

Foster Care Fortnight 2015: Fostering service evaluation

Executive summary

- Foster Care Fortnight 2015 took place 1 to 14 June 2015
- The campaign moved to be after the general elections to maximise media coverage
- Over 1,100 pieces of media coverage in around 600 media outlets;
- Highlights included BBC News, BBC 2 Victoria Derbyshire, ITV News, BBC 5Live, The Times, The Guardian, Independent and The Big Issue;
- The campaign coverage has an AVE (advertising value equivalent) of approximately £1,530,890
- Campaign coverage provided 109 million “opportunities to see”.
- Five celebrities backed Foster Care Fortnight with a further five contributing a ‘make a connection’ placard to the campaign
- Fostering services continue to see a rise in enquiries during Foster Care Fortnight with positive steps to the improvement in enquiry quality
- The campaign will return to May for 2016

Foster Care Fortnight is the UK’s foremost campaign, run by The Fostering Network, for raising the profile of fostering UK wide and for the need to recruit foster carers for specific groups of children in care.

Leading on the story that 40 per cent of teenagers in foster care are already with their third fostering family, the campaign generated over a 1,100 pieces of media coverage. While down by 125 on the previous year, there were over 60 per cent more opportunities to see and an increase in campaign value by £400,000.

This year’s Foster Care Fortnight theme, *Fostering, make a connection*, although not directly related to the news story, was sufficiently all-encompassing to create a link across the campaign. Building on learning from previous campaigns, the theme proved highly versatile both on and offline, for recruitment and retention purposes. These ideas were shared by The Fostering Network at three preparation workshops in January and February 2015, although two more were cancelled due to insufficient numbers of attendees. Workshop formats will be reviewed for 2016 and beyond.

To help maintain momentum throughout the campaign, theme days for the countries were retained and expanded to include a theme each day. Blogs and other content were shared celebrating fostering and faith, arts and sports among other subjects. These contributed to

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over 100 new likes and follows on The Fostering Network's Facebook and Twitter respectively, as well as thousands of uses of the campaign hashtag #FCF2015. The following report looks in detail at the various aspects of Foster Care Fortnight 2015 with a series of recommendations for further analysis with the potential to improve the campaign going forward.

1. Fostering, make a connection

Fostering, make a connection was the theme for this year's Foster Care Fortnight campaign across social media and fostering service activity.

Building on previous campaigns 'Get in the frame' and 'Guess who fosters', this year's campaign aimed to fulfil a number of internal and external objectives including:

- Raising the profile of fostering in the UK
- Helping fostering service members of The Fostering Network to recruit and retain foster carers
- Providing an opportunity to raise vital funds for The Fostering Network
- Engaging businesses and other organisations to support fostering

All fostering services develop promotional publicity at various points of the year; this year's theme was therefore created to be sufficiently versatile to overlay existing materials, or form the basis of a campaign. Fostering services could 'make a connection' to the need to recruit foster carers for specific children, and the needs of fostered children in local communities, and demonstrate to local businesses and organisations how they could lend their support.

This year's theme also satisfied the opportunity to celebrate the role of existing foster carers, 'making a connection' to their commitment and achievements throughout the year. The theme was not designed to substantiate a national news story, but rather to be sufficiently overarching that it could be linked across a range of media messages. The aims, objectives and ideas for application of the theme were shared at three workshops in Birmingham, Cardiff and London¹ and through the *Guide to Getting Involved in Foster Care Fortnight 2015*, available to fostering service members of The Fostering Network. The workshops and guide were promoted to services through the Attracting and Keeping Carers eNews bulletin.

Campaign content and resources

The country days were retained and expanded upon to feature a series of theme days for Foster Care Fortnight as follows:

- Monday 1 June – Launch

¹ Workshops in Edinburgh and Manchester were cancelled due to low numbers of registrations.

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- Tuesday 2 June – Fostering and Arts
- Wednesday 3 June – A celebration of fostering in Scotland
- Thursday 4 June - Fostering and Education
- Friday 5 June – A celebration of fostering in Northern Ireland
- Saturday 6 June – Fostering and sports, and fundraising
- Sunday 7 June – Foster Care Associations
- Monday 8 June – Fostering and social pedagogy
- Tuesday 9 June – Fostering and health
- Wednesday 10 June – Fostering and LGBT
- Thursday 11 June – Fostering and faiths
- Friday 12 June - A celebration of fostering in Wales
- Saturday 13 June – A celebration of fostering in England
- Sunday 14 June – Care leavers

Blogs were written by a range of contributors to provide and maintain social media content throughout the campaign. In total, 32 blogs received 2,100 views.

