



Fostering and Adoption Marketing

Report



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Setting the Scene

From a Local Authority perspective, the ultimate aim of adoption and fostering communication is to increase the amount of adopters and foster carers we have available to support our children in care. In order to achieve this, recruitment marketing activity needs to raise awareness of what this entails amongst key audience groups, challenge misconceptions, and communicate the benefits through the appropriate mix of communications channels.

The long-term marketing strategy (2021-2024) looks at the external environment, competitor analysis and internal environment to understand where our Lincolnshire Fostering Service currently is and how it can develop and move forward. The aim of this strategy is to make Lincolnshire Fostering and Adoption Service the number one choice within Lincolnshire with a reputation for openness and excellence.

With record numbers of children in care and around 13% of the foster carer workforce retiring or leaving nationally every year, recruitment and retention of foster carers and adopters has never been so crucial. In fostering locally we are seeing an annual loss of approximately 10% of foster carer households, less than the national average but still an increasing challenge whilst considering the rise of our children in care population. Reasons for ceasing to foster range from ill health, change in family circumstances such as moving, relationship breakdown, age and agility etc.

Our overall aim is to increase the number of fostering households, replacing those that resign as well as grow our fostering population to give greater capacity and good quality matching and choice for children across Lincolnshire. Although resignations from fostering children are expected, the retention of foster carers remains a key part of community growth.

The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need to recruit at least a further 8,600 foster families in the next 12 months alone. There is a particular need for foster carers to look after teenagers and sibling groups.

In line with what is seen nationally, the number of children in care in Lincolnshire has continued to rise. The shortfall predicted over the next 12 months for the East Midlands is 480 households.

As a result of being unable to place child/ren with suitably assessed family members and Lincolnshire are unable to find a suitable foster home or family member for children in care in Lincolnshire, our efforts shift to seeking this from another foster agency (Independent Fostering Agency) at a significantly higher cost to the Local Authority. This continues to be the case when public spending remains a constant challenge, children can be moved away

from their communities and networks which is further unsettling for them at a time of uncertainty.

Lincolnshire County Council is part of Family Adoption Links, a regional partnership of Adoption Services. The government's agenda for adoption was set out in a paper, "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DFE) in June 2015 setting out arrangements for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) by 2020.

This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and North Lincolnshire Council. It has been agreed that Lincolnshire County Council will act as host for the arrangement.

The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14th October 2020 and describes how the Family Adoption Links manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we will benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

Some advertising for the adoption service still takes place locally; this has been largely concentrated during adoption fortnight.

The Family Adoption Links arrangements creates a platform for sharing good practice and better joint working relationships, although fostering remains a competitive market it is important to learn from the experiences and successes of others advertising and marketing strategies to help inform future tasks and objectives. It also helps us to be able to continue to be aware of trends locally and nationally and ensure we can continue to bring an attractive offer through research of what others are providing. Regular market research and the building of relationships with other providers is a current and future priority.

The Impact of the Pandemic

The country has experienced extremely challenging times as the Covid-19 pandemic affected the PEST areas (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) significantly with everyday life for many people being thrown into turmoil and uncertainty. Although the rollout of the vaccination throughout early 2021 has been promising, recovery of the economy etc. is still uncertain/slow/cautious. Therefore, the biggest implications for the service in recruiting more fostering and adopters households are currently hinged on how quickly we as a nation can adapt and bounce back economically and socially from the pandemic.

There currently is no national data available to measure the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on foster carer and adopter recruitment and retention. However, based on anecdotal evidence and conversations with external stakeholders, the fostering network predicts the coronavirus pandemic will have increased the need for more fostering and adopter households.

A Competitive Market

In terms of competition, independent fostering agencies are operating locally and are recruiting foster carers who are often attracted by the perceived enhanced allowances and support provided compared to Local Authorities.

Within a competitive market Lincolnshire fostering service targets its preferred market segment by promoting its unique selling points and, in particular, emphasises the community feel through its call to action by inviting prospective foster carers to "Join our community!"

Fostering
Putting children first

Lincolnshire COUNTY COUNCIL
Working for a better future

Can I foster?

We consider each application on an individual basis, so you can be a foster carer regardless of whether you are:

- Single, married or unmarried
- Heterosexual or LGBT
- Disabled or able-bodied
- Employed or receiving benefits
- Have your own children, or not
- Are a home owner or renting
- From any ethnic or religious background
- And there is no upper age limit to foster

What else do I need to know?

