature embedded into Stage One of the Walking Tall Project.

5.2.2 Message in a bottle activity

Children decorated water bottles with a range of stickers as illustrated in Figure 3. As outlined in the Methodology section, they also wrote a message on a piece of paper to put inside their water bottle with three questions that they would like to ask an imaginary child in a different country and three statements about themselves.



Figure 3: Message in Bottle – Bella (age 9)

All of the children were complimentary about this activity, 10/10 (Rhian age 8), 10/10 (Rosie age 9).

'I gave this, 10 stars... Yes, do you want me to read what did you feel when you were doing this activity. Excited and a smiley face' (Richard age 9)

They enjoyed decorating the water bottle with the range of stickers and being able to add their name to the bottle, particularly children who had unusual names and find it difficult to find ready-made personalised items.

'I said on the review for the bottle, I put I liked it because it said, what did you like? I put I liked doing the bottle because I don't normally get my name on anything' (Erin age 10)

The opportunity to personalise items such as t-shirts and bags has proved successful in previous studies with children in foster care (Mannay et al 2015) and it was a feature of the activity that all the children valued. Overall, children managed to decorate their own water bottles, but foster carers and children commented that some of the stickers, particularly letters, were difficult to peel off the sheet so assistance and/or patience was required.

'I struggled so I asked [foster carer] to do it and then she struggled and then I did [other letters], but they were easy' (Erin age 10)

'Stickers were hard. We had some help' (Rees age 8)

'We did it on our own' (Dean age 11)

'Dean did everything himself because he is good at most things like that, but Daniel needed lots of help... Just a practical thing. We had to get a knife; you couldn't just peel them off with your fingers. I think it was a design fault. Normally you fold them in half, and they peel off' (David – foster carer)

Despite the difficulty with peeling off some of the stickers, the water bottles were highly valued by the children. As previously noted, personalisation was appreciated, but children also discussed how they used the water bottle. Children had taken their water bottles to school, as in line with regulations around the COVID-19 pandemic they needed to bring their own containers for water. Accordingly, the Message in a Bottle Activity provided a personalised and aesthetically pleasing material resource that they could show their friends and use in the school context. Children were excited to use their bottles and in one case this meant that the 'message' element got wet because of Daniel's eagerness to use his new bottle. The writing of the message was completed by children autonomously or with support depending on their individual needs and preferences.

'We did the bottle itself then [foster carer] came and helped with the writing part' (Rhian age 8)

The messages that children wrote were brief descriptions of themselves in relation to gender, age, hair and eye colour, favourite foods and details of where they lived, some also had comic elements.

'I am 10 years old. I have got black hair and my eye colour is brown. I live in Cardiff and I am a boy. I am in the middle of the sea. Help. Help' (Dean age 11)

Dean's questions to the child who found the bottle were

'Do you look like me? Where do you live? How old are you? Do you like pasta? What country do you come from? Do you have black hair?' (Dean age 11)

In discussing his questions Dean said that he has asked about pasta because it is his favourite food, and Dean also has black hair. Accordingly, in this example from Dean and in the accounts of other children the questions posed were to find out the extent to which these imaginary children who found the bottle were 'like them'. Given that the living situation is different for children in foster care than many of their peers who reside with birth parents there is often a desire to find other children who are 'like them' (see Mannay et al 2015, 2018). Returning to the earlier points about altruism in the Rockstar Activity, children were also keen to tell the imaginary child that they were 'nice, kind and helpful' (Rees age 8), 'kind and helpful' (Erin age 10) and 'helpful, kind and thoughtful' (Bella age 9), which provides some insights about how the children chose to represent themselves to others.

The immediate context of the COVID-19 pandemic was also noted by Rosie (age 9) who wrote in her message 'I also hate coronavirus'. This theme was also communicated in some of the National Health Service rainbow paintings in the Rockstar Activity (Rosie, Rhian and Erin). A recent report concluded that the 'effects of the coronavirus - and the measures put in place in to manage it - have impacted children and young people's lives significantly' (Welsh Parliament 2020, p. 50). Therefore, it is unsurprising that children reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic in these project activities.

