

Minutes

21 March 2023 | 10am- 12.30pm

Present:

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Foster Carer, member of FCAC	(JAB)
Hanan Al-Najjar	Foster Carer, co-chair of FCAC	(HAN)
Linda Briheim-Crookall	Coram Voice	(LBC)
Sarah Carter	Essex County Council	(SC)
Jacqueline Cassidy	The Fostering Network	(JC)
Lucy Croxton	Together Trust	(LC)
Cara Jones	Foster Carer, co-chair of FCAC	(CJ)
Alitha Lee-Townsend	Achieving for Children	(ALT)
Vivian Okeze-Tirado	West Sussex County Council	(VO)
Charmaine Orchard	Expert by experience	(CO) (chair)
Claire Rogers	Tree House Care	(CR)
Elizabeth Ross	AFKA Scotland	(ER)
Steffi Roth	Brighter Futures for Children	(SR)
Liz Spaven	Newcastle	(LS)
Nicola Smith	Barnardo's	(NC)
Sarah Thomas	The Fostering Network	(ST) (vice)
Tony Turner	The Fostering Team	(TT)
Ruth Willetts	Foster Talk	(RW)

In Attendance:

James Bury	CoramBAAF (CB)	(JB)
Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF (CB)	(GC) (minutes)
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF (CB)	(EF)
John Simmonds	CoramBAAF (CB)	(JS)

Apologies:

Sam Frith-Jones	AFA Cymru	(SFJ)
Nazeema Gill	Foster Carer, member of FCAC	(NG)
Angie Gillies	AFKA Scotland	(AG)
Sarah McEnhill	The Fostering Network	(SME)
Rebecca Olayinka	Expert by experience	(RO)
Matt Taylor-Roberts	Proud 2 B Parents	(MTR)



1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and initiated a round of introductions.
- 1.2 Following the election earlier in the year, it was noted this was CO's first meeting as Chair and ST's first meeting as Vice Chair.

2. CARE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

- 2.1 EF presented the DfE slides on the recently published government implementation strategy, released in response to the care review. EF summarised the key points relating to fostering, with particular focus on Pillar 4- 'Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care.' Members recognised that many details of the implementation are not yet clear.
- 2.2 JB shared the eight consultation questions, which organisations can respond to before 11th May 2023. CoramBAAF will be submitting a response that will take advisory committee and practice forum members' views into account.
 1. Overall, to what extent do you agree that the 6 key missions are the right ones to address the challenges in the system?
 2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a care experienced person would want to be able to form a lifelong bond with another person?
 3. What would you see as the advantage or disadvantage of formally recognising a lifelong bond in law?
 4. What support is needed to set up and make a success of Regional Care Cooperatives?
 5. Do you have any additional suggestions on improving planning, commissioning and boosting the available number of places to live for children in care?
 6. Are there changes you think would be helpful to make to the existing corporate parenting principles?
 7. Which bodies, organisations or sectors do you think should be in scope for the extension of the corporate parenting principles- and why?
 8. Do you have any further feedback on the proposals made in the 6 missions of this chapter?
- 2.3 JC is involved with the retention part of the Mockingbird Model and explained that North East funding has been allocated in two parts. Firstly, to bringing 12 local authorities together to look at recruitment and activity and secondly to the retention strategy (i.e. Mockingbird). JC noted these 12 local authorities already have Mockingbird Models in place, so are looking at expansion and development with the support of The Fostering Network. Practitioners recognise that, although Mockingbird works brilliantly for many families, it is not an effective solution for everybody. DfE have an allocated sum of money that needs to be spent within two years and Mockingbird is seen as a tried and tested evidence-based method that can be rolled out efficiently. The term 'path



finder' rather than 'pilot' has been chosen to emphasise they not testing something new, but rather exploring potential obstacles in growing an existing model.