- You must have a spare bedroom for a foster child or young person to use.
- If you have any criminal cautions or convictions for offences against children, or sexual
- If you smoke (including e-cigarettes) you cannot foster a child under the age of 5 years.

Lifestyle considerations

Lifestyle choices are considered for all prospective foster carers in order to ensure that children and young people in care have positive role models for a healthy lifestyle as well as being protected from risks. Prospective foster carers should be aware that smoking, alcohol, obesity and lack of exercise can cause:

- If you are applying to foster as a couple, you need to have lived together for a minimum of 18 months.
- It is important to remember that fostering will have an impact upon your own children. From experience we know crucial they can be to support their own children through this reason they will be part of the application and assessment process. We will always seek to support you through this.
- We hold a one-day (non-mandatory) course designed specifically to help prepare you to become a foster carer. We also have a support group for birth children within foster families called the Supporters. Supervisors who meet throughout the year to take part in activities to help through anything that may be bothering them.
- If you smoke (including e-cigarettes) you cannot foster a child under the age of 5 years.

Smoking

There is considerable evidence to show that smoking and passive smoking have long-term effects on health. Passive smoking can damage the heart, brain and lungs and we promote smoke free homes for all children.

Alcohol

There are prescribed health limits relating to alcohol consumption. Currently it is no more than 14 units a week for both men and women. Alcohol consumption by applicants will be discussed as part of the assessment process. We will take the context of a healthy lifestyle and factors associated with this.

Health

The result can be an increased risk of body damage e.g. cardiac problems, liver damage, diabetes and hypertension.

We will assess an applicant's weight issues have an impact on their diet and exercise during the assessment process. A full medical is not normally required other than for permanent health conditions. A full medical may be considered by our medical advisor who may require a full medical to be completed if it is considered to be necessary.

Obesity

Applicants wishing to foster can expect their smoking habits to be considered within the assessment process. Applicants who smoke, including e-cigarettes, are not able to be considered as carers for children under the age of 5 years.

Obesity

There is medical evidence to suggest that obesity, weight and eating difficulties can pose dangers to

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Don't foster misconceptions!

Think you can't foster because you're...

- Single
- A different ethnicity
- Unemployed / low income
- In a same-sex relationship
- No Limit
- Rent
- Disabled / health problem
- Without own children
- Too old
- Not a home owner

Think again!

Foster carers are needed from all walks of life to meet the diverse needs of the children in their care.
So, before you rule yourself out, count yourself in!

Ready to join the family?

You can complete the initial Expression of Interest form online now at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering
Alternatively you can speak to one of our friendly staff by calling our dedicated Recruitment Team on 01622 854114.

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In any competitive market it is essential that we can provide an efficient and type of service people will not only want to use but talk to others about.

Advertising

The Digital Market

Once a person has started to consider fostering or adoption, they seek out rational information on what the process involves. The research highlights the extent to which potential adopters and foster carers will rely on web based information at this stage.



(Press Ctrl and click on the image above to watch the animation).

2020 saw one of the biggest swings towards digitalisation in the work place throughout the world as organisations invested in their infrastructure for employees to be able to work from home. In addition to this, there is evidence to suggest more people were accessing news etc. digitally with many local media companies reporting a surge in traffic to their websites. As we move towards a more digital reliant pool of applicants its important along with the other developments within the local authority that Fostering is not left behind and can continue to compete in this market.

Although some challenges remain in regards to the website we have been able to develop and use other digital means of recruitment and advertising such as social media campaigns, mail chimp marketing campaigns and advertising on other targeted companies' websites.

Use of Social Media

Once people feel they know how to adopt or become a foster carer, they want to know what it is really going to be like. Potential applicants want first-hand testimonies that tell them about the good and the bad, and the effect this might have on their current lifestyle.

Social media is a key channel at this stage and one that Lincolnshire uses to share videos of children's experiences and foster carer's testimonies.

Research has considered the members of society that are most likely to want to adopt or foster a child, according to the research we need to be reaching members of the public between the age of 25-44. Lincolnshire is targeting their social media campaigns to platform such as Facebook where over 47% of its users are within this age bracket.

Some respondents do express an interest in a phone line and there is some evidence that including a phone number on marketing materials prompts telephone enquiries. As Lincolnshire moves to a more digitalised system a phone line and a model of relational practice remains a real priority.

