



Fostering & Alternative Carers Support Service Annual Report

2023 – 2024

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Team: Fostering and Alternative Carers Support Team

Author: Jo Smith, Service Manager



Contents

Introduction and National Data	3
Warwickshire Fostering Data	4
Demographics of Foster Carers	8
Structure of the Service	10
Functions of the Team's	11
Recruitment of Foster Carers	16
Approval, Training and Retention of Foster Carers	17
Working in Partnership with Foster Carers	19
Challenges to the Fostering Team	20
Team Priorities for 2024-2025	20
Appendix 1–	Annual Private Fostering Report

Introduction

The Fostering Service is a countywide service, providing a range of foster placements to Children in Care. These include short term, long term, respite care, connected persons care, and schemes carers. The scheme carers offer a range of specialist support, and these include:

- Solo (step down from residential / edge of residential care)
- Breathing Space (Short Term Emergency Placement)
- Parent and Child
- Family Link
- Emergency Duty
- Flexible Fostering

In addition, foster carers may provide a Staying Put placement that will enable the young person to have placement continuity beyond 18 years. Private fostering also sits within the team.

The Service was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and was assessed as 'Good'. The Fostering Service will be inspected as part of the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILAC)', which is a whole system approach again in 2024, unless OFSTED determines it wishes to inspect at an earlier date.

This annual report looks at National trends with a focus on Fostering Networks Research and recommendations on Recruitment. There is then a focus on Warwickshire's Data to show comparisons and trends, information on how Warwickshire Local Authority manages its fostering agency and we end on our team priorities for 2023-2024.

National Trends - taken from Ofsted National Statistics for Fostering in England 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 (please note the 2023-2024 report is not published until November 2024)

Main Findings

There has been no substantial change in the combined total of mainstream and family and friends households. However, the number of mainstream Local Authority households has decreased since 2019

At the end of March 2023, there were around 43,400 fostering households in England. This total has remained fairly stable over the last 5 years, but the make-up has altered. Since 2019, the number of mainstream LA households has fallen by 11%, and the number of family and friends households has increased by 21%. The number of IFA households has not changed substantially. The largest subset of fostering households continues to be mainstream LA households, which currently account for 46% of the total.

There is an upward trend in family and friends households.

At the end of March 2023, family and friends households (sometimes known as kinship foster care) accounted for 19% of all active fostering households, an increase from 16% in 2019. The family and friends sector accounted for 48% of all fostering households with newly approved status as at 31 March 2023.

The number of mainstream households has decreased.

Since 2019, the number of approved mainstream fostering households has fallen by 7%. There was no substantial change until 2021 to 2022, when the number decreased in both the LA and IFA sectors. This year, there has been a 5% decrease in the number of LA households, and very little change in the number of IFA households.

The use of IFAs for mainstream foster care is increasing.

The IFA sector now accounts for 43% of mainstream fostering households, up from 40% in 2019. In 2019, IFAs accounted for 42% of all filled mainstream fostering places. In 2023, this had risen to 47%.

There has been a downward trend in the number of applications and newly approved households for mainstream fostering since 2019.

The number of applications received from prospective fostering households in 2022 to 2023 was around 8,000. This is the lowest number in several years and is 18% lower than 2018 to 2019. This year, the proportion of approved applications has returned to its previous level after dropping last year. Similarly, the proportion of withdrawn applications has returned to its previous level. At the end of March 2023, there were around 3,800 newly approved mainstream households. This represented a 26% decrease compared with 2019.

Compared with 2019, a higher proportion of mainstream fostering places are filled or unavailable. Over the same period, the number of vacant places has decreased.

As at 31 March 2023, there were around 72,800 approved mainstream fostering places. Since 2019, the number of vacant mainstream places has decreased by 25%. The most substantial decrease in vacant fostering places over this period has been in the LA sector, where the number has fallen by 29%.

Warwickshire Fostering Data

The below data was derived from our Ofsted return analysis for April 2022- March 2023.

1. Number of initial enquiries received from new prospective fostering households

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of enquiries received	232	256	217	91	105

During the 2023/24 financial year there was an increase in the number of households who enquired to the service about becoming a foster carer. In regard to applications, we buck the National trend, whereas applications have decrease ours have marginally increased in 2023-2023.

