



Annual Report of Lincolnshire Fostering Service

April 2011 – March 2012

Introduction

The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000. Fostering has become an increasingly complex service in relation to children and young people who need to be looked after by the local authority. It requires a range of foster carers who are skilled and resourceful.

Lincolnshire county Council have invested heavily in preventative services which has assisted in maintaining a relatively low number of children looked after. However this has meant that those children who become looked after are either very young or likely to be placed for adoption or increasingly complex in their needs. In Lincolnshire, after discounting those children placed with parents under Placement with Parent Regulations 1991, those placed for adoption or those in independent accommodation, 401 children out of 445 are placed in foster care. This comprises over 85% of the population with only 11 children placed in externally commissioned foster placements as at 31st March 2012.

The Fostering Service is managed by the Head of Regulated Services, through two Team Managers who manage dedicated fostering teams from bases in the north (Lincoln and Louth) and the south (Sleaford). The Team Managers are supported by three Practice supervisors, who each have lead responsibility for an area of service development. These are currently Permanence, Duty desk and the Family Link Short break scheme. The Service continues to benefit from stable and skilled staff who have considerable knowledge of the fostering task and have been responsive to the requirements of the regulatory changes introduced in 2011.

Numbers of Foster Carers

As of the end of March 2012 there are 304 carers currently registered with the Fostering Services (some with dual approval), these are broken down by type as follows:

Type	Number
Task Centred	120
Parent and Child/task centred	1
Task Centred/Respite/Parent and Child	11
Respite	29
CWD Short Break Carers	6
Placement Plus	15
Permanence	43
Permanence/Respite	17
Permanence/Task Centred	30
Permanence/CWD respite	0
Family/Friend	25
Emergency	4
Staying Put / Task centred	3

Number of Fostering Households Approved

In the period between April 2011 and March 2012 there were 41 new fostering households approved (not including changes of existing approval). Of these:

Approval	Number of Households
1 child	28
2 children	10
3 children	3

During the period April 2011 to March 2012, 38 carers including kinship carers ceased fostering. The reasons recorded for deregistration were as follows:

Reason	Number
Health reasons	1
At carer's request not health	16
Family circumstances changed	11
Child reached 18 years of age	2
Retired	2
Carers no longer considered suitable	2
Carers moved out of the area	0
Child has residence/adoption/SGO agreed	3
Transferred to independent Fostering Agency	0
Carers withdrew due to dissatisfaction	0
Transferred to Staying Put	1

It is of concern that an increasing number of carers have resigned feeling unable to meet the needs of the children requiring placements. It is also of note that the number of friends and family assessments have increased as this has an impact on agency approvals.

Role of Fostering Service

Foster carers provide a range of family based services, from providing a weekend's respite for birth parents or carers, preparing a child for adoption, or providing a longer term placement that will see a child through to independence. Carers are categorised as respite, task centred or permanent. In addition to these groups, there are a growing number of family members who come forward to look after children in their extended family. These friends and family or kinship carers are crucial to achieving positive outcomes for children and are afforded the same remuneration, training and support as agency foster carers. Many of this group are registered as foster carers for a short period as the children are then legally secured with them via residence or Special Guardianship orders.

The service has developed and trained a group of Foster carers to provide assessment placements to parents and children. These placements focus on a parents capability to meet and safeguard the needs of a child and foster carers are vital in terms of enabling parents to develop basic parenting skills. In 2011/12 we continue to offer a range of additional, specialist placements, Placement + carers provide placements for those harder to place young people, emergency placements are available for any child who needs to be accommodated immediately. In 2011, we have developed placements for children on licence or subject to court bail and have enhanced working relationships with the Youth offending team.

The Family Links Short Breaks Service for Children and Young People with Disabilities has continued to develop with additional carers and capacity added to the scheme which now offers a county wide service.

The Council is committed to maintaining children within their own families and has invested heavily in preventative services for families. As a result, there is a recognition that those children coming into foster care will have increasingly complex needs. In order to better equip carers the service has continued to offer a range of training opportunities, including e-learning packages and the role of the Placement Support Worker has been more crucial. In addition individual support packages have been developed with colleagues from Family Support teams and other key agencies.

