

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
31st July 2008

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
FOSTERING SERVICE – ANNUAL
REPORT FOR 2007 - 2008

**MIKE CARR - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN FAMILIES
& LEARNING**

**GILL ROLLINGS – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with information about the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service during the year 2007/8 and plans for the year 2008/9. The report also seeks formal approval for the Statement of Purpose for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2008/9 and the Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2008/9.

BACKGROUND

2. The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services were brought into force on 1st April 2002. One of the requirements of the Regulations and National Minimum Standards is that each fostering service should produce a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide to the Fostering Service. There are clear guidelines about what should be included in these documents. The Regulations also require that, in the case of a local authority, the Statement of Purpose is formally approved by elected members and that it is reviewed, updated and modified at least annually.

3. In previous years, the Fostering Service used to produce an annual report which was a separate document. However there were always several areas where the Statement of Purpose and the Annual Report contained the same material and in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, it was agreed last year that in future the annual report will take the form of a Committee Report rather than a stand-alone document.

ACTIVITY OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE DURING 2007/8

4. A summary of the main areas of activity is as follows:

Number of enquires received	193
Number of requests for initial visits	54
Number of applications	4
Number of foster carers approved	6
Number of foster carers de-registered	9
Total number of approved foster carers on 31 st March 2007	96
Number of children in foster care on 31 st March 2007	128
Number of children whose long-term fostering plans were approved	9
Number of children matched with long-term foster carers	8

5. Staff shortages and structural changes have affected the Fostering Service during the year. In September 07 the Adoption Team Manager left the service and following her departure, the Service Manager carried out a review of the structure of the whole of the Family Placement Service. The result was to create an additional post at Senior Practitioner level so that, instead of one Senior Practitioner being shared between the Adoption Team and the Fostering Team, each team has its own Senior Practitioner who is responsible to the Family Placement Manager. The Senior Practitioner supervises the team members as well as carrying a small caseload. In addition, an extra social work post was created within the Fostering Team. However it has taken several months to establish the new structure and to recruit people to the 2 new posts and the existing members of the Fostering Team have had to absorb additional work during this period.
6. The Fostering Service provides a programme of post-approval training for registered foster carers and during 2007/8, the topics for the training sessions were:
- ◆ Healthy Living – June 2007
 - ◆ Internet Safety – September 2007

- ◆ Behaviour Management – December 2007
- ◆ Every Child Matters – March 2008

In addition to these quarterly sessions, foster carers also have opportunities to attend courses which are part of Middlesbrough Children, Families & Learning in-house training programme, those run by the Local Safeguarding Children Board, and some run by external organisations. Several foster carers took advantage of these opportunities during the year. A programme of First Aid training has also been provided by St John Ambulance specifically for Middlesbrough foster carers, with sessions held in May, September and November. Upon completion, this provides foster carers with a certificate which is valid for 3 years.

7. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills carried out the 6th annual inspection of Middlesbrough Fostering Service in October 2006. This inspection was undertaken by two experienced Inspectors who carried out a wide range of checks and interviews to determine whether the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards are being met. As with previous inspections, the findings of the Inspection were generally positive and recognised the contribution of foster carers and their supervising social workers in ensuring positive outcomes for children looked after by Middlesbrough Council. Some issues were identified as areas for improvement and an action plan has been devised and implemented to address these issues. Comments were made about staffing levels and about the levels of allowances paid to foster carers.
8. The recruitment and retention of foster carers has continued to be a challenge during 2007/8. There has been a net decrease in the number of registered foster carers for the fourth year in succession and a low number of applications. On the positive side, the joint work with Sure Start has continued and during March and April the two services worked jointly on a high-profile recruitment campaign. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of enquiries but unfortunately there has not been the same level of increase in the number of people who have the potential to meet the needs of children looked after.

PLANS AND ISSUES FOR 2008/9

9. The Fostering Service will continue to offer support and training to all registered foster carers, in a bid to value and therefore retain them. Training planned for 2008-9 includes sessions on Care Matters and Emotional Well-being, Education of Children Looked After, and Attachment. The programme of First Aid training will continue. Other courses from internal and external providers will be made available when appropriate.
10. A key task during the coming year will be to begin implementing a new set of standards issued by the Children's Workforce Development Council, relating to the training and support of foster carers. The existence of our on-going training programme and the work done in respect of NVQ3 should contribute to our implementation plans but other aspects of the standards will present challenges to the service. One of the tasks of the newly appointed Senior Practitioner will be to lead on this piece of work.

