

Minutes

19 July 2023 | 10.00am - 12.30pm

Present

Hanan Al-Najjar	Waltham Forest	HAN (chair)
Adam Dalal	Blackburn with Darwen BC	AD
Dawn Elliot	Leeds	DE
Steven O'Reilly	TACT	SOR
Sam Penny	Devon	SP
Darryl Pottinger	Greenwich	DP
Jennifer Roy	Haringey	JR

In attendance

Freya Burley	The Fostering Network	FB
Alexandra Conroy-Harris	CoramBAAF (CB)	ACH
Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF (CB)	GC (minutes)
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF (CB)	EF
Joe Rigby	Department for Education (DfE)	JRi
Hannah Williams	Department for Education (DfE)	HR

Apologies

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Nottingham	JAB
Nazeema Gill	Homefinding Fostering Agency	NG
Cara Jones	Chrysalis Consortium	CJ
Lisa Little	Hull	LL
Darryl Pottinger	Greenwich	DP

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and apologies were given.
- 1.2 Members discussed the Mockingbird model and brain stormed questions for The Fostering Network. Concerns were expressed regarding social work responsibilities being transferred to foster carers and whether Mockingbird contracts would be legally binding.

2. Fostering Network Mockingbird presentation

- 2.1 Freya Burley recapped the history and purpose of the Mockingbird model. FB summarised the key elements of Mockingbird and explained the intended benefits for children, young people and



families. Key roles within the Mockingbird Model include the Hub home carer, Liaison Worker (employed by the LA fostering service) and Satellite carers. Key elements of the model are:

- Peer guidance and support
- Sleepovers
- Training and development
- Socials
- Support to permanence
- Siblings and birth family

3.2 As of July 2023, 131 constellations existed across the UK. FB shared impact data collected from these constellations, as well as figures taken from the Mockingbird Impact Report 2022.

3. Mockingbird Q&A

3.1 Members asked FB questions about the Mockingbird Model.

3.2 Creating a sense of community around children and young people remains the primary focus of Mockingbird. FB acknowledged this model may not work for every foster family and that in some cases young people are able to form connections and meaningful relationships in other ways. However, feedback shows foster families can feel isolated and that children do benefit from forming friendships within the care experienced community.

3.3 Hub home carers are expected to take one day off per week and one weekend off per month, in order to increase resilience, improve wellbeing and prevent burnout. Evidence had shown the most successful constellations rely on positive communication and teamwork between Hub home carers and Liaison Officers. They also have access to compassion fatigue and wellbeing workshops and forums and are encouraged to appoint deputies to share responsibilities when necessary.

3.4 The Fostering Network works with local authorities to design a model that suits them, but high staff turnover is an increasing challenge. Supervising Social Workers who take on the role of Liaison Officer are expected to form relationships with families and develop an understanding of their needs. Taking on a Hub home is the equivalent of two caseloads.

3.5 FB noted constellations are expected to look different in different areas, such as in rural areas where hub home carers live further away from their families. The type of care available needs to reflect the geography and capacity of the Hub Home Carer. The model is flexible and will continue to adapt to newly identified issues.

Action: CoramBAAF to keep in touch with Freya and invite to future meetings.

Action: CoramBAAF to collate members' additional Mockingbird questions and send to The Fostering Network at a later date.

4. DfE Update and 'quick fixes'

4.1 JR asked if CoramBAAF could consider some potential 'quick wins' with fostering guidance – i.e. points of clarification where things are unclear and confusing, or minor changes that would be fairly straightforward to make.

4.2 Committee members suggested quick fixes in the following areas:

- Staying put
- Delegated authority



- Identity needs of children in care
- Nursery fees
- Free school meals, trips and clubs
- Professionalism of Foster Carers

- 4.3 *Free school meals*- children who are eligible for free school meals before entering care should maintain that eligibility. Eligibility currently varies between local authorities and IFAs, as well as between siblings from the same birth family.
- 4.4 *Delegated authority*- should be a mandatory agenda item on all childhood care reviews, even if no changes are needed. Not updating documents causes problems when making basic every day decisions. DfE acknowledged the nature of these decisions change the longer a child is in care.
- 4.5 ACH noted foster carers should be recognised as a separate category and considered before legislations are passed. Can the DfE fostering team be more active in ensuring other government departments consider foster carers when making decisions?
- 4.6 DfE asked members to take this away and come back with any further suggestions 30 August.

Action: CoramBAAF to collate additional 'quick fixes' from members via email and send to DfE by end of August.

5. Legal Q&A

- 5.1 Alexandra Conroy-Harris, CoramBAAF Legal Consultant, answered members' legal questions.
- 5.2 *Adopting a foster child*- In order to adopt the child they've been fostering for three years, SP was told by multiple senior managers they needed to wait 10 weeks after panel to submit paperwork to the court. ACH confirmed a child placed for adoption by the local authority needs to have been living in the adoptive household for 10 weeks prior to placement, therefore waiting the extra 10 weeks is unnecessary in this case.
- Action: ACH to email SP with further information on this.**
- 5.3 *Child savings limit*- HAN asked whether local authorities have a statutory obligation to ensure children in care have savings. At the moment this responsibility seems to fall to foster carers and money is going missing. ACH confirmed looked after children are required to have savings and that older children should be encouraged to save for themselves. However, it is down to local authority discretion how this is achieved. Many local authorities find managing these savings very difficult, so the responsibility is placed on foster carers. A lack of national guidance means no consistency across areas, which causes issues when a child moves on or turns 18 and the money must be transferred.
- 5.4 *Foster Carer records*- ACH confirmed foster carer records have two purposes; to support a child's life story work and to provide the local authority with evidence of the type of care a foster carer is providing that child. If these records lead to court proceedings then they should be incorporated into social worker statements. Local authority legal teams can't be seen to coach witnesses, so the support they're able to provide foster carers during court proceedings is limited. This support should come from the fostering support worker.
- 5.5 **Action: ACH to prepare a response to CJ's question on foster carer allowances and allegation procedures. CB to return to this topic at a future meeting.**

Date of next meeting: 4 October 2023