

April 2015 - March 2016

“Is it easy? Not always...  
...Is it worth it?  
**Absolutely”**

#### Fostering Service

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June 2016

# Fostering Service

## Annual Report

**foster** for Gateshead



# Introduction

As Lead Member for Children and Young People in Gateshead and Interim Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning we hold the responsibility to ensure that children requiring fostering receive good quality services which will support them.

Foster carers play a vital role in helping children make sense of their past, live for today and enjoy their new future. Our Fostering Service and team of foster carers work in partnership to ensure children live in safe, nurturing family homes where they can achieve their potential and enjoy their childhood. One of the recruitment campaigns during this year said "Do something amazing in 2016 - Give a child and a family a future" and that is exactly what the service and our foster carers do.

This 2015/16 Fostering Annual Report of Gateshead Council highlights some real progress the fostering service has made over the past year. 26 new foster carers have been approved, and our carers continue to achieve success in their Level 3 Diploma in child care the Training support and development standards for the Children & Young People's Workforce. We look forward to building on this work and continuing to improve outcomes for children and families in Gateshead.

Gateshead Council continues to seek to improve outcomes for Looked After Children in order to improve their life chances and opportunities. These outcomes are closely linked to placement stability and ensuring that children have placement choice and are matched and placed with the right carers.

It's fantastic that this area of work was noted in the Ofsted Inspection Report, published in March 2016, which stated "Placement stability is very good and the vast majority of children looked after live with foster carers." They added, "The success of recruiting good-quality carers and careful matching is illustrated through very good placement stability. Foster carers are well supported."

We are extremely proud of the work that the whole Fostering Team does in order to provide the best possible service for our Looked After children in Gateshead. We are acutely aware that children in our care deserve the very best and colleagues and foster carers alike are to be commended for, not only the work they do but for their dedication and commitment.

**We thank you all for making such a difference.**



*A Douglas*

**Councillor Angela Douglas**

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People



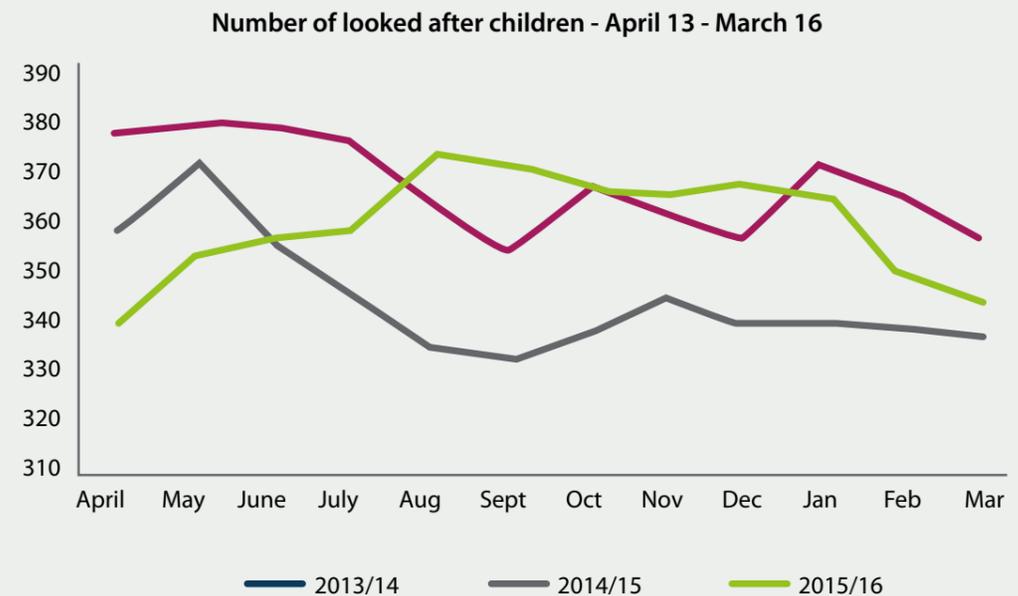
*Allison Elliott*

**Allison Elliott**

Acting Strategic Director Care, Wellbeing and Learning

# The Fostering Service

The Fostering Service staff team is made up of the Team Manager, 2 Assistant Team Managers, 15 Supervising Social Workers, an Education Worker who liaises with the REALAC team and schools in the area, a Support Worker who engages with children and young people in the community on a one-to-one basis and a Recruitment and Marketing officer. The team is supported by a Business Support unit with dedicated support to foster carer payments, panel and duty administration..



Over the last year the number of Looked After Children in Gateshead has ranged from 340 to 376 with the majority of these children being placed with in-house foster carers.

Many of the children leaving care throughout the year are those who are already living with relatives under Fostering Regulations where other legal orders are obtained to secure their permanence with that family i.e. Special Guardianship or Residence Orders. This does not free up any fostering placements within the Service and consequently resources and placements have continued to be limited. This issue of limited placement capacity is not unique to Gateshead as the Fostering Network estimates that there is a shortfall of 8,750 fostering placements across the whole of the U.K.

## Payment for Skills

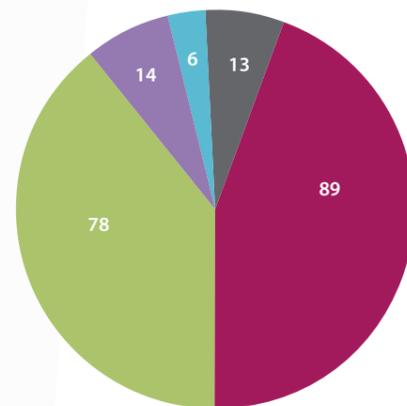
Gateshead Council seeks to continuously improve outcomes for Looked After Children in order to improve their life chances and opportunities. These outcomes are closely linked to the achievement of placement stability and ensuring that children have placement choice and are subsequently matched and placed with the right carers. These factors were at the heart of the Payment for Skills scheme which was developed to operate through a payment model that clearly defines the expectations and in September 2012 the scheme was approved by Cabinet for implementation within the Service.

There are four payment levels within the scheme structure; Level 1 being the lowest level of payment and Level 4 being the highest. The highest level of payment is based on the areas of greatest skills which are required in order to undertake the necessary care tasks. The payment levels were implemented for new and existing foster carers during the Summer of 2013 and all foster carers are now on one of the four levels, linked to their skills, knowledge and competencies.

