

Leicestershire Fostering Service Annual Report 2016 – 2017



Introduction

Leicestershire County Council operates an integrated Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service. This arrangement has been in operation since April 2015 following a service review. Over recent years the shape of the Fostering Service has been subject to many changes as the scope of and demand on Family Placements has become more challenging and the service changed to meet demand. Over the last year we have implemented a range of initiatives to attract new carers, support our existing carers and maintain placement stability. Our aim is to provide a range of placement choices for the children and young people who need to be looked after by the local authority. In order to do this we require a range of foster carers who are skilled and resourceful.

Whilst we operate a joined up service we also ensure that the Fostering Service is subject to its own set of standards. The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000.

The Fostering and Adoption Service is managed through one Service Manager, Joss Longman, who holds responsibility for fostering, adoption and placements.



*Joss Longman
Fostering and Adoption Service Manager*

The Fostering Service is led by Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care and Virtual School- Nicci Collins. As the service area has grown to meet demand, we introduced a further senior manager. Michelle Robinson is the Assistant Service Manager and she supports the Service Manager, with specific responsibility for Permanence.

The Service reports directly to our Departmental Management Team.

Numbers of Foster Carers

As of the end of March 2017 we had 119 approved mainstream carers. This is a decrease of 1 from our position last year. Many of Leicestershire's carers have supported our children for many years and have done so well into their retirement years. As such, we had anticipated a decrease as we had a number of carers approaching retirement from the Service.

During the year we approved 22 new mainstream carers and deregistered 5 carers because they were not able to provide the standard of care required. The other 16 carers are no longer

working with Leicestershire County Council as they either retired or decided to offer our children a permanent home.

We are very proud that we have carers who have provided a service to us for over 40 years and we are immensely proud to have worked with them.

The Role of the Fostering Service

The Service delivers services through five key teams:

- Recruitment –fostering and adoption
- Assessments – fostering, adoption, private adoption and private fostering
- Team around the Child – support to our foster carers
- Kinship – assessment and support to our kinship carers
- Dedicated Placements Support Team

The Services' purpose focuses on three primary strategic functions:

- Marketing and Recruitment
- Assessment
- Support and Retention of foster carers

About the Recruitment Team

This team is the first port of call to all potential carers and work with our Communications Team to encourage carers to approach Leicestershire. The Recruitment Team comprises of a Recruitment and Retention Unit Manager supported by one Recruit Support Co-ordinator and one Recruitment and Retention Officer. We use a range of media to promote recruitment campaigns:

- Social media
- Face book campaigns
- Local radio adverts
- Local media
- Recruitment campaigns at local sporting events – Leicester Tigers and Leicester City
- Targeted recruitment in Leicestershire market towns

We have used the opportunities within *Foster Fortnight* and *Sons and Daughters* events to advertise our service.

This team also championed the *Word of Mouth Campaign*, a scheme to reward existing carers to recruit carers within their own network to also become carers. We have had a small pause in our progress of this campaign during the period of recruitment to the Recruitment and Retention Officer post.

The team is supported by a dedicated Business Support Team and systems.

Recruitment Activity

The Recruitment Team is the first point of contact for people interested in becoming carers, either through telephone contact on our dedicated recruitment line or through our many recruitment events run monthly at County Hall.

Over the year we had 704 initial expressions of interest in becoming foster carers, of which 74 requested initial visits, requiring a worker to visit their home to discuss in more detail the options around becoming a foster carer. This worker is called a Stage One worker, referring to this initial period that helps the carer understand the complexities of the role and explores matters like the support they are able to access.

Of those 74 initial visits 28 converted to fostering applications and were progressed to Stage One assessment. This resulted in 21 carers progressing to Stage Two, and 22 new carers approved. This figure is lower than the previous year by one set of carers.

There has continued to be an increased demand for foster placements for the specific children and young people:

- Parent and child placements (including mother/father and baby assessment placements)
- Siblings
- Teenagers
- Children with complex needs, particularly those who have suffered trauma and present with emotional and behavioural needs.

