

Warwickshire County Council

Fostering Services Annual Report

April 2012 - March 2013

Warwickshire County Council Fostering Services Annual Report April 2012 - March 2013

1. Introduction

The Fostering Service is a countywide service, providing a range of foster placements including EDT placements, short term and respite care, family and friends care, long term, permanency and parent and child placements. In addition, foster carers may provide a Staying Put placement that will enable the young person to have placement continuity beyond 18 years. There are a further 4 Emergency Duty Team carers and a number of family link foster carers who provide short stay care for children and young people with disabilities.

On the 31st March 2013 there were 342 foster carer households. The service continues to be successful in recruiting sufficient families to meet the needs of the majority of Warwickshire Looked after children and young people.

The service was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2011, and was assessed as good with some outstanding areas of practice.

2. Structure of the service

A structure chart is attached (Appendix A)

The service has 4 practices -

Fostering North Practice: Located in Kings House, Bedworth

Fostering South Practice: Located in Saltisford Office Park, Warwick. The Practice is co-located with the Central Recruitment and Training Practice and the Adoption Services Team.

Fostering Kinship Practice: Located in Oakfield Park, Rugby and co-located with Rugby Children's Team.

Central Recruitment and Training Practice: Located in Saltisford Office Park, Warwick.

The Fostering Service is managed by an Operations Manager with 7 Practice Leaders.

The Service benefits from an experienced stable staff group. As a countywide service, there is the on-going opportunity to relocate staff members across the Service to meet increased pressure at different times within the different practices.

During the year the service provided 6 placements for Social Workers in training.

3. Functions of the services

North and South Fostering Practice

These Practices are responsible for undertaking foster carer assessments, supporting, supervising and annually reviewing all mainstream foster carers and private foster carers.

Kinship Care Practice

This practice is responsible for completing the assessments of prospective family and friends foster carers/connected others. Reports completed are presented to either the Fostering Panel or the Court. The Practice provides support, supervision and annual reviews of Family and Friends foster carers. The assessments may result in the assessment of relatives/connected others as special guardians or residence order holders.

Central Recruitment and Training Practice

This Practice is responsible for the recruitment of foster carers and for providing the annual training programme

Family Link Service

This service provides placements for children with disabilities. As of the 31st March 2013, there were 22 approved Family Link carers.

Administrative Team

The Fostering Service has 1 Team Administrator and the equivalent of 7 full time administrative staff based in 3 locations

4. Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Service recruits carers through a range of mediums.

These include by word of mouth, radio advertising, posters, newspaper and magazine advertising and the internet. The Service is also featured on West Midlands's web recruitment page.

Recruitment priorities remain:

- Carers for Teenagers (young people 10-18 years)
- Permanence placements for children 8 years and above
- Carers for younger sibling groups
- Parent and child placements

This service offers a duty system, which operates 9am - 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9am - 5pm on Friday.

Prospective foster carers have the opportunity to:

- Talk to a fostering social worker
- Attend an information session run by foster carers and social workers

- Receive an information pack within 1 working day
- Receive a home visit within 5 working days.(subject to the applicant's availability)
- Attend Fostering Preparation Groups

Data April 2012 - March 2013 (excluding family and friends carers)

Number of initial enquiries	399
Number of information packs sent	393
Number of home visits	83
Number of applications received	50
Number of Information sessions	4
Number of preparation groups	9
Number of households who attended	50
Number of households approved	27

Information Sessions were introduced in September 2012, enabling recruitment to fast track the initial visit stage.

During this year, the Practice totally revamped the preparation groups, moving from Fostering Network's 'Skills to Foster' to Warwickshire County Council's 'Focus on Fostering' programme.

In addition, they have increased the number of weekend preparation groups running 'Focus on Fostering' on both Saturdays and Sundays.

North of the county continues to attract more potential carers. The Practice continues to review and try new recruitment initiatives in the south of the county.

5. Training for Foster Carers

The Service provides a range of training opportunities to foster carers. This ranges from Core Training through to an opportunity to gain a professional qualification through the team's QCF Centre.

The centre was inspected by City & Guilds on 14th March 2013 and obtained an excellent rating.

The Service also provides over 50 training events for foster carers, each course has 20-25 places available for carers and an additional 2 places for social workers/other professionals. This recognises the advantages of joint training opportunities.

Upon approval, every fostering household starts work on the completion of their CWDC training, support and development standards. They have one year to

complete this. Completion of these standards and attendance at training is linked to the County Council 'payment for skill scheme' at level 1 for foster carers.

