



Brighton and Hove  
Children and Young People's  
**TRUST**



# **Annual Fostering Service report**

## **2008-2009**

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## **1. Introduction**

The report will detail the work undertaken by the Fostering Service within the Children & Young People's Trust [CYPT] from April 2008 – March 2009, including information on fostering recruitment activity, the work of the Fostering Panel and developments within the Service.

A key priority of the CYPT is to ensure children can be brought up safely with their birth parents or within their wider family network if at all possible. When a child does come into care foster carers play a pivotal role in the multi agency team around the child. Foster carers take children and young people into their homes often at very short notice and work to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child in care. Ideally that child will be able to return to their birth family but if that is not possible achieve permanence either through adoption or another legal order or through long term foster care.

The Fostering and Adoption service is a city wide service within the CYPT and a key strand of the CYPT's services for children in care with a need for close working relationship with area social work teams, agency placement team and other specialist health and education teams working with children in care. The work of the Fostering and Adoption service contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in the city and is in line with the priorities outlined in the Children and Young People's Plan and the Every Child Matters agenda.

Fostering is a highly regulated area of social work practice and is governed by the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 under the Care Standards Act 2000. The Department for Children, Family & Schools [DCFS] is undertaking a review of the minimum fostering standards and it is anticipated that there will be a plan to implement the new standards in 2010.

The national profile of fostering remains very high. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 there were 59,500 children looked after in England and two thirds of these children were living with foster families. Fostering Network, the national charity, estimates that there are 37,000 foster families in England with a shortfall of around 8,000 foster families to fully meet the needs of the children and young people in the care system.

Within Brighton and Hove the numbers of children in care fluctuated during 2008/9 with a significant rise in the numbers of children coming into care from December 2008 in line with the national picture. The average number of children in full time care in the six months prior to December 2008 was 375. However the numbers of children in care rose rapidly in 2009 with 444 children in full time care by the end of July 2009. This very rapid rise of children coming into the care system has put significant pressure on all aspects of the CYPT's services for children in care and has resulted in larger numbers of children needing to be placed with agency providers.

The Children & Young Person's Act received royal assent in November 2008 and it contains measures intended to strengthen the legislative framework underpinning the care system and to improve the life chances for young

people in care. Key elements of the Act are the focus on the need to improve placement stability and the opportunity for young people to stay in their foster placements post 18 rather than move out into independent living before they are ready. Within the CYPT the Care Matters implementation group has been meeting throughout the year to oversee the work to ensure compliance with this new legislation and promote the significant messages that underpin the legislation in relation to improving the quality of life for children in care in Brighton & Hove.

## **2. The Fostering Service**

The Fostering Service Manager has continued to be Clare Smith for 2008/9. The Service comprises the Fostering Team and the Intensive Placement Team and the Service Manager also has responsibility for the administrative team. The Fostering service has 3.8 Practice Manager posts and there is very close liaison between the Fostering & Adoption & Permanence teams given the overlap in the work with some children moving through from fostering to adoption. Foster carers are also supervised and supported within the Family and Friends team and Adoption & Permanence team and the work of those teams is reported within the annual adoption agency report.

The Practice Managers within the Fostering Team take lead responsibility for different aspects of the service, namely: recruitment and assessment, duty service, training for carers and parent and baby placements. The Intensive Fostering Team is managed by 1.2 Practice Managers. The Intensive Placement Team was formed in 2006 in a merger between what was formerly the Placement Support Team and the Special Placement Scheme and works to enhance placement stability and provide an increased level of support to intensive fostering placements.

The teams are made up of a number of experienced social work practitioners, social work resource officers and intensive placement team support workers. The team provides a family finding duty service for the social work teams which is staffed primarily by dedicated duty staff managed by a Practice Manager. Staff also take a lead role in providing a recruitment duty service to prospective foster carers with a worker in post particularly dedicated to the recruitment of Black and Minority Ethnic foster carers. Other staff within the team take a lead role in relation to the provision of a range of support groups and oversight of emergency duty carers.

The Agency Advisor plays a key role in ensuring the effective running of the Fostering Panel, providing a quality assurance role in relation to reports being prepared for panel and for providing specialist advice to staff within the Children and Young People's Trust in relation to fostering work. A separate report on the work of the Panel written by the Independent chair of Panel is appended to this report.

It is essential that there are close working links between the Fostering and Adoption service and the other area and city wide teams involved in working with children in care and their families. Quarterly meetings are held with the Fostering and Adoption and Area Team Managers, Children's Disability Team Manager and 16+ Support Team Manager, Agency Placement Manager, the

Medical Advisor, and Consultant Nurse for Children in Care to discuss practice issues in relation to fostering and adoption and services for children in care. The Head of Service is also involved in the CYPT Care Matters implementation group.

The Head of Service has also continued to chair a monthly pre-birth assessment panel which comprises key social work and health staff within the CYPT plus the midwifery manager and the family group conference co-ordinator. This panel maintains an over sight of all the pre-birth referrals of children at risk of care proceedings or a child protection plan at birth and endeavours to ensure that early pre-birth assessment takes place to minimise any delay in achieving permanence for vulnerable babies, and to reduce the numbers of children coming into care through the planning of appropriate multi professional support services. However the significant increase in numbers of children coming into care since December 2008 and the pressure on area social work teams in particular has led to a greatly reduced capacity for the social work teams to undertake timely pre birth assessments. It is hoped that this can be addressed through future strategic planning within the CYPT to develop an early permanence service to ensure that these very vulnerable babies receive a co-ordinated and priority service.