5.2.3 Wishes and dreams activity

In the Wishes and Dreams Activity, children made up to four dreamcatchers and reflected on the dream that they would like to catch, considering their hopes and wishes for now or for the future. Participants used the completed dreamcatchers as decorations in their bedrooms or around their homes.

This activity was not as popular as the others, as some children found it more difficult to create. Foster carer Rebecca commented that Rosie and Rhian found threading the needle was frustrating and other foster carers and children also commented that there were some difficulties with the threading process.

'And on the dreamcatcher, you know the holes, the holes were too small to put the wool through, so you had to get like a needle to push it through...'

'But, after we finished, there was some little plastic things that were probably for threading it' (David – foster carer)

'It was quite difficult. It is actually up here... Yes. We got there in the end. We didn't know how to do the feathers so one is tied on and we had to staple the other two' (Erin age 10)

'Little bit of advice, the needle for the cotton, the needle was too thin for the cotton. Cotton was very thick' (Rebecca – foster carer)

Nonetheless, with some support all of the children were able to construct dreamcatchers as illustrated in Figure 4 and reflect on their hopes, dreams and aspirations.



Figure 4: Dreamcatcher – Bella

Participants' dreams primarily focused on future jobs, such as being youtubers and professional footballers (Richard and Rees) or around acquiring things such as a Nintendo (Daniel), X-box and television (Dean), and cars or motorbikes (Richard, Rees, Rhian and Rosie). However, some children discussed more poignant and personal dreams, for example, Erin reflected on her new foster home where she had been for only six weeks and wished,

'To stay here... My other dream would be to stay 10' (Erin age 10)

Similarly, aligning with the earlier discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic in the previous section, Bella wished for coronavirus to be over as well as discussing relational aspects of her life and living arrangements.

'I wish the coronavirus would go away... My second wish is that I would live back with my nanna. I want everyone to be happy and not to fight or argue'
(Bella age 9)

Previous research has examined the conceptual link between cognition and motivation, by exploring individuals' possible selves: their 'ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming' (Markus and Nurius 1986, p. 954). The dreamcatchers facilitated this future oriented thinking for children and, as in other projects that have drawn on creative activities to explore the aspirations of children in foster care, there was an emphasis in the accounts of Bella and Erin on the security and stability of the home and interpersonal relationships (Mannay et al 2015; Mannay and Hodges 2020). Given the fragility of some care

placements (Girling 2019), it can be particularly important to gain an understanding of care experienced children's ideas about their futures, as well as their current needs and requirements. However, given the difficulties raised with the threading and stitching process it would be useful to explore alternative activities that can facilitate future oriented thinking for Stage Two of the Walking Tall Project.

5.2.4 Star rating activity

The Star Rating Activity was planned as an evaluative summary of the three creative activities. However, discussions about the activities tended to occur when talking through the individual items that children had created. Additionally, the rating activity was not always consistent with children's preferences as they discussed giving the same star rating for all of the activities, even though they reported liking some activities more than others.

'They actually all got the same star rating. Yes. I did it out of 10'
(Erin age 10)

'I gave it 5/5 rating... Yes, because they were all super good'
(Richard age 9)

However, the activity provided an opportunity for children to generate new ideas for future sessions in the Walking Tall Project. For example, as illustrated in Figure 5, Erin talked about and shared an alternative dreamcatcher that she had made before.

'Actually, I didn't have a kit. I just did it. I will go and get it. I made it out of a party plate' (Erin age 10)



Figure 5: Alternative Dreamcatcher

This alternative Dreamcatcher was positioned as easier to create than the one sent out in the pack for the project, and this design could be considered

in future face-to-face workshops with children. There were also suggestions for origami paper flowers (Bella), board games with glitter and unicorns (Bella), papier-mâché, sculptures, and baking (Richard and Rees), and a magnet set to build stuff (Dean). As illustrated in Figure 6, Erin also suggested and shared a snowman made of socks and rice, which could be a useful seasonal activity to use in face-to-face workshops.