2. Households approved during the financial year

Approval Type	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Family and Friends	68	91	77*	80	76
Mainstream	21	23	10	12	8
Shared Care Only	0	0	0	1	0
Short Breaks	0	2	0	0	0
Foster to Adopt	6	5	5	2	3
Number of Households	95	121	92*	95	87

*Includes 4 Family/Friends carers that OFSTED asked us to remove as although approved were yet to have children placed with them as at 31 March 2022

The number of fostering households approved decreased during 2023/24 by 9.1%. Approvals of mainstream carers saw a decrease compared to last year. Most approvals in the year continue to be for Family and Friends households.

Of the 8 mainstream foster carers approved in 2023/24, three of these fostering households transferring to Warwickshire from another fostering agency.

3. WCC Households De-registered during the financial year

Approval Type	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Family and Friends	69	70	87	77	78
Mainstream	35	24	25	20	14*
Shared Care Only	2	3	1	0	1
Foster to Adopt	3	5	5	5	4
Number of Households	109	102	118	102	97*

*Includes 3 mainstream foster carer households who were on last year's return as open on 31 March 2023 but who were retrospectively closed after the return was submitted

The number of mainstream carers who left the service saw a slight decrease on the previous year. However, the number of mainstream carers leaving the service remained higher than the number of mainstream households approved during 2023/24 resulting in a reduction in mainstream carers at year end (Table 4 - below).

Of the 78 family & friends approvals ended during 2023/24, 22 of these approvals ended due to a special guardianship order being granted to the carers. This compares to the same number of 22 SGOs granted out of the 77 family & friends approvals ended in the previous year.

4. WCC Fostering Households at Year End

Approval Type	31 March 2020	31 March 2021	31 March 2022	31 March 2023	31 March 2024
Family and Friends	75	103	96*	101	98
Mainstream	170	169	154	146	141
Shared Care Only	6	3	2	3	2
Short Breaks Only	2	4	3	3	3
Foster to Adopt	5	4	6	3	2
Number of Households	258	283	261*	256	246

*Includes 5 Family/Friends carers that OFSTED asked us to remove as although approved were yet to have children placed with them as at 31 March 2022

Warwickshire has seen a slight decrease in the number of fostering households during the 2023/24 financial year with 10 less fostering households available on 31 March 2024 compared to the same point in the previous financial year. The most notable reduction at year end is in the number of mainstream carers with 5 less households than the same point last year.

5. Placement Use as at 31 March

	31 March 2021	31 March 2022	31 March 2023	31 March 2024
Number of Children Placed at 31 March	352 (71.1%)	342 (74.3%)	327 (70.3%)	324* (71.8%)
Number of Vacant Placements	79 (16.0%)	70 (15.2%)	76 (16.3%)	74 (16.4%)
Number of not available placements	64 (12.9%)	48 (10.4%)	62 (13.3%)	53 (11.8%)

*One child placed with a WCC Foster Carer at 31 March 2024 is from another local authority

Warwickshire Fostering Service had less children placed at year end than the previous year end although the proportion of placement usage has increased (up from 70.3% to 71.8%). On 31 March 2024 there were 53 placements with approved foster carers which were not available. This is where carers are on hold for a variety of reasons such as resting, pending resignation or where the placement is filled by a young person staying put.

As of 31 March 2024, 40.5% of Warwickshire's child in care population were placed with a WCC foster carer compared to 41.5% at the end of the previous financial year.

6. Number of children placed with a WCC Foster Carer during the financial year

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Children placed with a WCC Foster Carer during the year	604	570	581	541	535

NB. The above includes all children placed during the year regardless of duration of their placement. It also includes children where a viability assessment was completed where children were placed under REG 24.

535 children were placed with a WCC foster carer (including Family/Friends) during the 2023/24 financial year which is a slight decrease on the previous financial year. However, the number of children in care has fluctuated with numbers decreasing so this will impact on numbers of placement.

