

Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	NO
Title	Fostering Recruitment
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For Consideration By	Corporate Parent Committee
Date to be Considered	14 December 2017
Implementation Date if Not Called In	
Affected Wards	None
Keywords/Index	

Purpose of Report:

This report serves to brief the committee on current fostering recruitment activity

1. Recommendations

Members are invited to note this report and identify any additional information they would like to receive.

2. Reason for Decision and Options Considered

Introduction

This report updates members on Ealing's current fostering recruitment activity following on from the input of 'Impower' consultancy work and the implementation of Brighter Futures new ways of working.

Recruiting foster carers has been a challenge for many years and is an issue across the country and is especially difficult in London. An Ealing target of recruiting 84 carers over the 3 years April 2015 to March 2018 has previously been set..

Fostering Recruitment Update December 2017

The fostering recruitment project as initiated through the 'Impower' consultancy started in earnest in April 2014 with a preparatory build up in the year before. The project initially was set for a three year period. In April 2017, the Brighter Futures programme was implemented across the service and as part of the reorganisation the recruitment

team was reconfigured, the previous temporary marketing assistant post was not part of the new establishment.

Research undertaken by the Fostering Network, (the national body leading on all aspects of fostering in the UK) into fostering recruitment patterns has consistently shown that on average, it takes people three years to actually come forward to actively pursue their interest in fostering from the point of expressing an initial interest. This is the third year of using the principles and learning from the ‘Impower’ project and our statistics are starting to indicate an increase in approvals.

The previous two years 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 saw a large amount of recruitment activity take place with 10 new carers approved in each of these years. However, the year 2017–2018 after a slow start is starting to look far more promising with current statistics showing that we are on track to have 9 new carers approved by December and a likelihood of a final figure by March 31st of 15, which if achieved would represent a 50% increase in the approval rate.

Month	Approved and projected
April	0
May	0
June	1
July	0
August	1
September	2
October	1
November	2
Total date	7
Projected	
December	2
January	1
February & March	5
Total	15

Digital Marketing

Support for the service to directly enter the digital age has seen the launch of a micro website and a fostering and adoption Facebook page. Both are proving useful ways to promote fostering though as with all approaches there is no magical solution or specific increase in enquiries that can be related to these activities and those coming forward continue to be very much one from a variety of sources. Although it is interesting to note that four out of the seven approvals to date (April to October 2017) all have a connection to our ‘Word of Mouth’ campaigns or outreach work, with one approval going back to an initial interest in 2010, where a particular individual needed those seven years for it to actually be the right time for her to come forward.

Change THE FUTURE

Ealing Fostering and Adoption Connections
 Published by Ealing Adopt 17 · 14 November 2017 · ID

Sharon has been looking for foster for 2 years and was delighted to win the 'Foster of the Year' award. She was chosen as 'Foster of the Year' which she was presented with by Council for Residential Care for children and young people and Quality Management Director, Children, Adults & Public Health.

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- National Ealing
- Create Ealing Families

EALING FOSTER CARERS' ANNUAL AWARDS CERIMONY 2017

We held another fantastic Foster Carers' Awards Ceremony on 11 November 2017.

The formal event was to thank our foster carers for all their hard work and commitment throughout the year and was also a chance for them to have some fun and relax for an evening.

We presented awards to carers who had been fostering with us for some time, as well as announcing the Foster Carer of the Year.

You can read the full story here.

READ MORE

SIBLING BOYS NEED A FAMILY WHO CAN ADOPT THEM

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With a move to the digital age and a reduced Recruitment Team with the new ways of working it has not been possible to undertake so many 'word of mouth' campaigns though the team has been active in the community and made good headway within the Polish community creating an exciting new project, though with funding issues for

the organisation we have been working with, this has not yet developed as fully as we had hoped.

Given that we can now clearly see the benefits of the word of mouth approach, a decision was made to take up the opportunity of recruiting an apprentice under the Ealing Apprenticeship Scheme. The priority once the apprentice is in post is to re-establish 'word of mouth' events and undertake more outreach work in the local community. An apprentice has been appointed and we hope that she will be in post by February, when she has received a comprehensive induction and with support and guidance we are confident that she will make a valued contribution to the team.

Social Media update

Facebook

Whilst social media is essential and may produce results in the longer term, we have not yet experienced a rise in enquiries since launching our Facebook page.

We have been posting daily and are still developing our Facebook activity, with the aim of increasing greater traffic and increasing the number of followers in the coming months.

67% of our followers are female and 33% male. We currently have 89 followers - 83 from the UK, 80 of which are in London.

We have promoted the page to foster carers both via a mailing and cards at the recent awards ceremony and we have now included our Facebook page link on much of our marketing materials. As with previous initiatives, we will be encouraging our foster carers to get more involved with our promotion of Facebook early next year.