11. Recruitment and retention of foster carers is likely to remain a challenge in the year ahead. A preparation group is planned for September 08 and could result in 6 or 7 new carers being available by spring 2009. However recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market and it is increasingly difficult for Middlesbrough to attract applicants of the appropriate quality. Retention of experienced foster carers has not been a major problem to date, with most de-registrations happening due to changes in the foster family circumstances or because the Fostering Service was not satisfied with the standards of care provided. However there are strong indications that this situation may be changing with several experienced carers making enquiries to Independent Fostering Agencies and some are likely to make a move in the near future.
12. It is felt that the level of allowances paid to Middlesbrough foster carers is contributing to the recruitment difficulties. Efforts are continuing to try to address this issue; however in the current financial climate it is proving to be extremely difficult to resolve. This is a source of discontent with some of our existing foster carers who have formed into an independent Foster Care Association to represent their views to the Council.
13. Work which has been in progress for some time in relation to developing a new payments database which is compatible with SWIFT and ICS will be completed during the year, with testing of the new system planned for August 08.
14. Following publication of new guidance from the British Association for Adoption and Fostering about the need to protect children looked after from environmental tobacco smoke, there is a need to update the Fostering Service's policy in relation to the issue and this piece of work will be completed during the year.
15. There is currently an Interim Service Manager in post with specific responsibility for the Adoption and Fostering Services. Part of her remit is to carry out a review of the structure and work of the service and therefore other plans may be developed during the year as a result of this.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CHILDREN'S GUIDE FOR 2008/9

16. The Statement of Purpose for 2008/9 for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1. This document is a requirement of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and is updated at least once a year. It contains information about the principles, aims and objectives of the Fostering Service, the standards of care, management structure and staffing details, number of carers and number of children placed, numbers of complaints and their outcomes, the services and facilities provided, and a summary of the procedures and processes used by the Service in relation to recruitment, assessment, approval, support, training and review of foster carers.
17. The Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2008/9 is attached as Appendix 2. This document is also a requirement of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and is updated at least once a year.

18. The two documents are now being presented to Corporate Parenting Board for the 6th annual review.

OPTION APPRAISAL

19. Not applicable to this piece of work.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

20. There are no immediate financial or legal implications in this report. There are no specific ward implications as the Adoption Service covers the whole of Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

21. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
- (a) note the information relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service.
 - (b) formally approve the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2008-9
 - (c) agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2009 or as soon as possible thereafter.

REASONS

22. This recommendation is supported by the following reasons:
- (a) the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide to the Fostering Service are documents which are required under Regulations 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002
 - (b) the review and updating of these documents is required under Regulation 4 of the same regulations
 - (c) formal approval of these documents is required under standard 1.3 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- (a) the Fostering Services Regulations 2002
- (b) National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

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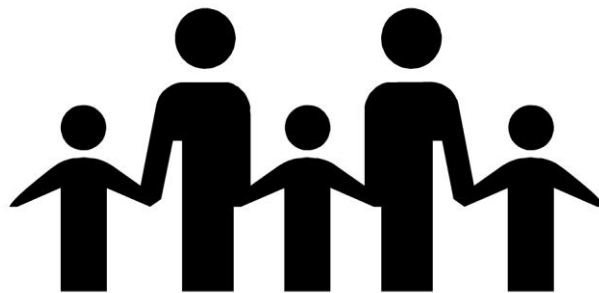
Jane Wilson, Family Placement Manager

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MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2008-9

Version 7 issued in July 2008 by
Middlesbrough Fostering Service
Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning Centre
Cargo Fleet Lane
Middlesbrough TS3 8PE


Middlesbrough
moving forward

Principles

The work of Middlesbrough Fostering Service is based on the following principles:

- (1) Child focussed**
The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the fostering process.
- (2) Partnership**
The Fostering Service will work in partnership with parents and children, foster carers and their families, and social work staff and other professionals when delivering the service.
- (3) Anti-discriminatory practice**
The Fostering Service will respect Human Rights and will ensure that there is fair and equal access to all its services. The services it provides will be free from discrimination, prejudice and racism.

