



Lincolnshire Fostering Service

**Quarterly Report
October - December 2022**

Quarter Three Fostering Report:

The Annual Report for 2021/2022 was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in September 2021. The statement of Purpose was revised and was ratified on the same day.

This is the third quarterly report for 2022/2023.

Introduction

In 2022/2023, the Fostering Service has an annual budget of £9,102,467. Most foster carer allowances have been increased by 2% for this financial year. This has ensured that allowances continue to remain above the government recommended minimum rates.

Moving forward and owing to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis the service is reviewing and considering how the Council can best support foster carers in these challenging economic times.

Giving due regard to the fostering allowances is crucial in terms of supporting Lincolnshire fostering, maintaining children in their local community where possible and ensuring positive and sustained services in the future. To retain our competitiveness, allowances are a significant factor alongside the continued annual retention payments within a framework of high-quality supervision and support. The budget continues to afford flexibility to provide enhanced allowances to certain categories of carers such as those offering permanence or managing particularly distressed children and those with challenging behaviours.

In a continued effort to support carers in the best way possible, the service continues to support fostering families to have access to recognised discount cards that are compatible with what is available to Lincolnshire County Council Social Care staff alongside all other employees.

It is recognised within the service and fostering community that the retention and ongoing recruitment of foster carers continues to be a priority. Whilst remuneration is one aspect of the support offer, this coupled with the support and supervision is crucial to maintaining commitment and motivation going forward.

Nationally and regionally, it is observed that the fostering marketplace continues to be extremely challenging with competition at a peak level with several independent agencies actively recruiting in the Lincolnshire region.

The emphasis on recruitment and retention was impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic where the service had seen an increase in numbers of children in care (CIC) and diminishing foster carer availability owing to retirement, health, and social factors. However, most carers who took time out during Covid have returned to fostering and continue to offer a variety of placements across the board. The service continues to seek new recruits and prioritise the wellbeing of all existing carers given the national recognised shortfall.

The development of the virtual foster care community continues with significant momentum which coincides with the fostering monthly newsletter which is distributed across the foster

carer community, our website and across social care and early help. Please find a copy attached within Appendix B. This has been embedded into the report to highlight and celebrate the work of the fostering community across the board. This has proven to be a valuable forum for carers who have recently joined Lincolnshire or those that are well versed with fostering and see their role in mentoring and supporting others wherever in their fostering journey.

At the end of Quarter three the number of children in care had continued to rise to 759. At the same time those placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) rose to 48

During this quarter 97 children became children in care for the first time in this quarter, of these 57 were placed in foster care and Kinship care arrangements. This compares to 73 children exiting care owing to their age or a permanent arrangement being sought with other carers. Therefore, the overall numbers have increased by 24 children. The percentage of children in foster placements is 69%.

The efforts of the service were in keeping with the sentiment of the John Lewis Christmas advert in 2022. The advert illustrated the lengths that foster carers will go to support children in care who invariably have experienced significant trauma. It emphasised the physical, social and huge emotional investment that is needed in caring for children. It reflected how people can make a difference and how the power of kindness can impact and affect the lives of so many others.

The fostering service continues to be engaged in developmental work with a strong focus on the core offer to foster carers and the ongoing development and practice of the Valuing Care Toolkit being an integral part of the foster carer's annual reviews, experience and Form F assessments. Further work is occurring in relation to embedding the Valuing Care Toolkit so that it is integrated in all Kinship and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments.

A highlight for this quarter relates to the Fostering Service being invited to attend the National Children and Adult Services conference in Manchester in November 2022 to support IMPOWER the headline sponsor in delivering a presentation and interactive session on 'Hope'. This involved Lincolnshire young people in care, care leavers and foster carers filming with IMPOWER to share their experiences of hope by sharing their lived experience of care and aspirations for the future.

In addition, a Lincolnshire foster carer was part of the plenary session at the conference and shared his lived experience as a foster carer. His contribution on behalf of all fostering households in Lincolnshire was phenomenal and sparked such interest on this national stage.

To further reinforce the valuable contribution the foster carer was awarded the IMPOWER Hero of 2022 which is an accolade he graciously received on behalf of himself and his colleague carers across the county of Lincolnshire.

Recruitment and Retention:

Within the whole of the fostering service, it is recognised that the recruitment and retention is the key to delivering an effective fostering service. Although there continues to be a national shortage of foster carers, Lincolnshire conduct targeted campaigns in an effort to maximise every opportunity to make local people more aware of the need for foster carers across the county. During this financial year to date, the service is performing well with new approvals in a context where nationally the demand for foster carers outstrips supply.

