

Carers Learning and Development Strategy

Fostering and Adoption Services Placements

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Abbreviations Index:

ASW: Assessing Social Worker

SSW: Supervising Social Worker

ADM: Agency Decision Maker

TM: Team Manager

DTM: Deputy Team Manager

FDC: Fostering Development Coordinator

TSDS: Training, Support and Development Standards

KAFA Team: Kinship, Adoption and Fostering Assessment Team

FST: Fostering Support Team

**Staff roles in regards to this strategy are explored at the end of this document.*

Position

Brent Placements Service Development Team have developed this strategy in line with the Placements Service Plan 2014-2015 with a core focus on Objective 3 “To ensure that all Looked After Children achieve their potential” through the development of high quality support and training packages for Foster Carers. Furthermore this strategy complies with the Learning and Development Strategy for the Children and Young Peoples Department.

Introduction

Brent Placements Service Development Team is committed to ensuring that all carers receive an adequate level of training and support to enable the delivery of their role as a foster carer. Being a carer is a demanding role; and preparation plus continued professional development including professional qualifications ensure that the workforce is adequately confident and competent in order to provide the quality care that children require.

Training should therefore be basic requirement for all foster carers, and there should be an expectation that they attend and participate as fully and as constructively as possible. The Learning and Development of Carers is underpinned by the Fostering Regulations and the National Minimum Standards as detailed throughout this Strategy.

Aims and Objectives:

Brent Placements Service Development Team have set out the following aims and objectives for carers, this includes those within the assessment process, who are newly approved as a carer by the Fostering Panel and ADM and those who have been fostering for a number of years.

- All carers who are being recommended to Panel will complete both stages of the Preparation Training as part of their assessment,
- All carers will complete an initial level of safeguarding and first aid training during stage 2 of the assessment process,
- All carers at point of approval will agree a personal development plan and profile of previously recognised training with their SSW,
- Within Year 1 of approval Carers will attend Module 1 of the core training offer,
- All carers will work towards the Training, Support and Development Standards within the agreed timescales dependant on their approval type¹,
- Modules 2 and 3, which can run concurrently but are also optional, are offered within Year 2 of approval. Module 3 is undertaken dependant on the individual carers, their needs, and the needs of the children in placement,
- All carers show a commitment to on-going developmental training to enhance their skills as carers

¹ Training and Development Standards Workbook should be completed within 12 months for task centred, short term and long term carers. Kinship and Connected Persons Carers have up to 18 months to complete the Training and Development Standards Workbook.

The Strategy

Brent Placements is committed to providing high quality foster care provisions for children and young people in the Brent. The Council widely accepts the crucial role that foster carers play in promoting good outcomes for children in care and should be given appropriate and structured opportunities to develop skills essential to their roles.

Training and development is an essential part of being a foster carer. Brent Placements Service Development Team has a clear expectation that all Carers will participate in the training offered by the Service as fully as possible. This requirement to engage in ongoing training is contained in the Foster Carer Agreement, that is agreed and signed by all Brent Council approved foster carers.

The Training Plan

The Training Plan is designed to address the requirements of all carers which include:-

- Preparation of applicants in assessment. This course can also be used as a refresher for carer's who are on hold or have taken a break from fostering. Repetition of this course is at the discretion of the Team Manager and Fostering Development Coordinator
- Pathway module of core training at a introductory level for all carers
- Training Support and Development Standards Programme of courses and support
- Developmental general courses available to all carers
- Specific training arranged for particular age/child needs
- Specific training arranged to develop specialist resource carers
- National formal qualification/s
- Workshop / Short information sessions

Preparation/Pre-Approval Training:

The National Minimum Standards for Foster Care dictate that

"13.3: Prospective foster carers are prepared to become foster carers in a way which addresses, and gives practical techniques to manage, the issues they are likely to encounter and identifies the competencies and strengths they have or need to develop."

Brent Placements Service recognise that the most effective and universally accepted manner in meeting this standard is through the participation of the carer in a Preparation Group training session; this is 3 days split into 2 parts. Part 1 is completed during the initial stage of the assessment and part 2 during the latter part of the assessment process.

The undertaking of this preparation training forms part of the assessment process and as such a report on each attendee is generated and forms part of the Form F approval.

Additionally, it is an expectation that all carers are given the opportunity as part of the preparation training to attend appropriate safeguarding children and first aid training, the focus of the training (babies and toddlers, first aid for carers) will be dictated by the terms of approval sought by the carer and in agreement with the ASW.