Aims and objectives

The main aim of the Fostering Service provided by Middlesbrough Council is:

- ◆ to provide suitable foster care placements for children who are looked after by Middlesbrough Council.

The Fostering Service will achieve this by:

- ◆ recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective foster carers and their families
- ◆ supporting, developing and retaining approved foster carers and their families
- ◆ working in partnership with the child's social worker to identify a suitable placement when it has been agreed that the child's assessed needs will be met by placement in foster care
- ◆ working in partnership with the child's social worker and other appropriate professionals to identify a suitable alternative placement from an Independent Fostering Agency, where appropriate and agreed by Middlesbrough Children's Panel.

Standards of care

The work of Middlesbrough Fostering Service is delivered in accordance with the following standards:

- ◆ UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999
- ◆ the Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers 1999
- ◆ the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002

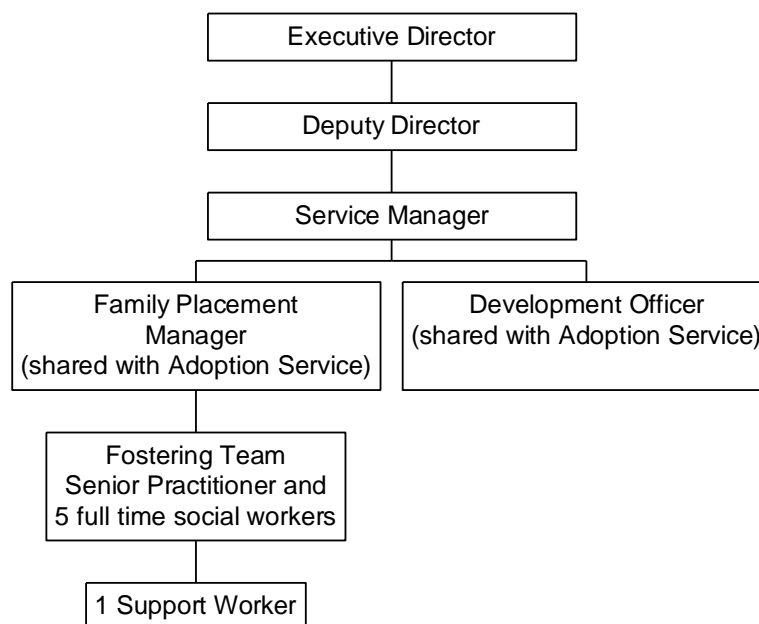
In addition to the national standards, Middlesbrough Fostering Service has adopted local standards which underpin its approach to service delivery. These include:

- ◆ responding to enquiries from potential foster carers in a positive and welcoming manner and sending them an information pack within 5 working days of receiving the enquiry

- ◆ a requirement for social workers who join the team to be Level E workers with a minimum of 2 years experience of Children & Families work
- ◆ a commitment to the use of co-working by 2 social workers during the assessment process, in the belief that this leads to a high quality, thorough assessment
- ◆ the use of a banded payments system which recognises the valuable contribution made by foster carers as they develop skills and experience and relates the payment received to the skills and experience they have developed

Management structure

The Fostering Service of Middlesbrough Council is provided by workers from the Fostering Team who are based within the Children, Families & Learning Department of Middlesbrough Council. The management structure as at 1st July 2008 is shown in the diagram below.



Details of staff as at 1st July 2008

Name	Job title	Qualifications	Experience
Jane Wilson	Family Placement Manager	CSS – 1987 CMS – 2001	With Social Services since 1984. With Fostering Service since 1996.
Vacancy	Senior Practitioner, Fostering Team		
Jane O'Toole	Social Worker, Fostering Team	DipSW – 1998	With Social Services since 1998. With Fostering Service since 2002.