The Fostering Service is committed to reducing reliance on externally commissioned placements, and developing local placements for children who have complex and challenging needs. This has been a continuing objective and has seen a reduction in children placed in commissioned placements from 86 in 2005 to only 11 in out of county foster placements by end March 2012. This includes 7 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. This achievement has released monies to further bolster the preventative strategy. In doing so Lincolnshire has shifted it's combined unit cost (independent and in-house) for foster and residential care provision from being £50 above the national average to £128 below the national average (source: CIPFA benchmarking club).

Achievements 2010-11

Permanence

In 2011/12, there has been a continued emphasis on recruiting permanent carers. This focuses primarily on the needs of young people aged 8+ and often includes young people with attachment problems and complex medical needs. For the vast majority of this group their needs are met by task centred foster carers with whom they have an established relationship, agreeing to maintain the placement on a long term basis. At the end of March 2012, some 31 young people with a plan for permanence were planned to remain with their current foster carers. The service has been able to agree additional payments to promote these as positive placement options for this group of children. There is a central group of Supervising Social Workers who consider the needs of these children and identify any matches for them. They are responsible for ensuring that every effort is made for each individual child to secure a permanent outcome including devising individual adverts and promotional material.

Family Lincs care

The Family Links Scheme is now entering its fourth year. The purpose of the scheme is to enable Children's Services to provide family based short breaks as part of a range of services to children with disabilities and their families.

Twenty eight children accessed the scheme in 2011/12 this is an increase on 2010 when 25 children accessed the scheme. Of these 9 were new starters. Two children left the scheme due to them attaining the age of 18. It is hoped that a further three children will access the scheme in 2012.

The service was unable to match 1 child successfully due to his complex needs and alternative Short break provision within the residential sector was subsequently sought. Of the others two children were subsequently accommodated as a result of child protection concerns, 6 were placed.

Each carer has to complete 200 units of care throughout the year to meet the obligations of their contract. Three carers were in excess of this capacity being in demand due to their location and in one case their ability to meet the complex needs of children with physical disabilities. In addition some children were reassessed and the outcome of these assessments was the families and children required further units of support. In such cases it is clearly appropriate for the child to go to the same carer where a relationship and routines are already established. Furthermore there were demands made on the service from children in foster care where an alternative respite carer could not be identified. This accounted for two children and 57 units. One carer did not meet their capacity but this was due to them being on hold for some time whilst the allegation was investigated. In total the scheme was therefore approximately 100 units over capacity throughout the year.

The total numbers of units used by the carers totalled 1,156.88 a slight increase on last years total of 1,061.84

The Scheme no longer has a steering group but is managed by Karen Ashworth whose role includes performance and development issues. In 2011 the short break procedure and promotional leaflet for families of children with disabilities was further revised. This has been distributed across the county, features in the Family Services Directory and the 4 all magazine. The scheme was further promoted to families in the 4 all during July of last year utilising feedback and comments from both children and parents. We are currently looking at how we might be able to engage those children with limited communication skills in gaining their feedback about the scheme and hope to work with Colin Hopkirk on this project.

The location of family link carers is as follows:

- 1 Sutton on Sea
- 1 Skegness
- 1 Spilsby
- 2 Bourne
- 1 Whaplode
- 1 Grantham

Historically Lincoln and Gainsborough have been difficult to recruit to. An assessment is underway of a carer who will hopefully fill this gap. It is not intended that the scheme grows further. The CWD teams are currently piloting personal budgets and it is not known what the implications of this might be on service delivery. This will become evident over the next few years.

Training

The Family Lincs scheme operates a support group that runs four times a year. Throughout 2012 we aimed to have a number of speakers attend our meetings and offer input and training.

Colleague's from the sensory impairment team offered a mornings training which was extremely beneficial

We improved our joint working and accessed Makaton training through Willoughby school which was excellent. Julie Harrison is currently researching whether this could be offered by John Fielding or St Bernard's for the north carers.