Short Term/Long Term/Respite/Enhanced Carers

All foster carers approved by Brent are required to attend the preparation course commonly known as 'Skills to Foster'. This course is mandatory for all carers, including those transferring from another agency prior to their approval. Generally an intake of this course is offered 6 times per year by the KAFA Team, however as part of increased working together arrangements potential carers may be asked to attend in a neighbouring borough.

If the KAFA Team are not able to provide availability to complete the preparation course, a request can be made to the Fostering Panel that approval is recommended subject to:-

- The course is attended within three months of approval
- The applicant be provided with basic appreciation of the role of a carer
- Carers are only offered short pieces of care (respite) with close supervision by the allocated ASW/SSW.

All Carers in Stage Two of the assessment process are expected to attend (subject to the Council providing the learning opportunity) the following training before a placement of a child is made:

- Relevant first aid training, the content of which is determined by the approval sought.
- Safeguarding Children Level 1 Training²

Kinship and Connected Persons Carers

All kinship and connected persons carers are managed under the same regulations as Short Term/Long Term/Respite/Enhanced Carers however there is a slightly different approach to the preparation of Kinship and Connected Persons Carers. Kinship and Connected Persons Carers have the opportunity to attend the Preparation Training detailed above (this is recommended however not a mandatory requirement) however there is an expectation of mandatory attendance at an additional session that details the specific expectations of being a Kinship and Connected Persons Carer.

As with the expectation for Short Term/Long Term/Respite and Enhanced Carers all Kinship and Connected Persons Carers are expected to attend relevant first aid training, the content

² This is currently arranged and delivered by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Further details on accessing the training can be provided by the FDC.

of which is determined by the approval sought/children in placement/children planned to be placed and also the Safeguarding Children Level 1 Training³

Carers Personal Development Plan

During the approval process a Personal Development Plan (PDP) will be developed for each carer and it is recommended that a PDP is also developed for each adult child within the fostering household. This initial PDP will include an overview of relevant training to date, and a plan for the first year of training with due dates for completion of the courses.

All PDP's will be updated on a yearly basis by the SSW who will identify learning areas in partnership with the carer before the annual review with the Fostering Reviewing Officer. The Fostering Reviewing Officer will ratify the PDP reflecting on placements made within the carers' home to promote further development. The Fostering Reviewing Officer will include the planned training for the coming year as part of the recommendation to continue as a Short Term/Long Term/Respite Carer/Enhanced or as a Kinship and Connected Persons Carer.

Additionally Foster Carers will receive individual work/advice during the monthly visits by their SSW. They will also identify ongoing training required by the carer to meet the PDP and any specific needs of a child in placement.

Carers who do not meet the minimum requirement to attend 4⁴ training sessions per year will have this issue addressed at the Annual Review. The reasons for this, plus a plan to remedy the situation will be noted on the Annual Review Report. Repeated non-compliance may lead to a change of approval terms, reduction in fostering fees and in some cases may lead to deregistration of a Carer.

Post Approval Training:

Brent Placements Service coordinate the delivery of an extensive training programme, this is developed in accordance with Regulation 17 of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 which states:

" 17. (1) The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them."

Brent Placements Service Development Team undertake a regular review of training opportunities provided to carers to ensure they are appropriately matched to the needs of

³ This is currently arranged and delivered by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Further details on accessing the training can be provided by the FDC.

⁴ The minimum requirement can include an element of online learning however it is the expectation that all carers attend classroom based learning activities.

the children in placement. An annual training needs analysis is undertaken utilising feedback from; carers, trainers, ASW, SSW, TM, DTM and of crucial importance with looked after children. The information gathered forms part of the wider Learning and Development Plan for the Children's and Young Peoples Department.⁵

The Training Programme is delivered on a rolling basis therefore giving all Carers the opportunity to attend a range of training opportunities and additionally ensures that each carer has the opportunity to fulfil the requirements of their on-going approval.

Module 1: First Year of Approval – Core Training Offer

Brent Placements Service Development Team have agreed a collection of courses that are mandatory⁶ for all Carers and it is the expectation that **50%** of these are completed within the first year of approval.

Training, Support and Development Standards

In addition to the courses where attendance is expected within the first year of approval all Carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards.