Figure 6: Snowmen

A strong theme that came across in children's accounts was that boys and girls would like different things.

'I think they'd like all of it. I would recommend it to most of my friends who are girls... Something nice. If it doesn't go out to boys... Well, I if it wasn't going to any boys, I thought it could be a unicorn thing... And there could be another board game for boys, there could be a board game where if they like astronauts or football people' (Bella age 9)

'I do have a friend who is fostered. So, I think [girl's name] would like to do that. She likes painting... Maybe not so much the boys. Maybe stuff like football stuff' (Erin age 10)

'Do you know what would be good to tell [project team member], what you think are good games for boys' (David – foster carer)

Researchers using creative activities with children have acknowledged the difficulty of reproducing dominant conceptualisations of gender (Mannay and Turney 2020). However, this is difficult to avoid when children's toys often represent versions of hyper-femininity and hegemonic masculinity (Owen Blakemore and Centers 2005). Children had definite views on the suitability of activities in relation to gender and their views need to be considered in future stages of the Walking Tall Project, as such, it may be useful to have a range of activities that children classify as activities for boys and for girls, as

well as more neutral options where children do not attribute gender to an activity. The Star Rating Activity generated new ideas, as well as confirming the popularity of the three activities in the pack. It will be important to privilege the voices of children in designing Stage Two of the Walking Tall Project.

5.2.5 Completing the activities and conversations remotely

In line with previous projects involving children in foster care, Stage One of the Walking Tall Project had originally been envisaged as a series of face-to-face activities with children, where a range of activities would be offered (Mannay et al. 2015, 2018). The making process and discussions around the children's creations would have been supported by the project team. As discussed in the Methodology section, the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic required that activities needed to take place in participants' homes. This meant that it was necessary for foster carers to support the making activities and the online conversations. The activities were delivered through couriers to the children's homes. As in previous projects where books have been delivered to children in foster care (Griffiths and Comber 2011), foster carers noted that children were excited to receive their parcels.

Foster carers had to find time to work on the activities with children and the next section will outline their reflections on the process. For the children involved, there was no base of comparison as they were only invited to participate remotely. However, they reported that they enjoyed working autonomously and with foster carers to complete the activities, as illustrated by their conversation excerpts in the earlier sections. All of the children engaged with all of the activities remotely. The effectiveness of remote engagement with creative activities has been a feature of other studies with families and care experienced young people during the COVID-19 pandemic (Power et al 2020; Roberts et al 2020).

The online conversations went well, and children and foster carers were able to share their reflections with the project team. Notably, there was a time lag between the children completing the activities and discussing these with the project team. Therefore, not all children remembered why they had chosen to paint the stones with particular images or other aspects of the activities. If the face-to-face workshops had been held there would have been opportunities for discussion in situ. Nonetheless, some children had made notes and foster carers also supported note taking and through the online conversations both children and foster carers remembered additional aspects. All of the children except one, Daniel, engaged in discussing the activities with the project team. Daniel only contributed minimally.

The online context had some challenges as occasionally the Wi-Fi signal would drop or the sound quality would be poor, which meant that some conversations needed to be repeated. Families who used laptops generally had a more stable online conversation than those using a mobile phone. It

was also more difficult to negotiate turn taking in the conversations that involved more than one child with the discussions being held via Zoom; and more difficult to transcribe the conversations and distinguish the individual voices of children in these interactions.

One foster carer, David, reported that he had difficulties engaging Daniel and Dean in previous online activities, including education sessions and contact with a birth parent, which may have been a factor in Daniel's lack of engagement. Overall, despite the barriers of conducting online conversations children did communicate their views and engage in the discussions enthusiastically and were articulate in their responses to the activities and suggestions for Stage Two of the Walking Tall Project. As children and foster carers were in their own homes, this meant that they were in a comfortable and known environment for the online discussions. All foster families were happy to use the video function and this assisted with paralanguage, so that smiles and gestures could be exchanged. However, it is important to remember that online conversations may not be appropriate for all children and to offer alternatives, such as telephone calls or sending written reflections, if children and foster carers would like to engage in a different format.