This evidence based approach is also being used in the assessment of new foster carers, with the Fostering Panel linking the recommendation of approval of new carers with the Payment for Skills level. This has been reviewed during 2015/2016 and minor amendments have been made to the criteria.

**Breakdown of Foster Carers by Payment for Skills Level**

■ No Level ■ Level 1 ■ Level 2 ■ Level 3 ■ Level 4



## The Foster Carers

At 31st March 2016 there were 201 approved fostering households comprising 351 foster carers, an increase on the previous year. During the year ending 31 March 2016, 26 new fostering households were approved at Fostering Panel, with 25 being de-registered.

The Fostering Service provides a wide range of resources including short break and emergency, short term, task centred and long term/permanent placements for Looked After Children and Young People. The Service also provides short breaks to families who have a child with a disability through the Home from Home scheme and we also have a growing number of foster carers who are providing placements for extended family members or connected children. Many foster carers can offer more than one type of placement, which increases the flexibility within the Service regarding the types of placements we can offer.

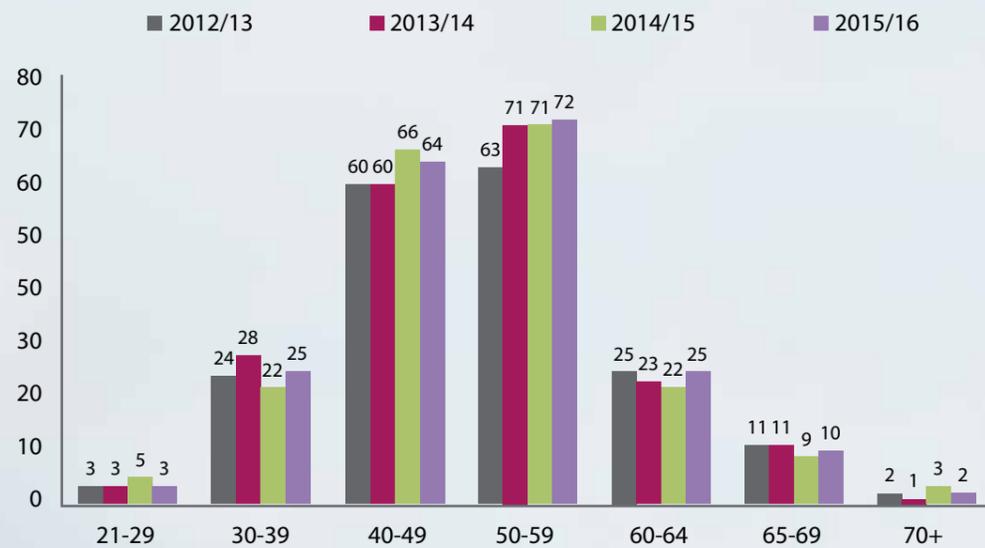
MAIN TYPE OF CARE	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS
Short Break and Respite	1
Short Term and Task Centred	74
Long Term/Permanent	89
Home from Home	15
Connected Person	22

The majority of foster carers (98.6%) within Gateshead come from a White British ethnic background; however we also have fostering households from the Pakistani and Orthodox Jewish communities. This reflects the shortage of foster carers from ethnic minorities that is experienced nationally.

Though a high proportion (91%) of children in placement during the year ending March 2016 were White, our carers also provided placements for those from other ethnic groups.



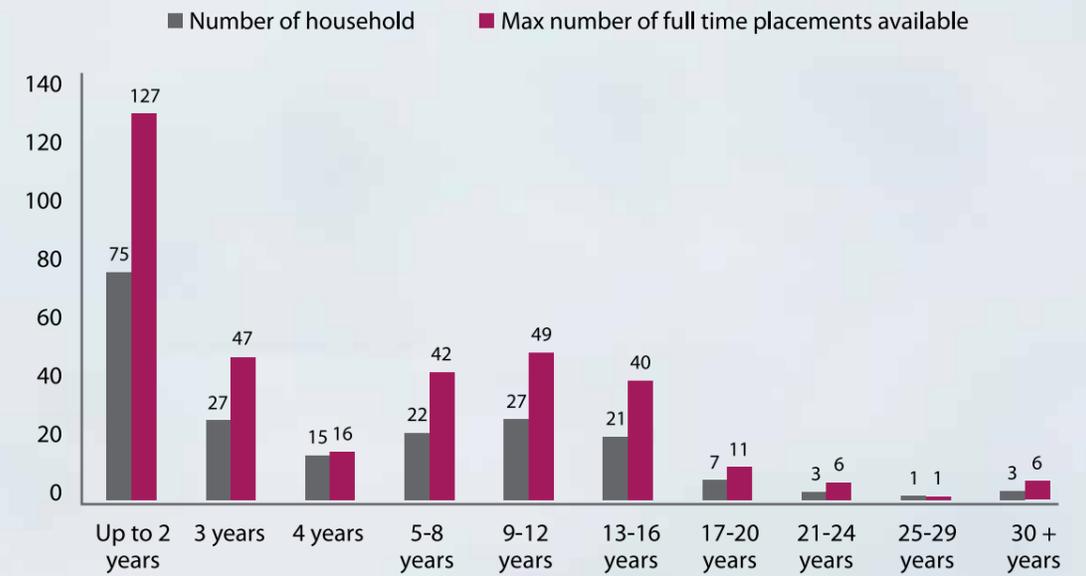
**Age of Main Carer in Fostering Household:**  
2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16



