



Lincolnshire Fostering Service

Quarterly Report
January - March 2023

Quarter Four Fostering Report 2022/2023:

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

This is the fourth 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 which 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 and rate of inflation the service is reviewing and considering how the Council can best support foster carers in these challenging times.

Reviewing fostering allowances in the context of a broader support offer is critical in terms of supporting Lincolnshire fostering in undertaking this valuable and integral role in maintaining local children with local fostering families.

For Lincolnshire to be the carers provider of choice it is vital that allowances including the retention element, in the context of a strong supervision, support and development offer are key given the rigorous competition from other fostering agencies within the region.

The fostering 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.

Given the economic challenges the authority supported fostering families with recognised discount cards that are compatible with what is available to Lincolnshire County Council Social Care staff alongside all other employees. This affords an additional benefit for carers 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.

It is recognised within the service and fostering community that the retention and ongoing recruitment of foster carers continues to be an absolute priority. Whilst remuneration, supervision and support are strong components of the Lincolnshire offer, the growing emergence of the fostering community online is one aspect of the support offer that cannot be replicated or underrepresented.

This community virtual support offer adds another dimension to what carers in Lincolnshire do well and how they appreciate and care for one another. This incentivises members and pools together a phenomenal amount of experience, advice, guidance and support for new carers and those more experienced ones too.

The emphasis on recruitment and retention remains a service priority and at the end of the year the service have been privileged to see a further number of households join the fostering community. This is important given the continued number of children in care and the national and local diminishing number of foster carers.

The Fostering Network, the UK's leading fostering charity lead on innovation in the field of recruitment and retention of foster carers and support agencies with research, new approaches and how agencies can improve the conversion rate of people who express an interest in fostering getting through. In conjunction to this, and as part of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England, the Fostering Network have elicited views concerning the main priorities of recruiting more foster carers given the continuing national urgency in the sector.

At the end of Quarter four the number of children in care had fallen to 723 from 759 at the end of the previous quarter. At the same time those placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) slightly decreased to 45.

During this quarter 51 children became children in care for the first time, of these 28 were placed in foster care and Kinship care arrangements. This compares to 83 children exiting care owing to their age, permanent arrangement being sought with other carers or exiting care and returning to family based on a current and favourable assessment. Therefore, the overall numbers have decreased by 37 children. The percentage of children in foster placements is 68%.

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 which is an integral part of the foster carer's annual reviews, experience and Form F assessments. The Valuing Care Toolkit implementation into all Kinship and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) assessments is underway in an effort to ensure that the support and skills set of the carers are suitable matched to the needs of the child given the lifelong arrangements that form part of these assessments.

The Fostering Service eagerly awaited the Government's strategy and response to the Care Review reforms- Stable Homes, Built on Love that was published in February 2023. This implementation of the pillars of reform will undoubtedly address the financial support to fostering households together with investment in national recruitment and retention programmes with a focus on local need in recognition this differs across the country.

In addition to the above the Department of Education accepted the recommendation from the care review to regionalise placement commissioning through the test and piloting of Regional Care Co-operatives. This principally which would serve to address the insufficiency, excess profits and poor outcomes for children who are placed a distance away or where placement availability results in instability.

Whilst the concept of regional working is not new given the introduction of Regional Adoption Agencies some years ago it is yet to be seen and understood how these national restorative actions will be implemented in an effort to deliver best practice for children in care and the valuable resources caring for them.

Recruitment and Retention:

Across the fostering service, recruitment and retention is understood as key in delivering an effective fostering service. It is well publicised that there continues to be a national shortage of foster carers and we are not untouched in Lincolnshire by that reality. As a forward thinking and innovative service, we still continue to struggle to meet the demand of placements in our own in house resource. Lincolnshire are maximising every opportunity to make local people more aware of the need for foster carers and recognise Lincolnshire fostering service as part of their community and their local choice and provider when considering fostering. During this financial year, the service has performed well with new approvals in a context where nationally the demand for foster carers outstrips supply.

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. Our information events have been advertised through paid adds on social media across Lincolnshire in targeted advertisement. The participation in recruitment information event remains higher than face to face events and can be delivered at a much lower cost. Online events will continue at this time but will be reviewed . This decision is supported in the feedback and improvement of conversion to people going on to stage 1 of the recruitment process.

The service has organised several pop-up stalls for the first quarter of the next financial year in public areas for increased visibility and the intention to build better relationships with local businesses.

The service had introduced recruitment events in the daytime these have been poorly attended and some applicants have been unable to attend an event in a timely way due to not been available, due to pop up stalls the information events have returned to evening times.

