

# Bring them all home

In recent years, York has made excellent progress keeping children safe while reducing the number of children who are looked after. We have achieved this by intervening early with families, working with families on the edge of care, and helping children return to their birth families. York's challenge now is improve the outcomes of the children who are looked after.

Our goals, in this programme are to:

- improve the **wellbeing** of children who are looked after,
- improve the **stability** of children's placements,
- and improve the **value for money** of our looked after children service

## Bring them all home

Our vision is to '**bring them all home**'.

We will bring all our looked after children and young people home to York. We believe that we can keep our children and young people safe and improve their outcomes, if we keep them in the city and properly support them with a completely transformed approach to fostering for some of our young people with greatest needs.

We will steadily **reduce the number of young people in independent fostering agencies, and residential children's homes outside the city.**

We will **reduce the number of residential children's homes placements and replace them with high support fostering placements.**

We will ensure that **all our foster carers are York foster carers.** We will make full use of the benefits of being a small city with a stable population enabling us to recruit '**extended foster families**' in York. This will enable more young people to 'stay put' on leaving care, and we can help them manage their relationships with their birth families better.

We will **divert resources currently spent on placements outside York into Foster Care in York.** This will transform the fostering experience in York, resulting in fewer young people going missing, fewer placement breakdowns, and better life chances for young people.

We will create fostering experiences in York that will produce more **young who are resilient, who know who they are, how they got here and are ready for adulthood.**

## Delivering the vision

To achieve these outcomes, we will have to:

- change the way children and young people relate to their foster parents,
- change the way social workers practice,
- change the way foster carers are trained, supported and recruited,

- and change the systems that support staff, foster carers and children.

### **Children and Young People**

We want children to feel fully part of a foster family in York. We want to give them the message they are joining a foster family and they are allowed to fully participate as a member of that family for as long as they want to stay. At the heart of approach is attachment. We want young people to develop an attachment with their foster family that is deep and enduring. We want everyone to share expectations of stability, continuity and acceptance.

### **Foster Carers**

We want York foster carers to welcome foster children into their extended family, and develop an attachment with their foster children, as with any other member of their extended family. We want foster carers to develop trust with their foster children and feel responsible for them. We want foster carers to feel empowered and behave like a member of any extended family would.

This means that foster carers will have more decision making responsibilities to make all but exceptional decisions. Foster carers will take on more responsibilities currently held by social workers. This will require foster carers to be better trained in behaviour management, communication, de-escalation and attachment. They will need to be better managed supported and remunerated. In particular we want foster carers to be better supported by specialists including psychologists, speech and language therapists, social workers, nurses, doctors, teachers and other specialist child and adolescent professionals. We want these specialists to develop the capabilities of foster carers, and reinforce the relationship that foster carers have with a young person in their primary parenting role. We also want foster carers to have the support of a network of other foster carers, able to provide informal support, advice, practical help and respite - as any extended family would.

We want York Foster carers to feel fully part of the team keeping children safe in York. We want foster carers to be more concerned with their practice in bringing up children, helping them develop, helping them overcome difficulties, and transition to adulthood successfully. We want York Foster carers to develop high standards, evaluate their practice, and continuously improve how we bring up young people.

### **Social Workers**

We want social workers to trust foster carers, have confidence in them and empower them to bring up children. We do not want social workers to operate as remote professional parents. We want them to let go of things that foster carers can do best, and play a unique role that only are qualified to play.

To achieve this we will deliver joint training with social workers and foster carers, and enable foster carers to deliver some of the training to social workers. We will give foster carers greater access to data that currently only social workers can access, and enable them to have an evidence informed conversation about a child.

We want a new enhanced role of the supervising social worker - who is developing the foster carer workforce and developing their capabilities to work with children of all needs.

### **Systems that work**

To enable this to work, we will create a new system for information sharing between foster carers and social workers, enabling more informed decisions. We will create a new system for dealing with conduct issues with foster carers, as well as monitoring and supervising their practice - ensuring that they meet the high standards of foster care in York. We will create a more systematic approach to evaluation in foster care, collecting new data to monitor progress towards better outcomes.

We will recruit new foster families in York, attracting a different profile of foster carers to meet the full range of needs in the city. Some foster carers may well be salaried or sessional workers in the children's workforce. We will be head hunting foster families for specific children not, rather than generic recruitment.

To start with we have a high level 10 point action plan:

1. Recruit a new cadre of foster carers onto the programme
2. Design and deliver a new training programme for foster carers
3. Develop a new set of standards for foster carer practice in York
4. Design and introduce a system of supervision and monitoring for foster carers
5. Create new networks of extended family support for foster carers
6. Organise specialist services to better support foster carers with high need children
7. Develop new decision making protocols
8. Develop a new information sharing platform
9. Develop new communications messages for children and foster carers
10. Develop and implement a workforce culture change programme
11. Establish a credible impact and process evaluation

This project is supported by York Council, York Foster Care Association and Innovation Unit. We are seeking partners to help make our vision a reality. In particular we are looking for:

- An evaluation partner to help collect and analyse the data measuring impact
- A scaling partner to engage the fostering community nationally and internationally
- An investment partner willing to invest alongside City of York Council, in implementing, evaluating and scaling the 'Bring them all home' model

We hope you can join us.

