

Fostering Service 3 monthly Report for Executive and Senior Management Team:

Period covered: 1st April – 30th June 2012

How the foster care provided meets the needs of the child/young person.

Matching of children/young people with foster carers is carefully based upon the information included both in the referral forms for the child/young person and the assessment of the foster carers. When a placement is requested the child/young person's social worker submits a Placement Plan that clearly outlines the young person's needs. A search is then undertaken of foster carers approved for the appropriate age range with vacancies, to identify the foster carer best able to meet these needs. If there are any other young people in placement the duty family placement worker then discusses with the social work of any looked after child in placement the proposed placement and asks that they discuss with child and the foster carer the possible impact if another child is placed. If the outcome of this determines that the proposed placement could proceed, then the duty family placement worker liaises with the requesting social worker to give information on the placement and asks the social worker to phone and discuss the child/young person's needs with the foster carer. If the social worker wishes to proceed, and the foster carer feels that they could meet the child/young person's needs, then a pre-placement planning meeting is set up involving the child/young person, parent, foster carer, Independent Reviewing Officers, social worker and the linked family placement social worker.

At the meeting the placement plan is shared, along with rest of the care plan, and if there are areas of the child/young person's needs that the foster carer cannot meet, the plan for how this will be addressed is agreed and recorded. The final version of the Placement Plan is then completed and agreed, including all details of authority delegated to the foster carer, and other placement forms (consent, delegation of responsibility, etc) are completed and signed. The Placement plan is then distributed and reviewed at subsequent Child Care Reviews.

Children and young people's progress in their learning, health and social development

The health of looked after children/young people in York is vigorously promoted and closely monitored. All initial health reviews of looked after children/young people are now undertaken by a paediatrician, with

subsequent reviews undertaken as part of the targeted work of health visitors and school nurses. There is designated Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS) team, which provides support both to young people and consultation to their foster carers. There is active commitment to ensure that health engagement with young people while looked after does not cease as young people move into independent accommodation, with gaps in health and mental health services for care leavers addressed with partners.

There is active collaboration between the City of York Safeguarding Board, all of its partners and Children's Social Care staff to promote the awareness of safeguarding and child protection for all looked after children/young people and care leavers. All staff and foster carers are trained in child protection awareness to ensure that issues of concern can be addressed. Early Years Personal Education Plan's [PEP's] are completed jointly with foster carer, parents, social workers and Early Years and Extended Schools staff to facilitate early identification and intervention. There is a range of highly effective alternative learning provision which ensures, that for those children/young people who cannot be supported in the classroom, there is effective tailored support which regularly results in their prompt return to mainstream education. The number of young people on the Education Otherwise register has fallen.

There are determined efforts to divert looked after children/young people from offending, which is evident in the work of the Youth Offending Team (YOT). Targeted youth club provision for looked after children/young people is offered in partnership with the Youth Service, and other staff. Many young people are supported to remain in their foster placements up to and beyond their 18th birthday. While the young person remains in care, they will continue to have access to social work support, and their foster carer and Pathway worker will undertake the preparation for their becoming independent. Whilst in care, care leavers have the opportunity to experience being independent for 4 weeks in our 'Taster' flat. This has helped to reduce the determination of some young people to become independent before they are ready. We have excellent relationships with local housing services, with access to 5/6 'Trainer' flats for care leavers to move into, but also with the proviso that if the tenancy doesn't work out, they are able to end it without loss of status.

As indicated above looked after children/young people in York have excellent chances to experience family life while they in care, and this

translates into long-term support from their foster carers post-18. This success is manifest in the engagement of young people in Year 12 in education, training and employment. At 19 years, York care leavers are very likely to continue to be in education, training and employment.

How the fostering service contributes to promoting good outcomes for children and young people

The Service Manager for fostering is a key member of the Council's Strategic Partnership for Looked After Children Committee (SPLAC). She has a lead on achieving good and safe placements and works collaboratively with other key partners to promote best practice in relation to identity; health; emotional well being; education; moving into adulthood; corporate parenting and respect and involvement for children and young people in foster care. The Strategic Partnership for Looked After Children Committee reports to the newly established Corporate Parenting Board.

Looked after children/young people are regularly consulted and consistently involved in decisions that affect their lives. In addition to a child/young person's individual review, this is undertaken with reference to the children in care council - "Show Me That I Matter" and "I Matter 2". York's "Show Me That I Matter" is a panel of looked after young people, care leavers and Council Members that can challenge officers about decisions made and require explanation of, and involvement in, future planning. The panel regularly invites key officers in the council (including the Chief Executive and the Director of Adults, Children and Education services) and partner agencies to discuss specific issues. The 'I Matter 2' panel is a more informal panel for younger looked after children which feeds into the 'Show Me That I Matter' panel via the Children's Rights Officer. The panels are consistently well attended by young people and members.

What children and young people say about the service and how they contribute to its development

The Children's Rights Service for looked after children provides access to an advocate to ensure the voice of the child/young person is heard, whether this is in reviews or to act on their behalf in the early stages of any complaints. The Children's Rights Officer also provides the means whereby looked after children/young people can offer feedback (individually or in groups) on service quality and potential future developments. A panel of 'care experienced' young people routinely participates in the recruitment and interview process for key posts across Children's Social Care.