A recent survey of foster carers conducted by FosterWiki highlighted the serious financial pressures on the sector as the cost-of-living increase continues to mount. This echoes the findings of the annual survey where 13% of carer households considered resigning due to the financial constraints on their household. 69% of carer households considered that the financial package to carers should be reviewed, a further 13% confirmed that they were satisfied with the remuneration received.

As already indicated finance remains a high priority for the Council in terms of investment in fostering going forward and is something that remains at the core of the service strategy and review. The high rates of pay and recent increases or financial incentives to join independent fostering providers is creating a challenging marketplace for Local authorities to compete within.

Online platforms and creative, targeted marketing continue to provide the service with the flexibility and low-cost options of supporting part of the services' recruitment activity. The fostering service has since the pandemic used and will continue to include online options to increase capacity, accessibility, and convenience for Foster Carers and fostering applicants in the future. This includes online recruitment events and the fostering preparation course.

Those making formal or informal enquiries to foster are encouraged to attend information events. This is supported in the feedback and improvement of conversion to people going on to stage 1 of the recruitment process. The participation in recruitment information event remains higher than face to face event and can be delivered at a much lower cost, online events at this time will continue. During the next financial year, the service will explore pop up stalls in public areas.

The service has introduced recruitment events in the daytime as previously information events took place exclusively at night. Fostering staff recognise the importance of providing events that suit both working and non-working applicants although attendance was lower compared to evening events. This will be monitored to establish if this will be continued into the next financial year.

Replacing those who leave the fostering community during the year is essential. Understanding why carers choose to cease fostering in conjunction with the data from Ofsted allows the service to predict the percentage of carers likely to be lost in the year. This helps

the service shape and determine the key performance targets for recruitment to ensure the service are replacing lost households as well as growing their population.

The national average fostering agencies are expected to lose each year is approximately 10%, this is the number of fostering households Lincolnshire have been losing in recent years and the expected percentage of loss for 2022/23. The service aim to improve this by understanding more about why foster carers are choosing to leave fostering or transferring to another provider. This intelligence is collated within the exit interviews completed.

Retention of Foster Carers remains the most effective means of recruitment. Providing individual levels of support to our carers and specifically those newly approved remains crucial. Fostering need to continue to grow the population of foster carers given the number of children coming into care has been rising in recent years thus enabling more choice whilst not disputing that the reliance on the independent market in some instances.

An audit in relation to recruitment was completed by an external source on behalf of the Council during 2022 which has informed and shaped the strategy and best practice guidelines. The recruitment strategy is revised monthly, and performance reported to help understand and inform the actions and trajectory of activity. Key recommendations from the State of the Nation Report (Fostering Network, 2021) and the Care Review (DFE, 2022) have been taken into consideration in all activity and planning for the service.

The work continuing will closely monitor quality with a strong emphasis on good customer service and community. Initial results from the impact of changes in practice and processes can be seen through key performance indicators. Conversion rates from applying and approval has already seen a rise from 4-6% over the past 5 years to over 11% in December 2022.

Although conversion has improved across the service, it is important to explore the reasons why people become foster carers, their motivations and trying to understand better why people withdraw their interest. This helps the service to monitor, improve and understand the challenges the service face, support the development of quality information and customer experience. This quarter fostering has seen an increase of people completing an IEI but then choosing to proceed with an IFA due to the financial incentive.

In the latest annual survey foster carers were asked why they chose Lincolnshire as their fostering provider. The services' efforts have concentrated on establishing our provider as the choice for local people. The refer a friend scheme has received a lot of attention internally and the posts on social media/ discussions at the information event provide information on the huge amount of quality support offered to carers and their families. This has clearly been reflected in the results.

Results:

| Reason for choosing Lincolnshire | Result |
|---|---------------|
| It's the local choice | 73% |
| Recommendation | 11% |
| Support Package | 9% |
| Good Ofsted rating | 2% |
| Other | 5% |

The average national conversion rate in the UK for Local Authorities was 11% last year, this set the target for Lincolnshire's own performance. Lincolnshire County Council have successfully raised the conversion rate to meet this national benchmark although in the meantime the national average has fallen to 6%, with this in mind this makes the progress even more significant, superseding national trends and expectations. As the number of IEL's fall the conversion rate will help to secure approval for more of those applying.

Previously the service did find that almost half of those in stage 1 would change their mind about fostering and choose to withdraw, although the service has seen a 34% increase in retaining those in stage 1 due to applicant decision. An indication of the strong support offer and customer service that has developed.

