



Annual Report

2009-2010

Birthlink (formerly Family Care Incorporated). Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in Scotland (SC78854);
Registered Office 21 Castle Street, EH2 3DN; Registered charity (SC013007).
www.birthlink.org.uk

Chairman's report 2010

It is my privilege and pleasure to present my third annual report as chairman of Birthlink

This time last year I referred to the fact that our accounts to the end of March 2009 showed a deficit of almost £30,000. I made reference to some of the factors that had contributed to that, and suggested that those factors had now worked their way through the system. Our budget for 2009-2010 anticipated a very much smaller deficit, with some expectation of breaking even.

I am very pleased to be able to say that we did even better than expected and had a surplus for the year of £12,000. Our income was slightly up. The surplus was achieved largely as a result of strenuous efforts on the part of our Executive Officer, in particular, to reduce costs, and also as a result of improved financial planning, for which our Finance Director, Jamie Dalzell, was primarily responsible.

Since the last AGM, we have updated our lists of members and friends and collected an annual subscription, as well as donations, from those who have chosen to be members. We hope that both members and friends will see themselves as having a real stake in Birthlink. We are grateful to all of them for their support. It has been interesting to see that the new arrangements have led to a significant number of members and friends increasing their contributions.

Our two thrift shops have continued to make an important part in funding our activities. In the course of the last year, the shops benefited from a face-lift, financed by an award of £14,000 from the Scottish Government's Resilience Fund, for which we were most grateful. The shops continue to attract increased custom, despite or maybe because of the recession. Donations are always welcome, and nothing is wasted – our Executive Officer has secured a good deal for recycling of items deemed unsaleable. We are grateful to the staff and volunteers in the shops for their splendid efforts.

We were fortunate to obtain help from the Resilience Fund. We have also had support from most, though not all, of Scotland's local authorities, and significant support from City of Edinburgh Council for our Care Connect service. The Scottish Government has continued to support the Adoption Contact Register for Scotland, which Birthlink created and maintains. In the course of the year, Lloyds TSB Foundation in Scotland announced the re-opening of its grant-making programme. Birthlink has submitted an application. The Foundation distributes its funds to recognised charities in Scotland which are focused on improving the quality of life for people in Scotland who are disadvantaged or at risk of becoming disadvantaged.

A difficulty encountered by Birthlink is that of explaining to people, including potential funders, just exactly what the needs are that we endeavour to meet. Despite a stream of books, films, news stories, personal communications and the like, there are many who have little knowledge of what it can mean to be affected by adoption. With that in mind, we have taken two initiatives in the course of the year. One was the preparation of a paper by our consultant, Gary Clapton, summarising academic knowledge of the kinds of disadvantage often suffered by persons affected by adoption. The other was the preparation of a further amendment to our constitution, designed to make as clear as possible the charitable objects for which we exist. OSCR, Scotland's charity regulator, has consented to a proposed change to our constitution. Once the amendment has been made and duly intimated, our leading charitable purpose will read as follows:

To provide to people affected by adoption in Scotland and to people who have been looked after by local authorities in Scotland services designed to eliminate or alleviate disadvantages (such as ill-health and absence of well-being, particularly of a psychological nature; feelings of guilt, loss and grief; identity problems; discrimination; impaired life chances; impaired or lack of access to information relating to genetic inheritance and relevant medical history; separation from birth relatives; lack of information relating to birth relatives; and difficulties arising in relation to making contact with birth relatives and building and maintaining relationships) suffered by such people as a consequence of having been affected by adoption or having been looked after by local authorities in Scotland.

Our thanks are due to Gary Clapton not just for the paper I have mentioned but also for the preparation of our most recent publication, "Relatively Clear", and our informative newsletters.

Our numbers have kept up over the last year. Our Care Connect service has once again exceeded its planned limit and spot purchase arrangements have been made for the extra cases. It seems likely that demand for this service will increase as it becomes better known, presenting additional challenges for social work staff.

Birthlink was the subject of Care Commission inspections in February 2010 and again in November 2010. On each occasion the grade awarded for the "Quality of Care and Support" was "Very good". I would like to congratulate our social work staff for their dedicated work throughout the period since my last report. They have been ably assisted by our corps of volunteer searchers, whose contribution is vital to the effective delivery of our services.

