

KENT FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT



Making Kent a County that works for all children

APRIL 2018 - MARCH 2019

Introduction

Caroline Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, Integrated Children's Services



Kent Fostering is part of the range of services within Corporate Parenting, who support our children and young people in care.

I am very proud to be a Corporate Parent to over 1,500 children and over 1,600 care leavers and be able to share with you the work to support those children that are placed with our Foster Carers. Every day in Kent, Foster Carers make a real difference to children's lives and we continue to strive to provide both carers and children with the best possible support we can.

Nicola Anthony, Head of Fostering, East, Children's Social Work Services



Welcome to our Annual Report for Kent Fostering Agency which details the work of Kent Fostering Service. As Head of Fostering East and working alongside Mark Vening, Head of Fostering West, our aim is to ensure that Kent Fostering recruit and supervise the very best foster carers to promote a safe and secure environment for children and young people in Kent. I am proud of foster carers and their achievements and it is a privilege to work with them.

Mark Vening, Head of Fostering, West, Children's Social Work Services



I am delighted to welcome you to Kent Fostering Service's Annual Report. The report will outline the key functions of Kent Fostering and a summary of the work undertaken from April 2018 to March 2019. The annual report is an opportunity to celebrate our successes as a service as we work towards developing Kent Fostering towards our ambition to be Ofsted rated as 'outstanding'. I am very proud of the achievements of all staff within Kent Fostering along with the highly skilled foster carers who work tirelessly to improve the lives of our looked after children.

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Section 1

Key Messages

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards (NMS) require all Fostering services to provide a report of their activities and to review a written Statement of Purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service and the facilities they provide.

The Fostering Service provides a service to recruit and support foster carers and to match carers to children who require temporary or permanent homes. Kent Fostering remains committed to identifying and supporting stable placements for children where foster care is the identified plan.

Throughout 2018-19 the Fostering Service has continued towards its goal of providing high quality, local placements for all children that are equipped and supported to meet their diverse needs. This is a key strategic priority within the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy which has continued into the 2019-20 working year.

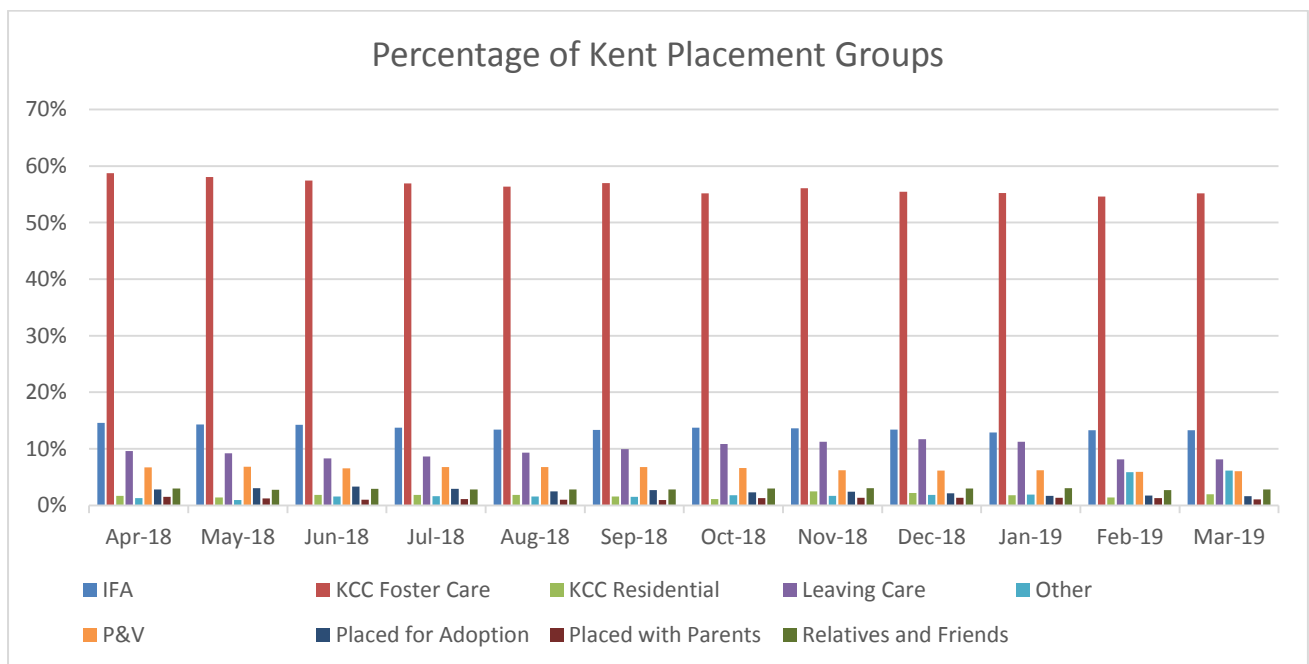
The structure for the Kent Fostering Service during 2018-19 had been in place since October 2012. It was made up of 7 fostering supervising social work support teams and a centralised service which covered the recruitment and assessment of foster carers (including Connected Persons). The specialist teams including the Disabled Children's Fostering Team, the Sense of Belonging Team and the foster carer training and development team were also within the Centralised Service area.

Kent Fostering Service was managed by one Head of Fostering, who had direct management responsibility for the centralised teams and for maintaining the standards within the Fostering Service as a whole and was the registered fostering manager. Line management was provided by the Service Managers in the locality areas and oversight and quality assurance was provided by the Assistant Directors. The aim of the service was to provide a range of high quality, appropriate foster placements that met the National Minimum Standards (2011), the requirements set out in Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and ensured the best possible outcomes for Kent's children in care.

