



National Fostering Framework

Phase Two Report

2016 – 2017



National
Fostering
Framework
Fframwaith
Maethu
Cenedlaethol

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The Foreword

ON BEHALF OF ALL THOSE WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO DEVELOPING THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL FOSTERING FRAMEWORK

A strong consensus has emerged across Wales that a National Fostering Framework is needed as a matter of urgency. This is the clear message emerging from the extensive consultation programmes that we have organised. They made us understand even more why foster care is so important and how it can be made even better.

Young people have told us of the profound impact that warm, accepting and effective foster care placements can have on their lives.

"If you come into care it is getting out of a bad or difficult situation and there are (young) people who are really glad to get away from this. Some young people who are in care see this as more opportunities becoming open to them and being given a chance to express themselves. Young people see (being in care) as being placed in a good home, which gives them love and support and this is giving them a helping hand in the world"

"Even though it (being taken into care) took away my voices, as in it took away my individuality, it also gave me a loving home, it gave me one of the greatest people I ever met and it gave me 15 years of my life. My foster dad thought the world of me and never saw the barriers"

Foster carers helped us to realise that they share a common set of values and ambitions, offering authentic relationships and responding to sometimes overwhelming levels of need as colleagues in care.

"Our children are seen as the benefit for fostering. They are our joy, our spark. They are the reason we keep doing this. We watch a child begin their time with us flinching as we offer a cwch, or be threatened with a PRU if their behaviour doesn't improve at school, or get in trouble with the police. Under our watch, those children transform before our very eyes. Suddenly they jump into our arms – not content with a simple cwch – they want an all-encompassing embrace. They go from being in the bottom 10% in maths in their class to it being their favourite subject and on target for succeeding at their age, all in two months and because we fought for them to be in a better school and not go to straight to the PRU. They are no longer in trouble with the police but volunteer with a youth group who put on a tea dance at the local residential care home. These are some of our successes. With the support of Welsh Government and the National Fostering Framework we can do so much more."

We are confident that our work in Phase 2, demonstrated in this report, has helped to begin addressing some of the complex challenges which threaten to undermine the effectiveness of foster care services in Wales:

- the involvement which young people have in their care;
- issues around the recruitment and retention of foster carers;
- the support, protection, status, respect and recompense afforded to foster carers;
- the need for more effective corporate parenting;
- relationships between local authorities and independent fostering service providers.

However, while we have been able to build on considerable strengths and evidence of improvement in some areas, delivering the Phase 2 the work programme has made us even more determined also to find effective answers to concerns expressed in previous reports about a risk that the future of fostering services will be one characterised by 'managed decline'.

We are seeing an unprecedented demand for fostering placements, difficulties in commissioning placements in the independent sector and an increase in the number of exemptions being sought in order to expand in-house fostering provision. There are some early indications of an increase in use of placements in residential care because of pressures within fostering services. Information from the nine pilot local authorities involved in the performance management framework indicates that last year saw them lose 59 foster care places.

It is crucial then that we quickly turn strategic intent into action. Partial and piecemeal solutions are not enough.

This is the reason that much of our time has been devoted to planning for a far more integrated approach to the provision of fostering services by means of a functional model which will operate at local, regional and all-Wales levels. It is time now to take advantage of the consensus and momentum achieved to put in place an effective and sustainable National Framework. This means signing up to Phase 3 when all ten recommendations from our original report need to be implemented in full. Only in this way can we be assured that foster carers will be available in sufficient numbers to play their crucial role in providing children in our care with the health, well-being and future prospects they need and deserve

Phil Evans, Chair of the Strategic Steering Group



What Young People Say:

What foster care gives me:

"if you come into care it is getting out of a bad or difficult situation and there are (young) people who are really glad to get away from this. Some young people who are in care see this as more opportunities becoming open to them and being given a chance to express themselves. Young People see (being in Care) as being placed in a good home, which gives them love and support and this is giving them a helping hand in the world"

"Even though it (being taken into care) took away my voices, as in it took away my individuality, its also gave me a loving home, it gave me one of the greatest people I ever met and it gave me 15 years of my life. My foster dad thought the world of me and never saw the barriers"

.....
*"(being in care is about)
Getting another chance"*
.....

What a Foster Carer said at the National Conference:

Speech by Sarah L. Jones Foster Carer

Prynhwn da. My name is Sarah Jones and I'm a carer with Foster Swansea and a foster carer ambassador.... Thank you to the conference organisers me to speak. I should note I am speaking in a purely personal capacity.

Out of interest how many people here are full time foster carers?

Who am I?

I need to come clean and tell you that I've only been fostering for two years. Actually not even two whole years!

But I do have experience of working in the sector and with care leavers. 27 years ago I worked in a traditional children's home, and then in a short stay hostel for the young single homeless in London. After 17 years of running my own business in the US, I returned to the UK and made Wales my home and have since worked in care leavers projects, as a policy officer and as a manager for a large extra care scheme, all within the Third Sector. My wife and I then decided we would foster and I became the main carer.

Why am I here?

My keen interest in policy and strategy inspired me to become one of a number of foster carer ambassadors in Wales who, among other things, offer peer support and amplify the voices of foster carers across Wales.

When all the ambassadors first met recently, we talked about some of the issues we face as foster carers.

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And it didn't matter whether we were from rural areas or cities, our concerns were the same, just as Jane Moore mentioned earlier. We wanted:

- Better match placements with more information given to us in advance where possible
- We wanted carer fees and allowances to be reviewed as they did not cover the cost of looked after fostered children
- We wanted improvements in training
- We wanted to have our regional diversity recognised and considered as carers face different issues around the country
- We wanted to have an equal voice at the table with other professionals

And so, we're really excited that the National Fostering Framework is taking this great opportunity to review the fostering system in Wales because we are sure our concerns match some of your concerns.

We have the opportunity to see what's working well and where it's not working well, find ways for the system to work better. This will benefit our looked after children and support them to thrive. I think that is something we can all want to see.

We have a lot to celebrate

In terms of the issues we raised as a group of ambassadors, I there are examples of some successes already out there and there are examples of work we still need to do.

Training

In terms of training, the Confidence in Care programme is a great example of a national programme being delivered to foster carers by organisations working in partnerships, including Barnados, TACT, Action for Children, Cardiff University and The Fostering Network. This has been achieved by funding won by the partnership from Big Lottery. It is a specially designed course developed by a team at the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust that has proven to help carers learn new strategies and techniques for strengthening relationships with the children they care for. It helps to improve placement stability and overcome the difficulties with challenging behaviour.

Over a five year period 1500 foster carers in Wales will have receive 12 weeks of training. It's a programme that gives foster carers real tools for working with children, in small peer groups and with time to reflect and work out the carers' immediate issues and concerns.

The opportunity for more partnership training I think is very real under the National Fostering Framework discussions. Local Authorities could work together in clusters and be able to programme training events that they may not be able to afford locally. They could deliver specialist training that a single authority finds cost prohibitive. It will no longer matter whether you live in a large authority or a small one, the opportunities for a high standard of training could be available to every carer in all parts of Wales. It would end the issue of some carers not receiving any training other than the mandatory training when they first sign up, and it could offer them an annual training plan. We noted that carers in North and West Wales may need additional levels support from Welsh Government to allow them to come together, and particularly for the more rural communities and authorities.

Maintenance Allowances

The ambassadors in particular welcome the opportunity to discuss and resolve some of the disparities in pay for carers and the maintenance allowances. When there are carers who need to work a second job to make sure they can cover their bills, we know there's a problem. Carers can go for periods of time without a child in their home, and as such, can struggle to make ends meet.

We are concerned that in 2011, Welsh government outlined the Minimum Maintenance Allowance for Foster Carers 2011-2014 and the figures within the research were based on "the minimum appropriate level of income." It goes on to state that this level is equivalent to the **relative poverty thresholds. It uses poverty thresholds as a baseline for maintenance allowances.** What does this say about how our society values our looked after children and the carers who are raising them?

I raise my concerns about the findings of London Economics (Wales) and the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies as the basis for the setting of minimum fostering allowances across Wales, because in January of this year, the same research was used to set the guidelines for maintenance allowances for 2017 to 2020.

For 2017-18, the allowances for babies 0-4 are £170 per week, higher than those in the 5-15 age group at £155 per week. That's £170 versus £155. Feeding and clothing a 5 year old does not compare with a feeding and clothing a 15 year old. These fees are questionable and I would argue, inconsistent. I believe we should take this opportunity to review the research as it appears to be flawed in its many conclusions.

And it also raises questions:

How are we to encourage more foster carers to take on our hard to place 13-15 year olds? Ask yourselves who are the more challenging children? A 4 year old or a 14 year old? Who do your carers spend more on?

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Will these children have the same experiences as children who are not looked after? There are no recommendations for one off payments, holidays and the separate rooms needed for looked after children while on holiday. It does not take into account Christmas or birthday payments. Some local authorities give money to carers for Christmas and birthdays, others do not. Some give them to foster carers but kinship carers get nothing. We ask that these disparities end and that further research is done into the true cost carers face.

Are these to remain recommendations or will the government have an absolute minimum standard?

Carer Fees: As we move on to Carer fees – those fees vary from no payments at all to something more meaningful in other authorities. And yet there are looked after children needed in every local authority, not just the ones that pay. That said, the pay for a full time foster carer with one child is less than a £1 an hour, we are available 24/7 and if we have a partner, they get nothing for contributing. We do not get pay for long term sick leave. Or time off to grieve. Or any of the other special considerations given to the other professionals that are involved in raising the local authorities' children. A report released by The Fostering Network noted that a carer could be paid £37,000 in one part of Wales, and £13,000 in another for doing exactly the same job. What other profession has such pay disparities?

We know that poverty is a major contributor to children becoming looked after and that Wales has the highest rate of child poverty of any nation in the UK. We can perhaps see why there are 5600 children looked after in Wales in 2016 when one in three children live below the poverty line.

So why would we want to perpetuate the poverty for those same children and expect different outcomes?

So let's look at the question of maintenance fees and payments to carers and we ask that you pay us fairly.

There are several areas we would like to be reviewed and hopefully changed.

We can start by reviewing if and why there is a high turn-over of foster carers. There is a huge investment in the assessment and training to become carers. Let's see what we can do make that training pay off, retain our carers for longer and see a return on that initial investment. Let's see those foster carer retention figures for each local authority and compare that to their carer fees.

We would like to see more transparency around the use of IFAs in terms of performance, cost and outcomes, this does not include 3rd Sector partners. For example, Foster Swansea spent the same amount on IFAs as it did to the local authority carers and yet the local authority carers supported twice the amount of children. For those IFAs, is that additional money going to the carers and the children or is that money going to shareholders? Is it acceptable for private agencies to be making a profit out of looked after children? Bring that money back to the local authority where it belongs and raise the fees for foster carers.

There are skills that are recognised through the approval process that fostering services could make more use of. We want to contribute ideas on how to recruit, on best practice. We want to recommend changes to policies and procedures. We want to have input into training too but our ideas are not always heard. We don't just want to be a carer complaining about a child over the phone. We all want the same thing: consistent placements that are well matched and do not break down. We know this business, listen to us. We honestly have some good ideas.

I know I've talked a lot about money, training and being seen as professionals but they are all key to keeping carers and have them be the best carers they can be. We're not under any illusions that this career choice will become a highly paid one, but undervaluing it will also have its consequences and they will sadly be felt by our looked after children.

We do this job because we love it.

Our children are seen as the benefit for fostering. They are our joy, our spark. They are the reason we keep doing this. We watch a child begin their time with us flinching as we offer a cwtch, or be threatened with a PRU if their behaviour doesn't improve at school, or get in trouble with the police. Under our watch, those children transform before our very eyes. Suddenly they jump into our arms – not content with a simple cwtch – they want an all-encompassing embrace. They go from being in the bottom 10% in maths in their class to it being their favourite subject and on target for succeeding at their age, all in two months and because we fought for them to be in a better school and not go to straight to the PRU. They are no longer in trouble with the police but volunteer with a youth group who put on a tea dance at the local residential care home. These are some of our successes. With the support of Welsh Government and the National Fostering Framework we can do so much more.

Thank you for listening.



1: Introduction

Introduction

'TO DEVELOP A NATIONAL FOSTERING FRAMEWORK WILL NOT BE EASY BUT IT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER AND THEIR FOSTER CARERS'

A clear consensus emerged during Phase One 2015-16 that a far more compelling and strategic intent was needed as a matter of urgency to address some of the growing concerns about the effectiveness and sustainability of our fostering services.

The principles of active engagement of all key stakeholders, greater co-ordination and co-production have gained momentum during 2016-17 and there is now a very real commitment to continue the journey of greater collaboration and cohesion.

The National Fostering Framework is part of the overall work programme of Welsh Government to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people. This work is led by the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG). The National Fostering Framework is not a panacea for all the challenges we face in fostering services but together with the other complimentary work streams reporting to the MAG we have a real opportunity to improve outcomes for children and young people and foster carers.

The work programme for Phase Two 2016-17 has been strategically driven by the Strategic Steering Group (SSG). Membership of the SSG is as above:

SSG Membership	Organisation
Phil Evans, Chairperson	Director of Social Services, Vale of Glamorgan & ADSS Cymru lead for NFF
Cllr Huw David	Bridgend County Council
Cllr Geraint Hopkins	Rhondda-Cynon-Taff County Council
Stewart Blythe	Policy Officer, WLGA
Tanya Evans	Head of Children's services, Blaenau Gwent & Chair of AWHOCs
Elizabeth Lockwood	Welsh Government
Suzanne Griffiths	Director of Operations, National Adoption Service
Ann Batley	Head of Children's Services, Rhondda-Cynon-Taff
Kathy S'Jacob	AFA Cymru
Maria Boffey	The Fostering Network
Colin Turner	The Fostering Network
Karen Benjamin	Manager Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's)
Debbie Jones	Voices from Care
Chris Dunn	Voices from Care
Dr Carolyn Sampeys	Designated Doctor, Looked After Children/Safeguarding, Public Health Wales
Helen Kirkaldie	CAMHS, Aneurin Bevan HB
Dr Alyson Rees	CASCADE, Cardiff University
Marian Hughes	Head of Children's Services, Gwynedd



SSG Membership	Organisation
Craig McCloud	Head of Children's Services, Flintshire
Jonathan Jones	Welsh Government, Education, Supporting Achievement & Safeguarding
Stefan Smith	Head of Children's Services, Camarthenshire
Julie Thomas	Head of Children's Services, Swansea
Cressy Morgan	LACE Co-ordinator, Carmarthenshire
Jane Moore	Project Manager , National Fostering Framework (NFF)

The Strategic Steering Group has promoted the increased collaboration between all key stakeholders, created opportunities to influence the development of the NFF and provided the overall strategic co-ordination of all the elements of the work programme for Phase Two 2016-17.

The rationale for setting up a National fostering Framework and the views of those engaged in the debate so far have been set out in a number of documents:

- First Thoughts & Case for Change Paper November 2015
- The Phase One Report March 2016
- Briefing Paper August 2016.

There is now a strong consensus across all key stakeholders that a National Fostering Framework should be established as a matter of urgency. This is the clear message emerging from the extensive consultation programme that has taken place and the need has been demonstrated even more by the performance information which we have been gathering. We have growing evidence for the concerns expressed in previous reports about the risks that the future of fostering services will be one characterised by 'managed decline'. The case for change and the need for a National Fostering Framework as the best solution have been reinforced by the information provided by the pilot authorities for the

national performance framework and also by operational intelligence. Managers speak of an unprecedented demand for fostering placements, difficulties in commissioning placements in the independent sector, an increase in the number of exemptions being sought in order to expand in-house fostering provision and early indications of a rise in the number of children and young people being placed in residential care, on occasions due to lack of capacity within fostering agencies. Meanwhile, information from the nine pilot authorities who completed the draft national performance framework for fostering services indicates a continuing fall in the overall number of mainstream foster care households and foster care places during 2015-16.

It is now time to turn our strategic intent into action. This means learning too from other services which are being remodelled by differentiating the scale at which functions are best performed –local, regional and central/national – including the National Adoption Service, the national approach to children's advocacy, the Wales Community Care Information System and Dewis Cymru.

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There is no intention of creating a national fostering service, managed by any one sector or organisation. Rather, we are trying to construct a collaborative framework with real authority which can ensure greater service quality, more consistency of outcomes, greater transparency about performance, increased collaboration and co-operation by all key stakeholders, economies of scale where appropriate and better links to evaluation and research. Functions delivered on an all-Wales or regional basis cannot operate in isolation and we will need to have a strong emphasis on co-production.

The financial context for creating a National Framework which can deliver all these functions well is very challenging. We have considered, in the first instance, the resources currently deployed in fulfilling some of the central/national functions already outlined in this report. A number of statutory and third sector organisations already hold a national brief in relation to permanency planning for children and young people, the provision of fostering services and the commissioning of services for children who are fostered. These organisations include the 4Cs, AFA Cymru, the Fostering Network and the National Adoption Service. Voices from Care plays a crucial role in ensuring that the views of children and young people are heard clearly and are at the centre of service developments. All the organisations have engaged purposefully in the work done to date. Local Government (via the WLGA and ADSS Cymru) and the Welsh Government have devoted resources to this enterprise. Additionally, Social Care Wales is likely to be a key contributor to the overall work, especially as looked after children will be one of their priorities for 2017-18.

Discussions with these key stakeholders have produced an agreement in principle that we must exploit vigorously opportunities for coming together and sharing expertise and resources to deliver, as a collaborative enterprise, some of the central/national fostering functions. There are challenges to be faced (for example, resolving issues such as securing consent within organisations and devising effective governance arrangements) but also a real will to continue working together on these matters.

Before taking on new responsibilities, all these organisations have to ensure that they have sufficient resources available to meet current commitments. Analysis indicates that there is negligible slack within their current staffing and other resources. It is inevitable, therefore, that additional financial support will have to be found if we are to create a sustainable and effective National Framework. Given that the fostering service in Wales currently costs over £100m per year, there is a strong case for an invest-to-save-bid.

All the key stakeholders in the statutory and third sector who currently hold a national brief have worked together over recent months to explore options for delivering the national/central and regional functions. In a workshop and in the NFF Strategic Group, they have considered the strengths and weaknesses of various models. They remain committed to working together, whichever option is agreed to take forward the National Fostering Framework. Key principles have been agreed:

- we need to maintain the very considerable momentum behind the NFF as a concept which has grown over the last two years;
- greater co-ordination, co-production and cohesion in delivery of our fostering services are crucial;
- creation of a new organisation to manage the NFF would be counter-productive and would risk increasing the current fragmentation.

Four options have been considered to deliver the central/national functions and a brief options appraisal has been undertaken for each of them.

- The role of the central team of the National Adoption Service (NAS) could be extended, to include a wider brief around permanency (covering both fostering and adoption and permanency planning).
- The role of the 4Cs could be extended to deliver some of the national functions.
- The Third Sector could take the lead role in delivering the national functions, either by one organisation or a number of them acting as a consortium.
- Maintenance of the 'coalition' which has been working on creation of the NFF to date but strengthening its work through more formal structure and governance arrangements.



Introduction

In January, it was agreed by all members present at the Strategic Steering Group that an expanded role for the National Adoption Service (NAS) central team is the preferred option. Crucially, this must involve harnessing the considerable contribution that can be made by the 4Cs and the third sector, through co-production and co-ordination. The current NAS central team can provide an anchor point for the central fostering framework functions that are similar to those already provided. It is felt that this would be more useful than creating separate and freestanding senior officer oversight for the NFF. This option is considered to be the most cost effective, best able to build on existing expertise, achieve delivery of the central/national functions more speedily and build on the working coalition of key stakeholders that has been achieved in the last eighteen months.

We acknowledge that this option is not without its challenges, many of them centred on issues of governance and resources. The governance arrangements for the NAS are currently under review and there is no intention to disrupt the considerable and important work that remains to improve Welsh adoption services. It is proposed that the initial governance arrangements for the NFF central functions will lie with Directors of Social Services and Heads of Children's Services. There is clearly an opportunity to explore the current remit of the 4Cs Management Board (which comprises Directors and Heads of Service of the local authorities signed up to the Consortium) to include delivery of some central/national and regional functions. Consideration will need to be given to the involvement of the WLGA and elected members in these governance arrangements. Any arrangements will need to be kept under review as the National Framework evolves.

