It is a long time since we last produced a newsletter for the Fostering Advisory Partnership and so for your delight and delectation here comes another one. I thought that it would be a good idea to just re-introduce the aims and objectives of the group so that all are clear on what we are about.

Aims.

a. Maximise the welfare of children in our care through the promotion of good practice and partnership working. To adopt a culture of continuous improvement, to offer ideas on new and innovative ways of working. The clear objective being to achieve a better outcome for every child involved in the care system in Norfolk.
b. Promote working partnerships though facilitating good communication.
c. Create opportunities for children and young people to meet together for the purpose of growth and development through activity and learning.
d. Create opportunities for the team around the child to meet together for the purpose of growth and development.

We have now been in operation for more than 18 months and have made some progress, it feels slow and probably is but progress we are making. We could make more progress if we had more people involved in the working groups and at various stages of our development we have asked people to put their names down on lists to help which they have done. We have not managed this process very well and it has sometimes been a long time before we have made contact, if at all. At this point we do however need more people to help, we may not need you all the time but the ability to have a list of people we can call on to help would be useful.

A major problem that we face is apathy, our aims and objectives are well thought out and worthwhile and there should be no reason why any foster carer would not wish to take part in some way to help us achieve these.

The biggest issue that we faced when we started this group was the lack of communication between children’s services and foster carers; this is also probably true for others involved in the team around the child. Each of the network groups now have a person who attends and takes any issues raised back to the Partnership meetings, I have mentioned this before in the previous new letter but it is worth saying again, so this makes it easier for foster carers to get any issues resolved.

There are still the three working groups which feed issues into and take issues out of the partnership meetings; these are the Team Around the Child working group, the Continual Professional Development working group and the Network Groups and Social Events working group.
Team Around the Child.

The team around the child working group has done some really good work on re-writing the foster carer charter into a more Team around the child charter, a copy of which will be attached to this newsletter. The idea of this new charter is that it should be quite a dynamic document which can be updated and changed to accommodate new ideas and practices as they occur. It puts the child at the centre of all that we do and we hope provides us with some guidance on how we may all work together to achieve the aims that are set out above.

The Team Around the Child is also organising some open days/mornings in each of the children’s services areas. The idea of this is for foster carers to meet social workers and managers to get to know each other and understand each other’s roles more fully; this will hopefully mean that we improve relationships and communication between foster carers and children’s services, another opportunity to improve communication. A tour will be followed by refreshments and a chance to have an informal chat.

County Hall open day is on the 19th May 2016.
Gt Yarmouth is on April 21st 2016
Kings Lynn is on 12th July 2016

The group have also been discussing the fact that some children and young people have been faced with regular changes of social worker. It was felt that it would be beneficial for the child to receive in the post a simple portfolio with a photo of their new worker and a brief description of themselves to make introductions easier and less challenging for the children. A social worker is in the process of devising a template for this which will be rolled out shortly.

The next main task for the TAC group is to use the work that we have done on the education part of the charter as a basis for looking into how we work together to improve things in the area of education. The group have already started this work, the first key area that they have looked at has been the PEP, we anticipate that this work will take the next 2-3 months and then the group will move onto the next area which is likely to be health and wellbeing. If you have some views or would like to take part in these discussions then please make contact via the email link at the end.

All of the minutes from all of our meetings are posted on the NCC website should you wish to read about previous meetings.

Membership.

Pam Weyer – Foster carer and Chair of the TAC group
Robert Jordan – IRO
Laura Thompson-Molloy – Social worker.

Pg2.
Daniel St John – LAC Team Manager
Keeley White – Interim Head Virtual School
Anne Mckendrick – Manager Social Work Breckland
Caroline Sexton – Foster carer
Stefan Rice – Foster carer
Rupert Green – Foster carer

*Continuous Professional Development*

The group meets every 3 months to look at current courses, discuss future training needs, budget implications and the planning of new and existing courses as well as looking at developing and implementing strategies for recording Foster carer training and professional development. We discuss attendance on courses and how to increase and improve this, provision of different platforms for learning, location and venue of training etc.

This year our work has, in the main, concentrated on the following –

- Foster Carer Portfolio which will be launched very soon and will provide a means for carers to record, alongside their worker, details of their own professional development.
- The planning of 2 new courses devised primarily by foster carers - ‘Parent and Child’ which was successfully launched in January and ‘Stepping Stones’ which is nearing completion and due to be launched very soon – this course is aimed towards newly approved carers but can be accessed by experienced carer wishing to fill gaps in their knowledge and keep abreast of current practice.
- Discussing and planning the annual conference.
- Planning, overviewing and agreeing the Training programme, which foster carers can access, for the coming year.

Meetings are usually held in Dereham and our aim is to have representatives from all locations and to have expertise covering all areas of fostering within this group.

*Signs of Safety briefings are taking place for carers in March.*

**Membership**

Anne Ritchie - foster carer and chair of the CPD group
Sarah Hunter – Learning and Development Consultant
Suzy Holman – Fostering Team Manager

Pg3.
Network Groups & Social Events:

The key responsibilities of this group are to assist with the organisation of the Network group meetings, the organisation of social events for foster carers either with their young people or maybe even on occasion without and lastly and probably most importantly the organisation of events which provide some really positive experiences for the children and young people in our care.

As I mentioned above the Network Groups are an integral part of the way in which we as foster carers can communicate with each other, Children’s Services and the Advisory Partnership. We have discussed at length what the content of these meetings should be, how to improve attendance levels, why some groups are more successful than others. It will come to pass that foster carers will take more responsibility for the content and the organisation of these groups. We have agreed that the content should be geared to areas that need to see improvement or we need some feedback on, all positive stuff when it comes to improving communication but it will require some people to assist with the organisation to make these things happen.

The Schedule for 2016 network groups has been sent out to carers. There is a new venue for Children With Disabilities Group, and Norwich Network Group – Roxley Hall Yarmouth Road and a new group has been set up in Watton at the Christian Community Center, 57 High Street.

The group organised an event for foster carers at Norwich Castle on Saturday January 23rd. The theme was Prince and Princesses with a castle trail, and craft activities and was enjoyed by all who attended.

We have had lots of discussion on social events for both us and the youngsters and I am sure that many of these will come to fruition, but the group will need your help and support to organise and then to attend, as there is no point in doing all the work if no one comes.
Advisory Partnership and Working Groups Need You!:

- A Social worker and a Foster Carer are needed on the Team Around the Child group to bring along any examples of good or not so good practice with the aim of improving the lives of our Children. The commitment is one morning a month at Dereham or Norwich.

- A Carer who attends Watton network group is required to represent South Norfolk area on the Advisory Partnership. The role is to ask carers who attend for any issues which they would like to be raised at the Advisory Partnership meeting and feedback at the meeting. Advise those who attend the network group meeting of what has been discussed at the AP meetings. The AP meetings are held at Dereham Football Club once a month for a morning and network groups one morning bi-monthly.

- Carers are needed to help with Network Groups and Social Events to be involved with planning and ideas for events and finding ways of increasing participation in and utilising network groups. Meetings are held every 6-8 weeks for one morning.

Membership
Kevin Daniels – Fostering Support social worker.
Julia Spinks – Foster Carer.
Loraine Ong – Foster Carer

- The Continuous Profession Development Team needs more foster carers to discuss training needs and set the training courses for the following year. This group meets every three months in Dereham.

The meetings are not as daunting as they sound, they’re friendly and informal, so if you are considering helping please do not hesitate to contact us for further details.

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PG5.