Ongoing analysis of the process and performance of becoming a foster carer, motivations, and barriers to becoming approved and how we can make improvements has supported improvements and developments in our application, assessment, and approval process.

Replacing those who leave the fostering community during the year is essential. Every year we expect to lose carers, some of these are unavoidable as carers come to the end of their fostering carers and retire or people’s circumstances change, or they experience ill health. Our focus remains on learning from those we lose that could have been avoided but also understanding more about why people choose to remain.

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 needs 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.

During the last annual survey, the service asked carers for the first time to identify who their Supervising Social Workers (SSW) were, this allowed us to better understand themes in practice, supervision groups. 66% chose to provide details of their SSW. The information that is identifiable by supervision group has been sent to the Practice Supervisor (PS) so that any learning, compliments or challenges could be restoratively addressed. The service wants to ensure the feedback is used to inform personal and professional development and celebrate great practice; the feedback has been discussed in supervisions with staff.

Through analysing the annual survey data, fostering was able to determine how supported carers felt in terms of the type of fostering they offered. Those carers feeling the most supported in their role were long term and task centred foster carers. It will be important through continued consultation to understand further the reasons why these groups feel the most supported and other groups report to feel less so. We cannot rule out simply these are the carers with the highest level of involvement with the service and likely to have the most needs.

The group that reports to feel supported only some of the time are largely represented in the respite group, although the area they feel needs to improve the most is financial. When considering this more closely, this is largely due to the way financial payments are reported on and the breakdown of their payments not being in a remittance slip rather than the support they receive from the service personnel or the standards they have to adhere too.

Although we are concerned about the number of carers that are unsure about their longer-term commitment to fostering or are planning on leaving the service according to this survey, we should see an improvement in retention over the next 3 years.

Do you think you will still be fostering in 3 years' time?	2021/22	2022/23	Difference
Yes	55%	62%	+7%
No	8%	5%	-3%
Maybe	36%	33%	-3%

The annual survey completed and reported on in January 2023 reported that 69% of our foster carers participating in the survey felt the financial package needed to improve. The fostering service anticipates increasing allowances from 1st April 2023 and in line with the government's recommended 12 % increase. The service has also reviewed its expenses payments and the collective feedback is foster carers is positive.

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 (Department for Education, 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. 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 12% in March 2023.

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. We have now introduced feedback forms that are sent to applicants at various stages of the process to learn about their journey and understand the reasons why they withdraw and continue. The service will begin to report on this next financial year thus providing us with richer data to inform our strategies and processes whilst maximising productivity.

Over the last 12-months work has continued 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 investment in a community approach to support is clearly felt by those engaged with this being reported as a one of the strongest parts of the support offer in the last annual survey.

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. Social groups are an area for development, foster carers have requested more face to face groups which will be planned and facilitated across Lincolnshire in the new financial year.

Marketing:

During this quarter 49 Initial Enquiries of Interest (IEI) were received from the public enquiring about becoming a foster carer.

There have been 12 newly approved households in this quarter of the financial year. 30 fostering households have been recruited since April 2022, completing the total for 2022/23.

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:

January- March 2023

- During January we concentrated on our permanence campaign, sharing profiles on social media of children seeking long term placements.
- “Myth Busting Monday” on our social media has continued, 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.



- Promoted refer a friend with virtual chat groups and the newsletter. We have had 3 approvals this year that have come from existing fostering households.
- Advertisements have been used 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.



- Additional airtime was purchased with Lincs FM and this airtime was used with a focus on permanence.
- Article on Int Comms within the County Council advertising the information event in January.
- We agreed a new marketing campaign for advertising the service, using 4 different buses across the county during the month of February 2023.



- Libraries across Lincolnshire agreed and were provided with free Lincolnshire fostering service bookmarks, they are also displaying posters in their public areas.
- Posters were distributed to children centres and NHS buildings for display.
- An advert was created for Lincolnshire Life website for 3 months, running until April 2023.

Permanence:

Attracting long term foster carers remains a priority for the service. Profiles and campaigns 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 the 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 and at the preparation course. The campaign ad is played daily on Lincs FM and there is a dedicated page on the councils.gov webpage.

The profiles on social media create a lot of attention and are our most liked and shared posts. This is an area for development within the next financial year with paid adverts being developed.

Hi, we are Sarah and Skylar!
We are two sisters aged 12 and 9, and we are from Louth!

About Sarah:
People say I am a very lovable young girl who loves spending time with others. I wear glasses and I have difficulty hearing, but I never let that stop me! I like spending time on my computer and reading books in my spare time, but my favourite thing to do is going to the theatre. I am really excited as I will be attending a theatre group very soon!
I also enjoy spending time with my siblings and going to the youth club in my village.

