

Minutes

4 July 2023 | 11.00am - 2.30pm

Present

Hanan Al-Najjar	Foster carer – LA	HAN
Sam Frith-Jones	AFKA Cymru	SFJ
Nazeema Gill	Foster carer – IFA	NG
Cara Jones	Foster carer – IFA	CJ
Denise McLean	BMEPAC representative	DML
Claire Rogers	Treehouse Care	CR
Nicola Smith	Barnardo's	NS
Liz Spaven	Newcastle LA	LS
Sarah Thomas	The Fostering Network	ST (chair)

In attendance

Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF	GC (minutes)
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF	EF
Leoni Kemp	Violence Reduction Unit	LK
Kelly Reid	Violence Reduction Unit	KR
Student on placement	Violence Reduction Unit	

Apologies

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Foster carer – LA	JAB
Linda Briheim-Crookall	Coram Voice	LBC
Angie Gillies	AFKA Scotland	AG
Pal Jandu	Camden LA	PJ
Alitha Lee-Townsend	Achieving for Children	ALT
Charmaine Orchard	Konnected CIC & CE	CO
John Simmonds	CoramBAAF	JS
Matt Taylor-Roberts	Proud 2B Parents	MTR



1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 ST welcomed members and guests to the meeting. Introductions were made and apologies given.
- 1.2 Minutes from the last meeting were accepted as an accurate record of discussions, with no changes necessary.

Action: Members to send GC their mini biographies

Action: EF to send members CoramBAAF's response to the government implementation strategy.

2. Violence Reduction Unit Presentation

- 2.1 Kelly Reid, Parenting Programmes Manager at London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), delivered a presentation on their current mission, vision and impact goals. The VRU are looking to develop a new project to directly support foster carers, which will in turn support children in their care.
- 2.2 KR asked the committee three key questions:
 - What do you feel would be the key focus areas for this piece of work?
 - How do you feel foster carers support would work best? (E.g. Partners or specific models.)
 - Would you focus this work to a targeted cohort? If so, which group and why?

Key areas of focus raised by members were:

- 2.3 *Mental health*- Foster Carers need better resources to enable them to support a child's mental health whilst they are on the CAMHS waiting list. Fully certified mental health first aid training should be compulsory for all foster carers.
- 2.4 *Education*- Foster Carers require support to communicate with schools who need to increase their knowledge and understanding on how trauma influences behaviour.
- 2.5 *Professionalisation*- Any resources must support the importance of foster carers being seen as professionals, who will be speaking on behalf of the child and advocating for their needs.
- 2.6 *Violence Awareness Training*- More focussed and in depth training is needed to support foster carers with children who have entered care as the result of violent crime, many children and young people will have witnessed violent crime in their homes.
- 2.7 *Matching Process*- Social workers are fearful of including details of violence in children's profiles, in case foster carers are unwilling to care for them. VRU could support social workers with writing profiles for children who have been involved in violence, as it is vital foster carers know these details so they can prepare and seek appropriate support.
- 2.8 *Domestic abuse*- children and young person's profiles, members noted the domestic abuse label is vague and unhelpful. Social workers should be supported to include specific, honest descriptions of a child's experience so foster carers can display empathy and understanding. It was suggested some form of immersive training session could help foster carers with this.

3. The Foundling Museum

- 3.1 EF arranged for members to experience a tour of The Foundling Museum.



- 3.2 Members heard about the history of Thomas Coram and the [Foundling Hospital](#), which opened in 1739 and eventually became the children's charity [Coram](#). Today, Coram is the first and longest running children's charity.