The Fostering Service Manager attends the quarterly meetings of the South East Local Authority Regional Foster Carer group which meets to share practice and policy issues.

### **3. Ofsted Inspection**

The Fostering service was inspected by Ofsted in January 2009. The service had been previously inspected by Commission for Social Care Inspection in November 2006 and it had been a requirement that fostering services are inspected on a yearly cycle. The delay in the timing of this inspection reflected the fact that the responsibility for inspecting children's services moved to an expanded Ofsted from April 2007. It is the intention that inspections of fostering services will move to a 3 yearly cycle in line with that of adoption services.

Considerable work was undertaken to prepare for the inspection in order to complete all the pre inspection documents and supply all the supporting evidence. Two inspectors were based in the service for one week along with two inspectors for the adoption service and had a very full programme of meeting managers and staff from the Fostering service, the Consultant Nurse for Children in Care [CiC] and manager of CiC education team, lead elected member and representatives of the foster carer association. They attended support and training groups for foster carers as well as visiting foster carers and children in their own home and attending the Fostering Panel. They also read a number of case files and policies and practice guidance.

The outcome of the inspection was extremely positive with the service being rated as 'outstanding'. This result was not only a significant achievement for our foster carers and staff within the service it has also helped raise the profile of the service to assist the ongoing recruitment drive for more foster carers.

The Mayor of Brighton kindly hosted a reception for 40 foster carers in March 2009 in order to thank carers particularly for their considerable work to improve the lives of children in care. This was a very welcome acknowledgement of the work of our foster carers.

#### **4. Fostering Recruitment Activity 2008/9**

The recruitment strategy for the service is updated annually and is developed in response to the profile of children in care and the trends in the demand for placements considered alongside the profile of Brighton & Hove's foster carers. At the end of March 2008 there were 159 fostering households including family and friends foster carers and concurrency carers. Of these 148 were White/ British and 11 from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

The Fostering Service during the year has continued to prioritise the recruitment of carers for older children (10 years+), Black and Minority Ethnic [BME] carers and parent and baby carers but has now decided to broaden the recruitment activity in acknowledgement of the very high numbers of children coming into care since December 2008 and the fact that it has not always been possible to place younger children under 10 years with in-house foster carers.

During 2008/9 there were 244 enquiries received by the Fostering team from prospective carers. There were 6 information sessions held during the year that were attended by 65 prospective carer households. These enabled applicants to have the chance to find out more about fostering and meet carers before making the decision with workers from the service about whether to proceed on to the preparation group. There were 20 applicants attending preparation groups over the year and 14 of those progressed to the assessment stage.

Six new sets of foster (excluding family and friends foster carers and concurrency carers) were approved in 2008/9 which is a drop from the previous year when 11 new carers were approved. This in part reflects the decision by the service at the start of the year to continue with a focused recruitment campaign and not to prioritise applications from carers offering placements for children under 10 years [apart from BME applicants]. There was also a much higher drop out rate from prospective carers this year during the assessment stage with 10 assessments being discontinued for a range of reasons including unexpected changes in the applicants' circumstances. There has been an analysis of the reasons for such a high drop out rate to try and understand whether any lessons can be learnt from this as clearly this represents a significant investment of staff time. It does appear that there were a number of unpredictable personal events such as health or relationship or employment issues and it is hoped that for some of these prospective carers they may come back to fostering once their lives are more settled. It was also noted that there were a small number of carers from independent agencies that wished to transfer to Brighton and Hove and further assessment work indicated that there had been some difficulties in their previous fostering career which led to decisions not to take forward these assessments.

The service has continued to grow the total number of fostering resources year on year over the last 5 years although this year the number of new carers approved was balanced with the number of carers who left the service through resignation or termination of approval. Managers within the service continually work to review the recruitment strategy and the way the service is configured to ensure recruitment and assessment activity is given a high priority alongside the other areas of work. However without an increase in staffing into that part of the service there is limited capacity to expand further as it is essential that all foster carers and particularly those newly recruited receive a high level of support from the service with the fostering task. The service does use 2 regular independent social workers to assist with undertaking assessment work. These social workers have worked with the service for a number of years and produce high quality assessments however once carers are approved they have then to develop a new relationship with their supervising social worker so use of independent social workers to assist with recruitment and assessment work can only have a limited role.

There is a turnover of carers every year as fostering can be a very challenging and demanding task and some carers decide that it no longer fits with their family life or retire due to health issues. In 2008/9 there were 6 resignations or terminations of approval and sadly one set of carers that died during the year.

Of the new foster carers approved one couple was White/British/Asian and the remainder were White/British. There are 2 BME couples currently being assessed.

The approval range of the new carers also reflected the priority need for the CYPT. One carer was approved for 3 children 10 years+, one for 2 children 12 years+ and the other new carers were all approved for children over the age of 5 years.

### **Recruitment strategy**

The Service has run 2 high profile recruitment events in 2008/9 including a range of activities for National Foster Care Fortnight which is in May each year. These events include advertisements in the local press plus 'good news' stories which profile the work of our carers. This included a profile on Brighton and Hove's longest serving carers and the recognition that was given to them for over 30 years of fostering by an invitation to the Queen's Garden Party.