An online tool was commissioned to provide a series of [fostering facts](#) by country or region to illustrate the number of children in care, the number of foster carers, the number of new foster carers needed and a link to www.couldyoufoster.org.uk visited almost 18,000 times during the fortnight. The tool will continue to be used beyond Foster Care Fortnight on the Could You Foster webpages.

The primary tool for this year's Foster Care Fortnight was the Make a Connection placards. Over 3,000 were produced in English, with a further 150 in Welsh, with individuals or groups instructed to write their connection to fostering on the placard and have their photo taken with it to be part of the campaign. Placards were sent to all politicians across the UK and to fostering service members of The Fostering Network. A PDF version of the placard was also available, downloaded almost 350 times.

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2. Engagement

Media

There were around 1,100 pieces of media coverage about Foster Care Fortnight 2015 across outlets in the UK.

	2015	2014
UK	85	69
England	791	922
Northern Ireland	58	60
Scotland	85	107
Wales	84	67
Total	1,103	1,225
Print	687	733
Online	279	378
Radio	94	98
TV	43	16
Total	1,103	1,225

As in 2014, the majority of coverage in Northern Ireland was generated through the Foster Carer of the Year award event.

A series of events helped increase the coverage in Wales, including launching the Foster Carer Charter and *When I'm Ready*.

News story

The Fostering Network published two news stories during Foster Care Fortnight. The campaign led with the story that *Teens moved too many times around care* – two in five fostered teenagers are already living with their third foster family since coming into care. Week two featured a story of the celebration event at the Senedd in Wales.

Online news stories throughout Foster Care Fortnight

Social media

The Fostering Network developed social media collateral based around the main campaign image and theme. A Facebook cover photo and Twitter banner incorporated the image, while Facebook and Twitter profile pictures carried the images of a puzzle piece, used to illustrate the 'make a connection' theme. However, although available to share widely, only the Department for Education made use of the cover photo on their accounts.

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We shared 25 posts on Facebook during Foster Care Fortnight, seen by almost 75,000 people, liked by over 750 and shared around 330 times. Our Twitter and Facebook accounts saw a rise of 182 and 135 new followers/likes respectively during the fortnight. The hashtag, #FCF2015, was used thousands of times on Twitter. There were some isolated cases of services using the incorrect hashtag #fosteringfortnight which needs to be addressed going forward to ensure all can maximise the benefit of the coverage.

The placard provided a good opportunity for online visual content, with [Pinterest](#) used to host images of participants. Across the fortnight, 468 placard photos were pinned, with contributions continuing beyond the campaign. Placards featured celebrities, politicians, foster carers, sons and daughters and many others, perfectly showcasing the variety of people who have a connection to fostering to raise awareness.

Supplementing the visual element of the campaign, The Fostering Network launched an account on Instagram at the London Foster Walk during Foster Care Fortnight. Twenty eight posts have been liked a total of 48 times, with 25 followers. This is a modest start but a platform on which to expand and can be used throughout the year.

Theme days led to an expansion in the number of blogs produced and posted on our website. Thirty two blogs were published during the fortnight², receiving around 2,100 views. Foster carers and other members of the fostering team contributed to writing blogs, with feedback suggesting that bloggers appreciated the opportunity and valued being asked for their views. We anticipate being able to notify services of theme days earlier in the year to allow greater participation and activity creation around the themes.

Celebrity support

Five celebrities gave their full backing to Foster Care Fortnight 2015. Singer and theatre star Gareth Gates; chef, author and the Government's fostering ambassador, Lorraine Pascale; presenter and journalist, Gabby Logan; and award winning author, Jacqueline Wilson, continued to provide support. They were joined this year by Hollywood actor, Michael Sheen, who also gave his support to the campaign.

This year's theme also allowed other celebrities, who although not directly involved in the campaign, to demonstrate their support for fostering. Steve Redgrave, Matthew Pinsent, Mike Tindall, Darren Clarke, Debbie Douglas and Kevin Whateley all contributed a placard, which we were able to share through social media. Of the additional celebrities, Kevin Whateley's picture generated the most engagement on social media.

There were though far fewer examples of celebrity engagement with fostering services than in previous years. This may have contributed to marginally less press coverage in some

² See Appendix for the list of blogs produced

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areas, but it is difficult to assess if this has had a detrimental impact on the campaign at this stage.

We will continue to seek support from those celebrities connected to fostering in future years, expanding to others depending on their tangible connection to next year's theme.

