

**ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT
TO:
THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
&
CHAIR OF THE DUDLEY SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
BOARD**

September 2012

PRIVATE FOSTERING

PURPOSE

Standard 7 of the Private Fostering National Minimum Standards (NMS) requires that an annual report be provided to the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the LSCB which includes:

- ❖ An evaluation of the outcomes of the local authority's work in relation to privately fostered children within its locality;
- ❖ An evaluation of how the local authority satisfies itself that the welfare of these privately fostered children is safeguarded and promoted and how the local authority co-operates with agencies in this connection.¹

INTRODUCTION

The last Ofsted Inspection took place in January 2008 there have been no further inspections of Private Fostering since.

EVALUATION OF PROGRESS 2011-2012

Since the appointment of a dedicated half-time worker to respond to, assess and support Private Fostering arrangements:

- Awareness raising has continued, and;
- Compliance with the statutory requirements to assess, monitor and support private fostering arrangements has improved overall.

These activities continued to remain the focus for 2012-2013 and it is anticipated that their will be further improvement.

Awareness raising

Within the existing resources, awareness raising activity has concentrated on agency partners through:

¹ National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering 7.9 & 7.10

- Continuing to deliver awareness of Private Fostering through the Child Protection (CP) training programme at Level 1 (both multi-agency and single agency), Level 2 and where appropriate Level 3 courses.
- Delivery of the online training programme for professional partners being piloted via the Safeguarding Board initially with Health Visitors. There have been some technical issues which had delayed the roll out however these are being addressed by the programme developers; Re-Construct. It is anticipated that these problems will be resolved within the next 2 months. It will then be rolled out to our Education partners and others delivering services within Social Care.
- Continuing discussions with the Safeguarding Lead Officer for Education in relation to foreign exchange students and policy development for residential students and trips involving overnight stays.
- The development of an information pack for staff, the Trustees of Elmfield (Steiner) School, host families and their foreign students to clarify that these young people are in Private Fostering arrangements and that Dudley MBC has a duty to assess and monitor the quality of these arrangements.
- Participation once again in the annual national BAAF Private Fostering Awareness campaign during 22 – 26th February 2012, at minimal cost.
- Briefing session to the Youth Offending Service and subsequent information sharing specifically focused on the legal arrangements of Private Fostering.
- Attendance in the Family Court arena to assist a particular carer and to inform barristers, solicitors and the Family Court Judge about the legal requirements surrounding Private Fostering and the implications for the children who were being cared for in a Private Fostering arrangement.
- The audit of school admission arrangements (within one primary and one secondary school) has begun. The focus schools have been identified; Wrens Nest Primary and Hillcrest Community College.
- All publicity has been updated to reflect the current arrangements to respond to notifications and undertake assessments.
- In compliance with the Private Fostering Regulations New publicity documents have been created identifying 'Local Services' in the borough that may assist young people in Private Fostering Arrangements, 'How to Keep Safe' and 'Advocacy and Independence' which are currently in the process of being uploaded to the Council's dedicated *Private Fostering* webpage

Compliance with the statutory requirements

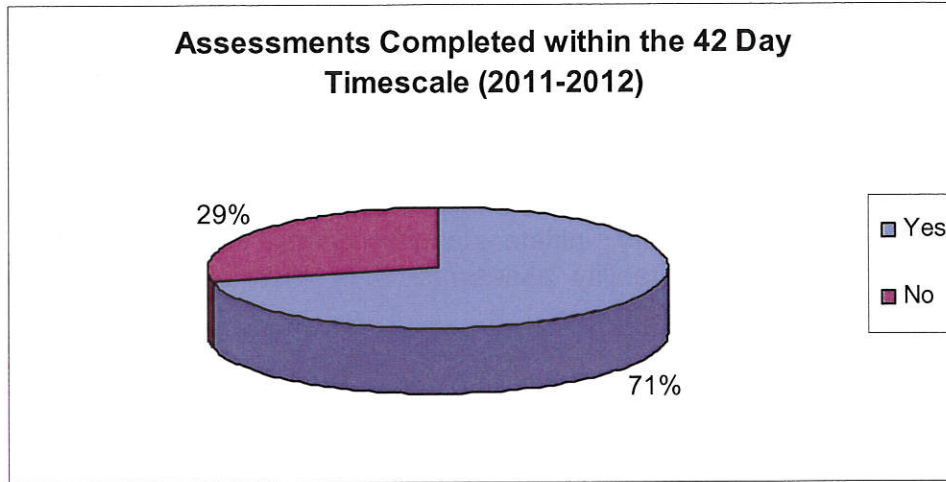
The Divisional Manager for Safeguarding and Review still remains the named lead manager responsible for Private Fostering and Private Fostering now has a profile within the Safeguarding Board's Vulnerable Children's Task Group.