The Service also organised a comprehensive update and refresh of the dedicated website for the service and this was completed in time for Foster Care Fortnight in 2009. An increasing number of enquiries from prospective carers are now received via the website.

The Recruitment and Publicity Officer for BME foster carers and adopters has continued to profile the work of the service. She has placed advertisements in a number of different publications and made contact with key local BME and faith groups and ensures the service has stalls at events like Black History Month and International Women's Day.

Foster carers and young people continue to play a very important role in recruitment events by attending information sessions and talking to prospective carers about their experience of fostering and the fostering task. The lead Practice Manager maintains an oversight of the recruitment activity and provides regular reports to the whole management team.

## **5. Placement Activity**

The Fostering Service runs a duty service for social workers needing to find a foster placement for a child. This service is overseen by a Practice Manager and has two dedicated workers supported by other staff within the team.

The duty service has had a sustained high demand for placements with significantly increased pressure on resources since December 2008. The increased number of referrals has been across the board with very high requests for placements for parent and baby foster placements and placements for teenagers and sibling groups. There were for example 25 referrals for parent and baby foster placements during the year.

This very high demand for placements has had an impact on the capacity of the service to consider the detail of the matching requirements of the child and to find placements that fit with the matching needs. The increase in numbers of children in care is a national issue and hence neighbouring authorities have also experienced rising numbers of children coming into care and there is therefore pressure on available fostering or residential resources across the south east. There have at times been very limited availability of placement across the south east region and although both the fostering duty team and agency placement team have worked very hard to find appropriate matches for children there has sometimes been a need to place children or young people at some distance from Brighton and Hove or to place more challenging children with carers that were newly approved.

### **Agency placements**

The Fostering Duty service works to place children with in-house foster carers that meet their needs where ever possible and agency placements are only used when this proves impossible. There is a close working relationship between the duty service and the agency placement team who oversee the contracts with the independent providers.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 there were 109 placements being purchased from independent fostering agencies and this included 7 parent and baby foster placements. At the end of the year there were 62% of children in in-house placements and 38% with agency foster placements. With the current high demand for placements this level of purchase of placements from the independent sector is unlikely to reduce.

Over the past year the agency placement team within the CYPT and West Sussex County Council undertook a tendering process for agency fostering and residential providers. A framework contract was agreed and commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2008 and there is now a joint list of 39 accredited

independent providers [16 residential and 23 foster care]. This has improved the process for commissioning of placements and fits very much with the need for the CYPT to achieve high quality placements and value for money for such placements. There is now an advisory group established jointly with West Sussex to oversee the running of this new process for commissioning these placements for children in care. Young people have also been involved in a programme of monitoring and review of service providers.

During 2008/9 the Fostering service received all the referrals for children needing foster placements and sought placements with independent fostering agencies if there was not an available in house placement. The agency placement team undertook placement finding for residential providers as well as assisting where necessary in negotiation with independent fostering providers. From September 2009 the plan is for the process to be streamlined further with the Fostering team receiving all referrals for children needing placements. The agency placement team will take over all the placement finding for children that cannot be placed in house although it is recognised that the 2 teams need to work closely together as in many cases placement finding needs to be twin tracked to ensure there is minimal delay in finding an appropriate placement.

### **Parent and baby placements**

During the year there has been a sustained high demand for parent and baby foster placements. Most of these placements are made at birth and as part of a care plan within proceedings. Most of the referrals for these placements come from the social work team at the Royal Alexander Children's Hospital [RACH] that has had lead responsibility to undertake pre birth assessments. The RACH team has been the referral point for the midwifery team in relation to referrals for babies that are potentially vulnerable and at risk of being subject to a child protection plan or care proceedings at birth. Given the high bombardment rate and staffing shortages within the RACH team the capacity for the team to undertake timely pre birth assessments has reduced significantly during the year. The lack of opportunity to undertake full and timely pre birth assessments has inevitably contributed to the increased number of referrals for parent and baby placements.

It is been recognised by the CYPT that the area of pre birth work and early permanence planning is one that needs to be reviewed to ensure that the pre birth period is used to full advantage to ensure that multi agency assessments can be undertaken to fully inform care planning at birth. There have also plans to change the organisation of social work team at the RACH with responsibility for assessment of new pre birth referrals moving to the area teams in September 2009.

There are now 11 approved in-house parent and baby carers which is a further increase on last year. There is a turnover of parent and baby carers as this can be a very demanding task with the carer needing to provide an intensive level of supervision and support to the parent. Most new parent and baby carers are existing foster carers who decide that they would like to extend or change their fostering role. Many of the placements go on for quite a long period with some placements lasting over 12 months so there can often



be limited turnover of new placements becoming available. Sometimes these placements have to be used for other children that are coming into care and need an emergency placement, for example a sibling group. At any one time there can be on average 20 parent and baby foster placements with roughly an equal number of in-house and agency placements being made.

During 2008/9 the Head of Service and the Consultant Nurse for CiC completed a piece of evaluation work to consider the outcomes of these placements over a 4 year period from April 2004 – March 2008. The evaluation work involved an analysis of the data relating to these placements plus interviews with foster carers, birth parents and key professional groups. A number of practice recommendations flowed from this piece of evaluation work which relate to pre birth work and the management of parent and baby placements to ensure there is no delay in achieving permanence for these vulnerable babies. Presentations on this evaluation work have now been given to appropriate managers and staff groups within the CYPT as well as the foster carer group. There has also been a presentation at Brighton University Making Research Count seminar. It is hoped that progress can be made in taking forward some of the good practice recommendations over the forthcoming year as part of the review of early permanence work.