Allocating earlier allows the service to complete the recruitment process in shorter timescales without shortening the stage 2 assessment time. The service is now approving carers 1-2 months earlier. This allows the Council to compete with independent providers that have in recent years completed their processes within 6 months, completing both stage 1 and stage 2 together.

A tiered support offer has been set out, which includes a stage 1 support package, stage 2 support package and then a support offer to all approved carers. This allows for a smoother transition to fostering for all applicants. This enables the service to support them to be better informed and equipped for the journey, whilst feeling and experiencing a level of support from the service. The intention is to support and boost their level of confidence in Lincolnshire as a fostering provider.

Work continues to develop a community hub approach across the county. The support forums continue to act as a way for Foster Carers to access support from other Foster Carers and children's service's teams. This is providing a more integrated approach to support. This is something that requires more promotion, so it's clearly understood more widely, and foster carers feel confident in accessing and understanding what is available.

The hub continues to be supported by the Foster Carer champions who have roles that cover responsibilities as 'Hub Links'. They also hold social groups and support with workshop delivery.

Participation in the different areas of the hub continues to increase. Assessed need is monitored to ensure that the right kind of support is identified and delivered. In the recent annual survey foster carers identified the top 5 areas of support as follows

| Type of support | Result of survey | Comparison to last year |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|
| The support and supervision they get from their SSW | 74% | +1% |
| Support from other foster carers in the community | 72% | +24% |
| Support from fostering duty desk | 46% | +19% |
| Training Offer and Workshops | 42% | -13% |
| Support from the Childs Social Worker | 40% | -5% |

A challenging time has shown to be the most likely reason Foster Carers consider leaving the service or spend time offline. This is a key area for attention, planning, action, and ongoing review for 2023/2024. Other key themes for retention include support to carers that are offline, new Foster Carers and staff retention.

The survey completed in December highlighted that 8% of foster carers felt unsupported. For the first time foster carers were able to provide their name and this has aided the service to understand the context and details. Although the remainder of the population felt they were supported most of the time it is important to understand the areas that require improvement partially impacting on the stability of placements and retention of fostering households.

Top areas for Improvements for support

| Type of support | Result of survey | Comparison to last year |
|--|------------------|-------------------------|
| Financial package | 69% | +52% |
| Support from your Childs Social Worker | 47% | -5% |
| Short breaks and Respite | 29% | -11% |

It is vital in terms of the services' self-evaluation and review that the findings from the survey are evaluated to help shape the operational planning and development of the recruitment and retention offer support offer moving forward.

Short Breaks and Respite was a campaign during quarter one of this year and the service have seen an increase in the number of approvals for respite foster carers. A targeted campaign for permanence has also generated a higher number of carers been approved for permanence this year.

Marketing:

During this quarter 52 Initial Enquiries of Interest (IEI) were received from the public enquiring about becoming a Foster Carer.

There have been 7 newly approved households in this quarter of the financial year. 19 fostering households have been recruited since April 2022.

On 31st December 2022 there were 27 open applications in stages 1 or 2, 13 of these are expected to attend panel this financial year. Finishing the year on 32 approvals.

Advertising:

In Lincolnshire, the service continually reviews the marketing strategy and continuously develop the approach as being a local option for carers wanting to care for Lincolnshire children.

During this quarter and for the whole year our objective is to draw upon the strengths of carers joining an Ofsted rated Outstanding authority who work collaboratively to find local placements within a local community for local children.

The continued energy in advertising is to ensure that the objective is understood that Lincolnshire is further establishing itself as a local option.

The last three months have had a continuous and busy approach to identifying Lincolnshire as a number one choice. The efforts are detailed below:

October 2022

- During the month of October, our fostering paid adverts were shown a total of 27,330 times to over 14,680 local people on social media. Our page posts were shown a total of 19,570 times between our 1,300 followers and their friends.
Our social media account was searched a total of 310 times that month and brought us 10 new followers.
This is an increase from the previous month, as well as from previous years, this was positive when considering that the advertisement was stopped for over 2 weeks due to a technical issue.

- October marked the start of our Permanence campaign described below.
- We established “Myth Busting Monday” on our social media, which shares either a 10 second video or a graphic created in house regarding misconceptions about fostering. These posts reach on average 320 people each week.
- October “son’s and daughters’ month”. The service openly thanked Foster Carer’s birthchildren across our social media platforms and in the monthly newsletter for their support and role within the community as well as provided them with an opportunity to share their experiences. This allowed fostering to promote Lincolnshire’s offer to families with birthchildren to over 2,000 local people.