About Skylar:
I am told I am a very confident young girl with a beautiful smile and a cheeky sense of humour.
Like my sister, I also have hearing aids that help me hear better.
I love to be outside on my scooter, bike, trampoline, or swing set. When I am at home, I love to cook and bake, and adults say I make delicious recipes! I also enjoy watching movies and doing crafts. I can be very creative, and I enjoy painting using lots of colours.
Bed time can be a very difficult time for me and I am still learning to be less stubborn and more honest, especially around that time. I need carers who can be patient but firm with me.

We need foster carers who can spend time with us giving us stability, love, and affection, while supporting us to grow more independent. Our carers also need to be supportive of our family time, especially with our other siblings.

If you feel you could offer a loving and stable home to Sarah and Skylar where they can live for the rest of their childhood and thrive, please speak to your SSW or email caring2learn@lincolnshire.gov.uk

HI, I'M TIFFANY
I AM 10 YEARS OLD AND I AM FROM LINCOLN

GET TO KNOW ME
I am described as being funny as I like to make people laugh, and I enjoy cuddles and one-to-one time with my carers.
I like to do lots of fun things like going to the park, having activity days out and going to the beach. I also like playing with my dolls, having stories read to me, and painting and drawing. I also enjoy going to brownies every week.

MORE ABOUT ME
I love spending time with adults, and I like getting lots of attention. Sometimes I will seek attention if others are getting more, as I struggle sharing things.
I will tell you if there's something I don't like. Sometimes if I'm not happy and things aren't going my way I will get angry and try to control things.
I also like to be included and making decisions, but only with simple options as otherwise I might get overwhelmed.

WHAT I NEED:
Because of what has happened to me in the past, it is hard for me to understand positive relationships and what is appropriate.
I need carers who are patient and understanding of my past and how this affects my behaviour.
I also need them to help me build my self-esteem, and understand and manage my own emotions.

If you feel you could offer a loving and stable home to Tiffany where she can live for the rest of her childhood and thrive, please speak with your SSW or email Caring2Learn@Lincolnshire.gov.uk

Hi, I'm Chloe
I am 11 years old and I am from Lincoln!

People often describe me as a confident and chatty girl. They say I have a cheeky smile that lights up the room!
They also say I am kind, smart and thoughtful.

I like being busy and doing lots of different activities. I am very sporty, so I enjoy running, going for walks and gymnastics.
I also attend Girlguides and I enjoy spending time outdoors going to the park or simply spending time in the garden.
I also love animals, and I would love to have my own pet one day!

I need a carer who can show me patience and understanding, and who can provide stability and put in place firm boundaries.

My favourite things are pretty clothes (especially if they are pink or with leopard print), days out, and spending time with family.

If you feel you could offer Chloe a loving and stable home where she can live for the rest of her childhood and thrive, please talk to your SSW or email caring2learn@lincolnshire.gov.uk

FosteringLincs
Lincolnshire Fostering Service

Campaigns are used to attract new carers, this year the service have approved 6 new carers for permanence. Supporting applicants considering long-term fostering early in the assessment process remains a priority, by engaging them early in family finders' events, matching and training.

In addition to attracting new carers, the service recognises that people's circumstances change, and Supervising Social Workers continue to have conversations about different types of fostering keeping long-term fostering on the agenda. Fostering households are kept up to date on long term events and can attend these to explore their interest and options.

Family Finding:

It has been an exciting and productive time quarter within Family Finders. The service 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 household.

Over this final quarter two additional children have been referred to Family Finders and there has been one child removed as his current carers has agreed to offer a permanent placement to him. There are now twenty-five children currently seeking long term placements, eleven of these are singleton placements and there are seven sets of two siblings.

One of these sets of siblings have moved to their permanent family and are likely to be removed from Family Finder shortly. The transition has gone well for these children and regular support meetings, additional training opportunities and the support of the Placement Support Worker (PSW) has been crucial in providing stability and consistency for the family.

On the 17th January 2023 a Family Finding permanence event took place in Woodall Spa. The format was very similar to previous events. Current carers and those in the assessment stages

that are interested in offering permanence alongside those respite carers that are interested in making a long lasting, connections and relationship with a young person are invited to attend the event to learn more about the children on Family Finders. An experienced set of carers also shared their positive experience of supporting a young person transitioning to their care from a residential setting.

In total eleven sets of carers who were interested in permanence attended the event to learn more about the young people. This was a mix of carers already approved and those who at the time were still being assessed with a panel date of February/ March 2023.