In respect of regional working, it is proposed that the Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs), established by the Social Services and Well-being Act, should be the geographical footprint for the delivery of the fostering functions on a regional basis. The RPBs and the reporting arrangements to Welsh Government under Part 9 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act will provide the required governance structure. Existing Regional initiatives will need to be supported and other regions will be expected to learn from their experiences, which will also help inform delivery of the central/national functions. Local authorities are generally well placed to continue to deliver the fostering functions at a local level but they will benefit from increased learning and sharing of best practice as the national performance framework creates greater openness and transparency. We anticipate that there will be some discussions in each region about whether or not to increase the scale of integrated service provision working by collaborative working through arrangements such as lead or host authorities for specific functions. The national performance framework will assist RPBs in agreeing their individual work programmes. There are likely to be regional variations (e.g. whether it is desirable to hold Regional Foster Panels, pre and post approval) but similar priorities also across all regions, particularly around marketing activities.

The resources required to deliver the central/national functions have been considered at length. All the key stakeholders who currently hold a national brief have committed to exploring how existing resources can be

used to deliver these functions. While there may be some very limited capacity for some of the stakeholders to contribute some staff time, there is clearly not the capacity to deliver the central/ national and regional functions in any meaningful way. Additional resources will be required if we are serious about creating the National Framework to address effectively and sustainably the pressing challenges we face.

Given that the fostering service in Wales currently costs over £100m per year and that there is limited evidence of effective commissioning plans, there appears to be a strong case for an invest-to-save-bid. We are aware of the Welsh Government's Invest to Save Fund which has been operating since 2009 and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government has announced a new £5 million Innovate to Save Fund. One of its priorities is looked after children services. It is important to test out these options but to acknowledge also the need for prompt action and that the National Fostering Framework is only an emerging concept at this stage. The repayment period would need to be substantial as implementing the change programme is likely to take at least one National Assembly electoral cycle.

Savings would need to come from a reduction in the number of children/young people placed within the independent sector. Information from the NFF Phase One work programme demonstrated the following pattern of expenditure on fostering services across Wales.

2014/15	Costs	Number of Placements	Average cost of placement per year
Local Authority Foster Care	£51,320,599	2,200 children	£23, 327
Foster Care Provision from the Independent Sector	£52,271,037	1,205 children	£43,378

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The table indicates a potential saving of approximately £20,000 per placement per child per year, if more children can be placed within local authority provision. The North West of England, comprising 23 local authorities, established a regional collaborative to market and recruit local authority foster carers in 2012. They estimated a saving of £17,000 per year per placement for every child placed within a local authority rather than with the independent sector. If we take this more conservative estimate, the potential savings that could be achieved by local authorities providing a greater share of the total foster care places are as follows.

Increased number of placements in local authority provision.	Potential savings
10 places	£170,000
30 places	£510,000
50 places	£850,000
100 places	£1,700,000

This proposition still needs significant development. Would a target saving be set for each local authority or region? What happens if some areas are more successful than others, especially as there is a considerable disparity between local authorities in their use of Independent Fostering Agency placements? What is the timeframe? How can local authorities be persuaded to commit savings to the scheme rather than using them to meet their own financial challenges?

A debate about these and related issues has begun. One clear conclusion is the need to put in place a more accountable partnership to lead the National Framework. We have looked to explore the essential elements that need to be in place if ambitions for an integrated approach to fostering services are to be achieved. This has involved setting out the prerequisites for success in areas such as a shared culture, trust between individual organisations, a shared commitment and agreement to redesigning current services, decommissioning ineffective services as well as creating new ones. Shared culture and trust, as well as a shared purpose, are essential to create a resilient system that is able to cope with the practical challenges of transforming services. We have considered also whether there is a genuine sense of shared leadership across the system, with a clear understanding of where joint and individual accountability sits. And finally, it has been important for us to determine whether we can put in place the right governance, leadership and infrastructure to achieve our integration ambitions. The work done to date indicates many positive attributes within the current system and approach but also considerable scope for improvement and additional developments.





2: Recommendations & Priority Areas for Action for Phase Three 2017-18

Priority Actions for Phase Three 2017-18

The emerging priority action areas for Phase Three are:

- establishing regional work programmes, as part of each Regional Partnership Board's work programme, based on information from the national performance framework and including support for the two current regional initiatives and for those regions as yet to address regional functions.
- creating capacity for an extended National Adoption Service central team, in partnership with the 4Cs, to provide the co-ordination and leadership required;
- increasing the number and range of local authority general foster carers (by means of a national brand, marketing and increased capacity to assess, establishing national standards for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers);
- embedding the National Performance Framework and preparing for WCCIS;
- implementing the Best Practice Guide for Kinship Care as a key issue in its own right but also to tackle the impact this work is having on local authority capacity to recruit general foster carers;
- continuing work on some elements of the Phase Two work programme, including national commissioning arrangements and harmonisation of fees and allowances;
- enabling the current coalition of key stakeholders to continue working together on how to deliver additional central/national functions, primarily those of training and a common policy framework; and
- undertaking further work on the governance arrangements for the proposed framework.



Priority Actions for Phase Three 2017-18

Priority Actions for Phase Three 2016/17	Likely Resources Required
Establish regional work programmes, as part of each Regional Partnership Board's work programme, based on information from the national performance framework and including support for the two current regional initiatives and for those regions as yet to address the regional functions.	Each region will need additional capacity to develop a regional work programme with urgency and to take a lead role in implementation. Dedicated resources will be required to take this forward, this could include a part-time Team Manager in each region.
Create capacity for an extended National Adoption Service central team, in partnership with the 4Cs, to provide the co-ordination and leadership required;	Increased capacity is likely to be needed for the Director of Operations (Adoption) to provide strategic leadership and co-ordination for the National Framework and to work closely with the 4Cs.
Create an all Wales brand for local authority fostering and national/regional marketing of the brand.	There are two potential options for delivering on this priority area. There is a possibility of us 'buying in' to the existing North West England Regional Collaborative for Marketing. This option would allow us to make speedy progress in increasing the number of enquiries to foster being received by local authorities. The alternative is for an all Wales brand/ website/social media presence to be developed from scratch. A detailed options appraisal will be required Both options will require a part-time marketing officer to deliver the marketing strategy.

Priority Actions for Phase Three 2016/17	Likely Resources Required
Increase capacity within the regions to respond to an increase in numbers of enquiries to foster	When the all Wales brand for local authority fostering is developed and the high level marketing campaign is underway, we anticipate a significant rise in the number of initial enquiries to foster. It is critical that there is sufficient capacity to respond in a timely manner to all the enquiries and to undertake the fostering assessments.
Implement the national performance framework across all local authorities to help shape regional and national/central priorities	Building on the work in Phase Two, the national performance framework will need to be adopted by all local authorities and most importantly used in each local authority and region to develop their own work programme. The 4Cs would be well placed to lead on this work to ensure alignment with a performance framework for the independent sector and with WCCIS. Additional support would be required, this could be in the form of a temporary performance post until WCCIS is implemented across all local authorities.
Programme and programme manager costs, including continuation of key elements of the Phase Two work programme (regional/ national commissioning strategies; Kinship Care; harmonisation of fees and allowances; national training framework for Foster Carers, etc.)	Work needs to continue to embed these work streams in the overall NFF and develop new approaches.

The above, to give an indication of the likely functions that will require resourcing in order to establish a National Fostering Framework. These proposals are still under consideration, they will require discussion and challenge from the Strategic Steering Group and endorsement by all key stakeholders. Further work will be required to develop a detailed action plan with timescales and more precise costs for each of the key elements. Continuing dialogue will continue to identify the options for funding the NFF.



3: Messages from young people

Messages from young people

CAPTURING THE VOICES FROM EXPERIENCE

Introduction

Voices From Care and Practice Solutions co-designed and delivered a project aimed at supporting the National Fostering Framework's Year 1 report recommendation 6: Introduce a national website, social media, brand and identity for foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication.

Voices From Care are a charity who support and promote the views and experiences of those who are or have been looked after in Wales.

Practice Solutions; who are based in Wales, who's innovative and flexible approach enables them to work with a wide range of clients including: Welsh Government, local authorities, health boards, many voluntary and third sector organisations throughout Wales.

Methodology

During 2016, Voices From Care; in partnership with Practice Solutions, worked with children and young people who are looked after, or leaving care from all over Wales. The remit was to develop the confidence, knowledge, skills and self-esteem of the young people, whilst at the same time, co-producing a series of digital narratives that present their experiences, thoughts, feelings and ideas about being looked after in Wales.

These narratives have been created as part of Welsh Government's strategic drive to improve outcomes for all children and young people who are looked after.

The project worked with 48 of young people, aged between 13 – 23, using Voices From Care's newly developed 5 regional participation groups.

Project Outcomes

The project co-produced 5 digital narratives, all of which are based around the conversations, group work and resources developed with young people. These include:

- What makes a good foster carer
- How the system impacts on children and young people
- What good foster care gives me
- Addressing the stigma
- Supporting positive outcomes – ideas for change.

The videos that follow, are not polished films, but provide a real insight into the voices of young people who speak in their own words about their life experiences.

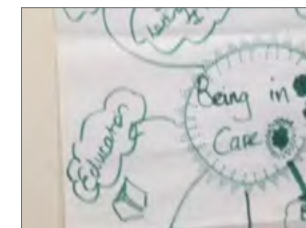
The videos are available to be shared and utilized in:

- The development of any national website or marketing strategy
- Training for foster carers, social workers, corporate parents and stakeholder's
- Local authorities marketing strategies
- National, regional and local events to promote the voice of children looked after and care leavers.
- Production of the National Fostering Frameworks Phase Two and activities.

For more information on the project, Voices From Care's 5 regional participation groups, or if you would like to share or show the videos, please contact Chris Dunn on 02920 451431 or christopher@vfcc.org.uk.



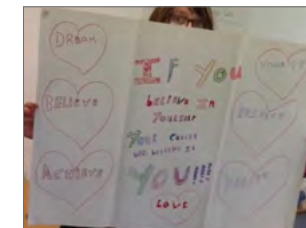
Addressing the stigma



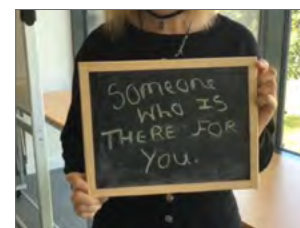
How the system impacts on children and young people



Ideas for change within the system



What does good foster care give me?



What makes a good Foster Carer?



4: The Work Programme For Phase Two

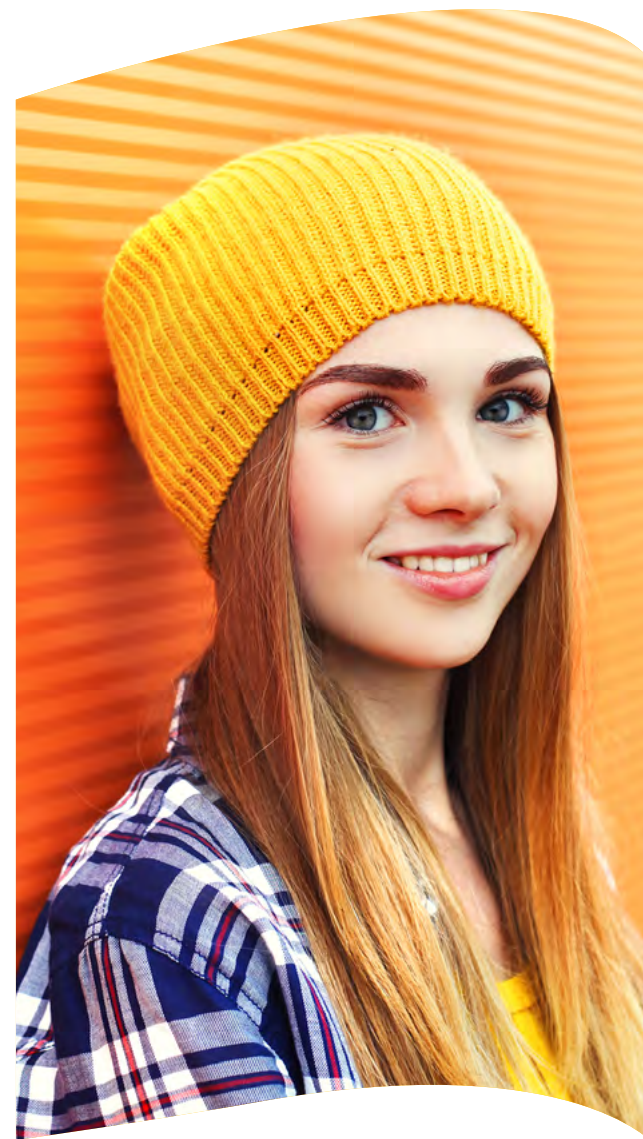
The Work Programme For Phase Two

PHASE TWO WORK PROGRAMME: 2016-17

The Phase One Report 2015-16 brought together the key messages received from the extensive consultation and engagement programme and from that a number of recommendations to be taken forward in a work programme for 2016-17 and 2017-18. The recommendations for 2016-17 have formed the work programme for this year.

All key stakeholders have been actively engaged in this extensive work programme. Local authority staff at all levels: Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and elected members, Directors, Heads of Service, strategic managers, operational managers, Social Workers, the Manager and staff of the 4C's, the Director of Operations of the National Adoption Service and the central team. Our Third sector partners from AFA Cymru, Fostering Network and Voices from Care have all played a lead role in taking forward some of the recommendations for this year. Our partners in health, including CAMHS and education have made positive contributions and we have been very privileged to have CASCADE as active partners so the learning from their extensive research programme can inform our developments. Consultation with the commercial independent fostering agencies has continued as has the engagement with children, young people and foster carers.

The National Fostering Framework is being talked about across all regions in Wales; a truly national conversation about the future of our fostering services is taking place!



The Work Programme for Phase Two

Recommendations 2016-17	A Snapshot of the Approaches taken to the Recommendations
Develop a National Fostering Framework, including the allocation of functions at national, regional and local authority levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures	Support for a National Fostering Framework Small group of key stakeholders, ADSS Cymru, WLGA, NAS, 4C's, Afa Cymru have worked together to consider a number of options for how the regional and national/ central functions could be delivered.
Introduce a national performance framework aligning this with the work being done to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (WCCIS). A phased approach to implementation will be developed. A distinct performance framework should be developed for the independent sector.	Nine local authorities volunteered to work on the draft national performance framework; they worked together on the codes/definitions for each of the performance measures and completed a dry run for the year 2015-16.
Introduce a national website, social media, brand and identity for local authority foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication.	Staff from six local authorities across Wales who are involved in the marketing and recruitment of foster carers have worked together. A visit to the North West of England Regional Collaborative to learn from their experience.
Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster Care for children who are looked after.	AFA Cymru has led on this work. A number of regional events have been held and a national conference in February. Local authorities across Wales have attended these events.

Recommendations 2016-17	A Snapshot of the Approaches taken to the Recommendations
Develop national arrangements for commissioning all placements, regardless of sector and building on the work of the 4C's.	The 4C's have taken a lead role on this recommendation. A national conference was held in October '16. A small working group of fostering managers and commissioning officers have worked on taking forward some of the key messages coming from the national conference.
Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster care placements.	Voices from Care and AFA Cymru have led on this recommendation. Regional events have been held and a national conference in March.
Harmonise policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers.	The Fostering Network have led on this work. A survey of all local authorities' fees and allowances has been undertaken to map the picture across Wales.

Work on taking forward each of the recommendations has been reported to the SSG meetings. The work on each of the recommendations, whilst being approached in different ways have all had the principle of co-production at their core. A very inclusive approach has been adopted; all those interested in any of the work on each of the recommendations have been encouraged to participate. A truly national conversation has taken place.



5: National, Regional and Local Functions – the proposed Delivery Model

National, Regional and Local Functions – the proposed Delivery Model

Recommendation 1

From the Phase One Report: Develop a National Fostering Framework, including the allocation of functions at national, regional and local levels and begin putting in place the appropriate structures.

Representatives from the key stakeholders have undertaken work designed to make to progress with Recommendation 1 from the Phase One Report. Separate discussions have been held with ADSS Cymru, the WLGA including elected members, the National Adoption Service, AFA Cymru and the Fostering Network. These organisations also came together for a workshop aimed at sharing ideas about the possible delivery mechanisms for the central/national functions of the National Fostering Framework

One of the key messages has been the need for an integrated or joined up approach which allows us to benefit from opportunities of working on a bigger scale (greater strategic direction, better co-ordination, sharing resources, delivering consistency, etc.) without losing the advantages of localism (meeting the specific needs of individual areas, strong accountability, direct links to practice, etc.). Structures and services at all three levels –local, regional and central/national – have to operate within a devolved but managed approach which encourages co-operation and collective action.

This section of the report outlines:

- the functional model;
- the proposed delivery of the fostering functions at the local, regional and central/national levels

The proposed functional model for the National Fostering Framework, allocating primary responsibility for different areas of work at each level, is set out in the grid below. We consider that agreement on adopting a national performance framework is a priority objective, as it can be used to help shape improvement activity at all levels. It must be emphasised also that there is no intention of creating a national fostering service, managed by any one sector. It is the regional priorities based on information from the national performance framework that will together form the priorities at the national/central level.

We are trying to construct a collaborative framework which can provide greater service quality, transparency about performance, increased collaboration and co-operation by all key stakeholders, economies of scale where appropriate and better links to evaluation and research. Functions delivered on an all-Wales or regional basis cannot operate in isolation and we will need to have a strong emphasis on co-production.

The Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) are the suggested geographical footprints for the regional delivery of services. It is envisaged that each RPB will develop its own regional priorities; it is likely there will be some overlap of priorities between regions and equally some region specific priorities.

The national performance framework will help shape each of the regional priorities.

The regional priorities will together form the national/central priorities, rather than the centre determining the regional priorities.

The National Fostering Framework: The Functional Model

Local Functions	
Supervision and support of individual foster carers	Local Functions: There is an almost unanimous view that the statutory responsibility to plan the care, services and support for individual children should remain within individual local authorities.
Generic fostering assessments	
Kinship Foster Care assessments, support and training	
Provision of local support groups for foster carers	
Placing and matching of children and young people	
Agency Decision Maker (ADM) responsibilities	

Regional Functions	
Regional Foster Panels	Regional Functions: Some good regional initiatives have taken place in recent years and it will be important to draw on these examples. The South East Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) have worked on developing a 'best practice model' in the recruitment of foster carers and explored how it might be possible to begin harmonising fees and allowances. North Wales has developed a regional approach to delivering some aspects of fostering services- a consistent policy framework for 'When I'm Ready'; harmonisation of fees and allowances; and better marketing of fostering services. The Heads of Children's Services in the region are leading the work and they are already beginning to identify benefits. In addition to these more formal approaches, the Heads of Service in the Gwent local authorities have begun exploring a regional fostering service. Other regions are collaborating on a number of fostering functions, most notably around training and Foster Panels.
Exchanging placements between local authorities	
Regional approaches to marketing	
Responding to initial enquiries	
Peer Support for Foster Carers	
Annual Foster Care Reviews	
Pre- and post-approval training	The Regional Partnership Boards, established under Part 9 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act, will provide an appropriate geographical footprint for taking forward regional approaches. This would help to support robust governance, co-ordination and leadership for delivering functions at this level. However, local authorities could opt to work on a bigger geographical area (covering more than one health board) that respected local health board boundaries. The functions set out in this section are ones that local authorities could consider delivering on a regional basis, if thought appropriate. The evidence coming from the proposed national performance framework and the national standards for the Recruitment & Assessment of Foster Carers would help to inform such decisions. It is likely that there would be some regional variations.
Regional Approaches to 'When I'm Ready' (WIR)	

National, Regional and Local Functions

Central/National Functions	
A National Performance Framework	Central/National Functions: These are functions which could help to achieve: • increased co-ordination and leadership; • a means of ensuring that the voice of children and young people who have experience of foster care and the views of foster carers are heard at a national level; • more sector-led and sector-wide improvements; • greater strategic coherence; • a means of measuring, monitoring and improving performance and resource management at all levels; • greater accountability; and • a search for economies of scale where appropriate. The approach would involve providing the means whereby known concerns can be addressed strategically greater consistency can be achieved without sacrificing the acknowledged strengths and diversity of local accountability within the current system.
An all-Wales identity for Local Authority Fostering	
High level marketing of the all-Wales brand/national website	
A set of national standards and timescales for recruiting and assessing Foster Carers	
A Common Policy Framework	
A National Training Framework for Foster Carers at pre and post approval level	
Securing more consistent approaches to Foster Care Fees and Allowances	
National commissioning arrangements	

Overview		
Central/National Functions	Regional Functions	Local Functions
A National Performance Framework	Regional Foster Panels	Supervision and support of individual foster carers
An all-Wales identity for Local Authority Fostering	Exchanging placements between local authorities	Generic fostering assessments
High level marketing of the all-Wales brand/national website	Regional approaches to marketing	Kinship Foster Care assessments, support and training
A set of national standards and timescales for recruiting and assessing Foster Carers	Responding to initial enquiries to foster	Provision of local support groups for foster carers
A Common Policy Framework	Peer support for Foster Carers	Placing and matching of children and young people
A National Training Framework for Foster Carers at pre and post approval level	Annual Foster Care Reviews	Agency Decision Maker (ADM) responsibilities
More consistent approaches to Foster Care Fees and Allowances	Pre- and post-approval training	
National Commissioning Arrangements	Regional Commissioning Arrangements	



6: The National Performance Framework

The National Performance Framework

Recommendation 2

Introduces a national performance and resource framework, aligning this with the work that is being done to deliver the Welsh Community Care Information Service (WCCIS). A phased approach to implementation will be developed. A distinct performance framework should be developed for the independent sector (commercial providers and third sector providers)

In Phase One we tried to learn what does our current performance looked like. But what we found was the current sources of information on fostering services performance were fragmented and sometimes difficult to access. We discovered we had inconsistency in what and how we are collecting information.