- 2.4 Newcastle City Council is one of the 12 Mockingbird local authorities. LS noted Mockingbird is at different stages of development within each of these 12 areas. Following yesterday's task and finish group meeting, LS is to be part of an upcoming project board meeting so can provide this committee with updates moving forward.
- 2.5 JS acknowledged the huge investment in Regional Adoption Agencies. DfE and the fostering sector could learn from the benefits, complexities and challenges of RAAs. NS agreed and noted Barnardo's met with DfE to raise significant concerns about the difficulties faced with RAAs and the risks of these being repeated with Regional Care Cooperatives. NS felt this message has not been successfully delivered. SC agreed any separating out of placement services from children's social work would inevitably create unnecessary barriers and risks, as seen with RAAs.

3. BREAKOUT GROUPS AND FEEDBACK DISCUSSION

- 3.1 Members broke out into four groups to discuss the implementation strategy and fed back key points.
- 3.2 *Lifelong Legal Bond*- Members discussed how young people may or may not want lifelong legal bonds with their carers and the potential impact of legal orders on recruitment and retention of foster carers. Practitioners have a professional responsibility towards the legalities and logistics of foster carers continuing to support care leavers. Members wanted more context from DfE regarding where the idea for lifelong links came from, due to concerns around potential issues around relationship legislation. Many foster cares wish to keep connections with children but can't, so clarity is needed around what this legal bond means and how permanency plans fit into this.
- 3.3 *Regional Care Cooperatives*- Members reiterated the challenges faced with Regional Adoption Agencies and the risks of repeating these issues with RCCs. There were concerns the sector was not being listened to on this point. ST reflected on the significant issues with the Welsh Children's Commissioning Consortium, which covers all 22 local authorities in Wales. The purpose of this commissioning tier was to increase foster care capacity in Wales for Welsh children. However, more foster carers in Wales are now caring for children from England than were doing so 12 years ago before this tier was introduced.
- 3.4 *Recruitment and Retention*- members raised concerns about government focus being on recruitment, when word-of-mouth is the main recruitment method for foster carers. Focus needs to be on the conditions in which existing foster carers are currently working, particularly financial conditions, to encourage them to recommend fostering to others. Suggested actions, such as changes to the tax allowance, are not good enough. Foster carer allowances are too low for many to afford fostering and most fostering households do not reach the threshold for the tax changes.



- 3.5 *Commissioning*- Members recognised commissioning could generate new capacity, but has limitations unless the numbers of good quality homes and foster carers can be increased.
- 3.6 *Pillar 4*- JS recognised the novelty of a government strategy being driven by love, even though this is the key to family relationships. Further discussions should be had on the meaning of love within fostering.

4. BOOKTRUST PRESENTATION

- 4.1 BookTrust presented an overview of their organisation. They are the UK's largest children's reading charity, supporting cared for children in local authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Their Letterbox Club delivers books to children who are looked-after, previously looked after or on the edge of care.
- 4.2 Members were invited to contact Arwenna at arwenna.davis@booktrust.org.uk if interested in further discussion on this.

5. EACH & EVERY CHILD TOOLKIT

- 5.1 Last year, members requested that a language and terminology discussion be added to each meeting agenda. Each & Every Child are a Scottish organisation looking at language use within children's social care. ST shared the link to their terminology toolkit: [The Toolkit | Each & Every Child \(eachandeverychild.co.uk\)](https://www.eachandeverychild.co.uk)
- 5.2 CoramBAAF will invite Each & Every Child to a future meeting.

6. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- 6.1 *The Black Care Experience Charter*- EF gave an overview of The Black Care Experience Conference which took place in February. A video recording of the event is now available to watch on YouTube. There was a work force panel in the morning and a care experienced panel in the afternoon. EF summarised the key points of the [Black Care Experience Charter](#), which was launched at the conference. Organisations are invited to sign up to at least 1 of the 8 commitments, pledging to improve experiences of black children and young people in and after leaving care.
- 6.2 VO sat on the conference workforce panel and emphasised the value of learning from care experienced people. VO had a positive response to their social media posts about the event, showing practitioners are keen to develop their knowledge in this area. Members discussed how the charter could be promoted within different local authorities and how these conversations could be expanded to Wales and Scotland.
- 6.3 *Proud 2 B Parents*- In December 2022, CoramBAAF hosted a very successful webinar with Proud 2 B Parents on supporting and recruiting LGBTQ+ foster carers. A follow up webinar on 16 May 2023 will focus on micro-aggressions and unconscious biases experienced by LGBTQ+ foster carers. Following the presentation, a panel of foster carers from CoramBAAF Foster Carers



Advisory Committee will be answering questions from attendees. Past webinar recordings are available in the CoramBAAF website members' area.