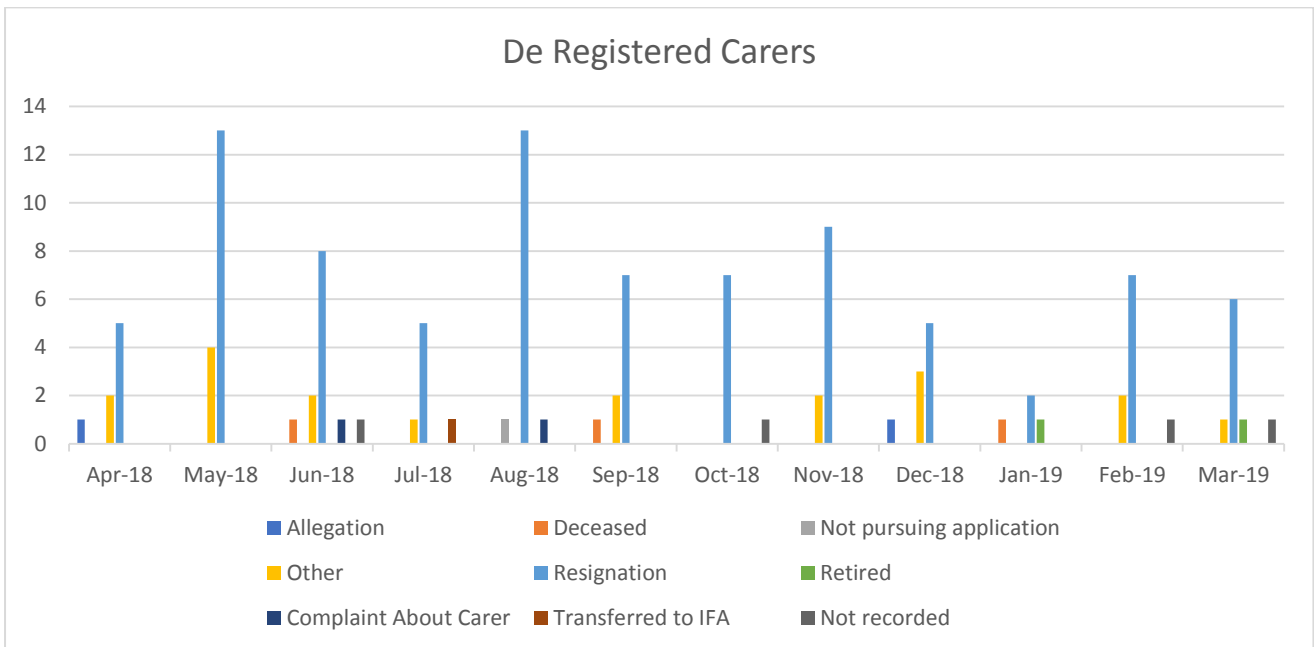
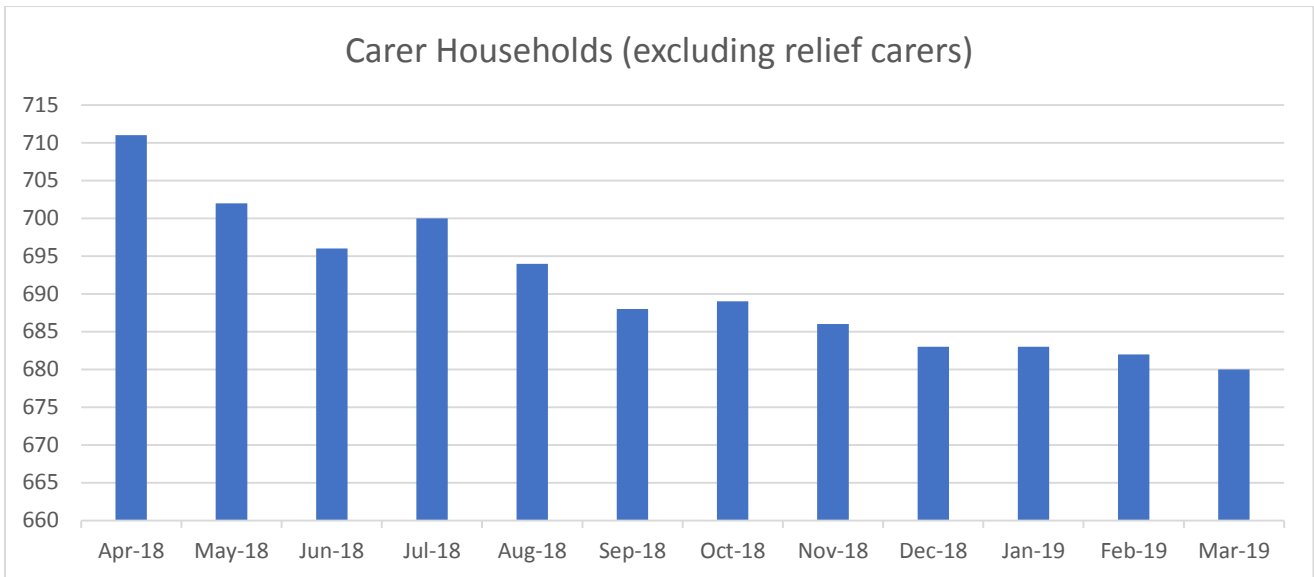
Section 2

Supervision and Support to Foster Carers

As of the 31st March 2019 Kent Fostering had 680 approved foster carers caring for 910 mainstream children and 47 children living with a family relative or friend under an interim or full care order (a Connected Person Arrangement). The remainder of our children in care are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies, residential units, residential schools, Staying Put placements, Supported Lodgings or in semi-independent accommodation and children placed for adoption.



Whilst 80% of our children in care are in a Local Authority provision the service identified ongoing areas for improvement around the utilisation of foster carers, maximising the use of our in-house vacancies and enhancing the processes in place to match children both locally and across the County. The focus of each support team was to continue to ensure that maximum use of in-house vacancies and ensuring foster carers have the skills and knowledge required to maintain their registration. The aim was to work towards only having carers who were actively fostering and committed to working with the department. This has meant that several foster carers have been deregistered due to being unable to take the children requiring placements; not actively fostering for prolonged periods and not meeting the requirements set out in fostering regulations. This has meant a reduction in the number of registered foster carers over the past few years.



Kent Fostering Service in 2018/19 continued to implement actions around the strengthening and development of our service delivery including actions to improve consistency of practice and support provided directly to carers and strengthening the specialisms within the Service. To this aim, work was undertaken to look at transferring the responsibility for the management of the area based fostering support teams to come under the umbrella of the Corporate Parenting management structure, bringing together both the support teams and centralised fostering teams under one area of accountability.

As part of the Change for Kent children programme, a review of the structure of the fostering service was undertaken. Several changes were identified, driven by a recognition of the need to improve the support we offered to Kent Foster Carers, promote consistency of practice throughout the county and ultimately address the worrying decline in the number of Kent carers that we have seen over the last three years. Moving forward we shall be working to stem that flow and improve our support offer to carers and their families. We shall do this by looking at our current carers and using them more effectively by developing the use of sessional work in helping to provide bespoke packages of support to foster carers in crisis. We have also started to promote and develop Hub Families who will be identified to specifically support our most vulnerable children to remain in their placements and prevent breakdown with their carers. Our drive will be to increase our recruitment numbers, and this is especially the case for those supporting the most vulnerable and challenging of our young people including parents and their children who need to be placed with foster carers during a period of assessment. This new structure took effect on the 1st April 2019. ¹

Section 3

Communication and Support

Working relationships and information that we provided to our carers continued to be developed to ensure that feedback on changes were constructive without losing the opportunity for foster carers to raise concerns about the service. Support groups continued to take place each month in all of the areas and any issues were then fed into the Foster Carers Advisory Board which was chaired by the Head of Fostering and attended by both the team managers within all the fostering teams and foster carer representatives within each of the four areas. Virtual School Kent, the Recruitment Co-ordinator and the Training Coordinator are also in attendance.

However, during 2018/19 the Fostering Service built on these areas. One of our key aims was to focus on retention of foster carers and improve the communication further. A Foster Carer Satisfaction Survey was launched in June 2018 to gather feedback from foster carers to understand the areas of the Fostering Service that are working well and what areas can be approved upon.

One of the developments following this survey was to introduce Meet and Greet sessions, for foster carers and the Head of Fostering, alongside Child in Care Service Managers. These meetings are held twice a year in each area to continue promoting the relationship and communication with foster carers.

During this year Kent Fostering recruited 30 Foster Carer Ambassadors. The foster carers are from across all areas of Kent and undertake the following roles:

- Work within their local community to recruit carers to join the Service

¹ Kent Fostering Service Structure Chart – Appendix A

- Attending meetings with the Head of Service to review, update and develop policy and guidance
- Facilitate training events and conferences to disseminate learning to foster carers and social workers
- Consult on developing new services for foster carers and children
- Represent Kent Fostering in local forums and
- Co-facilitate the Meet and Greet sessions with the aim to work with senior managers, fostering and CIC social workers and other colleagues involved in the team around the child.

The Ambassadors have been working on the actions that have originated from these meetings. These have included:

- A review of the Annual Review paperwork, with the view that it will be streamlined and the quantity of written work for foster carers will be reduced,
- Developing a Kent Fostering App to improve the speed of our communication so that all foster carers are kept up to date with any changes
- Promoting the Foster Carer Awards Ceremony which took place on the 14th November 2018 (see below).



