

Dudley Fostering Service Annual Report

1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- To report on the activities of the Fostering Service during 2011/12
- To review the work of the Fostering Panel
- To identify priorities for 2012/13

BACKGROUND

Local Authorities are required under the Children Act 1989 Section 17 (6) as amended by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to provide accommodation for children in need who require it as a result of:

- There being no person with parental responsibility for them
- Their being lost or abandoned
- Their care is being prevented for whatever reason from providing them with suitable accommodation

All Fostering Services are governed by the regulatory framework of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering. The Regulations and National Minimum Standards define the required and expected conduct of Fostering Services which are inspected by Ofsted who take the Standards into account when conducting and inspection.

The Dudley Fostering Service was last inspected March 2009 and was given a satisfactory judgement.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

The Fostering Service in Dudley provides a comprehensive range of fostering provision working closely with the social work teams to secure appropriate placements for looked after children. The service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers and both pre and post approval training, development and support to carers in order to enable them to discharge their responsibilities and duties to children who are placed in their care.

Carers offer a range of provisions from short term care, short breaks care to support families through to more permanent and long term foster care where it has been determined that a child cannot return home to their birth family.

In addition to mainstream foster carers there are a growing number of family and friends carers who care for children with whom they had a pre existing relationship through being part of an extended family or a part of the child's network of known adults prior to them becoming looked after. Family and friends carers are assessed, trained and supervised in the same way as our mainstream carers and this has been a growth area of work for the Fostering Service.

The service also facilitates carers support groups and groups for young people in care and birth children of families who provide fostering.

In addition to financial remuneration the Service offers a comprehensive range of support to its carers including the work of the Dudley Foster Carers Association and the LACES Team within the Authority. Many of the other Council departments are also actively engaged in supporting this area of work with regard to ensuring that Foster Carers have access to leisure opportunities and ensuring our young people have opportunities for engagement in a wide range of leisure and employment opportunities within the Council.

It is important to recognise that the needs of our looked after children are wide and varied and require a wide range of fostering provision in order to meet individual needs but also in order to enable appropriate matching and placement choice.

In order to respond to some of the very demanding and challenging needs which children and young people present Dudley has developed a specialist foster care therapeutic treatment programme (Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care) which operates with carers specifically trained in delivering an evidence based programme to a small range of young people with extremely challenging needs.

Dudley has developed the full range of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care programmes for both younger and older children and the service in Dudley has been recognised as good practice by the Department for Education National Team who supervise and develop evidenced based interventions for children and young people.

Dudley has also been at the forefront of developing a specialist programme KEEP (Keeping foster and kinship parents supported and trained) which is designed to support mainstream and family and friends carers to prevent or reduce the likelihood of placement breakdowns. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for young people and support to carers and this is demonstrated through the Authority's performance on placement stability which is continuing to maintain high levels of performance.

Dudley Foster Carers Association (DFCA) is an active and thriving group with charitable status which supports all foster cares within Dudley. Dudley Foster Carers Association works with the Fostering Service and continues to have a positive input into the recruitment of new carers and in the promotion of the Service. Carers are also involved in a variety of projects and initiatives that are helping Dudley to gain a national reputation for being amongst the best for providing children with positive activities and opportunities. Recently Dudley Foster Carers Association have secured larger premises which will enable them to further develop a Carers Centre to increase their activities for both foster families and looked after children.

The Fostering Service fulfils a key role for the Authority in ensuring that children have good quality placements which enable them to have a positive care experience when they can no longer remain with their birth families. The Team are actively engaged in both supporting foster carers to provide short to medium term care during periods where children and their families are engaged in court processes and active assessments but also fulfil a significant role in relation to family finding for children who need longer term placements to ensure that their safety and wellbeing is maintained throughout their childhood.