Initially we were achieving a high post reach (number of times a post has been seen), peaking at 21,778 on 7 September. This was paid reach as we were running a campaign with 'The Council Advertising Network', (CAN). We continued to achieve a high reach throughout the time we were using CAN, but it then dropped significantly after that.

Adoption Week provided some higher numbers and we achieved a peak post reach of 1,090 on 19 October 2017, we are hopeful that by the time of Fostering Fortnight in Spring 2018 our reach will exceed these figures.

Website

The new website ensures that we are able to present a more professional image and in our view a much stronger image than that of our competitors, both in Local Authorities and the private sector.

It is also a useful resource to share information; each page has our contact details on and also a 'register your interest' form. We promote our new web address on all marketing materials and advertising.

For a period of time we noticed that we were getting very few enquiries through the website, and so we added a floating button that appears the entire time on the top left of the screen of each page. We have received 24 enquiries through the new website from launch 20/06/17 to 30/11/17 and whilst we have not yet experienced a surge from this channel, as we had hoped would be the case.

It also needs to be noted that there was a period of double running when the fostering pages were still up on the main council website and enquiries were coming from both sites, which adds an additional 15 website enquiries totalling 39 enquiries

In the past 90 days as at 30 November 2017:

- We have had 1,800 users of the website
- 2,200 sessions
- 68.9% bounce rate
- 1m 21s session duration
- 91.9% of users are in the UK
- 37.6% viewed the site on a mobile
- 54.4% viewed the site on a desktop
- 8% viewed the website on a tablet

From this detailed information we can see that most visitors only stay on the site for a minimal amount of time and most don't go further than the page they landed on.

How we have acquired users during that period:

- 5% organic (listings in search engine results)
- 10% paid (adverts)
- 39% social (social media)
- 44% direct (typed in or taken from a link)
- 2% referral (other sources such as external pages)

From this we can see that that the paid advertising through CAN was not particularly effective and that most people landed by clicking on a link or from searching.

Hopefully as we develop our social media audience visitors to the site will increase.

With both Facebook and the microsite it is still very early days but the richness of information available to us now by using this medium will enhance our understanding and intelligence of the community and the way in which they use social media.

As has been stated many times across the fostering sector, any new initiative, whilst enhancing opportunities and refreshing a fostering agencies image, as with existing mechanisms everything to do with fostering recruitment takes time to reach fruition.

Statistics

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18*
Enquiries	243	382	270	375	174
Information Session	91	113	90	85	50
Initial Home Visit	49	52	57	57	31
Prep Groups Held	2	3	4	5	1
Prep Group Attended	16	19	27	25	10
Approvals	10	9	9	10	7

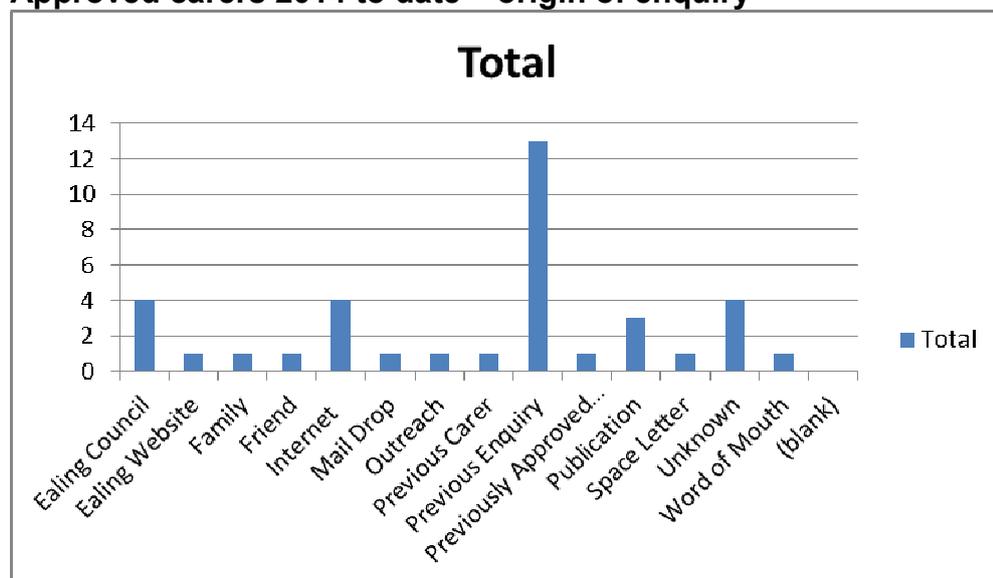
* April to October 17

Fostering recruitment is far from an exact science and does not produce predictable results as the table above shows. For example, it is possible that the enquiry level for this year will be lower than the past four years and to date we have only had enough people to hold one preparation training group (another planned for January 2018)

However, we are likely to produce the highest number of approvals in recent years and the quality of those approved has been very good. The high enquiry figure last year has had an impact on this year's positive approval rate, therefore, it is important to maintain a high level of recruitment activity and we are very hopeful that the appointment of the marketing apprentice, the website and Facebook page now in place we are well positioned to continue to make good progress.

