

# Minutes

**7 November 2023 | 10am - 12.30pm**

## Present

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Foster carer – LA	JAB
Hanan Al-Najjar	Foster carer – LA	HAN
Sally Barnett	South Coast Fostering	SB
Linda Briheim-Crookall	Coram Voice	LBC
Sarah Carter	Essex	SC
Jacqueline Cassidy	The Fostering Network	JC
Pal Jandu	Camden	PJ
Sam Frith-Jones	AFKA Cymru	SFJ
Nazeema Gill	Foster carer – IFA	NG
Angie Gillies	AFKA Scotland	AG
Cara Jones	Foster carer – IFA	CJ
Charmaine Orchard	Konnected	CO (chair)
Rebekah Pierre	BASW	RP
Claire Rogers	Treehouse Care	CR
Steffi Roth	Brighter Futures	SR
Liz Spaven	Newcastle LA	LS
Matt Taylor-Roberts	Proud 2B Parents	MTR
Sarah Thomas	The Fostering Network	ST (vice chair)
Ruth Willetts	FosterTalk	RW

## In attendance

Andrew Carter	Lambeth	AC
Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF	GC
James Bury	CoramBAAF	JB
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF	EF
Terry Galloway	Nottingham	TG
Daniel Kenny	Sunderland	DK
Claire O'Hara	Each and Every Child	COH

## Apologies

Florence Chiwetu	BMEP Advisory Committee	FC
Anthony Turner	The Fostering Team	AT



## 1. Welcome and introductions

1.1 CO welcomed members to the meeting and introductions were made.

## 2. Care Experienced as a protected characteristic

2.1 TG gave a presentation on the origins and progress of his campaign to get care experience recognised as a protected characteristic by individual local authorities throughout the UK, following the government's decision not to implement this. Key points made during this presentation were as follows:

- TG is himself care experienced, with first-hand knowledge of how the care system can negatively impact people's lives. TG reflected that outcomes for young people have not changed much since then.
  - Care Experienced individuals are 70% more likely to die pre-maturely than the general population.
  - Children and Social Work Act 2017 – brought in corporate parenting for the first time and put it on district councils who had no understanding of care experience. This led to TG instigating the first joint local offer for care leavers in England (Nottinghamshire.) Publicity around this local offer was utilised as a means of raising awareness and reducing stigma.
  - The Care Review was used as a catalyst for creating other changes, before the official outcome was known.
  - Key recommendations from the Care Review included the extension of corporate parenting and making care experience a protected characteristic. Before the government declined to implement this, TG set up a campaign encouraging individual councils to adopt this voluntarily. In July 2022, Cumberland Council became the first to pass the notion.
  - As of November 2023, 64 councils across the UK have passed care experienced as a protected characteristic (with around 32% of the UK population living in one of these areas).
  - TG recognises the campaign will not have the desired impact until embedded into legislation. In the meantime, by looking into the socioeconomic costs, the aim is to support councils make impactful policy changes. TG illustrated a 7-year timeline, where providing the right support could produce a net saving of £195,480 per year.
  - TG emphasised the need for people/industries outside of the 'care system bubble', who have different priorities, to understand what is needed. By looking through the 'care experienced lens' they can help reduce stigma. Care experience as a protected characteristic is one way of encouraging this.
- 2.2 AC spoke to Lambeth Council's experience of adopting care experience as a protected characteristic. He emphasised the need for councils to be bold in taking that first step and not overcomplicate it. Draft models are available for councils who want to change policies. AC acknowledged how care leaver support, though far from perfect, has significantly improved over the last few years; particularly the extension of support to under 25. AC noted the continuing effect of stigma and people being blamed for having been in care. Appropriate provisions must be available throughout life. The intersectionality of protected characteristics must also be acknowledged, so care experience is not considered in isolation.
- 2.3 As a foster carer, CJ struggles with navigating the transition from child to adult services which in her experience do not work together. TG believes a protected characteristic could help the



systems to communicate and save money. AC noted transition provisions are one factor that Ofsted inspect against.

