

SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	4 th March 2021
Report Subject	Mockingbird Fostering Project – update on the programme
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of our commitment to enhance our in house fostering offer we secured an innovation loan to implement the Mockingbird model of foster care (which mirrors a family model). This report provides an overview of the implementation of Mockingbird. The report identifies challenges, barriers, progress and success in establishing of our first two Mockingbird constellations. A constellation within Mockingbird is the name given to each group comprising between 6-10 fostering families supported by one experienced foster carer, or Hub Carer. Within Flintshire, each constellation has a geographical focus. Our ambition is for a further Mockingbird constellations in 2021 along with an intensive campaign to recruit more general foster carers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members note that the implementation of constellation one and two is recognised with number three set for Autumn 2021.
2	Members note the effectiveness of the model in terms of a social and cost benefit analysis.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE MOCKINGBRID FOSTERING PROJECT – UPDATE ON THE PROGRAMME
1.01	The Fostering Network has delivered the Mockingbird Family Model in the UK since 2015 under the licence from the Mockingbird Society, who

	<p>established the Model.</p> <p>Its aim is to replicate the support available through an extended Family Network, with the fundamental imperative to provide children looked after with a safe, secure and stable environment, with the clear intent to avoid disruption and unnecessary change.</p>
1.02	<p>Groups of Mockingbird Carers are called a Constellation. A Constellation comprises of 6 – 10 satellite Fostering Families who are supported by a Hub Home that is operated by an experienced Foster Carer and offers advice, training and peer support, planned and emergency sleepovers. It also facilitates positive relationships and visits for sibling groups who are in care, but not in the same care setting. Each constellation is supported by a Mockingbird Liaison Worker who provides support and a link between the Constellation and Fostering Service.</p>
1.03	<p>Grant funding was secured to enable comprehensive research to exploring the feasibility of the Mockingbird model in Flintshire. The research was supported by NESTA, Cardiff University and YLAB to research the benefits that could be realised through this innovate way of delivering foster care and the associated model that could be deployed to respond to the needs of Flintshire.</p>
1.04	<p>In summary the research identified that the Mockingbird model could increase child wellbeing, placement stability, and improve foster care recruitment and retention. Specific identified service improvements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in foster carer retention • Reduction in foster carer recruitment costs per constellation • Reduction in placement breakdowns • Reduction in the use of external fostering and residential providers. • A higher skilled foster care population • Improved recruitment from word of mouth and competitive advantage.
1.05	<p>This research informed a successful bid leading to a significant loan of £1.5m from Welsh Government's initiative to establish innovative social programmes. We have been working with the Fostering Network to utilise this loan to implement Mockingbird as part of our corporate commitment to expand in House Fostering and rebalance the balance between in house and externally commissioned services for children and young people.</p>
1.06	<p>The following activities were completed in advance of the first constellation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of an Implementation Group. • A arrange of stakeholder engagement activities. • Recruitment of Hub Carers. • Identifying satellite families and launching our first constellation. • Developing operational protocols, policies and procedures to support the running of the project.
1.07	<p>The planning of the first constellation commenced in the Spring (2019). The experience of setting up the initial project provided learning relating to the recruitment of key staff, the identification of a Hub Carer and the</p>

	<p>mixing of appropriate Foster Carers/Children within a geographical cluster. Challenges in these areas were overcome with key appointments and an extensive programme of consultative events with Social Care, Education, Health Third Sector, Young People and other allied agencies promoting the model.</p>
1.08	<p>Our first constellation has been live since January 2020 and now consists of one Hub Carer and 6 Satellite families comprising 6 looked after children, 1 birth child and 2 young people in 'When I'm Ready' arrangements. Over the last 12 months the constellation has provided a range of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency and planned sleepovers/short breaks. • Monthly social activity events. • Peer Foster Care support and training opportunities. • Family and sibling contact.
1.09	<p>Our second constellation recently launched in February 2021 and now consists of one Hub Family and 5 Satellite families comprising 8 looked after children, 10 birth children and 2 young people in 'When I'm Ready'.</p>
1.10	<p>Constellation one and two have both been impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic as face to face support and activities have been limited. Hub Carers have been innovative in their practice and have adapted to new technologies in order to promote, develop and sustain the relationships within each constellation.</p>
1.11	<p>Specialist Therapeutic services have been identified to support Mockingbird. Currently therapeutic support is offered in Flintshire to children who meet a threshold of need as part of the RAP project commissioned from Action For children. Therapeutic services within Mockingbird provide additionality, focusing on support for foster carers to discuss the children's behaviour directly with the therapist and receive support and develop strategies for meeting the holistic needs of the children.</p>
1.12	<p>COVID 19 pandemic has presented challenges to Mockingbird and the fostering community however we have remained on track with regards to progression and implementation. Further consultation has taken place and agreement given to extend the loan period due to the ongoing COVID restrictions and limitations.</p>
1.13	<p>We plan to use the leverage of the Mockingbird loan to enhance our capacity to recruit, assess and support additional foster carers in 2021. The ambition is to expand our portfolio of general foster carers with a view to ensuring a sufficiency of foster carers for Mockingbird constellations as well as to establish general fostering model.</p>

1.14 Mockingbird constellation example:



The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme

2.00 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

2.01 There are a number of clear social and cost benefit analysis which are measured as part of the projects work which demonstrate the following:

- Placement stability which avoids unplanned moves, avoids both the social disruptions for a young person, but also the need for high cost emergency settlements.
- Children missing from placement, which results in the potential for increased vulnerability in young people and less staff demand upon social and support services.
- Children avoiding residential care, with the net consequence of reducing the social care budget and retaining young people within their social, peer and educational groups.
- Foster care support, training and retention.

There is no need for further additional resources; the potential positive impact of preventing more expensive care options is clearly evidenced within Mockingbird Programme Evaluation Reports.

3.00 IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

3.01 The medium to longer term results of the project will determine the success of the model. The collection of key data, in conjunction with the Fostering

	Network, alongside localised social budget and scrutiny activity will enable a longer term measure of the cost savings and social benefits of the project. As part of the loan arrangement it has been agreed to delay the external evaluation phase of Mockingbird within Flintshire by 12 months. This reflects the challenges of COVID -19 and will enable the evaluation to cover a period where the project has been able to operate with full functionality.
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	There was an extensive programme of professional, and sector specific dissemination and promotional work undertaken including direct work with looked after children. This remains under review as part of the rollout for 2021 and 2022.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Mockingbird Research and Development report https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-project/evaluation-of-the-mockingbird-programme/
6.02	Mockingbird Programme- Evaluation Report September 2020 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933119/Fostering_Network_Mockingbird.pdf

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Hub Home Carer- An experienced carer who acts as the glue who unites the constellation. The Hub Carer is responsible for organising social arrangements and sleepovers.</p> <p>Satellite – Each fostering family receiving support within the constellation is known as a Satellite family.</p> <p>Constellation - This is the collective name given to the group of Foster Carers comprised of 6-10 satellite carers and a Hub Home Carer.</p> <p>Mockingbird Society (USA)- A social care organisation set up in 1999 to promote the welfare of children within good care placements.</p> <p>Fostering Network- A UK wide organisation that promotes the values and strengths of Foster Care. Fostering Network are responsible for Mockingbird within the UK.</p>