7. Allegations, Complaints, Exemptions and Physical Restraints

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Allegations	25	22	16	9	11
Formal Complaints	8	6	9	5	2
Physical Restraints	4	3	3	3	2
Number of Carers who had an Exemption in place during the year	17	10	6	10	13

8. Independent Review Mechanism

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
How many applications were made for a review to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)	2	0	1	3	0
Of the applications made to the IRM, how many resulted in a recommendation being made to your service to review your decision?	1	0	0	0	0

Applications have decreased which demonstrates that our assessments are deemed robust and therefore challenge to the decision is not required.

9. Additional Data: Number of New Foster Care Placements started in the year (Extracted from SSSA903 Looked After Return)

Type	Number of Placements Starts during 2021/22	%	Number of Placements Starts during 2022/23	%	Number of Placement Starts during 2023/24	%
Internal Fostering	504	76.0%	430	78.5%	442	73.3%
Agency Fostering	159	24.0%	118	21.5%	161	26.7%
Total Fostering Placements Started	663	100%	548	100%	603	100%

NB. The above includes all placements which commenced during the financial year regardless of duration of placement.

The volume of new placements made with a WCC Foster Carer placed during 2023/24 saw a slight increase compared to the previous financial year whilst those made with an agency foster carer saw a significant increase compared to previous financial year. This is a positive trajectory.

Demographics of Foster Carers

The table below shows the demographics of Warwickshire Foster carers during 2023/24 (excluding Connected Persons & Foster to Adopt Carers)

Number of foster carers in household	19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	No. of House holds	%	No. of House holds	%	No. of House holds	%	No. of House holds	%	No. of House holds	%
1 carer	67	31.3%	60	29.6%	53	28.6%	50	29.1%	46	29.1%
2 carers	147	68.7%	143	70.4%	132	71.4%	122	70.9%	112	70.9%
Total Number of Households	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%	172	100.0%	158	100.0%

Total excluding Family/Friends & Foster to Adopt Carers

Ethnicity of All Carers in Households	19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%
White British/Irish/Other	345	95.6%	326	94.2%	301	95.0%	278	94.6%	253	93.7%
Black/ethnic minority	12	3.3%	15	4.3%	13	4.1%	10	3.4%	13	4.8%
Not recorded	4	1.1%	5	1.4%	3	0.9%	6	2.0%	4	1.5%

Total Number of Carers)	361	100.0%	346	100.0%	317	100.0%	294	100.0%	270	100.0%
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Total households during year excluding Family/Friends & Foster to Adopt Carers

Ethnicity	Number
Any Other Ethnicity	4
Asian Pakistan	1
Black African	6
Black Other	2
Chinese	1
Mixed Other	2
Mixed White & Caribbean	1
Unknown	16
Refused	2
White British	341
White Irish	8
White Other	26

Age of Main Carer	19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%
Under 30	1	0.5%	3	1.5%	3	1.6%	2	1.2%	1	0.6%
30 to 40	23	10.7%	20	9.9%	20	10.8%	21	12.2%	19	12.0%
40 to 45	22	10.3%	18	8.9%	15	8.1%	12	7.0%	12	7.6%
45 to 50	30	14.0%	34	16.7%	32	17.3%	25	14.5%	19	12.0%
50 to 55	44	20.6%	39	19.2%	25	13.5%	25	14.5%	25	15.8%
55 to 60	44	20.6%	39	19.2%	44	23.8%	39	22.7%	34	21.5%
60 to 65	29	13.6%	30	14.8%	27	14.6%	29	16.9%	26	16.5%
65+	21	9.8%	20	9.9%	19	10.3%	19	11.0%	22	13.9%
Total Number of Household	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%	172	100.0%	158	100.0%

Total number of households excludes family and friends & Foster to Adopt carers

Gender of Main Carer	19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%	No. of Carers	%
Male	27	12.6%	20	9.9%	19	10.3%	20	11.6%	19	13.7%

Female	187	87.4%	183	90.1%	166	89.7%	152	88.4%	139	88.0%
Total Number	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%	172	100.0%	158	100.0%