5.2.6 Reflections from foster carers

Overall, foster carers reported that they enjoyed doing the activities with children and engaging with Stage One of the Walking Tall Project.

'In fairness we did them together, read through them and did each exercise... It was nice to sit there and do them. Although we do home learning and stuff like that, it was nice to do more fun stuff like this' (Robert – foster carer)

'Kind of brings everyone together. It was really lovely and enjoyable'
(Rebecca – foster carer)

Only one foster carer, David, reported that it had been difficult to engage children with the activities. David felt that it had taken a lot of encouragement and that as Daniel and Dean did not generally engage with craft activities this was a barrier. Dean had enjoyed the activities when he did engage, but Daniel had required more support and the activity was also hindered by his message in a bottle getting wet when he made a drink and the family dog chewing another of his activity outputs. David's experience suggests that a wider range of activities should be offered, and it also links back to children and foster carers discussions of the gendered nature of activities and the importance of providing activities for 'boys'.

Facilitating face-to-face workshops with children and the project team would mean that foster carers would not need to directly support the activities. However, as well as reporting enjoying the activities, foster carers also commented on the ways in which it had provided opportunities for them to learn more about children.

'It is important that the parent participates, it is learning as well. Like him wanting a motorbike, never heard that before, but it is good to know. You never know. It is definite a benefit if the parent plays a part in the exercise. Very important' (Robert – foster carer)

Robert also suggested that the activity pack provided would be useful to send to foster carers when they begin to foster a new child. Robert suggested that engaging with the activities would facilitate a way for child and foster carer to get to know each other through completing the creative activities. This point was echoed by another foster carer who in relation to taking part in Stage One of the Walking Tall Project commented

'This is good for her [Erin] really. She has only been here six-weeks' (Edward – foster carer)

These different accounts from foster carers should be considered in Stage Two of the Walking Tall Project. The initial design before the COVID-19 pandemic was that foster carers would not be involved in the making activities and associated discussions. This design may work better for families who feel that it is difficult to engage children with the project activities at home. However, some foster carers may want to retain a more active involvement as it provided a source of enjoyment, an opportunity to do something together, and potentially learn new things about the children they foster. This suggested that even when face-to-face activities are possible a choice should be given to children and foster carers about whether children complete activities with their foster carers, with the project team, or in a format where children, foster carers and the project team work together.

5.3 Stage One - Recommendations

Reflecting on the Stage One of the Walking Tall Project and the suggestions from children and foster carers generated a number of recommendations to consider in the design of Stage Two and the Walking Tall Project more widely.

1. The original activity materials worked well overall and the Rockstar Activity and Message in a Bottle Activity should be offered on a menu of activities in Stage Two. Given the difficulties with the materials for the Wishes and Dreams Activity an alternative activity that facilitates future oriented thinking should be designed for Stage Two.
2. Pens or finer point brushes should be provided to support the Rockstar Activity.
3. Items such as the Message in a Bottle Activity that can be personalised with children's names should be retained in this or other formats throughout the Walking Tall Project.
4. A version of the Star Rating Activity should be retained throughout the Walking Tall Project to provide further discussions with children about the activities and to generate new ideas for development.

5. Children from Stage One who have expressed an interest in having further involvement should be further consulted as advisors on the generation of new activities for Stage Two.
6. Attention should be given to the points raised about the gendered nature of the activities and adaptations made in relation to the preferences of children.
7. Any new activities should be piloted by children before they are introduced to new participants to check functionality and complexity.
8. Children and foster carers should be consulted about the best way to engage with children during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and options should be provided for children to take part in face-to-face meetings with the project team (if appropriate), online conferencing, telephone consultations or written feedback summaries.
9. Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic children and foster carers should be consulted about whether or not they would like to work together on the activities. Options could be provided for children and foster carers to work together at home, for children and foster carers to work with the project team in a suitable venue, or for children to work with the project team without their foster carers.
10. The Walking Tall Project and similar projects should be embedded in an organisation comparable to The Fostering Network to ensure both the suitability of the children to take part in the project and continued access to support for children and foster carers.