- Promoted refer a friend with current households on the virtual chat groups and the fostering monthly newsletter. The majority of the IEI’s received during the month have confirmed that they originally enquired about fostering after hearing about it from other members of the community. This indicates the refer a friend campaign was successful.
- The fostering service collected food during their service day to donate to a local food bank (Lincoln Food Bank). A large amount of food was donated, and the whole service was thanked publicly from their social media accounts which was viewed by over 5,000 people.
- Fostering have built a relationship with the county’s biggest network of volunteers (Voluntary Centre Services). They have agreed to help fostering promote the service by including information on their online platforms and newsletters. So far, 2 volumes have been sent to volunteers across the county with information about the service.

November 2022

- During the month of November, our fostering paid adverts were shown a total of 120,083 times to over 56,672 local people on social media, an increase of over 286% from the previous month. Our page posts were shown a total of 56,176 times between our 1,300 followers and their friends. Our social media account was searched a total of 505 times that month and generated 10 new followers on Facebook and 7 on Instagram.
- New advertisements have been created regarding Lincolnshire's offer to foster carers for social media, which has been well received by the public with a record number of likes and shares.

FOSTER FOR LINCOLNSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE

What we offer:

- ✓ High quality training supported by our award winning Caring2Learn initiative
- ✓ Competitive financial package
- ✓ 24/7 professional support
- ✓ Short breaks (AKA Respite)
- ✓ Support for birth children
- ✓ Rewards and celebrations
- ✓ And more!

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- Fostering campaign running on Lincs FM added one new advert focused on permanence. Extra airtime was added in November until the end of March 2023.
- Joint working with Schools, District Councils, local businesses to help us promote fostering within their social media forums.
- Attended the Virtual Schools and Caring2Learn's schools' awards, promoting fostering and providing a physical and digital copy of a banner that included 10 different things schools and school staff could do to help their local fostering community and increase their visibility. Good connections were created at the event that will aid promotion of the service soon.
- Article on Int Comms within the County Council advertising the information event in November.
- Fostering held a first morning information event which attempted to improve attendance and accommodate public demands. Although it had low attendance, this

was well received by those present. Fostering will be trying one more morning session in the future and analysing the results.

- Promoted, the refer a friend scheme with current households via social media, WhatsApp groups and in the newsletter.
- John Lewis' Christmas advert was launched at the end of the month shining a light on fostering, it followed the story of a man learning to skateboard, to establish some common ground with their new "foster daughter".

To make the most of this opportunity, Lincolnshire fostering:

- Created social media adverts in line with "The beginner" theme that specifically targeted those who liked John Lewis' advert.
- Created Email Marketing for local businesses (over 25 different establishments) connecting our message with "the beginner" to inform them about what they can do to help their local fostering community ahead of the festive period.
- Contacted the John Lewis and Partners marketing team and local stores. It was agreed they will provide support, raising awareness in local branches by the end of February.
- Share the story with our existing group of foster carers via social media, WhatsApp and the newsletter, encouraging them to share their personal stories, which allowed us to increase our visibility and use their experiences as promotional material.
- Shared initiatives and results with other Local Authorities to obtain new ideas and compare outcomes.
- Attended Lincolnshire BBC Radio to promote our community, offer to foster carers and recruitment needs.

November received the highest number of IEI's of 2022. This is believed to be related to John Lewis's advert and our effort to exploit the attention it has received.

December 2022:

- During the month of December, our fostering paid adverts were shown a total of 212,435 times to over 98,784 local people on social media, an increase of over 74% from the previous month. Our page posts were shown a total of 99,326 times between our 1,300 followers and their friends.

Our social media account was searched a total of 1500 times that month and brought us 31 new followers on Facebook, a new monthly record since the opening of the account.

- New advertisements with a festive theme were created for social media.



- Joint working with Schools, District Councils, local businesses to help us promote fostering within their social media forums.
- The fostering service collected food during their last meeting of the year to donate to a local food bank (Lincoln Food Bank). A large amount of food was donated, and the whole service was thanked publicly from their social media accounts, this was seen by over 5,000 people.
- A new marketing campaign consisting of advertising the service on the rear side of local Stagecoach buses was agreed. We will initially use 4 different busses across the county during the month of February 2023.
- December's fostering information event welcomed 12 potential new households and received good feedback.

- 15 team members attended Lincoln's Santa Fun Run & Walk 2022, representing the service. As a result, the service was mentioned by the organisers over 3 times at the event (attended by over 1.2K people) as well as being promoted on their social media. We were given the opportunity to talk at the event for about 5 minutes, allowing us to increase our visibility and reach. This event also caught the attention of BBC, who talked about the service, the service then featured as a headline story on the news later that evening.