The Foster Care Ambassadors have been working with the Service in updating the Payment for Skills Payment structure which outlines the criteria for foster carers to be acknowledged financially for the skills they have gained and used when meeting children's needs as well as being fundamental in the updating of the new Staying Put policy which has now been agreed and uploaded onto Tri-X. They have also contributed to the development of the outline for a new Parent and Child scheme which is at the service design phase.

This has enabled the Kent Fostering Service to access key specialised knowledge that foster carers have in developing new forms and processes as well as giving carers the opportunity to invest and have a say in their agency and its path of travel. Following feedback from the Meet and Greet sessions, we have also introduced a monthly newsletter from the 'Head of Fostering' which includes updates and ways in which foster carers can get involved across the service.

Section 4

Fostering Assessment Teams

There are two Assessment teams within Kent with one covering the assessment of carers in the East and South areas and the other covering the North and West. They are responsible for the initial training and assessment of all new applicants as well as those family members who are seeking to become connected persons for a specific child. They attend information events and recruitment stands at arranged events planned throughout the County to help advertise and promote recruitment for Kent Fostering.

The teams are responsible for undertaking the Skills to Foster courses which are held for new applicants; twelve of these three-day courses took place last year, three of which were held during the weekend and evenings. In addition, Panel training took place over 2 days in the Autumn of 2018. Here foster carers shared good practice and the Panel Members revisited values, attitudes and professional curiosity around risk and vulnerabilities. The team also share good practice with the area children's teams and delivered three Connected Persons workshops across the county highlighting the statutory and practice requirements for any member of a looked after child's family, or friend of the family, becoming a foster carer for Kent.

The teams also play a key role in other areas. As part of the role in keeping in contact with foster carers, they held Meet and Greet sessions across the county. This was in light of the significant changes within the service and the completion and outcome of the first Kent foster carers satisfaction survey. In maintaining consistency in practice, the teams have also developed and revised existing processes and policies including foster carers diary record keeping, nominated carers and parent and child placements.

Section 5

Recruitment

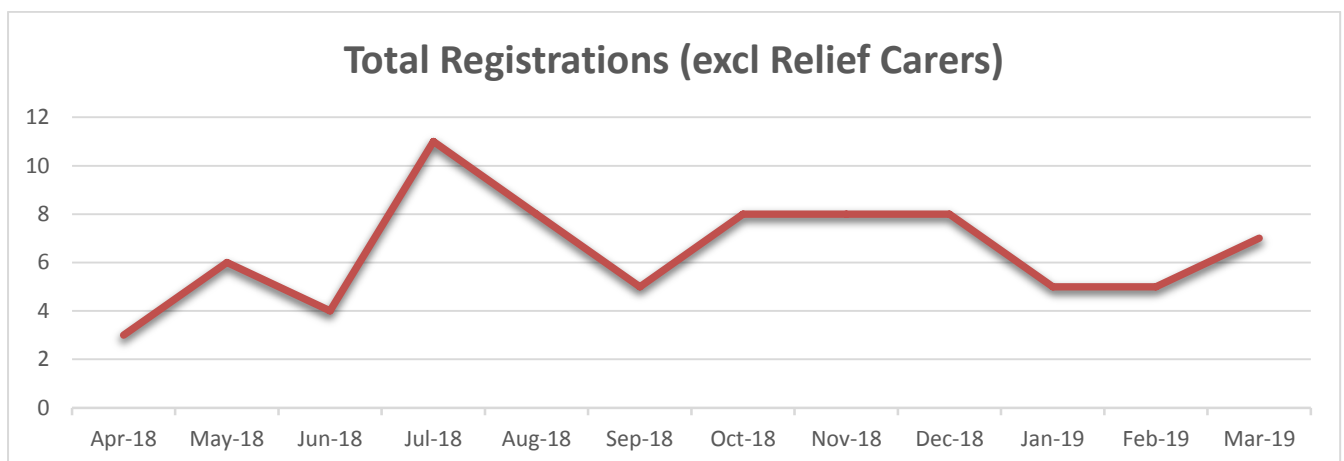
The recruitment of foster carers continues to be a challenge especially in Kent where as well as there being a nationwide issue regarding the recruitment of carers, Kent Fostering are in competition with the highest number of Independent Fostering Agencies compared to any other county.

Foster Carer Approvals April 2018 to March 2019

	2017-18	2018-19
Number of Approvals	81	78
Average time to complete full approval process <i>(Government set timescale target is 8 months)</i>	8 months	5.72 (90.9% completed in 6 months or less)

Recruitment has remained consistent and there has been a significant improvement in the timescales to complete the full approval assessment process. The application process has been streamlined, to ensure there are no delays and additional Skills to Foster Training courses and panels are arranged, at times of increased recruitment activity.

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19
Total Registrations (excl Relief)	3	6	4	11	8	5	8	8	8	5	5	7



In their report 'The State of the Nation', the Fostering Network highlighted that the recruitment and retention of Foster carers continues to be a challenge locally and nationally and in addressing this, greater regional cooperation with south east regional local authorities has been formed to combine recruitment efforts in an attempt to improve the number of carers coming into the agency. As a new initiative, a 'Carer's Career Fair' took

place in October 2018 which included Kent Fostering and Adoption, Shared Lives, Supported Lodgings, Young Lives Foundation and Medway Fostering.

Key to the number of enquiries and applicants we receive are our recruitment materials. As a result, we looked at our advertising images towards the end of the recruitment year. Following the 'Open Your Heart to Fostering' campaign, which had been our branding for the last 3 years, changes have been made to promote Fostering for Kent as a Local Authority. The branding will now have the focus of "Foster for Kent", aiming to attract Kent families, for Kent Children with local Kent support.

The use of social media has increased, including Facebook and Twitter to ensure Kent Fostering has a greater presence within the local community via social media platforms. The impact of this has already been seen this year when during Fostering Fortnight we received 85 new enquires which is more than those received during the same period for the three preceding years.

The Corporate Parenting Panel elected members and foster carer ambassadors have greatly contributed to the recruitment of foster carers in their local areas. Kent elected members have assisted with advertising the Information events and circulating recruitment materials, they have supported and attended local events and presented awards at the Foster Carers Appreciation Ceremony. The promotion of Kent Fostering by the members and ambassadors has ensured a larger footprint in the community and crucial media coverage.

Mr Mike Angell, former Chairman for KCC commented at the Appreciation Award Ceremony: "I was delighted to have been invited to present the awards at this year's appreciation event, I feel it is very important we recognise the wonderful work undertaken by our foster carers and staff, often unlooked for behind the scenes. I hope more people will consider fostering with the council and joining our wonderful team."

The focus on the Service's recruitment has led to several developments which include:

- The development of a comprehensive recruitment strategy,
- Changes in fostering images and branding,
- Continual development of the fostering service website,
- Development of the use of social media, including the use of a Facebook page for 2018/19,
- Bespoke/targeted advertising and profiling events, for our children with more complex needs.



FOSTER FOR KENT
If you would like to foster and have a spare room, call us today!

Kent County Council
03000 420 002

FOSTER FOR KENT
If you can provide loving care to a child, you could foster.

Kent County Council
03000 420 002

Advertising this year has included new banners, short films and stills on social media, railway and radio advertising, leaflets in school bags and a new format for the information events. Furthermore, collaborative working with Virtual School Kent, Kent Libraries and Kent Country Parks has been formed to reach wider areas of the community. Experienced foster carers are part of all information events, to enhance presentations by sharing the rewards of being a foster carer for Kent Fostering.