Total number of households excludes family and friends & Foster to Adopt carers

	19/20		20/21		21/22		22/23		23/24	
Location of Household	No. of House holds	%	No. of House holds	%	No. of House holds	%	No. of House holds	%	No. of House holds	%
North Warwickshire	14	6.5%	12	5.9%	11	5.9%	9	5.2%	8	5.1%
Nuneaton & Bedworth	61	28.5%	55	27.1%	48	25.9%	46	26.7%	43	27.2%
Rugby	35	16.4%	34	16.7%	32	17.3%	27	15.7%	29	18.4%
Stratford	21	9.8%	24	11.8%	22	11.9%	24	14.0%	22	13.9%
Warwick	36	16.8%	34	16.7%	29	15.7%	25	14.5%	21	13.3%
Coventry	15	7.0%	13	6.4%	13	7.0%	15	8.7%	14	8.9%
Leicestershire	11	5.1%	10	4.9%	12	6.5%	9	5.2%	7	4.4%
Northamptonshire	4	1.9%	6	3.0%	4	2.2%	4	2.3%	5	3.2%
Staffordshire	3	1.4%	3	1.5%	2	1.1%	2	1.2%	1	0.6%
Worcestershire	7	3.3%	7	3.4%	7	3.8%	5	2.9%	3	1.9%
All Other Out of County	7	3.3%	5	2.5%	5	2.7%	6	3.5%	5	3.2%
Total Number of Households	214	100.0%	203	100.0%	185	100.0%	172	100.0%	158	100.0%

Total households excluding Family/Friends & Foster to Adopt Carers

As with previous years the majority of our foster carers are two parent families and are White British; the main carers tend to be female 88.0%. The highest number of carers are in the age range 55-60 age bracket at 22.7% this has been a consistent pattern for four years of data. There is a decrease in 40–45-year age range. This may be due to several factors: carers own children being older or leaving home and perhaps being more financially secure. There is % rise in older carers, Over the age of 65. The concern with approving carers in an older cohort is that they may potentially choose to retire at 67. However, we do have foster carers in their late 70's. Our demographics are similar with Ofsted's findings, 41% were in their 50's.

Historically we have had more success approving foster carers in the north of the county and this continues to be the case, currently we have 27.2% in Nuneaton & Bedworth and 5.1% in North Warwickshire. We continue to approve an increasing number of foster carers outside the county border; this figure is currently 22.8 which

is slightly less than last year. This is a positive indication that more children are remaining in the local authority.

As with previous years, Ofsted reports there was a greater proportion of foster carers from non-White ethnic groups in IFAs than in the LA sector.

Structure of the Team

The Service has 5 Teams.

- **Recruitment, Training and assessment** – based in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Fostering Supervision and Support** (including specialist schemes) - located in Hilary Road, Nuneaton and in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Connected Person Assessment Team** located in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **SGO & Alternative Carers Support team and Private Fostering** - located in Shire Hall, Warwick.
- **Family Support Team** – linked to Connected Persons team, countywide.
- **Placement Hub** - located in Hilary Road, Nuneaton,(managed by a separate Service Manager), 5 fostering social workers from fostering establishment have dual roles, split between the Hub and fostering supervision and support)

The Fostering and Alternative Carers Support Service is managed by a Registered Fostering Manager, 8 Team Leaders, 5 Family Support Workers, and 41 Social Workers and 1 Training Manager. During this period, we have had 2 agency workers to support workload and at the end of year we had 1 agency Social Worker in supervision and support.

During the year the service provided work placements for two social workers in training.

A hybrid model of working continues to be adopted of people working at home and being office based.

Functions of the Teams

Recruitment, training, and assessment

We have a varied and full training programme and are a QCF centre of excellence.

Assessments for Mainstream foster carers are held in this team. The team also manages initial enquiries, initial visits and recruitment events. The Recruitment team works in partnership with Warwickshire's Marketing and Communications Team on recruitment strategy,

Support and Supervision

We have 4 Support and Supervision teams. Social workers in this role monitor and support foster carers with regular supervision, placement planning meetings, reflective learning meetings, permanency matching, annual foster home performance reviews and training requirements of being a foster carer. They also investigate and/or support with standards of care concerns, complaints and allegations.

Social workers in this team also complete SGO reports for court. Caseloads include mainstream and connected persons foster carers. Family support workers are assigned to support carers where they meet specific criteria, they complete specific pieces of time-based intervention work and support with some aspects of childcare.