FOSTERING PANEL

A Fostering Panel is established under the Fostering Service Regulation 2011. The functions of the Fostering Panel in respect of cases referred to it are to

- Consider each application for approval and to recommend whether a person is suitable to act as a Foster Carer
- To recommend the terms on which the approval is given
- To recommend whether a person remains as a suitable Foster Carer on the basis of review of the Foster Carer
- The Fostering Panel also has a role in advising on procedures under which reviews are carried out and monitor their effectiveness
- Oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the Fostering Service provider
- Give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or cases the Fostering Service provider may refer to Panel
- The Fostering Panel therefore has a significant role in relation to quality assurance

In Dudley the Fostering Panel also fulfils a role in relation to considerations of care plans where there is a recommendation for permanent fostering and looks at the suitability of placement matches to meet individual children's service needs. Panel are also presented any variations and exemptions regarding changes in the approval category of carers and panel review minutes of any meeting held when a permanent placement approved by panel has disrupted.

The current Fostering Panel has 10 members. In 2011/12 because of increased activity particularly relating to Family and Friends Assessments the Panel has met on a twice monthly basis.

Because of the increased workload it has sometimes been difficult for members to attend all of the Panels and therefore during 2011/12 there has been active recruitment to increase the membership of the Fostering Panel and this will continue through 2012/13 to ensure that we have an ability to hold quorate Panels on a timely basis to ensure that there is no delay and drift in care planning for children and young people.

We have also recognised that black and minority ethnic Panel members are currently under represented on the Fostering Panel and this is a matter to be addressed during the forthcoming year.

Fostering Panel's recommendations are assessed and approved by the Agency Decision Maker and that function currently rests with the Head of Children's Resources.

As previously noted Panel has a significant role in relation to quality assurance and in order to enhance the quality and independence of foster homes reviews an Independent Reviewing Officer is located within the Independent Reviewing Service with a specific remit for undertaking foster care reviews.

It is not possible within the current capacity to undertake all of the reviews and some of them continue to be undertaken by the Fostering Manager who works together with the Independent Reviewing Officer in order to identify emerging themes from the reviews.

PRIVATE FOSTERING

The Local Authority is responsible for satisfying itself that the welfare of privately fostered children are safeguarded and promoted. An evaluation of the outcomes of the Local Authority's work in relation to privately fostered children within its locality is subject of manual report to the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board (DSCB). The Annual Evaluation Report for 2011/12 has been presented to the Director and DSCB and is available to Scrutiny Committee if so requested.

PROFILE OF FOSTERING SERVICE STAFF

Manager	37 hours
Senior Practitioner	37 hours
Looked After Children Policy & Project Manager	30 hours
Training & Staff Development Co-ordinator	37 hours
Social Workers	5 @ 37 hours 3 @ 30 hours 2 @ 25.5 hours
Permanency Social Workers	37 hours 30 hours
Family & Friends Social Workers	3 @ 37 hours
KEEP Programme	14 hours
Administrative Support	2 @ 37 hours 22.5 hours 25.5 hours
Sessional staff	In addition to the above complement of staff there are two independent social work agencies who have been commissioned to undertake Family and Friends assessments, and 5 independent social workers offering social work support to those family and friends placements out of borough.

Service Activity Levels

A profile of our current foster carers and activity relating to recruitment and approvals is shown at appendix 1.1.

EVALUATION OF PROGRESS 2011/2012

Nationally the numbers of looked after children are increasing and this has been reflected in the trend in Dudley. As of the 31st March 2012 there were 678 numbers of Looked after Children. The majority of looked after children within Dudley are accommodated with foster carers with only a small number of children placed in residential settings.

The service whilst it has attracted new carers over the year has not been able to grow at a pace which can totally meet the increased demand for service and offer the necessary placement choice. During 2011/12 the placement team sourced 90 placements from independent fostering agencies. This situation is not limited to Dudley with many local authorities finding themselves with a lack of sufficiency placements within internal resources. There has been a significant demand for specialist placements for large sibling groups and we have identified through our analysis of the looked after children population that there have been specific pressure points within the looked after children population with regard to new admissions. The largest demand for service has come from the need for placements for children aged 0-4 and a growing increase in the request for placements for teenagers and aged 10 plus.