FOSTER CARE FORTNIGHT
13-26 MAY

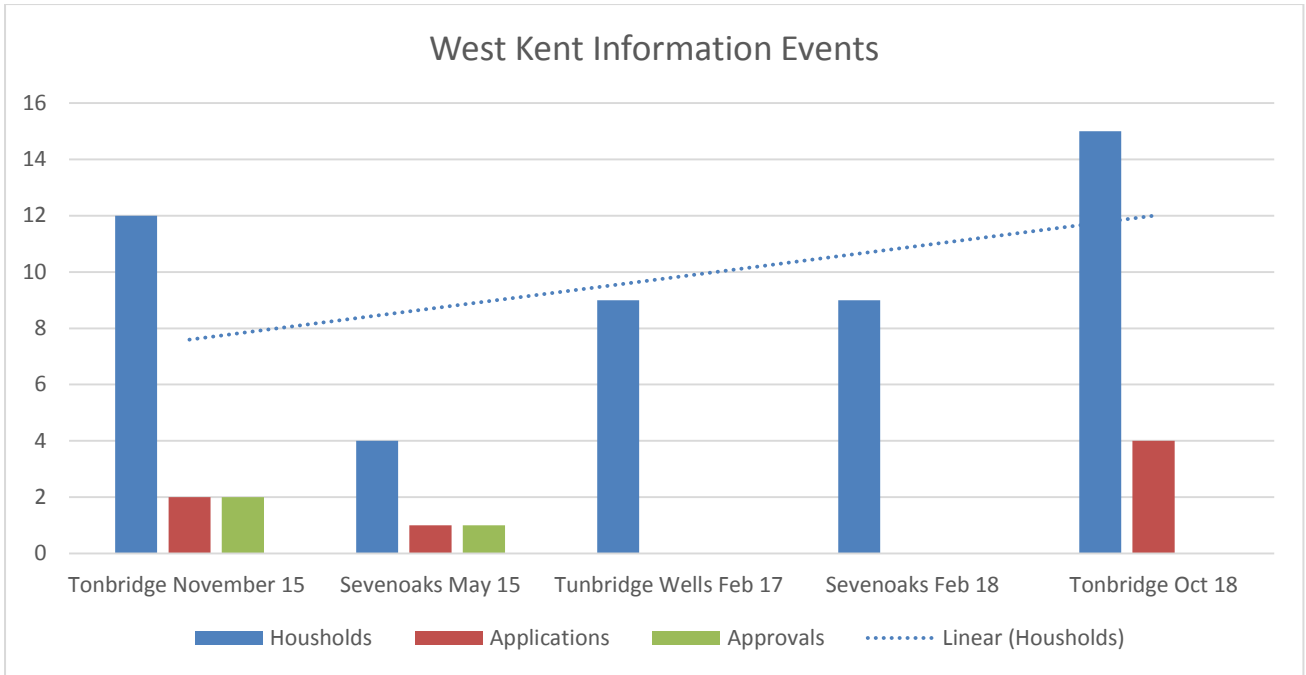
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kentfostering.co.uk

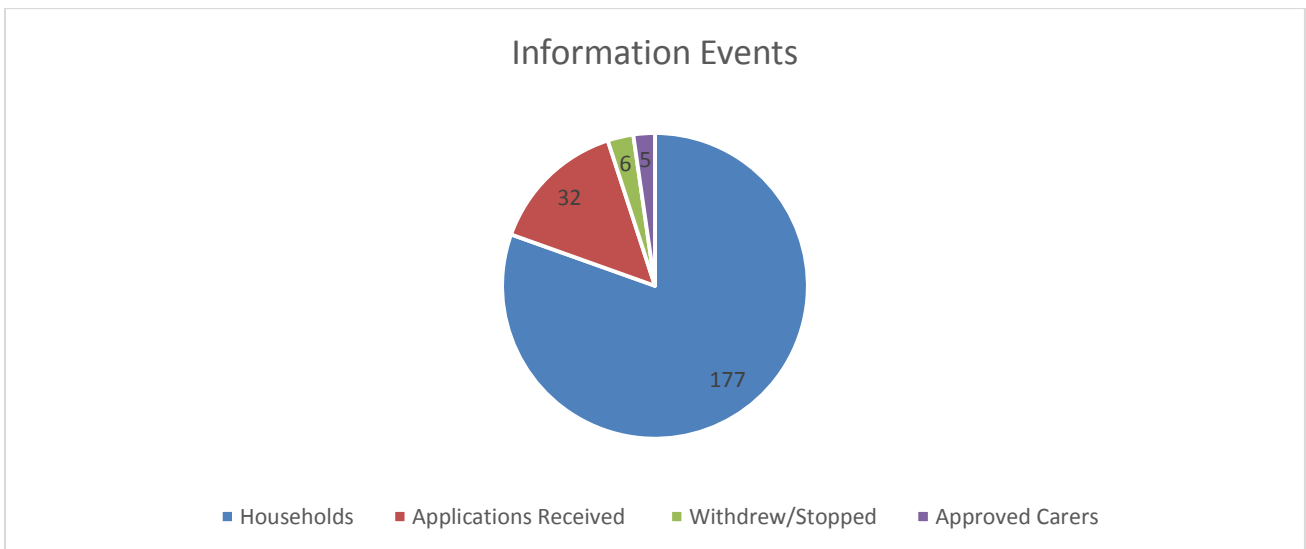
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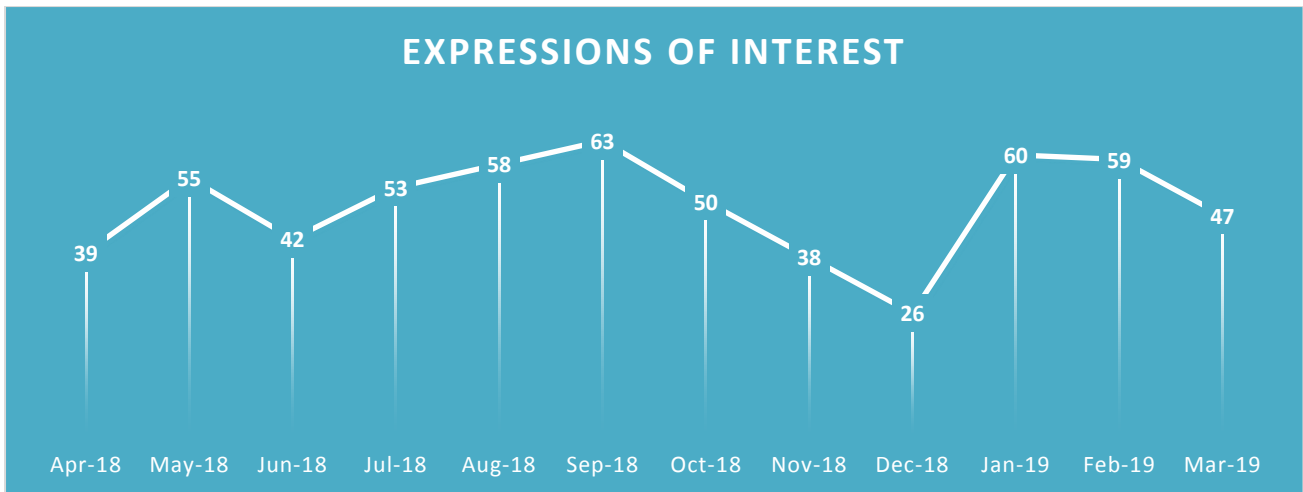
Initial enquiries to Kent Fostering have remained consistent during 2018/2019 with 590 enquiries over the past year. This is in line with the previous year which had 597. The conversion rate of applications received from enquiries is 34% and the conversion of enquires to full approval has remained steady at 10% which is in line with the national average. In the last six months of the 2018-19 reporting year, there has been an increase in approvals from the previous 6 months which appear to reflect the increased recruitment campaigns and impact of social media.