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7. Section four: Appendices

Appendix 1



The Walking Tall Project: Support and engagement for children in foster care

Information for foster carers

About The Fostering Network

[The Fostering Network](#) is the UK's leading fostering charity and we are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. The Fostering Network is passionate about making sure that the voices of children in foster care are listened to and learned from.

The Walking Tall Project

Walking Tall, as part of the [Fostering Communities](#) programme, is a project which provides opportunities for children (aged 9 – 10 years old) in foster care to make their voices heard, whilst helping them to gain in self-confidence and 'walk tall'.

The project is a fantastic and innovative opportunity where children can participate in creative play-based activities which will empower them to share their views, whilst having fun and enjoying themselves.

The Walking Tall Project will be supported by [Dawn Mannay](#) and [Rachael Vaughan](#) from Cardiff University. They will draw on their vast experience of working creatively with care experienced children, to assist The Fostering Network to design and deliver the project.

How you can be involved

1. Activities

The project team have designed four, fun and creative play-based activities for children, to help them share their perspectives, experiences and ideas. As this is a new project, we would like your child's help in trialling these fun activities out for us.

Children's home-based creative activities

The arts and crafts activity resources and accompanying instructions have been made into an individual Home Activity Pack which we will post to you and your foster child in October.

Together, you and your foster child can work through and enjoy the creative activities at home in your own time. Each activity will take approximately 1 hour to complete and can be carried out at different points over a 2 – 3 week period. The activities will include making dream catchers, decorating their very own water bottle and painting stones, to name but a few!

Each activity has a particular theme and a focus of discussion, for example, the painting stone activity will encourage your child to talk to you about people or things in their life that make them happy. Whilst the dream catcher activity will help them talk about their hopes and wishes for the future.

2. Feeding back on the activities, feelings and thoughts

Once the fun activities are completed, we will contact you in November to arrange an online chat for yourself, your foster child, and a Walking Tall worker. We ask that your child brings along each of their creations to the online call to show the staff member and talk through what they liked about the activity and why; and what was discussed. They will also be asked if they have any of their own ideas about what other activities they would like to see and what they feel is the best way for children to share their perspectives, experiences and ideas.

The chat will take place on Zoom and will last approximately 1 hour, on a day and a time that is convenient for you and your child.

By taking part, your child will play an invaluable role in helping us to design the Walking Tall creative play-based session, which is planned to take place as a face-to face event in February 2021.

It will also serve to provide a unique opportunity for your foster child to express their feelings, contribute ideas, and share their experiences whilst developing their confidence. We do hope your child will be able to take part.

As a way of thanking you for taking part, we would like to send your child a £10 amazon voucher in the post.

3. Walking Tall resources

Your child's insight and views will be used to help us create more fun activities and develop a children's resource that will encourage practitioners across Wales to think about how they can adopt a more participative approach when working with children and highlight the importance of co-production - working side by side with children - empowering them to share their views and be heard.

Please note - all information shared will be anonymised.

4. Breakdown of project engagement

What?	When?	How your child will be involved?
<p>Home-based creative play activities</p>	<p>End of October</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have created four fun creative activities that we would like your child to trial for us. • We will send your child a Home Activity Pack in the post. • The pack will include all the resources and instructions needed for four different creative and fun activities. The activities will include making dream catchers, decorating their very own water bottle and painting stones to name but a few! • In your own time, you and your child can work through each of the activities. Each activity will take approx. an hour to create and complete. • At the end of each activity your child will have a home-made creative ‘keep safe’ that is theirs for them to enjoy. • There will be a 2 – 3 week period for you and your child to carry out the activities at home.
<p>Feeding back on the activities, feelings and thoughts</p>	<p>Mid – End of November (tbc)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will contact you to arrange an online Zoom call, for yourself, your child and a member of the project team. • Your child will bring each of their activity creations along with them to the online call to show us how fabulous they are! • We will ask your child what they liked about the activity and why; and what was discussed when making the creation. We will also ask if they have any of their own ideas about what other activities we could include in the project. • Your child’s views and insights will help us develop and plan the creative play-based event due to take place in February 2021.