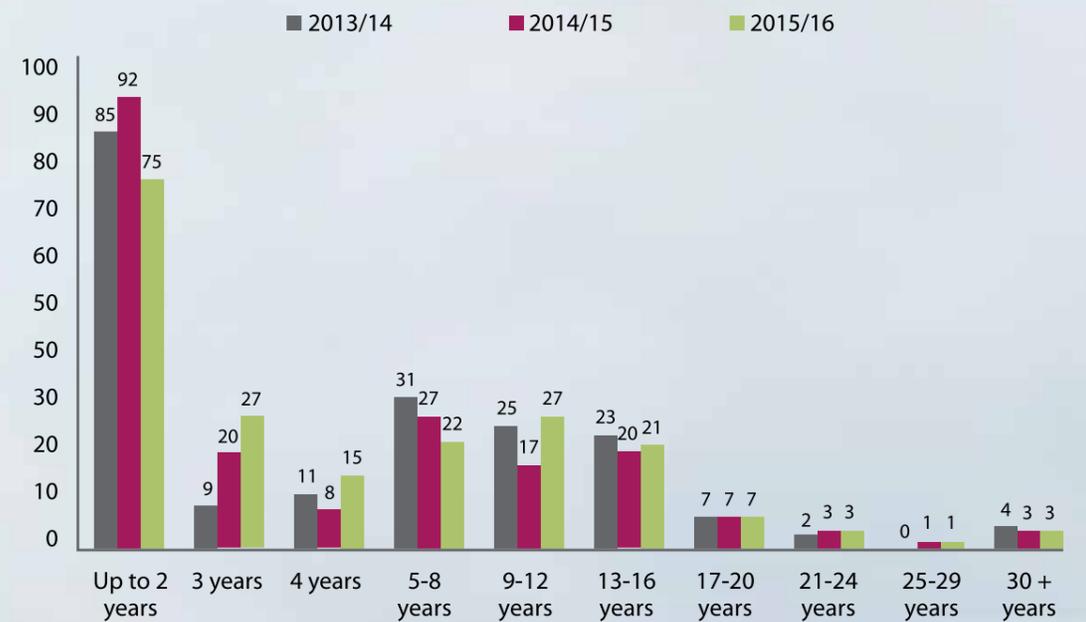
We continue to have a high proportion of older foster carers within the Service. 54% (109) of main carers within fostering households are over the age of 50 and currently provide approximately 56% of the potential available full time placements.

It is anticipated that over the next 5 years between 10-15% of these older foster carers will retire and therefore it is a priority for us to ensure that we recruit enough new carers not only to replace those retiring but also to continue to increase the overall numbers of fostering households to between 200 and 230. This would provide a significant increase in placement choice and assist in reducing the numbers of children being placed in Independent Fostering Agencies.

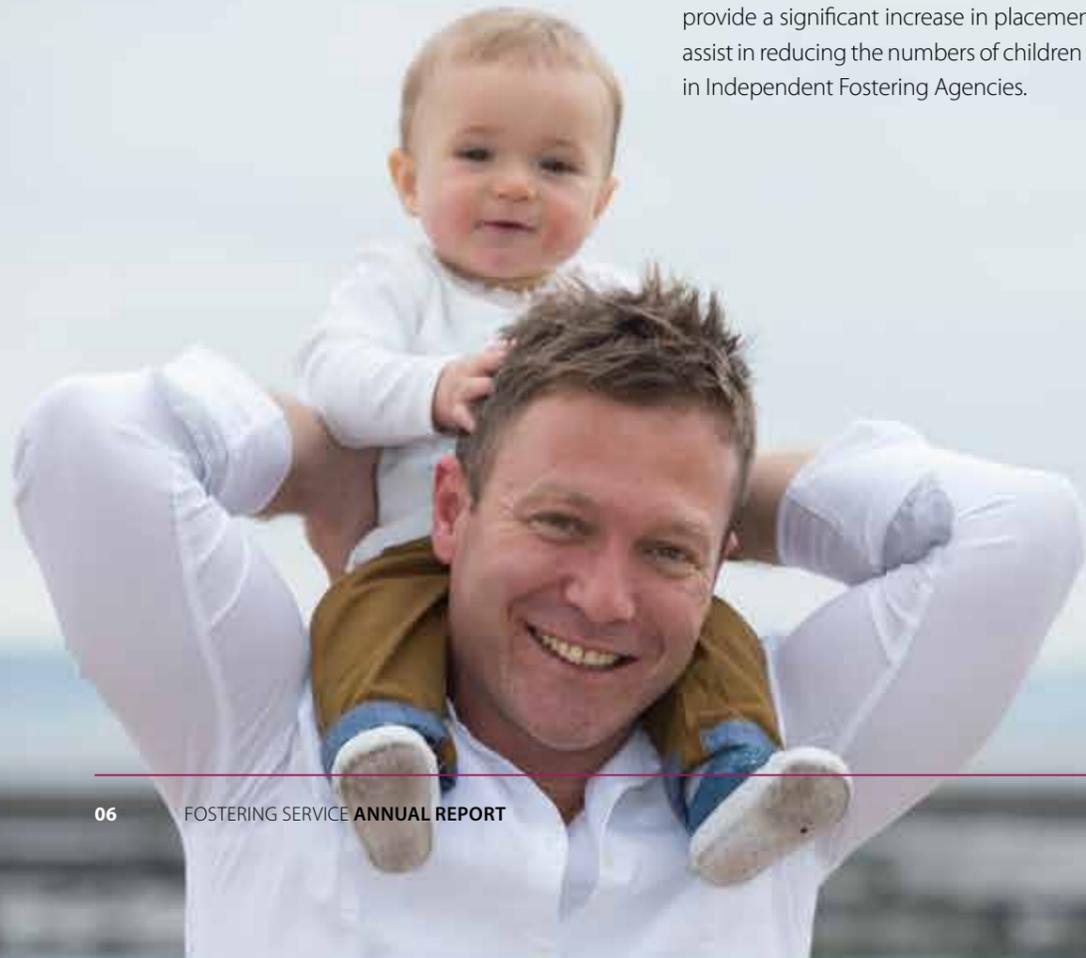
**Length of Approval and available full time placements: 2015-16**



**Length of Approval: 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16**



The Fostering Service has recruited a significant number of new foster carers in the last 5 years, with 37% (75) of fostering households having 2 years or less service with the Authority. This number also includes Connected Person carers for specific named children. We also have a cohort of very experienced foster carers, with 15% of our fostering households having over 15 years service. 3 households have been fostering for at least 30 years.