E learning for Kids, a package specifically tailored for carers working with children with disabilities took place and carers continued to work on this throughout the year.

A joint training workshop with staff at Strut took place where case studies and recording with care were discussed.

The manager from Haven has attended the support group and opportunities have been given to discuss complex cases and behaviour management strategies.

Carers will continue to link with the residential sector in updating their future first aid/ lifting and handling training.

Medical training continued to be offered by John Gowans.

Carers have been offered an opportunity to shadow a shift within the residential sector and this will be followed through in 2012

Feedback from parents and carers as part of the carers review process has been hugely positive. One of our carers met with inspectors who were impressed with the service offered. We are still looking at ways of getting feedback from children whose communication is limited and this work will continue into 2012.

Foster carer recruitment

The service employs a dedicated Marketing Officer who is responsible for the construction and delivery of an annual recruitment plan. In 2011, a review of the effectiveness of the present system of responding to initial enquiries was undertaken in the face of increased competition from independent fostering agency providers. The Customer service Centre is the initial point of contact for all enquirers. They record all initial enquiries and pass details to the Fostering Duty desk. Direct contact is then made with all enquirers. The Recruitment officer co-ordinates a small group of dedicated staff to ensure that the most promising enquirers receive a prompt visit and become engaged in the process as quickly as possible. This has resulted in an increase in the number of applications received from prospective foster carers across the County. At the year end 44 applications were being processed.

We continue to use capital expenditure to enable additional capacity and prevent out of county expenditure. In 2011 such developments included provision of a downstairs shower facility for a child with disabilities and provision of a security system to enable 2 children to remain safely with their carers. The emphasis has been on the provision of grants for vehicles so that children can be transported safely and allocation of small grants that make a real difference to the lives of children and their carers.

Kinship assessments have become a more significant part of the service in 2011 with 41 Reg 24 assessments having been requested. In 2011, following an unsuccessful pilot of the FRG paperwork, the Council adopted the BAAF Form C as standard for these assessments.

The Fostering Service has a recruitment sufficiency strategy which utilises current data, regarding the gaps in resource provision. More places are needed for teenagers; long-term care for children and young people; children with disabilities and younger sibling groups and black and minority ethnic children.

All recruitment work is targeted, with specific carers recruited at different times. Most recently a campaign “make your house their home” was launched and will be on-going until May 2013. This campaign is focusing on recruiting carers who can take shorter and planned placements as well as permanent placements. There is also a focus on encouraging carers from ethnic minority communities to match profiles of children coming through with identified cultural needs.

The Fostering Service uses a variety of mediums to recruit local carers, and information that has been collated over the past 10 years on the most successful advertising forms, is reflected in our current advertising strategy.

We have a clear “brand” displayed in adverts, publicity material, leaflets, posters, etc. We have access to the Council media Office who are able to help us promote the service to the press and we have a stand alone website where potential carers can register an interest in becoming a foster carer.

Features on radio, newspaper articles, community meetings and briefings are all undertaken regularly. The appointment of a recruitment and marketing officer has been instrumental in creating additional in house resources as well as ensuring access to high quality externally commissioned resources.

Placement Stability

Placement stability continues to be a critical factor in offering an effective fostering service and crucial to ensuring that the Council delivers good outcomes to each looked after child. The National indicator NI062 has remained relatively low throughout 2011, ending just below target for the year on 6.80%. This is an area where it is recognised that the complexity of the young people being placed has an impact. The wrap around package to these children is of ever increasing importance. Placements have been well supported by access to placement Support Workers, Family Support staff, educational support workers and other specialist staff. The service is also able to offer additional payments for some of the most challenging young people and where appropriate, carers are provided with respite.