Specialist schemes

We have developed several 52-week schemes:

- Solo is for children who are on the edge of residential or stepping down from residential care, including children with disabilities.
- Breathing Space foster carers are for those who need a time limited placement to allow for planning (10 to 20 days).
- Specialist Parent and Child is a 12-week placement to allow for an assessment of parent (s) and child in a family setting. The parent and child foster carer are expected to accept three placements a year.
- Specialist Solo Disability Scheme foster carers meet the high needs to children with disabilities.
- Treehouse –The treehouse carers support 8 branch carers. The aim of this scheme is for children and young people to have a trusted adult to stay with as would occur in family life and it also offers foster carers who need this support due to the needs of the child or having limited support network themselves 28 days per year for day or overnight care. There is an element of shared experiences for foster carers and children. Group activities are planned and learning experiences are promoted in this scheme.

Other schemes

- Family link foster carers support the needs of families or connected persons where a carer needs a respite facility. The benefit to the young person is that they stay with a foster carer they build a relationship with on a regular basis for short term breaks.
- Staying Put –young people over 18 stay with carers until 21.

- Flexible fostering – This scheme was developed to meet the demand for flexible fostering arrangements. This equates to 20 nights or 5 periods of accommodation within year.

Connected Person Assessment Team

This Team is responsible for completing the assessments of prospective connected persons. Connected persons are more commonly known as Kinship Carers, once assessments are completed the reports are presented to either the Fostering Panel or the Court. or placed on file. The assessments may result in recommendations of relatives/connected persons to become foster carers, special guardians or to hold a child arrangement orders.

The Team continues to undertake assessments across the country. Most assessments abroad have been outsourced to Social Workers in the country itself.

Connected Person Statistics

	No. Of referrals	No of assessments started	No of withdrawals	No of negative viabilities	No of overseas assessments	No, of approvals
19/20	210	146	29	0	1	69
20/21	262	220	27	13	1	58
21/22	230	182	66	19	0	41
22/23	140	129	69	3	0	52

There has been a decrease in the number of referrals compared to last year which bucks national trends. We have seen a decrease of 3 from last year's withdrawals. It is positive that fostering panel have had more approvals than last year which tells us that initial IVA's are of better quality. This is in line with national trends. The dedicated duty worker continues to be an effective role and the children's team are clear how to seek advice and guidance.

The number of approvals is captured for cases going to fostering panel this does not account for assessments where SGO, CAO or where assessments are completed but not required as the subject child is returned to parents.

This year 22 children have been discharged from care with an SGO.

Role of Family Support Workers

The Fostering Team has 5 Family Support workers. The family support worker's role is to offer foster carers time-limited support for example, behaviour strategies or bespoke targeted training, emotional support, advice, link the carers with another local foster carer, or on a more practical level, to spend time with children who are looked after, or emergency support with school transport or family time to support the stability

of placements. Planned work also involves support with carers who have an identified need for support with induction or financial management. Family Support Workers run local foster carers support groups, leading on the Kids Who Foster groups, support with distance learning and ensuring carers can access the WeLearn Platform.

We continue to invest in training for family support workers. Four of our family support workers are Non-Violence Resistance (NVR) trained, including one worker who completed the advanced course.

Special Guardianship and Alternative Carers Support Team

This team support carers and children who have a Special Guardianship order or where children are on a Child Arrangements Order seeking an SGO when a child has been previously in care. If the child has not been in care but the carers have sought a private law SGO we will sign post them to relevant services and offer the opportunity to join support groups.

The team makes applications for therapeutic intervention under the Adoption Special Guardianship Support Funding (ASGSF) Criteria for children and carers. This funding is given by Government and regulated by an independent body. The ASGSF criteria includes all children under a Residency Order or Child arrangement order who were previously looked after and all children who were looked after where an Adoption, Special Guardianship, Residency or Child Arrangement Order placement had broken down, irrespective on any reconciliation plans. This team is the only team in Warwickshire Children's Services that can access the ASGSF.

This year we have actively put in mechanisms for annual reviews for SGO Support Plans, this is a requirement under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005. The family support workers are managing the initial influx of this work. If a request for therapeutic care is made the Family Support Worker will transfer to the Social Workers. Annual review for finances is carried out by the FABBA team.