## Connected person

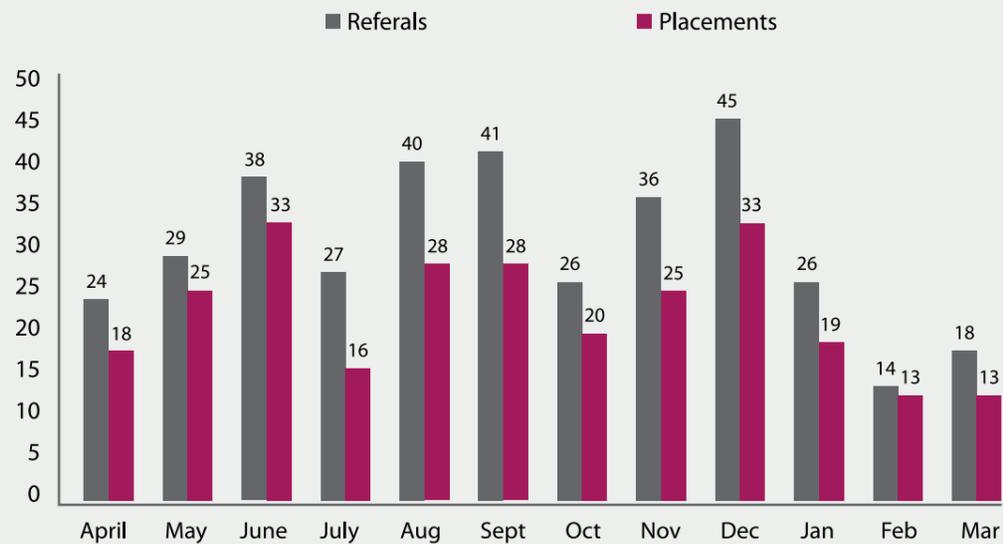
This area of work continues to increase as more children are being placed with family members, and given the tight timescales for assessments panel are monitoring these closely to ensure compliance with the regulations. To ensure compliance with regulations, two members of the team are leading on this area of work.

The service recognises that these carers are often dealing with complex family situations and have implemented special support groups for connected person carers. We have also developed strong regional links with the national support group Grandparents Plus, with two of our connected person carers being regional mentors for this group.

## Referrals for Placements

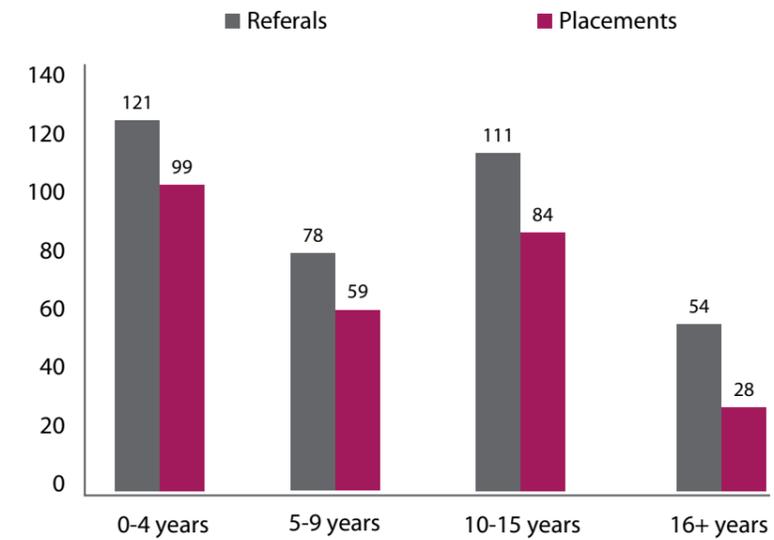
Gateshead's social work teams made 364 referrals to the Fostering Service for placements between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. This is an increase of 6% on the previous year. Of these referrals, 272 (75%) placements were eventually made and 94 (25%) were withdrawn by social workers as alternative arrangements were made for the children in question.

Number of referrals and placements 2015-16



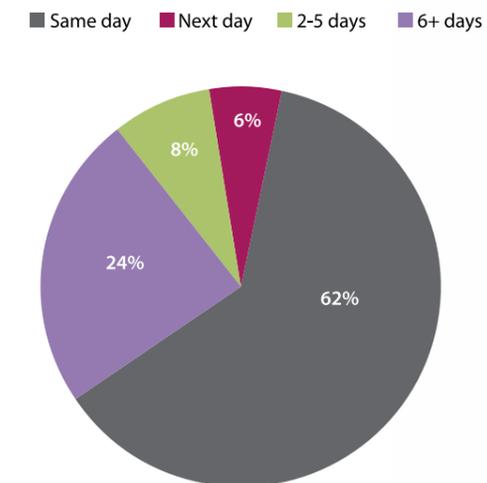
June, August, September and December saw the highest number of referrals during the year. One of the highest demands for placements during the year has been on the 10-15 years range, which continues to influence the marketing campaign to attract more carers for older children in particular teenagers.

Number of Referrals and Placement by Age Group



The majority of placement referrals from social work teams are for emergency requests where placements are needed on the day that the referral is submitted, 6% are needed for the following day and 8% are needed within 2-5 days. 24% of referrals were needed after six days.

Placement identification timescales



Over the year 42 sibling groups were referred to the Service for a total of 104 children, an increase of 35% on last year. In general requests are primarily to keep siblings together. This is often difficult to achieve given the size of sibling groups referred and has resulted in a number of sibling groups being placed in Independent Fostering placements. However, in the last year there have only been 11 sibling groups placed separately including 3 groups of 4 children and 1 group of 5 children.

SIZE OF SIBLING GROUP	NUMBER REFERRED	NUMBER OF GROUPS PLACED TOGETHER	NUMBER OF GROUPS SPLIT	TOTAL CHILDREN
2	28	27	1	56
3	9	3	6	27
4	4	1	3	16
5	1	0	1	5



## Independent Fostering Placements

Occasionally, due to the type of placements requested and the availability of our own foster carers we are unable to place children in house. In this event the Service commissions placements through external independent fostering agencies, which are more expensive than placing a child with our own foster carers.

All Independent Fostering placements are approved and monitored by the regular External Placements Panel which is chaired by Service Director - Social Work. Every effort is made to keep the use of these placements to a minimum, and also to return children to our own foster placements as soon as possible. However if there are ongoing care proceedings the Service is often directed by Court to leave the children in their placements until these proceedings are concluded.

As of 31st March 2016, Gateshead had commissioned Independent Fostering Placements for 24 children. Of the 28 new placements commissioned during the last financial year, eighteen of these placements were needed for teenagers aged 15 years and older with complex and challenging behaviour where there were no in house foster carers with the necessary skills or space to accommodate them.

Several sibling groups were also placed in Independent placements where the requirement from social workers was to keep the children together and it was not possible to do this within the Service.