The Core Training courses are run 3 times a year and include:

1. *Child Protection, Safeguarding*
2. *Making Placements Work*
3. *Attachments*
4. *Equality & Diversity*
5. *Basic First Aid*
6. *Recording Skills*

These courses are also available as distance learning packs/on-line training. Currently 288 foster carers have completed all of their required core training courses. This represents 64% of main stream carers.

The service invested in AC Education Online Training which offers carers the choice of a further 49 training opportunities.

6. The North and South Fostering Practices

As of the 31st March 2013, the service had 342 mainstream foster carer households and 16 staying put households.

Approval Process

Once potential carers have attended the preparation group Focus on Fostering they are allocated a social worker from either the North or South Fostering Practice. The social worker completes an assessment of the household, involving any children of the applicants. They undertake a number of statutory checks, including DBS, medical checks, ex-partner references, education checks and visits to referees. The completed assessment report is presented to Warwickshire's Fostering Panel.

WCC Fostering Service target for completion of the Assessment is 6 months (National Minimum Standard is 8 months).

Approval Timescales April 2012 - March 2013

Assessment length	Number
2 months	1
3 months	1
4 months	5
5 months	8
6 months	6
7 months	3
8 months	2
9 months	1
Staying Put 4 months	1

During this period xx % were completed within the enhanced timescale required by the Service

Once foster carers have been approved, their induction process begins. Carers need to complete their CWDC Induction standards within 12 months of approval. For kinship carers the timescale is 18 months.

All newly approved foster carers receive 6 weekly professional supervision by their social worker. After their first annual review, supervision is quarterly.

Support is provided to foster carers via their fostering social workers, the child's social worker, involvement in professional meetings, paperwork including the care plan and placement plan, which highlights the role and expectations of the carer, local support groups, training, newsletters and the services of an independent Advice and Mediation Worker.

In addition to support the North and the South Practices provide social opportunities to carers and their own children, via the Children who Foster programme, Christmas Parties and Family Days

In line with the Fostering Regulations all foster carer households have a minimum of one unannounced visit by a fostering social worker. Foster carers are only approved for 12 months at a time and all foster carer annual reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel for on-going approval

Foster carers accompanied by their fostering social workers attend a range of meetings concerned with the child/ren in placement including placement planning meetings, Child Care Reviews, End of Placement meetings and meetings with education and health professionals .

These Practices are also responsible for the assessment of private foster carers.

7. Fostering Duty Service

Warwickshire Fostering Service operates a county duty system. The system operates 9am - 5.30pm Monday - Thursday and 9am - 5pm on Friday. Duty cover consists of 2 Duty Social Workers, 1 Administrator and the availability of a Duty Manager.

The Service receives referrals from Children's Teams who are requesting a foster placement. A large percentage of these placements are same day requests. Once the service has received the referral, matching with foster carers begins. This involves considering both Warwickshire County Council foster carers but also the possibility of seeking a placement via an Independent Fostering Agency. Warwickshire is party to a sub-regional fostering framework agreement with Coventry and Solihull.

The service holds the following data:

- Details of all Warwickshire County Council foster carers and availability including profiles on these carers
- Vacancy lists
- Details of other children in placement
- Details of placements already arranged.

The number of Looked After Children:

March 2010	577
March 2011	639
March 2012	691
March 2013	699

Challenges to the Duty System:

- Volume of referrals including same day placements.
- Between April 2012 - March 2013 the Duty service received ??? referrals. . Key periods for respite referrals are the school holidays.
- Number of respite placement requests.
- Increase in referrals for solo placements for young people with challenging behaviour.
- The challenge to place children within their home location (to prevent changes in schools, travel to contact and to ensure the continuation of leisure activities etc.).

8. Kinship Care Practice

This Practice is responsible for the assessment and support of kinship and connected others as foster carers. This processes mirror those of the other 2 Practices. Kinship foster carers receive the same support, supervision and are involved in the same re-approval processes. In addition the Practice completes assessments of prospective special guardians. Timescales for all kinship assessments are tight and court driven. This Practice has undertaken assessments across the country and on occasions abroad (Ireland, Portugal and Scotland).

9. Working in Partnership with Foster Carers

The Service consults annually with all foster carers via an annual questionnaire. This seeks carer's views on a range of areas. The percentage of carers who responded during this year was lower than the previous year. However the majority of the feedback was positive especially around support. Areas identified for additional work included contact issues, support groups in the south of the county, lack of paperwork at the point of placement.

