

**From:** Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

Andrew Ireland, Corporate Director for Social Care, Health & Wellbeing

**To:** Corporate Parenting Panel – 18 September 2017

**Subject:** **PLACEMENT STABILITY - THE SENSE OF BELONGING SERVICE**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Electoral Divisions:** All

**Summary:** The Kent Fostering Service previously presented the Sense of Belonging project to the Corporate Parenting Panel on 20 March 2017. The project is part of the Fostering Business Plan for 2017-2018. This report outlines the progress over the last five months and work plan for the improvement of placement stability.

**Recommendation:** Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **CONSIDER** and **COMMENT** on progress made over the last five months and the work plan for the improvement of placement stability.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Kent Fostering offer the Council's foster carers the Sense of Belonging Service to create and support increased placement stability. The main aim of the service is to provide additional support to foster carers, children and young people where there are additional pressures and higher risk of a placement breakdown. There are three separate components to the project which is accessed based on the following criteria:

- Children/young people who have had three plus placement moves in the past 12 months
- Children/young people out of education or excluded from school
- Children/young people on a part-time timetable
- Children/young people at risk of missing/Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Placements assessed at risk of breakdown where the package is identified as a support to maintain the placement at the stability core group
- Those children with complex needs can be provide with Sense of Belonging service as an offer of support within the referral and matching, particularly for children where there have been numerous placement disruptions, including disruptions from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA).

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Sense of Belonging - Part 1**

2.1.1 Part 1 is a three month package of support, utilising the Council's outdoor activity centres, Bewl Water and the Swattenden Centre, offering day activities and overnight residential weekends. These are staffed by trained instructors from the centres and supported by youth workers through joint working with Early Help, to provide additional supervision and pastoral care, including overnight support, to the children.

2.1.2 The first pilot ran from January – April 2017, for a group of ten children from across the county aged between 8-14 years. Key learning from the first programme of support was provided through feedback from the children and foster carers. This has been used to plan the next 12 months of activities, with the most recent programme being held in July 2017. The July programme allowed for 12 children aged 8-12 years to receive a package of support during the school holiday period.

2.1.3 This part of the Sense of Belonging Service is funded jointly by Kent Fostering and Virtual School Kent (VSK) using pupil premium, with the aim to support young people back into full time education by building their self-esteem and confidence, whilst also giving their foster carers a respite. Having a programme of planned activities, gives children something to look forward to and carers a much needed break from managing some of the more complex behaviours.

### **2.2 Summary of Feedback from Children and Foster Carers**

*“My child’s behaviour improved from being with a new peer group and from having male staff as positive role models” (single female carer)*

*“Our young person talked non-stop about the fun he had and asked when he could go again. He had a great time despite his nerves and rated the day '10/10”*

*“I just wanted to pass on some feedback from the weekend the children had. I have a child that rarely expresses any feelings of happiness or fun. He is a lad that seems to carry the worries of the world on his shoulders, and sadly, doesn't like to let any good feelings into his life. After his weekend at Swattenden, he came back like a different boy! He was exhausted, filthy and happy....3 things a child should be! He couldn't stop talking...about his new friends, the things he'd done, the experiences he'd had, the food he'd eaten etc. He usually passes on a few details but rarely remembers many of the finer details. He seemed to remember so much of the weekend...it's been great! He struggles to tell wholly the truth and I'm guessing the lads didn't really go mountain climbing and banger racing!! But I'm surprised at how much he has remembered and I'm guessing the reason for that is how much he got out of the whole experience.”*

*“He struggles to maintain friendships but often talks fondly of the other lads from that weekend. He said how the older boys helped the younger ones on several occasions and how he went to one of the older boys to help him on the night hike cos he was a bit scared. He had a great time playing on the piano and one of the older boys could actually play and taught him a tune...he is still so happy about this and it has now prompted me to buy a small organ for him to play on. It may seem a small thing to most but for me to hear him talk fondly of other children, and for him to feel like that, it is huge. He told the Head of Fostering “I have never had a friend, but on this weekend I was the same as everyone else, for once I wasn’t different and I made a friend”*”