7. PROMISING PRACTICE- CARE EXPERIENCED AS A PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC

- 7.1 One Care Review recommendation not picked up by government was making care experienced a protected characteristic. Terry Galloway is campaigning to encourage local authorities across the country to commit to making care experienced a protected characteristic in their area. Members were shown a video of Terry being interviewed on ITV News: [Terry ITV Video - YouTube](#)
- 7.2 CO suggested this would have a positive impact on the stigma surrounding care experienced people, by raising awareness and improving education around the challenges they face. Training on other protected characteristics is now mandatory in most organisations. The experts by experience panel for the Care Review discussed how this would enable certain services (mental health, housing etc.) to be held accountable for their treatment of care experienced people.
- 7.3 Members discussed Terry's campaign and the following points were raised:
- Concerns around the potential increase in stigma
 - The need for clarity on what making care experienced a protected characteristic is supposed to achieve for young people and adults
 - The need to consult with care experienced people to gauge their feeling on this. A Coram Voice consultation with young people found 60% thought it was a good idea, with the rest worrying about potential negative impacts of being identified as care experienced.
 - A recent incident on Twitter was raised, where a social worker was outed as care experienced by their manager to the rest of the team. This has implications for professional relationships.
 - Interest in how local authorities who have adopted this policy are going about implementing it.
 - Overall, most members thought this sounded like a good idea, but were unsure of the details and wary of potential repercussions.
- 7.4 EF suggested some reservations expressed by members reflected those raised before other protected characteristics became embedded in legislation. Regarding stigma, care experienced people would be given the option to disclose their identity or not, in order to access certain benefits or services. There would be no expectation that everyone reveal their care experienced status wherever they go, but enabling that choice must surely be a good thing.
- 7.5 LC supported the initial set up of Terry's campaign and their policy team has been following its progress with interest. They understand the motivations behind the campaign and view it as a positive development, but remain unsure of the difference in practice between protected characteristics and corporate parenting, which the government seems to favor. LC noted the key to accessing support is implementation. Protected characteristics won't positively impact people unless the local authority follows through with actions. Making disability a protected characteristic has given people a basis on which to challenge poor services or treatment, so it is worthwhile pursuing for that reason alone. ST noted that protected characteristics give a legal standing that corporate parenting does not. It is designed to combat stigma and provide



protection when necessary. Many care experienced people involved in the campaign feel very strongly about this.

8. CORAMBAAF POLICY UPDATES

- 8.1 *Form F Revisions Group*- Meetings to revise the CoramBAAF Form F have begun. EF is still looking for organisations (both local authorities and independents) to volunteer to trial the new form once the first draft is complete. Members were invited to contact EF and/or GC to express their interest in doing this.
- 8.2 *Hunt's budget tax relief*- The government has increased tax relief for Foster Carers, Kinship Carers, staying put and shared lives carers. This is the first amendment made since 2005 and the government has committed to continuing to adjust it in line with future inflation rates. Members were asked whether they viewed this as a positive development or not.
- 8.3 CJ recognised most foster carers would not meet the threshold required to benefit. However, this announcement has provided an opportunity to discuss foster carer allowances as the government has inadvertently revealed how much they think foster carers are worth. ST reported that, because of allowance rates, only 5% of foster carers across the 22 Welsh local authorities would benefit from the tax relief increase.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 9.1 CoramBAAF will contact members post meeting to gauge interest in holding an in person meeting in July.

Date of next meeting: 4 July 2023