The half time Social Worker is located within Children's Resources Fostering Service. The remit of this role is to undertake joint visits with the district Social Workers where necessary, initiate statutory checks (including initial police checks), undertake suitability assessments of Private Foster Carers and continue awareness raising.

- During 2011-2012 the Private Fostering Social Worker received 20 new notifications (one child was notified twice in the period therefore 21 in total) in addition to the 7 already active private fostering cases that were notified during 2010-2011. This reflects a 171% comparative increase in notifications from 2010-2011.
- All the original procedures have been revised to reflect the current arrangements for notifying and assessing Private Fostering.
- The notification process via Dudley Council Plus has also been revised to reflect the current arrangements for responding to notifications.
- Ongoing discussions with colleagues in IT to address the requirements of Private Fostering in terms of the Integrated Children's System (ICS).
- 21 Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks were required following completion of the initial assessments. There is a clear monitoring and tracking process in place to evidence what steps have been taken by the authority to secure full CRB checks.
- Collaboration with staff and the trustees of Elmfield (Steiner) School has led to the development of an effective notification protocol in respect of foreign students coming to Dudley to live with host families (privately fostered) to ensure that the authority is able to undertake its legal obligations under the Private Fostering Regulations 2005.

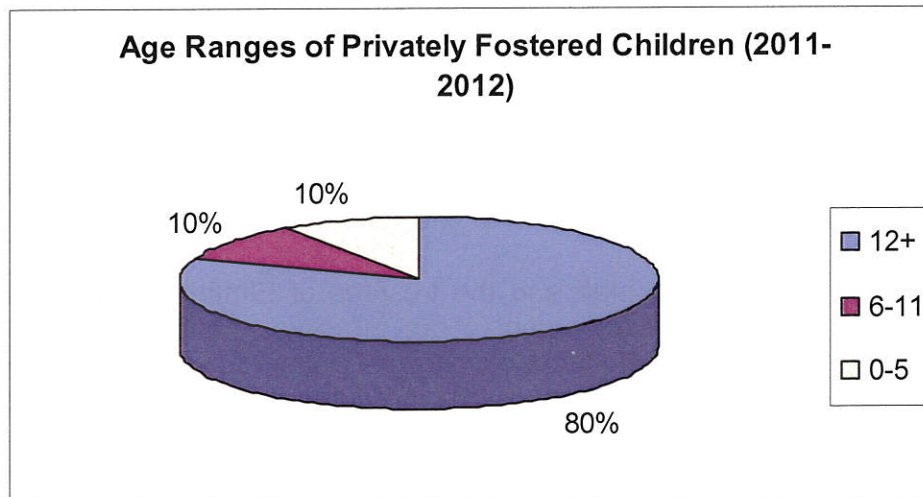
PROFILE OF PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN IN DUDLEY

Completion of Assessments



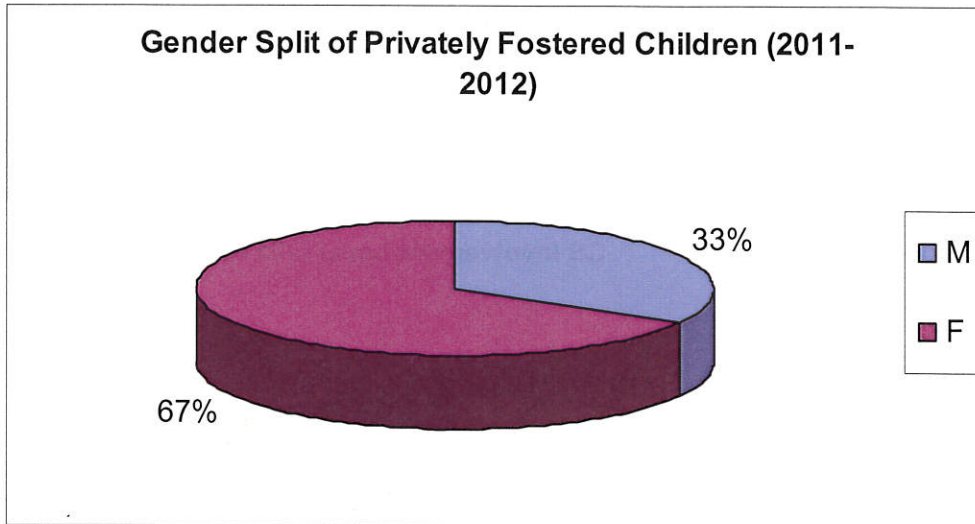
Where suitability assessments were undertaken, 71% (15) were completed within the 42 day timescale. 29% (6) were not completed within the required timescale due to either the unavailability of the carer, the child or the child's Social Worker.