Val Hampton	Social Worker, Fostering Team	CQSW – 1986	With Social Services since 1986. With Fostering Service since 2001.
Jill Fawcett	Social Worker, Fostering Team	DipSW – 2000	With Social Services since 2000. With Fostering Service since 2003.
Lesley Farquharson	Social Worker, Fostering Team	DipSW – 1994	With Social Services since 1994. With Fostering Service since 2005.
Vacancy	Social Worker, Fostering Team		
Judy Yelder	Family Placement Development Officer (shared with Adoption Service)	CQSW – 1976 Certificate in Training & Development – 1992 B.T.E.C Management Studies - 2005	With Social Services since 1976. With Fostering Service since 1999.
Val Scott	Support Worker	NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People – 2003	With Social Services since 2000. With Fostering Service since 2000.
Gill Bisp	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services (shared with Adoption Service)	NVQ Business Admin. Level 2 – 1995 Level 3 – 1997 Level 3 Key Skills – 1997	With Social Services since 1981. With Fostering Service since 1996.
Sue Atkinson	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services (shared with Adoption Service)	B.T.E.C Business Admin – 1996	With Social Services since 1998. With Fostering Service since 2000.

There are two vacant posts in the team; appointments have been made and the posts are likely to be filled within the next two months.

Number of foster carers

The number of foster carers approved by Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service on 31st March 2008 was 96.

Number of children placed

The number of children placed in foster care by Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service on 31st March 2008 was 128.

Numbers of complaints and their outcomes

There were 2 complaints in the year ending 31st March 2008.

- (1) This was from a young person in foster care who complained primarily about lack of consultation with regards to moving out of a bedroom in order to make space for another young person who was being placed, but also about other aspects of the care provided. This complaint was partially upheld in relation to the aspect of moving bedrooms but it was felt that this issue was the responsibility of the Fostering Service rather than the individual foster carers. The other aspects of the complaint were not upheld.
- (2) This was from a foster carer who complained about not being able to complete the NVQ3 due to lack of facilities and that when facilities were provided, they caused additional work. This complaint was partially upheld and the foster carer accepted a payment as compensation.

The Services and Facilities provided by the Fostering Service

The services and facilities provided by Middlesbrough Fostering Service fall into 3 main areas:

- (a) Those provided to prospective foster carers:
 - Information and advice about fostering
 - Initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming foster carers
 - Preparation training for applicants
 - Competency-based assessment of applicants using BAAF Form F
 - The opportunity to attend the Family Placement Panel when their application is presented
- (b) Those provided to foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service
 - Supervision and support from a named social worker from the Fostering Service
 - Practical support (such as transport and activities for children) from a Support Worker, according to need
 - A regular newsletter specifically for foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service
 - Membership of Fostering Network
 - Support groups and social events for foster carers
 - A foster carers handbook containing information on policies, procedures and practice guidance
 - Access to independent advice and mediation when necessary
 - A programme of induction training for newly approved foster carers
 - A programme of post-approval training specifically for foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service, consisting of 4 training events a year
 - The hire of the training facilities at Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre or other appropriate facilities for use as a venue for the training events
 - Financial support for placements, using a banded payments scheme
 - Loan of essential equipment or household items to support specific placements
 - A peer mentoring scheme, provided by foster carers who had had relevant training

- (c) Those provided to social work staff who need a placement for a child looked after by the Council.

These consist of:

- ◆ A duty social worker available during office hours Monday – Friday
- ◆ Provision of a range of foster care placements for children looked after by Middlesbrough Council
- ◆ Provision of carers for use by the Emergency Duty Team for placements at evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