The Service works diligently to recruit new carers and has an annual recruitment plan. All new mainstream carers are now being offered a fee on full approval in line with all Local Authorities in the West Midlands and Independent Fostering Agencies which makes the Service more competitive in terms of its ability to attract carers.

The approval of family and friends carers is increasingly seen as a placement of choice for many children and clearly if children can secure placements within their wider family and friends networks this has significant benefits for them.

The Service has seen a significant increase in request s for assessments for Family and Friends Carers, many of which are directed through care proceedings by the courts.

Dudley provides ongoing support and training to Family and Friends Carers as well and remuneration which is in line with our mainstream carers and is also in line with national policy direction in relation to equity of treatment for Family and Friends Carers.

Because of the wide range of Family and Friends situations which occur it is important that processes and procedures are applied consistently and that cases being considered by Fostering Panel are quality assured in order to reduce the risk of subsequent disruptions or concern that the Family and Friends situation is not meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering.

In order to ensure that our decision making processes around initial viability assessment are as comprehensive as possible this year we have enhanced the liaison between the district social work teams and the Fostering Service in order that there can be more timely consultation around the application of National Minimum Standards to these situations.

Currently 2 of the Supervising Fostering Social Workers take the lead on recruitment of Foster Carers with the remainder of the Team offering support at recruitment events which are held regularly throughout the year.

In order to further develop our recruitment strategy the Fostering Service has this year had implemented a survey form which was sent to all enquirers asking for feedback as to whether they intend to pursue a fostering application or to identify why they are no longer interested in order to target our recruitment strategy more effectively.

We also consider the cultural and ethnic needs of children requiring placements and quarterly data is now recorded on the number of trans-racial placements made to inform future recruitment activities.

As part of the West Midlands Fostering Consortium there is active discussion on the possibilities of a regional recruitment strategy and work has been undertaken with the 4 Black Country Authorities and a proposal for a joint recruitment campaign for Fostering in the Black Country has been developed and is currently under discussion.

There has been a concerted effort by the Fostering Service to improve the number of carers undertaking the Children's Workforce Development Course and completing their training. As of 31 March 2012, 53 carers had completed their Children's Development Standards course.

Training is an important facet of the support that Dudley offers to its Foster Carers in ensuring that they are aware of new and emerging challenges and requirements and that they maintain their mandatory training in areas for example such as Safe Caring and Safeguarding.

There is a mandatory list of training which Foster Carers are required to undertake and there is a dedicated training resource within the Service to facilitate these developments.

The Fostering Service has developed two new policies this year which have been approved by the Director of Children's Services addressing the issue of:

- Transracial placements
- Bedroom Sharing Policy

A number of children and young people have been more proactively involved in the decision making about their care. Panel see this as integral to ensuring that the children and young people's views have been taking into consideration and are accurately reflected.

INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND FOSTER CARERS

Children Who Foster Group – We Care We Share

The Dudley Children who Foster Group was renamed last year We Care We Share and has been engaged in generating membership and interest amongst the birth children of Dudley Foster Carers.

The Service has continued to offer both a one to one and a group service to the birth children and families of our foster carers. They have throughout the 12 months been consulting with children and young people about their views on training and activity that they feel would be beneficial to their position of living in a fostering household.

The Group have secured the use of a minibus and an approved driver from amongst the Foster Carers who now supports the group.

They are actively linking with other support groups such as the Acappella Acorns Choir and the Youth Club for Looked after Children which has dedicated support from the Youth Service within Dudley.

ACAPELLA ACORNS

Acappella Acorns Choir was born out of Sustainability Funding from Sound It Out, a community music organisation based in Birmingham. The funding provided training and a very supportive and skilled musician to help set up a choir by training foster carers in facilitation and music leadership skills to enable them to deliver this singing opportunity to children and young people, both looked after and the birth children of Foster Carers. It is now totally run by Foster Carers with the support of Fostering and Looked after Children in Education Service.

Acappella Acorns first performance was Christmas 2011, followed by a performance at the Youth Services Celebration of Children and Young People.