On a national and local level we have statistics that provide information on numbers and types of placements, if children are placed within the local authority boundaries and numbers of placement moves. We have some indicators of commissioning arrangements local authorities have with other fostering providers and some information about resources and local authority spend on fostering services. But the list of what we didn't know is far too long to include here!

So work began in Phase One and has continued in Phase Two to develop a

DRAFT NATIONAL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

The Performance Framework has 11 parts and includes

1. Nos and types of foster placements
2. Sibling Placement requests and parent & child placements
3. Nos of approved foster places with general foster carers at the end of each financial year
4. Placement disruptions & Unplanned endings
5. Recruitment of Foster Carers
6. Retention of Foster Carers
7. Kinship Foster Care
8. Approvals and De-registration
9. Age profile of children who are fostered
10. Unit costs of recruitment and retention and weekly unit costs of foster places
11. Foster Care Fees and Allowances

If we had all this intelligence we wouldn't need anything else to manage our fostering resource efficiently!

Colleagues from Caerphilly provided expert advice and skill in developing the performance framework, and for this we owe them a big thank you. The framework works like magic!!

PILOT AUTHORITIES

Once we had developed the performance framework we asked if any local authorities would like to have a first dry run at completing it and we were delighted that nine local authorities offered to join us in this work!

Powys,
Flintshire
Blaenau Gwent
Caerphilly
Merthyr
Newport
Rhondda-Cynon-Taff
Torfaen
Monmouth

So we had a good cross section of authorities from across Wales and authorities of different size and facing specific regional challenges.

Would like to say a really big thank you to all the staff from these authorities who have worked hard on developing the definitions and codes for all the different performance measures and for completing what they could of the performance framework for the year 2015/16. The National Adoption Service also provided us with some invaluable assistance in analysing the data received.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM PILOT AUTHORITIES

- Some information easily accessible
- Some information could be gained
- Some information not currently possible
- Not all authorities could collect the same data
- Information on budgets /staffing very difficult to collect
- Each local authority has unique data collection systems – no two the same
- Validity/reliability of the data
- Information gained from Pilot Authorities

This is just some of the headline measures we learnt from the pilot authorities completion of the performance framework. The information provided has not been validated.

Numbers of LAC in foster care 31st March '16

705- general foster care

293- kinship care

140- independent sector

Inquiries to foster '15-'16

- 997 initial enquiries
- 186 had previously fostered
- Conversion rate ranged from 2% to 20%

Kinship Care '15-'16

- 435 viability assessments completed
- 60 approvals as Kinship Foster Carers

Carers Ceasing to Foster '15-'16

- 123 general foster care households
- 131 placements

	Nos of General Foster care Households	Nos of General Foster Care places
April '15	556	774
March '16	534	723
Total Loss	22	51

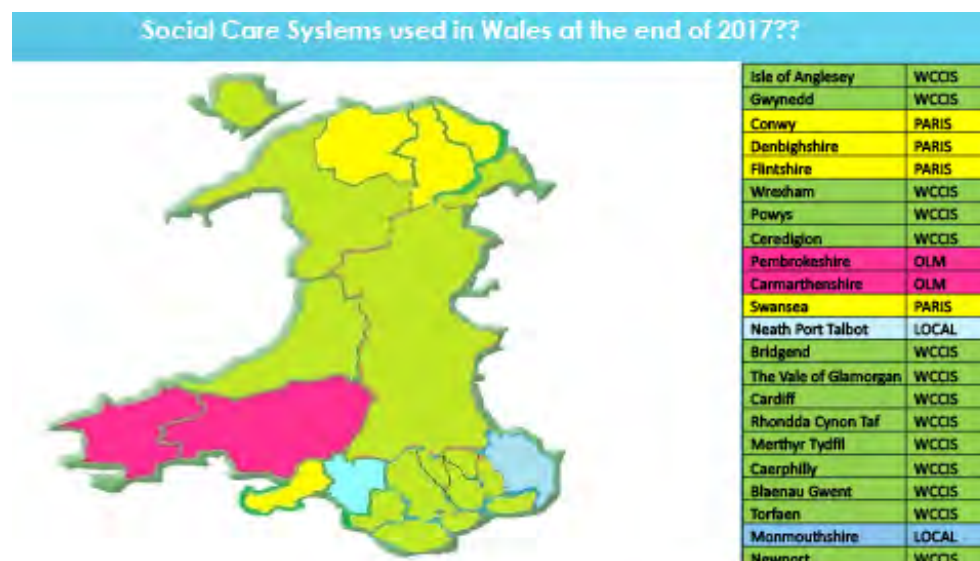
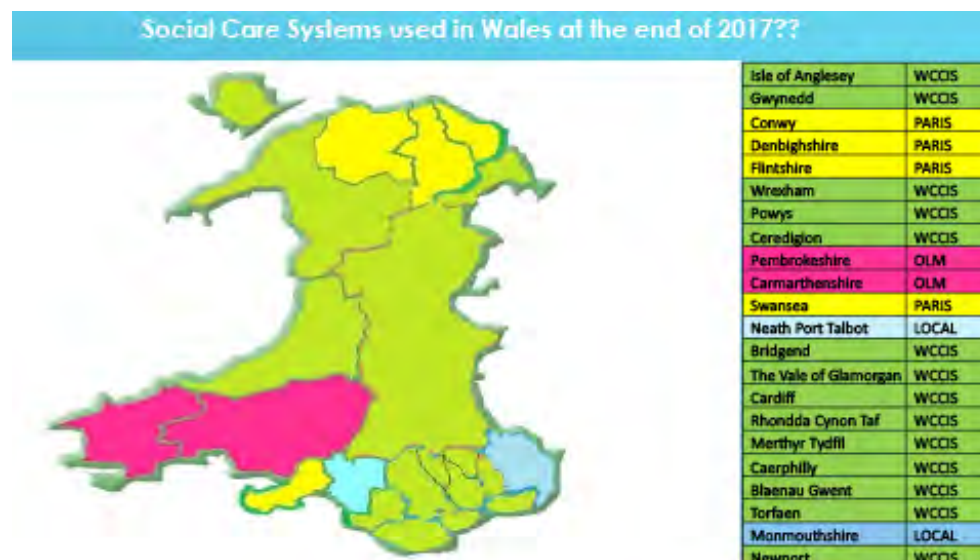
THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR

It is important that we strive to achieve as much consistency as is appropriate with the independent sector .

The 4 C's have led on developing a performance framework for the independent sector building on the information already held by the 4 C's. We are now at the stage of working with some of the independent providers, both the Third Sector and the commercial providers to pilot the performance framework specifically for them.

WELSH COMMUNITY CARE INFORMATION STEM

Throughout phase Two we have worked with the Business Change Manager for the Welsh Community Care System to ensure the performance framework for the NFF will be embedded in WCCIS. This will prevent local authorities from needing to complete data request from different sources – I think we will all be happy with this!!





7: The National Marketing Approach

The National Marketing Approach

Recommendation 3

Introduce a national website, social media, brand and identity for local authority foster care in Wales, to underpin a marketing strategy for recruiting foster carers and improving communication.

Before we could begin to develop a national approach to the marketing and branding for local authority foster carers it was important that we shared ideas, approaches and the challenges local authorities are currently facing. A number of staff from across Wales have worked together to begin this initial scoping work. Their energy, commitment and motivation to do things differently has been infectious! One Team Manager said 'I've been waiting for this approach for 10 years!'

It became clear that the position across Wales is different, some authorities have dedicated marketing and recruitment staff, some don't. Some have dedicated resources and budgets, some don't. Some have newly created marketing and branding materials, some don't.

What everyone did agree on was there are some aspects of marketing that could better be delivered on a regional and / or national approach. Below is an outline of the elements of a marketing strategy which are worthy of further consideration.



The National Marketing Approach

National Marketing Activity	Description/Detail of Work Required	Resources/Staffing required to Deliver this activity	Projected set up and annual running costs	Timescale	Any Additional Commentary
Development of national brand/logo	To develop logo ourselves Or Consider buying into "You can Foster" (YcF) – and amend title to reflect Welshness	Consultation with LA's & F/C A Nominated lead In long term a Wales Co-ordinator,	To give us an idea of costings: Rebranding the "YcF" in the NW of England cost the following- rebrand and website update £50K, £77 on PR and advertising On top of this they have the cost of co-ordinator (2.5 days per week)	From scratch – tender, photographer and model, translation, consultation, focus groups, stakeholders 18 months Period of consultation – do people like "YcF"	What is the WA agenda – do we need to create a brand new image or could we benefit from becoming part of "YcF", expanded to reflect Wales
Development of national website	Agree the details, images, contacts, FAQs – written and translated, hosting web team or commissioning a webteam Tenders process	Working group to develop pages Co-ordinator to maintain and update	To be explored	12 months	YcF expansion to include Welsh LA's and translation Off line option for events
Development of social media strategy	What is the most important messages – Working group Speak to all LA teams re social media – what do they find useful, message requirements Ensuring that it is all bi-lingual	Working group	Minimal costs for development of strategy – mostly time Cost implications if we were to employ an agency to build social media pages etc	By Spring 2017	YcF

The National Marketing Approach

National Marketing Activity	Description/Detail of Work Required	Resources/Staffing required to Deliver this activity	Projected set up and annual running costs	Timescale	Any Additional Commentary
National media campaign – tv/radio	Clear idea of message Tender process Production Identifying core FCs willing to be filmed etc	External media company – divide between companies to keep tender thresholds down	Airtime £300 per 30sec ad creation Total £6000 for 6 wks across north Wales (Heart) –these costs based on NWales last campaign £40k for 2 week campaign in prime time 3 prime time slots per week, plus some non prime time (based on costs provided by You Can Foster	Radio Production time TV – Sourcing company & actors Production time for film on top	Option of YcF – voiceover with local accent/welsh Need to advertise on S4C and ITV Wales
Development of positive messages about fostering- celebrities who have been fostered, foster carer ambassadors	Collation of a list of FC willing to be ambassadors across each LA Events for foster carer – north/south Media skills training Contacting agents of celebs Tap up Fostering Network	Working group in conjunction with LA fostering teams	Training costs Event costs Costs of celeb	List of carers – spring 2017 Event maybe end of FCF Training – TV, public speaking	
Marketing opportunities at national events- Eisteddfod, Royal Welsh show	Calendar of events, contact details and costs Identifying staff and national local level	Working group Gaining LA agreement to take the lead in each county		Stands, staffing and promo literature	Sharing costs with NAS Co-ordinated approach
Production of promotional material to be used at marketing events.	Banners, leaflets merchandise, branded gazebo, bus, big flags etc	Reliant on logos etc Working group to obtain costings	Costing to be undertaken once image/logo decided upon		



8: Kinship Foster Care

Kinship Foster Care

Recommendation 4

The principle of capturing the views of young people was embedded in the work we undertook in Phase One 2015-16, this principle has been maintained in Phase Two.

INTRODUCTION

This work was undertaken as part of the Year 2 National Fostering Framework Program. It followed on from Recommendation 7 in the Stage 1 Report.

NFF Phase 1 Recommendation 7

Ensure greater consistency in the use of Kinship Foster Care for children who are looked after, building on the initial scoping paper from Phase One

Outcomes:

- All children living with a Kinship Foster Carer will receive care of a consistent nature.
- Provide a consistent approach to the assessment, support and training of kinship foster carers

Aims

The work planned to progress Recommendation 7 was twofold:

- **Scoping of the current position across** Wales with regard to viability and assessments of kinship foster carers. It was intended that this would include court practices as well as local authority practices
 - Numbers of viability assessments, full assessments and approvals
 - Developing a national picture of when formal fostering arrangements are used for kinship care.
 - The processes used by local authority for undertaking viability and full assessments

- **Developing 'Best Practice'** models for the delivery of information, training and support for approved kinship foster carers. This will draw on the good practice already in existence in Wales. Within this piece of work developing a Best Practice Model was to include showcasing good practice examples in relation to:
 - Viability assessments and foster care assessments (this may include Unified Assessments for some local authorities)
 - Training, Information and Support e.g. are there core training modules that can be delivered across Wales.
 - Explore the potential to develop all-Wales assessment formats.
 - Explore how services for kinship foster carers link to services for other kinship care groups e.g. Special Guardians; informal kinship carers
 - Undertake consultation and draft proposals about how local authorities can implement the best practice guidance
 - To make recommendations to the Strategic Steering Group on what functions could best be delivered at a national, regional or local level.

Work Undertaken

September/ October 2016 – Work program agreed with NFF Governance group; Awareness raising/ scoping the task – practitioner groups (north and south Wales)/ legal group/ medical group/ IRO group. Consultation on questionnaire content.

November 2016 – 3 all wales workshops – Viability/ Full Assessment/ Support and Training

January 2017 – questionnaires returned/ workshop write ups.

February 2017 – final consultation and recommendations presented at the All Wales NFF Kinship Care Conference.

March 2017 – recommendations presented at Intent to Action, the NFF Phase 2 Conference. Final write up.

This work has also been linked with work being undertaken in other areas notably the Special Guardianship Technical group.

It has involved a large number of practitioners from across the childcare sector (childcare social workers, fostering social workers, IRO's, CAFCASS Cymru, CSSIW) and the active participation from kinship carers from both Grandparents Raising Grandchildren(www.grgcardiff.co.uk) and local authorities. We are grateful to you all!

Research Base

We are delighted to have been joined in this work by Joan Hunt, Honorary Professor at Cardiff Law School. Joan Hunt is one of the UK's leading researchers in the field of Kinship Care and has published research on this subject over a number of years. Her recent work on risk and protective factors, and support and training provided a current literature review to inform this work. The domains she identifies for assessment, risk and support have provided the basis of our discussions with practitioners.

Joan continues to develop her views in this area, and has during the period of this work. Her publication for Research in Practice encapsulates many of her findings:

Hunt, Joan (2015), Assessing and Supporting Friends and Family Care, Practice Tool, Research in Practice.

SCOPING CURRENT WORK LEVELS

18 local authorities responded to a questionnaire developed with practitioners and supplied fully or partial data. Because of timescales the data and definitions will not be perfect so some caution is needed with respect to the numbers. However, the high rate of completion suggests a willingness to have a first attempt to collate data cross Wales.

Data was requested in two sections

- 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016
- 1 October 2016 – 31 December 2016

Annual Data: 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016

14 of the 18 local authorities that completed the questionnaire knew how many viability assessments they had completed in the previous year.

Of those 14 authorities who knew how many viabilities they had completed

- 825 Viability assessments within the year
- 265 full assessments (Unified assessment, FC only, SGO only)
- Approved 178 foster carers of which 55 were actually been approved as Special Guardians/ CAOs as an outcome.
- The data collected showed that ADM's declined 11 applications, of which 2 went on to be approved as a SGO/CAO.

Looking at the information suggests that

- This is a lot of work when compared to the activity of recruiting and approving mainstream foster carers.
- Many factors seem to influence the level of viability and full assessments requested for example: local organisation around the PLO; regional differences about expectations

in court; resourcing. It would be helpful to further develop understanding about the level of work that is being generated.

- If the system has to create additional capacity to recruit and assess mainstream foster carers with no additional resource – could this be assisted by
 - Early identification.
 - Good management of pre-PLO process within local authorities.
 - Trying to develop a consistent pan Wales approach from the court.

3 month data: 1 October 2016 – 31 December 2016

16 Local Authorities provided data.

The intention was to capture the flow of cases from an initial request for a viability, through to approval. When we looked at the data it became clear that the short period of data capture means that the figures don't relate to one another i.e. within the 3 months not every viability assessment will have become a completed assessment. So this has provided a snapshot of business.

- 16 LA's provided data about the numbers of viability assessments they were undertaking.
- Within the 3 months they undertook 337 Viabilities of which 136 were positive and 141 were negative. In addition 51 people were known to have withdrawn. The remainder were on-going at the end of the 3 month period or outcome not known.
- Where multiple viability assessments were undertaken in respect of the same children the numbers varied from 2 to 6 assessments for the same child or group of children. The most common numbers reported were 2 or 3

assessments/ child or sibling group. The highest numbers reported were 6 (occasional).

- During this period 99 full assessments were started by 18 local authorities and they completed 90 assessments. 26 were started and completed within this 3 month period.
- Local authorities were asked how many of these assessments related to Regulation 26 placements and 16 local authorities responded telling us that a total of 36 assessments related to placements that had initially been made under Regulation 26.
- During this period 32 kinship carers were approved as foster carers and 13 applications to foster were declined by the ADM. Of those that were declined one kinship carer was approved as a SG/ CAO
- There were 9 disruptions that were reported in the 3 month period with a range of placement durations:
 - During assessment (removed); 1 month; 8 months; a 6 months; 3 years; 8 years

CURRENT PRACTICE IN VIABILITY ASSESSMENTS

Introduction

The purpose of a Viability assessment is to undertake a brief assessment to assist the local authority and the court to understand which extended family members can be considered as a 'realistic option' in terms of becoming a potential caregivers for the child (as set out in case law).

In most cases they do not indicate a preference for a legal order under which family members become the primary care givers – they simply indicate that there are sufficient positive indicators to progress.

A good Viability Assessment will enable full reasons to be provided to the family and the court in the event that the assessment is negative.

As well as having an assessment function the viability process also enables the start of an educative and information giving process about what future approval as either a foster carer or Special Guardian for the child will entail.

This information giving, which is akin to the pre-assessment training given to foster carers and adopters, has been highlighted as a critical factor in establishing a stable placement in the future (Wade, 2014). Because of the unplanned nature of the majority of kinship placements, it has been identified that there is a need for this to continue throughout the assessment process. This factor was also noted in National review of care planning for children and young people subject to Public Law Outline pre-proceedings CSSIW (2016).

More detail about the areas that should be covered is given in the section on support and training.

Current Practice

The following information was collated from formats provided by a number of local authorities.

Timing of viability assessments

- North Wales: 2-4 weeks for viability (full assessment 16 weeks including the 2-4)
- South East Wales: 2 weeks for viability, followed by 12-14 weeks for full assessment, unless otherwise directed
- Neath Port Talbot: up to 4 weeks for initial (viability) followed by 10 weeks for full assessment (total 16 weeks maximum)
- It was accepted by practitioners that 2-4 weeks is adequate to undertake a viability assessment.

Who should undertake viability assessments?

Feedback indicated that practice varies across Wales, for example:

- In North Wales, both child's social worker and fostering social worker undertake the assessment.
- In South East Wales: either the child's social worker and /or fostering social worker, depending on the local authority
- In Neath Port Talbot, the child's social worker undertakes the first visit. An audit of strengths and weaknesses then takes place, followed by a possible joint visit with the fostering social worker to focus on particular issues.

Most authorities viewed it as good practice to involve both the child's social worker and the family placement/fostering social worker, in order to:

- Share and develop knowledge of the family at an early stage. This prevented the family having to supply information twice and facilitated a one off review with them of information that is already known by the department about them (if applicable).
- Bring an element of expertise in assessment which the child's social worker alone may not have e.g. an understanding of the regulatory requirements and processes for foster care; an understanding of the assessment of substitute care givers.
- Introduce an element of independence for the family.
- Provide an analysis which focuses on the child's needs and whether these family members appear to be able to meet those needs sufficiently to merit a full assessment.