During the event five sets of children were highlighted and presentations given about these children. The presentations are jointly given by the child's social worker, foster carer and placement support worker (where applicable). The Valuing Care toolkit was used to evidence strengths and area where these young people will need additional supports, photos about the children and any artwork or anecdotes are shared about them to give a holistic view of the young person in context of their lived experience.

The other young people who were not showcased had their information shared around the room on storyboards and their social workers were also present to answer any questions or queries about them.

At the closing of the event the carers were asked to highlight any children that they were interested in knowing further information about. Of the thirteen sets of children ten of these were highlighted by carers as wanting to know further information about. All of the children that were showcased received positive interest which highlights how important such presentations are.

At the current time the event has potentially created permanence for six children in total (two sibling groups and 2 single children and information sharing meetings and transitions are being considered at the moment. One of these six has already moved to his permanent placement following a Signs of Safety (SOS) mapping using the Valuing Care profiles to consider whether these carers could meet his needs.

We are now planning the next family finding event which will take place on July 12th, 2023, in Lincoln. Our ambition is to maintain the momentum and continue with these well attended and invested events in order to maximise the chances for all children/young people and those carers who want to commit to longer term/permanent fostering.

Training and Development:

The training offer has been reviewed this quarter and the training for the next financial year has been planned. This will offer a combination of eLearning, face to face and virtual options. The training offer ensures a range of training at different levels to support the ongoing personal and professional development of carers with a range of different skills and levels of experience.

The fostering training offer will remain under review and alongside the scheduled events the service ensures that carers are updated on events that are offered by partner agencies and organisations such as the national association of therapeutic parents and the fostering network. These expand and compliment the available learning opportunities to support personal and professional development, avoids duplication and helps to build relationships across services which was identified by the community as a priority for development.

Foster carers training programmes continue to be 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 now runs throughout the year.

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.

In this quarter 27 courses were delivered with 410 attendees taking part from fostering households. This is an increased number compared with 3rd 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
- 3 Day Restorative Practice

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)
- ADHD and FASD, a carers perspective

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 87 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 April 2023 and will take place at Hemswell Court. The event recognises the contribution and achievements of our fostering community and welcomes all new carers. Foster carers will receive their long service awards together with a gift as a token of acknowledgement and appreciation.

Kinship:

The summary findings of the Care Review continue to place family networks at the forefront of best practice. The review further reminds the service of the significance, value and impact for children and young people being cared for within their network, kinship placements by

their very nature place children within the centre of their family network where they have an already established relationship.

Across the Country there are already thousands of grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters who care for their family members, this commitment has been recognised on a national level and services have seen the provision of additional funding to develop the Kinship Peer support group.

Lincolnshire have also become part of this initiative to allow the creation of additional support within the local and national communities. Kinship peer support provide both bespoke training and support groups to the kinship community, including coffee mornings, further strengthening our current support offer. This is shared regularly with kinship carers via their Supervising Social Workers. Additionally, this will be included in the Fostering Newsletter.

The fostering service have also further developed the foster carers support hub which kinship carers are very much a part of. Specific foster carer online forums seek to support and connect foster carers, this enables them to seek advice and guidance. In addition to this fostering are working closely with the post adoption support team to develop further the support provision for those carers who will be progressing as Special Guardianship carers.

As part of Lincolnshire's ongoing commitment to staff development the Kinship team are part of the delivery programme to the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and Social Work Apprentice scheme which supports staff in their early career to fully understand and appreciate both fostering as a whole and kinship specific work. This allows staff to ask any questions and be signposted to the policies, procedures and legislation in relation to fostering and regulatory requirements. This practice fully embeds and supports staff from the start of their practice to think about a child and families network and the pivotal role of kinship care.

Lincolnshire has also created One Minute Briefings which are readily accessible and quick to read documents for staff when needing support. In particular one minute briefings have been developed for each specific area around private fostering, regulation 24 and special guardianship orders. This has enabled staff to readily access information as and when needed, in a time effective manner. This keeps this alive and high on the agenda.

Further development work is ongoing with the Mosaic team to develop kinship specific workflows and to further embed the valuing care toolkit into practice.

The service continues to work closely with the Quality Assurance team to analyse and improve practice; this has included audits being undertaken and building on strengths. The Advanced Practitioners within the team who take a lead on kinship work have been working effectively

to further develop and review the kinship assessment paperwork, the kinship preparation course and training offer. This will further improve our practice in particular ensuring kinship carers are well informed and improving the effectiveness of the assessment process.