However, out of the 28 new Independent Placements commissioned between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016, 18 of these also ended during same period. Targeted recruitment has continued to take place over the year in an attempt to increase the number of teenage placements Gateshead can offer and this will continue into the next financial year.

To the period 31 March 2016 Independent placements ended for a total of 36 children which helped the Service's aim of reducing Independent placements.

### REASONS FOR PLACEMENT ENDINGS:

### NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Rehabilitated Home	7
Placed with Family Members	1
Moved to Residential Placement	5
Moved to Supported Lodgings/Independent Living/Staying Put	10
Carers transferred to Gateshead Fostering	1
Moved to In-house Placement	7
Moved to Secure Accommodation	1
Moved to Alternative IFA Provision	2
Recalled to Custody	1
Admitted to Hospital	1

# Recruitment and Retention

## Recruitment Strategy

The service set a target of recruiting at least **30 new foster carer** units between April 2015 and March 2016. The plan also aimed to ensure sufficient marketing activity took place in order to increase the number of initial enquiries but also improve the conversion rate of those enquiring to becoming carers.

With such a low conversion rate of people who enquire to those who are suitable and go on to be approved foster carers the 'net' needs to be cast as widely as possible. Promotion needs to be kept generic and not look to target people to foster for specific age ranges.

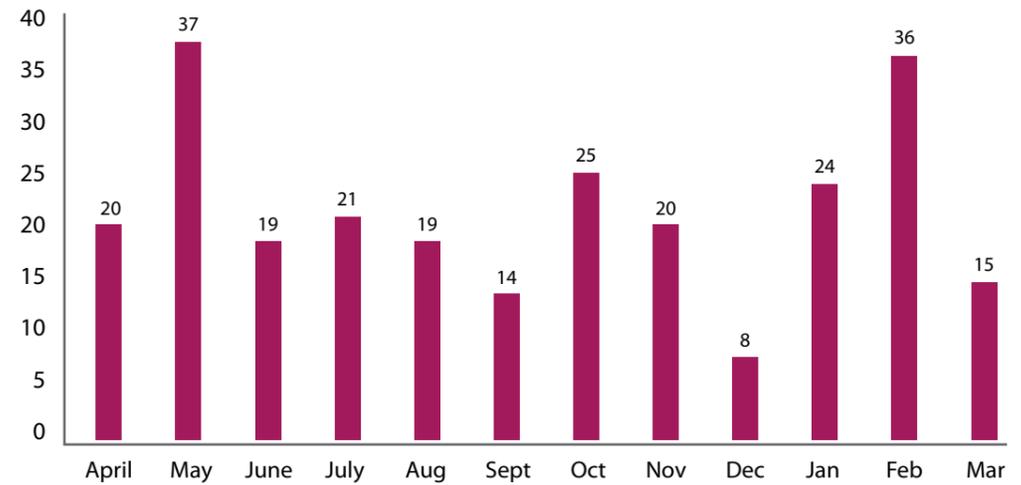
The key elements of the strategy included the following:

- Removal of the 'Information Evening Stage' of the recruitment process, so anybody successful at the telephone interview stage will be offered an initial visit. This will hopefully improve the conversion rate and speed of approval.
- Monthly follow up of people who haven't returned enquiry form.
- Career type events to be scheduled throughout the year to replace the Information Evening.

## Enquiries

In the year to 31 March 2016 the Service received a total of 258 enquiries, a decrease of 20% on the previous year. The number of fostering households approved at panel has also decreased from 41 (2014-2015) to 21 (2015-16). It is acknowledged that the service did not meet its target this year but the number of fostering households still remains slightly higher than last year.

Enquiries per month for 2015-16

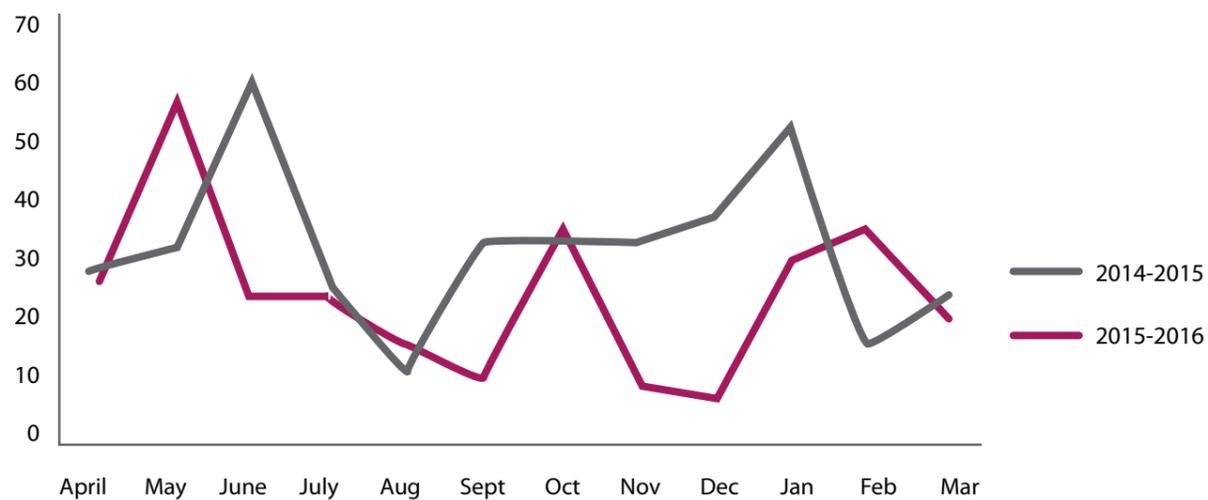


## Conversion Rate

The Local Authority Fostering Service benchmark for 2015 shows that nationally 11% of enquiries proceed to approved foster carers. The conversion rate for the service during 2015/16 has fallen to 8%. This indicates that a reduction in enquiries has resulted in a lower number of suitable applicants progressing through the system.

The graph below highlights that the recruitment approach has not performed as well as the previous year. One factor which has severely affected performance is the departure of the Marketing and Recruitment Officer; who took up a new post in November 2015. The post was subsequently deleted from the structure and the duties are now being covered by the Adoption Service's Marketing and Recruitment Officer. High level marketing activity was reduced in November and December which is reflected in the graph below.

