

**MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL
FAMILY PLACEMENT TEAM
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGY
2019**



Local children and young people need local families

Midlothian's children need a variety of carers from differing backgrounds to care for them

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Nationally there continues to remain a shortfall of the types of foster cares local authority look for within the market place. This deficit has a direct impact for local authorities in terms of achieving safe families for looked after children; permanence planning for children; retention of existing foster carers; and cost outcomes. Although many local authorities continue to purchase expensive Independent Fostering Agency placements, Midlothian Council continues to prioritise local placement for local children and young people.
- 1.2 Our success in our success in securing longer-term foster families for children continues to have an impact on the availability of our existing foster placements. This has meant there is an ongoing need to recruit more foster care resources.
- 1.3 National the shortage of foster carers and the ever-increasing number of children in care means Midlothian Council is not alone in facing a huge challenge in the recruitment and retention of foster carers. The local picture for Midlothian Council shows we have approximately 133 children and young people aged between 0 to 21 years who are accommodated in foster care. We have approximately 51 fostering families
- 1.4 Traditionally the average foster carers were married women aged between 36 and 55. However, this is no longer the case and the average age of foster carers is rising significantly. A previous study in Scotland found that only 12 per cent of foster carers were under 40 years of age. Thus, service found it difficult to recruit young foster carers. The survey found that only 6 per cent of the current foster care workforce is fewer than 40¹. Furthermore, many of these women now work fulltime and/or take on have adopted the role of informal care for members within their families.
- 1.5 In addition, older carers, those over 55 years, are coming to the end of their fostering career. The impact of this changing landscape means we have fewer traditional foster carers coming forward and we need to widen our net to include a broader mix of carers such as single carers, younger carers, target particular gender groups, age groups, etc.

¹ The Fostering Network, The age of foster care, voice of foster care , Helen Clarke, May 2009

- 1.6 Evidence suggests foster carers rely upon the income they receive from fostering children and that income was an important factor of them becoming foster carers. Independent Foster Association and some other local authorities provide higher levels of financial support than is the case within Midlothian Council.
- 1.7 Midlothian Council await the findings of the Scottish Government's national review of foster carer fees and allowances so that we can work with others to seek a more equitable solution with regard to fees and allowance scale across Scotland.
- 1.8 Significantly, the evidence suggests that foster carers are more satisfied where they feel supported by their supervising social worker and fully engaged in the care plan process; word of mouth is a key component of foster care recruitment². Satisfied carers were also more likely to take part in training, foster carer groups and social events.
- 1.9 Whilst research amply illustrates the importance of finance, payment level and the way it was administered, it also showed that when given a choice many foster place more value of the support of the organisation and in particular, their supervising social worker.

MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL DEMOGRAPHIC

- 2.1 Midlothian Council's population demographics mirror Scotland's national picture in that we have an aging population. However, Midlothian's partnership commitment to building affordable housing has actually resulted in an increase of younger families and first time buyers into the area. Midlothian plans for further housing investment means the population will continue to grow. Recent statistical studies illustrate that Midlothian is the fastest growing Scottish Council. While this puts pressure on resources, it also suggests there are opportunities to recruit locally as the population expands.
- 2.2 The impact of the changing nature of children' being accommodated' and the impact of the Continuing Care legislation does mean there is a need to target the population differently. As well as targeting recruitment based on the changing demographics, we need to consider more bespoke recruitment based on the needs of children and young people.

² <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/blogs/childrens-services-blog/2013/04/existing-foster-carers-need-to-be-supported-before-we-can-recruit-more/#.VFu2NlpFDcs>

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE STRATEGY

- 3.1 Midlothian Council is committed to making sure we provide children with local family supports wherever possible. The Council's vision is to deliver services in such a way that they continuously improve people's lives. This over-arching statement of intent includes improving placement choice for children looked after and for improving terms and conditions for foster carers.
- 3.2 The changes contained within the Children and Young Peoples (*Scotland*) Act 2014 means that many young people will stay with foster care for longer, thus reducing the turnover of available foster care placements.
- 3.3 The council's commitment and responsibilities to its 'looked after and accommodated' children and young people is reflected in the Corporate Parenting Strategy which asks,

'...are services good enough for my own child?'

THE FOSTERING MARKET PLACE

- 4.1 Independent Foster Agencies and other local authorities continue to operate in the Midlothian Council area and actively seek to recruit current and potential foster carers from within the surrounding areas. Often, they will offer higher financial rewards and other recruitment and retention incentives.
- 4.2 As previously mentioned the Family Placement Team needs to be able to respond to the changing population in our looked after children. In order to remain competitive within an ever-changing market environment Midlothian Council's Family Placement Team need to be flexible and responsive in planning and delivering services.

- 4.3 The development of the Fostering Strategy and subsequent Marketing/ Communication Plan will be the foundation for creating a flexible and responsive service to take account of future trends; physical resources; policy and legislative change, etc.