Permanence Campaign:

Attracting long term foster carers remains a priority for the service. Fostering have developed four areas of activity in attracting new and existing carers to this type of fostering. This includes attracting new carers to permanent fostering, supporting those currently in the assessment period to consider permanent fostering, explore possible matches prior to approval, hold family finders' events and support and encourage existing households to consider new permanent links or a change in approval.

Profiles are created for children seeking permanent foster homes, this includes anonymised profiles. These anonymised profiles are shared on the Council's social media platforms as part of our marketing campaigns to attract new carers, this includes the Caring2Learn closed Facebook page. The profiles are also readily available in the foster carers google drive and are shared with fostering applicants during the assessment period.

Hi, we are Jack and John!

We are two siblings from Lincolnshire aged 5 and 6 years old.

About Jack:
I am a very loving young man who loves to spend time with the adults around me. I enjoy playing with my toys, and I will often say my favourite room is the living room because I can get all my toys out!
I live with my brother, and this is something that makes me very happy. We have a very good bond and spend a lot of our time together.
I love spending time outdoors playing sports, playing catch, looking at the fish or going to the park. I also really enjoy reading, and my favourite book is She Rex!

About John:
I am described as an extremely lovable young man who has a great sense of humour and loves having a laugh and joke with those around me.
I really enjoy cars, especially my ambulance. I have a lot of toy cars at home which I play with, and I will ask you all about yours!
I also enjoy going to the park with my brother or staying in reading. If I can have a book to read, I will be happy for hours!

We need carers who can support our relationship. We love each other a lot and we always want to be together, but sometimes we argue and that requires adult intervention to help us both.

If you feel you could offer a loving and stable home to Jack and John where they can live for the rest of their childhood and thrive, please message us in here or email Fostering@lincolnshire.gov.uk

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Hi, I'm Jack

I am 11 years old and I am from Louth!

People often say that I am a very talkative, cheerful and funny boy. I love spending time with other people, and I also like to keep myself constantly occupied. I am always busy and I love it!

I really enjoy spending time outdoors playing football, Pokémon hunting or spending time in the garden.
Being indoors can be very fun too! I love watching TV, playing video games and listening to music. I am often singing, and I even know the words to many popular songs. Classic or new tunes, I like them all!

I don't like trying new foods, and I am a slow eater, but I am trying to be better. I also struggle sometimes with rules or people telling me 'no'.

I need carers who can be resilient and make me feel included. I also need some firm rules and boundaries to help me learn and develop.

If you feel you could offer Jack a loving and stable home where he can live for the rest of his childhood and thrive, please message us in here or email Fostering@lincolnshire.gov.uk

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Hi, we are Jim and Angela.

We are 8 and 9 years old, and we are from Lincolnshire!

About Jim:
I am a very energetic boy who likes getting a lot of attention. People also say that I can be very funny and that I have a great sense of humour.
I enjoy spending time outdoors exploring and playing on my own, with my sister or with other kids. Going on trips is always extra fun!
I also spend a lot of time colouring and drawing as I really enjoy arts and crafts.
I sometimes find it difficult to express my emotions, I need carers who can help me identify what I am feeling and express it better. This is something I am already working on, and people say I am doing better!

About Angela:
People say I am a bright, kind and chaty young girl as I love telling people about my day and my friends at school.
I have a very close relationship with my little brother and I love spending time with him. I love being a big sister and helping him when I can, but sometimes I need to be reminded that I shouldn't speak for him so often.
I love playing with my dolls and teddies when I am at home, but I also enjoy spending time in the garden playing on my trampoline or observing wildlife.
I really like arts and dancing, so I often spend hours painting or dancing. I have now learnt a lot of ballet positions for my arms and feet!

We need carers who can continue our routines as we thrive on them. We also need carers who can help us explore and understand our emotions and feelings in a healthy way. We both love getting attention from our carers and spending lots of time talking, so we need carers who can be patient and who make us feel listened to.

If you feel you could offer a loving and stable home to Jim and Angela where they can live for the rest of their childhood and thrive, please message us in here or email Fostering@lincolnshire.gov.uk

The campaign page on the Lincs Fm radio site features, information about permanent fostering along with the Council's webpage which has a page dedicated to this campaign.

Family Finding:

Family Finders has continued to meet monthly to consider all children with a care plan for long-term fostering who do not already have a long-term placement identified. This includes children in residential settings that have a trajectory to return to a fostering home.

Over this third quarter five additional children have been referred to Family Finders and there has been two children (a sibling group) removed. There are now twenty-four children currently seeking long term placements, twelve of these are singleton placements and there are six sets of two siblings.