Fostering Enquiries by month



## Application outcomes

Since introducing new monitoring systems in June 2014, the service has continued to monitor the outcomes of all enquiries. Of the 258 enquiries received in 2015-16, over half proceeded to the next stage of assessment (143/55%).

The service recognises that all enquiries need to be dealt with in a timely manner and wherever possible this should be dealt with on the day the person phones fostering. If possible potential applicants are immediately transferred to a duty worker to do the initial enquiry and there is also a back up duty worker every afternoon to help with this process.

The requirement to attend an information evening has been removed to streamline the process. This meant that potential applicants have been offered a home visit following a successful initial enquiry, thus speeding up the process.

## Skills to Foster Preparation training

Skills to Foster Preparation training for prospective foster carers is planned by the Service in advance and is held at least every 6 to 8 weeks depending on the number of prospective applicants. 38 families attended this training during the year. This is a priority area for the Service and has already been planned for the next 12 months.

## Promotional activity

Promotional activity throughout the year has been ongoing and has included the use of wider Council resources to target all Gateshead residents.

Use of Council Resources to target all Gateshead residents.

- Up to date website
- Regular use of council plasma screens
- Regular inclusion in Council News and Council Info
- Regular use of bridge banners and railing banners
- Regular poster distribution across council facilities, libraries, doctors surgeries, schools etc.
- Gateshead Now - direct email to Gateshead residents who sign up to this

## Careers Events

3 recruitment careers events were held during 2015/16 with each event being widely promoted using a range of paid for and free of charge advertising in order to maximise attendance.

- May 2015  
22 Family Units attended - 14 initial visits recommended
- October 2015  
16 family Units attended - 5 initial visits recommended (Poor attendance rate)
- February 2016  
20 Family Units attended and - 7 initial visits recommended

The service has also continued to use advertising on radio, public transport, outdoor billboards, public transport, Facebook and google adwords. The TV campaign was also rerun in January 2016 to coincide with the promotional activity surrounding the careers event in February.

## So which channels are working?

The graph below shows the channels that our enquirers have said they have seen. This information details the responses collected between April 2014 and March 2016 and therefore captures the advertising channels used during that period.

### Which of Gateshead Council's Fostering promotional materials has been seen by the enquirer?



### The top six channels cited are

- Council Website
- Bridge Banner
- Poster
- Radio Advert
- Council News
- Local Press

This data will be used to plan future marketing activity during 2016/17 and we will continue to monitor the data collected

## Motivations to foster - what have we learned?

Broad themes emerge why people choose to become foster carers and these need to be considered in planning future recruitment activity.

- Carers transferring from other agencies or authorities suggesting Gateshead Council's 'package' is attractive.
- Carers speak about their positive experiences or working with children and this desire to put these skills to better use to improve the life of a child.
- The majority of carers mention the 'timing to be right'. A significant number of carers mention thinking about fostering for years, and the time being right to do it now (whether this be a change in family or work circumstances).

## The next steps - recruitment

A plan for the year has been devised in order to maximise the use of "free of charge" marketing tools as well as deliver joint "paid for" campaigns with the adoption service, where appropriate. The marketing and recruitment officer will be evaluating the approach and aims to raise the profile of Gateshead Council's Fostering Service to ensure that we receive our market share of enquiries.

As the "careers event" approach has not produced the level of enquiries needed we have decided to run lower key "informal events" every two months to allow prospective foster carers to come and meet us and find out if fostering could be for them. Feedback from our own carers suggests that the formality of the word "career" is a little daunting so a less formal approach will be implemented.

Ultimately, this gives more opportunities for prospective foster carers to come and find out more and will hopefully lead to more foster carers being assessed and approved. An annual "Career's Style" event will be considered, depending on the success of the bi-monthly events.

We have a clear understanding of the most popular channels that our foster carers see but there is no "one size fits all" in terms of recruitment. As we have seen above, the "timing must be right" so having clear messaging across a range of different channels, which easily identify us as "Gateshead Council" will be our priority going forward.

## Retention

Retention of existing foster carers is also a high priority for the Fostering Service and foster carers are provided with extensive support and training.

Each fostering household is reviewed on an annual basis, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This process uses feedback from the foster carers, children in placement and children within the fostering family, as well as the carers' supervising social worker and social workers for children who are and who have been placed with the foster carers. This feedback is valued by the service and is used to develop and improve the service.

## Training

The service continues to develop the training offered to all approved foster carers. These include specialist subjects such as Attachment, Child Protection Awareness, Equality and Diversity, Emergency First Aid, Level 1 Food Hygiene, Life Story Work, Promoting Positive Behaviour, Recording Skills and Safer Caring Training. Full time foster carers are expected to complete these courses within the first 12 months of their approval, and Home from Home and respite carers are given 18 months to complete these. Foster carers are also encouraged to attend further training through their fostering career. These courses, as well as any refresher training they require, are identified through discussions with their supervising social worker and forms their professional development plan. This is also linked to the payment for skills criteria and levels.

Following feedback from approved foster carers the service has begun to deliver four of the mandatory training courses for people currently in the assessment process and there is an expectation of any prospective foster carer that they will have completed all four courses by the time their assessment is presented to Fostering Panel.

All foster carers under the Fostering regulations have to complete their Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster Carers within 12 months of approval. This year 26 foster carer households achieved this. Preparation training and regular workshops are provided for foster carers to help them with the information they need to be able to complete their portfolio, along with giving them practical hints and tips on gathering evidence and information.

The service also requires all foster carers on Payment for Skills level 2 or above to complete their Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce. 36 foster carers completed this during 2015-16

All of the carers who completed their Training Support & Development Standards or Diploma were presented with certificates for their achievements at the Foster Carer Awards Ceremony.

The training offered and taken up by Gateshead's carers is monitored and evaluated to ensure we are providing our carers with the skills and knowledge they need in order to support young people and help them achieve the best possible outcomes.

## Support Groups

Regular support groups for foster carers have continued to take place covering a wide range of relevant topics including Early Years, Advocacy, Sexual Exploitation, Long Term Training and Delegated Authority, with speakers regularly invited to attend. They have proven to be very successful with positive feedback from both foster carers and invited speakers.