Recommendation 1

Viability assessments are undertaken jointly by the child's social worker and the fostering team to ensure that the expertise and knowledge base of both is utilised at this stage

Levels of viability assessment

Within the workshops a lively debate arose about the potential to introduce a screening type assessment to be used on occasions where a family is potentially so 'manifestly unsuitable' that a viability assessment is not necessary. Practitioners were clear that this would be useful in very specific circumstances where the evidence of unsuitability was very clear at the outset and there was also evidence that no work with the family could effect a change.

Areas for this first viability assessment or ‘filtering’ assessment, would include:

- An offence against a child
- A proven inability to work with the local authority
- Where there has been significant involvement with the local authority and there is evidence that it is likely that no work can be done to improve parenting capacity or lessen risk.

This form of filtering viability could only be used in exceptional circumstances where the evidence was very clear. Where there is any doubt, a viability assessment should be undertaken.

Recommendation 2
That local authorities consider a form of ‘initial’ or ‘screening’ viability assessment which filters out the ‘manifestly unsuitable’ family members from any further assessment. Where there is any doubt, a viability assessment should be undertaken.

Domains for Assessment in Viability Assessments

A number of local authorities provided the assessment formats that they were currently using. These had developed via different routes, but broadly speaking all have evolved along broadly similar lines. North Wales had invested in a format that was agreed across all 5 local authorities and with local courts. The table below shows the similarities and differences. Other areas had developed more local formats, some with court agreement.

Format	Areas covered
All share (SEW, NW, NPT and Ceredigion):	• Reason for proposed placement. • Accommodation, including proposed sleeping arrangements for the child. • Health of proposed carer and members of family/ household. • Impact of placement on prospective carer and family/ household. • Proposed carer’s experience of caring for children.
North Wales only	• Whether family has been referred for a FGM • Motivation • Smoking
NPT only	• Any history of domestic violence. • Any substance/alcohol dependency. • Working relationship with LA and other agencies. • A list of positive and risk factors.
Ceredigion only	• Ability to engage with the LA’s care plan and to keep information confidential. • Proposed carer’s understanding of what is being asked (in terms of permanency). • Analysis of family dynamics, insight of family members into possible problems, family members’ support of the idea of reunification.

Figure 1 Domains for Assessment

The new Family Rights Group guidance on viability assessments sets out very similar domains to those highlighted by these Welsh proformas.

BEST PRACTICE – VIABILITY ASSESSMENTS

First Principles

The following principles were agreed as a basis for undertaking viability assessments;

- This is the start of an educative, two way process
- There must be an acknowledgement of the shock and distress a family may be experiencing.
- The assessment should be conducted in a spirit of openness, positivity and honesty in exploring whether these family members may be able to care for the child/ren concerned.

The main considerations for viability assessments are:

- Risk
- Ability of the kinship carer to protect the child from risk when working with the local authority
- Ability to work with the local authority to deliver the care plan

An All Wales Format for Viability Assessments?

The practitioners attending the workshops were not unanimous in believing that an all Wales assessment format should be used. This was in part due to the investment of time that there has been at both local and regional levels to develop a framework for this assessment. They also expressed a concern about the response of their local judiciary where they have been involved at regional levels in agreeing an appropriate format.

There was recognition from practitioners about the benefits of having a format which is ratified by Welsh Government and approved through the Family Justice Network, in order to underpin and strengthen the use of viability assessments in deciding whether a family is a realistic option.

At the same time as we were considering viability assessments in Wales (Feb 2017), we were able to have sight of the draft Family Rights Group assessment format. The final document was subsequently endorsed by the President, Sir James Mumby when the format was published in February 2017.

The similarity of the various viability assessment frameworks across Wales and the FRG format is noted. What was clear within the work with practitioners is that the quality of work undertaken and analysis of that work that is much more important than a particular format. However, as the FRG format has the endorsement of the judiciary and does not depart in any major way from the Welsh formats, we suggest that Wales adopts the FRG format, with some minor amendments to take account of the SSWBA and any language considerations.

Other factors that are seen as critical are the time available for the assessment, and linked to this, the processes for the early identification of family members. They are discussed below.

Recommendation 3

That Welsh Government considers providing an all Wales format based on the Family Rights Group Viability Format and provides good practice guidance to assist social workers in providing good quality, robust and analytical assessments.

The Social Worker's Evidence Template

This template is completed by social workers when they file for care proceedings. The most recent template has not been adopted by some Welsh local authorities but is the most recent guidance from the Ministry of Justice. Practitioners indicated that they believed that it sets a very high threshold for a viability assessment, particularly with the 'test' in 4(b). It was the view that any Welsh Good Practice Guidance should temper this viability test with an assessment of a willingness and capacity to learn; this reinforces the role of the assessment as being educative, particularly in the early stages.

The following is an extract from the 2016 template:

Social work evidence template:

6. Analysis of the evidence of wider family and friends capability
- 6.1 Analysis of the evidence of wider family and friends capability to meet each child's needs, including analysis of the evidence of any capability gap and whether/how this can be bridged in the child's timescale.

Key Considerations for a Viability Assessment

1. The main considerations for viability assessments are:
 - a. Risk.
 - b. Ability of the kinship carer to protect the child from risk when working with the local authority.
 - c. Ability to work with the local authority to deliver the care plan.
2. The genogram and ecomap should routinely identify those relatives who are already protective contacts for the child. Both the genogram and the ecomap should be comprehensive and inclusive.
3. Risky contacts should be excluded from consideration through a robust filtering process (see above).
4. This prima facie viability – for being a permanent carer – should be extended by three further tests – before a full assessment is carried out in compliance with the specific set of current Regulations that apply to the proposed permanent placement.

The three additional viability tests are:

- a. That the carer understands in broad terms the needs of the child subject to proceedings
- b. That the carer understands the level and type of care the child will need throughout their childhood as a consequence of their experiences
- c. That the carer expresses an authentic willingness to be part of the team around the child until matters are fully resolved.

Domains for Viability Assessment

(taken from the FRG model)

Given the endorsement of the FRG Viability Assessment model it seems prudent to adopt the domains outlined in this model, namely:

- Motivation
- Understanding of the needs of the child and family
- Age of carer
- Accommodation
- Employment status of carer
- Finances
- Health of carer
- Lifestyle of carer and household members
- Experience of parenting and significant other relationships
- Criminal convictions
- Relationship with child
- Family dynamics and contact
- Impact on other household members
- Working relationships with professionals
- Potential placement options

Time is Required to Assess Capacity

Early identification and involvement means that the carer has more time and opportunity to assimilate information about

- what has happened to the child and
- What will be required of them?

This was termed in a workshop as ‘a journey from disbelief to an understanding of permanency’. People do have the capacity to move on in their understanding but time is needed for this and some carers are not given enough time. Practitioners, other professionals and the judiciary need to understand that time is required to enable family members to make this journey.

The principle of early involvement has been highlighted in CSSIW's most recent report: The national review of care planning for children and young people subject to PLO pre proceedings, December 2016. Recommendation 3.3 states

“Arrangements should be in place to ensure that there is engagement with families at an early stage to agree what permanency options are available. This should include ensuring that families fully understand the need to nominate carers within the family.....Further guidance is needed to ensure that there is countrywide consistency on how to meet expectations of the court in supporting kinship care arrangements.”

Recommendation 4

That good practice guide includes the guidance to set up a family meeting at an early stage, ideally at child protection stage, in order to identify the wider family member's relationships with the child.

Kinship Skills

'I'm not a carer - I'm his grandmother!'

I've brought up a whole family without being assessed!

I didn't like being 'done to'

Assessors need to develop the skills in working honestly, collaboratively and transparently with prospective carers.

Responses from practitioners were consistent in recognising that there was a skillset required if these assessments were to ensure robust assessment and build a relationship with the kinship carer that would enable the educative and supportive elements of the assessment process to start to form.

The impact of family dynamics on prospective kinship carers to safeguard and nurture a child was seen as a key differentiator between these assessments and those for mainstream foster carers. In some cases it was noted that in isolation prospective carers may have the skills to look after a child. However their capacity to undertake that role within a dynamic family situation may be different from their capacity to care give in isolation. It is seen as dependant on the positive and negative dynamics in the changed family relationships.

Recommendation 5

That good practice guidance is provided on an all Wales basis to aid the practitioner in providing a robust and analytical kinship assessment.

Recommendation 6

That local authorities consider training specifically for the purposes of undertaking kinship assessments, to include an assessment of family dynamics

"When grandmothers become 'mothers' to their daughter's children a lot of things change in a family"

Jo Goodwin, NPT Kinship Team

CURRENT PRACTICE IN KINSHIP FOSTER CARER ASSESSMENTS

Scoping Current Practice

Practitioners indicated that there were a number of different models in use across Wales. Some regional collaboration had taken place, notably in north Wales and, more recently, across a group of 10 local authorities in south east Wales. In these areas assessment frameworks had been developed and work undertaken with the judiciary to agree a regional approach to assessments. Other good models had been developed in other areas, again with input from the judiciary, but their usage was more localised.

In terms of assessment areas there was broad similarity between the formats. The addition of a dimension about Family Dynamics by Neath Port Talbot was seen as innovative and helpful by other practitioners. It is reported as having been well received by the local court as well.

The recent literature review by Professor Joan Hunt on Risk and Protective Factors was used as the basis for discussions about domains as it provides an evidenced based approach.

Many, but not all, local authorities are using Unified Assessment frameworks for these assessments. These formats collect information about the prospective kinship carers that fulfils the criteria for both foster care and Special Guardianship assessments. It enables a recommendation to be made in relation to a prospective carers suitability as a caregiver for the specific child/ children; a recommendation is then made about which legal framework seems most suitable.

An All Wales approach to kinship assessments was discussed. As an abstract idea practitioners thought it would be helpful. However at a concrete level many of them had invested significant time and effort into their local or regional formats

and were reluctant to let this go for a format that may be less developed than theirs. However some of these barriers were broken down in the workshop as the many similarities were acknowledged.

Where models had been agreed with the judiciary this was also a significant barrier as practitioners were anxious about having to renegotiate content.

Two routes were discussed

- Developing an agreed All-Wales format.
- Sticking to current arrangements but providing good practice guidance about the domains for assessments. It would then be a local or regional task to audit local versions to outline where it was expected that the domains would be covered.

Due to investment of local effort into these formats it seems appropriate that the final decision is made by the Heads of Children Services Group. There are clear advantages to an All Wales approach but it does have a resource implication in addition to the development of the format e.g. staff training.

Recommendation 7

That Heads of Childrens Services are asked to make a decision about whether a national model for Unified Assessments is developed.



DEVELOPING BEST PRACTICE

Domains for Kinship Assessment

It was agreed that the domains identified within Professor Joan Hunt's research provide an up to date and evidenced based list of domains for assessment. As part of this work social workers and kinship carers considered the domains in detail and added to the definitions of what is required under each heading.

The Neath Port Talbot Kinship Team has pioneered work around the inclusion of Family Dynamics into these assessments and this was added as a domain. The headline areas for assessment are shown below.

Domains for Kinship Assessment

1. The carer 's personal attributes and attitudes (includes parenting capacity)
2. The child/carer relationship
3. The carer's understanding of the task and impact upon her life
4. Motivation and commitment
5. Family dynamics
6. Relationships with birth parent(s)

Detailed breakdown-see Appendix 1

The Need to Work Collaboratively with Families

One of the major principles enshrined in the SSWBA is that of co-operation and partnership with families in promoting the well-being of the child.

The relationships built up with possible kinship carers needs to be based on mutual respect and honesty. Family members who joined us for the workshops reiterated the importance of being treated with respect and empathy during the process.

Research (Wade, 2014), when researching special guardianship assessments reported that, while most special guardians felt that the assessment was sufficiently thorough in terms of assessing their suitability, some suggested that the process had been a bit one-way and that social workers hadn't given them the opportunity to

One of the training needs identified was for child care social workers to explore how to develop relationships and trust with prospective carers, be able to show empathy for the predicament in which family members find themselves, whilst being clear about the processes and expectations placed on family members.

Many child care social workers have not had the opportunity to develop skills in the assessment process. It was agreed by the workshop that providing good quality, focussed training for child care social workers to explore kinship assessments, away from the crises of front line social work, would help to improve practice.

Recommendation 8

That the local authorities provide training for child care social workers on assessment skills and working collaboratively with extended family members.



SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Training

Those consulted agreed that in the main training and support needs for kinship carers need to be considered separately from those of mainstream carers. Some kinship carers' experience of integrated training was positive, with mainstream carers embracing the family circumstances and providing positive reinforcement. Other experiences have not been so positive, with carers feeling judged as family members rather than accepted as foster carers. Some carers experienced these groups as 'overwhelming'.

This does not mean that it is either desirable (or indeed feasible) to provide completely separate and discrete training and support for kinship carers, but integration needs to be managed carefully, with support at the start built in, and perhaps some education provided to mainstream carers in preparation for mixed groups.

Integrating support and training for foster kinship carers with special guardians has been very positive – differences around the legal frameworks have to be acknowledged but the caregiving task and pressures are similar.

Timescales frequently preclude any pre-approval training for either group and it is noted that Wade (2014) highlights that delivering this type of input can enhance placement stability. It is therefore important to consider how the elements of a 'Skills to Foster' course could be delivered to this group of caregivers.

Annual reviews of Kinship carers approved under the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 will also identify gaps in training as they arise.

Consideration needs to be given to providing pre approval and post approval training, which could include online training as well as face to face training, allied with training with the assessing social worker. The pre-assessment training needs to include other birth children who may be in the family.

What doesn't work:

The groups identified the following factors:

- The word itself can be off putting – can we find another name?
- Attending a training event can be very intimidating , particularly if you are anxious about being judged
- A misunderstanding of what training is for – 'I have brought up my children and didn't need training for that'
- Lack of time/other commitments/geographical distance from the training venue
- If the training is jointly with main stream foster carers then a feeling that you are being looked at and judged

What does work:

- Providing a more flexible approach to training and aligning it with support events.
- Peer mentoring.
- Informal one to one training, allied to supervision (although time constraints are a challenge).
- Some training needs to be for kinship carers only (If training is to be shared with mainstream carers, kinship carers need to be teamed up together for the training).
- Online training specifically for kinship foster carers would be an excellent component of a training package and could be used to provide audio rather than written information. Thought needs to be given to the individual carer's learning style.

A Core Training Curriculum

A basic curriculum to be covered by all kinship carers was identified. Kinship carers may need support to enable them clarify why these areas are likely to be useful and relevant to their task as kinship carers. Also to see that it will be time well spent and is likely to provide useful information, as well as the opportunity to meet socially with other carers.

A Core Training Curriculum

1. Attachment and trauma/the rudiments of PACE. Understanding why children behave in a particular way and strategies for dealing with the behaviour (this would probably be best undertaken for kinship carers in a discrete session as discussion will inevitably turn to the trauma that the child has suffered). This is a topic, not just a day's training – the subject needs to be looked at different stages of development and consider secondary trauma.
2. Life story work/narrative/answering difficult questions, particularly when you as a carer may be part of that family narrative. Training specifically for kinship carers should be developed (and training for social workers in undertaking this work).
3. Understanding the system:
 - The legal framework for fostering
 - Attending meetings
 - The respective roles of the child's social worker and the fostering support worker
 - Delegated authority
 - Safe care/allegations/disclosures/ Recording
4. Understanding family dynamics. This was a topic that the grandparents group felt to be most important. To include:

Kinship Foster Care

- Managing contact
 - The importance of recording in this context
5. The way forward – looking at the pros and cons of SGO' compared with remaining as a foster carer for a looked after child
 6. Understanding adolescence To include the implications for financial, practical and emotional support

Training on a Regional Basis?

The workshop considered the benefits and disadvantages of providing kinship carer training on a regional basis:

Benefits:

- Greater/more timely availability
- Greater attendance and so better value
- Facilitates better use of external trainers (e.g. able to bring in someone like Kate Cairns or Mary Jones)

Disadvantages

- Geography/travel time
- Not building up local networks (for informal support)

Recommendation 9

That a core suite of training titles is agreed and offered consistently to kinship carers across Wales and that consideration is given to the benefits of delivering this on a regional basis for kinship foster carers and Special Guardians.

Support for Carers

The single most important factor for carers was the attitude of workers. One carer said of her support worker

'It was the way she put across the requirement for assessment and DBS checks to care for the family ... she understood my dynamics ... she was a shoulder to cry on.'

The workshop recommended that, in order to be able to support family placements, child care social workers need specific training and support in working collaboratively and empathically with kinship carers. Family placement social workers can often take the lead with this.

This attitude of collaboration, empathy and transparency needs to start at an early stage, with clear information being given at any family group meeting/family meeting and for a member of the family placement team to be available at the meeting to answer questions.

The provision of easy to read, appropriate written information, from an early stage. Would provide the right information at the right time. These leaflets could include a section on 'frequently asked questions'.

Some local authorities have already developed materials. For example Conwy has a leaflet for kinship carers.

Some authorities have dedicated kinship teams; others have support workers/ social workers with specific responsibilities embedded within mainstream fostering teams. In addition to a dedicated team NPT also provide a separate social worker for support for kinship carers who have a current placement under reg 26 CPPCR(W)R and who is separate from the fostering assessment social worker.

The groups identified that the following support was useful once children and young people were in placement – many of which are similar to the types of support that is found to be helpful by all foster carers:

Kinship Support – What Works

1. The provision of informal support groups carers. Again these could be separate or combined with mainstream carers or provided with special guardians.
2. Out of hours emergency support (should be provided already?).
3. Consideration given to practical support to be able to attend (travel/child care/timing of groups).
4. Activities (parties/picnics/pantomime trips) are popular support activities.
5. The provision of psychological advice and assistance apart from CAMHS.
6. The provision of support groups for children looked after by family members
7. Recognition that adolescence brings its challenges to all families and that support needs to be accessible throughout the child's minority.
8. Help to access counselling services for carers themselves.
9. Support with housing and benefits issues.

Support on a Regional Basis?

The workshop considered the advantages and disadvantages of providing support on a regional basis

Advantages:

- Enables a greater 'menu' of activities by sharing expertise across the region
- Avoid duplication/provide critical numbers for running schemes with very small authorities
- Provides links with wider community (e.g. BME carers/ LGBT carers)
- A greater opportunity for sharing best practice
- Out of area placement carers could tap into local support

Disadvantages

- Travel/distance from home
- Less chance to make more local, informal support network

It was agreed that there was a potential benefit for kinship foster carers in networking and making connections with other kinship carers (SGO's/informal carers). There may be more common interest between kinship carers with a different legal framework than between kinship and mainstream foster carers.

Workshop participants indicated that some form of national helpline would be helpful for carers to access the appropriate information and support. It is noted that information and advice is already available through organisations such as AFA Cymru and the Fostering Network and that suggests that perhaps the issue is accessibility – a clear information point would be useful. Information services may need to make it more explicit that they can be accessed by kinship carers.

Recommendation 9

That Support Groups for kinship carers are offered to kinship carers irrespective of legal status and that this development is considered on a regional basis by Local Authorities and the Third Sector.

The Need for Written Information

It was acknowledged by the workshop that there was a shortage of good quality, timely written information for prospective carers. This point was made by CSSIW in their report of December 2016, where a key finding was that there was a lack of suitable literature on the pre-proceedings process across Wales.

Prospective carers neither want nor need to be given information about the legal differences between special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders when they have just been presented with the fact that they are possibly to have their young relative placed with them on an emergency basis. However, that information will be important to them at a later date.

Recommendation 10:

That Welsh Government (or authorities) make available to prospective kinship carers good quality and up to date information leaflets, covering:

- Your child relative and the child protection process
- Family meetings – their function and your role
- Emergency placements – the legal and practice frameworks
- Viability assessments – what they are for, what they cover and what happens afterwards
- Full kinship care assessments – what they are for, what they cover and what happens afterwards
- Care proceedings – your part in them as prospective kinship carers and the orders the court can make
- Being a special guardian or a foster carer – what is right for you and your child? How to access legal advice.

THE EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF KINSHIP CARERS

The Early identification of family members who may wish to be assessed as kinship carers has been highlighted as a critical issue. A number of other practice issues flow from this. Notably

- The sharing of information with family members/potential carers
- The need to work collaboratively with families
- The need for written information

The Benefits of Early Identification

Not only does early identification enable local authorities to comply with the PLO timescales, but it also gives possible kinship carers the maximum available time to assimilate what is happening in their family, and recover a little from what is often the shocking and painful news that a child in the family has suffered or is at risk of suffering harm. They are then able to think more clearly and objectively about whether they, or other members of the family, can provide alternative, permanent care.