Age Profile



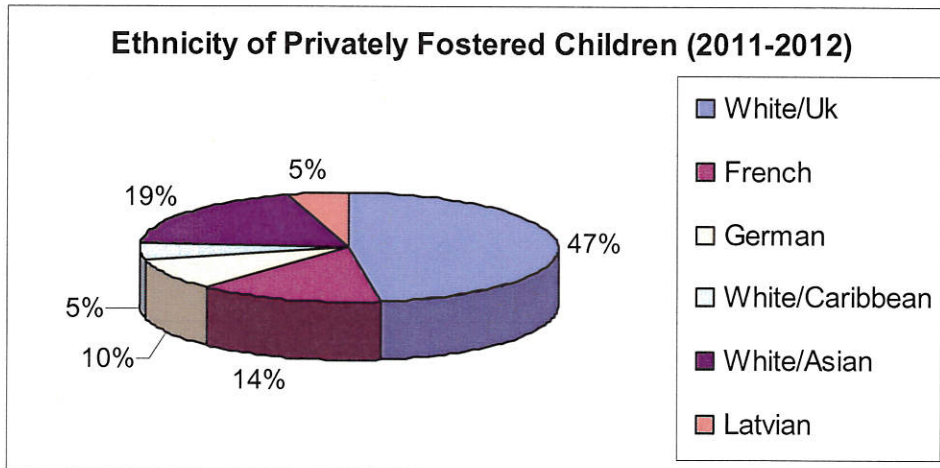
Historically, of the notifications received in respect of young people in Private Fostering arrangements, the majority were children aged 12+ years. During this last year 80% (17) of notifications were in respect of young people 12+ years. 10% (2) were notifications of children 6-11 years and 10% (2) were 0-5 years.

Gender Profile



Of the 21 privately fostered children in 2011-12 67% (14) were female and 33% (7) male

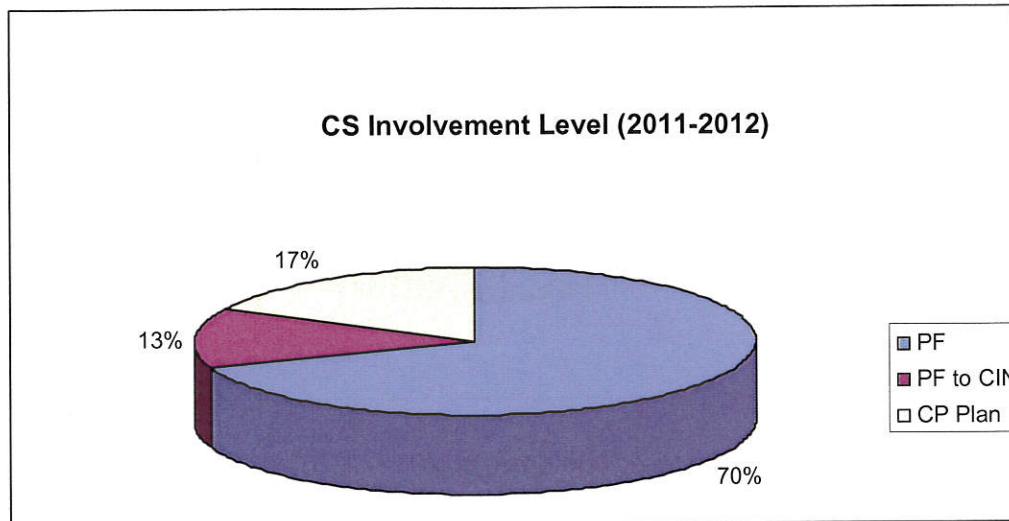
Ethnicity



During 2011-2012 47%, (10) of privately fostered children were recorded as having a White/UK heritage. The remaining children within the population were from varied ethnic backgrounds. 5% (1) with a White/Caribbean heritage 5% (1) with a Latvian heritage, 19% (4) with a White/Asian heritage and the