## **6. Fostering support services**

The provision of a range of support services from the individual work provided by the supervising social worker to training and support groups, an out of hours service, support with respite arrangements and an extensive school holiday activity programme for children in placement all play a key role in ensuring carers are enabled and supported to meet the needs of the children in their care. It is also a significant factor in the retention of foster carers.

The Fostering service has continued to work hard over the year to enhance the support package provided to carers, the central component of which is the supervisory relationship. The service has a stable staff group of experienced social workers and all carers have an allocated social worker.

### **Support groups**

There is a general monthly support group open to all carers which is long standing and well attended. There is also a new carers group which runs annually over a number of sessions. New carers are provided with an induction pack as well as their foster carer's handbook and the new carers group provides the opportunity for carers to meet each other as well as providing training input to consolidate their learning from the preparation groups and assessment process.

A specific group for parent and baby foster carers is now well established which has a clear training element with a programme of different speakers. There is also a group for the intensive placement foster carers and it is an expectation of being part of the scheme that they meet together regularly with the two dedicated workers who supervise the placements.

## **Support for carers of BME children**

The recruitment and publicity officer for BME carers also provides a specialist support role to carers of BME children. This is in recognition of the fact that a number of our BME children in care are placed trans-racially and their foster carers may need additional input in order to ensure they are supporting the child's identity needs.

The service has updated and re-issued the handbook for foster carers on the care of BME children and the dedicated worker visits carers to offer advice on specific issues like dietary needs as well as providing information on toys and activities as well as community and other support groups to join.

## **7. Foster carer training**

The service continues to offer a comprehensive training programme to foster carers that builds on the basic training they receive during the preparation group and assessment process. A working group is held with staff and foster carer representatives to review and develop the training programme.

There are 9 mandatory courses that carers are expected to take up over the course of their first two years post approval. Carers also have the opportunity to take up additional training provided within the training programme for foster carers or the wider training programme offered within the CYPT.

The service also supports foster carers that are interested in developing their skills through the NVQ Level 3 award for carers and there continues to be sustained interest amongst foster carers in completing this professional qualification.

## **CWDC learning and development standards**

Following the introduction of the Children's Workforce Development Council [CWDC] Learning and Development standards for foster carers the service piloted a support group for carers undertaking the workbook. Feedback from carers was very positive and further support/training groups for the second cohort of carers completing the workbook have now been established. There are 45 sets of carers involved in this second phase of the work to complete this CWDC workbook which started in April 2009 and these carers will have 12 months to complete this task. There are very high turn out of carers for these groups and it has to be acknowledged that compliance with this new requirement for carers to demonstrate their core knowledge and skills for the fostering task has been a significant undertaking for the carers themselves and for staff within the service that have taken a lead in running the support and training programme.

The Department for Children, Family and Schools expects that all new foster carers will be supported to complete the work to evidence knowledge of the standards from April 2008, with all existing carers expected to achieve this by April 2011.

## 8. Independent Fostering Support

The Fostering Service continues to have a contract with an independent company to provide support to foster carers subject to a serious complaint or allegation. This service also offers a 24 hour helpline to carers which has been used by a number of carers. During 08/09 Fostering Support Ltd provided individual support to 2 foster carer households. This involved providing telephone support, meeting with the foster carers, assisting in the preparation of reports and on occasion attending Foster Panel with the foster carers.

Evaluations received from foster carers using the service are extremely positive and the service plays an important part in the retention of foster carers whose experience of being subject to a complaint or allegation can cause considerable distress in some cases leading them to end their fostering career. Good practice guidance from Fostering Network, the leading national charity for fostering issues, strongly recommends the provision of an independent support service for foster carers.

## 9. Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers

The sons and daughters of foster carers play a vital role in the fostering task and the Service has continued to provide them with dedicated support services. Fostering is very much a family activity and research has shown that placements are more successful and less likely to break down when there is a positive framework of support in place that includes the sons and daughters of carers.

The Intensive Placement team provide specific activity days within the school holidays for these children which are well attended [see table below] There is also a session co-facilitated by the children of experienced foster carers for the sons and daughters of newly approved carers or carers that are undertaking the assessment process.

Holiday Period	Places offered	Places filled	No of different young people	Gender
Easter 08	15	14	14	4M & 10F
June ht 08	15	15	15	7M & 8F
Summer 08	10	8	8	2M & 6F
Oct ht 08	14	12	12	2M & 10F
Feb ht 09	17	17	17	8M & 9F
Total	71	66		

## 10. Foster Care Association

Brighton and Hove Foster Care Association has been in existence for 5 years. It provides a number of resources for foster carers and their families including

a buddy scheme for new foster carers and a quarterly newsletter for all foster carers keeping them up to date with news and events. It has also organised a number of social events for foster carers and their families. In the last year these have included an Easter egg hunt and a barn dance, Christmas pantomime excursion and summer picnics. The association also runs regular drop in coffee mornings in different locations for foster carers.

Members of the association are also involved in various working parties and are consulted with in relation to new developments within the Service. Sadly the Chair of the Association, died suddenly in June 08 and a new chairperson has now been elected to this post. The Foster Carer association has now set up their own website for foster carers as part of their role to ensure carers, that can become quite isolated in their own homes, have the opportunity to keep in touch with each other and keep updated on the work of the association.

