

TITLE OF REPORT: Mockingbird Programme – Progress Update

REPORT OF: Strategic Director, Children’s Social Care & Lifelong Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides members with an overview of Gateshead Councils Mockingbird Programme

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide members of the Families OSC with information in relation to the Mockingbird Programme and its implementation within Gateshead.

Background

2. The recruitment and retention of foster carers is a key priority for the Fostering Service. It is imperative we have a range of foster carers who can meet the needs of a range of children and young people. Locally and nationally there has been a decline in people wanting to become foster carers, therefore it is important we continue to look at innovative and create way to support foster carers, their birth families and the foster children and young people in their care. To help us achieve this we have embarked on a new approach which will complement the traditional fostering model, this is referred to as the Mockingbird programme.

The Mockingbird Model

3. The Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model which provides sleepovers, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. It supports with the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers children and young people, fostering services and birth families.
4. The Mockingbird programme was developed in the USA by foster carers and is based on the concept of peer support, creating an extended family for cared for children and young people. The model provides:
 - a secure base for carers and children,
 - it improves the foster cares experience through peer support from foster carer to foster carer,

- it supports and improves family time for foster children and their brothers and sisters and children
- it helps support the development of skills and confidence of the foster carers who are part of the hub.

5. Fostering Network own the licensing rights for the mockingbird programme and are the lead in provider in supporting Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Associates with its implementation and ongoing support and development.

6. The hub being the group of carers in the mockingbird programme. Each hub (group) has a main carer, we refer to this carer as the hub carer. The hub carer has six to ten fostering families aligned to them. Collectively the fostering families have between six and eighteen children living across all the fostering households. The hub carer does not have any children or young people living with them as their role is to support other carers, be the first point of contact, have sleep overs for the children and young people so the other foster carers have some respite and arrange social and networking events, so the hub become part of a family model. The diagram below is a visual representation of the mockingbird hub model:



7. The hub carer is the main foster carer in the constellation. Constellation means the whole group of families in the model. Fostering families are supported by a fostering social worker. In the model the fostering social worker is referred to as a liaison worker. Michelle Sterricker from the fostering service, was successfully appointed to the role of liaison worker for the programme and will take up full responsibilities once the model fully comes on board in November 2022. Two foster carers from the same fostering household have been appointed as hub

carers and all fostering families in the constellation have been identified and aligned to the consultation.

8. A working group of representatives from the fostering service, Gateshead foster carers and care experienced young people have met to steer and drive forward this model. This has been supported by the regional working group as this approach is being driven out across all 12 North East Local Authorities, thanks to financial support from the Department of Education following South Tyneside Councils success at obtaining bid funding. The bid funding ensured financial support for the Mockingbird license and project set up costs. It is envisaged that the model will be self-sustaining once implemented due to the benefits which it brings to foster carers, children and young people, recruitment and retention and stability for young people.

Next Steps

9. A wider communication and launch will take place in November 2022. This will ensure people are aware of the mockingbird model and its benefits and provide people with the opportunity to learn more. A launch event is currently being planned for November.
10. We will also be working closely with the liaison worker and the hub to embed the model and gather information in relation to its success as part of the evaluation process. We are hopeful this will be successful and enable us to develop a second hub.
11. We will continue to work with our regional partners as part of the wider network as well as working closely with Fostering Network.

Recommendations

12. The Committee is asked to acknowledge the content of the report.

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