This demand has been evidenced through the number of referrals for these types of placement to our Family Placements Commissioning Team and analysis of the Looked After Child Register. Due to the increase in demand we have had to go the independent fostering agency (IFA) market to make placements. In 2016/17 we placed 255 children in IFA placements.

The average age of children placed in IFA is 11, with 18 being the oldest (unaccompanied asylum seeker) & new born being the youngest.

Independent Fostering Placements made 2016/2017

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 0 yrs = 7 | 1 yrs = 5 | 2 yrs = 7 | 3 yrs = 4 | 4 yrs = 1 | 5 yrs = 13 | 6 yrs = 7 | 7 yrs = 6 | 8 yrs = 11 | 9 yrs = 22 |
| 10 yrs = 9 | 11 yrs = 17 | 12 yrs = 10 | 13 yrs = 13 | 14 yrs = 30 | 15 yrs = 27 | 16 yrs = 26 | 17 yrs = 30 | 18 yrs = = 8 | |

In 2016 /17 we also launched a number of Specialist Foster Carer schemes:

- **One2One Carers** – A specialist professional fostering scheme. This scheme is a professional contracted service, recruiting carers with extensive experience of working with children with challenging behaviours. The aim of this scheme is to work with some of our more challenging young people who were in a high cost placements, as part of their step down and return to a family based placement. Each placement has a clear trajectory for the young person to be reunified with their parents, return to family placement or into independence. This cohort of young people will have complex needs and require very skilled carers to engage and support them on their journey. One young man placed with them from a residential placement successfully returned home.
- **Parallel Carers** – Another professional scheme whereupon the children and young people have a clear plan to be accommodated for a specified period whilst intensive work is undertaken to enable their return home. The carers work closely with the birth family and support them with behavior management techniques, managing contact, working with education provision and health professionals.

- **Short Breaks** – For carers wishing to provide respite care to children with disabilities. We successfully recruited new carers to the scheme providing invaluable to parents by the provision of short breaks. These carers go to great lengths to build lasting relationships with birth parents / long term carers, so both the child and the family benefit from the scheme.
- **Parent and Child Placements** – There still continues to be a drive from the Courts for these placements, requiring skilled carers who enable parents to be placed alongside their child whilst an assessment is undertaken.

About the Assessment Team

Following the restructure of our service in April 2015 our Fostering Assessment Team integrated with the Adoption Assessing Team. The team currently assesses:

- Foster carers
- Adopters
- Step Parent adoptions
- Private Fostering Assessments
- Initial visits and Stage One support for Parallel, One2One carers
- Initial visits for Specialist schemes
- Initial visits for Supported Lodgings

The Assessment Team consists of:

- One Team Manager
- One Senior Practitioner
- Four Assessing Social Workers
- Two Stage One Recruitment Officers

Their role is to assess both foster carers and adopters. Last year 22 foster carers were recruited to the service.

About Team Around the Child

This team holds the responsibility of supporting all mainstream foster carers to meet the needs of the children in their care. The Team Manager of this team also oversees the training and development of all foster carers.

The team consists of:

- One Team Manager
- One Senior Practitioner
- One Training Co-ordinator
- One Reviewing Officer
- Seven Supervising Social Workers

During 2016 we became aware that some of our carers felt that some of our service areas were lacking and the level of support was not at the level they expected. We had experienced staff changes including the Team Manager, Senior Practitioner and Social Workers, and at times this had left shortfalls in delivery of support for many of our carers.

In July 2016 we appointed a new Team Manager to the Team Around the Child who has a wealth of experience and had been involved in the Leicestershire initiative to embed the Signs of Safety Approach into our working practice. In order to benchmark how our carers were feeling she undertook a Foster Care Survey in June 2016. The carers told us that:

- Generally they were happy with our training but wanted us to make it more accessible by using on-line training and providing events in and around the County, with times suitable for working carers
- The support we provided was lacking in some areas but was improving
- Carers wanted support to prevent placement breakdown and increase stability
- Carers wanted more attachment and emotional-behavioural awareness training
- Carers wanted the hubs to improve, with more engagement from social workers and other key professionals such as the Virtual School
- Wanted the Fostering Team (Team around the Child) to be more accessible.