Research in Practice (2015c) found that the use of family group conferences was variable and that potential carers may not come forward/be identified until care proceedings are well underway (RIP, 2016)

North Wales has a policy which facilitates a family meeting at a very early stage – prior to the child being made subject to a child protection plan and no later than eighteen months after a child protection plan has been made but there is no plan as yet to seek to remove the child. This provides family members with the opportunity to know, at an early stage, that there are difficulties with parenting the child to ‘raise the profile of safeguarding concerns amongst extended family at the earliest opportunity...’ It is at this stage that they may be able

to provide support to the birth parent(s). It also provides the local authority with a clearer picture of who may be available to care at a later date.

This early involvement with family members has the capacity for facilitating an easier relationship with family members if the child’s circumstances merit an escalation into the pre proceedings protocol. The shock to family members may be lessened and, if the child’s social worker has used the process well, the family members concerned may feel more able to see themselves as part of the team supporting the child.

If there is no early involvement, it was recognised by practitioners and carers that family members who are only identified through the pre proceedings protocol, or even during proceedings itself, tend to feel rushed and confused, which leads to an understandable defensiveness. This in turn hinders a full and robust assessment process.

It is noted that there was an amendment put forward in the Children and Social Work Bill which created a duty upon the local authority, when undertaking a s47 Children Act 1989 investigation, to hold a family group conference. This amendment fell but it highlights the general acceptance of early support and identification as being important.

A recommendation from the CSSIW report: National review of care planning for children and young people subject to PLO pre-proceedings, December 2016 is that

‘Arrangements should be in place to ensure that there is engagement with families at an early stage to agree what permanency options are available. These should include ensuring that families fully understand the need to nominate alternative carers within the family.’

‘Effective use of family meetings which were often chaired by workers themselves could be seen not only to prevent delays later on when legal proceedings were instigated but also to address at an early stage the complexities of managing contact and financial or practical support that might be needed.’

Some local authorities have full family group conferences; others have less structured family meetings. The view of the workshop was that the form of meeting was less important than ensuring that a family meeting of some kind takes place at this early stage. The meeting would preferably be chaired by a practitioner of team manager status.

Once one family meeting has taken place and the extended family is used to the structure and process, it may be reconvened at later dates to address different issues, for example contact arrangements.

The Sharing of Information with Family Members/ Potential Carers

One of the factors militating against early intervention in this way is the lack of clarity, from the local authority’s perspective, on how far birth parents’ confidentiality may be breached, in order to contact and involve particular family members. When the matter is in care proceedings, then a direction from the judge may be requested. However, that option is not available in any pre proceedings work.

Local authority practice varies, with some regarding the contacting of family members, against the express wish of birth parents, as being unlawful, whilst other authorities treat the information as the child’s rather than the parents and so feel able to contact possible kinship carers.

Practitioners are aware of the data protection principles determining practice in this area. However, if there could be some way in which, in exceptional circumstances, relatives could be contacted with the child’s information, rather than the parents’, that may facilitate early identification. A consultation with the Information Commissioner’s Office on this area would be beneficial.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of recommendations are made in this report and they are documented below. However some significant cross cutting themes emerged consistently across the work.

Time for Assessments

Anxiety about this underpinned discussions about all areas of assessment.

The assessment process is complex for family members and practitioners. Both parties require time for reflection, to build trust and for a two-way flow of information to be established. Lack of time can preclude a good analytical assessment process and inhibit family members fully exploring the issues for them if they are offer placements in an informed way

A recent serious case review published by Birmingham City Council (February 2017), where the child concerned, Keegan Downer, was killed by her special guardian, highlights the need for a robust and analytical assessment, which does not overly rely on self-reporting and has all elements completed. In this assessment, which was ordered to be filed within less than six weeks, the final report lacked DBS and medical checks, both of which contained relevant information. The DFJ reviewed the file for Keegan's case and stressed to the City Council and CAFCASS the importance of more in depth reports and to scrutinise assessments and proposals in more detail.

The significance of this Serious Case Review for kinship foster carer is that many prospective kinship carers are assessed under unified assessment formats which combine the assessments for foster care and special guardianship in one process.

Since many of these assessments are for permanency, across the lifetime of the child, the time required for a good quality, reflective assessment process is surely time well spent. Research supports that good preparation of potential caregivers is a positive indicator of future placement stability (Wade, 2014). Practitioners and family members who took

part in this work reported that the time spent is valuable for building relationships and trust, as well as supporting good assessments. It can mean that family members may feel more able to request support in the future if they become Special Guardians.

The work undertaken in Birmingham following the serious case review has led to an improved working relationship between the local authority and judiciary, with a shared understanding of the need for time to undertake a sufficiently full and analytical assessment, within the constraints of the Public Law Outline. It has been agreed by the DFJ's and Chairs of Circuits' LFJB's and by the Midlands Liaison Judge, the Honourable Mr Justice Keehan, that the special guardianship report process must not be curtailed in an attempt to conclude proceedings within 26 weeks.

We welcome the fact that the Special Guardianship Technical Group are proposing that a 12 week time for assessments is supported by inclusion in the Code of Practice, and welcome the start of a dialogue with the judiciary in Wales when the Technical Group takes a paper to the next Family Justice network meeting.

The Need for a Realistic Timetable

Practitioners and kin carers were consistent in their belief that assessments need to be completed in realistic timescales if they are to be robust and safe. The belief that a short timetable, with an intense period of assessment, will provide the same level of analysis is wrong for the following reasons:

- 1) There is little or no time for family members to assimilate information and reflect on it. These are family members often in a state of shock and disbelief that such terrible events have occurred;
- 2) The relationship the assessor necessarily has to build with the carer cannot be built in a short and pressurised time frame. The basis of assessment is a trusting relationship

developed between the assessor and the assessed, so that the carer can explore her feelings of doubt, anger and anxiety over the proposed placement as well as look forward to the positives. A shortened assessment, which does not have time for that relationship of support and challenge to grow, will result in a weak, and consequently unsafe, assessment

- 3) Checks and references are compromised by a short assessment; Practitioners tend to wait to interview referees later in the process where vulnerabilities may have emerged and those vulnerabilities can be tested out with the referees. If interviews have to take place as soon as the assessment is started, or shortly after, this is another safeguard lost;
- 4) Family members who put themselves forward as carers are sometimes involved with the reasons for and circumstances of the child's removal. This does not mean that they are unable to provide good enough care, but there needs to be the opportunity to learn and demonstrate a capacity to change. A short assessment denies some carers the opportunity to make the necessary adjustments to lifestyle or parenting pattern;
- 5) An assessment of a proposed family member's capacity to care for a young relative for the rest of their minority is the most complex of all assessments – far more complex than mainstream fostering or adoption assessments, which are rarely completed in less than six months.

Recommendation 12

That Welsh Government considers, through the auspices of the Special Guardianship Technical Group, amending the Special Guardianship (Wales) Regulations 2005 by adding a regulation that provides for no special guardianship assessment to be undertaken in less than twelve weeks.

Early identification of Family Members

This was a second cross cutting theme within the work. Pre-PLO processes in local authorities need to be organised in way that they facilitate the identification of potential care givers at an early stage. Approximately half of the local authorities who responded to us were using some kind of Family Meeting in their work.

This must be recommended as good practice at many levels. It provides a transparent way of working which the most families find helpful. It assists with the early identification of family members who can support plans for families to remain together if possible, but who may be potential care givers if this is not possible.

It is one way in which local authorities can work to increase the time available to them to undertake assessments. Part of achieving a 12 week assessment period is about local practice being organised in a way that maximises the opportunities for early identification and our scoping exercise suggested that this may not be the case in all local authorities.

An Appropriate Legal Framework for Kinship Placements.

The need for the regulatory framework to better fit with the issue of Kinship Foster Care is documented in detail within the report and recommendations. We are mindful of the on-going work of the Special Guardianship Technical Group in this context as well.

The Status of Good Practice Guidance.

Issuing statutory good practice guidance around the Viability assessments and full assessments of potential Kinship Foster Carers would be helpful for practitioners. It would create a clear line in the sand about expectations. We would therefore

welcome a move to develop this, through the development of a code of practice. This would be in line with developments through the Welsh Governments Special Guardianship Technical Group.

Support irrespective of Legal Status.

The needs of the children who are cared for within these placements are the same, irrespective of the legal status of the caregiver. Kinship carers are a fluid population, and may move between being foster carers and Special Guardians. Some children will be in non-statutory arrangements. What is clear is that if the system is to be child centred, the essential elements of training and support must be available for all kinship caregivers. The regulatory and practice framework that sits around foster care means that Kinship Foster carers are in many ways the easiest group to provide this for.

It is essential that a continuum of support, covering the areas documented here must be available for kin carers of all legal statuses if we are to support stable placements.

Engagement with the Judiciary at a National Level

It is clear from the responses from practitioners that there has been some good dialogue with the judiciary about the issues of kinship assessment at a regional level. In order to move to a consistent all Wales approach there needs to be engagement and dialogue at a national level, probably on an on-going basis.

Recommendation 13

That dialogue with the judiciary is instigated at a national level, with a mechanism for occasional reviews considered as art of the process.

Key messages for Practice

1. There is a need for realistic timescales for undertaking assessments – 12 weeks is good practice and facilitates an analytical assessment process that kinship carers can engage with.
2. Prospective Kinship Carers need to be identified as early as possible in the process to ensure
 - a. They can contribute to plans to help families stay together if possible.
 - b. They have time to process what is happening in their family, to understand the needs of the child(ren) to be looked after and what is being asked of them.
 - c. They can build working relationships and trust with the professionals who will be assessing and supporting them.
 - d. Family meetings are often the best way of doing this.
 - e. Well planned pre-PLO processes can help to maximise the time available for assessments.
3. Professionals need to treat family members with honesty, respect and empathy and to keep family members informed of developments in a timely manner.
4. Professionals working in kinship care need to develop skills in providing evidence based assessments with a proper analysis of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the prospective carer.
5. Local Authorities need to provide timely and effective advice and support to kinship carers.
6. Professionals need to keep the IRO and CAFCASS Cymru informed.

Sarah Coldrick
Legal Consultant

Kathy s'Jacob
Project Manager

APPENDIX 1

Domains for Full Assessments of Prospective Kinship Foster Carers (Form F/ Unified/ SGO)

The carer 's personal attributes and attitudes

- Carers background and experience of being a child/ relationship patternsinc attachment.
- Their own experience of being a parent, to include what may have happened to their own children's parenting and the local authority's worries for the child(ren).
- Their capacity to put the child(ren) first in their thoughts and identify the child(ren)s current and future needs.
- Their resilience/stickability during challenges in the past.
- Their relationship with any children of their own – do they intend to have more? If single might they enter into a new relationship?
- Are they aspirational for their family members? Will they be for this child?
- Look to evidence and not just self-reporting.

The child/carers relationship

- Observe the relationship (if there is one). Spend time with carer and child together
- What is the quality of the pre-existing relationship Take account of research showing that placements with grandparents create more placement stability (Farmer and Moyers, 2008 and Hunt et al, 2008) and that a pre-existing relationship is a protective factor.
- Acknowledge the vulnerability of a placement where there is no relationship. How could this vulnerability be addressed through a support plan?
- Is there enough capacity on her behalf to build on the relationship?
- What is the caregiver's capacity to love this child/accept the child for who they are?
- If there is no relationship consider this vulnerability and think of elements of support to help introductions and early weeks/months (as in adoption support). Consider introducing the child to the carer through the assessment process in order to be able to observe interaction
- Undertake direct work with the child – what is his or her understanding of and feelings toward the proposed placement (age appropriate)?
- Plan introductions before any final order made (i.e. under ICO or short term CAO before CO or SGO made) (see work being undertaken in England, through CoramBAAF to bring in the concept of a pre SGO order (similar to a Placement Order)

The carer's understanding of the task and impact upon her life

- It may take potential carers time to gain an understanding of what has happened and what is required.
- Recognise strengths and work on those.
- An ability to accept where things may have gone wrong in their own parenting (if they did).
- An acceptance of what has happened and the effect upon the child.
- Being able to agree and work with a 'script' in relation to life story telling and talk to the child.
- Having the capacity to work on understanding the child's need for a secure base.
- Being able to work with the local authority in telling difficult information and help the child make sense of their own life.
- What is the carers understanding of the nature of permanence? Are they really wanting to 'caretake' until the child can be reunified with birth parent(s)? Being able to accept the implications for their life course
- Being able to see another's perspective.
- Will they become a 'parent' – how do they see their role in relation to birth parents
- Managing contact and any potential conflict connected with relationships with the birth family
- Ability to accept support and ask for it when needed
- A proper understanding of the differences between being a foster carer and a special guardian or having a child arrangement order
- If they are to be a foster carer, an understanding of the expectation of the local authority (reviews/delegated authority/recordings etc)

Motivation and commitment

Carer needs to understand why they are motivated to put themselves forward. Is it obligation or guilt? If so, that will have implications for the child. The motivation needs to be free standing/unconditional and in relation to the child him or herself. Do they love this child/have the capacity to love?

- Carer needs to understand the concept of permanence for this child (as above).
- Carer needs to understand that the child's experience will have an impact on the child's behaviour and/or development.
- How the carer's age and/or health affects their ability to provide care both now and in the future as linked to the concept of permanency).

Family dynamics

- Look at the family history.
- An understanding that there will be a shift in priorities and, in the short term at least, other family members' needs, including children, will need to come second to the child placed.
- Observe the whole family together/hold a family meeting. Observe whole family system and look at how the family could work better.
- There needs to be an acceptance, by all family members, of the history leading to the child being cared for by the wider family. This should be not be either critical or magical, but be honest and non judgemental

Relationships with birth parent(s)

- The child needs to know that the carer is able to protect him or her from the birth parents.
- Is the carer able to resist a collusive relationship with birth parents?
- Is everyone clear about the benefits/disadvantages of continued contact with birth parents?
- Will the carer be able to place restrictions on/facilitate contact?
- Will birth parents accept the carer becoming a 'parent' to the child?



9: National Commissioning Arrangements

National Commissioning Arrangements

Recommendation 5

Develop national commissioning arrangements for commissioning all placements, regardless of sector but building on work of the 4C's



Recommendation 5 has been progressed by the NFF in conjunction with the 4C's team: the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru.

For those who are unfamiliar with the work of the 4C's they are a Looked After Children's placement commissioning resource for 15 South and Mid Wales Authorities and provide contract management of the All Wales Fostering Framework and All Wales Residential Framework for 21 signatory Authorities with independent fostering and residential providers. The commissioning work of the 4C's in South and Mid Wales supports development of internal local authority placement provision and inter-authority provision, in addition to working with the independent market.

National Commissioning Workshop

The first step in tackling Recommendation 5 was to arrange a national commissioning workshop, held on the 4th October 2016. The aims of the workshop were:

- To gain an understanding across Wales of the existing placement and commissioning strategies
- To share and bench mark good practice
- To agree a common structure for commissioning strategies
- To agree an action plan for moving towards a national, regional and local placement commissioning strategies

Authorities were asked to share any existing placement or commissioning strategies prior to the event on the agreement they would be anonymised, 9 were kindly received.

A review of these strategies supported the assumption that few Children's Services Departments had up to date, comprehensive strategies that could be used as working reference documents in terms of commissioning placements for their looked after children populations. Those strategies that were shared were very diverse with little consistency in what they were called, their structure, their content or their target audience, with some outward facing documents and some internal documents. Where strategies were in place there was an indication of them being incongruent with or prepared in isolation from other internal strategies, for example, fostering recruitment and retention strategies.

The workshop review of these documents identified some good practice examples that were used as a basis of discussion to consider the relative benefits of developing a template that all Authorities could utilise to produce robust and relevant commissioning strategies. There was a consensus that a toolkit of templates, guidance and best practice examples would benefit Authorities in their approach to placement commissioning.

National Commissioning Arrangements

The variety in documents and content stimulated interesting discussion about the relevance of information and took everyone back to the questions: What is commissioning? How is it similar or different from contracting or procurement? How can good placement commissioning help us approach some of the fundamental challenges of Local Authorities meeting their placement sufficiency duties under the SSWBA? And happily reinforced our mantra for the workshop: 'Commissioning is Exciting!'

The workshops thought about and captured ideas of what would be useful in placement commissioning at a local, regional and national level. Existing resource at each level was identified and thought given to how to support deficiencies or gaps in the known skill set. It was acknowledged that in Children's Services the commissioners may also be practitioners, frontline placement finders, recruitment and marketing officers, contract officers, procurement officers, senior managers, they may work across Children's Services, Adult Services or Local Education Authorities and so had to be many things to many people. This gave a clear context to why commissioning in practice was so varied across so many Authorities.

A factsheet 'Commissioning: Useful Resources & Links' has been prepared by 4C's following the Workshop and shared with all attendees to assist with some of the FAQs and requests for more information or guidance on commissioning.

Developing a Work Programme

Priorities for future work were captured in the initial workshop and formed the basis of a draft work programme to be taken forward. These were:

1. Every Local Authority to have a robust placement needs analysis.
2. Every Local Authority to have a placement commissioning strategy and where appropriate this should complement a regional placement commissioning strategy.
3. Inter Authority toolkit shared to support commissioning of Local Authority placements between one another.
4. An options appraisal to be undertaken on placement searching mechanisms.

A follow up workshop was held In January 2017 with volunteers from the National Workshop who expressed an interest in continued involvement with the work programme. At this workshop the draft work programme was refined to focus on 2 key aspects:

1. Every Local Authority to have a robust placement needs analysis.
2. Every Local Authority to have a placement commissioning strategy and where appropriate this should complement a regional placement commissioning strategy.

In respect of point 3 it was agreed that the 4C's existing work programme supporting Inter Authority placements could absorb the work identified in this area and members of the NFF group who were not already working with the 4C's would be invited to join the established group.

In respect of point 4 it was agreed that the 4C's option appraisal for the placement e-tendering system, secure exchange of information and commissioning performance data had addressed the concerns regarding placement searching. The group acknowledged that a Phased Upgrade Plan of the existing e-tendering system CCSR approved by the 4C's Board in December 2016 was sufficient to deal with this aspect of the draft work programme.

An open invitation has been extended to all Local Authorities and Framework Providers who use the system, where their input will be valuable in ensuring the software developers understand the challenges faced by users and help redefine the functionality of the e-system.



National Commissioning Arrangements

There are 4 Phases to the upgrade programme of CCSR. Phase 1 of the upgrade is complete and Phase 2 of the upgrade is well underway; progressing to timescale with excellent engagement by Authority and Provider frontline users to ensure the system meets the identified needs.

The January workshop in focussing on priorities 1 and 2 of the work programme: needs analysis and placement commissioning strategies; tackled the necessary pre-conditions, and component parts of each. Consensus was reached that template documents setting out expectations of minimum content and chapter headings would help the authors of these documents. The idea of consistency in approach across all Authorities was welcomed and recognised as being beneficial for Authorities when scaled up to regional or national level. The focus and depth of detail within the templates was considered as needing to vary based each Authority's circumstances but a minimum approach to covering specific areas was still considered important. Guidance and support on completion was identified as an area of future work to support the range of skill sets that exist amongst Authorities.

Benefits were also anticipated in offering clarity of message for providers who were expected to respond to the needs of commissioners and develop services to meet gaps in the market.

At the time of writing this report dates for the further development of this work is pencilled in.

Priorities for 2017/18

Moving forward into next year the ambition will be to:

- Build the momentum of the work programme and its 2 key priorities of needs analysis and placement commissioning strategies.
- Engage with independent providers, both the commercial and third sector providers on the development of a national commissioning approach, the issuing of market position statements, barriers and incentives to market development and opportunities for co-production.
- The 4C's Young Commissioners Group, which has won a number of awards for its participation work, will be consulted to ensure young people's views influence the work programme. The work led by Voices from Care with young people in Phase One on what makes a good placement will also be referred to.

The 4C's work programme on commissioning uses workshops with framework providers across fostering and residential provision to consider placement sufficiency and market growth. It will be important to build on this work and minimise duplication. Engagement of non framework providers will also need to be considered to ensure a market wide position is adopted.

The 4C's is currently supporting an alliance in its infancy between the charitable fostering providers; Action for Children, Barnardo's and TACT to develop a distinct market identity to differentiate between themselves and commercial providers. These charitable providers already work together closely to assist in delivery of the Confidence in Care foster carers training programme alongside The Fostering Network. Future exploration of the benefits of the commissioning relationship with charitable providers distinct from commercial providers should feed into the development of Local Authority commissioning strategies.





