

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

31st JULY 2008

FOSTER CARER RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

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

**GILL ROLLINGS - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN, FAMILIES & LEARNING**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to raise members' awareness of the outcomes of a recent fostering recruitment campaign and the need for ongoing efforts to increase the number of foster carers in Middlesbrough.

BACKGROUND

2. The Fostering Service's original recruitment strategy was devised by the Family Placement Development Officer and implemented in 2000. The underlying approach of the strategy was to drip feed information to the local population using different types of publicity throughout the year. The budget to support recruitment has always been very limited – averaging £5,000 per annum - which has meant that the amount of advertising has been limited and the presentation of written material has been basic.
3. The strategy did, however, produce a significant increase in the number of enquiries, applications and approvals for the first three to four years after implementation. Indeed, the highest number of foster carers Middlesbrough has ever had available to its children rose to 114 at around this time. The strategy has been less effective in the last 3-4 years and the service has experienced a net loss of carers as can be seen in the table attached (Appendix 1).

4. Since the implementation of the original recruitment strategy in 2000, the context in which Middlesbrough Fostering Service operates has undergone a dramatic change. A rapid growth in independent fostering agencies means that people interested in fostering have a variety of agencies to choose from. It is also felt that demographic factors, both national (e.g. the changes in family structures and the role of women, pressure to take paid employment and the low status of volunteering) and local (high levels of deprivation and a falling population) affect the recruitment of carers.
5. In March 2007, the recruitment strategy was reviewed by the Family Placement Development Officer and the Sure Start Marketing Manager. This joint working resulted in an increase in advertising opportunities from April 2007. The outcome of this was an increased number of enquires and initial visits (136 enquiries and 38 initial visits in the nine months to December '07) but no corresponding increase in applications. (Appendix 1) Alongside this issue, is the fact that Middlesbrough Foster Carers have, for the first time, begun to show an interest in transferring to independent agencies. There were 8 enquiries to SWIIS in 2007 and one carer, who currently looks after three Middlesbrough children, has been assessed and is ready to transfer.
6. In January 2008, funding became available for further joint work with Sure Start and it was agreed that this would take the form of an intensive advertising campaign. The following advertisements and other measures were put in place as part of the campaign which started in March and ran for 3 months:
 - Adshell posters at 10 locations in Middlesbrough for 4 weeks from 24th March
 - An advert in the Middlesbrough Football club programme for each home game
 - An advert in the Middlesbrough Herald and Post
 - A 2 page 'advertorial' in the Middlesbrough Gazette
 - A Community Roadshow in Middlesbrough Mall from Monday 3rd March to Sunday 9th March, consisting of a display stand with a multi-media presentation and with leaflets and other promotional items being handed out to the public.
 - A radio advert on Century Radio
 - A launch event which was held in conjunction with the re-branding of the Child Care Information Centre to 'The Family Information Service'.
 - A radio advert on TFM, featuring contributions from Middlesbrough foster carers, which ran during Foster Care Fortnight in May
 - Adverts in the Evening Gazette during Foster Care Fortnight in May
 - The purchase of 2 additional portable display banners
 - The purchase of information leaflets and a DVD for use at information evenings and other promotional events
 - The re-design of the Fostering Information Pack so it is available in full colour layout, using the skills of a graphic designer

The total expenditure on the campaign was £30,620.

OUTCOMES OF THE RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

7. The table below shows figures for enquires about fostering and for requests for initial visits for the first 6 months of this year.

	Enquiries	Initial visits
January	11	5
February	12	3
March	35	8
April	25	11
May	36	4
June	17	6

8. It is clear from the above table that the intensive advertising campaign did produce a significant increase in the number of enquiries about fostering. The total number of enquiries during the 3 months of the campaign was 96, as compared with 40 during the other 3 months. However the number of people who followed through their interest by requesting an initial visit after receiving an information pack did not show the same level of increase – there were 23 initial visits resulting from the campaign as compared with 14 during the other 3 months. At present, there are 3 initial visits which look likely to result in an application and these applicants will attend a preparation group in September.
9. The intensive campaign has enabled the service to monitor the responses to the various different types of advertising that were used and this has provided us with some very useful information. For instance, the Community Roadshow, which was situated in a busy shopping centre in Middlesbrough town centre for a whole week, only resulted in 9 direct enquiries. The most effective adverts were the press adverts and in particular, a double page feature in the Gazette.
10. The response to the intensive advertising campaign has been disappointing in some respects, although valuable lessons have been learned and will be incorporated into future recruitment plans. It is essential to continue to publicise the need for more foster carers and there are plans for more press advertising and for making more use of internet facilities during the recruitment process. Joint work with Sure Start will continue as a key part of the recruitment strategy.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

11. There are financial implications arising from this report in terms of:
- a) The cost of the recruitment campaign, as outlined in paragraph 6.

- b) The need to increase the budget available for fostering recruitment, in order to enable the service to increase the amount of advertising.
 - c) The cost to the authority of not improving recruitment, i.e. the increased use of more costly, independent agency foster carers. Along with this financial cost, is the 'cost' to children and their families of being placed outside of the Middlesbrough area or the Middlesbrough systems and practices – which are safe and robust.
12. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.
13. There are implications for all Wards in that foster carers are needed in all parts of Middlesbrough. This report will, therefore, be of interest to all members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
- a). note the information relating to the Fostering Service Recruitment Campaign.

REASONS

15. The Council is responsible for providing high quality care for its children, which is often best provided by locally-based foster carers. Elected Members can play a key role in encouraging and supporting local people who wish to be considered as foster carers.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- *Recruitment Monitoring statistics – Family Placement Development Officer*

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Appendix 1

Middlesbrough Council Children Families & Learning Department

Summary of fostering recruitment statistics for April 2003 to March 2008

Recruitment	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Number of enquiries	151	139	136	165	193
Number of requests for initial visits	58	37	37	38	54
Number of applications	8	6	9	6	4
Number of new registrations	9	2	5	3	6
Number of de-registrations	9	7	11	5	9
Number of registered carers on 31 st March	112	107	101	99	96

Judy Yelder
Development Officer
July 2007