In response to this we:

- Re-designed our training program
- Developed a Dedicated Placement Support Team
- Organised events to have more interaction with our carers and families
- Ensured all our carers have Supervising Social Workers
- Introduced *Signs of Safety* and *Ages and Stages* planning to the Supervising Social Workers
- Developed a Monthly Newsletter for foster carers with information on staff changes / developments in the service, spotlight on staff, training events and useful information
- Coordinated key events including a foster family Fun Day at Bosworth Water Park, stay and play events, and a Foster Carers Recognition Event. This event celebrated our carers with a dinner and dance event with awards for our long serving carers of 20 plus years, locality co-ordinators and our longest serving carers of 44 years who also celebrated their wedding anniversary on the same evening receiving a standing ovation from all in attendance.
- Introduced consultation sessions with CAMHS for social worker and carers to promote understanding of our children's emotional needs and how to meet these needs.

General feedback from our foster carers indicates that they feel better supported. A further survey will be undertaken in June 2017 to ascertain if the changes we wanted have been achieved and to determine what more we can do to best support our carers and the children in their care.

About the Dedicated Placement Support Team

In June 2016 a new team was developed within the service to enable the return of children to family based placement, promote placement stability and support our specialist foster carers.

We have four Support Workers in the team. Each worker brings a different skill set to the team. During POD (weekly case discussion meetings) and Team Meetings the team shares their skills, knowledge and experiences in:

- Improving placement stability for young people living in foster care who present the most challenging behaviour

- Working with our specialist foster carers and mainstream foster carers/residential placements to return children home, this includes working intensively with families and young people and other professionals including the child's Social Worker, preparing return home trajectories and offering support at evenings and weekends when necessary
- Theraplay for both working with children and to offer strategies to carers and workers
- Supporting young people and carers through the CAMHS process and will support young people on visits
- Managing behaviours, what is normal teenage/child age related behaviour and what behaviours cause concern and offering direct work with the young people. This can be around CSE, building self-esteem, friendships, and supporting young people and carers with CAMHS meetings. The presenting needs of the young people that the team are seeing are attachments (how young people's life experiences can impact of their behaviour) , difficulties in accepting boundaries and routines, mental health and safeguarding (young people not being aware of the dangers and putting themselves in risky situations).
- Facilitating craft days and family fun days to help build relationships with young people and carers

Achievements of the team:

- The main purpose of our team is to stabilise placement when difficulties arise and return young people home when this is identified in their care plan. Over the last year placement stability has increased by **5%**
- **Seven young people** have managed to remain within their current placement with intervention from support workers from the team and **seven young people** have returned home from either foster care or residential placements
- We have supported **13 young people** and their carers who have Special Guardianship Orders to settle in to their new homes. Direct work has been completed with other young people around identity, building family contact, and general support and advice to carers
- **Three young people** have remained at home with their parents after they had spent time in care previously but the family were experiencing difficulties with behaviours.

Difficulties experienced by the Support Workers:

- Each worker should have a **caseload of 5** to be able to offer the intense work needed, however the average case load is **8**
- One of the Support Workers also manages the Independent Visitors Schem (IV) which currently has **33 visitors**. They are all matched to our young people. This is quite an achievement. This worker should have a reduced cased load to allow her to work on the IV scheme.

- The team is not able to work with some children who have very complex emotional needs relating to the trauma and/or neglect they have experienced. The team does not have access to psychological leadership and lacks the experience and knowledge required to be able to reach out to these children and young people.

Supporting Specialist Schemes:

At present we have 2 full time Supervising Social Workers and one part time social worker in the team (helping to cover the increase in Supported Lodgings providers).