A consultation with foster carers takes place annually to help develop the support groups and to find out what carers would like from future support groups. This information has been used by the service to shape the format and frequency of the groups. Non-attendance at support groups is also monitored by the service with foster carers being regularly reminded by their supervising social workers of the importance of attendance to their professional development.

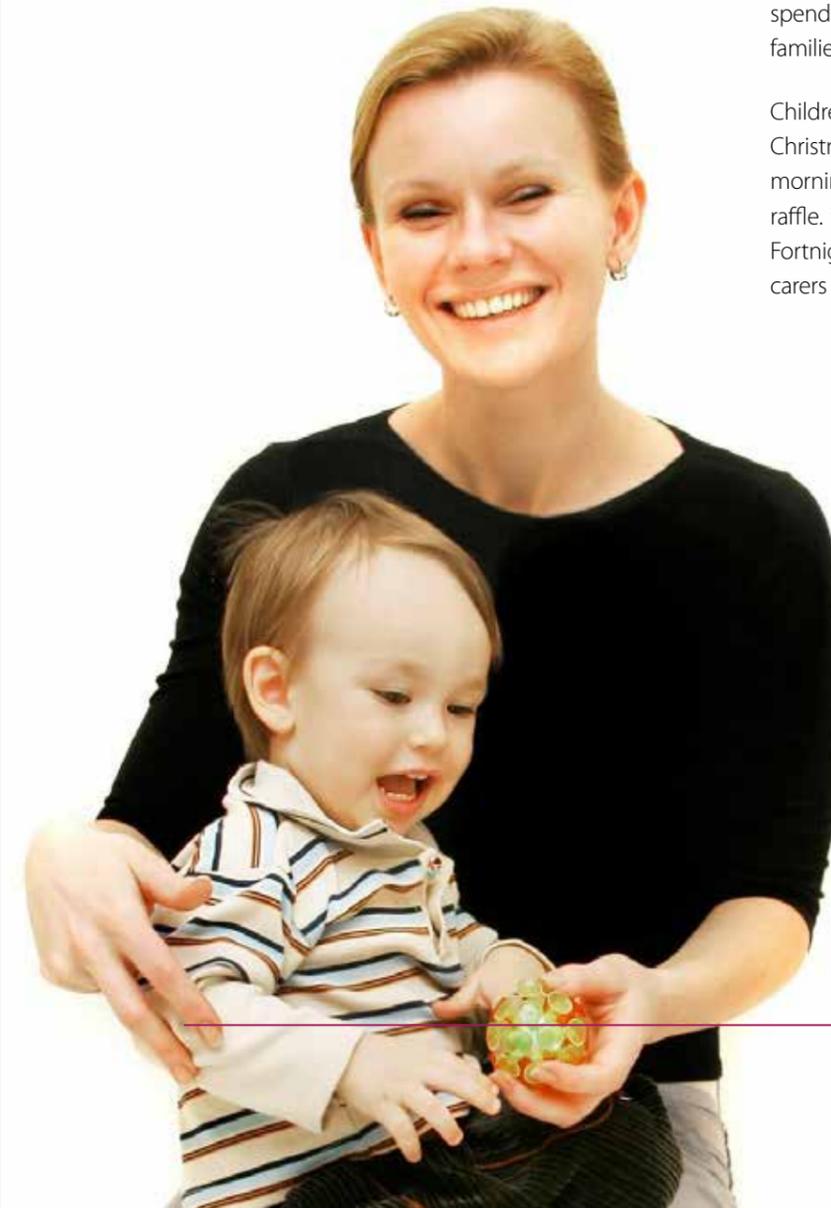
## Email updates

Regular bulletins to carers about the Service and its recruitment activity have continued throughout the year as well as updates via the Facebook page.

## Christmas Party and Summer Family Fun Day

A Family Fun Day took place in July at Cardinal Hume School. Children were able to take part in a range of activities including face painting, bouncy castles and football shoot outs, and there was the opportunity to see a range of insects and small reptiles with the 'Bug Man' and be entranced by a magician! This year there were also sessions in drumming, cheerleading, spray painting and jewellery making. Feedback from the carers and young people in attendance continued to be very positive and they welcome the opportunity to spend "quality time" with their families and fellow foster families, as well as colleagues from across the service.

Children enjoyed a visit from Santa at the annual Christmas Party, and carers met for a Christmas coffee morning, complete with mince pies and Christmas raffle. We also held a coffee morning for Foster Care Fortnight to acknowledge the excellent work foster carers do.



# Foster Carers Awards Ceremony 2016

The annual Foster Carer Awards were held on 19 April 2016, at the Lancastrian Suite in Gateshead, recognising the dedication and hard work of all of the Council's foster carers. In Gateshead there are 297 children placed in short and long term foster placements, including those children placed with relative and friend foster carers. Without our foster carers Gateshead Council would not be able to offer these children safe, nurturing family homes.

These awards allow us the opportunity to celebrate some of the fantastic work that goes on behind the scenes every day in the Fostering Service. This year's event was slightly different as it had a theme running through it: the theme was what Fostering does for the children in Gateshead... "Live in the now and prepare for the future".

This year a working group of staff and foster carers were involved in reviewing this event.

The outcomes of the working group resulted in:

- A range of new awards being introduced.
- Nomination forms being redesigned.
- Looked after children and Supervising Social Workers being able to nominate foster carers for awards.
- Foster carers giving their opinions on prizes, the programme and who would host the ceremony.
- Foster carers sourcing raffle prizes and arranging small posies for all carers as a "thank you".
- Foster carers facilitating the dance performance and helping with set up arrangements on the day.

The involvement of carers proved a valuable exercise and encouraged "ownership" of the event.

Councillor Angela Douglas formally opened the event and presented many of the awards and Councillor Alex Geddes welcomed all to the event; speaking about the commitment of foster carers and the vital role they play in the lives of our Looked After Children.

The evening saw the acknowledgement of the following:

- 26 sets of new foster carers welcomed to the service,
- 27 sets of foster carers achieving their certificates for Department of Education, Training, Support & Development Standards,
- 15 foster carers achieving a Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's workforce,
- 8 foster carers successfully completing the Bridging Units for the Level 3 Diploma, and
- Long Service awards were presented to 16 sets of foster carers for achieving their 5, 10, 15 and 20 year anniversaries.