Politicians

All lead ministers with responsibility for fostering provided a photo and supportive quote to contribute to Foster Care Fortnight 2015.

Over 40 MPs, MSPs, MLAs and AMs responded to The Fostering Network's direct letter for involvement in this year's campaign by providing a photo with a placard, which was pinned on the campaign Pinterest board.

3. Support for fostering services

As in previous years, The Fostering Network provided a series of one day workshops for fostering services to receive guidance on the theme and information on wider recruitment and retention issues.

Five workshops were scheduled, yet those in Edinburgh and Manchester were cancelled due to insufficient bookings. Those completing the evaluation cited distance, budgets and sufficient learning from previous attendance for the reason for not attending a workshop. The marginal price rise from £45 to £63 reflected the increased costs incurred by The Fostering Network, but is unlikely to have resulted in a 'tipping point' services could not afford. Rather a significant reduction in training budgets may have had an impact. This, along with the distance (including time and cost) should be considered when planning workshops next year and beyond.

Sixty two delegates from fostering services attended a workshop, with 95 per cent of those completing the evaluation rating them as either very good or excellent.

Workshops featured:

- an introduction to the current recruitment and retention work of the Fostering Network;
- briefing on the theme, *Fostering, make a connection*;
- ideas for how the theme could be integrated into local recruitment activity;
- presentations from local fostering services;
- opportunities to discuss and network with colleagues and practitioners from other fostering services

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Participants at the workshop received the *Guide to Getting Involved in Foster Care Fortnight*, which was also available online to members of The Fostering Network, alongside the *Making the Most of the Media* guide.

The Fostering Network also produced a series of resources to be used on social media including Facebook and Twitter cover photos/banners/wallpaper and profile pictures for both accounts. Although these were used sparingly this year, these will be a useful addition in future campaigns but will require more explicit communications that these are for services to use.

The 'make a connection' placard proved to be an extremely useful tool to promote the campaign on and offline. Over 3,000 were produced, including a selection in Welsh language. Placards were sent directly to politicians and six were sent to each fostering service member of The Fostering Network to use in local campaigns. The placard was also downloaded over 350 times from the website. Going forward, a similar tool to engage members of the public and raise the profile of fostering will be created for services to use. Fostering.net, couldyoufoster.org.uk and Find a Fostering Service

Whereas in previous campaigns, couldyoufoster.org.uk has been included as the link in all external communications, it was decided that www.fostering.net would be the primary link to enhance the association of Foster Care Fortnight belonging to The Fostering Network. This did not appear to have a detrimental impact on the could you foster pages, which received over 10,200 unique page views during June, compared with 9,500 in May 2014 and 7,000 in May 2013.³

Beyond the landing page, our FAQs were the most popular page, with 4,000 unique views (UV) although this did have a significantly higher than average bounce rate at 73 per cent. Information on finances, benefits and income tax generate the longest time on page, with averages between three and a half and five and a half minutes.

Around 30 fostering services contacted The Fostering Network to update their free listing and add events to our Find a Fostering Service pages during the fortnight.

During June, these pages received almost 2,700 UV, with searches in the Midlands (343 UV) and the south east (335 UV) most popular. There were also 230 UV of providers in Scotland, 157 UV in Wales and 68 in Northern Ireland.

³ This year's campaign was held in June due to the General Elections; May is the traditional month for Foster Care Fortnight.