## **11. Children in Care Health and Education teams**

The Consultant Nurse for children in care and her colleagues work very closely with the service. They provide training input to foster carers as part of their mandatory training but also run additional workshops for staff and carers as needed.

The Nurses for children in care also provide additional support and advice to foster carers as required about any health issues related to their children in placement. From April 2008 as part of the Care Matters agenda there is a new national requirement to report on the emotional well being of children in care and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire are sent to carers to complete on an annual basis with input from the young person as appropriate. The results of these are analysed by the health team for children in care. Foster carers have responded well to this and there has been very high numbers of the questionnaires returned. For children that are shown to have scored highly follow up support and advice is provided to carers and social workers by the health team.

The Education team for children in care also work closely with the service and provide input to the training programme. A new Education Psychologist for CiC was appointed in November 2008 and has already developed good links with the service.

## **12 CAMHS service**

The Consultant Nurse for CiC and Head of Service throughout the year have attended a monthly meeting of the specialist Tier 3 team within CAMHS that provided a fast track service for fostered and adopted children and their families. The CAMHS service for fostered and adopted children was re-commissioned during 2008/9 and the dedicated team has been now been disbanded. Referrals for these children are now directed to the one central referral point within CAMHS and are passed on to the three area teams within CAMHS and can be dealt with by a range of different clinicians at CAMHS

with an expectation that these referrals receive an assessment appointment within 4 weeks.

An art therapy group has continued to run during the year which is co-led by a worker from the Intensive Placement team and therapists from CAMHS with significant experience of working with children in care. In addition to this these workers also ran a successful intensive art therapy group during summer 2008 for three weeks with 7 young people between the ages of 9 and 12 attending each day.

### **13. Intensive Placement Team**

The Intensive Placement Team (IPT) works to support the general development and placement stability of children and young people aged between 7 and 16 years living in Brighton and Hove foster placements including Family and Friends placements. The work is subject to regular review in order that it is purposeful and professionally accountable.

IPT's remit includes the supervision of a limited number of Intensive Foster Placements where enhanced levels of placement support are required to sustain ongoing placement stability. IPT Support Workers are allocated to provide direct work to children and young people individually and in groups. Among its services, IPT offers a Morning Unit to support young people return to school where there is a break in education and to help support placement stability. An integral part of the team's work is to provide activity programmes for children and young people during each school holiday.

IPT's steady-state work provides a valuable resource in the fostering service's efforts to offer and maintain placement stability. New projects have been developed by the team to supplement this objective while aiming to provide further opportunities for growth and enjoyment to our children and young people in care. The department's recent Ofsted report acknowledged IPT's very positive contribution to the delivery of the Every Child Matters agenda.

There have been a number of significant team developments over the year alongside consolidation of earlier initiatives. These include: consolidation and expansion of the Creative Sounds Music Project which has provided workshops and individual music tuition to children and young people in care; a successful bid to deliver the Creativity4health agenda through various and far-reaching activities including a new peer-relations group; the diversification of its holiday activity programmes and one-off projects such as the production of a fostering guide for children and young people in care in Brighton and Hove.

#### **Morning Unit**

The Morning Unit remains an integral part of IPT's services to support placement stability. The unit operates four mornings per week between 9am and 1pm during school term times. It provides up to three spaces per morning for children and young people placed in Brighton and Hove foster placements.

Reasons for referral are various but the most common factor is the absence of educational provision. Research shows that this factor alone plays a critical factor in placement disruption. One of the main aims of the unit is to provide much needed respite for foster carers. Feedback from carers suggests that they consider it a highly supportive resource. IPT endeavours to work directly with the young people on the unit to help them understand and to modify where possible the kind of behaviours that often led to school exclusion in the first place. Furthermore, IPT staff members play an active role with social work and educational colleagues, to secure young people's readmission into suitable educational provision as soon as possible and minimise the risk of further exclusion.

It is evident that there are cyclical peaks and troughs in referrals to the Morning Unit. Though figures for 2007-8 showed a 34% increase, figures for 2008-9 show a decrease of 40%. Current policy guidance to schools may be resulting in the fact that young people are excluded less often.

The experience of the team suggests that the incidence and degree of challenging behaviours presented by young people, such as verbal and physical threats or aggressive outbursts towards staff and material objects, has increased. This has a number of consequences. It sometimes means that staff ratios have had to be increased in order to manage the situations safely in line with the risk assessments. IPT have also had to decline additional referrals if there is concern that combinations of certain young people were likely to produce behaviours that could not be safely contained, placing young people and staff at unacceptable risk.

It is of note that fixed-term exclusions have increased substantially as a proportion of the reason for referrals to the morning unit. Once on the morning unit children and young people are tending to stay for shorter periods as both IPT and Education staff work together to return them to a formal education programme.

### Morning Unit referrals

Type	April 2006/7	April 2007/8	April 2008/9
Referrals	41	55	33
Young People	-	25 (15 Male, 10 Female)	19 (12 Male, 7 Female)
Sessions offered	-	190	156

## Reasons for Referral to Morning Unit

Reason	April 2007/8	April 2008/9
Fixed-term exclusion	35	18
Permanent exclusion	1	1
Informal exclusion	1	2
Reduced timetable	2	2
No school place	3	2
Not attending	5	3

## Activity programme

IPT provides a range of holiday activities for children and young people in care during school holidays. Activities provide respite for carers and opportunities for children in care to share and enjoy different experiences together. In response to feedback from foster carers and young people in a previous questionnaire, IPT have sought to offer new and more diverse activities. The overall take-up rate has increased from 75% to 89%.