How the recruitment, assessment, training and supervision of foster carers promotes positive outcomes for children and young people

We provide families with as much information as possible in order that they can make an informed decision as to whether to become a foster carer. Assessment procedures follow Fostering Regulations and Statutory Guidance and are carried out promptly on receipt of application. Training is considered in supervisory visits, which cover training needs, needs of young people, resource issues and any concerns the carers may have, and in the foster carer's annual review... Foster carers have access to all training available to social work staff.

How foster carers are involved in planning for children and young people

Foster carers play an active part in the planning and review process for young people in foster care. Foster carers are trained about the importance of ongoing contact with parents and siblings and they are committed to provide a high quality service. They attend Child Care Reviews and planning meetings, are good advocates for young people and also feedback on how the the child/young person is, an invaluable part of the independent review system, which is often commented upon by the Independent Reviewing Officers chairing Reviews.

What foster carers say about the service.

The local fostering association meets regularly with senior managers from the fostering service to provide feedback on issues and ideas about improving the quality of the planning for young people. The Chair of the local fostering association is a member of the Council's Strategic Partnership for Looked After Children Committee, and also meets regularly with the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care. There is an active support group for foster carers looking after teenagers which directly contributes to service development. There are also regular consultation events for all foster carers focussed on providing high quality services for young people fostered.

How staff are involved in service development

The fostering social work team meets weekly to look at placement needs and consider issues from foster carers, children/young people and families, as well as changes needed in relation to policy and procedures. The Service Manager attends these meetings periodically. Team development days take place to look at specific areas of service development. Staff receives regular supervision and annual Personal

Development Reviews that look at their contribution to good outcomes for children/young people. Staff ideas and feed back are an integral part of service development.

Current plans for improvement and development

A review of foster carer career development, including fees payments, is ongoing, in conjunction with foster carers. The annual foster carer review process is also being revised to ensure that there is sufficient opportunity for feedback from all parties involved in fostering. It is hoped to identify a younger care leaver to join the central list of Foster Panel members, in order to ensure there is a consistent focus from the child/young person's perspective on the quality and suitability of fostering households. There is an aspiration to develop greater opportunities for foster carers, social workers and other professionals to become involved in presentation of core training events, so as to ensure each gain insight and understanding of the challenges presented within their respective roles. The placement planning process will be reviewed with foster carers and social workers to look at improvements that can be made, including revising Placement Plans for children and young people to emphasise the potential for delegated authority to foster carers.

Appendix: Data for period 1st April- 30th June 2012

Number of children and young people placed with City of York Council approved foster carers:

There were 253 children and young people looked after on 30th June. Of these 182 children and young people were placed with City of York foster carers, 72 % of all looked after children.

This compares with a looked after population of 258 on 31st March, with 76% placed with foster carers approved by City of York Council, and 251 at the end of January with 70% placed with foster carers approved by City of York.

Fostering households as of 30th June:

There were 120 fostering households as of 30th June. Of these, 96 were mainstream foster carers and 24 were those approved for a particular child/young person with whom they had an established relationship prior to the child/young person being looked after (e.g. aunt, grandparent). These foster carers are known as Connected People or Kinship foster carers.

This compares with 119 fostering households on 31st March, of which 23 were Connected People foster carers and 96 were mainstream foster carers and 119 fostering households on 31st December 2011, with 97 mainstream and 22 Connected People fostering households.

Placements with Foster carers approved by independent fostering agencies (IFA).

There were 17 children and young people placed with foster carers approved by other agencies on 30th June, an increase of 1 on the figure for 31st March, but a decrease of 4 on the number at the end of December 2011

Recruitment

There were 19 enquirers from members of the public interested in finding out about becoming foster carers during this period.

Preparation Course.

A preparation course for those who wished to understand what fostering fully involved before submitting an application, was held over 4 weekdays in June. 7 households attended this course

Applications

Applications were received from 9 households for assessment for suitability to become foster carers. Of these, 5 households had previously been given temporary fostering approval as Connected People for a particular child/young person.

4 households applied to be assessed as prospective mainstream foster carers.

The court timetabling pressure around completing full fostering assessments of those with temporary approval as Connected People meant that these cases had to take priority in allocation. All 5 applications were allocated to a social worker to complete an assessment. This meant that the 4 potential mainstream foster carers had to await allocation until a social worker became available to pick up this work.

Connected People temporarily approved as foster carers

8 households were given temporary approval as Connected People foster carers during this period; of these, there were 2 requests presented to Fostering Panel for an 8 week extension of temporary

approval as foster carers, in order to complete a full fostering assessment.

The steady increase in the number seeking temporary fostering approval as Connected People for a particular child/young person continues to provide a challenge for the service in respect of allocating assessment work. The full fostering assessments have to be completed with 16 weeks of temporary approval, with the option of an additional 8 week period, if Fostering Panel recommend this.

New Approvals

There were 5 new households approved in the period. Of these, 4 families previously had temporary approval as Connected People and 1 family was approved as mainstream foster carers.

Exemptions

There were 3 households granted exemptions from the usual fostering limit of 3 placements. The period of exemption agreed ranged from 1 week to 2 months.

Deregistration

3 fostering households were deregistered in the period: 1 retired due to poor health; 1 resigned; and 1 connected person resigned as the children were rehabilitated to a parent.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers

There were 2 complaints in respect of 2 different foster households; both were substantiated.

There were 2 allegations involving 2 different fostering household; 1 was substantiated and 1 unsubstantiated.

Mary McKelvey
Service Manager