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Minutes

Fostering Advisory Committee

5 November 2024 | 10am - 12.30pm

Present

Hanan Al-Najjar	Foster carer – LA	HAN
Corrie Biddle	The Fostering Network	CB
Linda Briheim-Crookall	Coram Voice	LBC
Florence Chiwetu	Independent consultant	FC
Sam Frith-Jones	AFKA Cymru	SFJ
Pal Jandu	Camden	PJ
Cara Jones	Foster carer – IFA	CJ
Anna Logan	Newcastle LA	AL
Denise Mclean	CB BMEPAC rep	DM
Vivian Okeze-Tirado	VOT Training & Consultancy	VOT
Claire Rogers	Treehouse Care	CR
Matt Taylor-Roberts	Proud 2B Parents	MTR
Sarah Thomas	The Fostering Network	ST (vice chair)
Ruth Willetts	FosterTalk	RW

In attendance

James Bury	CoramBAAF	JB
Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF	GC
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF	EF
Derek Kirton	CB Research Committee	DK
Natalie Williams	The Fostering Network	NW
Alan Wood	FosterTalk	AW
Isobel Mintz	The Fostering Network	IM

Apologies

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Foster carer - LA	JAB
Sally Barnett	South Coast Fostering	SB
Jacqueline Cassidy	The Fostering Network	JC
Nazeema Gill	Foster carer – IFA	NG
Angie Gillies	AFKA Scotland	AG
Julie Macer-Wright	Essex County Council	JMW
Charmaine Orchard	Konnected	CO (chair)
Rebekah Pierre	BASW	RP

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Steffi Roth	Brighter Futures	SR
Liz Spaven	Newcastle LA	LS
Nicola Smith	Barnardo's	NS
Anthony Turner	The Fostering Team	AT

1. Welcome and introductions

1.1 ST welcomed members to the meeting as chair.

1.2 The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as an accurate reflection of discussions.

2. Foster Talk presentation: Allegations recommendations and solution focussed discussion

2.1 RW and AW presented an overview of their report on Foster Carers' experiences of allegations. This has been identified within the sector as a key issue impacting the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The key findings, recommendations and points for consideration were shared.

2.2 Members split into breakout groups to discuss how these recommendations could be implemented in their organisations. A spokesperson from each group fed-back on key ideas and suggestions. Highlights included:

- The role of independent supporters as representatives for foster carers and the need for clearer guidelines on what is permissible in their role during meetings.
- The need for a tailored approach to independent supporters by recognising the differing needs of foster carers and their situations. Conversations should be had between agencies and independents at an early stage to identify what help they require. This dialogue should continue throughout the process, as the foster carer needs may change over time.
- Increasing foster carer awareness of 'near misses' where allegations are made but not followed up on straight away. This would increase their ability to defend themselves and address simple misunderstandings, before the full process has begun. Timelines of LADO processes should be clear and shared with the foster carers.
- The attitude that foster carers are guilty before proven innocent and the damage this can do to the whole family.
- How active advocacy on behalf of the foster carer has decreased over time, resulting in their voices not being heard and limiting their understanding of the process. Active advocacy from the person providing support should be accepted in practice.
- Supervising social workers should take on the role of advocate, unless this is not appropriate. It was noted that when supervising social workers work as part of IFAs they sometimes have concerns about affecting LA relationships for future placements, which can impact how they deal with situations.
- Creating templates and policy to ensure prompts on access to support are in writing and then embedded in practice.
- Making changes to prevent the removal of independent support when it is still needed.
- Ofsted to be utilized in its remit as a driver of good practice.
- Guidelines about undertaking practice audits would help this.

- The need for support for kinship foster families in terms of maintaining relationships.
- Use of disruption meetings in a healing way – repairing ruptures.
- Potential use of Family Group Conferences (FGC) to look at support/relationships in extended foster family.
- Reparative work - practitioners/foster carers.
- Embedding trauma-informed approaches in allegation work.
- Communication is key to ensure the team around the child/foster placement is maintained.
- The possibility of holding employment tribunals, where foster carers could go as a last resort.