5. Data Protection and Confidentiality

Information from the discussions will be used to help us to create more activities; develop a children's resource and an evaluation report, but this information will remain anonymous.

Any personal information we receive will be treated with confidence and not shared outside of The Fostering Network in Wales and no names, addresses or other identifying features will be stored.

6. Confirming your child's involvement

If you are happy for your child to take part in the project and to receive further information, please complete the booking and consent form attached and return to Charlotte Wooders, Project Manager – charlotte.wooders@fostering.net by Monday 12 October 2020.

7. Contact

If you would like to ask questions about Walking Tall please call Charlotte 07701387968 or email her charlotte.wooders@fostering.net.

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Appendix 2



Walking Tall Project

Home Activity Pack instructions

The Walking Tall team have designed four, fun and creative play-based activities for children, to help them share their perspectives, experiences and ideas.

Thank you for helping to trial these fun activities out for us.

The arts and crafts activity resources can be found inside of the pack and the accompanying instructions below. Together, you and your foster child can work through and enjoy the creative activities at home in your own time. Don't forget to take photos of the fabulous activity creations for us to include in our evaluation.

We will be in touch soon to arrange the online discussion with you, your foster child and a Walking Tall worker. More information can be found on the 'Information Document' included in the pack.

If you have any questions, please email Charlotte Wooders, project manager on charlotte.wooder@fostering.net. We hope that you enjoy the activities!

Activity 1 - Rockstar Activity

Instructions for Children

- Paint your stones to represent people or things in your life that make you happy.
- You can paint them to look like the people or things or you can just paint patterns on the stones – as long as you know who or what each stone is.
- There are 10 stones to paint so you can choose 10 people, 10 things or a mixture of people and things using the 10 stones – you can paint all the stones, or you can paint less than 10 stones and save the others to make something else for you or for your friends – it is up to you.
- When you meet with the Walking Tall worker, they will ask you to tell them more about the stones you have painted and why these people and things make you happy.

Activity 2 - Message in a Bottle Activity

Instructions for children

- Decorate your water bottle using the stickers provided in the kit.
- Use your water bottle at home if you want to.
- Before you come to meet the Walking Tall worker make sure your water bottle is clean and dry.
- Write a message about who you are on a piece of paper to put inside your water bottle.
- Imagine you are going to put your water bottle into the sea and it is going to float to another country and be found by a child.
- In your message tell them three things about you and describe where you live and write three questions that you would like to ask the child in a different country, if they found your water bottle on the beach

Activity 3 – Wishes and Dreams Activity

Instructions for children

- You have 4 dreamcatchers to make in your pack.
- Make as many dreamcatchers as you like.
- For each dreamcatcher, think about the dream that you would like to catch, what would you like to dream about, what are your hopes and wishes for now or for when you are an adult.
- Try and remember your dream for each dreamcatcher or write them down.
- Bring your dreamcatchers when you meet with the Walking Tall worker.
- Tell the Walking Tall worker about your different dreams.
- After the activity you can use your dreamcatchers to decorate your bedroom or share them with family and friends.

Activity 4 – Star Rating Activity

Instructions for children

- Fill in the star rating chart or bring it with you when you meet the Walking Tall worker to complete together (the star rating chart is included in the pack).
- To show how you felt when you did the activity use the emoji stickers or write some words describing how you felt.
- For the star rating give more stars to the activities you liked and less stars to the activities you did not like as much.
- Think about what other activities you or children your age would like to do that we could complete with other children, to find out more about them.
- When you will meet the Walking Tall worker you can share your ideas about any new activities.

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