

# Minutes

**10 July 2024 | 10.00am – 12.30pm**

*Chair: Cara Jones and Steven O'Reilly*

## Present

Hanan Al-Najjar	Waltham Forest	HAN
Dawn Elliot	North Yorkshire	DE
Nazeema Gill	Homefinding Fostering Agency	NG
Cara Jones	Chrysalis Consortium	CJ (co-chair)
Nicky Lockett	West Midlands	NL
Steven O'Reilly	TACT Care	SOR
Sam Penny	Devon	SP
Jennifer Roy	Haringey	JR
Rebecca Pacy	Time Out (Sussex)	RP
Melanie Stubbs	Shropshire	MS
Fiona Trewartha	East Riding	FT

## In attendance

James Bury	CoramBAAF	JB
Georgina Coope	CoramBAAF	GC

## Apologies

Jenny Alexander-Brown	Nottingham	JAB
Adam Dalal	Blackburn and Darwen	AD
Emma Fincham	CoramBAAF	EF
Catherine Lucas-Smith	Surrey	CLS
Alastair Scott-McKinley	Northern Ireland (West Region)	ASM

## 1. Welcome, minutes from the last meeting and matters arising

- 1.1 CJ welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced SOR as the new co-chair.
- 1.2 The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the last meeting. Members can email GC with any amendments.
- 1.3 The first meeting of the Foster Carers Subgroup Committee is set for 16 July to begin discussions on two-carer households. The Zoom link has been circulated and all are welcome to attend. SOR shared some of the context behind this subgroup.

## 2. Introductory warm up

2.1 CJ initiated a round of introductions, where members shared their experiences of LGBTQ+ support within their organisations. Examples included:

### What is working?

- Support for LGBTQ+ children in care
- Organised trips to Pride events
- Promotion and acceptance of LGBTQ+ adopters
- Training courses for foster carers supporting young people
- Newsletters including support for LGBTQ+ community
- Skills to Foster trainers and social workers with personal LGBTQ+ experiences
- Availability of 1-2-1 mentoring
- Agency culture of respect, acceptance and allyship
- LGBTQ+ support groups
- Fostering agency presence at Pride events/ active recruitment
- Providing memberships to organisations such as New Family Social

### What is not working?

- Lack of representation for LGBTQ+ foster carers
- Lack of promotion and resources for LGBTQ+ foster carers by agencies
- Area inconsistencies in diversity of adopters and foster carers
- Limited in-house support regarding EDI beyond compulsory training courses
- Performative marketing
- Matching LGBTQ+ carers and misconceptions around their capabilities

2.2 JB shared some relevant resources:

- [New Family Social - 1 in 5 adoptions in England to same-sex couples \[20 November, 2023\]](#)
- [LYPSA PRACTICE BRIEFING \(birmingham.ac.uk\)](#)

## 3. Equality, diversity and inclusion: LGBTQ+ fostering

3.1 The recently published '[Just Like Us](#)' report was used to introduce a discussion on LGBTQ+ parents and carers. SOR highlighted some key findings and statistics. Members thought about how the report recommendations could be applied to fostering.

3.2 There are prospective carers coming to panel who are unwilling to fully support LGBTQ+ young people, due to their strong beliefs. Members questioned the balance between respecting the religious identities of foster carers and the need to fully support young people, due to both being protected characteristics. Changes to training and resources, such as the Form F, could be made to address this. It was acknowledged that prejudice and discrimination often stems from a lack of education and awareness.

3.3 HAN recognised that many young people in care have already experienced trauma relating to their LGBTQ+ identity, therefore foster care should be an escape from that. Strong religious views can co-exist with an attitude of acceptance and inclusivity and the child should come first.

However, the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ foster carers must also be considered when being matched with young people with discriminatory views.

- 3.4 RP recognised the naivety of foster carers not wanting a certain ‘type’ of child, when not all young people have an awareness of their identity when first coming into care. Matching can’t always be relied upon, as identities change over time. Children should always be treated with love and respect, regardless of a carer’s personal views. However, it is vital that prospective foster carers can discuss their identities and beliefs early on in the assessment.

**Action: CoramBAAF to ask DfE about plans regarding implementation of recommendations and to identify someone who can talk to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools.**

#### **4. Foster Wiki report: how can we work together?**

- 4.1 CJ acknowledged the discomfort of an ‘us against them’ attitude amongst foster carers and fostering professionals. The recent report by Foster Wiki has highlighted some animosity towards certain organisations, when both sides are fighting for the same things. Conflicts between IFAs and LAs have been addressed at previous committee meetings, where foster carers are seemingly pitted against each other. This attitude is a barrier to creating positive change for everyone.
- 4.2 SOR noted how the key issues identified by Foster Wiki are the same issues already recognised by professional bodies (DfE, Coram, The Fostering Network etc.) many of which have been discussed by this committee previously. This highlights how the collective concerns of foster carers match those of practitioners, but collaboration is not always two-way.
- 4.3 Foster carers feel let down by fostering services and like they are not listened to, resulting in burnout and apathy. This has a major impact on retention.
- 4.4 It was acknowledged that organisations such as CoramBAAF and The Fostering Network directly support local authorities, therefore cannot be wholly independent. JB recognised the value of this committee in CoramBAAF’s policy work and the importance of hearing personal experiences. JB also noted how closely foster carers’ feelings reflect those of social workers. Significant repair work is required across social services, for children and for adults.
- 4.5 NG emphasised the importance of having as many voices as possible asking for the same things, especially in regards to basic rights of foster carers. However, these voices also need to work together rather than in parallel. Lack of professional status for foster carers often prevents this. HAN felt carers were getting closer to achieving professional status, but that this must come from central government. Pensions and paid leave should also be standard. Foster carers also lack self-employment benefits, such as powers of negotiation, which leads to inconsistencies in how carers are treated.
- 4.6 CoramBAAF are committed to placing this committee in positions where they can communicate with people in power.

#### **5. Language – next meeting prep**

- 5.1 In the chat, members were asked to share examples of language (words or phrases) that they either dislike or think should be kept. Examples shared included:
- Respite – family time, short break
  - LAC/CLAR/CIC review – *\*Insert name\**’s review meeting

- Placement/Placement team – Family finder/ Homefinding
- Contact
- Section 20 references
- ‘Just a carer’

5.2 TACT are meeting at the same time as this committee to discuss ‘beyond language that cares’.

***Action: Language to be included on the next meeting agenda.***

## **6. Any other business**

6.1 MS shared their findings regarding indemnity insurance. The issue was identified as being when foster carers leave children with people who are not registered foster carers. In these cases, insurance would not cover them should allegations be made.

***Date of next meeting: 9 October 2024***