Fostering Panel

Type of approval	Number of carers approved
Task centred	18
Family and Friend/Kinship care	14
Respite care	9
Task centred and respite	0
Emergency	0
1 st year reviews	0

In the same period 38 carers have been deregistered

Training and Development

Foster carers continued development

The ambitions for Lincolnshire’s children and young people depend on a sufficient, motivated, skilled workforce, including paid and voluntary workers. We want our workforce to be inclusive, competent and highly skilled in serving the needs of children and young people. We look towards achieving this for Foster Carers through excellent practice in workforce planning, recruitment, retention, training

and development, therefore maintain the highest standards in delivery and client satisfaction for all the children and young people.

Our priorities for Foster Carers' development have been over 2011/12 that:

- Foster Carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively.
- A clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing Foster Carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs. (DfE National Minimum Standards – Standard 20)
- Make sure our Foster Carers are able to better understand and support the physical and emotional health and well-being of children, young people and their families

Between April 2011 and March 2012 carers attended the following courses:

'Nits and Nasties' **8** attended

'Diversity' **92** attended

'Safe Care' **70** attended

'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' **33** attended

'Therapeutic Crisis Intervention' **12** attended

'1st Aid for Foster Carers' **86** attended

'Behaviour Management' **50** attended

'Safe Handling of Medicines' **13** attended

'Child Development' **12** attended

'Invasive Treatment' **9** attended

'Communicating with Children with Disabilities' **2** attended

There has over the last year been a rise in carers accessing e-learning programs and many augment their 'face-to-face' learning with these easily accessible training opportunities.

Report from the Independent Chair of Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel follows the regulatory framework provided by The Fostering Service Regulations 2011, Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011 and the standards set out in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011. The foster panel takes account of the legislation set out in The Children Act 1989 and The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Guidance, volume 2, 2010.

The Fostering Panel has the responsibility for making recommendations in relation to:

- The approval of foster carers and the recommended terms of approval;
- The approval of family members or friends as "connected Person" carers for children who are looked after by Lincolnshire County Council and connected to the applicant as a family member or friend;
- The first annual review of all foster carers and connected persons carers;
- Reviews of carers where there have been serious issues such as child protection investigations; or
- Reviews of carers where there are concerns regarding their fostering practice.

The Fostering Panel has the responsibility to monitor the range and type of foster carers available and to work with the Agency to consider sufficiency issues

The Foster Panel has a role to oversee and advise on the conduct of assessments and make recommendations to Children's Services about performance standards and quality issues. These are fed back through the Panel Advisor.

Some major changes to the membership of fostering panels have been brought about by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. Firstly, the regulations require that the chair of the fostering panel must be independent of the fostering service. Lincolnshire County Council has employed an Independent Foster Panel chair since June 2008 and also have an independent Vice Chair.

Secondly, the Fostering Guidance removes the necessity to have a fixed membership or a maximum number of members. A "Central List" has been established which allows much more flexibility, ensuring that panel meetings do not have to be cancelled when otherwise there would be insufficient panel members to achieve quoracy.

On the whole, panel membership has remained the same providing consistency and experience. We have also welcomed back a former looked after child following a break of maternity leave. There have been some additions to the central list, giving both independence and relevant experience and those individuals have regularly contributed to the fostering panel. The panel benefits from the regular attendance of an elected member who is committed to the function of panel and the welfare of children requiring placement.

All new panel members are asked to observe panel and an induction plan has been developed to assist new members in their learning.

The permanent panel advisor has remained in post, again providing consistency and enabling positive working relationships to be made with panel members. The Panel Advisor has been useful in drawing to the attention of the panel, the guidelines and regulations which the panel is governed by..

The Panel Advisor has continued to assist panel members in understanding the changes to regulations and National Minimum Standards implemented in 2011, particularly the complex area of connected persons assessments. The Panel advisor has a crucial role in providing quality assurance.

Panel members have taken part in training sessions on the new regulations and also connected persons carers during the last year.

Panel members are able to take advantage of in-house Children's Services training opportunities.

Annual appraisals of panel members and the panel chair have taken place within the last year, which has enabled members to reflect upon their role within Fostering Panel, the skills which they bring and to highlight further training which would be of benefit.

