

Service Update

I hope that you are all well and enjoying the first glimpses of spring.

In June, I will have spent a year in my post as fostering service manager. I continue to be struck by the dedication of Nottinghamshire's foster carers who give their lives to supporting and caring for looked after children. The hope that you give these children by providing them with a stable and loving home cannot be underestimated and I have heard amazing stories about what has been achieved by the children in your care, with your support.

In March, we provided our first joint pre-approval training course with Nottingham City. Due to low numbers of foster carer being recruited, both we and the City had been forced to cancel some pre-approval training sessions. We therefore agreed to pool resources and Hyacinth Buxton has been working hard with colleagues from the City to launch this joint venture. Courses will still be as regular but will alternate between County and City venues.

On April 28th we will be holding our second 'Fostering's Got Talent' evening which we are really looking forward to. This is a great opportunity to celebrate the creative gifts of children and adults and bring members of the fostering community together to enjoy a wonderful evening.

Unfortunately the financial challenges the department face continue. When the service was reviewed in 2016 it was originally proposed that the service would be reduced by 9.5 supervising social worker posts. After consultation this was reduced to 5 at that time, with the remaining 4.5 being reviewed again in a year's time. Following the introduction of the fostering support officer posts and low numbers of foster carers being recruited, it has been decided that the 4.5 posts will be removed. Due to vacancies, this will not mean any job losses, but 2 of our temporary staff will be returning to their permanent roles in other parts of the department.

We are now coming up to a year of our fostering support officers (FSOs) being in post. Team managers, supervising social workers and I have found the addition of these post to the service invaluable. We are lucky to have 5 very hard working and effective people in these roles and feedback from the service has been very positive.

Debby Marshall and Ruth Goodison have been in the fostering independent reviewing officer posts (IROs) for around 7 months. The introduction of these posts has freed up team managers time, although this is a mixed blessing, as I know that team managers miss seeing you all at annual reviews. Debby and Ruth are working hard with the service to ensure that you all experience good quality reviews that help to identify your strengths and support you with your development as a foster carer.

In May, we will be participating in the annual Foster Care Fortnight when we will be launching a countywide campaign focussing on recruiting foster carers for teenagers and sibling groups, which remain the areas of most need. We have also identified that we need to do some targeted recruitment in the Mansfield/Ashfield areas. When we looked at our data it was clear that this is where we have a high demand for placements and not enough availability.

Finally, we said goodbye to Chris Smith at the end of March this year. Chris has been a team manager in the fostering service for 13 years and she will be greatly missed by us all. As a goodbye present, the fostering service presented Chris with a blanket made up of squares knitted by colleagues. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chris for her hard work and commitment over the years and to wish her every success for the future.

Naomi Sills
Service Manager - Fostering