Adoption Special Guardian Support Fund

In 2023-2024 the team has made 60 Applications (increase by 21 from previous year), totalling an increase of spending from £103,299.31 to £ 156,136.54 to support children and their carers.

SGO carers can access fostering training and have access to monthly support groups across the county, there is a regular newsletter highlighting services available.

Private Fostering

A private fostering arrangement is one made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 or under 18, if disabled. This criteria for private fostering also include Unaccompanied Minors Homes for Ukraine Scheme to the age of 18 (without restriction of disability). The young person must be cared for by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt or host.

The private fostering assessments are held within the Fostering Support and Supervision team. Family support workers complete the monitoring visits (known as regulation 8 visit).

As of the 31st March 2024 there were 8 Private Fostering Arrangements processed in Warwickshire.

Please see Appendix 1 – Private Fostering Annual Report

Foster for Adoption

Foster for Adoption has been reviewed and since November 2021 there are 2 dedicated social workers responsible for monitoring and providing support. We continue to work closely with ACE. In 2023-2024 there have been 4 children placed under foster for adopt early permanency. This is a decrease from 2022-2023 of % - This would be in line with the decrease in adoptions as a form of permanence for children.

Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel's role is to make recommendations in respect of Connected Persons Carers and Mainstream foster carers. It's function is to also make recommendations on annual Foster Home Performance Reviews, terminations and note resignations, exemptions and temporary change of approvals. Five members of panel sit at one time and the panel is made up of level 4 professionals from social work, health and education, foster carers and adults who are care experienced. The Independent Panel Chair is supported by one Deputy Chair and Warwickshire's salaried Panel Advisor. Business Support provide a dedicated panel administrator. The recommendations of panel are sent to the Fostering Agency Decision Maker who is a senior manager. In 2023-2024 Fostering Panel considered 124 fostering households and 63 business items.

Phoenix Psychology

This service is commissioned for 3 days a week and is available to foster carers and to staff for consultation. The provider also offers training for carers and staff. This service has been instrumental in supporting foster carers and maintaining placements where therapeutic support is required.

During 2023-2024 the service received 62 referrals for psychological support for our foster carer and this has supported our retention and supported placement stability.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

Sufficient recruitment of foster carers remains a national problem, with both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies competing within the market. WCC Fostering Service has a clear market brand. There are 66 Independent Fostering Agencies operating in the area. All these agencies pay carers a fee from day one of a placement. WCC pay skill level one allowance if one carer is at home full time or if they have professional transferable qualifications for example, nursery nursing. Other newly approved carers must evidence their skills via the induction standards and attendance at core training. The Team has a good reputation, and carers continue to promote fostering. The Team continues to look at new advertising opportunities and ways to promote the profile of the Service.

Our foster friendly policy has been rolled out to enable Warwickshire County Council employees to access days off for their foster carer assessment and subsequent training etc once they are approved foster carers. This will be advertised and may encourage staff across the council to apply.

Following resuming marketing and recruitment in house, we have rebranded creating a new logo and full marketing campaign in line with existing WCC Child Friendly design.

The Team uses a range of methods of advertising and awareness-raising as follows;

- Digital marketing
- Facebook and Instagram
- In person promotional events
- Online information sharing sessions -Teams and Facebook Live
- Press releases of relevant foster carer achievements / human interest
- Retention activities promotion including conference, well- being day and celebration events.
- TV advertising
- Radio advertising
- Shared Council Advertising Network activities

Case studies and video content

Recruitment priorities remain;

- Emergency duty carers
- Carers for teenagers (young people 10-18 years)
- Solo placements (including children with disabilities)
- Breathing space carers
- Carers for sibling groups
- Parent and Child specialist placements
- Family Link carers and short break carers

Prospective foster carers can:

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

- Enquire online, via email or telephone.
- Receive a brochure within 1 working day of enquiry
- Receive a phone call within two working days of enquiry
- Receive a 'Useful Information Document'
- Have a home visit within 5 working days (Subject to the applicant's availability)
- Attend Fostering Preparation Groups 'Journey to Foster'
- Meet support and supervision social worker on or before panel to promote positive transitions.