The Service has also targeted specific “hot spot” areas for recruitment within the county, which require additional fostering placements, due to a lack of foster carers in those areas. These include the North and West areas. As a result, posters were displayed at the Orchards Shopping Centre in Dartford, St George’s in Gravesend and Chequers Shopping Mall in Maidstone for a period of 6 months from May 2018. Generic posters were sent with accompanying letters to doctors, dentists, hospitals and cafes along with targeted small businesses in West and North Kent to promote Kent Fostering. This was in addition to specific event posters.



Throughout the year 13 information events were held with 177 households in attendance, with 18% completing applications. To date 16% of the applications have been approved as Foster Carers.





Additional Recruitment Events

The Carers Recruitment Fair was held at Detling Showground with IFA's, Kent Adoption Service and Kent Care Leavers Service. The event was advertised via Facebook, radio, Jobcentres and a 'poster drop'. The Specialist Recruitment Event took place at Thanington Resource Centre and was advertised via the KM Group digital media and a targeted 'flyer drop' to 1641 local businesses schools, police, hospitals and nurseries as well as our Facebook page. The events were attended by 13 households resulting in 3 current applications. Whilst this is lower than we hoped for, the service is ambitious to try new ways of recruitment and be creative in trying new events.

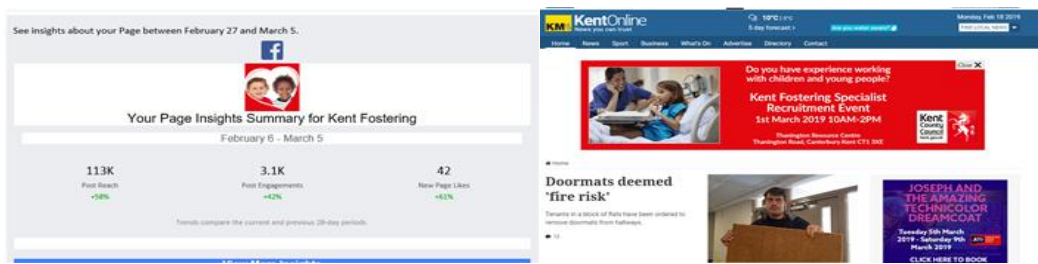
We have developed our attendance and links with local community events to encourage applications from the wider community and have had a presence at:

- Paddock Wood Hop Farm (Aug 2018)
- Canterbury Pride (June 2018)
- Canterbury Fire Station Open Day (Aug 2018)
- Paws in the Park Event at Detling (Sept 2018)
- Paddock Wood Christmas Light Switch on (Nov 2018)
- Folkestone ArtMart Christmas (Nov 2018)
- Ightham Mote Christmas Market (Dec 2018)



We have had pop-up stands working alongside our KCC partners in libraries across Kent as well as the cinema chain Cineworld. We also attended various supermarkets across the county including Whitstable, Tesco and Queenborough Morrisons.

Kent Fostering has utilised radio, digital content via external agencies and social media platforms to a far greater degree. Kent Fostering's Facebook page along with KCC Twitter and Instagram pages have predominantly been used to advertise recruitment events. We have gradually increased this to include content of "days" e.g. "siblings' day" and details of MythBusters. These have proved popular and the content is shared by staff and carers along with linking in to other Kent Services social media i.e. Catch 22 and our internal KNET website.



The national average 'click' rate for a website is 0.03%, Kent Fostering advertising an event in Feb / March 2018 had a click rate of 0.82%.

Radio advertising was trialled with the KM Group for Half Term Heroes and a Kent Foster Carer was interviewed for a "Work place shout out". Radio adverts ran with Global (Heart Radio) between May and June as well as a specific radio advert for the Carers Fair in October.

A set of films have been commissioned to help promote Kent Fostering detailing the various types of fostering. These currently follow the old-style branding with "Open your Heart" and are under review for 2019/20. The films include a series of short 'filmletts' with additional films for Parent and Child fostering and Caring for Teenagers films in production. Shortened version of the films (10 seconds approx.) have also been created to use to advertise information events.

<Z:\Global\Ashford\FSC Central Fostering Assessment Team\Recruitment\Vicky\Social Media\Facebook\Gravesend Jul 19\01d 4 July Fostering Event.mp4>



Kent Fostering has sponsored Chestfield Cricket Junior Club. The Kent Fostering logo appears on the players shirts and jumpers which are worn at club matches in Kent and further afield. The cricket club also display Kent Fostering Service leaflets in the clubhouse and have a banner at their practice ground.



Kent Fostering sponsors The Tunbridge Wells Youth Bowling Club and have our “Open your Heart” campaign advertised on their jerseys. They play in a Kent league and attend numerous competitions county and country wide.



Moving forward Kent Fostering has rebranded to Foster for Kent. Adverts have already been placed in the Canterbury and Dartford areas with Canterbury Park and Ride and at Dartford Prospect Place. The Park and Ride has been noted as the media source accessed to contact the Initial Enquiries Team on several occasions.

A photograph of a young girl with long brown hair, wearing a yellow and white striped shirt and a red skirt, sitting on a grassy area. She is holding two colorful pinwheels on sticks. The background is a soft-focus green field.

FOSTER FOR KENT

#Pridemonth

If you're LGBTQ+, then you can become a foster carer. Call us today!

Kent County Council
kent.gov.uk

03000 420 002

Section 6

Fostering Review Team

The Fostering Review Team has been in place since September 2016, Senior Practitioners in this team have taken on the chairing of foster carer Annual reviews to give independency and consistency to the review process, with clear recommendations. There is clearly more of a focus on outcomes for children within the review period and feedback on foster carers practice, alongside their development and training needs for the year ahead.

This has been the second year that foster carer Annual Reviews have been managed and completed by the Fostering Review Team providing a level of independent assessment of foster carers, a quality assurance function for the service and opportunities for reflection,

learning and development for the service as a whole. The team is well established and settled, managing a high number of Annual Reviews across the county.

The Fostering service has continued to achieve a high compliance rate and good practice regarding foster carers Annual Reviews with 622 fostering households Annual Reviews completed in the year April 2018 to March 2019.

An average of 86% of Annual Reviews have been successfully completed within the statutory 12-month timescale. The 14% of Annual Reviews that have not been completed within timescale have been due to clear reasons including:

- Annual Reviews delayed due to foster carers circumstances e.g. significant ill health, bereavement, travelling abroad
- staffing issues e.g. sickness absence, high vacancy numbers
- Liberi errors e.g. consolidation errors with the Annual Review form and a change in data reporting

From October 2018, the Fostering Review Team also started undertaking 6 month follow up calls to newly approved foster carers. 21 were completed by 31st March 2019. The purpose of this is to follow up on newly approved carers to check on their progress and provide an independent review early on in the year of how well the assessment process prepared them for the fostering task. It allows us to understand how they are managing the transition from Assessment to Support Team, consider how they have been matched (or not) to children, quality of supervision, training and the quality of the support they are being provided. This is also a good opportunity to introduce the Annual Review and to ensure new foster carers have all they need to be on track to achieve a successful first year of fostering.