Two of the Supervising Social Workers are attached to the Support Lodgings Scheme one full time and one part time on a casual contract-

- We currently have **20** Supported Lodgings Providers with **18** young people in placement
- We have **8** young people who have Stayed Put in their foster placements
- We have **5** Supported Lodgings assessments currently being undertake
- 90% of our young people in Supported Lodgings have remained stable in their placement
- **3** young people have moved into Supported Lodgings from Residential Placements, out of County, and are all stable at present
- We are looking to recruit **Specialist Supported Lodgings Providers** who will work with our 16+ young people who have more complex needs; these maybe young people who are in their final school year or who are moving from residential care back into Leicestershire. We are hoping that this scheme will enable young people to have a level of independence but also the security of knowing that they have support and guidance that will make their transition into adulthood smooth. These young people may require an extra level of supervision and support that is not offered with our current Supported Lodgings Providers.
- At present we have **two** One2One carers and **one** Parallel Carer, the Supervising Social Worker supervises all three, as well as a Level 5 specialist placement. We have one Parallel Carer due in panel in June 17 and another **two** potential Parallel Carer due to begin their assessment stage in June 17.
- At present we do not have an Assessing Social Worker which has transferred to the assessing team to meet mainstream demand requirements. The Supervising Social Worker is also responsible for undertaking the assessment of potentially new specialist foster carers.
- The Supervising Social Worker works closely with the child's Social Worker and the Team around the Child. Where necessary, this includes CAMHS. At present there is a system whereby foster carers can book sessions through their Supervising Social Worker to discuss the child's mental health and any presenting behaviours (consultation sessions).

About the Kinship

The Kinship Team works with the family or connected network of the child, who are putting themselves forward to care for a child or young person who otherwise would be placed with a mainstream foster carer. The team completes an assessment of the family member or connected carer and takes a report to panel with a recommendation about registration as a foster carer for that specific child/children. The team also provides support to the carers following placement .

The team has continued to be extremely busy and numbers being referred for assessment continue to rise. During the last year, 81 assessments were completed.

In terms of children placed under Regulation 24 (Reg. 24) of the Fostering Regulations, 45 Reg. 24 placements have been agreed (comprising both single children, sibling groups and parent and child placements).

Of these, 8 have had negative outcomes and some are still in the assessment process. These negative outcomes, where children are placed, raise particular issues as the Courts are extremely reluctant to agree to remove children already in family placements, unless there is immediate danger whilst other assessments are ongoing. It also means that placements can become *unregulated* unless the carers appeal via the IRM (Independent Reviewing Mechanism) process.

It has now been agreed that any Viability Assessments completed by locality Social Work teams will be signed off by locality Service Managers (whether the outcome of the Viability is positive or negative) to ensure checks and balances prior to these being submitted to the Kinship Team Manager, and then to the Head of Service/nominated officer, where there is a Reg. 24 placement.

Issues around risks from pets have been flagged up and sadly there have been two injuries caused to children by dogs. This has led to a review of safety processes around this area and we are now commissioning specialist assessments when safety issues are triggered by an initial assessment.

Fostering Panel activity has reflected the large number of cases coming through and this can raise issues in terms of capacity. In terms of Reg. 24 placements, the regulations allow for 16 weeks to complete assessments with a possibility of an 8 week extension if checks are not complete. However, the reality is that most assessments are completed under much tighter timescales than this with the most extreme this year being an assessment due to be completed in 4 weeks.

The staffing in the Kinship Team has, by and large, remained stable with one worker taking flexible retirement and another part time worker leaving to another post. The vacant posts continue to attract a high degree of interest and we have been lucky to attract very experienced staff, including a new Senior Practitioner who has extensive experience in this area and also in terms of her experience of therapeutic social work practice. We also have two newly qualified staff in the team and the mix of skills and experience has proved very positive with a strong team identity and commitment to the work.

The high numbers of assessments and the tight timescales involved have meant that we have commissioned assessments from workers both within the department and externally. Senior managers are aware of this ongoing issue and the cost implications of this as opposed to

having permanent staff within the team. There is an acknowledgement regarding the importance of this team and, of course, our kinship carers who provide our children with care.

The team also has 1 full time and one part-time social worker to act as Supervising Social Workers for the kinship carers who continue to care for Looked After Children (LAC) – currently these workers are holding 29 carers assessments, with 15 more needing to transfer from assessing workers. There will be new cases to allocate pending independent assessments coming through. Recent guidance in terms of delaying SGO's until after a child, or children, are established for a period of time in placement is also likely to see these numbers rising, again with consequences in terms of caseloads.

