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## **NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LOOKED-AFTER BROTHERS AND SISTERS**

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*To nurture: to take care of, feed, and protect someone or something, especially young children (Cambridge English Dictionary)*

### **Introduction**

It was interesting recently to read about the life of 89-year-old Irene Hancock, who fostered 256 young children between 1961 and 1986; the article included the following:

*‘As a single mother with little money, things were not easy.*

*‘When she began fostering, she had no hot running water and an outdoor toilet. On bath night she started with the cleanest child first, then when they were all clean she washed the nappies in the water. She then dragged the bath to the back door to clean the yard with the remaining water.*

*‘Irene has a wicked sense of humour, a way with words, and an empathy and way of connecting with people. It is abundantly clear that she cared deeply for each child and felt pain and sadness when having to say goodbye to them.*

*‘At times she was looking after as many as five children together, so siblings would not be separated.’*

*(BBC News, 18 March 2021 In Pictures: Hidden depths of a life lived)*

This account of fostering many years ago made me pause for thought. Clearly much has changed in the intervening years but in what ways have services improved for looked-after brothers and sisters? We no longer use residential care to keep brothers and sisters together and it is, perhaps, the case that more children now are living apart from one or more of their siblings whilst placed in foster care. I don't know to what extent, all those years ago, foster carers looking after separated siblings felt able to make their own arrangements to meet up with other carers or how well this was prioritised by staff at the time. What we do know, is that today many brothers and sisters are living apart and this separation has a long and profound

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