It is important to take a broad approach to recruitment as can be seen from the bar chart below with enquiries coming from a wide range of sources and no one element is conclusively more successful than another. The key piece of information here is 'previous enquiry' which shows the importance of maintaining good communication links with enquirers, as people do come back. Keeping in touch with previous enquirers is a key element of our recruitment strategy and we take various opportunities to do this.

Approved carers 2014 to date – origin of enquiry



Approved carers 2014 to date – origin of enquiry

Ealing Council	4
Ealing Website	1
Family	1
Friend	1
Internet	4
Mail Drop	1
Outreach	1
Previous Carer	1
Previous Enquiry	13
Previously Approved Carer	1
Publication	3
Space Letter	1
Unknown	4
Word of Mouth	1
(blank)	
Grand Total	37

Those people who did come back again came from a variety of media:

Adoption initiative for Somali Twins	1
Always knew about us.	1
Around Ealing	3
Carnival	1
Member of staff	1
Friend approved carer	1
Gazette	1
Home for Good	1
Mum is a FC	1
Previous - did not attend IS	1
Previous - IFA carer	1
Social Worker	1
Unknown	1
Website	1

However much recruitment activity is undertaken, recruitment is still dependent on people being in the right position at the right time in their lives to actually come forward to pursue their interest and does not guarantee essential elements such as; the space needed or security of income over a job. Though clearly the more people we talk to, the more we can provide correct information to help them make an

informed decision about the realities of the fostering task and the essential requirements.

Unfortunately, interest in fostering and adoption can also be affected by negative stories in the media, there have been a number of high profile stories covered recently. These stories may have had an impact on enquiries in the recent few months.

Future Plans

- Film clips to be produced for use on website and in other promotional activities.
- Possible road show in February in Ealing Broadway
- Word of mouth campaign to re-commence
- Outreach activities in the community in partnership with foster carers to re-commence in the New Year.
- Completion of updating all materials with new branding
- World Book Day – Bookmark mail out to Ealing Primary schools
- Planning events and a theme for Foster Care Fortnight in May 2018
- Standard marketing activity to be planned for 2018 including traditional advertising
- Further development of Social Media Strategy and activity.

Overall numbers of Foster Carers and current position on Net Growth

The Fostering Network continues to state that Fostering Services can expect a 10% attrition rate of foster carers per year. In 2016/17 - 8 fostering households resigned for a variety of reasons. To date in 2017/18 there have been 6 resignations and 1 foster carer has had her registration terminated due to practice concerns.

In Ealing, the main reasons that foster carers leave the service is because they retire or due to ill health. Ealing continues to benefit from a large group of foster carers who have been with the service for many years, however, unfortunately a small number of carers who have been unwell for some time are likely to make the decision to retire before the end of March 2018.

Therefore, the net growth of foster carers has been negligible with overall numbers remaining at around 100 households. However, the utilisation of foster carers has increased considerably; we are now achieving an average of between 87 – 90% utilisation. This change is attributable to the new ways of working in the Connect teams, integrating Supervising Social Workers into the same teams as the allocated social workers for Looked After children has enhanced practice considerably and increased the potential to place children and provide the correct support package to the placement where needed.

As has been stated earlier in the report, there have to date been 7 new approvals of foster carers, a further 3 households are due to be approved at this month's fostering panel and a further 5 households predicted by the end of March 2018. A detailed

analysis of the current cohort of foster carers and predictions for future attrition will conclude in the New Year.

3. Key Implications

Net increase of foster carers

4. Financial

a) Financial impact on the budget (mandatory)

5. Legal

S 23 (1) Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to maintain a 'looked after' child in other respects as well as providing accommodation that meets all their needs.

6. Value For Money

Financial aspects are monitored within existing budgets and existing value for money assessments and reviews.

7. Sustainability Impact Appraisal

None

8. Risk Management

None

9. Community Safety

None

10. Links to the 5 Priorities for the Borough

Children and young people fulfil their potential

Children and young people grow up safe from harm

11. Equalities, Human Rights and Community Cohesion

Equality Impact is consistently reviewed and evaluated in terms of service delivery.

12. Staffing/Workforce and Accommodation implications:

13. Property and Assets

No property implications

14. Any other implications:

15. Consultation

N/A

16. Timetable for Implementation

17. Appendices

18. Background Information

Consultation (Mandatory)

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent to consultee	Date response received	Comments appear in paragraph:
Internal				
Judith Finlay	Director			
				e.g. 5. Legal
				e.g. 4. Financial
External				

Report History

Decision type:	Urgency item?
For information	No
Report no.:	Report author and contact for queries: Carolyn Fair, Operations Manager Childrens Placements, x8815
	First and surname, job title