All Panel members have been fully involved in the process of the fostering panel, taking the time to prepare questions for panel and taking responsibility for asking relevant questions of applicants and supervising social workers. Each panel member has been able to share their views and make a recommendation based upon their own views, even in the most difficult cases. All panel members are

respectful of applicants and Supervising Social Workers and each panel member is committed to working in an anti-discriminatory way.

During the last year, the fostering panel have again been asked to consider the approval of a small number of prospective adopters as foster carers which then allows them to take a direct placement of very young babies, thus allowing the attachment process to start much earlier. This has been very successful for those relinquished babies needing early placements, has also been very rewarding for panel members but is also very much in line with the currently Government's thinking on concurrent planning to speed up the adoption process. Whilst this type of placement carries risks for the prospective adopters, of a birth parent changing their mind, the staff involved in the process have explained everything fully to the applicants and supported them fully.

The panel process has remained unchanged, applicants are introduced to the chairperson before they join the meeting and then to other panel members in the meeting. Although this process may take longer it is hoped it will reduce the levels of anxiety for applicants and help to put them at ease during what can be a daunting process. Applicants are seen again in private following the meeting, to inform them of the recommendation. Applicants also receive an information booklet prior to panel identifying panel membership and the process. Again this is intended to reduce the levels of anxiety.

Applicants and supervising social workers are asked to complete an evaluation form of their experiences at panel; the majority of those returning the forms have been very complimentary of the panel process. Improvements have continued to be made to the waiting time of applicants ensuring that panel now runs largely on time except for unavoidable delays and the occasional exceptionally complex matter.

A feedback form is used by the Panel Advisor to note any general social work practice issues in order to continually improve upon the quality of information brought to panel. Supervising social workers are congratulated verbally at Fostering Panel for particularly good assessments and information.

Quality assurance

Panel is part of continuous improvement in all aspects of the services and ensures that we comply with both internal and external minimum standards. Panel acts as a source of information, advice, support and evaluation to staff at all levels across the service.

The panel is further developing a quality assurance role for the work that is undertaken within the fostering service. The Panel feeds back to the team any current trends that have been picked up by panel. This has led to development of a sibling assessment to consider the placement needs of children within a sibling group where permanent plans are being considered

The quality of assessment is considered along with the regulatory standards, the Panel Adviser continues to work with the Principal Practitioners and supervising social workers in the service to look at the quality standards particularly at evidence based practice and analysis to ensure a sound assessment of carers' strengths and vulnerabilities.

Participation

As identified in the OFSTED inspection “children and young people receive a consistently high level of consultation. (Ofsted 2011)

In 2011 there has been considerable emphasis on consultation and participation:

As part of 11 million takeover day 2011

- Mock Scrutiny meeting with young people, including care leavers and a young person from the staying put scheme, looking at issues for young people in post 16 education
- LAC Children and young people working with the LACES team to review and improve EPEPs, making them more child and young person friendly and avoiding duplicating information gathered elsewhere
- LAC children and young people working with LAC team manager and team to begin a piece of work identified by children and young people, seeking to identify what LAC are happy with, and not, about their relationships with their social workers, identifying what needs improving and how to work together to achieve this (suggestions from young people have included LAC young people offering to help induct new social workers and train social work teams.)

98.6% of children & young people communicated their views for each of their statutory reviews.

Advocacy is provided directly to children and young people, including LAC, returning children who go missing, privately fostered, care-leavers and disabled children through NYAS. A recent development of this service has been to provide support for children going through the Child Protection process. Self-referral to NYAS services has steadily increased, year on year. This service has established a good working relationship with the Children’s Complaints officer at LCC.

The chairperson of the Voices for Choices (Lincolnshire’s Children In Care Council) Executive group has a standing seat at Corporate Parenting Panel and works closely with the responsible Assistant Director to plan for panel meetings ahead of time.

There is an established programme of service improvement, called ‘The Big Conversation’ which brings together groups of LAC and Care-Leavers with an Assistant Director, Head of Service and Team Managers and workers from LCC and Barnardo’s Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service. The model is one of co-production, with priorities being developed, action plans agreed and joint-working on improvements following. The cycle of Big Conversation events happens at February, July and November each year. Big Conversation is the brainchild of the V4C executive group.