The sibling group that has moved to their long term family was as a direct result of the Permanence event that took place in July 2022. The carers attended and expressed an interest in the siblings during their stage 2 assessment. Once the couple were approved at panel an information sharing meeting took place and introductions with the children could take place quite swiftly. This ensured that carers that expressed an interest in fostering children on a permanent basis were matched appropriately with children that needed a permanent home. The team have a second sibling group currently in the midst of introductions with their carers. This has needed to take place at a slower pace to ensure a successful transition.

A Placement Support Worker (PSW) now takes a lead on Family Finders and when it is felt necessary children and young people are allocated a PSW that can support them through this transition process continuing to offer support and guidance to both their task centred and permanent carers and to support the young person during this period of uncertainty.

During this quarter Family Finders have been working hard to update the children's profiles. It is essential that up to date, factual information is included within the profile.

Fostering prepared for the fostering permanence event that took place on 17 January 2023. This was a positive event and will be updated at the next Corporate Parenting meeting.

Family Finding review meetings, are held monthly when necessary and are chaired by Senior Managers the role of the review meeting is to consider children where no suitable match has been identified after a three-month period. This is to ensure there is no delay for children. During this quarter, four children were referred to this process with reviews held in both November and December.

The Permanence Campaign is on-going and includes a variety of advertising, With the use of social media platforms including, radio, local publications and the use of the fostering Facebook page and Instagram. The Instagram page is utilized by the service as part of the recruitment drive. The County Council fostering web page continues to provide information on long-term Fostering and the support available to Foster Carers.

Training and Development:

The success of the face to face and virtual offer was recently affirmed with 100% of those taking part in the annual survey of fostering households stating, they wanted our training offer to continue to have the option to attend online or in person.

The fostering training offer remains under review and alongside the scheduled events the service has planned a workshop around supporting children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). This has been requested by several carers and the number of those booking on and taking part has been positive. This is a workshop that the service will hold again in the future given how warmly received this was.

Other courses have been planned in response to data and information concerning placement breakdowns and unplanned moves, this includes therapeutic crisis intervention. Feedback from the therapeutic crisis intervention has been positive and carers have felt able to go away and put this into practice. Placement Support Workers (PSW) and Advanced Practitioners have also completed the training, so they are able to advocate this practice, cascade it throughout the team through practice and development workshops and support foster carers to put it into practice in the home.

Foster carers training programmes have also been considered are part of the support packages developed, this includes the 6-week therapeutic parenting course, delivered jointly by foster carer champion and PSW. This includes 6 one to one sessions with a PSW to support implementing the learning and reflecting on children needs and behaviours. As a group learning session and form of support it encourages networking between households. This has been successful and in response to its success this will run more often throughout the year, including twilight sessions as requested by foster carers.

It is important to also recognise the huge number of courses and workshops that are available and delivered by partner agencies and organisations. The service has shared information with carers of learning opportunities they can access through health services, the fostering network, and The National Association of Therapeutic Parenting. These expand the amount of learning opportunities to support personal and professional development without the use of additional service resource and finances, avoids duplication and helps to build relationships across services which was identified by the community as a priority for development.

The ongoing personal and professional development of foster carers and their families remain a key priority, equipping households with the knowledge, skills, and practices to meet children's needs. It is also important to consider how the service better prepare families for fostering. Lincolnshire believe well prepared households will experience a smoother

transition and are less likely to leave fostering early in their fostering journeys. Applicants have access to training and development throughout the assessment period. Recruitment have seen an increased number of applicants accessing the offer and booking mandatory training in advance of approval. This early investment in their journey is having a clear impact on the conversion to approval.

It is important in training and development to also ensure our more experienced foster carers and those that have attended many of the courses on offer continue to have access to further learning and development. The service has specifically identified the 6-day Social Pedagogy and 2-day Restorative Practice to address this objective.

16 courses were delivered during this quarter with 306 attendees taking part from fostering households. This is an increased number compared with 2nd quarter.

Training Courses:

In this quarter the training schedule has continued to be delivered to assist the training and development of Foster Carers.

Various courses have been available including:

- First Aid/ paediatric training
- Safeguarding
- Safe Care
- Fostering Preparation Course
- Foster Carer Induction
- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention

Practice Workshops:

- Introducing Social Pedagogy
- Introduction to Restorative Practice
- Introduction to mindfulness, Creating Calm
- Introduction to Trauma Awareness
- Supporting sleep, nightmares, and night terrors.
- Supporting grief, loss, and positive endings
- Relational repair
- Fostering Weekly therapeutic parenting Programme (Caring2gether, 6 weeks)

E-Learning:

LSCP eLearning courses are still being accessed and Foster Carers have attended.