Action: Share updates re: allegations developments in the sector when available

3. The Fostering Network presentation: Fees report and solutions focussed discussion

3.1 NW and IM presented an overview of their Out of Pocket: Fairer Fees for Foster Carers' campaign. Key findings highlighted the variation in fees between local authorities and how they categorise foster carer skill levels. The differences between mainstream and post-16/18 foster care were also emphasised, as well as the differences in kinship care.

3.2 The overall impact of current foster carer fees is:

- Postcode lottery for foster carers
- Negative impact on recruitment and retention
- Fees are not competitive or attractive
- Becoming a foster carer is limited to those who can afford it

3.3 NW shared the key recommendations of the report, which all involve calling for the government to ensure more consistency for foster carer finances across the UK. Members split into breakout groups to discuss the following questions:

- What other impacts do these findings have on foster carers and the children in their care?
- Do you believe a national minimum foster carer fee is required?
- Should foster carer fees be increased according to the skill of the foster carer? If not, how should it be structured?
- Should foster carer fees consider the needs of the child? Should this only feature in the child's allowance?

3.4 Key ideas raised by members included:

- Increased wages should be based exclusively on foster caring ability and the child's needs, not on additional work such as training or recruitment activities.
- Children's needs vary over time and a child who does not meet the higher skill level when first placed may do so later on.
- The strain that can arise from foster carers having to prove a child's level of emotional and behavioural challenges and/or distress.
- The need to consider the child's perspective on money and foster carer motivations.
- How new foster carers being recruited are more likely to go with an agency that pays more.
- Agencies should not put pressure on foster carers to perform additional duties in order to gain access to a higher tier level.

- Consistency amongst all types of foster carers, including kinship and staying put should be achieved.
- The need for fostering regulations to go past the age of 18, so staying put carers can remain foster carers without going through the approval process again. This would be beneficial for the carers, the young person and the agency, who would not lose experienced carers.
- New foster carer expertise in other professional areas (teaching, social work etc.) is not considered when evaluating skill set.
- A minimum fee would be very beneficial in balancing current inconsistencies.
- The need to evidence a correlation between fees and retention in order to make a case to the government.

4. Equality, diversity and inclusion

4.1 *LGBTQ+ foster carers practice note* – CoramBAAF and Proud 2B Parents are working on a new practice note around the recruitment, assessment and support of LGBTQ+ foster carers. The aim of this is to address the discrimination and micro-aggressions still experienced during these processes. A focus group of foster carers is due to meet in November to inform this work.

Action: Charlotte Andrew to be invited to facilitate a future discussion on LGBTQ+ young people in care.

4.2 Stable Homes, Built on Love: LGBTQ+ identity - Coram Voice

4.3 *Summer racist riots* - Members noted the significance of the racist riots which took place over the summer. The impact of these racist riots on the wellbeing of young people, foster carers and the communities they live in – and how services responded to this - was discussed. It was felt more formal guidance and support was needed from fostering services to help foster carers talk to young people about these events. Members recognised the importance of continuing these conversations, particularly around the vulnerability of children and young people in care. Exploring potential collaboration in working with the police.

Action: Members can contact CB at corrie.biddle@fostering.net if interested in the development of their EDI pledge.

Action: EF to contact London Violence Reduction Network for advice on what organisations can do to support carers and young people with racism.

5. Useful links

5.1 The Grand Campaign: £3,000 for every care leaver - clear rights, fair support and freedom to choose - Coram Voice

5.2 Disability, disparity and demand: an analysis of the numbers and experiences of children in care and care leavers with a disability or long-term health conditions - Coram Voice

5.3 Racial Justice Family Network

Date of next meeting: 4 March 2025