Procedures and processes used by Middlesbrough Council's Fostering Service

Recruitment, assessment and approval

- (1) Recruitment activity is planned in accordance with the Family Placement Recruitment Strategy, which has been in place since January 2000. This uses a continuous, low-key, community development approach with a 'drip feed' of various types of publicity and information. Fostering is marketed as a way of helping a child which also has a benefit for the foster carers. Recruitment activity goes on at 3 different levels - national (for example Foster Care Fortnight in June, inclusion of our agency details on various web-sites); regional (for example joint adverts with Stockton and Redcar&Cleveland in the Evening Gazette) and local (for example the use of 3 standard adverts placed in various publications, creation of 3 different posters, inclusion of family placement information on Middlesbrough's web-site).
- (2) Another key element of the recruitment strategy is that of responding to enquiries in a positive but realistic way. Enquiries are taken by a member of the Fostering Service who takes basic details and answers any initial questions. An information pack is sent out within 5 days of receipt of the enquiry. If the enquirer wants to go on to the next stage, they send back a short form giving basic details of themselves and the type of fostering that interests them.
- (3) The Manager will then arrange for 2 Social Workers to visit and give information on the application process and its requirements, the needs of children who are looked after and the role of the carer. They will also find out about the family's circumstances and their motivation to foster. Approximately 4 weeks after this initial visit, the same workers return for a follow-up visit. They ensure that all household members have been seen, and then, following further discussion, an agreement is reached about whether it is appropriate to proceed with an application.
- (4) An application form is given to prospective carers if appropriate. This includes consent for statutory checks for all relevant people in the household. Once the application form has been completed and returned, references are taken up with Criminal Records Bureau and all relevant statutory agencies. This includes contact with the relevant embassy if the applicant has worked abroad and the records of the RAF/Navy/Army if the applicant has been a member of the Armed Forces. References from the applicant's current employer are sought if appropriate. Medical examinations are carried out by the applicant's doctor using the BAAF Medical Form and returned to Middlesbrough Medical Adviser for comments and a recommendation.

- (5) The applicants are notified of the dates of preparation group and given a clear message that the preparation group is an important part of the application process and they are expected to attend each session. The preparation group runs for 5 full days and includes the children of the family if they are of an appropriate age. There is evaluation and feedback at the end of the group, to see if applicants have met the competencies and if not, people are advised not to proceed any further. At this point some people also decide for themselves not to proceed any further .
- (6) The next stage is the home study which is done using the BAAF Form F. It consists of a minimum of 6 sessions with 2 workers, with individual sessions with each applicant in addition. The topics covered include personal background/history/experiences, parenting experiences, birth children's views, the home environment, including dog/pet safety and applicant's own work to show absorption of material from groups. In addition to these sessions with the applicants and their family members, 2 personal referees are interviewed, as are the ex-partners of the applicants where it has been agreed that there was a 'significant' relationship. Children of the applicants living elsewhere will also be interviewed, with the agreement of their carer.
- (7) When all the necessary material is available, the Form F is completed by the social workers using contributions from the applicants themselves at appropriate points. The Form F is read and signed by the applicants and is presented to Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel which meets every 2 weeks. Applicants are able to attend the panel meeting when the application is discussed if they wish. The Family Placement Panel considers the Form F and makes a recommendation regarding the application. This recommendation is then approved (or not) by the Deputy Director of Children, Families & Learning. Applicants are then notified in writing of the outcome of their application.

Support, training and review

- (1) Once a foster carer has been approved by Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel, they will complete a foster carer agreement and be provided with a Foster Carer Handbook. They will receive ongoing support from a Supervising Social Worker who is a member of the Fostering Service. This Social Worker will visit regularly to supervise the work of the foster carer and help with training and development needs. The minimum visiting frequency is one visit every 8 weeks, but this normally only applies to long-term, stable placements and many foster carers have a much higher level of contact than this. Foster carers also have access to a support workers who provides support of a practical nature, such as transport and activities for children.
- (2) In addition to the support provided by Social Workers and Support Workers, all foster carers receive a regular newsletter which keeps them up-to-date with relevant developments within Children, Families & Learning and elsewhere. They also receive full membership of Fostering Network and access to independent advice and mediation when necessary. There are social events for foster carers , their children and children looked after.
- (3) As part of its commitment to the development of the foster care service and increasing the skills of foster carers, Middlesbrough Fostering Service provides a quarterly training programme specifically for foster carers. Foster carers are given

support and encouragement to attend and each topic is presented in the morning and the evening in order to fit in with family commitments. A survey is carried out at the end of each year to get foster carers views on the topics for the training programme for the following year.