One of the most popular events that the team manages is the IPT Christmas Party for children, young people and their carers. Approximately 150 people were able to come although demand for places exceeded this number.

### 253 Activities - Children in Care

Holiday Period	Places offered	Places filled	No. of different young people	Gender
Easter 08	90	73	52	28M & 24F
June ht 08	49	45	39	18M & 21F
Summer 08	211	198	63	33M & 30F
Oct ht 08	60	51	42	32M & 19F
Feb ht 09	60	51	38	24M & 14F
Total	470	418		

## Group work

*Music workshops:* IPT staff members were partners with Rythmix and Brighton and Hove Music and Performing Arts in their successful bid for a substantial grant from the DCSF to promote and deliver access to music for children and young people in care in the South East region. Under the Cre8tive Sounds Project, IPT staff worked with 2 specialist external music

tutors to provide a closed group offering young people the opportunity to learn and play music together. The group involved 6 young people attending weekly sessions for 10 weeks.

No less important than the individual interest and skills developed was the fact that the participants learned and worked together in a group, being helped to manage their anxieties and tensions and to reach compromise where possible. Participation was and remains enthusiastic. This is borne out by the fact that 4 members of the initial group are now involved in individual lessons in their selected area of interest. None had previously received this opportunity within their birth family or care history. Music Taster Days continue to be offered under the 253 Activity Programme. A total of 56 sessions have been attended so far. As a consequence, a further five young people have asked for 1:1 music tuition. A sixth young person has had the resource redirected to be included in her school timetable (singing lessons).

*253 Club:* This closed group is provided for six young people referred by their social workers. The purpose of the group is to work with young people who struggle forming relationships with peers and who are low in confidence when forming friendships. It aims to build confidence and self esteem, to support young people to create friendships and to have fun whilst doing so.

### **Creativity4Health**

Two members of the team identified and successfully applied for a grant from the Lottery and Arts Council funded Creativity4Health project. The aim of the project is to promote the participation of looked after children and young people, care leavers and foster carers in creative and physical activities to improve emotional health and wellbeing.

IPT staff members have designed a programme of activities and events over one year to meet team and project objectives. They will work with 25 young people in care or care leavers over the year with the support of 4 different artists.

Activities include:

*Arts Award:* The arts award is a national qualification offered under the National Qualifications Framework to support young people (11-25) to develop as artists and arts leaders. Completion of the award will demonstrate a young person's skills and ability to communicate well and lead projects and is useful for gaining further education opportunities and jobs. A number of young people in care will be supported by IPT staff to help them achieve this award.

*Youth Arts Fringe Festival:* children and young people in care have been working on their own artwork and exhibited it as part of the Brighton Fringe Festival. A further exhibition is planned in November 2009

*Lewes Festival:* Young people were supported to exhibit photography and other work in the festival in June 2009. The theme was young people's use of words.



*The Graffiti Project:* During what proved to be a highly successful IPT activity day, 15 young people and two foster carers worked with a graffiti artist in the garden at 253 Preston Road to produce graffiti art on installation boards. The artist was on hand to teach professional techniques and safe ways to paint.

*Garden Project:* Further work has taken place on the garden to extend the vegetable patch and to build a creative aspect to the garden with totem poles and a wishing tree, and to create a workshop outside for young people to use. 'Gardening with IPT' has proved a popular and successful addition to the range of holiday activities offered.

### **IPT Sessional Workers**

IPT has set up a small pool of sessional workers to compliment the staff group. Sessional workers have been allocated to provide direct work with children and young people at weekends in order to support placements and to engage with young people on a range of issues such as independence skills, social skills and community integration by accessing local resources.

IPT currently employs and supervises five sessional workers. Three provide direct work to children and young people in placement; two supplement staffing on 253 activity programmes. One of the latter has been specifically employed to provide one to one support for a young person with a significant disability.

### **Intensive Fostering Placements**

There are currently 8 carers offering intensive foster placements with 11 children in placement as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009. An additional 5 placements for children were provided during the year and placement stability remains high with the average duration of an intensive fostering placement standing at 4 years.

A comprehensive enhanced support package is provided for these carers with a key feature of these placements being the very regular network meetings for the carers and key workers with the child to ensure there is effective communication to support the young person in placement.

## **13. Fostering Panel**

It is the responsibility of the service to ensure the effective running of the Panels and the Agency Advisors manage the panel administration team and take a lead in the recruitment of panel members. Panel contributes significantly to the positive work of the CYPT in planning for children and providing a key quality assurance role.

Panel has been particularly busy during the year and this in part reflects the significant number of family and friends foster placements.

There was a change in the independent chair of panel with Sarah Borthwick being appointed and taking up this role in January 2009. Gill Harris was the previous chair and had to leave Brighton and Hove in December 2008 as her tenure as chair came to an end. Gill Harris was an excellent chair of panel and contributed greatly to the very effective performance of panel which has been commented on very positively in all inspections of the service. The CYPT was very pleased to be able to appoint Sarah Borthwick as her replacement, she is not only a very experienced chair of panel but has national reputation within the adoption and fostering field as a trainer, consultant and author of a number of books on aspects of family placement work. A report on the activity of the fostering panel is appended to this report.

