FOSTERING: GET IN THE FRAME

Thank you to everyone that has attended our Foster Care Fortnight workshops in Birmingham, Edinburgh, London and York, so far, to hear about our plans for Foster Care Fortnight 2013 #FCF2013. Our final workshop for this year is in Cardiff on 14 March. Please email wales@fostering.net to book your place.

Each workshop has generated some fantastic ideas for how fostering services can get in the frame and support their foster carers and care leavers to join in the Fostering Network’s national campaign. You can download our guide to Foster Care Fortnight from our website at www.fostering.net/foster-care-fortnight

Social media has sparked some great debate. For those of you yet to create your social media profile, our Getting started in social media guide, available at www.fostering.net/social-media-guide, provides the introductory information you need for the main social media sites. If you are seeking more advanced guidance, we are looking into running social media masterclasses. Please contact me at james.foyle@fostering.net if this would be of interest.

RECRUITMENT TARGETS

On Thursday 14 February we announced that an estimated 9,000 more foster carers are needed in 2013 alone to meet the diverse needs of children and young people coming into care across the UK. In the respective countries, 7,350 more foster carers are needed in England, 850 in Scotland, 600 in Wales and 200 in Northern Ireland.

Against last year’s target of 8,750 new foster carers, fostering services made a significant gain in the number of new foster carers approved. The Ofsted data set shows 7,400 approvals in England during 2011-12, with increases across the UK. However, with around 13 per cent leaving the workforce annually and a sustained rise in the number of children coming into care needing fostering, the number of new foster carers needed continues to go up.

To find out more, please go to www.fostering.net/news

HOUSING BENEFIT

The discussion in the media continues around the impact of the welfare reforms on foster carers with regard to housing benefit.

Fostered children are excluded in the calculation, with their bedrooms considered ‘empty’, which could see foster carers in social housing lose up to 25 per cent of their housing benefit. The Government has added £5 million to the Discretionary Housing Fund to mitigate the impact on foster carers and we encourage fostering services to liaise closely with housing departments to ensure none of their foster carers miss out.

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Durham County Council has taken the bold step of developing a page on their website dedicated to a monthly feature on a child in their care that needs fostering.

Faye’s name has been changed and sensitive information hasn’t been revealed in order to protect her identity. However the copy does provide a bit more insight into her personality, such as being ‘a bit of a chatter box’ and her love for ‘painting and drawing’, which adds a human element.

Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator, Lisa Richardson confirms that the service has seen more interest in people considering long-term fostering.

‘In Durham we have a high number of children that need a long-term foster family, and really wanted to encourage people who were thinking about fostering to find out more. Since the campaign began in January, we have had a good response from people who would like to provide children with a long-term family.’

Giving the viewer more insight into a child’s interests enhances the chances that they will make a connection with the child, which could encourage them to find out more. It’s also an opportunity to dispel some of the myths about children in care.

To see Faye’s profile, go to www.durham.gov.uk/Pages/Service.aspx?ServiceId=8682

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Ofsted inspectors found that children in Bolton are being given ‘chances and activities’ they otherwise would not have received thanks to the local fostering programme.

One quote from a long-term fostered child in Bolton that stands out was, ‘I don’t feel like I am in care, it’s my family’. For the foster carer to achieve this recognition is fantastic.

As Bolton have done, using this positive story in the media provides a perfect opportunity to launch an appeal for more foster carers for their fostering service, or as in the case of Stockton, use it as an opportunity to publicly thank foster carers for the contributions they make.

Congratulations also to the fostering team in Dumfries and Galloway for receiving a ‘very good’ rating for their fostering and kinship service, and to Stockton Council for their outstanding rating.
attracting and keeping carers

Foster Swansea campaign...
Making a Difference to Children in Care in Swansea

West Sussex County Council has supported foster carer Michelle Barnes to share her experience of fostering in the media and encourage others like her to come forward.

The article provided a great opportunity to bust some of the myths around fostering – Michelle is a single mum of two who started fostering at the age of 25 years. Speaking in the Crawley News, Michelle said: ‘There are still people out there who think to become a foster carer you need to have the perfect 2.4 children family. You don’t need a perfect lifestyle.’

Michelle spoke very openly about the positives and negatives of fostering: ‘Once they realise you are not going to throw them out the first time they do something wrong like stealing or shoplifting – because they are testing you – they realise it’s not acceptable and their behaviour starts to change. That’s lovely to see.’

Fostering can provide wonderful rewards, but it is a challenge requiring a high level of dedication. It’s crucial to show a balanced view of fostering to encourage the right people to come forward and progress through to approval.

The Fostering Network is a strong advocate of supporting your foster carers to feature in your local media, as not only are the local press keen to publish stories with a human interest, but it also provides a platform for prospective foster carers to see the type of people that foster. Our Foster Care Fortnight guide contains information on how you can generate case studies for local press, which you can download at www.fostering.net/foster-care-fortnight.

To see the full article from the Crawley News, go to: http://www.thisissussex.co.uk/Tilgate-foster-carer-describes-rewards-fostering/story-17937961-detail/story.html#axzz2LLHDB0vE

Foster Swansea’s campaign Make a World of Difference...Foster is proving how it really is making a difference to the lives of children in care in the area.

The campaign is set to approve 42 new ‘mainstream foster carers’, by the end of March offering between 75 and 88 more placements to children in Swansea, almost double what Foster Swansea set out to achieve this financial year.

The new way in which the team at Foster Swansea now recruit and assess those wishing to foster has improved conversion rates dramatically and means that for every six enquiries received, one is progressed into an application.

Foster Swansea’s new recruitment and assessment procedure has had a significant impact. Initial enquiries are responded to within 24 hours, comprehensive information packs are sent out the same working day, initial home visits are offered within seven days and assessments are being completed within a four-to-six month timescale.

Kelly Lewis, Business Development Officer at Foster Swansea, said: ‘The success of the campaign would not have been possible without the hard work, commitment and professionalism of the whole team at Foster Swansea who have this year had to adapt, learn and develop to work in a generic way to operate a new customer-focused recruitment and assessment process.’

This is a fantastic achievement for the team and demonstrates how improvements in the internal processes to engage the enquirer can generate more approvals.

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Coexisting with Safer Internet Day on Tuesday 5 February, the Fostering Network launched its new book *Fostering in a Digital World: a common sense guide*.

The guide contains essential information to provide foster carers and other professionals with the tools to support fostered children to go online.

Maria Boffey, author of the guide and project manager at the Fostering Network for Wales, said: ‘We want to help foster carers support young people in foster care to safely get the most out of the internet. Often young people know more than adults about new technologies, so the guide is aimed at bringing foster carers up to speed and enabling them to be more confident about setting boundaries.’

Members of the Fostering Network can pre-order copies of the guide for the special members price of £15 online at [http://www.fosteringresources.co.uk/?cid=1&sid=8&pid=499&p=0](http://www.fosteringresources.co.uk/?cid=1&sid=8&pid=499&p=0).