10: Corporate Parenting

Corporate Parenting

Recommendation 6

Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster care placements

Voices from Care and AFA Cymru co-designed and delivered a project aimed at supporting recommendation 6 from the National Fostering Frameworks' Year 1 report: Benchmark best practice in corporate parenting across Councils and other public services-to improve outcomes for children and increase the resilience of foster carer placements.

Voices from Care are a charity who support and promote the views and experiences of those who are or have been looked after in Wales. The Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru (AFA Cymru) is a Welsh charity working to improve outcomes for children and young people in all types of permanency arrangements – rehabilitation, kinship care, Special Guardianship, fostering and adoption.

The ethos of the project was to promote and celebrate examples of good practice, to promote shared learning, not to identify or highlight poor practice.

Methodology

Voices From Care and AFA Cymru developed and facilitated 3 regional events, which aim to provide Local Authorities and other public services will the opportunity to promote and present best practice as corporate parents. Representation from the 3 regional events; held in Colwyn Bay, Cardiff and Carmarthen, was wide ranging, from young people, Heads of Children's services, Local Authority senior managers and practitioners, elected members/councillors, Welsh Government, Health, CAMHS, Foster Carers, Assembly Members and the Third sector.

Young people looked after and care leavers have been instrumental throughout in the project by supporting and contributing at the regional and national events and through their participation at two young people's residential in Bala and Ceredigion. Description needed

The three regional groups and the young people residential all fed into a National Corporate Parenting Event, which aims to bring projects findings together and to hear from innovate project.

Sample of Shared Practice

Below are some examples; identified by young people and attendees at the regional events, of innovate projects that support local authorities corporate parenting responsibilities.



Participation

Many Local authorities have developed participation and consultation groups for children looked after and care leavers. The scope and role of these participation groups vary but the ethos is to provide advice and guidance on the policy and practice within their authority, and many instances feeding into elected members and Corporate Parenting panels.

A group of young people and local authority staff co-produced an online information and consultation website with the ethos of 'designed for care experienced young people by care experienced young people'.

A 'Sons & Daughters' group which provides support and advice for birth children of foster carers.

Several Authorities highlighted 'Celebrating success events', which provide an opportunity to bring children looked after and care leavers together, to promote positive individual achievements and provide interactions with corporate parents.

Strategic Development

One Local Authority has appointed a Senior Manager whose role is to oversee and promote an integrated corporate parenting strategy, with colleagues from housing, social care, education, leisure and health.

There were a number of examples of young people providing training to councillors and elected members, specifically focusing on what it means to be looked after.

Theming elements of corporate parenting panel meetings. There were a number of examples where Corporate Panel meetings heard from the 6 partner agencies who presented regular updates from their particular agency; this sought to ensure that all partners were fully aware of the work of partner agencies and that Corporate Parenting panels were relevant, dynamic and accountable. .

Health and Wellbeing

In one Local Authority to reduce the impact or feeling of being stigmatised, Young People's health assessments are carried out by School Health Nurses or Health Visitors, rather than the identified LAC specialist nurse who continues to have an overview of those children's needs.

One Local Authority currently uses MIST – Multi-disciplinary Intervention Support Team – which brings together professionals from Social Services, Education and Health; the scheme is currently managed by Action for Children. MIST provides long-term therapeutic support to looked after children and young people, their families and carers and the team of professionals champion family-based placements for the most vulnerable children and young people needing high levels of emotional, social and educational support.

A service is being developed for children who have experienced complex developmental trauma and disrupted attachment histories. These children are likely to be:

- Extremely vulnerable to ongoing mental health issues
- Experience difficult relationships in all contexts (home and education)
- In the looked-after system or on the Child Protection Register.
- Have complex difficulties
- Do not fit the diagnostic/medical category or meet criteria for SCAMHS

The services focus is on creating the environments in which secure attachments can develop and young people have the best chance of building resilience and recovering from trauma. The complex needs of this population require an integrated approach from the relevant agencies – Education, Health and Social Care.

Education and employment

There were several examples of authorities providing young people looked after and care leavers with the opportunity to undertake apprenticeship within the authority.

It was recognised that looked after children experienced difficulties in achieving in school due to the impact of trauma, and it was felt that at all schools would benefit from training to understand how attachment relationships and trauma impacted on children's capacity to study and achieve. One local authority reported that are working with colleagues in education to delivered attachment awareness training within school, with additional support to students and teachers being offered.

Looked after Education Coordinators supporting young people in Yr 11 and college to visit Cardiff University to spend time meeting lecturers and fellow students. Explores all options of education and includes a build up to an overnight stay in student halls.

Several Local Authorities have developed programmes that offer young people looked after and care leavers tailored support and to enter education, employment, or training. These include, work experience placements, Volunteering opportunities, Employability courses, Career pathway planning, Employer and Training Provider talks and Confidence building.

Housing

One Local Authority has developed a series of training flats, providing a young person on the cusp of leaving care, with the experience of running their own home. A young person would spend up to 4 weeks living in a training flat, where they are given a weekly allowance for their food travel and bills. They then move back to their placement

In one instance a local authority purchased a property to ensure siblings would not be placed apart. They then moved the siblings and foster carers into the property.

Fostering

A foster carer and counsellor surgery which support understanding and to influence change. This provides elected members with the opportunity to meet with and to discuss the needs of Foster Carers and young people.

A number of Local Authorities supported their foster carers by using PACE, a therapeutic intervention developed by Dr Dan Hughes, Clinical Psychologist, who created Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy. PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) focusses on the child and not simply on the child's behaviour, and enables adults to see the strengths and positive features that lie underneath more negative and challenging behaviour.

Leisure

Several Local Authorities provide schemes at providing support or 'free passes' for Looked after children, and foster carers, with the aim of promoting healthy living.

Emerging themes

A number of similar themes emerged from the three regional event including:-

- Closer co-working between agencies with the focus on the needs of the child
- That there should be 'true placement choice' for all children at the point of accommodation into Local Authority care, and that placements should be determined on the child's needs rather than on availability of placement
- There should be a reduction in the number of social workers that children were likely to have. Many people acknowledged that children find it difficult to provide their narrative to yet more social workers and indeed it was acknowledged that many young people stop providing their own narrative and wishes and feelings due to the number of social workers that they have had and the difficulty in developing a trusting and meaningful relationship
- Therapeutic support was identified as hugely important for those children looked after and care leavers, both for the child and young person and the foster carers and other professionals such as teachers. It was suggested that therapeutic support should be available throughout the time the child or young person was accommodated, and it was recognized that at times of change, for example transferring from junior to high school, puberty or changes within the family, there would be a greater need for support for that child or young person.
- The CAMHS provision was viewed as a poor service for looked after children, not because of the commitment or knowledge of staff, but due to the austerity cuts that the CAMHS service has experienced for some years with the resulting increase in threshold to access the service.
- That corporate parents should be aspirational for those children who are unable to live with their birth parents, and passionate in their desire that all children should have every opportunity to excel

Recommendations

- Holding an annual National Corporate Parenting Conference, bringing opportunities to share best practice and creative learning.

This sentiment that was echoed across all the 3 regional groups was the need to continue the pan Wales conversation focusing on corporate parenting.

- To revise and extend corporate parenting guidance, so senior officers with local authority departments and public services are aware of their responsibilities and accountabilities for looked after children and care leavers.

Who is a corporate parent? This was discussed at length at the 3 regional event and young people's residential. What was clear that people have differing opinions on who is a corporate parent that their roles and responsibilities. Clarity from Welsh Government would be welcomed.

- Utilising existing local safeguarding boards or the regional partnership boards to bring partner agencies together to work collectively to strengthen corporate parenting practice.

Discussion took place around the importance of gaining high level strategic direction on local corporate parenting practices. An example given on how this was worked successfully was the development of local of Safeguarding Children's Boards,

- All departments within Local Authorities actively demonstrate 'due regard' regarding their corporate parenting obligations for children looked after and care leavers in services strategic development.

'Corporate Parenting is not just for elected members and Social Services'. A view shared by many who attended the events and young people. The need to ensure partners from across the spectrum of a local authority services are aware and act upon their duties as parents to the looked after population in their authority.

- The principals and duties of Corporate Parenting form part of the induction process of all senior managers across the whole of a local authority.

Again following the sentiment that Corporate Parenting is not just for elected members and Social Services, the leaders of all departments need to have an understanding of the lives of looked after children and how their department can support their wellbeing.

- Ensuring looked after children receive an active offer of admission into the looked after system. The need for therapeutic support should be revisited at every looked after child review.

Many conversations focused on the need for therapeutic support for children looked after. It was recognised that many children will have experienced trauma prior or during the process of becoming looked after. The support need to be individually tailored to meet the specific need of each child at that moment in time.





11: Foster Care Fees and Allowances

Foster Care Fees and Allowances

Recommendation 7

Harmonise Policies for paying fees and allowances to local authority foster carers.

Following an extensive consultation programme with all key stakeholders, the National Fostering Framework Phase One Report 2015-16 contained a number of recommendations. In particular, a need for greater consistency and transparency of payments to foster carers in Wales was identified.

Harmonising fees and allowances will improve outcomes for children and young people by ensuring all carers are able to provide good quality care for children and young people. It will also improve outcomes for foster carers by creating consistency and transparency.

It is recognised this will present challenges, but these are challenges that need to be addressed.



Some highlights of the Report

FOSTER CARER ALLOWANCES AND PAYMENTS SURVEY 2016 -17 (PREPARED BY THE FOSTERING NETWORK)

The report demonstrated the scale of inequality of financial arrangements for foster carers across Wales, in particular in relation to fees. There are currently no national recommended payments to foster carers, and the report shows that one typical scenario could mean foster carers in one part of the country receive £37,000 per year compared with £13,000 in another local authority: a “postcode lottery” difference of £24,000.

This huge variation in total income is largely down to fees, but there is still a significant discrepancy when it comes to allowances in isolation. There remains less consistency in ad hoc expenses payments. Mileage rebate varies from zero to 52 pence per mile. The largely rural nature of the country means that travel costs to and from schools, meetings and other fostering-related activities will soon add up. Extra birthday, festival, and holiday payments also vary widely.

Meanwhile, despite Welsh Government guidance, six local authorities currently pay less than the 16+ allowances rate to foster carers hosting young people under the When I am Ready 18+ scheme, and some will also pay less for those young people who are not in education employment or training. (NEET) Foster carers in these local authorities are therefore faced with the decision to take a reduction in income or ask the young person to move out at a crucial stage of their life.

The report acknowledges an absence of data from the independent sector. Without clear information about Independent Fostering Providers payments, it will be difficult to get a full picture of the financial fees and allowances paid to all carers across Wales. The Fostering Network welcomes the recommendation in the phase 1 report that advocates for

the standardisation and collection of fostering data.

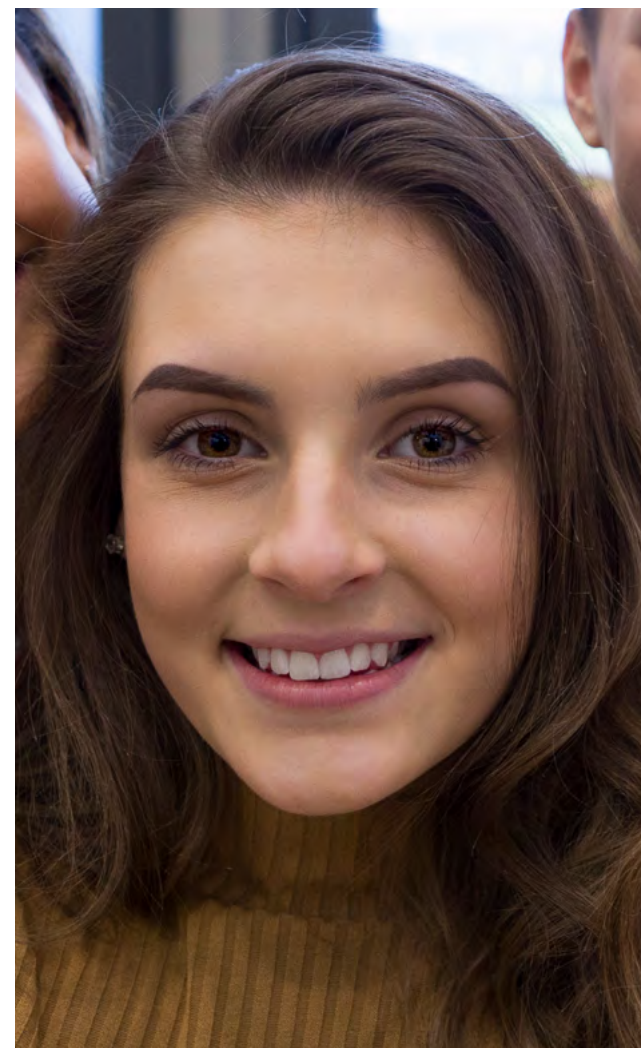
The report highlights that some fostering services in Wales had transparent, up to date data on their websites, but unfortunately this was a minority. Consequently, it is proposed that A National Fostering Framework should include reporting tools for fees and allowances to make it easier for future benchmarking to take place.

The report recognises that fostering, while rooted in providing families for children, is not a single entity. Some foster carers offer occasional short break care, others emergency or short-term placements, while some provide children with a home for their whole childhoods and transition into adulthood. Many foster carers do a mix of these forms of fostering. Some foster carers are approved to provide care specifically to members of their extended family; these ‘kinship’ or ‘family and friends’ foster carers may have different needs and expectations from some of their ‘mainstream’ colleagues.

Finally, the report states that fees and allowances cannot be studied in isolation; they are part of the whole fostering package including training and support, all of which has an impact on recruitment and retention of foster carers and ultimately successful outcome for children.

For decades fostering in Wales has benefited from a dedicated, committed and expert workforce of foster carers helping fostered children transform their lives. We should no longer take this dedication for granted. There is a real need for change

The Fostering Network welcomes the development of a National Fostering Framework in Wales and the work that is ongoing to create a foster care system that recognises values and rewards foster carers in the vital tasks they perform. The report concludes that by addressing the inequalities in fees and allowance, this will inevitably have a positive impact, both for foster carers and the children they look after





12: Engagement with our Partners

Engagement with our Partners

Child & Adolescent Mental Health

– Dr David Williams, member of Strategic Steering Group

Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services are currently being reshaped through the Together for Children & Young People programme. In addition to ensuring Specialist services deliver high quality evidence based care for those young people with mental illness and disorder it is also addressing the need to CAMH practitioners to work alongside services that work with children whose experience, environment or condition presents them with higher mental health needs. Dr David Williams, the adviser to the Chief medical officer and Welsh government on Child & Adolescent mental health, is a member of the steering group and together, over the past year the T4CYP and NFF have started to progress a number of issues.

Firstly, good practice is being identified and shared .e.g. ABUHB has used new monies through CAMHS and ICF funds to develop an attachment service that provides support, education and input into those children and young people requiring care and their carers. Over the next year Specialist CAMHS providers, the NFF and the National Adoption service are meeting together to develop a shared expectation of service provision for practitioners, carers and children & young people who experience distress and emotional upset as a result of early experience.

Secondly, to underpin this the T4CYP programme have released a new framework for improvement for specialist CAMHS that restates the need for CAMHS to provide greater levels of consultation and liaison to services working with vulnerable children and to include children who have developed their problems as a result of early attachment and trauma. This should reduce the postcode lottery currently experienced across Wales and enable evidence based interventions to be delivered.

Looked After Children in Education: The purpose of this paper is to inform the progress made to deliver the commitments in *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales*

Progress report

Progress against the commitments in year one of the action plans reported under the key themes:

Effective roles and responsibilities

- Education consortia have each appointed a lead co-ordinator and roles have been agreed.
- Regional co-ordinators are working closely with the Welsh Government to ensure that the Pupil Deprivation Grant delivers an agreed, strategic programme of work based on local and regional priorities.
- Regional co-ordinators – working with LACE co-ordinators in their area – are leading actions to be delivered through the National Strategic Group.
- The Welsh Government has strengthened the corporate accountability for looked after children by issuing a revised code of practice on the statutory role of the Director of Social Services – *Social Services and Well-being Act 2014: Part 8 Code of Practice on the Role of the Director of Social Services*: <http://gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/160322part8en.pdf>
- The Fostering Network, with input from local authority practitioners and support from the Welsh Government, has produced A Foster carer's guide to education. This guide takes account of the strategy and links its aims to foster carers, identifying roles, responsibilities and expectations. The guide was published on 1 December 2016 and has been widely promoted.



Engagement with our Partners

- The Fostering Network has delivered a tailored core training package for foster carers based upon the published guide. These 'master classes' for foster carers were supported by the regional education consortia.
- Further education institutions (FEIs) have worked to build upon the good practice gained from Buttle UK continues. Good practice materials, based on the Buttle Quality Mark principles, were published in November 2015. The Learning and Work Institute has undertaken work to embed the principles, including converting the existing materials into an interactive 'toolkit' for FEIs and capturing the views of stakeholders around improving foster carers' understanding of post-16 learning.
- The Learning and Work Institute has targeted support for individual FEIs to help them improve their responsiveness and support to care leavers.
- All FEIs now have in place a designated lead person for young people from a care background as part of their

Building effective partnerships and collaboration

- The establishment of the NSG, and a discrete work programme.
- The Welsh Government is working closely with CASCADE – Cardiff University to develop and host an online community of practice for practitioners who are responsible for the education and well-being of looked after children. The community of practice will act as a repository for guidance, case studies and resources.
- The Welsh Government's (Youth Engagement) held four regional events to help build an effective network of all key personnel to ensure a consistency of service provision for looked after children. These events will be held annually.

- Estyn produced a best practice report which highlighted the support available for looked after children in education.
- The Welsh Government is how data transfer between schools and post-16 providers can be strengthened, to reduce the administrative burden on providers and ensure more effective support for all learners. A review of data sharing regulations has been undertaken and guidance will be published in spring 2017.

Effective teaching and learning

- A national contact list of key personnel involved with supporting looked after children is being created and will be available to practitioners via the online community of practice hosted by CASCADE – Cardiff University.
- The Welsh Government has worked with Adoption UK (Wales) to co-produce Getting it right for every child- a schools' guide to working with adopted children and their families. This guide provides information on effective interventions to better support adopted children in education. A further publication titled Getting it right for every child – A parents guide will be available shortly.
- The results of the Welsh Government's survey (for LACE coordinators and Education Welfare Officers) on school attendance of looked after children have been analysed and further statistical information has been gathered. The information obtained confirmed that robust systems are in place for dealing with unexplained absences and there were no major issues which needed further attention.
- National statistics have confirmed that permanent exclusions for LAC is not an area for concern although fixed term exclusion rates are higher than the all pupil rates. The Welsh Government will continue to monitor fixed term exclusions and examine how the use of LAC PDG has impacted positively on these statistics.

- The Welsh Government commissioned a survey of all the higher education institutions in Wales on the student mentoring schemes they have in place for young people who have experienced time in care system. The results of the survey identified good practice and innovative programmes which have been shared widely via the CLASS Cymru group.
- Through the National Strategic Group's work programme, EAS consortia has commenced a project to improve tracking to monitor the educational progress of looked after children and ensure meaningful Personal Education Plans and Independent Development Plans.
- Regional consortia have commissioned and delivered attachment awareness training for school personnel. Professionals are now better equipped to manage challenging behaviour and understand the needs of children suffering from trauma and attachment issues.

Making better use of data

- The Welsh Government commissioned FFT to undertake a baseline analysis of post-16 outcomes for looked after children which was completed in April 2016. We have completed procurement of an annual matched dataset which will make it easier to undertake analysis on learners' progression/destinations in future (including children who are/were looked after); the first matched dataset will be available in spring 2017.
- Through the National Strategic Group's work programme, local authority practitioners are undertaking a discrete piece of work to produce a good practice guide on the collection and presentation of educational data pertaining to looked after children. This guide will assist practitioners in producing a consistent report for corporate parenting panels.

Strengthening funding arrangements

- The Wales Audit Office are currently undertaking an evaluation exercise on the use of the looked after children element of the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) in the financial year 2015-16. The results of this exercise are expected in spring 2017.

Participation of children who are looked after and adopted to inform strategic approaches and operational decision making

- The Welsh Government continues to work closely with The Fostering Network and Voices From Care to capture the views of carers and the children in their care on progress made against the education plan.
- The Care Forum Wales Looked After Children Network published its Charter for children who are looked after: <http://www.careforumwales.co.uk/resources?c=10>

Supporting Achievement and Safeguarding Team Support for Learners Division (February 2017)

Dr Carolyn Sampeys

Health representative on the National Fostering Framework Strategic Steering Group

Designated Doctor for Safeguarding, National Safeguarding Team, Public Health Wales NHS Trust

Health professionals for Looked after Children (LAC) welcome the continued momentum towards developing a National Fostering Framework for delivering consistent and high quality foster care in Wales. We believe this in turn will lead to improved social, educational and health outcomes for LAC.