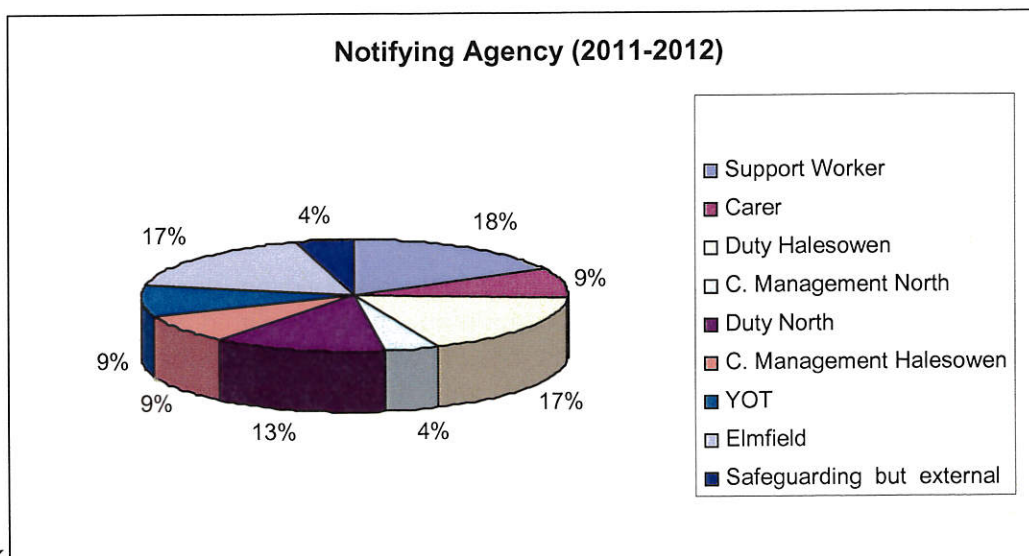
German and French young people were foreign exchange students constituted 24% (5).

Social Work Intervention



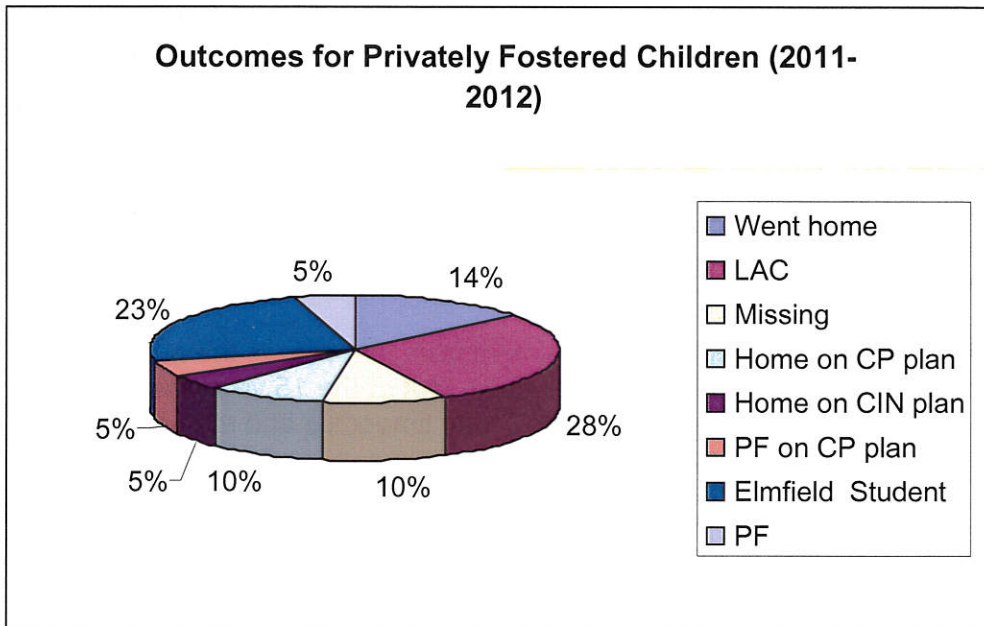
The level of Children’s Services involvement varied at the notification stage. 70% (19) of the children received support solely from the Private Fostering Social Worker, 17% (4) already had their own Social Worker and were the subject of a child protection plan. 13% (3) of the population were assessed as Children in Need (CIN) via the private fostering process and the involvement of the Private Fostering Social Work