The Fostering Manager meets with the Warwickshire Foster Carer Group 5 times a year. This enabled the manager to receive direct feedback from carers and also involve carers in the on-going development of the service.

Foster carers are involved in recruitment initiatives and lead/ co-lead some training events.

Exit interviews enable carers to express their views about the service they have received and the Advice and Information Service provides information for the Service about the issues that concern carers.

10. Team Plan 2012-13 and Outcomes

Objective/Target	Timescales	Action to be Taken	Outcome
Review processes, timescales and preparation group material for potential fostering applicants	6 months	Produce Focus on Fostering Preparation material. Induct fostering staff on the new materials.	Achieved
Increase the number of Fostering applications by 10%	12 months	Increase advertising opportunities via the internet, Google etc. Redesign adverts for teenage fostering. Review all current recruitment avenues	Achieved
Improve level of support to all foster carers	12 months	SCW to be trained in Triple P Parenting. Increase level of supervision to newly approved foster carers. SW to visit within the first week of a placement.	Achieved
Review paperwork and procedures for the Kinship Care Practice	12 months	Received feedback from legal services, children's teams, Kinship Care Practice and carers	On-going – to reflect the changes of the Public law Outline
Involvement in sub regional work to ensure greater range of local placements	12 months	Work with Multi Agency Commissioning, fostering and the consortium to review future commissioning opportunities	On-going
Review Foster Carer financial systems	12 months	To review feasibility of deducting long term savings at resource. Amend skill level payments.	Partially achieved
To review and develop Parent and Baby	12 months	Working groups to review current arrangements,	Partially achieved. Areas for on-going

placements, permanency placements and solo placements		payment and support. Recommendations to SLT	development including sub regional work.
To explore the development of concurrent or 'fostering to adoption' placements	12 months	Joint workshop with Fostering, Adoption, Panels and Children's Teams	Ongoing Workshop completed. Scheme to be developed
Confirm funding for Family Link service	12 months	Joint work with Integrated Disability Service to explore the options re-funding and support to Family Link carers	On going

11. Achievements of the Fostering Service

In addition to the outcomes achieved in the Action Plan

- The reorganisation of the Fostering Service went smoothly and has resulted in greater consistency of the Service across the county.
- The Kinship Care Practice is working well and is developing specialist knowledge and skills in this area.
- We –Learn (secure email portal) is a positive development and enables the Service to communicate more efficiently with carers.
- The Service has been provided within budget.

12. WCC Fostering Service Data April 2012 – March 2013

Number of approved foster placements in total at 31 st March 2013	593
Number of children placed with WCC foster carers between April 2012 and March 2013 (excluding short breaks)	708
Number of exemptions to the fostering limit	14

Approved Foster Carers regulated on the 31st March 2013

Number of approved foster carers (not households)	421
Number of approved family and friends carers (not households)	100
Number of approved foster carers (not households) exclusively offering short breaks	36

Recruitment/Retention of fostering households approved April 2012 – March 2013

Number of approved	44
How many initial enquiries from prospective foster carer households	399
How many applications from new prospective fostering households	149

Retirements/resignations April 2012 – March 2013

Number of resignations/retirements (households) Of these 10 households had fostered for over 10 years 9 households had fostered for over 5 years 23 households had fostered between 1 – 5 years	52
--	----

The overall percentage of retirements/resignations of foster carers April 2012 – March 2013 was 14% of the total.

Approvals April 2012 – March 2013

Number of approved	52
Number of applications withdrawn (this also includes applications received before 1/4/12)	94
Number of applications rejected by Fostering Panel	1
Number of applications to the Independent Review Mechanism	0

Complaints/Causes for Concern April 2012 – March 2013

Number of allegations of misconduct made against foster carers	12
Number of complaints made about the service	17
Number of complaints upheld	7

13. Challenges to the Fostering Service

Demand for local fostering placements

As the looked after population continues to increase, it is becoming increasingly difficult to meet this need. Although the number of foster carer applications has increased, matching placements can be difficult. There are a number of factors influencing this:

- Vacancies in the south of the county but teams requires children being placed locally in the north
- The number of same day placements which take priority over planned placement moves
- Inability to place another child/young person in placement because of the needs of the other children
- Lack of solo placements for young people with complex needs. The current skill level payment scheme makes solo placements less attractive to experienced carers
- Complex needs of many of the children seeking placements
- Parent and baby placements - a growing number of requests for mothers who are over 18 years of age or mother, father and baby placements. These placements are falling outside of a traditional view of fostering

Recruitment of Foster Carers

This remains a national problem, with both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies competing within the market. The Service has a proven track record for recruiting carers with a clear market brand. There are a large number of Independent Fostering Agencies operating in the area. The Service

continues to look at new advertising opportunities and ways to promote the profile of the Service. W.C.C. is part of a West Midlands web site which promotes the advantages of fostering for Local Authorities and caring for local looked after children.