- (4) In addition to the quarterly training sessions, other training opportunities are available through the in-house training programme provided by Middlesbrough Council; through the training programme provided by the Middlesbrough and Langbaugh Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service; through the training provided by the South Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board and through the purchase of places at external training events which are relevant to foster care.
- (5) Foster carers are to obtain the NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People and the Fostering Service works in partnership with Stockton Riverside College who provide the necessary facilities.
- (6) All foster carers who are approved by Middlesbrough Fostering Service have their approval reviewed at least once a year. The review process within Middlesbrough is also used as a means of giving foster carers the chance to give some feedback on the service they receive from Children, Families & Learning and to evaluate whether the foster carers are meeting the competencies of Middlesbrough Banded Payments Scheme. Foster carers are fully involved in the review process and are given a report to complete prior to the review meeting. They are fully involved in the review meeting which is chaired by a Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officer who is independent of the Fostering Service. After the review meeting, the Q.A.R.O completes a review report with a recommendation which is presented to Family Placement Panel for discussion and approval. Foster carers are able to attend the panel meeting when their review is discussed if they wish. The review recommendation is then approved (or not) by the Deputy Director of Children, Families & Learning and foster carers are notified in writing of the outcome of their review.

Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

- The safety, welfare and needs of children come first.
- The fostering service works in partnership with young people, their parents, foster carers and their families. They also work with people from other agencies such as teachers and community nurses.
- The fostering service aims to treat everyone fairly.
- The fostering service works within the law and to national standards for foster care.
- Staff in the fostering service are all properly trained and experienced.
- The fostering service is very careful about choosing and training people who want to be foster carers. This includes checking into their background, assessing their ability to be a foster carer and providing training to help them to understand what is needed.
- The fostering service provides training for people who are already foster carers. The service helps foster carers to study for NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People.
- The fostering service provides practical help and support for foster carers. This includes having their own social worker, being offered respite care to let them take a break and being able to contact a member of the team in an emergency.
- Foster carers are reviewed every year to make sure they are still suited to be foster carers.

People - Who's who in the family placement service?

These are the people who work in the fostering and adoption teams.

Name	Job title
Jane Wilson	Family Placement Manager
Vacancy	Senior Practitioner, Fostering Service
Jill Fawcett	Social Worker, Fostering Team
Lesley Farquharson	Social Worker, Fostering Team
Val Hampton	Social Worker, Fostering Team
Jane O'Toole	Social Worker, Fostering Team
Vacancy	Social Worker, Fostering Team

Tony Kerr	Senior Practitioner, Adoption Service
Jane Clarke	Social Worker, Adoption Team
Connie O'Neill	Social Worker, Adoption Team
Val Thompson	Social Worker, Adoption Team
Joyce Virth	Social Worker, Adoption Team

Judy Yelder (shared by both services)	Family Placement Development Officer
Val Scott	Support Worker
Sue Atkinson (shared by both services)	Team Clerk
Gill Bisp (shared by both services)	Team Clerk

Being 'Looked After'

- We always try to keep families together if we can. Sometimes this is not possible because the children in the family are not being looked after properly for some reason.
- There are lots of reasons why a young person is not able to live with their own parents. Those reasons are special to you. Your social worker will try to help you to understand why this has happened - it is not your fault.
- Sometimes a young person is able to stay with other members of their family or with close friends. This is called 'Family Network Care'. Sometimes a member of your family is able to become a foster carer so that they can get extra help to look after you.
- You may be 'looked after' as part of a voluntary agreement between your parents and your social worker. This is called being 'accommodated' (having somewhere to live). This can give your parents time to make things better so that you can go home.
- If your parents do not agree that you need to live away from home, your social worker has to go to court to prove that this needs to happen. This is called having a 'care order'.
- It is the job of the court to decide what is best for you. Their aim is to keep you safe and to make sure you have the best chance to grow up as a healthy and happy person.

Being Fostered

- Being in foster care means living with a foster carer as part of their family. You live in their house and join in with their family life. We try to match people up so that they will get on with each other.

“When you are having problems in your real home, it means you have someone to love you and care for you.”

“It’s just normal family life - a proper family.”

“The best thing is if you just ‘click’ with your carer.”

Young people in foster care in Middlesbrough, 2002

Who are the foster carers?

Foster carers come from all sorts of backgrounds and have all sorts of families. They are all different because young people are all different.