Notifying Agencies



Where district teams and agencies had been the focus of awareness raising activity either through briefings provided by the Private Fostering Social Worker or through the multiagency safeguarding training to raise awareness of Private Fostering, there is an identifiable link with an increase in notifications. For example, Halesowen District Teams have been responsible for 26% (6) of the notifications with 17% (4) from Dudley District Teams, in addition to increased liaison and discussions between team members and the Private Fostering Social Worker. Interestingly the only Social Work team that has not been briefed has not made any referrals or notifications. There have also been a number of discussions with health and education professionals about individual children to determine if they were Privately Fostered or not.

OUTCOMES FOR PRIVATELY FOSTERED CHILDREN IN DUDLEY



Outcomes for those 21 children who were assessed as being in Private Fostering arrangements (spanning 2010-2012) varied:

- 28% (6) of children went on to meet the threshold for ‘Looked After Children’.
- 10% (2) remained privately fostered with 5% (1) of these being subject of a Child Protection Plan.

- 29% (6) of children went home to their main carers with 10% (2) of these subject to Child Protection Plans and 5% (1) subject to Child in Need plans.
- 23% (5) returned home as they were foreign exchange students.
- 10% (2) of the population were recorded as missing; 1 child after extensive inquiries including the involvement of International Social Services, was later found safe and well in Latvia in the care of his Mother. The other young person at aged 16 years went missing and was last seen in Wolverhampton, suspected of being sexually exploited by an older male. All relevant agencies have been notified and in particular, the police in Wolverhampton are pursuing this.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that the appointment of a half time assessing Social Worker who concentrates on the key aspects of the Private Fostering Regulations 2005 (awareness raising and assessment and support) has led to the anticipated increase in the level of notifications of Private Fostering arrangements, however the increase has been over and above what was initially envisaged.

Improvement in the quality of the Private Fostering Data has also been realised with completion of an accurate return to Government for this year and improved communication with the Directorate Management Information Team

In addition, there has been an improvement from last year in the number of cases where action was taken within 7 days. Out of the 15 visits that were made, 10 visits were within the required 7 day timescale and the reasons for non-compliance are known²

Statutory visits have occurred for the most part in accordance with the Regulations with only 2 arrangements not being visited accordingly³.

This is a sound foundation on which to continue to improve practice in respect of Private Fostering in this authority thereby leading to an improved outcome when a further Ofsted inspection eventually transpires.

² In the case of one child the district office did not notify the private fostering worker of the arrangement in time. In the case of the second child the PNC check from the police was not returned by the time the visit was due and In the case of the remaining 3 children the issue was carer availability or lack of co-operation

³ In the case of one child the scheduled visit was cancelled by the carer and could not be rearranged within the statutory time frame and In the case of the second child the Private Fostering Worker was on leave when the visit should have taken place.

ACTIONS FOR 2012-2013

1. Continue targeted awareness raising through the Safeguarding Board via multi agency training, ongoing work to pilot the online training programme and relevant briefings, in addition, to participation in any national Private Fostering Awareness Raising campaign supported by MARCOMMS.
2. Improve further, compliance with the statutory requirement to visit the carer and child within 7 days of notification and undertake statutory visits within the regulatory time scale.
3. Overcome the technical problems with the Private Fostering online training programme for professionals and roll out to Education and to relevant sectors of the Council.
4. Maintain good working relationships with Management Information Team to ensure a robust approach to Private Fostering Data
5. Explore the possibility of additional administrative resource to Private Fostering arising from the high level of monitoring, reporting and the collation of data on ICS particularly in view of the increased numbers of notifications and assessments.
6. Complete the audit of school admission arrangements (within one primary and one secondary school). The aim of this audit is to ascertain whether there are private fostering arrangements, which can be identified from school records. This type of activity has been fruitful in other areas, leading to changes in the processing of admission arrangements to more easily identify where a young person may be residing in a private fostering arrangement and thereby leading to an increase in notifications.
7. Implement any revised external statutory frameworks or regulations as required during 2011-2012 to ensure compliance.
8. The Integrated Children's System (ICS) is made compliant with the requirements of Private Fostering and the data input.

Sarah Whitehouse
Private Fostering Social Worker

May 2012