All activities delivered as part of the Training Strategy are linked with the Training, Support and Development Standards and the National Minimum standards for Fostering. Each training session/programme delivered is linked with the TSDS and will support carers in building the required evidence.

All approved Short Term/Long Term/Respite/Enhanced Carers are expected to complete the Training Support and Development Standards within 12months. Kinship and Connected Persons Carers should complete the Training Support and Development standards within 18 months. An extension may be granted by the Fostering Support Team Manager in exceptional circumstances. Specific workshops are delivered as part of the Training Strategy to support Carers in meeting the requirements of the TSDS.

Foster Carers

Training Supporting and Development Standards

1. Understand the principles and values essential for working with children and young people
2. Understand your role as a carer
3. Understand health and safety and healthy care
4. Know how to communicate effectively
5. Understand the development of children and young people

⁵ This can be found within the Learning and Development section of the staff intranet.

⁶ See Mandatory Course Document.

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Keep children and young people safe from harm7. Develop yourself |
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Kinship and Connected Persons Carers

<p><i>Training Supporting and Development Standards</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand your role as a carer2. Provide a safe environment and healthy care3. Know how to communicate effectively4. Understand the development of children and young people5. Keep children and young people safe from harm6. Develop yourself

Module 2: Second Year of Approval – Core Training Offer / On-going Refreshers

During the second year of approval all Carers are expected to complete the remaining mandatory core training that they were unable to complete in the first year of approval. This would be approximately 40% of the Core Training offer.

➤ Refresher Training

It should be noted that a range of training courses have a validity period and therefore will require regular renewal. Renewals should be booked so that there is no period between one validity ending and the next beginning.

Module 3: Second and Third Year of Approval - Optional Training Sessions and Optional Specialist Training Pathways

During the second year of approval and on-going from that period Carers have the opportunity to attend a range of courses that are delivered to enhance their skill set. These courses are not mandatory however the Brent Panel Advice and Quality Assurance Team hope that all Carers make every opportunity to access these wider learning opportunities.

Specialist Pathways – Identified Carers Only

It is the expectation that as the second annual review approaches the SSW and Carer will discuss the potential opportunity to become a Specialist Resource Carer within the third year of approval. The agreement to become a Specialist Resource Carer is made between the Carer, SSW, TM/DTM, FRO and the Head of Service for Placements; not all Carers will become Specialist Resource Carers.

Specific/Specialist Workshops (Not planned as part of the Training Programme)

Brent Placements Service Development Team works to proactively identify further training opportunities for Carers that generally will be in addition to the wider training programme. This programme is designed to facilitate more immediate, flexible sessions to carers with particular needs and will generally be delivered within small groups. The need for this workshop or programme could come from emerging behaviour from an existing child in placement or as a result of a new placement. The workshop will plan to provide introductory information in lieu of a formal training course on the subject matter. Further training may then be delivered within the wider training programme at a later date.

These will be advertised as required and may include a range of mandatory and optional sessions, additionally at times only certain carers may be identified to attend a session due to their approval range or issues arising.

Support Groups

Brent Placements Service Development Team provide the opportunity for Carers to attend a range of Support Groups; Support Groups are delivered in partnership between the Placements Service Development Team, The Fostering Support Team and the KAFA Team alongside the Brent Foster Carers Association.

Support Groups have various functions that support Service Development and Improvement, foster a greater rapport between the service and Carers and enable Carers to take a greater level of control over the services on offer to the carers.

Brent Placements Service Development Team run a minimum of one support group per month throughout the year.

Conferences and Events

The Foster Carers Conference is run bi-annually and all Carers are expected to attend. Carers should discuss any difficulties that they may face in attending with their SSW, the DTM or TM.

Additional Conferences and Events are planned to run throughout the year, these are not mandatory for carers to attend however it is the expectation that carers attend as many as are practically possible.

Brent Placements Service Development Team promote the permitted use of Nominated Carers to enable Foster Carers in attending training and other events delivered by the Placements Service.

Mentoring

Brent Placements Service Development Team will match all newly approved Carers that express an interest with experienced carers who will act as a mentor and be introduced to the wider support services provided by the Brent Foster Carer Association.