MIDLOTHIAN'S LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGIC ACTION 2018/19

- 4.4 Midlothian Council has identified areas for development in its current Family Placement Team based on the current policy and legislative changes. Children and young people require carers who:
- Live in Midlothian,
 - Have the ability to cater for sibling groups,
 - Have the ability to cater for teenagers,
 - Are willing to look after a child/children on a permanent basis,
 - Can offer specific placement types e.g. shared-care, support care leavers, awaiting adoption and moving on to adoption.
- 4.5 To meet the current and future demand Midlothian Council do need to recruit a range of carers. We must develop a marketing plan that includes the need for additional foster carers, permanent foster carers, respite carers, adopters and supported lodgings, and must include recruiting men and younger women as foster carers so as to broaden the pool of prospective carers that can be drawn from.
- 4.6 The strategic objectives for 2018/19 will continue to address future supply and demand but they will embed performance management in order to deliver excellent services. Midlothian Council has developed systems to collate meaningful data, so that we can inform our recruitment priorities and maximise the number of prospective carers who contact the council in response to our recruitment campaign. Furthermore, we need to monitor and examine the number of those enquiries that result in a carer being recruited – see *appendix 1, 2, 3*.

Campaign to recruit more foster carers

Introduction:

- 5.1 Since December 2017, we agreed to focus our efforts on making sure we had a responsive and dynamic team who were committed to improving relationships with our current foster care population. We remain committed to increasing the number of foster carers and reducing the number of young people placed with external foster care agencies as we go forward in 2019. We are keen to recruit bespoke foster carers in line with our policy areas, namely Continuing Care. The latest statistics show that between January 2018 and January 2019, we had 84 enquiries, seven new carers were approved, 10 potential carers started a prep group and, of those, seven completed it. We now have two respite applications being assessed, one full-time application is being considered and three people are waiting to start a preparatory group.
- 5.2 From November 2017 to December 2018, our recruitment strategy began targeting potential foster carers via local newspaper advertising, social media, local radio, drop-in sessions and lamppost wraps. We also agreed to incentivise foster carers recommending us to others.

Evaluation

- 6.1 From the last three campaign, the highest number of enquiries was during a campaign culminating in two drop in events in January 2018. There were 18 recorded enquiries, including 13 people who came along to the events. The cost of the campaign was just short of £3,000 as it involved lamp post adverts and social media paid for advertising. Almost as successful was the last campaign of 2018 focusing on short-term carers. The spend was £614.41 on our own Facebook advertisements to a targeted demographic coupled with a leaflet drop to all houses in new build housing developments. This generated 15 enquiries and applications that are being processed in the team.

6.2 The first campaign of 2019 is online with a moving advert to encourage people to foster teenagers. It will run for a month from the last week in January and will be supported, as is the norm, with media releases and local radio reminders.

Key Messages:

- Our recruitment strategy will continue to play a key role in raising awareness of the council's need to recruit a range of carers for local children. Whether you foster for a short or a long time, you can make a huge impact on a young person's life, improving their confidence and helping them towards a more stable and happy future.
- We are always looking for more foster carers to care for children and young people from zero - adulthood. This does mean that we need to review our existing processes to ensure our services are able to accommodate this range of age, which in some cases will require us to approve foster carers for young adults.
- In Midlothian, we offer a number of care options; each tailored to fit in with the needs of the children, their families and you. Whatever your circumstances, you might be surprised how you can help and offer care to children looking for a home.
- Fostering is a paid job, you can still work and be a carer (respite care, for example),
- [Our foster carers are paid and receive a weekly allowance per child, plus quality support is available and a full training package.](#)
- There is no such thing as a typical foster carer – we are looking for a wide range of people with their own personalities and different life experiences,
- Children and young people need to stay with other carers for a variety of reasons,
- Looking after a vulnerable child is one of the most rewarding careers you could do.

Further messages to communicate are:

- Improvements to the preparation training and assessment process following conversations with carers,
- Improve retention of carers once they have been recruited,
- We regularly review the support and training offered to our carers,
- We provide positive communications on the work of carer workforce,

- We celebrate our looked after children's achievements (link in with corporate parenting and 'Celebrating Young People campaign)
- We will develop a culture of a regular recruitment campaign

Campaign strategy:

- 7.1 The approach will continue to target widely across Midlothian and relevant Edinburgh suburbs using a fully integrated campaign made up of marketing and media elements. Paid for Facebook advertising, targeting our demographic, will continue supported by regular recruitment events, lamppost advertising, interviews in the media with foster carers, and social media featuring interviews and video footage, when required. As mentioned, however we will focus on how best to recruit more bespoke carers who can offer a range of children and young people a placement. Examples include young people transitioning into adulthood and children with complex needs.

Campaign Evaluation:

- 8.2 The communications team will continue to produce a 'dashboard' evaluating the impact of each campaign. This will include social media reach and engagement levels, visits to the relevant website pages, traditional media coverage and stats on how many times the email enquiry button was used from our website. The communications team will liaise with the Family Placement Team to ascertain enquiry levels after each campaign and how many of those enquirers are now training to become a foster carer.