Regular events for kinship carers have continued to be held throughout the year and kinship carers can also access all training open to mainstream carers and they are expected to complete the Fostering Standards.

In 2017/18, we are hoping to introduce a Permanence Support Worker to the team, who will offer all kinship carers a visit at particular points to assist them with implementing their training, accessing training and generally providing advice about how to meet the children's emotional, behavioural and developmental needs.

About Fostering Reviews - Report from the Independent Reviewing Officer

The team is becoming more aware of the need to hold a Review following an allegation/concern. There is awareness that good practice advises that Foster Carer Reviews include the SSW (Supervising Social Worker). This has been happening more, but is still in the minority, apart from when there are concerns when the SSW involvement is always requested. Experienced foster carers are often suspicious/ uncomfortable of SSWs being included within the review meeting and seem to welcome the opportunity to talk openly with the Reviewing Officer, without their SSW involvement.

SSWs are now working towards obtaining AH/AH2 (Adult Health) reports prior to the review. This up to date health information can then inform the Review.

On the whole foster carers feel there is now more stability in the fostering department.

Feedback regarding the Team Manager and Service Manager has, on the whole, been good and for the most part carers have welcomed events such as the Celebration Evening. Foster carers recognise that the Department are trying to make improvements to the service and recognise the role foster carers' play.

A significant number of foster carers had experienced changes of SSW, particularly during 2016. When this occurs there can be inconsistent and conflicting advice. This is due to a lack of clear procedure.

Going forward (from 1 April 2017) First Reviews are now going straight to Panel without the oversight of the Reviewing Officer. This appears to be in line with other authorities.

About the Foster Carer Annual Review Feedback- May 2017

The information contained within this report has been obtained from the confidential questionnaire feedback forms which are provided to carers at the time of their Annual Fostering Review. The statistics below are based on the responses obtained from 45 questionnaires-

Feedback from Confidential Questionnaires

Payments to Carers

86% of the respondents stated that they were paid on time and 82% expressed that they were happy with the payment level that had been allocated to them.

Training

88% of carers stated they were happy with the quality of training on offer;
75% were happy with the variety of training offered and 55% of the respondents were happy with the availability/ timing of training.

Fostering Support

85% rated the support that they receive from their Fostering Social Worker as either excellent or good;
73% rated their relationship with their Fostering Social Worker as either excellent or good;
76% rated the accessibility of their Fostering Social Worker as either excellent or good.

Team Managers

68% rated the response to crisis by Team Managers as either excellent or good;
63% of respondents rated ease of access to a Team Manager as either excellent or good.

Fostering Panel

13 of the carers who responded had attended at Fostering Panel during the period when the statistics were collated;

84% rated this experience as either excellent or good;

1 of the 13 respondents stated that they had found this to be a very unsatisfactory experience, stating that they *"went to panel as a couple, both questioned and approved. Later got a phone call saying we'd need to return as that panel was for my partner"*.

Duty Desk

77% stated that the response to calls by the duty desk was either excellent or good;
71% stated that the response to crisis was either excellent or good.

1 of the 13 respondents stated that they had found this to be a very unsatisfactory experience, but did not state any reason as to why.

72% stated that they felt that they had received a satisfactory response. Again, 1 of the respondents stated that they had found this to be a very unsatisfactory experience, but did not state any reason as to why.

Fostering Out of Hours Support Line

60% stated that the response to calls was either excellent or good. 3 of the 10 respondents stated that they had found this to be a very unsatisfactory experience, but did not state any reason as to why;

62% stated that the response to crisis was either excellent or good. 2 of the 8 respondents stated that they had found this to be a very unsatisfactory experience, but did not state any reason as to why;

66% stated that they felt that they had received a satisfactory response. 2 of the 9 respondents stated that they had found this to be a very unsatisfactory experience, but did not state any reason as to why.

Emergency Duty Team / Out of Hours

25% stated that the response to calls from the emergency duty team was either excellent or good;

28% stated that the response to crisis was either excellent or good. 2 of the 7 respondents stated that they had found this to be a very unsatisfactory experience, but did not state any reason as to why;

28% stated that they felt that they had received a satisfactory response. 1 of the 7 respondents stated that they had found this to be a very unsatisfactory experience, but did not state any reason as to why.