- 2.4 NG suggested local authorities give every child coming into care rights to provisions (such as access to private mental health services and other early interventions) so that issues facing care leavers are minimised. Current services are reactive as opposed to pro-active.
- 2.5 The current gap in care experience statistics was recognised.
- 2.6 TG feels the campaign is still unable to call out individual councils for not passing the motion, but that this can be done once critical mass is reached and examples effective implementation by other councils can be given.
- 2.7 ST acknowledged the gap in participating Welsh councils. Any members who wish to take this forward with their own councils should contact local politicians and care experienced groups. TG can be reached via social media if additional support is required: [terry@ngalloway.co.uk](mailto:terry@ngalloway.co.uk), 07838317574, @terrygalloway (Twitter)

### **3. Together for Children North East Pathfinder – project update**

- 3.1 DK (manager of the fostering service in Sunderland) provided an update on the [Foster with North East](#) pathfinder. This is the UK's first foster care recruitment regional support hub, which launched six weeks ago. It is a collaboration between 12 local authorities, working closely with the Department for Education as part of 'Stable Homes, Built on Love.'
- 3.2 Three main aims revolve around carer recruitment, retention and marketing and communications strategy. Retention will be addressed by the Mockingbird model. Funding is currently available until end of March 2024.
- 3.3 Fostering support hubs receive all enquiries from across the region. Buddy schemes and Skills to Foster training is also provided, before the local authority assessment begins. This approach aims to drive the conversion of enquiry, into assessment, into approval. Enquiries are currently received by experienced fostering social workers from across the region.
- 3.4 CJ stated that foster carers do not seem to view Mockingbird as a solution to retention. DK recognised the issue is complex, however Mockingbird is where the DfE funding is going. JC confirmed the Fostering Network do not view Mockingbird as the answer to all problems, but that it does have an evidence base behind it.

***Action: DK to be invited to a future meeting next year to provide further updates.***

### **4. Each and Every Child Language Toolkit**

- 4.1 [Each and Every Child](#) is a Scottish organisation, funded through The Robertson Trust, working to reduce stigma and discrimination faced by care experienced children and families. COH, Programme Director, presented an overview of their background, aims and resources.
- 4.2 Research into public attitudes towards care experience showed that people do care about children, but cannot transfer that care into active participation in the movement for change. Each and Every Child aims to support people in becoming part of the solution through [eight recommendations](#). Recommendations were developed with their '[Voices of Experience](#)' group and tests on the public show they work.



- 4.3 COH explained the concept of ‘Framing’, which involves making choices about language and mindset when talking about care experience. This helps raise public awareness that they are part of the problem, but also part of the solution. The effects of framing are evidenced by previous campaigns, such as ‘Love is Love’ in Australia and the UK campaign to stop smoking in public places.
- 4.4 COH highlighted three main challenges:
- Public perception that care experienced children are permanently ‘damaged’, facilitated by the lack of support for early interventions.
  - The care system is viewed as ‘broken’, cold, dysfunctional and unable to provide love and support.
  - Public perception that children come into care due to poor parenting or bad choices, therefore no amount of support will be sufficient. There is no wider understanding of factors such as poverty, whilst older children are blamed for their ‘bad’ behaviour.
- 4.5 As a foster carer, COH has altered how she writes about her young people to reflect these eight recommendations, recognising the need to be mindful of what they may read in the future.
- 4.6 LBC recognised how fundraising applications are often deficit based. COH recommended the NSPCC Full Stop report as an example of a successfully framed campaign that was simultaneously hard hitting and research based, whilst also portraying the wider context.

## 5. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 5.1 Members provided feedback on Black History Month and Inclusivity Week activities in their areas.
- 5.2 CoramBAAF are planning two events for next year on black boys and black girls in care. Issues explored will include adultification and how children’s needs are not being met, e.g. hair care, skin care, culture and identity. The [EDI page](#) on CoramBAAF’s website has also been updated.
- 5.3 SB’s organisation sent an email every day in October, to all staff and all foster families, about a different person in history who faced discrimination before achieving success. A different quiz question was also sent out every day, with the first correct answer receiving a prize. Additionally, a heritage day was organised during half term to celebrate cultures of all foster families.

## 6. Any Other Business

- 6.1 EF updated members on the progress of Form F.

**Action: GC to add the new Form F to the next meeting agenda.**

**Date of next meeting: 19 March 2024**