Quarter Reporting 2019	When	Lead/ Who	Outcomes	Activity	Increase / Target	Impact
Outcomes 1	18/19, (Q4)January-March 2019	TL/ Communications	Increase the number of carer looking at providing placements for young adults into adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop online marketing materials to support teenager campaign ▪ Media interview with FC looking after teenagers ▪ Media interview teenager/s to help launch new campaign ▪ Launch new online campaign re teenagers on Facebook and Twitter 	4 X per annum 3 new units per annum 6 months Application to approval	Increase teenage Foster carers Dec 2018 baseline
	19/20 Q1			▪		
	19/20 Q1			▪		
	19/20 Q1				▪	
Outcome 2	18/19 Q4 January-March 2019	TL/ Communications	Increase the number of carer looking at providing support/respite for children with complex needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop online marketing materials to support teenager campaign ▪ Media interview with FC looking after teenagers 	4 X per annum 3 new units per annum	Increase complex needs Foster Carers

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Media interview teenager/s to help launch new campaign ▪ Launch new online campaign re teenagers on Facebook and Twitter 	6 months Application to approval	Dec 2018 baseline
	19/20 Q1			-		
	19/20 Q1					
	19/20 Q1					
	19/20 Q1					
Outcomes 3	18/19, January- 2019 -March 2020	TL/ Communications	Increase the pool of carers available to foster local children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop online marketing materials to support teenager campaign ▪ Media interview with FC looking after teenagers ▪ Media interview teenager/s to help launch new campaign ▪ Launch new online campaign re teenagers on Facebook and Twitter 	3 X campaigns per annum 4 new units per annum 6 months Application to approval	Increase Foster carers Dec 2018 baseline
	19/20 Q1			▪		

	19/20 Q1			▪		
	19/20 Q1			▪		



2017- 2018

The table below shows the communications activities used in 2017/18 Quarter 1,2,3 to achieve our objectives:

Timescale	Activity	Staff resource	Outputs and outcomes
November 2017	Launch of Facebook, paid for campaign to encourage potential foster cares to come to one of two events in January or enquire about fostering	Lynn	Facebook advert re Penicuik event viewed more than 1,000 times and reached 24,000 news feeds. 22 people 'interested' Dalkeith event reached 16,000 news feeds and viewed by 647 people with 51 saying they were interested.
November - January	Book two events – one in Penicuik, one in Dalkeith for January	Lynn with Family Placement team leading on evening	13 potential carers came along on the night
November to January	Media release highlighting the events	Lynn	Two stories carried in Advertiser
November to January	Comms team to produce and organise lamppost wraps	Comms	42 produced and erected. Evaluation on night found just over 50% of attendees had seen the wraps with remainder seeing the Facebook adverts or hearing about it through contacts.

November to January	Black Diamond reminders	Lynn	Push on our Wednesday afternoon Black Diamond slots – difficult to evaluate as station does not have listening figures.
November to January 2018	Website activity	Lynn and comms colleagues	127 visits to events pages, 1,444 to main fostering pages, 96 visits to main news story. Also 'ad' created about events on school terms date page. Contact us fostering button on website used 34 times during the period with family placement email on website used eight times. 18 recorded enquiries.
Mid March 2018 to Mid April 2018	Two new paid for Facebook ads created to highlight two events	Lynn	First Corn Exchange event reached 3,400 news feeds and viewed by 379 people. Gorebridge event reached 1,700 news feeds and viewed 260 times.
Mid March to Mid April 2018	Media release about events	Lynn	Coverage in Midlothian Advertiser 96 visits on our website to the news article 'Ad' created on school term dates page about the events
Mid March to Mid April 2018	Website events created where social media traffic driven to	Lynn	498 pages visits to events pages with further 1,760 views to main fostering pages

Mid March to Mid April 2018	Lamppost wraps created	Communications	Again 42 produced with details of events and placed in high footfall areas around Midlothian
Mid March to Mid April	Supporting Twitter reminders	Lynn	24,000 impressions with 143 engagements
Mid April	Two events held	Family Placement Team with Lynn's support	Only 4 potential carers came along – poor attendance. However, online enquiries during that period better with 12 recorded, including the four from the events.
August to September 2018	Facebook adverts featured interviews and pictures of two short term carers who are now longterm carers	As above	Adverts reached 61,848 demographically targeted news feeds with 2,848 readers clicking into them to find out more
September	Twitter posts featuring carer with £250 cheque	Lynn	3,493 impressions with a 1.1% engagement rate (average).

August	Media release featuring interview and pic	Lynn	Featured in Midlothian Advertiser print and online.
August and September 2018	Website	Lynn	All social media signposted to news story about our carer. Page visited 2,741 times with a further 539 people clicking through from this page to our main fostering pages. All fostering related pages viewed 4,935 times from August to 12 September compared with 481 page views in the month of July 2018.
August and September 2018	Leaflets	Lynn and FPT	Leaflets printed and distributed to 500 large homes in 10 new housing developments across Midlothian. Evaluation ongoing.
August and September 2018	Black Diamond reminders	Lynn	Difficult to evaluate as no listening figures, as stated previously
August and September	Evaluation	Lynn	During the campaign there were 15 enquiries with five progressing and two remaining open. This compares with between May and end of July when there were seven enquiries but none progressed.