In addition to social media developments, digital marketing in the future will also extend to the use of podcasts, digital events and the review of forms and marketing materials been moved to have online options.

Initial Triggers/ Inspiration

Triggers and motivations vary from individual to individual when considering becoming a foster carer or adopter. Friends advocating their own positive experience of adoption and fostering can play an important role in 'nudging' people to consider it for themselves. Our current marketing strategy includes editorial content about adoption and fostering in newspapers, magazines and radio as an important touch point. We use real life stories and spokespeople to maximise the effectiveness of this type of marketing. The placement of case studies (stories of people who have adopted) have proved to be of particular interest to local and regional media; as have expert spokespeople who can provide information about adoption in the local area, making the content relevant.

The qualitative research found that a common motivation for people who have biological children is the realisation that their children have 'grown up' For those without children or who are unable to have children, when they accept they can't have biological children, is often the key trigger. An important insight from the DFE research is the importance of friends in 'nudging' people towards adoption/fostering – a potential initial trigger can be a friend talking about their positive experiences. In Lincolnshire we offer a "recommend a friend" initiative to existing foster carers with a payment attached.

Lincolnshire County Council has also led by example in the community by adopting its policies and procedures to offer those it employs the flexibility and support to foster its children. Lincolnshire County Council is a **fostering friendly employer** and will be working with other companies and organisations in Lincolnshire to support the recruitment of foster carers by becoming "fostering friendly employers".

From past experience it is felt that tactics which 'cast the net' wide rather than a narrowly focused specific campaign ensure a good turnout at information evenings giving us the opportunity to introduce different types of fostering opportunities.

It will be important in the future to also ensure recruitment strategies that introduce closely the idea of fostering or adoption to those members of society that are most likely to want to adopt or foster now or in the future. Placement advertising such as the use of posters and banners is a priority, as well as mainstream media channels. A two pronged approach rather than a choice between targeted or wide spread advertising will be used.

Research undertaken by the DFE (2014) shows that, for married heterosexual couples, women tend to be the drivers of the adoption and fostering process and often took a role in leading their partner towards a decision. Women tended to be influenced by the personal and emotional side of adoption and foster care; for married, heterosexual men, rational information was typically more important in the decision-making process – they wanted the facts about adoption and a common tipping point for them was an open day or workshop that provided them with this information. Lincolnshire's initial advertising starts from a position of evoking a personal or emotional response in people with information coming later when decision making such as links to further information, testimonies from other carers/adopters and recruitment events. It is important in future advertising to consider where it can be placed to meet high levels of women.

In Lincolnshire we use a variety of advertising methods; these are reviewed and developed according to latest data and recommendations.

Lincolnshire currently use **Lincs FM Radio** to advertise locally, although this is more so for Fostering, the Family Adoption Links uses more wide spread advertising for adoption, fostering very much are still targeting the local area. Radio adverts can have mixed outcomes across the country although we find locally it increases initial enquiries.

Research shows the importance of the back up within the community of advertising using bill board events and local ads, a **call-to-action campaign** is shown to increase interest by up to 147%, advertising in the future will use more call-to-action campaigns to attract Foster Carers.

Poster Campaigns are a popular choice with many agencies, as they are relatively cheap to implement, with posters often placed in local libraries, community centres and other areas with a community focus. There is evidence that posters are a successful way to target specific segments although this is not a method routinely used in Lincolnshire. Poster and Banners within the community is an area to be explored and utilised, particularly using a call to action with local businesses and attractions to provide space.



Press Advertising works best, in the context of a wider marketing and advertising campaign; a radio and digital advertising campaign also runs alongside this.

Lincolnshire does not currently use **TV Advertising** due to the high cost and a mixed review regarding its effectiveness which makes it high cost without any evidencing of a reward that justifies the spending.

In Lincolnshire we sought to demonstrate the type of children that are available for adoption or require foster care. These are important messages; however we also use advertising to dispel myths and create reassurance regarding some of the challenges and worries carers may have. This means involving current foster carers and adopters within the recruitment processes and using various touch point opportunities.

Lincolnshire fostering and adoption service prides themselves on an Outstanding Ofsted rating; we would also like to confidently pride ourselves on an outstanding customer service rating. Good customer service is a real priority now and in the future with effort and planning informing training, systems, timescales, practice and recording, making Lincolnshire in the future the number one place to foster/adopt.

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