Annual Review Process, Quality of Annual Reviews and 6 Month Follow Up Telephone Calls

The Annual Review administration system has become well established and functioning more effectively and consistently across all fostering Support teams. There is evidence of good communication and collaboration with Fostering Social Workers, Team Managers and foster carers regarding Annual Reviews ensuring joint ownership and responsibility of the Annual Review process and reducing areas of frustration and dissatisfaction for foster carers.

There has been a more visible increase in the feedback recorded by fostering social workers from children (looked after children and children who foster), children's social workers, birth family and other professionals e.g. IROs, education, health. This is mainly from fostering social workers being proactive and creative in gathering such feedback in different ways including fostering social workers speaking to children in care themselves when they visit the fostering household, speaking to children's social workers, birth family

and other professionals directly, using what is recorded on the child's file, Child in Care Review minutes, correspondence etc. which better informs foster carer Annual Reviews.

Overall the quality of Annual Reviews is regularly improving with marked improvements in the quality of assessment and analysis by fostering social workers, reflection by all involved with Annual Review reports being thorough, well evidenced and informed. Annual Reviews have provided an opportunity for foster carers to feel that their good work is recognised, and they are valued as an invaluable resource within the service. In the same way, Annual Reviews have become a positive and open forum for reflection and learning for fosters and the wider service too.

Learning from Annual Reviews has continued to be significant in identifying and flagging for the service areas of vulnerability, practice improvement and learning which has led to better case management, practice and policy changes and improvements on individual case basis and at a wider service level. This is key in improving the service provision, quality of care provided for children, foster carers satisfaction and retention. The 6 months follow up calls have especially helped ensure newly approved carers feel valued and that anxieties and vulnerabilities are identified and responded to early by the service. They have contributed to carer retention and have so far helped us hold onto three sets of carers that we risked losing early on due to issues following approval.

We have also received feedback about foster carer Annual Reviews from foster carers, fostering social workers, fostering team managers and the Fostering Panel. These include:

- Foster Carers feel that the annual review has become a more meaningful process where their good work is acknowledged and celebrated, birth children and family recognised, their voices heard, the service being held accountable and everyone being able to reflect on their practice and consider learning to improve practice.
- Staff feeling that their assessment is validated, feeling supported to have open and honest reflection with foster carers which can be difficult to do on their own, that the annual reviews are thorough which allows things to be picked up which they may have missed especially given staff changes and high workloads. They also like the opportunity to reflect and have clear and well thought out action plans from the annual reviews.
- Fostering team managers feel that the annual reviews provide a thorough case audit which informs management function as they consider different aspects of the file and individual case management. It highlights good practice and flags up where there are gaps, practice or compliance issues that they may not be aware of. Annual reviews also help inform staff performance management.
- Kent Fostering Panels feel that it is more thorough and provides better evidence which informs Panel process.

Vulnerabilities however remain regarding Annual Reviews around the processes of the reviews in relation to Liberi, staff changes and consistency in the fostering social worker completing annual reviews and the lack of feedback of the carers work from colleagues. Ongoing communication with the children's social workers will continue to help minimise

delays and feedback forms not being completed as well as changes in our processes to ensure that the views of the fostering team managers and their oversight of recommendations remains consistent.

Section 7

Kent Fostering Specialised Services

Sense of Belonging Service

48% of foster carers are supporting a child with mental health needs who are not accessing specialised services. This puts significant pressure on the placement and heightens the risk of breakdowns. The Sense of Belonging Service supports foster carers and professionals in the network at times of crisis and when the placement is at risk of disruption, to de-escalate the issues and thereby increase placement stability. This includes a Clinical Psychologist supporting foster carers to understand the meaning of their child's behaviour and to consider what might help to both manage the behaviour and sustain the relationship with the foster child. In addition, where children and young people have had multiple placement moves, the service provides support around transition and placement planning.

The service opened for referrals on 8 September 2017. During the first quarter the focus was on establishing the service and building links and relationships with social work teams and other key agencies. Although the service has been running for less than one year, it is already evident that Sense of Belonging is having a significant impact on placement stability for the children they are working with. The focus of the work continues to be on the network and on supporting foster carers at times of significant stress.

- *“Absolutely fantastic! The best advice I have had since beginning my fostering journey has come from the psychologist. She saved me from going mad!”*
- *“Thank you so much for your invaluable input over the last months. You have provided us with support and very helpful direction in some difficult times.”*

Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 there have been 99 referrals which have been accepted. Out of these referrals 61 (62%) were due to the placement potentially breaking down and out of those 24 are still current with ongoing work with the carers continuing, 75 cases are closed following work being completed. The plan is for short term intervention, as opposed to long term case work.

Of the 75 completed cases 51 or 68% remained in placement with 24 (32%) moving to an alternative provision. These moves were to more appropriate identified placements of another foster carer or residential unit.

Activity Weekends

Kent Fostering run an Activity Programme for children and young people who have had several placements moves or are at risk of placement breakdown due to complex needs, being on a part time timetable, at risk of being excluded or missing from care.

The programme of events provides foster carers with additional support and an opportunity to have a break. Children and young people have an opportunity to make new friends, try new activities and build self-esteem with the aim to improve placement stability and to become more settled at school.

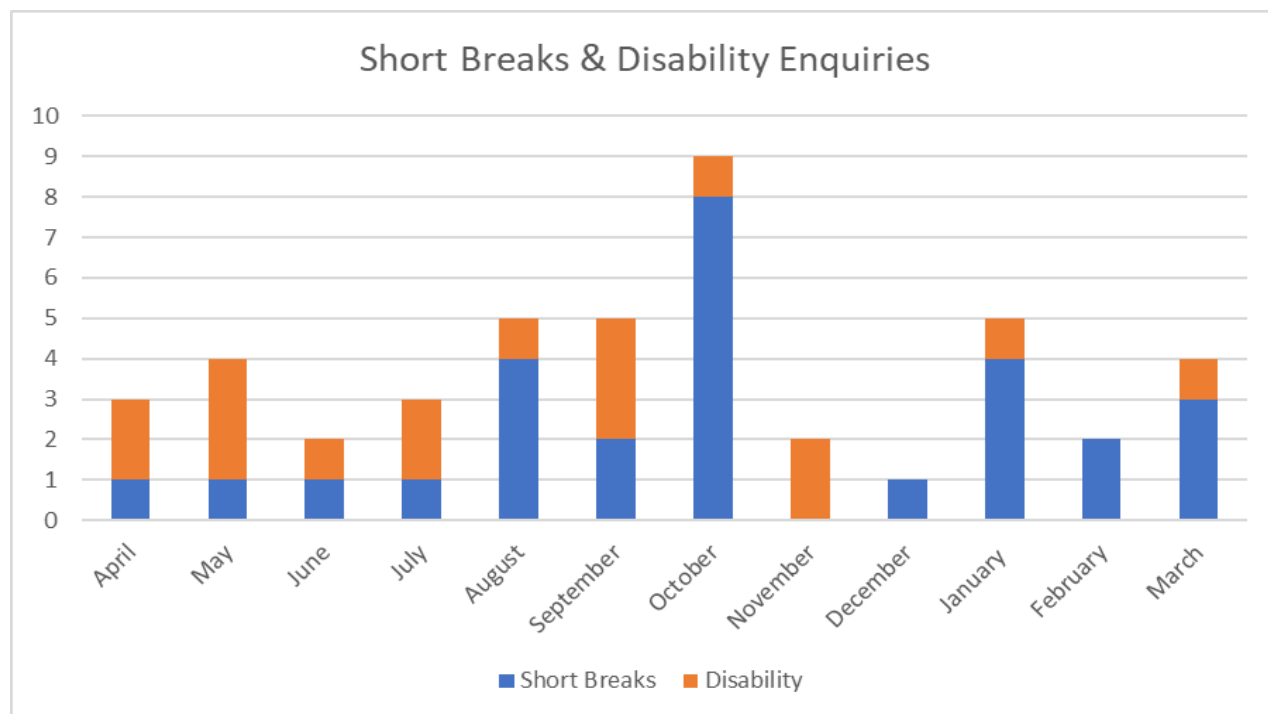
- *“My child’s behaviour improved from being with a new peer group and from having male staff as positive role models (single female carer)”*
- *“Our young person talked nonstop about the fun he had and asked when he could go again.”*
- *“He is still talking about the friends he made on the activity day and can’t wait until the next one.”*
- *“Thoroughly enjoyed the first day despite his nerves and rated the day 10 out of 10.”*