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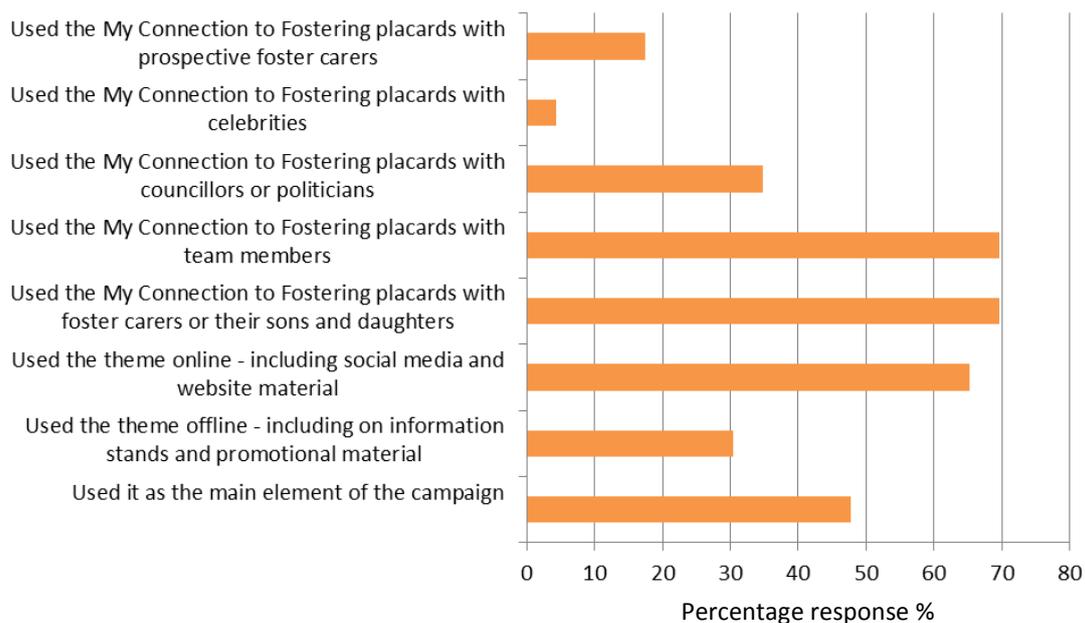
4. How members of The Fostering Network used the campaign

Just 24 responses were received for the evaluation survey for Foster Care Fortnight 2015, so conclusions are difficult to draw.

Of those who responded, the need to recruit more foster carers was the most common focus of local campaigns (90 per cent), followed by raising the profile of the fostering service (86 per cent). Ninety five per cent made use of the *fostering, make a connection* theme, the one response who didn't use the theme had planned an alternative campaign.

As the chart below shows, just under half used the theme as the main element of the campaign. The three most common uses of the theme online or used the placards with foster carers, sons and daughters and/or team members. Although fewer used the theme as the main element than last year (down from 70 per cent), there was a significant increase in online activity (up from 30 per cent).

How did your service use the Fostering, make a connection theme?



Bridgend and Suffolk Council fostering services were two that created specific resources for the campaign, linked to the theme, including puzzles. Bridgend saw a significant increase in the amount of traffic to their website and received the most enquiries during a month they have ever had as a result of the activity.

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FOSTERING

Can you make a connection?

Bridgend Foster Care  Gofal Maeth
Pen-y-bont a'r Ogledd

English / Cymraeg

Play our game and see if you can **match up pairs** to make a fostering connection.



CORRECT! You've made a connection!

Becky (32) and James (37) Abbott have been foster carers for four years. Becky is a childminder whilst James is a project manager. They have their own children, Jasmin (14) and Jack (8) and provide short-term placements for children 0-10 years.



[Read more about Bridgend Foster Care](#)



The placard proved extremely popular. Blue Sky Fostering, Swiis Foster Care, Slough, Glasgow City, Bridgend, West Sussex and Liverpool councils all contributed significantly to the gallery.

5. Campaign impact for fostering services

Where the data was available, only one service (5 per cent) of those responding saw a decrease in their initial enquiries during June. One service saw a fivefold increase in the number of enquiries received between March and June.

Quality is a key consideration, with enquiries received during Foster Care Fortnight historically either slower or less likely to progress given the nature of the contact for a decision that can take a significant period of time to make. However, through stronger and more targeted messaging, over 40 per cent of respondents saw a better quality of enquiry

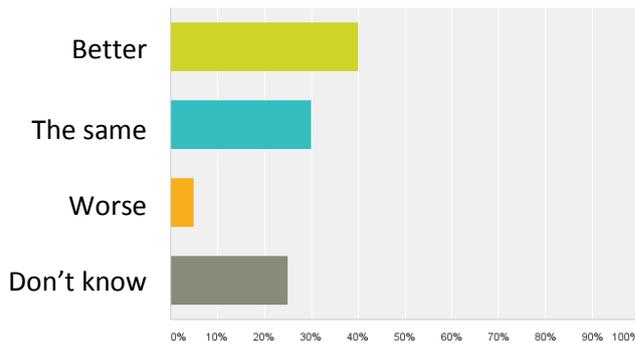
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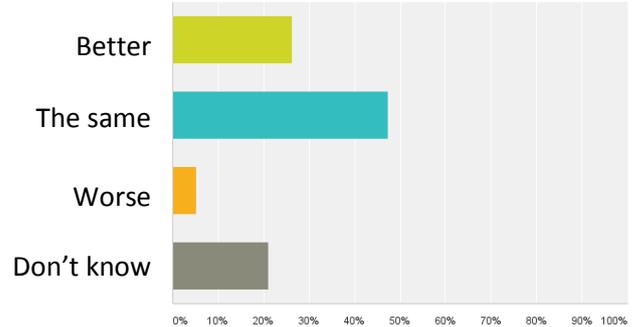
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than in previous Foster Care Fortnights. Around half also found the quality of enquiry to be similar to that received year round, which is a further positive.