Support needs for Kinship Carers

With the numbers of kinship carers increasing, the Service needs to provide a different form of support to these carers. They do not view themselves in the same way as mainstream carers, and are spread further afield, often not within Warwickshire. The Service needs to be able to signpost carers to the most appropriate support and local services.

Complex needs of Looked After children and young people

W.C.C does not have any residential provision and therefore young people with extremely challenging behaviour need local fostering placements. It is not always possible to match vacancies with the needs of these young people. In addition the Service cannot always access the intensive levels of multiagency support required. This can put foster carers under extreme pressure, and unlike residential care, foster carers have these young people in their homes 24/7.

14. Conclusion and Service Priorities for 2013- 2014

The Fostering Service over the last year has faced enormous challenges. The growing number of placement referrals, legislative changes, financial cuts within Local Authorities and the turnover of staff in some Children's Teams, all impact upon foster carers. Foster carers are required to work in partnership with a range of professionals, work with birth parents and at the same time provide children with a positive experience

of family life. Some of these young people do not want to be in care and may not be committed to their placement. Warwickshire retains a large pool of foster carers who want to make a difference to a child's life and will go that 'extra mile'. As the manager responsible for the Service, I want to acknowledge the work that foster carers undertake on behalf of W.C.C.

Over the forthcoming 12 months the priorities for the Service will be to

Lesley Malley

Operation Manager Fostering Services

Supervision Structure Chart
 Lesley Malley, Operations Manager
 Ext 58 3094

North Fostering Kings House King Street Bedworth CV12 8LL		South Fostering Saltisford Office Park Ansell Way Warwick CV34 4UL		Kinship Oakfield Park 32 Bilton Road Rugby CV22 7AL	Central Fostering Services Saltisford Office Park Ansell Way CV34 4UL
Janice Crookes, Practice Leader,	Yvonne Brown, Practice Leader,	David Price, Practice Leader,	Tracy Avill, Practice Leader,	Sybil Mlambo, Practice Leader	Dawn Jeffs, Practice Leader,
Fiona Bates, Social Worker,	Marie Anne Howell, Social Worker	Julie Ripley, Social Worker,	Sharon Beattie, Social Worker, (Part Time)	Wadzanai Wonzeri, Social Worker,	Jeanette Mainwaring, Social Worker,
Claire Brown, Social Worker,	Philomena Dickson, Social Worker	Gary Smith, Social Worker, (Part Time) Ext	Lynda Buckley, Social Worker, (Part Time)	Martin Quelly, Social Worker,	Kelly Furness, Social Worker,
Julie Kane, Social Worker,	Sarah Dawson, Social Worker,	Clare Bradley, Social Worker	Jane Beck, Social Worker,	Sue Barlow, Social Worker, (Part Time),	Rebecca Clifford, Social Worker,
Pam Uppal, Social Worker, (Part Time)	Kathy Louis, Social Worker,	Becky Eden, Social Worker, (Part Time) Ext	Tracy Faulds, Social Worker	Susie Rafferty, Social Worker,	Lynn Rowleston, Deputy QCF Centre Manager,
Harriet Finn, Social Worker	Beverley Ellis, Social Worker,	Bob Clark, Social Worker, (2 Days),	VACANCY	VACANCY x2	
Vikki Putt, Social Worker,(Part time	Sue Atkins, Social Care Worker,	Sarah Carson, Social Worker (Maternity Leave)	Norma Wilson, Foster Care Support Worker	Lynn Secret, Social Care Worker,	
	Diana Harris, Social Care Worker,	Karen McKay, Social Care Worker,			
	Kelly Somers, Social Care Worker	Margery Blower, Social Care Worker, Sally Smith, Social Care Worker,			
Admin Annette Easto, Norma Hill (Part Time)		Admin Debbie Clark, Tracy Buckley, (Part Time)		Admin Renuka Amanda Trodd (Part Time)	Admin Jen Brennan Nikki Salter
VACANCY		Marilyn Jones (Part Time)			