There are four V4C groups in the county, supported by a designated participation officer, with supervising social workers and IRO’s helping run the local groups: an executive that works at a higher strategic level and meets monthly, and three local groups covering different areas of the county which meet four times a year and also contribute to local developments and the Big Conversation programme. All groups get involved in fun, social activities as well as contributing to service development. Feedback from children and young people taking part has been positive and helps us to develop new ways of working, at times and in places that feel right for them.

V4C has its own pages on the new www.teenifolincs.co.uk website and reports on its activities. There will soon be a moderated discussion board area on this site, enabling more children and young people in Lincolnshire to contribute to discussions on 'hot topics' for them, something we can also make use of to identify what matters to our young people in the county, and to particular groups of young people like LAC.

We have worked closely with young people as peer researchers to investigate issues and support for LAC in our residential homes (2009), leading to service improvements, directly for children and young people, and support and training for staff caring for them. From May 2012, this model will form part of the model for wider reaching six month research programme on Education with the whole LAC population in the county.

The FAB! Awards, recognising and celebrating the achievements of LAC and Care Leavers in Lincolnshire, is co-designed with young people from the V4C executive group, who co-host the event each year. Nominations have grown year on year, with 170 children and young people being nominated for an award by their carers or social workers in 2012.

Children, young people, carers and professionals all contribute to the design and review of the CIC Kit, providing useful information for children and young people when they start to be looked after. We have recently worked to bring together children and young people with learning disabilities from one of our children's homes and a partner agency's project, working with a design company, to create an animated DVD that gives children with a learning disability access to important and useful information. This was recently launched with good feedback from young people who took part, and from a range of carers and professionals.

We have a dedicated participation team that provides support and training for children and young people in the aforementioned groups, and in research and activity programmes described above.

Foster Carer Involvement

Foster carers are involved in both the recruitment of staff and more importantly, the recruitment of prospective foster carers. All preparation courses are jointly delivered by qualified staff and experienced foster carers to ensure that the balance between theory and practical experience is reflected. There are a number of carer led support groups across the County and informal links are made between carers in a geographical area to promote small support networks. All foster carers are provided with access to a dedicated Fostering Friends website where they are able to share experiences or concerns. The views of carers are sought on specific developments, as in 2011 with the development of parent and child fostering. Feedback is received as an integral part of the annual review and comments received have resulted in the review forms being modified in 2011. The service has completed video clips for the website from children who foster and a leaflet directed at children has been produced for sharing with all new applicants. The service recognises the importance of both foster carers and young people's participation at events through the year.

Developments

The Period 2011/2012 saw the service consolidate the work started in 2010/2011 for an increase in the provision of Parent and Child placements. The aim was to provide carers with a toolkit to guide their assessments and a consistent approach to the placements to assist carers, social workers and the

Parents in placement. Training was provided on the use of the toolkit and the assessment model behind it to carers and supervising social workers by an external trainer.

The feedback from carers was very positive and they appreciated having a framework for the placements rather than using what they individually thought was required. The toolkit is also available with guidance to carers and supervising social workers who were unable to attend the training further increasing the options available for placements.

Further work was completed after the toolkit had been in use for six months involving carers, social workers, supervising social workers and the consultant. This looked at how the toolkit had been used in practice and suggested changes to the toolkit, policy or procedures are being made. During the period 1 April 2011-30 March 2012, 20 Parent and Child Placements were made meaning that for these families, assessments could be completed while they remained within communities in Lincolnshire.

We will continue to review the framework for Parent and Child Placement throughout 2012/2013 and would look to include parents' views in any future reviews.

Lincolnshire was accepted to provide multi dimensional treatment fostering (MTFC) in 2011. However a subsequent needs analysis determined that , due to the very low level of external placements and relative stability of the looked after cohort, the programme would provide no added value to the looked after children in County. Lincolnshire considered a therapeutic training model (KEEP) but again took the view that it would not enhance foster carer development and would potentially detract from the core business of recruitment and retention. In addition we continue to benefit from therapeutic training of carers called "nurtured heart" provided by CAMHS as a Tier 2 service.