The Disabled Children’s Fostering Team

This is an area of excellence, with experienced fostering staff supporting foster carers to provide both full time care for disabled children and Short Breaks for children and young people with disabilities, alongside their foster and Short Break families throughout Kent. We currently have 56 foster carers of whom 35 offer full time placements (of which 6 also offer Short Breaks and 1 is a Connected carer) and 21 offer Short Break care to children

with disabilities. The numbers of carers that Kent have for disabled children has remained stable, however we need to build further in this area to provide more opportunity for disabled children to live within the community and will be focussing on developing a recruitment campaign to achieve this.



'4% of all approved foster carer are Short Break carers'(Foster Care in England (2018) Review (Narey & Owers)) 8% of total enquiries to KCC last year were for Short Breaks

One of the main challenges for disabled children is to ensure that their thoughts and feelings do not go unnoticed or unheard. Therefore, to help ensure that this does not happen and to give every opportunity to a disabled child to have their voice heard, each social worker has been allocated a Widget communication tool, to aid communication regarding all aspects of their care. Widget is a symbol-based form of communication used with children and adults with a disability.

Activity Events

The team continues to ensure that disabled children have positive, inclusive activity events taking into account their needs. Throughout the year various events have taken place including:

- Kent Life
- Christmas Party with Kazamataz
- Pantomime
- Hythe Summer Picnic
- Festability,
- Making My Mark, Art display – displayed in Canterbury, Folkestone, Margate, Dover.

- Performers without Borders – Circus Skills.



Section 7

Training and Learning

Training for foster carers across the county and Fostering Panel Member Training is the responsibility of the centralised fostering training coordinator who develops and delivers a programme of training days, workshops and e-learning which is responsive to the diverse requirements of a large county fostering service. The programme includes “pre-approval” training, i.e. Skills to Foster, Fostering Changes, Core training for all carers and workshops for experienced foster carers. There are opportunities for carers to gain nationally recognised Level 3 and Level 4 Diploma qualifications.

The training in the past year has included learning from Allegations, ‘thinking the unthinkable’, Understanding and Recognising Predators in Positions of Trust, Safeguarding and updates of the service.

The training introduced new developments in the service such as the Kent Foster Carer Risk and Vulnerability Assessment and using ‘Signs if Safety’ in fostering assessments and supervision and the triangulation of the safe care plan.

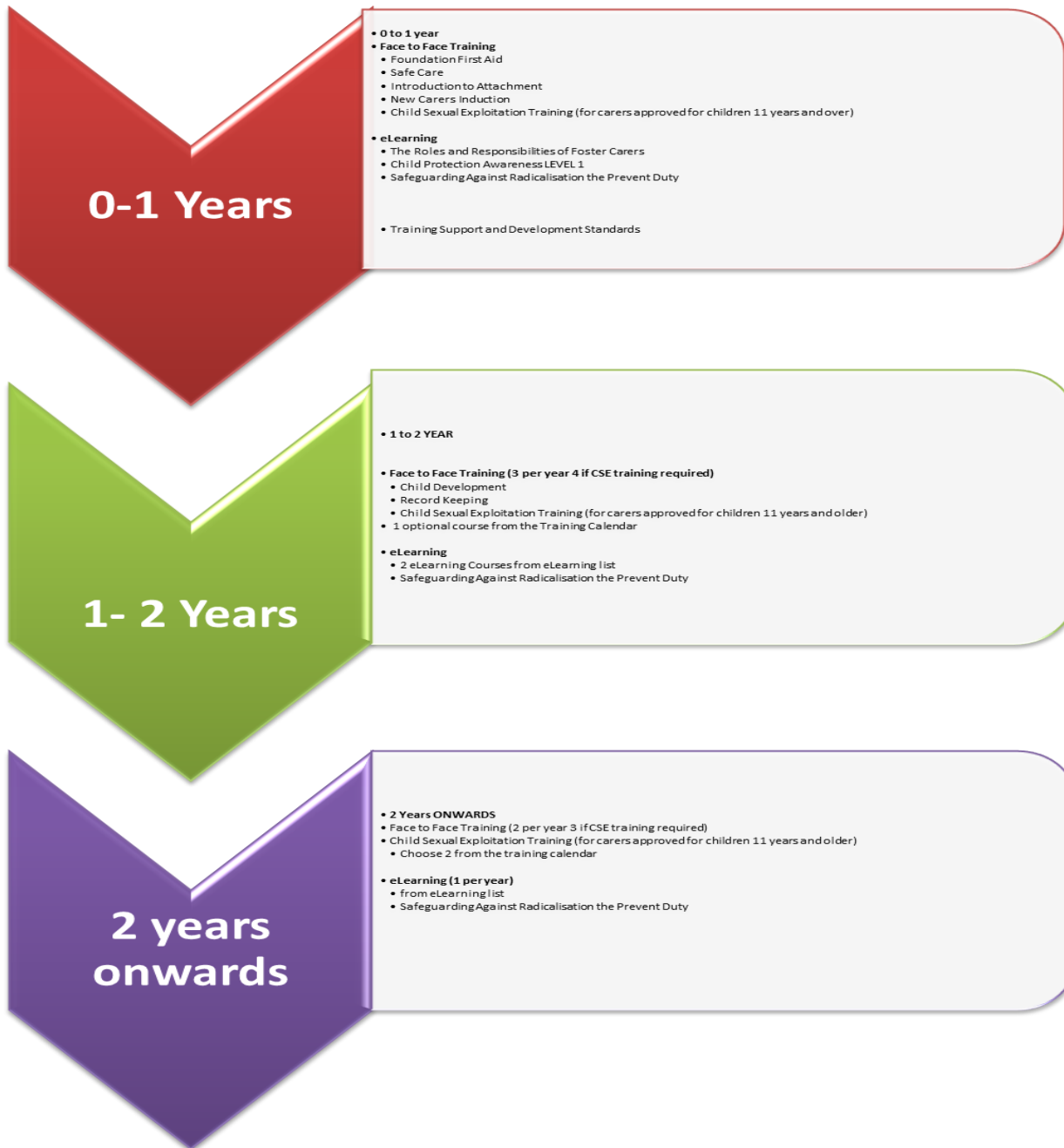
Last year we held a conference looking at informing, supporting and updating foster carers about the themes and new research within the fostering field and to introduce the Reflective Fostering Programme. The Fostering in Today's World Conference took place on the 5th and 11th March 2019 and outlined the aims and purpose of reflective fostering to provide carers with practical ways to help build and maintain supportive relationships with the children in their care, drawing on, but not strictly adhering to, the model of 'reflective parenting'. Participants were then able to choose workshops on two of the following

- Non-Violence Resistance
- Internet Safety / Pornography and the effect on young people
- Radicalisation and Extremism of Children
- The effects of Gangs Culture on children and young people.
- Mental Health Needs of Children

As the demands and needs of carers and children are ever changing, we seek feedback from our Foster Carer Advisory group and have this year commissioned training on Allegations made against carers and how to safeguard against these. Courses on Child Trafficking, Exploitation and Modern-Day Slavery, Caring for Children with Sexualised Behaviour and Online Safety will soon be added to the events calendar education course on Key Stage 5 Planning, Special Educational Needs Training, Personal Education Plans, Attainment and Progress and Pupil Premium Plus.