Looked after Children health professionals recognise the importance of providing quality health assessments for looked after children wherever they live in Wales. The LAC Steering Group is chaired by the Designated Doctor for Safeguarding/ LAC from the National Safeguarding Team, Public Health Wales and has representation from all LAC Teams within the NHS in Wales. It is a subgroup of the NHS Wales Safeguarding Network attended by the safeguarding leads from all Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales.

There are particular concerns about the 1,050 LAC placed out of local authority area, the continuity of their health care and appropriate information sharing between health professionals. The LAC Steering Group has developed the NHS Wales Notification Pathway for Looked after Children. The Pathway provides standards of good practice for Health Boards and NHS Trusts working with LAC and has been produced in collaboration with all Health Boards across Wales. There was wide consultation during the development of the pathway with multi agency colleagues including LAC health professionals, safeguarding leads within the NHS, All Wales Heads of Children's Services (AWHOCS), Welsh Government, and members of the National Fostering Framework Strategic Steering Group.

The NHS Wales Notification Pathway for Looked after Children facilitates a safe and effective notification process to ensure that children and young people who are looked after have their health information shared promptly and appropriately with relevant persons in the area where they reside and that continuity of health care provision is maintained and monitored.



13: Research Messages

Research Messages

CASCADE (Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre) is based in Glamorgan Buildings at Cardiff University. CASCADE is concerned with all aspects of community-based responses to social need in children and families, including family support services, children in need services, child protection, looked after children and adoption. It aims first and foremost to improve the well-being and safety of children and their families by:

- Generating primary research evidence of an internationally recognised high quality.
- Making the results of this research, and research produced elsewhere, available in an accessible form for children and families who receive social care services, professionals and policy-makers.
- Developing social care research capacity in Wales by providing opportunities for researchers from undergraduate through to senior career stages.
- Engaging a range of collaborators in research, including children and young people, parents and carers, practitioners, policy-makers and social care providers from the public, private and third sectors.

What makes CASCADE unique?

CASCADE is well placed to make a unique contribution to children's social care research in Wales. Its distinctive features are:

- It is the only centre of its kind in Wales, bringing together children's social care researchers in Wales in order to promote evidence and better meet the needs of policy and practice so as to improve outcomes for children and their families
- It has strong links with policy and practice. This includes engagement with policy processes in Welsh Government, close engagement with local authorities and children's charities, and a research advisory group of care experienced young people. The Centre academics and doctoral students have a wealth of policy and practice experience, with many having previous or parallel careers in social work and social care.
- Its members have a successful history of grant funding from diverse sources, including research council, government and voluntary sector funding.
- The Centre academics have an established track record of methodological expertise in a diverse range of research methods, including qualitative and quantitative designs, making the Centre well-placed to respond to a wide range of policy questions. These include ethnography, participatory research, secondary analysis of cohort and routine data sets and involvement in randomised controlled trials.
- A large number of doctoral students (15+) working on children's social care substantive topics.



CASCADE aims to improve the well-being and safety of children and their families and is concerned with all aspects of community based responses to social need in children and families.

If you would like to be added to our database so that you can receive emails about the latest research, events and news from CASCADE please email CASCADE@cardiff.ac.uk.

Cascade Voices

At the heart of Cascade work sits an ongoing commitment to the meaningful participation of children and young people in research that concerns them. To enact this commitment Cascade collaborates with Voices from Care Cymru in the consultation and advisory group 'Cascade Voices'. This group is made up of care-experienced young people who advise researchers on projects, from research design to dissemination. Drawing on their diverse personal experiences, Cascade Voices give their views and advice on ethics; methods; participant recruitment; research questions; impact, and more. To ensure that the young people feel confident in discussing these matters all members of the group undertake a tailor-made short social research methods course designed and delivered by Cardiff University researchers and lecturers.

Cascade Voices have played an instrumental role in the development of many Cascade research projects and the value of their expertise keeps the group consistently in demand. From their engagement in the group, many of the young people have become involved in Cascade impact and dissemination activities, generously sharing their stories, views, and time to produce music videos, 'digital stories' and poetry, as well as speaking at Cascade conferences and workshops in relation to the projects with which they are involved. More information on Cascade Voices can be found at <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/people/young-peoples-advisory-group/>.

CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. The Child Welfare Inequalities Project is funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

This is the largest single project the Foundation have funded in the children and families area. It involves quantitative analysis of administrative data in each of the UK nations and mixed-method case studies in England and Scotland. It is a collaborative project involving seven different universities.

The project tackles the relationship between deprivation and child protection. The report on Wales, published online in February 2017, shows that children are far more likely to be on child protection registers and come into care in the most deprived areas in Wales. There is a social gradient, with increasing intervention with every level of deprivation. This is broadly in keeping with trends in the other UK nations, but the social gradient is steepest in Wales. There is also variation in rates of child protection and children looked-after by ethnicity category. The report argues that child welfare inequalities should not be taken for granted, but that preventing them should be as high a priority as preventing inequalities in health or education.

1a 'Looked-after' children in Wales: An analysis of the backgrounds of children entering public care

Wales has rates of children 'looked-after' rates generally much higher than those of English local authorities and there is also significant variation in rates between local authorities in Wales. Both the differences in rates of children 'looked-after' between England and Wales and the variation in rates between Welsh authorities clearly identify this as a policy area which requires urgent investigation in Wales.

Using a quantitative analysis of six years' data (2008-2014) relating to every child who has spent time in care in Wales (excluding short breaks), the intention of the research is to explore the variations in rates between Welsh authorities using both aggregate and child-level data.

Early findings from the study have highlighted the relationship between some characteristics of children and their placements and a local authority's overall rates of children in care. Of these the most significant is the 'social gradient' in rates based on relative deprivation e.g. for each step increase in neighbourhood deprivation there is a corresponding increase in rates of children 'looked-after'. The study has also highlighted a relationship between the age profile of children entering care and overall rates. The research has highlighted a number of differences that whilst not statistically linked to a local authority's overall rates of children in care have implications for practice e.g. differences in the rates of usage of Emergency Protection Orders (EPO) or in the rates of children exiting care through a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

2. The Building Blocks: 2-6 Study (follow on from the Building Blocks Trial)

This study is currently being undertaken by the Centre for Trials Research, CU.

This study is designed to evaluate the medium-term effectiveness of the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) programme. The FNP programme aims to support teenagers expecting their first child and has been shown to reduce child abuse and neglect in the longer term in US studies. There has previously been one evaluation of the FNP programme in England called Building Blocks Trial, but this only looked at the short term effectiveness, this followed mothers and their children until the child's second birthday. The current study will follow up the same mothers (a total of 1562) and their children for a further four years until the child is 6 years old.

This is a data linkage study, this means that researchers will access the routinely collected medical, education and social service records of the mothers and their children and link these records to the data collected in the Building Blocks

Trial. The records requested from social services (via the National Pupil Database) will contain information on children classed as in need, placed on a child protection plan as well as if they are a looked after child. This information will indicate whether the FNP programme has impacted on these children's outcomes in particular the main question this study is asking is whether the FNP programme has reduced child maltreatment in the medium-term. The study started in November 2013 and we report to funders in May 2018

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/centre-for-trials-research/research/studies-and-trials/view/building-blocks-26>

3. Confidence in Care

Confidence in Care is a Big Lottery Funded project run by the South East Wales Trials Unit, Cardiff University and Cascade. The Fostering Changes Programme is being delivered to foster and kinship carers in Provider Agencies (Local Authorities and independent fostering teams) in Wales. The 12 week training programme aims to increase carer skills and coping strategies and improve the relationship between carer and child.

The main part of the evaluation will be a Randomised Controlled Trial. This will test whether the Fostering Changes training course for foster carers and kinship carers produces better outcomes than if they had only continued to receive usually provided support and advice. This will be achieved by randomly allocating carers to receive the Fostering Changes course immediately or after 12 months. Those who wait at least 12 months will be the control group and those who receive it immediately will be the intervention group. We aim to involve 237 carers in total randomised to intervention on a 2:1 ratio. We will measure how well the carers in both groups feel able to care for the children in their care before the intervention groups receive the training, at the end of the training course and 12 months after randomisation. We will also measure whether children and young people in their

care have had any unplanned moves to different carers. We will calculate whether the training course made a significant difference to the intervention group compared to the control group. This will be the first time that an evaluation has tried to measure whether Fostering Changes has a positive effect for carers that lasts beyond the end of the course.

Alongside the Randomised Controlled Trial we will conduct a process evaluation to develop a logic model and investigate whether the Fostering Changes programme was delivered as originally intended and also explore the experiences of those receiving and delivering the training. We will find out how the new elements of the programme were experienced by trainers and carers. We are on track to recruit and follow-up sufficient numbers to analyse the data, so far we have recruited a total of 231 from 19 sites, and we have one more round of recruitment (at least 5 sites, possibly 6) to complete in April 2017

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/centre-for-trials-research/research/studies-and-trials/view/confidence-in-care-cic-evaluation>

Fostering Healthy Futures

This was a feasibility study carried out as part of the Confidence in Care programme to investigate whether an existing programme entitled 'Fostering Healthy Futures' which has been developed in Colorado, USA would be relevant and practical to replicate in Wales. The programme involves offering skills classes and mentoring to young people living away from home, mainly in foster care, over a nine month period (30 weeks). The model works with young people who are relatively new to foster care (18-24 months or less). In the US model, the skills groups are facilitated by experienced practitioners and the mentoring is provided by Masters social work students as part of their practice learning opportunity. Each student is linked with two young people aged 9-11. The aim is to improve the mental health outcomes for young people in foster care and is a pre-

adolescent, preventative programme to build children's resilience and self-esteem. The quality of the evidence base relating to the impact of FHF on improving outcomes for looked after children in Colorado has been independently verified by the California Evidence-based Clearing House on Child Welfare.

The feasibility study concluded that whilst with some adaptation (fewer sessions) it would be feasible to operate the programme in Wales, it would not be possible to extend fully across Wales because of the lack of Masters social work students and the geographical distances involved in some areas.

4. Young parents project

Young people who have lived in foster, residential or kinship care are more likely than the general population to experience early pregnancy and parenthood. Emerging international evidence also suggests that young parents in or leaving state care are more likely to experience compulsory child welfare intervention and to become separated from their children. A CASCADE research project, led by Dr Louise Roberts, is investigating this issue in Wales. The project has several phases and includes qualitative interviews with care-experienced parents and representatives from leaving care services across Wales. Local authority data will provide valuable insights into current rates of young parents in and leaving care in Wales, as well as outcomes for these families in terms of how many children remain in the care of their parent/s, how many are subject to Children's Services intervention and the proportions that are 'looked after' or adopted. A policy and practice advisory group, made up of statutory and third sector partners, has been established to consider the findings of the research and make recommendations to Welsh Government. Further details are available by contacting RobertsL18@cf.ac.uk'

5. Evaluation of Visiting Mum scheme

This is an evaluation of the Visiting Mum scheme, which has been set up by Pact in collaboration with Sova to assist children from Wales to visit their mother whilst she is serving a custodial sentence. Some of the young people go to live with relatives when their mother is in prison, others go in to foster care. Wales does not have a women's prison and thus most women from Mid, South and West Wales are imprisoned in HMP Eastwood Park, Gloucestershire. This is difficult to get to access on public transport from Wales and involves a long journey. The scheme links volunteers to families/children who book the visit and drive/accompany the children and carers to the prison. The family visits set up by the scheme are more informal and allow children to spend a longer periods of time with their mothers, in more intimate surroundings: arts and craft materials are made available to facilitate the visit. Mothers are allowed to move around during these informal visits and interact with their children. We have interviewed mothers serving a sentence, women released from prison, volunteers, children visiting their mothers and the project staff. We have yet to interview prison personnel. The interim evaluation of the scheme is very positive. The final report is due at the end of June 2017.

6. Looked after children and animals: Creature Comforts

This is a small project being undertaken by Cascade to investigate and explore the importance of animals and pets in the lives of children in foster and residential care. The study has set up a blog for young people to add their stories and photographs of pets and will be running a workshop with Voices from Care in Summer 2017.
<https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/creaturecomforts/>

7. Creating an Online Community of Practice: Developing the Sharing of Expertise for those working with Children and Young People who are Looked After

A number of action points are currently being advanced by the Welsh Government and key stakeholders, educators and practitioners to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for care experienced children and young people. Action point 13 set out the following;

We will work with the WLGA and Association of Directors of Education Wales (ADEW) to implement a 'community of practice' to help build more effective working relationships and communications between designated lead members of staff in schools and further education institutions, LACE Coordinators, carers and social workers (Welsh Government 2016, p.28).

In response, the project 'Creating an Online Community of Practice: Developing the Sharing of Expertise for those working with Children and Young People who are Looked After' is working to address the need to establish a community of practice to improve the educational experiences of care experienced children and young people in Wales. The project was commissioned by the Welsh Government and the team delivering the online resources include Dawn Mannay, Jennifer Lyttleton-Smith and Louisa Roberts. The project is housed within ExChange, which is a new community of practitioners, researchers, and current/former service users aiming to build better social care in Wales. ExChange is facilitated and organised by practice-focused social care academics from the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE), Cardiff University.

The website, ExChange: Care & Education was launched in April 2017 and its purpose is to maintain an online platform to host a community of practice for individuals and organisations with an interest in children and young people who are looked after, and care leavers. The online platform has an emphasis on education as well as other issues that relate to children and young people in care, and care leavers. The online platform is a cost free resource for all users, and it hosts a range of academic literature, policy reports, best practice case studies and other relevant literature. It also acts as a repository for materials collected by the project team as well as housing literature recommended and contributed by its user base.

Reference – Welsh Government. 2016. Raising the ambitions and educational attainment

PREVIOUS STUDIES

1. Looked After Children and Education

In 2015 Welsh Government commissioned Cascade in collaboration with Fostering Network, Voices from Care and Spice Innovations to investigate the education of looked after young people. The study involved reviewing existing statistics in England and Wales, and summarising what was known in relation to the educational experiences, attainment and achievement of young people in care. A systematic review was conducted to identify effective interventions designed to improve aspects of looked after children's education.

The second research objective was to provide insight into the experiences of young people in Wales. This included their day-to-day experiences of education, their future aspirations and opinions on improving provision and support. To this end, an in-depth, qualitative study involving 67 care experienced young people was undertaken. The young people were purposively sampled and ranged in age between 6-27 years, comprising of 27 females and 40 males.

For school age children, four events were held -two events were held in north Wales and two in south Wales. Two events were designed for primary school age children (5-11) and two were targeted at secondary school age young people (11-16). The events were designed to be fun and interactive days with age appropriate sports and arts workshops.

The findings suggested that more research in to this area is required, particularly involving care experienced young people. The study also found that professionals can be well meaning but often have low educational expectations of young people in care and this can be disempowering. Young people should not be exposed to disputes over finances, funding and responsibility which is dispiriting and dehumanizing. Meetings with professionals should not be held in school time as these can be emotionally challenging and not only take young people out of lessons, but leaves

them unable to re-engage when held during the school day. Decisions about remaining in the same school or moving should happen in consultation with the child and expedited quickly. Training for foster carers should include explicit teaching on how to support children with homework. Training for educators, careers services and social workers should be designed to combat the low expectations held by professionals, and to bolster the aspirations and ambitions of young people.

<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/understanding-educational-experiences-opinions-attainment-achievement-aspirations-looked-after-children-wales/?lang=en>

2. Video Interaction Guidance

The Video Interaction Guidance Service Evaluation completed in December 2016 was conducted by Cascade (Cardiff University) on behalf of Cornwall Council has found that Video Interaction Guidance is a cost effective, yet minimal intervention which appears to have lasting benefits and impact on the relationships between children and their carers. The underpinning ethos and approach of Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) is strengths-based, drawing upon mediated learning and self-modelling and as a result is very empowering for those who engage with it. The VIG process is led by trained 'VIG Guiders' who work with the carer to determine what aspects of their parenting they would like to improve, before recording the carer and child interacting with each other in a natural setting, such as the home. The VIG Guider then carefully selects elements of the recording which show successful interaction. The guider and carer review these micro moments focusing on the relationship between the child and carer, as opposed to the behaviour of either party by reflecting upon the use of sensitive, responsive communications for positive interactions (Kennedy et al, 2010). At the end of the review session, parents decide what they would like to improve and the cycle repeats until the desired behaviours are achieved (Doria et al, 2013).

Evaluation findings revealed that VIG can be used with a variety of parents/carers and children ranging from in foster care, those at risk of adoption breakdown to children with severe additional needs. The number of cycles were tailored to the family needs giving them time to reflect on what they do well and build on that; it is very motivating for parents to be able to move forward. Many parents noted that by becoming more attuned to their children, in particular by giving the child space and time to articulate their own needs, then the bond between them grew, 'Helping us interact with 'Sam' and listening to him more when it comes to play and things like that, understanding him a bit better' (Participant 5). Most participants continued to use what they had learned from VIG six months after the intervention, and as a result feel that they are far more attuned to their children and this improvement has been sustained, 'I now have no problems with my son, I watch how I talk to him, I involve him in things. I'm happier, he's happier, it's hard to believe where we were 12, 18 months ago' (Participant 10).

Interview findings showed that VIG differed from other interventions in that only the positives were highlighted, '...to find something good in there gave me a big boost that I wasn't completely bad at everything' (Participant 10). Hence, VIG 'was not about teaching us techniques' (Participant 3), but more building on their own strengths and focusing on what they did well. Another positive factor noted by Participant 10 is that VIG is simple and easy to follow, 'It wasn't too complicated so it was quite easy to remember how to do the things because it wasn't set out in a complicated way. It was very easy to follow and to understand and that's why it has stayed with us for quite a long time'. The fact that parents and carers saw themselves interacting with their children was also powerful and the visual image remained with them, as one participant noted they were able to, '[actually] see yourself doing it' (Participant 6). Indeed, VIG seemed to be very helpful when parents were having difficulty in parenting older, adolescent children,

allowing both parties to see what is going on between them without apportioning blame and to recognize the reciprocal nature of communication, 'He's (son) would watch it and go, oh yeah you're doing this and I'm doing that' (Participant 2, parent of a 12 and 17 year old). This type of experiential learning (Kolb 1984) is effective in allowing people to be in charge of their own change.

Based on the evaluation findings, Cornwall Council are exploring the expansion of the VIG Service into the Adoption and Fostering Teams for both adopters, foster carers and as a tool for improving parental contact.

Books

Alyson Rees and Andy Pithouse (2015)
Creating Stable Foster Placements
London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers,
ISBN 978 1 84905 481 2;
eISBN 978 0 85700 865 7

The aim of this book is to explore, from a multi-disciplinary perspective (social work, childhood studies and social sciences), key aspects of the everyday lives of people in foster families and to focus on those practices that define this remarkable arrangement whereby a family invites an unknown child or young person – a stranger – into their lives. We chart the ways in which the newcomer learns the tacit and explicit rules of joining the home, becomes acquainted with the family and their kin and friends, develops trust, and through time and shared living becomes part of the way in which family life is accomplished in that particular home. The book maps the transitions of the fostered child from being relatively unknown to 'known', we do this by analysing the understandings, activities, settings, and relationships that go to make up foster families and the ways in which these are jointly constructed by adult carers, birth children and the fostered child in relation to place and time. For example, we look at the rituals of meal times, bed times, leisure and

family outings, the importance of personal space for fostered children, their clothing, appearance and personal needs. Issues of 'touch', safety, and risk are considered; as is the reciprocal nature of care and affection between members of the family unit. Throughout, aspects of identity and time come to the fore as we examine the changing nature of 'belonging' across the weeks and months of a placement and the ways in which the fostered child becomes 'known' and moves from stranger to a distinctive subject of relationships and affect. The view we provide is explicitly from the participants, the fostered child and the family members, not the professionals. The perspective is about strengths and success; it is about foster placements that have worked well and why. To that end, our book maps in depth the social and emotional worlds of 10 foster families comprising 15 adult carers, 9 birth children and 9 foster children. They live in Wales and England and are considered by relevant agencies (local authorities and independent fostering provider) that use their services, as delivering lasting and effective care. We chose these families as they offered inspiring and motivating examples of stable placements from which we could learn and share much about the ingredients of success.