- Safeguarding
- Safeguarding refresher
- Hidden harm
- Covid 19
- Think Safe be safe
- Equality and inclusion
- E-safety

Learning Homes:

The toolkit for new carers which includes the standards from the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDs) is now embedded and common practice within the service.

Currently there are eighty-four foster homes and five residential settings that have achieved their Learning Homes Award. Due to all new carers completing the award within twelve months of approval as part of the TSD; the service is seeing the number of awarded homes to continue to rise.

Celebration Event

The annual event has been arranged for March 2023 and will take place at Hemswell Court. The event recognises the contribution and achievements of our fostering community. Foster carers will receive their long service awards, a voucher and lapel badge. The voucher and lapel badge are given to carers as a token of gratitude and was positively received last year.

Other services such as FAST, Children in Care, Independent Reviewing Officers, Adoption and the Virtual School will have the opportunity to recognise carers for their contributions and impact on outcomes for children.

The service will also formally introduce new foster carers to the community, thanking them for choosing Lincolnshire as their preferred provider.

Kinship:

The initial consideration for any child or young person who may need to be accommodated by the Local Authority is always to prioritise and ensure extensive exploration of the family

network. This is a custom and practice within the Local Authority and part of the care planning for all children.

The Government's manifesto committed to review the children's social care system which was launched in March 2021. As part of this independent review of children's social care, the author Josh MacAlister reminds us of the significant value of Kinship placements the author in May 2022 cited the following:

"For some children, care will always be the best option and Chapters Five and Six of this report set out how we can transform the care system. However, many children should and could safely– with the right help – remain within their family network rather than enter care.

Growing up within a family network means retaining a strong sense of identity, culture and place, which young people have told the review is often lost or significantly diluted through care. A child living with their grandparents, aunt or uncle is unlikely to have to rely on social workers to recount their life story, nor grow up with carers who have very different family or cultural values.

There are already thousands of grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters who care for their family members. While foster and residential care will come with an end date, with young people often having to set out in the world alone, staying within a family network, usually known as kinship care, is significantly more likely to mean children grow up with love, and retain those loving relationships throughout their whole life.

As a Local Authority the service fully embrace and support the concept and practice of Kinship Care. It is recognised that this group of carers will often be supporting their own children and families whilst affording care to those children in care who have experienced trauma. Fostering recognise the different variations to kinship care and work collaboratively with all households akin to any other approved foster carer. This serves to reinforce the value of the carers and as an agency children's services work cohesively and sensitively to support both children and their carers.

Practice Supervisors and Social Workers from within the service work jointly with other social care staff to ensure that all family and their networks are engaged in the care planning process where it is deemed to be safe and, in the child/ren's best interests.

Practice Supervisors in both locality teams and fostering along with all Social Workers recognise the importance of relationship-based practice which is the foundation for working with children and families. We are committed to supporting and enabling kinship carers to provide care for children and young people who have experienced trauma.

In Lincolnshire, the children’s teams continue to work proactively in identifying the family networks by completing thorough viability assessments and having early conversations with Kinship Practice Supervisors to support the next steps on assessments.

There are sound working relationships established between Fostering and the children’s teams, regular discussions and joint supervisions take place and are standard practice. These proactive measures support and improve care planning for children and young people and supports the reduction in placement moves by identifying key supports for both the children and their prospective carers, by identifying the right carer at the right time.

Between the 1st October 2022 and 31st December 2023 the following data reflects the work undertaken during this period:

| Number of Referrals | SGO | Reg.24 /SGO | Reg. 24 / Connected Person | Private Fostering Including Ukraine | Statutory Checks/CAO |
|---------------------|-----|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 58 | 12 | 24 | 11 | 7 (includes 2 YP from Ukraine) | 3 |
| 51 | | | | | |

The service has seen an increase in the number of referrals when compared with the last quarterly report. These figures continue to demonstrate the Local Authority’s efforts to secure kinship placements for children and reflect the ongoing improvement in practice in exploring and assessing children and young people’s network. Both the children’s teams and the court arena continue to ensure all family networks are explored, and alternative placements are seen as the last resort.

Overall, there has been a rise in the work including the children’s placements under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and subsequent amendments, which progressed to Special Guardianship Orders (SGO’s). There has been an increase in the number of Reg 24 placement being made and placements being tested out and prior to an SGO being granted. This is in line with the Children’s Social Care Report dated May 2022, Josh MacAlister. This reflects a practice of planning for permanence for this cohort of children.

For statutory checks, these are undertaken when the children’s social work teams are completing assessments of family members for private law orders such as Child Arrangement Orders or Special Guardianship Orders. The circumstances in which the assessments are being completed outside of public law proceedings, or when the children are not children in care. The number of these has also remained similar since the last quarter.