Alongside the face to face training offered to carers, we hold a list of 40 plus eLearning subjects that are available to them. A program of training can be seen in the fostering handbook and this is updated with new courses as and when they are developed. <https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/kent/training.html>

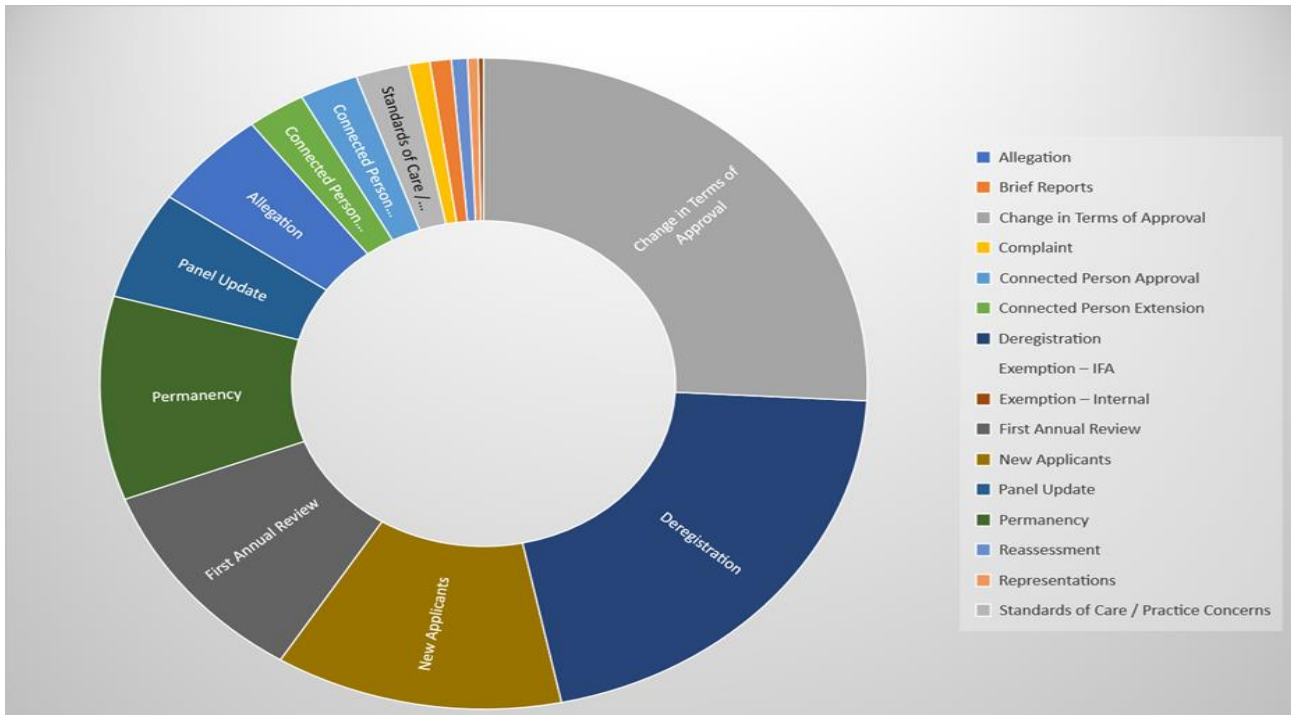
Moving forward we are working closely with our VSK colleagues to hold a conference being delivered by our young people on "Growing up in Care" and also a further 2 conferences on "Building the Bond of Attachment" caring for children and teenagers who have experienced developmental trauma.



Section 8

Kent Fostering Panels

Following the restructure of Kent Fostering Service, Fostering Panels have reduced from five to four a month in recognition of the changes to the Area Teams (North Kent, West Kent, South Kent and East Kent). The Fostering Panels consider new approvals for both mainstream fostering applicants and connected persons foster carers, alongside a range of matters regarding existing foster carers registrations (annual reviews, complaints, allegations and permanency etc.). In total 445 cases were heard at Panel from April 2018 to March 2019.



The Panels are held at two of the Fostering Service’s main offices; Kroner House in Ashford and Brook House in Whitstable. The Panels are chaired independently by experienced and suitably qualified professionals and the members of each Panel include a range of people with personal and professional experience of fostering, for example an Independent Fostering Agency foster carer, health care professional and adults who have been looked after in foster care.

Training days were offered to all panel members which included staff from the fostering service and foster carer peer support. The training focussed on the following themes:

- PREVENT, including radicalisation and pathways to extremism,
- Values and attitudes,
- Panel decisions and roles of Panel Members,
- Child Focussed National Minimum Standards and

- Celebrating Kent Foster Carers.

The training explored how individual and organisational values and attitudes can impact on fostering practice and further considered Fostering National Minimum Standards and their application at Kent Fostering Panels. PREVENT training was provided by Nick Wilkinson, Prevent and Channel Strategic Manager.

Feedback from the training was that it enabled time for reflection in respect of personal and professional values and beliefs in a fostering context. The PREVENT discussions were viewed as excellent and some attendees felt that this was more informative than the mandatory online training. The majority of attendees considered that joint training between staff and foster carers is helpful in delivering a consistent message across the fostering service and enabling a range of different perspectives to contribute to the development of the service.

Section 9

Kent Foster Care Association



The Kent Foster Care Association is a small registered charity which aims to work alongside Kent Fostering Service to provide support for our registered foster carers. The charity was set up and is run by our foster carers with a desire to help all carers in this rewarding but sometimes difficult role. They to protect and preserve the wellbeing of foster carers, the children in their care and the whole fostering family by providing advice, information, services, events, facilities and equipment. In the past year they have organised and funded training opportunities, an annual conference, and events for the foster carers.

The very successful events have included trips to Chessington, a training production of Chelsea's Choice for foster carers and KCC staff, they have assisted in funding Christmas parties and summer events for all children in care and their fostering families.

They work with localised KCC fostering events teams and support them to arrange their own events for children and their families. As a charity they rely on donations and fund raising and have therefore taken part in various events including an Autumn Ball and Dragon Boat Race which also raises the profile of Kent Fostering Service. The KFCA Chair and committee are extremely supportive of Kent Fostering and contribute to the recruitment of carers and staff and ensure that the voice of Kent foster carers is heard.



Section 10

Kent Fostering Business Plan

Following the restructure on 1st April 2019, Kent Fostering has two focuses for the coming year, increased recruitment of new foster carers and the retention of our approved foster carers. The Service has been successful in achieving Transformation funding and this will be used to improve our range of flexible support to provide to foster carers who are caring for our most complex children, to improve placement stability.

Kent Fostering will aim to increase Parent and Child placement provision, by recruiting an additional 10 foster carers for this area of work. The service will develop Hub family provision, aiming for 10 hub families for the county, 2 in each area. The service will be creative in using some of our experienced carers and foster carer ambassadors, to provide sessional hours directly to foster carers and children, where placements are fragile and require additional support to achieve stability. The Sense of Belonging Team will be expanded to become a specialist Fostering Team for Placement Stability.

Our detailed Business Plan is attached and concludes our Annual Report for 2019.