*“We went to a recent bowling event run by the Kent Foster Carers Association and bumped into a few of his Swattenden friends. He was so happy! It was great to see a connection. He can't explain why he feels connected to the boys but I have witnessed that there is definitely some connection. And that will only get stronger as they have more weekends together.”*

*“From another angle, and for selfish reasons, I have loved him going to Swattenden because it has given me some time for me...a rarity as a foster carer, especially as I am doing it alone. I stayed in bed on the Sunday after 6 am ...what a treat! As with most children in care, it is 'full on' and he can't be left for a moment so to have the weekend to do whatever I wanted was a real treat and a great chance to recharge my batteries . Thank you!!”*

*“I can't thank the people that organised this package enough, or the people that run it. I can only imagine how much hard work it all is. What I do know is how much he has benefited in so many ways (& me, if I'm honest!). Long may Swattenden continue! Thank you to everyone involved.”*

## **2.3 Key Learning**

2.3.1 Both the children and staff gave feedback that the age range was too wide, with the older teenagers not wanting to be in groups with younger children. Staff felt that having primary and secondary school aged groups starting at aged eight upwards would ensure children made friendships within their community which could be continued after the ending of the initial project. Linking the children and young people to their local Youth Hubs was introduced to facilitate this and provide ongoing support to the placement. The next 12 months of activities have been planned based on the feedback, as detailed in Appendix One.

2.3.2 One of the first children to access the outdoor activities was on notice from their in house foster placement, which would have meant their fourth move in care. The provision of this service made such a significant impact upon them and their foster carer that the carer withdrew the notice for them to move and they remain with the foster carer. Prior to accessing the project, they had refused all efforts to engage them in any physical or outdoor activities or being with their peer group, they would regularly be up in the night and exhibiting very challenging behaviours. The Sense of Belonging provided them with the

opportunity to make friends, learn to ride a bike, try activities in a safe environment that built their confidence and increase their self-esteem. The foster carer had the opportunity to have a break and felt better equipped to manage. Whilst this is just one example of the positive outcomes for children and foster carers, it is significant evidence of the successful outcomes that the project can achieve.

### **3. Sense of Belonging Part 2**

- 3.1 The provision of dedicated foster carer hub families who can provide a regular family based support package is based on research from the Mockingbird Project and Kent's pilot in East Kent of the 4x4 model/Adolescent Wrap around Project. Kent Fostering aim to recruit 5 fostering families as the "dedicated family hub" to cover seven areas of Kent. These foster families will work intensively with three to four fostering households to provide care for three to four children or young people. The aim is to create a "hub family" who become akin to extended family members for the child, offering them stability and care when the main foster carer needs a break or at times of placement instability.
- 3.2 The recruitment of these families is now being progressed through the Foster Carers Advisory Board, Kent Foster Carers Association and KCC's Foster Carer Ambassadors. Recruitment to this part of the Sense of Belonging project has been a challenge due to the national and local shortage of foster carers; in some areas of Kent all in-house vacancies are being used to full capacity. There will be a planned recruitment campaign in October 2017 to recruit new foster carers to become hub families.

### **4. Sense of Belonging Part 3 – A New Service Model for Therapeutic Support**

- 4.1 The current Therapeutic Re-Parenting (TRP) service ended in July 2017, with no new referrals for children being taken. The funding for TRP has been used to commission a different, county-wide service that will provide increased resource to carers. The successful provider and partner agency is the Anna Freud Centre London. The commissioned service will provide clinical psychology input to the in-house fostering teams, foster carers and children/young people and a new Clinical Psychologist is in post.
- 4.2 The overarching aims of Part 3 of the Sense of Belonging service are:
- To provide clinical psychology support to children in care at times of crisis and placement instability. The service provision is for 170 referrals for children per year
  - Intervene at the earliest possible stage, in the most appropriate manner to prevent the escalation of behaviour and support the emotional and/or mental health needs of children and young people
  - To support the remaining children and foster carers on the TRP scheme, by facilitating network meetings and support groups for the period August 2017–March 2018. This is our commitment, to ensure clinical psychology support to complete the two year placement and secure permanency for the five remaining children

- A training programme to support intervention with children who experience trauma along with practical methods of intervention is being developed for delivery to fostering staff and foster carers
- To effect improved joint working arrangements with providers of emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people.