The choir works on the principle that anyone can get involved in singing and performing regardless of ability and provides opportunity for all to achieve and develop a positive sense of self.

Acappella Acorns is going from strength to strength. The foster carers have worked hard to get the choir established and is actively seeing new members who can strengthen the initiative.

CHATBACK

2011/12 was a very successful year for the Dudley based drama group Chatback Productions. The group continue to support 11-18 year olds from foster families, helping children and young people who are looked after to have a voice. They are supported by Dudley Foster Carers and a drama teacher from Dudley Performing Arts.

Chatback has built on success of previous productions of Handle with Care, attacking the topic of looked after children's experience of the education system and the emotive subject of birth family relationships.

Chatback have produced an educational DVD/online training resource which was launched at an event in November 2011 to a wide range of Foster Carers and officer from within the Authority. Looked After Children's Education Services from across the country have expressed an interest in using this DVD as a teaching and training resource.

In addition Chatback have also accessed major funding from Children in Need to continue their work.

NEW INITIATIVES

BLACK COUNTRY COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Work has commenced with the Black Country Authorities around a number of themes, in the first instance these will be as follows:

1. Utilising money allocated from the DfE, to develop evidence based programmes around multi-dimensional treatment foster care across the Black Country and alongside this the development of KEEP which is aimed at enhancing placement stability. The development of Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care will allow a larger range of placement availability across the Black Country for the more challenging children that would otherwise be placed in external resources.
2. Proposals have been made around joint marketing and recruitment which will develop a Black Country brand around fostering similar to the one which is already in place with regard to adoption in the Black Country.
3. A small amount of resource has been allocated by West Midlands Improvement Partnership to undertake some scoping work around Special Guardianship to ensure continuity of approach across the Black Country and are able to develop collaborative approaches around post guardianship support and allowances.
4. Work is about to commence on the opportunities to collaborate, to consolidate fees and payment schemes across the Black Country and to develop the basis of further collaboration through training and recruitment and scoping up the possibility for a Fostering in the Black Country Service

FOSTERING FRAMEWORK

Dudley along with 6 other Regional Authorities is part of a Fostering Framework Agreement. There are over 40 independent providers signed up to the agreement, which in effect set a pricing structure for the commissioning of independent fostering placements. The placements are procured on a spot purchase basis and depending on availability allows the Authorities to select placements appropriate to individual need against a pre arrange price.

The Framework was implemented in April 2011 and the early indications are that applying it to current placements it will realise significant savings to the Authority.

Conclusions and recommendations for 2012/13

The demands of the Fostering Service have continued to rise due to the increasing numbers of LAC, placement provision pressures foster carer numbers and the increasing number of family and friends assessments. There has been a considerable amount of development activity in the last 12 months designed to implement the new regulations and national minimum standards. The emphasis in 2012/13 will be on embedding new policies and procedures designed to improve service delivery and a more robust quality assurance framework. The Service is expecting to be inspected during 2012 and is taking action to ensure that we are compliant and fit for inspection. We will aim to:

- Increase the involvement of Foster Carers in the delivery and development of training
- Increase awareness and take up of Special Guardianship Orders where appropriate
- Complete carer profiles which can be provided to young people prior to admission to a foster placement.
- Role out new developments of the MTFC KEEP programme -KEEP safe for carers of adolescents and KEEP for carers of younger aged children 3-6yrs
- Continue to promote treatment foster care through leading on and acting as mentor in developing MTFC across the 'Black Country' locality.
- Develop our activities to capture the 'voice of the child' more effectively and utilise emerging themes in service development
- Refresh and review the Children's Guide.
- Improve activities to identify themes from Foster Carer Reviews to influence service delivery and improve outcomes for young people in foster care.
- Continue to work with the Children in Care Council in the development of our service.
- Continue to promote strong working relationships with Children's fieldwork services
- There is a strong drive by Black Country Chief Executives to promote closer collaborative working in a number of ways, this will continue and opportunities for joint training, joined up services, joint recruitment will be explored.
- Develop partnership working within Dudley and with a neighbouring authority to improve our recruitment profile with a view to:
 - Improving number of carers/placements overall
 - Target placements for large sibling groups and teenagers
 - Recruit carers with expertise to look after mother and baby placements
- Review the allocation of roles and responsibilities within the Service to ensure that the allocation of resources is targeted effectively and the identification of future resource requirements is identified.