Children's Social Worker

70% stated that the response to calls/e-mails was either excellent or good. 1 of the 40 respondents stated that they had found this to be very unsatisfactory, but did not state any reason as to why;

74% stated that they were happy with their Social Worker's response to crisis, 7% rated this as either unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory;

78% stated that they were happy with the frequency of visits, 5% rated this as either unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory;

86% rated transport arrangements as either excellent or good, 6% rated this as either unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory;

70% rated the communication with the Children's Social Workers as either excellent or good.

8% rated this as either unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory.

What Charlie says about his social worker:



Other Agencies and Professionals

Additional educational support

81% stated that their dealings with this service were either excellent or good.

Mentoring

77% stated that their dealings with this service were either excellent or good.

Corporate Parenting

73% stated that their dealings with this service were either excellent or good.

Health Visitors

75% stated that their dealings with this service were either excellent or good.

CAMHS

55% stated that their dealings with this service were either excellent or good, and 1 respondent stated that they had found this to be very unsatisfactory, but did not state any reason as to why.

About Foster Panel

The Fostering Panel acts in accordance with the regulatory framework provided by The Fostering Service Regulations 2011, Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011 and the Standards set out in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011. The Foster Panel takes account of the legislation set out in The Children Act 1989 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Guidance, volume 2, 2010.

The Fostering Panel has the responsibility for making **recommendations** in relation to:

- The approval of mainstream foster carers
- The approval of family members or friends as "connected person" carers for children who are looked after by Leicestershire County Council and connected to the applicant as a family member or friend
- The first annual review of all foster carers and connected persons carers
- Reviews of carers where there have been serious issues such as Child Protection Investigations, or
- Reviews of carers where there are concerns regarding their fostering practice and their suitability.

Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) 2011 Constitution & Membership of Fostering Panel

The current membership of the panel is as follows:

Arlene Weekes – Independent Chair

Tony Richardson and Mohamed Patel – Independent Vice Chairs

Lorraine Daniels, Rebecca Peters and Ashley Scott – Social Worker Representatives

Steph Beeston Clark, Catherine Thompson and Kendall Concannon – Foster Carer Representatives

Margret Atkinson, Ann Bridge, Amanda Hales, Thure Johansen and Fiona Booth – Independent Members

Currently both Vice Chairs are independent of the Fostering Agency.

In 2016/17, there have been no issues regarding quoracy and the Panel Advisor has ensured that all business has been facilitated.

The current Panel Advisor has reviewed the volume and cost of panel business given the additional panels that have been required and in particular the growth in connected person cases. As a result, the schedule of panel meetings has been altered in order to meet this demand. There are now two Fostering Panels each month. This allows for additional connected person cases to be allocated panel time to meet the 16/24 week timescale.

The Panel receives medical advice within the Social Workers reports and this is considered within the assessments.

Workload of the Panel

The Foster Panel has met on 25 occasions between April 2016 to March 2017, an increase on the previous year's 24 occasions.

Panel Administration

The Panel has received a high standard of administrative support, which has been instrumental in developing processes to ensure that the Panel papers, minutes and time keeping are adhered to.

Panel actively seeks feedback from all participants and is received via a feedback form. The feedback is reviewed by the Panel Advisor and Chair. The Panel Advisor has reviewed the feedback information from those attending Panel. The feedback is then provided to the following panel for their consideration.

Panel Quality Assurance

The reports for Panel are signed as being suitable to present at Panel by the Team Manager of the specific team to ensure suitable quality standards are achieved. A key development via the Panel feedback process has been to generate a pro forma for approval based upon the Fostering Standards.

The panel adviser works closely with the managers of the service to ensure the QA of reports is undertaken in a timely manner.

We have established quarterly agency feedback meetings with the service. This has enabled further discussion around practice and areas for development and has encompassed the use of Signs of Safety to consider the work of the Agency and Panel.