I spoke last year of the dedication and thoughtful enthusiasm of our staff. That is in no way diminished. The annual away day was once again a stimulating experience. Staff

are not just content to do their work but have also given up their own time to fundraising activities and to spreading the word.

Special thanks are also due to our two part-time administrators for hard work and loyal support.

It has been a good year, then, in many ways. Sadly, however, we will now be losing three Directors, with effect from the AGM, and our Executive Officer, Linda Powell, with effect from 2 December 2010. It is unfortunate that all of these people are going, but it turns out that each of them, for one reason or another, is now moving on to a different phase of professional or private life. Jamie Dalzell has been an excellent Finance Convener who has helped us sharpen up our financial management. Jennifer Broatch was a valued member of the Board who contributed both legal knowledge and good sense. Peter Somerville's knowledge and experience of the worlds of law and finance were much appreciated by his colleagues. Linda Powell's energy, professionalism and determination have brought Birthlink through some difficult times and have improved our administrative practices in countless ways. She will certainly be missed.

There are undoubtedly serious challenges ahead. Funding for organisations like ours is likely to become increasingly problematic. There are lots of things we would like to do but cannot do because we cannot afford them. We would like to find ways of making our services better known. We would like more members. We intend to continue to modernise our information and management systems and keep policies up to date in response to new legislation and standards. We would like to work even more closely with service users to enable us to learn from their experiences. The aim for the coming year will be to maintain and if possible improve our services and to continue to manage our finances effectively. All of our Board members have very active in numerous ways over the last year. I am most grateful to them for all their efforts.

Finally, let me tell you, if you didn't know it before, that the year 2011 is in a manner of speaking Birthlink's centenary. Birthlink's work stretches back as far as 1911 when the "good" people of Edinburgh set up the Eastern Branch of the National Vigilance Association, its aim being to protect women and girls on the street. The Board has set up a Committee under one of its number to plan a suitable commemoration of this important event. If any one would like to help with the planning, please step forward.

Richard Scott
Chairman
November 2010

Birthlink Round up 2009/ 2010

Another busy 12 months for the Birthlink Social Work team, with around 1400 new enquiries. As ever adopted adults make up the biggest proportion of service users who approach us, followed by birth relatives and birthparents. We are also regularly contacted by other professionals, as our expertise in working with adults and adoption is well known and respected.

In the words of a service user and professional respectively:

“Birthlink staff were always very helpful putting me at ease and explaining what I had to do next and how to go about it. I always came off the phone feeling positive”

“I have always found Birthlink workers to be helpful, always available for advice and guidance.....and feedback from clients has always been good”

Credentials

As an approved Adoption agency we are regularly inspected by the Care Commission in this period we were awarded a “Very Good”

This is quite an achievement and speaks to the quality of the service and professionalism of the social work staff.

Partnership with Local Authorities

Birthlink continues to work in partnership with the following Local Authorities to provide a range of after adoption services to adults affected by adoption;

Aberdeen City Council
Aberdeenshire Council
Angus Council
Clackmannanshire Council
Dumfries & Galloway Council
Dundee city Council
East Dumbartonshire Council
East Lothian Council
East Renfrewshire Council
Edinburgh City Council
Falkirk Council
Fife Council
Highland Council
North Ayrshire
Perth & Kinross Council
Renfrewshire Council
Shetland Islands Council
South Lanarkshire Council

Stirling Council
West Dunbartonshire
Western Isles Council

Training for Other Agencies

Again we have been approached by social work agencies to provide training; more creative options are being considered in the light of tight budgets and professional training requirements. We are currently in discussion to provide input for a rolling programme of training to a local authority.

Staff Training

Opportunities for our Social work staff are limited, but this year they attended the following courses;
supporting victims of rape, protecting vulnerable adults group, Adoption (Scotland) Act 2007 impact on practice, post care and care leavers conference.
Also *in house*; IT training, telephone counselling and an update in searching public records. We give thanks to our team of volunteer searchers for their time and patience with the latter.