Signed:

Fostering Service Manager Date

Fostering Panel Chair Date

Data Information Appendix 1.1

No of variations to approval categories		36
A6	Information about young people aged 18 and over	No of YP
A6.1	How many young people in foster care turned 18 between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	15
A6.2	How many young people, aged 18 and over, remained in the foster placement they were in prior to their eighteenth birthday, under an arrangement, supported by the local authority? Please include all young people in this position at any point between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012.	7

Information about placements

A1	Information about placements	Permanent Placements	Short Breaks
A1.1	How many approved foster places (not carers) in total did your fostering service provide as at 31 March 2012?	461	0
A1.2	How many of these places were filled (that is the number of children placed) as at 31 March 2012?	388	0
A1.3	How many children were in foster care at any point between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	298	108

A3	Local authority fostering services only	Number
A3.1	How many sibling groups were not placed together between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 where the assessment was for them to be together?	3

A4	Information about placement endings	Number
A4.1	How many unplanned endings of placements occurred between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	32
A4.2	How many children and young people were subject to these unplanned endings?	31

A5	Information about exemptions	Number
A5.1	How many exemptions to the usual fostering limit were in place between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 in foster households in your service?	22

Section C: Information about foster carers

C1	Information about fostering households	Number
C1.1	How many fostering households did you have as at 31 March 2012?	246
C1.2	How many applications from new prospective fostering households did you receive between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012? (Do not count initial enquiries)	50
C1.3	How many applications from prospective fostering households, received prior to 1 April 2011, were not decided by that date?	12
C1.2 + C1.3 total:		62
C1.4	How many applications from prospective fostering households did you	36

	approve between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012? (This includes applications that you received before 1 April 2011).	
C1.5	Of those in C1.4, how many were new family and friends households? (This does not include those family and friends who have children placed with them under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning Regulations 2010 unless they are subsequently approved as foster carers).	23
C1.6	How many approved fostering households were de-registered between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	21

C2	Applications that have been rejected or withdrawn	Number
C2.1	How many applications to register as a fostering household were withdrawn between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012? (This includes applications that were received before 1 April 2011 but were withdrawn after that time)	9
C2.2	How many applications to register as a fostering household were rejected after being presented to panel between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012? (This includes applications that were received before 1 April 2011 and were rejected after that time)	2
C1.4 + C2.1 + C2.2 total:		47

C3	Information about training and development	Number
C3.1	How many of your individual foster carers in total had successfully completed the Children's Workforce Development Council's certificate in 'Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care' by 31 March 2012?	53

Section D: Information about the quality of care

D1	Allegations between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012	Number
D1.1	How many allegations of misconduct were made against foster carers?	7
D1.2	How many referrals to the Independent Safeguarding Authority did you make between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	0

D2	Concerns resulting in a referral to the local authority Child Protection Team	Number
D2.1	How many Section 47 enquiries were made involving allegations against foster carers between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	5

D4	Information about children/young people who went missing between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012	Number
	Where children went missing please calculate this as the total number of children who were missing i.e. where three children went missing this counts as three events. (See guidance)	
D4.1	How many times did children/young people go 'missing' whilst living with foster carers?	7
D4.2	How many children/young people does your answer to D4.1 refer to?	7

D7	Information about children/young people's education (this information is not required for children using short break services)	Number
D7.1	How many children/young people in foster care as at 31 March 2012 were of compulsory school age?	226

D7.2	How many children/young people have changed educational placement or school because of a foster placement change between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	0
D7.3	How many children/young people in foster care attended alternative educational provision between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	4
D7.4	How many children/young people in foster care had no educational arrangements between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012?	0