There continues to be an improvement in the quality of reports presented to panel and this has been assisted by the Panel Advisor actively engaging with the managers of the service to reiterate the need for sound, evidence based assessments. There is clear evidence of the Signs of Safety model in assessments in terms of the strengths and vulnerabilities of applicants. The Panel Advisor attends the managers meeting for a specified time at each meeting to feedback any issues arising from panel.

The Panel Advisor and Panel Chairs have developed a good working relationship which offers support and challenge where appropriate. This encourages transparency and openness within all Panel business and this is reflected through the work with the Panel and the service.

Training and Development

The Service has a dedicated Training Officer for the service who ensures training is delivered for all our carers which includes, mainstream, Kinship, Supported lodgings providers, Specialist carers (Parallel & one 2 one) and those carers who have legally secured permanence for the children in their care through Special Guardianship Orders, Residence Orders and Child Arrangements Orders.

All carers are expected to meet the National Minimum Standards of fostering by completing the 'Training, Support and Development Standards' which is offered online or by a hard copy. These are designed to equip all carers with the skills and knowledge to provide high quality care to the children they look after. These standards are linked with our Core training which includes:

- Paediatric First Aid (2 day)
- Safeguarding
- Allegations
- Record Keeping
- Health & safety for carers
- Managing contact
- Attachment
- Education
- Challenging behaviour

Our rich training programme offers the following:

- 150 E-learning courses at foundation and Advanced levels (either in the home, libraries or on smart phones)
- 2 free online courses for every carer and are based on current trending topics which changes every 12 weeks
- 45 'live' courses in venues booked by the training officer
- 2 information & learning event/fayres - Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) programme to offer carers a day's training jointly with young people in the Warning Zone and NHS health event workshops with information and advice stalls
- Level 3 Diploma for the CYPW at the carers' home
- NHS Diana training for short-break carers
- SGO carers can access all 'live training' free of charge.

In addition to this, we try to go the extra mile by:

- Delivering training all around the County, mainly in Sure Start or Community Centres, as well as County Hall.
- Using a variety of course delivery techniques to accommodate all learning styles and needs and a positive learning experience.
- We provide a text reminder about training service for all courses.
- Using Out of County/ additional companies also used to meet the needs of carers that are unable to attend the above.
- Commission additional training around current hot topics, e.g. FGM

Feedback/ Evaluations on training

- Evaluations are completed anonymously at the end of every training session by every carer and stored electronically by the training officer. They are evaluated by the trainer as well as the training officer and any issues, developments are noted and actioned.
- Trainers are also invited to provide feedback in order to gauge their experience with our venues/carers etc. which again are actioned and reported where necessary.
- We are currently designing a new feedback form to scale the learner's progress and knowledge from the beginning of the training to the end of the training session.

Plans for the forthcoming year

- There are many new courses that have been introduced or due to run in 2017: LGBT, Life story work, Communication and language, Drug awareness, Alcohol awareness, NHS Fayre and Fire & Road Safety Awareness
- Future work so far is working closer with our Caring About Reading Scheme and the libraries to create more carers & child focused training in the summer which will link into the training & events organised by the Corporate Parents Team
- Working with Family Action to develop a Post Adoption & SGO support package by being involved in their Focus Group to design
- Therapeutic parenting training for carers to be designed and run in the 2018 training programme
- Creating a training/learning event for carers and young people to attend and covers everything around leaving care
- Design an 'Introduction to Kinship care' training day for newly assessed carers
- Working closely with Leicester City to organise joint training/skills/workshops for all carers
- Developing post support for Adoption & SGO with Turning Point on Drug & Alcohol services & the Virtual School
- Continue to develop the Kinship/SGO support groups which currently stand at 5 support groups. (From Jan 2015 there are 135 children on SGO's)
- Launching the new SGO/Kinship newsletter and yearly events
- Designing a web page on the Leicestershire County Council for SGO/Kinship carers to access which will include signposting services, training and information
- Develop a Facebook page where carers can access information and do learning on the go
- Complete the Learning Hub for all carers by the end of 2017 to be live for 2018.