Further expansion of Private Fostering Regulations in relation to Ukraine children and Young People only

In anticipation of the Government's response following the invasion of Ukraine the Homes for Ukraine Scheme commenced in July 2022. This has involved processing applications from eligible children under the age of 18 who have already applied through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to come to the UK without a parent or guardian in carefully defined circumstances.

- Within 24 hours of a child's arrival the council should carry out an initial welfare visit.
- The council will give the child information in Ukrainian and Russian about how to raise any concerns, and how they have a duty to help them if they believe they are at risk.

With regards to Private fostering assessments, there has been a rise to 7 referrals in the last quarter, from 5 for the last quarter. This has included the 2 Private Fostering Assessments of Hosts in relation to Ukraine children and young people. Overall, the service is seeing a steadiness in the number of assessments requested which falls in line with Government processing Ukrainian cases.

Staying Put:

During this third quarter, the number of young people in Staying Put arrangements has risen to 46. Of these 46 young people six are attending university, 31 are in further education, three are in employment (including one in the Armed Forces), one is on an Apprenticeship and two are on the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme.

The remaining three are currently NEET but are being supported to actively seek employment or learning opportunities with additional support from the Leaving Care service. Several of the young people in further education or at university have part-time jobs or are engaged in volunteering opportunities.

During this quarter three young people left the Staying Put scheme. One moved in with their birth family and the other two young people moved on into supported accommodation supported by Adult Social care.

Staying Put remains an active part of the fostering service provision and continues to receive a steady flow of referrals from children in care social workers. Refresher sessions on Staying Put processes have been held to ensure the referral process is understood and referrals made

in a timely manner. There are currently 21 young people waiting to join the scheme when they turn 18.

This quarter saw an increase in the number of young people in Staying Put compared to the previous two quarters. Approximately half of the young people who are on a Staying Put arrangement were previously in a kinship fostering arrangement.

The number of out of county Staying Put arrangements has risen again this quarter. There are currently five out of county arrangements with one in Leicester, one in Mansfield one in Scarborough, one in Plymouth and one in Birmingham.

If a Staying Put arrangement is at risk, the fostering service continue to work alongside Staying Put Providers, the young person, and the Leaving Care Service to resolve issues and put solutions in place to stabilise the placement. Joint working continues to be one of the keys to the scheme's continued success.

Conclusion:

During the year the service have continued to see the demand on placement requests owing to the increasing numbers of children in care. There have continued to be pressures on placement availability yet despite this most children are placed within the Lincolnshire County Council approved foster carers. There has and will continue to be a reliance on external resources on some occasions, yet the hope and aspiration is that this will reduce.

There are many variables that can affect the match of a child with a carer and the strengths based approach together with the Valuing Care toolkit enables those searches to take place and give the children the best possible chance to achieve positive and child focussed outcomes.

The service and Council work hard to recruit and retain foster carers and this year to date the service are above the national trend for conversions. The early offer and tiered approach to involve applicants commencing this journey has been warmly received and hopefully delivers a key valuable message from the outset. Despite this the service take nothing for granted and have some key challenges going forward which hopefully will be eased by the continued retention payments and a review of payments for the next financial year.

The festive period was celebrated by many and the children in care, their carers and fostering households were all cordially invited to come together and celebrate together. This coupled with the accolade from Manchester and the gradual easing of staffing challenges meant that the service has ended the year in a good position.

During this quarter supervision and support to carers has been ongoing and invaluable in terms of maintaining best practice standards and improving placement stability. Many fostering households continue to make the difference and have despite the enormous challenges in recent years, demonstrated their commitment to the Lincolnshire children in

their care. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis upon carers and their fostering families is fully appreciated and understood hence the Council's attention to this matter.

The number of Children in Care remains significantly higher during the same period last year and the increase in this figure and reduced bed capacity results in pressures on the placements available and the matches achieved. The focus on the fostering service and wider colleagues is to continue to monitor and intervene early to prevent a placement breakdown and re-establish stability in the best interests of the child.

The service continues to be heartened by the interest from the Lincolnshire public in the fostering role and the service hope to secure an increased trend in registrations of interest and applications going forward. The efforts of foster carers, staff and the community in generating interest and delivering high quality services is a continued achievement.

The transformation programme will continue to support the service in maintaining and developing the core offer for fostering households. This remains a key strategic approach to maintain and further enhance an effective and ambitious service that continue to want to grow their caring community and give children the opportunity to live their best lives in a loving family environment.

Deborah Crawford

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