4. Care Experienced as a Protected Characteristic

- 4.1 ST summarised Terry Galloway's campaign to [make care experience a protected characteristic](#) within local authorities across the UK. ST shared a [video](#) from Cambridgeshire County Council of a care experienced young person explaining why this campaign is important.
- 4.2 Members agreed that changes needed to be made but questioned whether making care experience a protected characteristic was the best solution, particularly with the current government.
- 4.3 NS suggested the extension of Corporate Parenting principles could address many of the issues raised regarding a general lack of understanding of care experience. However, as it stands this would not support care experienced people past the age of 25. All bodies given corporate parenting responsibilities should be expected to write out their intentions for care experienced people. The government seem to prefer corporate parenting as an approach and there is some reluctance to open up the Equalities Act to be amended, discussions around which could potentially be disruptive.
- 4.4 Members acknowledged how outcomes for other protected characteristics have significantly improved with their protected status. At a previous meeting, CJ expressed concerns regarding impact on stigma and lack of understanding of what protected characteristics could accomplish. However, much of what the young person in the video said resonated with them. CJ recognised care experience impacts people throughout their lives and that organisations operating outside of the social work sector need to be made aware of this.
- 4.5 Members recognised that social work practitioners who aren't currently demonstrating best practice in their work would likely not be impacted by the protected characteristic. Nevertheless, it could have a positive influence over the general population who have never before considered care experienced people within their line of work.
- 4.6 ST noted that social work training includes information on the Equalities Act and detailed discussions on disabilities etc. Social workers who are taught about the life long impact of care experience at the beginning of their training are more likely to carry that knowledge through their careers and less likely to treat children as tick boxes. Making care experienced a protected characteristic could make these discussions a mandatory part of social work training. ST also recognised the Welsh government introduced a corporate parenting policy 15 years ago which made no difference to the sector.
- 4.7 A discussion was had around the number of 16- 17 year-olds living in supported accommodation, essentially independent living - who are not classed as looked after children, therefore are not eligible for care services. Members discussed the negative impact for these young people, who still require support in the same way their non-care experienced peers require support.
- 4.8 EF suggested that even though a protected characteristic and corporate parenting cannot solve all the sector's issues they both provide solid ground on which to step forward.
- 4.9 CJ noted the significant impact protected characteristic status can have on the education system. Many looked after children struggle to stay in school or to find the right school, but having a



protected status would force schools to consider them and make reasonable adjustments (as they would for disabled children.) This goes back to the need for education staff to better understand trauma, attachment and behaviour.

- 4.10 ST noted protected characteristics have made the greatest difference in education and employment, which are two key areas in which care experienced people face difficulty. Renting and banking were identified as other areas with significant obstacles.
- 4.11 Members emphasised that disclosing care experienced status would always be a choice, but that protected status would create more career opportunities for those who do wish to disclose it.

Action: *To receive a campaign toolkit, members can express interest in supporting Terry's movement.*

5. Retention and Recruitment Hubs

- 5.1 EF updated members on the current status of Retention and Recruitment Hubs, as set out in the government response to the care review.
- 5.2 12 local authorities in the north east are taking part in a pilot programme, with Together 4 Children taking the lead in Sunderland. LS updated members on the latest north east pathfinder meeting that took place on Monday 3rd July 2023. The plan is to develop a cross-regional marketing campaign to facilitate recruitment, but the specifics of this are yet to be revealed. All advertisements will display the same call number, with the central call center then distributing enquiries to different local authorities. The hub is also set to lead on skills to foster training, but the logistics of this need ironing out. Performance and information meetings will continue later in the week. LS acknowledged this model is not without challenges, but future developments will create a clearer picture.
Action: *LS to share the presentation and/or newsletter with members if able.*
- 5.3 Members discussed DfE's vision for foster carer fees and the complexities of standardising these across regions. Independent Fostering Agencies are not being considered within the hub model, which feels like a missed opportunity for LAs and IFAs to work together. Members identified addressing this lack of collaboration as the key to improving social care.
- 5.4 NS suggested lessons have not been learned from Regional Adoption Agencies. Independent fostering and adoption agencies have specialist knowledge of how to support children with more complex needs. Attempting to solve the recruitment problem without independent organisations will result in the loss of that specialist experience and jeopardise the futures of those agencies who are crucial for the effective functioning of the system. EF confirmed CoramBAAF have raised this concern with DfE.
- 5.5 EF clarified that (according to DfE) Regional Care Cooperatives are further behind in their development than Retention and Recruitment Hubs. The intention is for RCCs to eventually take over these Hubs, but directors of children's services have voiced significant concerns about them and DfE are struggling to find volunteers to facilitate pathfinders. At the moment it is unclear how these models will directly benefit children.

6. Any Other Business

Action: *GC to put Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at the top of the next agenda.*



Action: CoramBAAF to invite a representative from Each and Every Child to the next meeting to discuss their language toolkit.

Action: Members are invited to keep in touch with London's Violence Reduction Unit: Kelly Reid (kelly.reid@london.gov.uk); Leoni Kemp (leoni.kemp@london.gov.uk). VRU to keep CoramBAAF updated on project developments.

Date of next meeting: 7 November 2023 (Zoom)