Staying Put

2012 see's Staying Put 'coming of age'. This year will be the year when those young people first joined aged 18 celebrating their 21st birthdays. Staying Put began as a Government funded pilot scheme. Due to the positive outcomes for those young people who 'Stayed Put' it has become an integral part of the fostering service. In this first year of being 'mainstreamed' all thirty of those on the scheme are in Education, Employment or Training.

"If people are in a place where they are happy and feel safe, it seems dreadfully unfair to be told they have to live independently," (at 18).

Those in further or higher education can remain until completion of their education in that academic year. This allows the opportunity to concentrate on their studies without the worry or disruption caused by moving out at a critical time in their education. Five young people attend University, seventeen attend further education at college and eight are in apprenticeships or training.

The Pathway Planning process is managed by our Leaving Care Service Providers, Barnardo's. The Pathway Plan is used to measure their readiness for independence and is reviewed every five months during their Staying Put experience. This ensures that the skills they need for independent living are part of their everyday living. For those who are prepared and ready to move on, accommodation is planned, then sought and secured through the partnership of Barnardo's Leaving Care Service. If the young person wishes to move on before their twenty first birthday they are given a three month window in which they are supported by their carer. If they feel they are not managing they can return to their placement. This opportunity is also given to those young people who join the military services.

“People who are not in care can stay with their parents for as long as they like. Staying Put just allows you to feel like you’re part of a normal family.”

Staying Put is open to all young people who are fostered, whether they have a Care Order, Voluntary Care, and Kinship Care or placed with an Independent Agency. They and their carer agree to their wanting to stay and they should also be in EET or actively pursuing this.

Staying Put is now policy at National level. The experience of the young people of Lincolnshire has informed the Department for Education who will be releasing guidelines for Staying Put, for all local authorities, later this year.

Complaints, Appeals and Representations

There were 3 complaints related directly to the service. One followed the removal of children from a placement which was dealt with at stage 1 and was unsubstantiated. The same complaint then progressed to stage 2 but was withdrawn by the complainant. The third complaint related to the payment of travel allowances and this was resolved at stage 1. Low level concerns are managed within the service and are generally concluded quickly.

Forward Plan 2012/13

With an increase in the number of children looked after the primary focus of the service will be to improve foster carer recruitment to ensure that placement options are available throughout the County and we continue to be well positioned to resist the growing presence of Independent Fostering Agencies. To enhance the recruitment strategy, a dedicated website for the fostering service providing full editorial control will be operational to coincide with Fostering Fortnight.

With the recent changes to the adoption service, we will ensure that we understand the characteristics of older children who have a care plan of adoption /permanent fostering.

We are conscious of the likely impact of the recent Southwark judgement and requirements of the Legal aid and sentencing Bill which will confer looked after status to an increased number of children aged 16 and 17. It is our intention to develop a combined remand fostering and support lodgings service to meet these evolving needs.

The cohort of young people requiring foster care is increasingly complex and we continue to review and develop training to reflect these changes.

Work has started with a group of foster carers to develop a local Foster care charter. This will be developed and consulted upon in early Summer 2012 with a view to adoption later in the year.

Summary

The Fostering Service has been recognised as outstanding following the Ofsted inspection held in July 2011 and the effective management of the service has been recognised nationally at the Local Government Chronicle awards in 2012. The service remains committed to providing high quality, safe and secure placements to vulnerable children and young people, whilst promoting placement stability and emotional attachments with appropriately skilled and qualified carers. We have recognised the need to provide enhanced placement support given the increasingly complex children who require a family based placement.

We have very low reliance upon independent fostering agencies which is at variance to many Local Authorities. This has enabled the transfer of resources to enhance preventative services within the County. In 2012 we seek to further develop the carer base to ensure that this remains the case at a time of increasing placement demand.