In addition to these achievements we had one award, nominated by foster carers themselves, three awards that were nominated by colleagues and other professionals and the final award which were nominated by foster carers themselves.

These awards were

- Foster Carer Support Award - Awarded to fellow foster carers for proving peer support and advice.
- Extra Mile Award - Awarded to foster carers who regularly go above and beyond what is expected of them in delivering an exceptional standard of care. They provide a unique level of service that enhances the reputation of foster carers and Gateshead Council.
- Unsung Hero Award - Awarded to foster carers who have a sense of enthusiasm that drives them to put in extraordinary effort to deliver safe, high quality care and support. They epitomise dedication and drive and always deliver on their promises in an unassuming way. They never seek recognition and work really hard behind the scenes delivering what is needed.
- Outstanding Newcomer of the Year Award - Awarded to foster carers who have joined the organisation since 1 April 2015 and have brought a fresh perspective to the service. They show real drive, exceptional performance, enthusiasm, motivation and inspire those around them.
- Most Amazing Carer Award - We asked our looked after children to nominate their foster carer(s) for an award if they believe them to be amazing.

The evening saw two fantastic performances by looked after children and birth children of foster carers. The first performance being a contemporary dance, which was choreographed by one of our Looked After Children. The event ended on a high with a breath-taking singing performance by another of our very talented looked after young persons.

The event was inspiring for all who attended and the following quotes from children in foster care demonstrate the real difference foster carers in Gateshead make to the children in our care.

- "My foster family is one of the best things that have happened to me. They care for me, they support me and they help me. They also take you to school no matter what the weather is!"
- "Being with my foster family makes me feel warm, loved, protected and safe. I love them because they are kind helpful and joyful!"
- "My carers are amazing and make everyone smile. They never give up on me and I feel like I am part of the family."



# Fostering Panel

In broad terms the role of the Fostering Panel provides an independent perspective on the business of the Fostering Service, informed by a range of expertise to monitor and quality assure social work practice in the best interests of children and young people in foster care. It provides recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker that accurately reflects the facts of the cases presented.

There is a need for Fostering Services to maintain a Central List of panel members consisting of a multidisciplinary membership of experienced professionals. No business can be conducted by panel unless at least the following people are present:

The Chair or one of the Vice-Chairs

One member who is a social worker (who may or may not be employed by the Fostering Service) with at least 3 years relevant post-qualifying experience

Three other members from the Central List

At least one member of the panel must be independent (this can be the Chair or Vice-Chair) - Regulation 24 (1)

**The UK National Standards for Foster Care 2011 (14.8) recommends that:**

*"...the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for"*

Gateshead's fostering service continues to operate two panels per month, with membership being made up from the central list. Each panel has a consistent membership and is chaired by the same panel chair to ensure consistency and continuity when dealing with all panel business.

All panel members have an annual panel review, where they are consulted about their views, discuss how they are developing their role on panel, identify any areas of development and make suggestions on how panel can be improved. The review is carried out by Sue Holton - panel chair and Jill Little - agency advisor.

All new Panel members are given induction training, which is held over a half day and covers Panel's statutory function and business as well as the expectations of Panel members. This ensures people are fully aware of the legislation relating to panel, the function and running of panel and the expectations on panel members. People who have attended this training have given positive feedback and feel that it has helped them in their role as a panel member.

Training is also provided to all Panel members on a bi-annual basis. This year, the training has primarily focused on the implementation of the new Regulations, the Form F assessment process and analysis, Foster Carer Review paperwork and the long term matching process.

Following the retirement of Frances Powell in April 2015, new Service Director Deborah Patterson was appointed as Agency Decision Maker. Deborah will be leaving the authority at the beginning of the new financial year and an interim Agency Decision Maker will be appointed to cover.

The panel met twenty two times during the year to meet the increasing needs of the service.

ACTIVITY	2015-16
Form F assessments	21
Connected person	5
De-registrations of foster carers	14
De-registrations of connected persons	11
Change to approval category	9
Foster carer reviews	65
Identification of children needing long term foster care	6
Matching children and carers	24



## Number of placements

The Service has acquired 21 new sets of non-connected person foster carers who can potentially offer up to 34 full time placements, if siblings can share a room. Panel have been flexible with their approval categories in relation to the age range and have tried to approve people up to the age of 18 if they are in agreement with this. They have recommended preferences in relation to the age range rather than being specific, which ensures carers do not need to come back to panel if they take a slightly older or younger child than their preference. In addition, 5 new sets of connected person foster carers were approved throughout the year, for a total of 5 children.

## De-registrations

The 'Local Authority Fostering Services in England performance benchmark report 2013/14' shows that nationally 12% of foster carers left their service. In Gateshead 25 sets of foster carers were de-registered at panel, equating to 13%, which is roughly equivalent to this figure. The number of de-registrations in Gateshead has decreased significantly since the last financial year.

## Panel Feedback Forms

The agency has implemented feedback forms for everyone attending panel. This includes all social workers, prospective foster carers and approved foster carers. This feedback is monitored by the Fostering Team Manager and used to improve panel. The feedback forms have largely identified that people attending panel have a positive experience, they feel that they are made to feel welcome and the questions they are asked are relevant.

REASON	NUMBER
Resignation	7
Retirement	1
Change of personal circumstances e.g. return to work, new partner	2
Change in family circumstances e.g. birth of child, adopted child	2
Allegations/concerns	2
Transferred to Supported Lodgings/Shared lives/staying put	0
Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order for carer	5
Connected person – rehabilitation home	2
Impact on Family/Unable to manage fostering task	3
Connected person – child turned 18 years old	1



## Service Development

In addition to working to implement any proposed new governmental reforms to fostering practice, the key areas for development within the Fostering service are:

- To continue to develop the Staying Put scheme which allows and supports young people aged 18 and over to remain in their fostering placements.
- To work towards achieving targets for recruiting carers, with the aim being a minimum of 30 fostering households each financial year.
- To increase the number of foster carers willing to take complex teenage placement.
- To develop additional support and training for carers considering taking complex teenagers.
- To ensure that the recruitment strategy is robust and that there is evidence that we are providing a choice of appropriate placements for all children.
- To ensure that placement stability is improved and achieved.
- Continued reduction of Independent Fostering Placements.
- To continue to monitor the Fostering Service and evaluate all activities to ensure that the best performance and outcomes possible are achieved.