Recruitment initiatives:

- Flexible fostering launched Autumn 22 – recruitment for respite and planned emergency duty of people who cannot foster full time.
- Fostering Friendly organisation – a commitment to support Warwickshire staff who wish to foster.
- Refer a Friend £300 incentive for foster carers should their recommendation be approved at panel
- Giveaways at live events and craft activities for children.
- Working in partnership with CAN to deliver co-produced nationwide fostering promotion, benchmarking and practice development
- Co-development with Voice, Influence and Change team of child's voice throughout fostering throughout assessment and approval.
- Engagement in nationwide Fostering Network campaigns including fostering fortnight. Activities include foster walk, conference and live events.
- Attendance at live community events such as Leamington Pride, Lions events and cultural celebrations.

Assessment

- The team consists of 4 social workers who complete stage 1 and stage 2 of the mainstream assessment process to prevent delay.
- Access to full training offer during assessment
- National minimum standards weaved throughout the assessment.
- Handover between recruitment officer and then to supporting social worker
- Focus on 5 month assessment timeframe.
- Teaching within assessment including focus on Foundations of Attachment

Foster Carer approval, training and retention

Training for Foster Carers

The Core courses are as follow.

- Child Protection, safeguarding (all carers expected to complete as soon after approval as practical and must be completed within the first year of fostering)
- A Child's Journey Through Care
- Attachments
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Emergency Paediatric First Aid (all carers are expected to complete in first year of fostering)

- Recording Skills

These courses are also available as distance learning packs/online training. Following approval carers have 2 years to complete the core training to date 217 carers have achieved this.

There is a large number who have almost completed all 6 courses and it is encouraging to see how many carers are refreshing their training in these core areas by reattending, the Fostering services expectation is that carers courses are revisited every 3 years at least.

We offered carers training in both the live environment and virtually courses during March 2023 and April 2024, this is complemented by a range of online options. We continued to take on board what training our foster carers needed and what we as an authority have as our vision, restorative practice is a mandatory course for all staff including carers and has a rolling programme available for all carers to access.

Previously we have had more success in our virtual offer to carers but less successful in our live training, but we are making good progress on seeing more carers in the live environment, online training take up has been particularly high, 619 courses were requested and set up for carers.

This year the Service delivered the following new live courses; Understanding and reducing violence and aggression, Keeping children and pets safe in the fostering home, Surviving Trauma Series: Controlling Behaviour, Surviving Trauma Series: Lying/Telling Mistruths, Fostering Psychology: Compassion workshop for Foster Carers, The Health Needs of Children and Young People, Bringing Mindfulness into the Home, Vicarious trauma, Solihull Approach for foster carers, Being Me (a course led by our care experienced apprentices)

We continue to offer over 60 online training options specifically for young people, on a range of topics including Bullying, Managing Anger, Emotions and Getting Relevant Support, Gangs and Group Offenders, all about Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Leaving Care Expectations and Support, Eating Disorders, Radicalisation, What to Do When I Feel Stressed, Why Carers Get Worried When I Go Missing.

Since April 1st, 2023, to present, we had 35 households (24 of these were connected persons households) complete their TSD's. Overall, 180 households have completed their TSD's on our current approved carer list; the list is updated from panel minutes and therefore may be different to the number of current carers as ADM decisions and notifications take a few weeks to filter.

Retention of foster carers

Once foster carers have been approved, their induction process begins. Carers need to complete their Training, Development and Support induction standards within 12 months of approval. For Connected Persons, the timescale is 18 months.

All newly approved foster carers receive professional supervision every 4 weeks with their social worker. After their first annual review, supervision is every 6 weeks; Team Managers review this frequency thereafter.

Support is provided to foster carers via their fostering social workers, the child's social worker, family support workers, and the services of an independent Advice and Mediation Worker.

Foster carers are accompanied by their fostering social workers attend a range of meetings concerned with the children in the fostering home including Placement Planning meetings, All About Me Reviews, Placement Stability meetings, End of Placement meetings and additional meetings with education and health professionals.

In addition to support, the Fostering Service provides social opportunities to carers and their own children via Parties and Family Days. This year we were able to have a Christmas party, Wellbeing Day and a Fostering Fun Day where foster carers were recognised for their achievements. We reward them with Foster Carer of 2023 and four other categories are awarded. We also celebrate foster carers who have been with us for 10,15, 20 and 25 + years. In addition, there was a trip to the pantomime for fostering families, siblings event and an outing to Peppa Pig World.