A copy Training Programme can be found at:

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/field/pdf/2017/3/27/FOSTER-CARER-TRAINING-BROCHURE-2017.pdf>

About the Foster Carer Association

The Leicestershire Foster Carer Association has been running for a number of years, This followed the establishment of a committee who had determined the areas where foster carers and their families could be better supported. Over recent years the numbers within the LFCA have reduced and there is active recruitment in place to encourage further participation.

About Locality Support Groups

Within Leicestershire we have very active Locality Support Groups based over the County for our carers to attend.

Most meet on a monthly basis, they are very social groups and are facilitated by the carers. Details of the meeting times are advertised in our Newsletter. When a new carer is approved their details are provided to the Co-ordinator to make contact and welcome to the support group.

About Complaints and Allegations

| | Date of allegation | Who made the allegation/ Nature of Allegation | Outcome |
|-------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| Complaint 1 | Oct 2016 | CSW and Health visitor Unintentional negligence | Allegation Substantiated- LADO involved. Taken back to panel for de-registration |
| Complaint 2 | Oct 2016 | Another FC regarding FC lack of professionalism talking about another FC disrespectfully | Challenged and denied allegation. No evidence of accusations |
| Complaint 3 | Nov 2016 | YP reported being treated differently to others in placement | Placement move Issues addressed in review |
| Complaint 4 | Jan 2017 | CSW- Failing to work with agencies to safeguard YP | Unsubstantiated- lack of evidence from agencies |
| Complaint 5 | Jan 2017 | Child's father- Unlawful hunting | LADO consulted not required- incorrect information |
| Complaint 6 | Feb 2017 | CSW- Emotional harm | LADO consulted not safeguarding – intension to resign- (Unresolved) Issues to be taken to panel |
| Complaint 7 | March 2017 | YP-Racist attitude and emotional harm | LADO consulted not required. No evidence of accusations |
| Complaint 8 | March 2017 | Neglect- failing to attend medical appointments | LADO involved Unsubstantiated |

| | | | |
|-------------|------------|--|---|
| | | | Return to panel – continued approval |
| Complaint 9 | April 2017 | Drinking / inappropriate adult behaviour | LADO consulted not safeguarding- Profs meeting- Unsubstantiated Return to panel – continued approval |

Key message from Service Manager, Joss Longman

“The service has undergone many changes in the last year, and has met many challenges with success. We are very proud of the efforts made by our staff and foster carers during this very busy time. However, we recognize that we are still on a journey to become a service fit for the future. Our identified priority actions for the forthcoming year are:

Foster Carer Handbook

The handbook needs to be re-visited and offer the option of having a digital version.

Foster Carers Review paperwork

This is a little tired and dated and will be bought in line with our signs of safety approach

Payments Structure

Will be reviewed to offer more incentives to become a carer for Leicestershire

Foster Carer Profiles

Our young people have told us that they would like these to be in a digital format, that they would like to have a virtual tour of the foster carer’s home, and have it in video so they can see and hear the carers before they meet them.

Digital Profile

In April 2017 we launched our digital panels, this pilot scheme will now be developed further.

Specialist Carers On-going Recruitment

The on-going recruitment of foster carers is becoming more challenging as the Midlands is saturated with private agencies and the availability of carers reduced. We recognize that we have to meet the challenges of the market. One unique selling point is our placement support service, providing to support to carers when they need it to promote stability. This year we are launching:

Supported Lodgings Plus – For young people requiring support from foster carers in their step down from residential placements on their transition to independence.

Recruitment Business Rules

In April 2017 we introduced new business for recruitment, to meet our recruitment strategy.”

About Changes and Additions to the Staffing Structure

-  The Kinship Team has required staffing from other teams in the service areas to assist in the assessment of potential carers. Additional staff will be required on a permanent basis
-  If our fostering targets are to be achieved this will have an impact on the capacity of the Assessment team and once approved the Team Around The Child

This year has seen the structure of the service change to meet the needs of our carers to ensure the support and oversight is available to both the staff and carers.

There have been many challenges, and many successes too, we look forward to the challenges of the forthcoming year.

Joss Longman

Service Manager

Foster, Adoption and Placements