Among our foster carers we have:-

- People who are not married and live by themselves.
- People who are not married but live with a partner.
- People who are married but don't have any children of their own.
- People who are married and have children of their own.
- People who choose to look after certain kinds of children, such as
 - Children with disabilities
 - Babies
 - Teenagers
 - Children who come for a short stay - 'respite care'

Procedures - Recruiting Foster Carers

- The fostering service advertises for foster carers in the paper, on the internet (www.middlesbrough.gov.uk) and by using posters.
- An Information Pack is sent out to people.
- 2 Social Workers visit and talk about the application process, the needs of children who are looked after and the role of a foster carer.
- If the person wants to go ahead, they fill in the application form.
- References are checked and a check is made with the Criminal Records Bureau.
- The foster carer has a medical check to make sure they are fit.
- Applicants take part in a foster carer preparation group that lasts for 5 whole days.
- Foster carers then do at least 6 sessions with 2 social workers to look at their personal background, history, experience, their home and their attitudes. The social workers also talk to other people in the family.
- 2 personal referees are interviewed.
- The Family Placement Panel then considers the information and makes a recommendation about whether they think the person should be approved as a foster carer.
- The Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning gives the final approval.

Procedures - Support, training and review

- Once a foster carer has been approved, they sign an agreement and are given a Foster Carer Handbook.
- They are visited by their social worker at least once every 8 weeks.
- The support workers can help by providing transport, babysitting and activities for children.
- They are sent a Foster Carers Newsletter to keep them up to date.
- They are given full membership of the Fostering Network and access to independent advice and mediation if they need it.
- There is a training programme for foster carers after they have been approved. Foster carers are asked what they would like to learn about.
- Foster carers are also told about other training opportunities.
- Foster carers are encouraged to study for NVQ Level 3 in *Caring for Children and Young People*
- The approval given to foster carers is reviewed once a year. They are fully involved in that process so that the feedback goes both ways.
- The Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning confirms their approval.

What to do if you are unhappy about anything to do with the fostering service.

➤ **Talk to someone**

Many problems can be sorted out quite easily if you tell someone about them. *All our staff have a responsibility to help you to sort things out, if you ask them to.* Talk to your social worker (or any other member of staff), a relative, your teacher, your independent visitor (if you have one) or anyone else that you trust.

➤ **Contact an Independent Advocate**

You can also get help from an independent advocate who can speak up on your behalf. *The National Youth Advocacy Service will provide you with an adult (who does not work for the Council) to help you.* You can contact the National Youth Advocacy Service by using a **freephone** number: **0800 616101** or send a **text** message to **0777 333 4555** or **e-mail** to: **help@nyas.net**

➤ **Contact the Children's Rights Director for England**

The Children's Rights Director is responsible for listening to the views of children who live away from home. If you wish, you have the right to complain directly to him and he will make sure your complaint is passed to the right person and taken seriously. The Children's Rights Director for England is Roger Morgan. His address is Office of the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE. Contact Roger Morgan by **freephone**: **0800 528 0731** or visit the web site: **www.rights4me.org.uk**

➤ **Make a complaint**

The law says that if you are unhappy about anything that we do or do not do, you have the right to complain about it. The Children's Complaints Officer is there to make sure that your complaint is dealt with properly. The Children's Complaints Officer is based in Vancouver House:
01642 728416 Mon to Thurs 8.30 - 5.00pm, Fri 8.30 - 4.30pm
Email - **voicetheyourviews@middlesbrough.gov.uk**
Text - **07624 802273**

This is what happens when you make a complaint.....

You will get a letter saying who will look into your complaint. You should get this letter within 3 working days of us hearing from you.

Stage 1 - Local Problem-solving

A manager who is responsible for the service will talk to you about your complaint. They will try to sort it out as quickly as possible. We will try to resolve your complaint within 10 working days if we can. If your complaint has not been resolved or you have not received a response within 20 working days, you can move to.....

Stage 2 - Investigation

A different manager will look into what has happened. An Independent Person - someone who does not work for the council - will be involved too. They will make sure your complaint is dealt with fairly. We will try to complete this stage in 25 working days. If you are not happy with how your complaint has been dealt with, you can move to.....

Stage 3 - Review Panel

Your complaint will be looked at by a 'Review Panel'. The panel is made up of three independent people, who do not work for the Council. You will be asked if you would like to go and talk to the panel. This panel will decide if your complaint has been dealt with properly and fairly. The panel will say what they think should happen. We will tell you what we are going to do.

If you are still not happy, you can talk to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is based at Beverley House, 17 Shipton Road, York YO30 5FZ.

Tel: **01904 380200**

Adviceline: **0845 602 1983**