**Our Tayside Area Officer Deborah Brown shares the story of a family she has helped:**

‘Over the last year I have supported a local family Pat, Michael and their children Greg and Amy. Shortly after Amy’s birth, she was diagnosed with a congenital heart condition.  This required surgery at a national children’s hospital when she was only a few days old and Amy was in hospital for over two months.  The impact of her health condition, as well as a lengthy stay in hospital away from support networks, had a huge impact - not only on her Mum and Dad, but also on her four year old brother  Greg. The little boy had been looking forward to becoming a big brother, but he was completely unprepared for the trauma he experienced. His Mum spent most of her time at the hospital, while he stayed with Dad in nearby accommodation. This meant Greg was unable to attend his local nursery and he no longer had the security of a consistent routine.

I was introduced to the family by their Health Visitor when they returned home after their baby’s operation. Understandably, they were finding it difficult to come to terms with their daughter’s health condition.  They were also finding it difficult to get their son back into a routine.

I was able to offer some support for Greg, using our Hospital Play Box resources which helped him to process his experiences and feelings about the time when his baby sister had been so unwell in hospital.  As I got to know the family I was also able to offer support and advice in relation to Amy and her health condition.  This included sharing information about children’s health rights and signposting to other appropriate services including to a local authority welfare rights adviser.  When Greg was struggling with separation anxieties I was able to support the family to share information with his nursery to ensure that he received appropriate support.

Amy’s health was monitored closely at the local hospital and at the national children’s hospital where surgery had taken place.  Before Amy’s next operation, I again provided play support to Greg to prepare him for going back to the hospital where his sister’s surgery had taken place. I made sure the family were aware of support services available at the dedicated children’s hospital.  I also provided information about claiming travel costs for families who have to travel outside their home health board for treatment for their child.

When the family received very difficult news about their baby’s health they were faced with the prospect of agreeing to an operation that would follow a palliative route.  At that point I was able to support them to explore the option of seeking further medical opinions. This resulted in the family travelling to Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) where very complex surgery, which would potentially provide a better overall quality of life, was offered.  Once they had made the decision to go ahead with this surgery, I supported the family to organise and prepare to travel to GOSH. This involved the family staying away from home on several occasions, at a much bigger hospital this time and with many more scary and traumatic experiences for all of them.

Thankfully Amy’s surgery was successful and she has recovered extremely well. Her health has improved greatly and she continues to surprise everyone on a daily basis with her progress. Family life now has a much more settled routine and Greg now feels less anxious and more confident. He loves having a healthy sister he can play with and is a very protective big brother.’