Q20 From your initial view of the enquiries received during Foster Care Fortnight 2015, compared to previous Foster Care Fortnight campaigns, would you say the overall quality is



Q21 From your initial view of the enquiries received during Foster Care Fortnight 2015, compared to enquiries received throughout the year, would you say the overall quality is



One service commented, *“Though our enquiries were down 50% on the same quarter last year, the quality of enquiry is markedly better. Of the 17 enquiries received, we completed 6 initial (home) visits and have received 4 applications to date.”* Clearly this is a more effective and efficient use of resources. However one service reported, *“Far more unsuitable people coming through with issues that need to be sorted. Not enough people now who are financially able to foster/give up work/go part time.”*

Overall, when asked, *“Overall, does Foster Care Fortnight contribute to your fostering service achieving its goals and objectives?”*, 100 per cent responded yes, significantly or as part of our ongoing recruitment strategy.

6. Conclusion and going forward

Although the evaluation survey received a limited response, there are a number of positives and points for consideration to take forward into future campaigns.

The evidence presented shows that Foster Care Fortnight continues to achieve its aim to raise the profile of fostering across the UK. As the evaluation survey demonstrated, it is also increasingly helping fostering services to recruit new foster carers. This year’s, and the previous two themes, have also provided an opportunity to celebrate the role of existing carers, recognised by 95 per cent of those completing the survey.

The timing for this year’s campaign was dictated by the General Election, pushing the campaign back into June to increase the likelihood of high quality media coverage. That

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decision was vindicated with only marginally fewer pieces of media coverage than in 2014, but significantly more opportunities to see and higher campaign value. The campaign will though return to a fortnight in May for 2016, taking into consideration term dates in all UK countries.

Although well planned and promoted, workshops are declining in terms of numbers attending, quite possibly in direct correlation to the reduction in budgets for training across the sector as well as the increase in regular regional forums. Two were cancelled in Edinburgh and Manchester and numbers were down overall. A review of the format to ensure services are well briefed about Foster Care Fortnight 2016 but with the possibility of providing additional recruitment and retention information at the same event, or more regional events at lower cost, will be explored.

The theme for Foster Care Fortnight 2016 will be agreed and disseminated by late 2015, with additional resources available to members of The Fostering Network from January 2016. These, alongside the latest information for foster carer recruitment and retention, will be shared through the Attracting and Keeping Carers blog. To subscribe, please contact james.foyle@fostering.net

Recommendations

- 1. Review the format of workshops to ensure members of The Fostering Network can participate in affordable, cost effective events and activities**
- 2. Continue with the programme of daily themes during the fortnight to maintain campaign momentum**
- 3. Follow up with services to track the journey of those enquiring to foster during Foster Care Fortnight**
- 4. Investigate the 'added value' of celebrity participation in the campaign in terms of media coverage**
- 5. Continue to produce a tool, such as the 'My Connection to Fostering' placard for services and The Fostering Network to use to publicise the campaign**
- 6. Expand the involvement of local and national politicians to advocate for looked after children**

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Appendix

[Foster Care Fortnight 2015 draws to a close](#)
[One word to rule them all: innovation](#)
[The barber, the checkout assistant, the banker and the marine](#)
[People not policies make the difference](#)
['A profound conversation': foster carers and schools, a story from Wales](#)
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[My faith and fostering](#)
[Llinell Faethu Cymru: Achubiaeth i ofalwyr maeth](#)
[Fosterline Wales: the foster carer's lifeline](#)
[Foster carers needed for children with complex needs](#)
['I wouldn't change a single day of fostering a child with a disability'](#)
[How Fostering Achievement changes lives in Northern Ireland](#)
['A follower of social pedagogy' - a social worker's view](#)
[Social pedagogy - it reminded me why I became a foster carer](#)
[Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, staying together is success.](#)
[Capes for Superheroes: aspiration, achievement and foster care](#)
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[A view from Scotland by Sarah McEnhill, operations manager, The Fostering Network Scotland](#)
[The importance of reading: a view from a virtual school head](#)
[My parents foster, a personal reflection](#)
[The Little Book of Big Imaginations](#)
[Families who Foster Arts Award by Ruth Jones](#)
[What a day to start!](#)

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