## **14. Complaints and allegations**

During 2008/9 there were 7 standards of care investigations following complaints and allegations made against foster carers. One of the foster carers involved resigned due to changes in her circumstances that made it impossible for her to continue to foster and another set of foster carers had their approval terminated. Three of the standards of care investigations concluded with no further action being recommended. One complaint was received from a young person about the conduct of the foster carer and this was dealt with under 'carer supervision' and did not result in a standards of care investigation.

## **15. Service Planning 2008/9**

The service will keep the recruitment strategy under review in line with the profile of children coming into care. The service will continue to specifically highlight the need to recruit carers for parent and baby placements, more BME carers and carers for older children and sibling groups. However given the significant increase in the number of children coming into care prospective carers that are interested in providing placements for children under 10 years would also now be considered. The service will continue to work closely with the press office and ensure that the profile of fostering remains high locally. Currently the service is undertaking an 'empty nester' campaign in an attempt to attract older experienced parents that may have space in their lives and their home for a foster child. It has been very helpful that current foster carers have been prepared to assist with this campaign by having their stories profiled in the local media.

The Children and Young People's Act focuses on the need for young people in care to have access to foster placements that can continue beyond 18 years. The service will continue to work collaboratively with the 16+ support team to focus on improving placement stability and the placement options for older teenagers in care. The Care matters implementation group will also continue to profile within the CYPT and the wider council the corporate responsibility towards children in care and the need to work to ensure services meet the areas detailed within the pledge to children in care in Brighton and Hove.

The plan for the CYPT to develop an early permanence strategy for children in care will involve further consideration of practice in relation to parent and baby placements. Parent and baby foster carers can play a significant role in enabling a parent to retain the care of their child however there are a number of practice issues that stem from the evaluation work undertaken in relation to these placements that will need to be considered as part of the work to develop this strategy. The role that children's centres can play in undertaking parenting skills assessment work and linking these vulnerable parents into a range of support services will need to be part of future development work in this area.

The new process for the management of referrals into fostering duty and the close working relationship with the agency placement team will need to be kept under review. The aim remains to work to ensure that children can be placed with in-house carers if at all possible but if an appropriate placement cannot be found or there is a need for a residential placement the agency placement team will take on the placement finding role. Placement finding can be fluid process with the situation of the child and potential carers changing. Many placements are needed in an emergency but it is hoped that for those placements that can take place in a planned way there will be more opportunity for care planning meetings to consider matching needs and for planned introductions to placements thus enhancing placement stability.

Sharon Donnelly  
Head of Service, Fostering & Adoption September 2009

## **Appendix 1**

### **BRIGHTON & HOVE FOSTERING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2007 – 2008 (1 January – 31 March 2009)**

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 This report briefly summarises the new Independent Chair's experience of the work of the panel and its functioning over the last quarter of the year. The panel operates as a joint Brighton & Hove and Barnardo's panel. It is the first report provided by the new Chair who took up role in January 2009. This followed the departure of the previous Chair, Gill Harris in December 2008.

1.2 Gill Harris was an experienced and committed Chair of the panel and was held in high esteem by panel members and staff within the Trust.

1.3 The new Independent Chair is Sarah Borthwick who brings a range of experience and knowledge to her role on the Fostering panel. She is an experienced Chair of both Fostering and Adoption and Permanence panels for a number of Local Authorities. She worked for British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) for many years and was County Adoption Manager for a Local Authority. Sarah has co-authored a number of publications for BAAF including Effective Fostering Panels in 2007.

#### **2. Composition of the Panel**

2.1 A number of members have left the panel during the year and there have been several new members appointed in recent months. Please see the full report for details.

2.2 The panel membership as at 31.3.09 is:

- Sarah Borthwick, Independent Chair
- Coun Jayne Bennett, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Miriam Patrick, independent member, ex foster carer
- Jacqueline Stillwell, Barnardo's officer, vice chair
- Kay Woodley, independent member, ex service user
- Amanda Freeman, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, fostering
- Gerry Brandon, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, childcare
- Yvette Queffurus, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, health
- David Noble, Brighton & Hove CYPT officer, education
- Andy Hill, independent member, foster carer

2.3 The panel has one vacancy: for a Barnardo's member. It is planned that this vacancy will be filled in April 2009.

2.4 The panel meets the requirements of the Fostering Regulations, 2002. The panel continues however, to remain imbalanced in respect of gender and particularly race and ethnicity. This area is always a priority in the recruitment

of new panel members; however unfortunately it was not possible to successfully address this.

2.5 Brighton & Hove continues to pay an expenses fee for independent members to attend. The amount may be reviewed over the next year.

2.6 Graham Whitaker has continued as the Fostering Agency Adviser since taking up post in September 2007.

2.7 Sharon Cottington has been the panel administrator over this last quarter.

### **3. Work of the Panel**

3.1 The panel continues to meet on a monthly basis. It has met on three occasions during January to March 2009. This frequency appears to meet the Trust's needs and allows adequate time for panel business. Panel members are flexible in respect of attending additional panels when the need arises. This has not been necessary in the last three months of the year.

3.2 During this last quarter, the panel dealt with and made recommendations on **15** case presentations. 13 cases were presented by Brighton & Hove and 2 by Barnardo's Link Plus.