Between the 1st January 2023 and 31st March 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
36	12	10	8	5	1

The number of referrals has reduced in quarter four in comparison to the third quarter and this reduction is mostly in the number of Reg 24 assessments. The numbers remain stable other than this and demonstrate Lincolnshire’s priority to place children with family or connected persons where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Exploration of the child’s network remains at the forefront of practice throughout the case journey from the front door through to the conclusion of care proceedings and beyond.

Overall, this period has seen a reduction in the assessments requested which correlates with the fluctuating children in care figures. However, when considering themes and trends this is not unusual or a cause for concern.

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 dropped slightly since the last quarter.

What is working well:

- Kinship work continues to be a priority to ensure court timescales and regulations are adhered to.
- Kinship Peer Support, a national independent kinship peer support program, is in the process of being set up in Lincolnshire and incorporated within the SGO support package.
- Kinship staff have close working relationships with the Business Support teams who support and undertake kinship work such as Panel Admin, FPKinship and Children’s Financial team. These close working relationships enable all required tasks to be completed effectively and in a timely manner.

- During this quarter there has been a continued focus on joint supervisions between Kinship and the children's teams. This has supported joined up working and a consistent approach from the Local Authority.
- The children's teams will seek advice and guidance from the Kinship team where issues arise and give prior notice where kinship referrals may be made. This enables them to ensure their viability assessments are thorough, the regulations are clear and best decisions and recommendations can be made for children.
- Kinship has been undertaking work with the Mosaic team to develop how we record and improve the forms.
- The kinship application packs have been reviewed and made more streamlined to ensure a smoother and simpler process for applicants.

How we intend to further improve practice:

- Kinship continues to work with the Mosaic team to keep developing the forms and how we record.
- The Kinship preparation course is under review to explore how this can be further developed to meet the needs of the kinship carers. This is being undertaken through gathering feedback from kinship carers.
- The Fostering Newsletter to be provided with regular updates regarding kinship support in the community as a way of communicating this with kinship carers.

Staying Put:

During quarter four, the total number of young people in Staying Put arrangements was forty-five. The scheme continues to receive a steady flow of referrals from Children in Care Social Workers. There are currently nineteen young people waiting to join the scheme when they turn 18 years of age.

Of these forty-five young people in the scheme 39 of them are in education, employment or training with 6 young people temporarily not in education, employment, or training (NEET) during this quarter owing to mental health and physical health problems. It is important that young people are fully supported by a wide range of services to enable them to engage positively with education, employment and training as this is a core requirement of this scheme. It is recognised that for some young people this can be difficult at times, and we work collaboratively with the Leaving Care Service and providers to support young people.

During this quarter four young people left the Staying Put scheme and saw young adults transition to other accommodation or remain with their carers as part of their longer-term planning. The emphasis of joint working with the Leaving Care Services affords each young person at 21 a step across service unless they require additional support and eases them into independent living.

Positively, approximately half of the young people on Staying Put arrangements were previously cared for by a kinship or connected person foster carer. Staying Put has provided this group of young people with the opportunity to be supported by their former connected person carers, enabling them to maintain those lifelong relationships whilst having stability and support as they reach adulthood.

The number of out of county Staying Put arrangements has risen again this quarter by a further two. There are currently seven out of county arrangements with one in Leicester, one in Mansfield, one in Scarborough, one in Plymouth, one in Shipley, one in Worksop and one in Birmingham.

If a Staying Put arrangement is at risk, we 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 arrangement, this is where joint working and timely interventions continue to be a key to the scheme's success.

Since the change in the law in May 2014 and the Council's commitment to support young people staying with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 if both parties agree, the scheme continues to be a success. This scheme allows a number of young adults to remain living in a household that they are familiar with whilst being supported by a team of people that can provide comprehensive personal to support enable the planning and transition into adulthood less of a burden. This scheme is available to all carers and young people and is part of the leaving care core offer which is for some but not all.

As part of the induction program for new staff in the Children in Care team and in the Fostering Service an introduction to Staying Put has been included. This includes a meeting with the Staying Put Co-ordinator to present the Staying Put scheme, and the opportunity to observe a Staying Put license agreement meeting.

This quarter Staying Put refresher sessions were also held with members of the Leaving Care Service.

Conclusion:

Within this quarter there have continued to be pressures on placement availability and despite this most children are placed within the Lincolnshire County Council approved foster carers community. There has and will continue to be a reliance on external resources hence the need for this service to recruit and retain carers to maximise placement sufficiency.

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 continues to prioritise the matching of children with permanent carers where possible and this quarter has seen a positive and encouraging event in January 2023 with plans in place for the summer event.

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 ending the year on 30 new approvals. In the tough climate fostering is operating in this is an impressive figure. 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 from April 2023..

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, demonstrate 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 now and going forward.

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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