Forthcoming book

The edited book, *'Children and Young People 'Looked After'? Education, Intervention and the Everyday Culture of Care in Wales'* will be published in 2018 by the University of Wales Press. The collection is edited by Dawn Mannay, Alyson Rees and Louise Roberts and it aims to bring together a body of diverse work undertaken in Wales with children and young people who are care experienced. The book will be organised in three thematic sections considering education and policy intervention, participatory and collaborative approaches, and the culture of care and the everyday lives of children and young people.

The book will focus on a number of important topics including;

- Increasing numbers of children and young people entering the care system
- Educational achievement, experiences, aspirations, transitions, barriers and interventions
- Everyday experiences of foster care – food, communication and interpersonal relationships
- Benefits of play and outdoor experiences for children in care
- Care leavers accounts of parenthood
- Research methods for working with care experienced children and young people
- Using film, artwork and music to communicate research findings to key stakeholders

Overall, this edited collection will offer an opportunity to showcase the work of scholars in the areas of social work, social policy, childhood studies, sociology, history and education; and provide the reader with an important insight into the experiences of care experienced children and young people and care leavers in Wales.

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Research Messages

The book will focus on a number of important topics including;

- Increasing numbers of children and young people entering the care system
- Educational achievement, experiences, aspirations, transitions, barriers and interventions
- Everyday experiences of foster care- food, communication and interpersonal relationships
- Benefits of play and outdoor experiences for children in care
- Care leavers accounts of parenthood
- Research methods for working with care experienced children and young people
- Using film, artwork and music to communicate research findings to key stakeholders

Overall, this edited collection will offer an opportunity to showcase the work of scholars in the areas of social work, social policy, childhood studies, sociology, history and education; and provide the reader with an important insight into the experiences of care experienced children and young people and care leavers in Wales.

The principle of capturing the views of young people was embedded in the work we undertook in Phase One 2015-16, this principle has been maintained in Phase Two.

Voices from Care have led on this work and were commissioned to design and edit a series of short videos of young people talking of their experiences of foster care and what matters to them.

The videos have been and will continue to be used throughout the whole work programme of the National Fostering Framework, and used to promote the voice of the child in designing and improving social care services within Wales.

A hyper-link to a short clip from the videos can be found on each of the chapters in this report

The videos, are available to be used in the;

- Development of any national website or marketing strategy
- Work programme to implement any of the recommendations
- Local authorities marketing strategies
- National, regional and local events to promote the work on the NFF
- Production of the Phase Two Report at the end of Phase Two (March 2017)
- At least twenty young people will have gained an insight into how the video camera and editing applications on an iPad device might be used to give them a voice for positive change.





14: What Else is Happening in
Fostering Services?

What Else is Happening in Fostering Services?

AFA CYMRU 2016/2017

Facilitates meetings of the following special interest groups (3 – 4 times per year):

1. Kinship & Special Guardianship Group
2. Legal Group
3. IRO Group
4. Medical Advisors Group
5. North Wales Panel Chair Group

Has produced 3 Legal Bulletins during the period April 2016 – March 2017

Offers an advice and information service to professionals and members of the public affected by or working with children and young people living in a variety of permanency arrangements

Organised and delivered the following conferences:

1. Are we getting it right for Children? (jointly with CoramBAAF)
2. The Role of the IRO in improving outcomes for children in care
3. Nature, Nurture & Destiny (Medical conference)

Has delivered following training/workshop events specifically for foster carers or professionals working in the fostering service:

- Adoption & Foster Panel training
- Annual Reviews & Assessments
- Assessment of Permanence Carers
- Attachment & Resilience
- Attachment & the Secure Base
- Building Attachments & Supporting Relationships
- Child Protection
- Complacency in supporting carers long term
- Direct Work with children & young people
- Domestic Abuse
- Dyadic Developmental Psychology Level 1
- Foster Care Reviews
- Life Story Work
- Living with Contact
- Maintaining Support & Challenge in the supervision social worker



What Else is Happening in Fostering Services?

- Making Good Form F Assessments
- Managing Allegations
- Managing Serious Concerns – Panel training
- Non Violent Resistance
- Parent & Child Foster Placements
- Pathway Planning & When I am Ready
- Placing Siblings Together or Apart
- Quality Assurance for Panels
- Role of the supervising social worker
- Safe Care
- Safeguarding Children with disabilities
- Secondary Trauma
- Secure Base
- Sibling Rivalry
- Special Guardianship Orders
- Staying Put
- Supervision training
- Telling Children Difficult Information
- Therapeutic Caregiving

Has achieved the following:

- Secured lead on the development of Kinship Care and Special Guardianship (NFF)
- Organised the Kinship Care National Event (NFF)
- Secured consultancy work relating to Kinship Care proposal (NFF)
- Assisted Voices from Care with the delivery of 3 regional events and a national event addressing Corporate Parenting and the suggestion of developing a Welsh kitemark(with NFF)
- Sarah Coldrick advises NAS on alignment of Adoption Support Regulations to Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act
- Kathy s'Jacob sits on the NAS Advisory Group
- AFA Cymru contributed to the NAS midpoint review aligning activities v NAS priorities
- NAS commissioned AFA Cymru to undertake Fostering to Adoption good practice guide. This has now been distributed via NAS throughout Wales
- NAS commissioned AFA Cymru to develop a literature review on Life story Work and have recently commissioned further consultancy time from AFA Cymru to progress this to the implementation stage.
- NAS requested AFA Cymru support in facilitating four workshops on the Welsh Family Finding strategy
- Kathy s'Jacob is a member of Ministerial Outcomes Group for Children in Wales and has been appointed as vice chair on workstream three of the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group – Permanency Planning and Building Stable Placements
- Sarah Coldrick is the legal advisor on Welsh Government Technical group re Special Guardianship
- AFA Cymru presented at Advisory Group with other VAA colleagues re sustainable grant offer
- AFA Cymru offered support to the National NAS Conference
- Revamped the website which will be launched in April
- Produced a coordinated training/workshop calendar with AUK
- AFA Cymru has met with Maria Boffey Fostering network to discuss potential areas for collaboration
- Partnership arrangement with CoramBaaf extended to 2017/18 in terms of a membership deal for Wales
- Impact report been produced for members
- Secured a significant piece of work in relation to Life Story Work for the Cwm Taf Partnership (formal learning events to run alongside the establishment of a peer learning group plus access to support via the AFA Cymru advice and information line)

THE FOSTERING NETWORK

Some of the highlights of their work in 2016-17

Confidence in Care is a consortium of four of the leading organisations dealing with fostered and looked after children in Wales coming together to deliver a programme of interventions across Wales. The programme is being led by The Fostering Network and is being delivered in partnership with Action for Children, Barnardo's and TACT. The aim of the project is to improve the life chances of LACYP in Wales by: improving placement stability through better interaction and attachment levels; developing a more positive outlook towards education and future carer goals; increasing resilience and life skills.; and this is being achieved by engaging and supporting 1,500 carers through the delivery of 125 'Fostering Changes' training courses and 125 support groups, and 36 LACYP in a pilot of three skills groups. Fostering Changes was developed by the Maudsley Hospital, and is an evidence based training course for foster carers, empowering them to better manage the children and young people they are looking after. The course is behaviourally based and derives from research into parenting skills; attachment, educational attainment and the academic progression of looked after children who are in foster care.

The programme is being independently evaluated by Cardiff University who are undertaking a randomised control trial (RCT) which will evidence the effectiveness of the programme.

This national delivery is spanning rural and urban communities, ensuring a bi-lingual approach, and utilising community and local authority networks to engage foster carers. The programme has focused on enhancing existing provision for foster carers and foster care teams in local authorities while navigating issues around reduction in workforce capacity and training budgets.

Confidence in Care started in March 15 and has to date delivered training to in 17 of the 22 Local authority areas as

well as training mixed IFP groups, and an adapted training programme for residential practitioners based on the same underpinning theories and strategies. The learning opportunity has also been extended to social workers who have jointly attended training with foster carers. This national programme has been funded by the Big Lottery and will continue until May 2020, when evaluation evidence will be published and will influence future policy development in Wales.

Fostering healthy Futures

As part of the Confidence in Care programme, a discrete feasibility study has been undertaken to consider a model working with children in foster care entitled 'Fostering Healthy Futures' which has been running in the US for over a decade. The feasibility study has been funded by the Big Lottery Fund and an interim report was submitted to the Big Lottery in June 2016.

The Fostering Healthy Futures (FHF) programme was developed in Denver, Colorado, US. The model has not been run in the UK previously. The programme provides skills classes (for 1.5 hours each week) combined with mentoring to 16 young people (age 9-11 years- 8 girls and 8 boys) living away from home, mainly in foster care, over a nine month period, involving some 30 sessions. Two groups run at any one time with 8 young people in each. The young people will have been in foster care for only 18 months or less. In the US model, the skills groups are facilitated by an experienced practitioner and the mentoring is provided by Masters social work students (with occasional clinical psychology students) as part of their practice learning placements. The Masters students act as a role model and advocate for the young person, meeting with them individually for 2-4 hours per week and transporting them to and from the skills sessions.

The finding from the feasibility study concluded that the aims of the project and its founding principles are well evidenced. However there remain outstanding questions about the

viability of delivering this project in a Welsh context due to the eligibility criteria for Children and students Welsh geography, Welsh population size and the need to deliver to more than one defined rural area.

The new programme Fostering WellBeing programme

Fostering Wellbeing is a programme which has been funded by Welsh Government and will be delivered by The Fostering Network in Wales over the next two years. The programme combines social pedagogy principles and learning from our Head, Heart, Hands programme with core elements of our education focused activities from London Fostering Achievement. This hybrid model will deliver a holistic programme, predicated on 'wellbeing' and in alignment with the Government's narrative in Wales. This programme of work is part of the 'Improving Outcomes for Children' ministerial advisory work programme work stream 3: "Permanency Planning and Building Stable Placements" and work strand 4: "Consider delivering a social pedagogy pilot in Wales that will test and evaluate social pedagogy principles (focused on education and the upbringing of children) in a foster care environment".

The programme will formally operate at regional level, delivering learning, bringing people together and sharing best practice across service boundaries with an aim to embed a shared approach across the region. The core programme elements will include; service support, the recruitment and training of Foster Carers as champions and the delivery of 5 Master Classes. The masterclasses will all employ social pedagogy tools and principles as their approach and the underpinning principles for all masterclasses will be 'supporting children and young people through strong meaningful relationships'

What Else is Happening in Fostering Services?

Foster Care Fortnight

Foster Care Fortnight is the UK's biggest foster care awareness raising campaign, delivered by, The Fostering Network. Established for almost 20 years, the campaign showcases the commitment, passion and dedication of foster carers. It also supports fostering services to highlight the need for more foster carers. Thousands of new foster families are needed every year to care for children, with the greatest need being for foster carers for older children, sibling groups, disabled children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The Fostering Network provides resources for fostering services to engage with Foster Care Fortnight. Member services can find out more here.

Foster Care Fortnight receives around 1,000 pieces of media coverage each year, and The Fostering Network receives the backing of celebrities and politicians from across the UK who lend their support to the campaign. The campaign also engages social media.

Foster Care Ambassadors

The Fostering Network's Fostering excellence programme has developed a bespoke programme to create Welsh fostering ambassadors. This programme will utilise the expertise of foster carers, and children and young people in the care system, to promote fostering and to build their skills and experiences, with a view to empowering others. Research shows that foster carers can feel isolated and insufficiently supported as they cope with the practical challenges of fostering. Most foster carers find the work rewarding, but often describe it as demanding as they manage complex situations. Many children in foster care will experience extreme behaviour which can be emotionally challenging for foster carers. It will be invaluable for these foster carers to have reassurance from the foster carer ambassadors.

Foster carers have unique experience and expertise that they can share with peers and other professionals, to inform, motivate and inspire. Ambassadors will develop assertiveness and advocacy skills in order to play an effective part in influencing decision makers, have the confidence to influence policies of the services they provide and experience and have the opportunity to offer peer support. The scheme will also strengthen and develop sustainable networks of support within the Welsh foster care community, develop better communication channels and give foster carers the skills and confidence to play an active role within the community. It will open new channels for foster carers to make their voices heard, and work together with other professionals and stakeholders to have a genuine role in designing and planning fostering services. It will also bring greater access to advice, support and development opportunities.

• Education Master Classes

The Fostering Network delivered four education masterclasses to foster carers, teaching professionals and social workers across Wales from January to March 2017.

Foster carers already play a vital role in raising aspirations and supporting children in care. These masterclasses, delivered with a wealth of expertise, developed the work foster carers already do and pushed it to the next level so children achieve the very best they can in education.

Social workers are crucial too in improving educational outcomes for children living with foster families.

Teachers are, of course, another key group. They stand on the frontline of education every day, and the masterclasses encouraged them working more closely with foster carers and social workers, they can close the circle of educational care around the child.

The masterclasses brought these groups together to help them better understand each other's roles and expectations around education. They also served strengthen link between home and education.

The masterclasses covered four key areas:

- WG LAC education strategy aims and how all can play a role.
- Working together to raise attainment: understanding the education system, roles, responsibilities, delegated authority and sources of support.
- Happy children learn: strategies to support emotional wellbeing and readiness to learn.
- Building local networks of support.

These masterclasses complemented the newly published guide 'A foster carer's guide to the education of looked after children' and the 'Making it Happen' magazine for foster carers.

What Else is Happening in Fostering Services?

The Foster Care Charter

The Fostering Network Wales first produced a Foster Carers Charter in 2011 in consultation with its members. In 2015, the Charter was revised and launched by the Minister for Health and Social Services Mark Drakeford AM at a Senedd reception held by The Fostering Network. The Charter sets out mutual roles and responsibilities, which are 'owned' by both foster carers and the fostering service. In this way, a framework is created with which to improve the lives of children in care. The programme will enable fostering services to develop their own local charter, so that foster carers get the recognition they deserve and need, to provide children with the best possible care.

An implementation framework and toolkit will embrace the Charter and takes it to the next level: translating the ideals into concrete actions that can be taken by a wide range of partners to bring about real and measurable improvements in foster care for people across the country. The Fostering Network plans to build on this and produce a bilingual toolkit to support implementation that will focus on the roles of councillors, Foster Carers and local government officers for publication in 2017. A wide range of partners have worked together to produce this framework that really works for organisations on the ground. The framework includes practical ideas for how everyone engaged in foster care can make this Charter a reality. The framework focuses on improving outcomes, quality and value for money, and making sure that people who are involved in foster care services are fully involved – no decision about me, without me.

What is Needed to Enable Looked After Children to Achieve in Education – 2015.

This report by The Fostering Network was commissioned by the Welsh Government, and explores the views of foster carers in Wales regarding what they believe is needed to raise the ambitions and educational outcomes of the young people in their care. It follows consultations and a survey with foster carers carried out by The Fostering Network.

The report highlights the role of foster carers as first educators for the young people they are caring for, and the desire of foster carers to be increasingly involved in their fostered children's education.

Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales – a review of the first year of the Welsh Government's Looked After Children's education Strategy 2016 – 17.

This is a report of a consultation with foster carers in Wales carried out by The Fostering Network Wales for the Welsh Government between November 2016 and February 2017, to review the first year of their looked after children's education strategy.

The State of the Nation's Foster Care – 2016.

The Fostering Network has collated the views of 2,530 foster carers across the UK (including key Welsh data) through the State of the Nation survey, which is conducted every two years. The results are a snapshot of the views of foster carers in 2016. This report highlights the key findings, compares with previous survey results where possible, and makes recommendations for the changes that need to happen to ensure that all fostered children are given the best possible care and helped to fulfil their potential.



15: The 2nd National Conference

The 2nd National Conference

Our second national conference on the National Fostering Framework was held on March 14th in Llandindod Wells.

The conference was attended by 107 participants and was excellently chaired by Tanya Evans, Head of Children's

Services Blaenau Gwent and Chair of the All Wales Head of Children's Services Group (AWHOCs)

We had a lively day, full of challenging discussions and an ever increasing passion to improve our fostering services.

Here was our programme for the day, a big thank you to all those who contributed to the programme and to all those that attended to make the day such a success. The cafe style information tables were a big success!

NATIONAL FOSTERING FRAMEWORK PHASE TWO 2016/17

Intent into Action

All Wales Event for Local Authority Staff & Public Sector Partners

14th March 2017, The Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells

PROGRAMME

10.00am	Registration and refreshments	12.45pm	Café Style Information Tables: 7 Recommendations of the Phase 2 work programme
10.15am	Chair person's Opening Remarks & NFF Overview Tanya Evans, Head of Children's Services, Blaenau Gwent & Chair of the All Wales Head of Children's Services Group Welsh Government Response Elizabeth Lockwood, Head of Improving Outcomes – LAC, Welsh Government	2.15pm	The Regional Experience Aled Gibbard, Senior Manager Children & Families Support Services, Gwynedd County Council Tanya Evans, Head of Children's Services, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
10.30am	The Young Person's experience: Video stories Introduced by Chris Dunn, Programmes Manager, Voices from Care	2.30pm	Regional Working Groups What do we need to do next?
10.40am	The NFF Work Programme 2016-17 Jane Moore, Project Manager, NFF	3.15pm	The Foster Carer's Experience Sarah Jones, Foster Carer Ambassador, Fostering Network
11.00 am	Work Groups 1. Delivery of the National/Central, Regional & Local Functions 2. The National Performance Framework 3. Kinship Foster Care	3.25pm	Closing comments Phil Evans, Director of Social Services, Vale of Glamorgan and Lead Director NFF
12.00pm	Lunch	3.40pm	Finish



16: A Poem by Young people

A Poem by Young People

"The Children's Commissioner for Wales published a report entitled *"Hidden Ambitions: Wales' commitment to young people leaving care"* on 1st March 2017. During 2016 the Commissioner's office consulted with over 100 care experienced young people from across Wales at two regional events and one national event, as well as professionals. The consultations focused on what is important to young people as they move towards independence and what support or help they feel they need to achieve their ambitions.

The report centres on what all corporate parents can do to ensure that young people leaving care receive three things:

- Safe and stable housing suitable to their circumstances and wishes;
- An active offer of education, work or training; and
- Practical and emotional support up to the age of 25.

During the national consultation event, young people also engaged in workshops on radio, drama and poetry, facilitated by the Wales Millennium Centre. Those attending the poetry workshop collaborated together to write one poem to give their messages to their carers and corporate parents. The poem has kindly been brought to life by Michael Sheen in this short video but the words are all those of the young people at the event.

The Commissioner is visiting all local authorities in Wales between March and June 2017 to share the messages from the report and discuss how support can be tailored to the needs of young people in each local authority area, to help them to achieve their hidden ambitions and to be the best that they can be."



Watch the video of a poem written by young people and read by actor Michael Sheen here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eD36tyZQrY>



17: Conclusions

Conclusions

Creation of the National Framework is not a panacea for all the weaknesses in our fostering services. Staff and carers in all local authorities, the third sector and the independent sector are working hard on a daily basis to improve the service they deliver. This will need to continue at pace and scale.

However, we can say with some confidence that if we continue to deliver our fostering services in the same way, the future is likely to hold:

- a further reduction in the number of local authority foster carers, perhaps at an increasing rate given that the average age of carers is 55 years;
- increased dependence on the independent sector, in both fostering and residential care;
- increased placement costs for local authorities;
- more children and young people being placed outside their local authority area;
- more children remaining at home at greater risk of harm;
- greater likelihood that local authority fostering services will be unsustainable.

The work undertaken in Phase One and Two of the NFF has succeeded in achieving:

- a general consensus that creation of a National Fostering Framework is the way forward to address some of the most pressing of challenges facing the service;
- recognition that only a large-scale enterprise will deliver the changes required and that all sectors have a key role to play;
- a strong coalition of key stakeholders committed to working together to achieve greater cohesion and delivery in the delivery of fostering services and a commitment to keeping the outcomes we help to provide to children and young people and their foster carers at the heart of all we do.

It is difficult to overestimate the complexity or scale of the challenges facing us in creating a National Framework. There are considerable costs attached but this is a service which costs over £100 million each year and where costs are escalating. The Framework does present us with the only current viable opportunity for delivering our fostering services in a radically different way, producing better outcomes for children and young people and an improved offer for foster carers. Very positive engagement by all the key stakeholders on a national level and active involvement in the work programme by senior managers, operational managers and practitioners from across all regions in Wales are strong indications that a National Framework is the right approach. A 'national conversation' about our fostering services is taking place across all regions.

Work on the National Framework is part of the Welsh Government's strategic initiative to improve outcomes for Looked After Children. This is being led by a Ministerial Advisory Group, chaired by David Melding AM, and it will be asked to play a role in overseeing development of the Framework.