3.3 The panel recommended the approval of **2** new carers:  
1 were short term foster carers  
1 were Link Plus carers

3.4 The panel dealt with annual reviews for **7** carers:  
6 were short term foster carers  
1 were Link Plus carers

3.5 There was **1 termination** of approval of foster carers:  
These were short term foster carers

3.6 There were no resignations of carers during this period

3.7 The panel dealt with **5** cases in relation to Family and Friends care:  
Initial (interim) approvals 2  
Continued initial (further interim) approvals 1  
Full assessments 2

3.8 The Agency Decision Makers endorsed all of the panel's recommendations.

3.9 The panel can also be used to offer consultation and guidance in respect of cases. It was not used in this way over the last quarter.

## **4. Functioning of the Panel**

4.1 The format and process of the panel meetings, including the agreed structure for the discussion of the paperwork, remain largely as outlined in last year's annual report. There has been no reason to change it significantly as it appears to work well.

4.2 Clearly, however, there have been a number of changes to membership of the panel over the last quarter. There has been the introduction of the new Chair and three new panel members in the space of three months. In addition to this, a well established and experienced panel member left in March 2009. All of these changes have meant adjustments for everyone and a learning curve for new members. The panel is adapting very well. It will be helpful to have an opportunity to reflect on the panel's role and functioning together in the next few months.

4.3 The panel is a friendly and welcoming panel. It is professional, sensitive and thorough. Panel business is conducted comprehensively and panel members are prepared to participate, ask questions and challenge if necessary. All panel members demonstrate a high level of commitment and they contribute well to the process.

4.4 The attendance of applicants and foster carers for their approval and reviews is well established and panel members consider that this aspect of panel works well generally. Informal and formal feedback from applicants and foster carers indicates that they too value being included as fully as possible in the panel process. This has continued in the last quarter.

4.5 When there has been information that the panel needed to discuss in confidence with the workers or where there were questions around the assessment or reviewing process itself rather than in relation to the applicants or foster carers, then panel has seen the workers alone.

4.6 Feedback forms continue to be given to all social workers, applicants, and foster carers attending the panel to ensure that the panel is aware of their experiences and views. The panel has received only 1 feedback form for this period. Given the low response rate, it will be important to re-emphasise the value of receiving written feedback from participants so that more forms are returned.

4.7 The informal and formal feedback has been positive during this period. However, the main concern expressed by applicants and foster carers attending is still the number of people on panel and how over-whelming this can feel on walking into the room. Panel continues to make a considerable effort to ensure that applicants and foster carers are welcomed and made to feel as relaxed as realistically possible in a formal meeting. Applicants and foster carers also continue to have information available to them in respect of panel members and the Agency Decision Makers in the waiting room. These do however, need updating. A booklet is sent to them about attending panel and discussions are held with their assessing social worker or supervising social worker to prepare them for attending panel. They are also now given additional preparation by the Chair who informs them prior to coming into the

panel meeting of the areas that panel will be raising with them. The panel has also rearranged the seating within the room in an attempt to facilitate people's participation.

4.8 The panel meets on a regular basis with the team manager and practice managers for the fostering service in Brighton & Hove to discuss issues and developments and this has been valued by the panel. Panel also meets twice a year with the Head of Service and once a year with the Agency Decision Makers for Brighton & Hove and Barnardo's Link Plus. Panel members value this opportunity for discussion and consider it contributes to open and effective communication with both agencies. No meetings have occurred over the last quarter but they will be planned over the next few months.

4.9 Feedback forms for the Brighton & Hove Agency Decision Maker on every case presented to the panel continue to be completed by the Chair of the panel. This arrangement continues to work well and be of value.

4.10 Panel members have been getting to know each other and developing their roles and responsibilities over the last three months. It is a competent panel which will continue to consolidate over the next year.

## **5. Panel Terms of Reference**

5.1 The constitution and terms of reference for the panel continues to meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations and Minimum Fostering Standards.

## **6. Practice**

6.1 In general the work presented to the panel has been of a high standard over the last quarter of the year. Panel members have commented that the work from the fostering service in relation to assessments and reviews has remained of high quality during this period. Panel has fed this back directly to workers and managers presenting to panel.

6.2 There was one termination of approval in this quarter and panel members were impressed at the work undertaken and support provided.

6.3 As in the previous year's report, Family and Friends cases remain challenging for panel both in respect of the nature of the cases and the paperwork. There is improvement in respect of initial reports but it is difficult to achieve good information in 6 weeks and present it to panel as required by the Regulations. The Family Rights Group (FRG) report format which is used for the initial assessments has been amended by Brighton & Hove and the current format is clearer. Helpful guidelines are provided to workers.

6.4 Again as in last year's report, panel has not seen any significant impact in the work presented to it in relation to the recruitment of Black and minority ethnic foster carers. Panel is aware of the work undertaken by Brighton & Hove in respect of this in relation to specific targeted recruitment and fully

supports it. Panel is also aware of the training for workers and existing carers regarding the placement needs of Black and minority ethnic children who are placed trans-racially and trans-culturally. The panel continues to be mindful of its role in the approval and review of carers who will offer such placements.

6.5 Panel continues to be impressed by the high standard and quality of the Link Plus assessments and annual reviews presented to it.

## **7. Conclusion**

7.1 In general the organisation and functioning of the panel works well in Brighton & Hove. It will continue to develop and consolidate over the next year.

7.2 The panel continues to play an important role in ensuring the provision of a quality fostering service to children.

Sarah Borthwick  
Independent Chair, Brighton & Hove Fostering Panel (June 2009)