Care Connect

We continue to work on behalf of the City of Edinburgh Council in relation to care adults accessing information from their care files. We have enabled 21 adults to access their care records held by the City of Edinburgh in this year. The needs of this group are similar to those of adopted adults, as some wish to search for and make contact with their family of origin. We have provided searching and mediation as requested.

Our appreciative service users say the following;

“very caring, concise and most importantly very sensitive handling of potentially traumatic issues relevant to information sought”

“I couldn’t have wishes for better.....to deal with my very emotional situation.....very supportive and efficient in dealing with my case”

Group work

Sadly due to limited resources we have been to unable to offer group work to adopted adults or birth relatives. This is something we would like to consider in the coming year.

Achievements

Fundraising

Our thanks again, to Michael Crosby and his two friends who ran the Edinburgh marathon in our name and raised £135.00. They have also advertised Birthlink in every other event they have participated in this year by wearing our tee-shirts. Good friends of Birthlink Trevor and Anne (previously a service user) celebrated their Golden wedding and asked for donations to Birthlink instead of gifts. Their generous act brought us nearly £400.00.

Services

In 2009/10 as well as a first point of contact by phone the social workers have provided the following services;

Mediation 190
ACR links 19
Searches 183

We are now able to provide searches in England and Wales and these searches are steadily increasing.

This person used each of the services Birthlink provides for adopted adults and says;

“The people of Birthlink have changed my life and my newfound families’ lives for the best forever.....my contact (at Birthlink) made me feel a very important person and understood my needs from the beginning..... I am a whole person now and feel totally at peace with myself.... Every one of us has benefited to some degree from this incredible meeting.”

**Jennifer Bryson
Birthlink Social Worker
2010**

Birthlink 2009-2010

Another challenging year for Birthlink but at least we have some positive outcomes to report this time around, good news considering the impact the recession is having on everyone.

The new book keeper had a difficult start trying to understand what her predecessor had been doing but did manage to fathom out where we were and get the accounts up to date. We would like to thank Jane for all her hard work and patience.

Due to the recession and increased bank charges various contracts and service providers to Birthlink have been changed to help keep costs to a minimum. This has resulted in considerable savings over the year and helped to keep us out of overdraft and incurred costs.

The Act database is finally up and running and all staff have been trained in its use. This should make a considerable difference allowing effective and timely access to client information.

Overall the general office has been very busy this year. With reduced administration support trying to keep management costs down at times it has proved difficult to keep all the plates spinning. The implementation of the new membership scheme and subscription was a time consuming exercise but a very worthwhile one. Both the membership subscription and "Friends" donations have helped our coffers.

Thrift Shops

A successful funding application secured sufficient funds to allow us to refurbish both shops. This has had a beneficial effect on staff and customers alike. The shops are brighter and cleaner and more welcoming to customers and far more pleasant for our staff and volunteers to work in. The refurbishment was a huge challenge for staff and volunteers alike, involving a lot of hard work within tight timescales. Everyone rose to the challenge and much thanks and appreciation is extended to everyone involved.

We have a different company picking up our recycling now and as they also take books we are able to make more money. Each shop has a dedicated volunteer who looks after the books and keeps the stock up to date. The shops rely on their volunteers and Birthlink could not manage without them.

Please remember we are always in need of good quality donations. You can check out the phone numbers of the shops on our website www.birthlink.org.uk or call the office on 0131 225 6441 if you need any information.

Executive Officer

Birthlink Staff

Executive Officer – Linda Powell

Social Work Manager – Kate McDougall

Social Workers

Jennifer Bryson

Sally Lynch

Hazel Dorey

Administrators

Winnie McGillivray

Kirsti-Louise Anderson

Searchers

Angus Mitchell

Ann Coulson

Jennifer McNiven

Rosemary Hamilton

Vivienne Triseliotis

Jan Dollar

Shop Staff

Dorothy MacAlister

Maureen Brennan

Liz Lamb

Kevin Harman

Shop Volunteers

Margaret Rutherford

Rose Martin

Anna Shepherd

Isabel Sawers

Bill Halliday

Mary Sanderson (Sandy)

Ronnie Sutherland

Nina Noafshar

Carole Redpath