4.3 The commissioning for this service has been completed in partnership with foster carers and young people who were involved in all aspects of the commissioning process including selection of the provider and design of the future service. In the recent Ofsted inspection, the inspectors reported **“the Sense of Belonging project, outdoor activity days and residential courses provide more targeted support for carers and children.”**

## 5. Work Plan for Placement Stability

5.1 Alongside the Sense of Belonging Service, significant changes have been made within the work plan to improve the permanency care planning for children in line with The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (updated 2015). Social workers undertake mandatory online training on Care Planning and a focus has been to ensure early permanency planning meetings are held to plan a child’s journey into care or at the point of entry into care. The permanency planning procedures have been updated to reflect that early care planning provides increased placement stability. Recruitment of foster carers has been updated to ensure robust assessment and recruitment of carers who can offer permanent homes with a commitment to providing Staying Put for young people into adulthood.

5.2 A new referral form that includes delegated authority, matching, a risk assessment and placement planning arrangements all within one document was implemented in July 2017. This provides a much clearer format and focus for social workers and the sharing of information with foster carers at an earlier stage. The use of the in-house emergency beds has been reviewed, to increase the availability of their use for Out of Hours placements. The focus on social work practice to improve placement stability has impacted on the performance target for the numbers of children who experience 3+ or more placement moves. Prior to March 2017 this was a deteriorating picture but since March 2017 the target has improved from 12.6% to 11.9% in June 2017. Whilst this improvement is gradual, it reflects the impact upon the first cohort of children accessing the Sense of Belonging project and the link to the improvement in their stability within the fostering household and their education.

5.3 There is a direct link between the provision of the outdoor activities that provide carers a regular break and the stability of the placement. Six out of the ten children remain with their original foster carers with plans for permanency. At the point of referral, four of the children were already on notice to move from their carers and the scheme was identified as part of the package of support offered to the new placement; this additional support meant all of the children were secured in-house foster placements. There have been no further placement moves for any of the ten children since accessing the scheme.

There is a clear link to the impact upon placement stability and their education provision, with more immediate support being needed at times of crisis. Overall there has been a reduction for the ten children in temporary exclusions from their schools; only three of the ten have experienced a temporary exclusion since being part of the project. From September 2017, with the implementation of Part Three of the Sense of Belonging, there would be clinical psychology crisis support identified at the point of exclusion, to provide immediate intervention for the child and foster carers.

- 5.4 The link to placement stability and children on part time timetables is detailed in Appendix 2 and this data will be used to identify children for the next cohort to access the Sense of Belonging Activity days. The aim will be to build on the success of the scheme and its link to the improvement in placement stability in order to target those children most vulnerable within their education. Virtual School Kent (VSK) will identify these children within the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process and be able to refer children directly to the Sense of Belonging Project.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Each part of the Sense of Belonging project will be evaluated quarterly, as part of the Fostering Business Plan. The Head of Fostering meets with all the children and foster carers referred for the outdoor activity centres to ensure they understand the scheme and have the opportunity to give feedback. This will enable the project to further develop and improve, maximising the positive outcomes for our children and foster carers. It is recognised that the outdoor environment is not the first choice of activity for all children/young people and in these circumstances, the other two parts of the service will offer appropriate alternative resources. The priority for the next quarter will be the recruitment of the hub families and the launching of the clinical psychology support at times of crisis.

## 7. Recommendation

7.1 Recommendation: Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **CONSIDER** and **COMMENT** on progress made over the last five months and the work plan for the improvement of placement stability.

## 8. Background Documents

The Mockingbird Society developed the model in USA

<http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/index.php/what-we-do/mockingbird-family-model>

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