Children Who Foster

The Fostering Service recognises how difficult fostering can be for the carers' own children and provides some activities for children of foster carers, trips to the cinema or other activity twice a year. The aim is to offer support but also offer opportunities to talk with other children in a similar position.

Foster carers' own children can add their comments to the Foster Home Review.

Working in Partnership with Foster Carers

All foster carer home reviews are signed off by a Fostering Team Leader. The Fostering Review Officer keeps a log of issues as does Fostering Panel and ADM which enables practice issues to be raised.

Exit questionnaires are offered to enable carers to express their views about the service they have received. An electronic version of the exit interview form that may increase uptake. This will also allow us to collate and report on trends. A face-to-face exit interview is offered if carers request this.

In addition, OFSTED invites foster carers to respond to an online questionnaire about the fostering service the uptake is low.

We have worked with foster carers to support with recruitment activities which has been a real focus this year.

Challenges to the Fostering Team

There are several factors influencing this.

- There is a national shortage of foster carers who can meet the needs of our children, this has been ongoing since 2019. Recruitment continues to be a challenge.
- The cost-of-living crisis continues and impacts on choosing fostering as a career.
- An increase in the number of same day placements.
- We see increasingly complex needs of children for example mental health issues and CSE.
- Children in teenage years and large sibling groups are hard to place within our own resources.
- There are constraints around matching due to the needs of the other children in the home who may have complex needs.
- Increased need for foster carers requiring more respite and difficulty resourcing this.
- There have been staffing difficulties due to retirements, maternity leave and suitability to the role. We have also struggled to appoint to posts in a timely manner. This has had an impact on foster carers consistent relationships and timely completion of Foster Home Performance Reviews.

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Team Priorities for 2024-2025

Action	Responsibility
Increased recruitment of foster carers. New advertising strategies will be implemented. Facebook, Instagram, face book live and podcasts will be used. A combination of traditional methods and new tech will be agreed over a 12 month programme.	Team Manager/Operations Manager/Comms and Marketing Team/Child friendly Warwickshire - ongoing
Introduce a Mentoring Scheme for new foster carers – they will be matched and supported by an experienced foster carer, this will be known as the Sapling Scheme	Recruitment and assessment Team by October 2024
Grow the Treehouse scheme to be able to offer this direct support to 8 Warwickshire foster carers in the north or east of the county	Schemes and Recruitment Team Managers

Training Foster Carers as Appropriate Adults	Fostering Team Manager/ Youth Justice Team
Further develop the SGO and Alternative carers support team to offer support to previously looked after children and their carers once they have been granted an SGO. Ensure DDP level 1 training is secured for new SGO support team practitioners.	Operations Manager/Team Leader
Continue benchmarking against other Local authorities, to ensure knowledge is shared and ensure Warwickshire's offer is competitive.	Service Manager
To review policies and procedures particular focus on Warwickshire Foster Carers who Adopt policy, Policy on other adults joining the family, Connected Persons Assessment Policy	Service Manager Fostering and Childrens Safeguarding and Support Team October 24 – Others ongoing
Offer support to the Children's team's and ensure regular training on Regulation 24 & 25 plus Private Fostering	Year 4 advanced practitioner and Team Manager
Transfer fostering review data onto Power BI so that data is available for transparency and monitoring	Business Intelligence
Scoping exercises between with Business Support and Fostering Alternative Carers Team to bring about best practice, identified as Review Process, DBS process, Medical Checks process	Business Support/Fostering and Alternative Support Carers and Service manager change programme, Children's Nurse, lead GP NHS 24/25
Add a Summer BBQ for Foster Carers to the events diary, Peppa Pig World trip, Foster Carer Wellbeing Day, Annual foster carers conference, Seaside trip, Siblings Celebration and Christmas Party and Panto to support Retention of foster carers	August 2024 and ongoing throughout 2024
Administer the Annual Review of SGO Support Plan's in line with legislative policy.	SGO Team Leader/Family Support Worker

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Private Fostering Annual Report



Private Fostering
Annual Report 2023