Deploying the Training Programme

To facilitate this training requirement the Brent Placements Service Development Team will:

- Provide early notification of training events and ensure all Carers are provided with a full training programme at the earliest possible opportunity
- Define carer training needs at the Carer Annual Review, carer supervision and as needs arise
- Organise and deploy a diverse training programme to address the needs of all carer groups.
- Plan training within school hours, evenings and weekends

The Placements Service will endeavour to provide and pay for child care if there is a clear difficulty by a foster carer making their own child care arrangements and without which they would not be able to attend the training.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Brent Placements Service Development Team recognise that all Carers have a range of learning opportunities outside of the Training Packages offered by the Council. Brent recognise that the external training completed has a positive impact on the care provided to children in placement and therefore it is the expectation that Carers provide evidence of the Learning opportunities undertaken, the expected evidence would generally be a certificate of completion.

Evidence can be forwarded to the Fostering Development Coordinator who will confirm that this evidence is acceptable and upload a copy of the evidence to the information management system.

Regardless of the amount of training completed by a Carer externally from the programmes offered by Brent Placements Service Development Team it is the expectation that Carers will still attend at least **4** courses per year as the minimum requirement as part of their approval as Carers. However it should be noted in some circumstances the level of training may be higher as recommended by the Fostering Reviewing Officer as part of the Annual Foster Carer Review.

The recognition of Prior Learning includes training undertaken at previous agencies for Carers who have transferred to Brent Placements Service.

Recording Learning

Brent Placements Service Development Team will keep a record of Training attended (or not attended) by a carer.

It is the responsibility of the foster carer to maintain a personal portfolio and training log in which their training needs and attainments will be recorded. Brent Placements Service Development Team will provide all Carers with these templates to enable a consistent approach to recording learning.

Electronic Certificates of attendance will be issued for all conferences, courses and workshops. Certificates for Professional Qualifications will be provided by the delivery body. Copies of all certificates will be kept on file in the event that a Carer needs a replacement and for recording purposes.

Foster carers will be asked to complete an evaluation of the courses and workshops attended to provide Brent Placements Service Development Team with a review of the quality and usefulness of the training that has been provided. Outcomes of this review will be conveyed to all carers on an annual basis via the Carers newsletter.

Non-Attendance at Training

Non-attendance at training by Carers poses an issue for the delivery of the Training Programme; non-attendance affects other attendees, reduces the opportunity for learning within the session and also does not allow other carers to attend the course. The non-attendance of training also poses financial implications on the department.

Non-attendance will be raised by the FDC with the SSW initially, the SSW will then raise this with the Carer; if this occurs on a number of occasions then it will be raised by the TM/DTM as an issue of concern and with further occasions at the annual review⁷. As presented in the Rates and Guidance Document carers who fail to maintain the agreed Training and Development Plan for the year will revert to the Standard Rate Fee. In serious cases, repeated non-engagement with Learning and Development Activities potentially poses a standards of care issue and may result in the deregistration of a Carer by the Fostering Panel.

⁷ It should be noted that Annual Foster Carer Reviews can be brought forward in the event that there is a cause for concern.

➤ Charges for Non-Attendance

The budget allocated for Carer Learning and Development, like all local authority budgets, is under close scrutiny and has to be allocated efficiently to enable maximum use of the resource. Therefore it is necessary for the introduction of charges for non-attendance and cancellation at short notice without good reason. The introduction of charges for non-attendance or cancellation at short notice without good reason will be introduced at the beginning of the 2015-2016 financial year.⁸

Financial Responsibility

Brent Placements Service Development Team hold responsibility for the Carers Training budget, and will arrange timely payment for all invoices relating to the delivery of training courses for Carers.

Placements Staff Attending Training

Training places are allocated on a first come first served basis to Carers, in the event that places are available on a course and there are no carers who have expressed an interest in attending then these will be offered to staff within the Placements Service.

This offer will be made between 24-36 hours before the course takes place and will be confirmed on a first come first served basis to staff. Staff on allocation of a place must either have or seek permission from their Direct Line Manager or nominee for permission in attending⁹. Attendance at a training opportunity should not be to the detriment of work currently being undertaken or incur toil by the staff member.

It should be noted that at a staff member will not be prioritised over a Carer in attending a Learning and Development opportunity. If staff members express an interest in attending a course this expression does not automatically result in a place being offered.

⁸ Further clarity can be found in the Charging for Non-Attendance on Training Document

⁹ The FDC takes no responsibility for informing a staff member's line manager, or seeking permission on their behalf. This responsibility is solely with said staff member.

Staff Responsibilities

The following staff have a responsibility for the deployment of this strategy;

Fostering Development Coordinator

The responsibilities of this position are to work across the Placements Service and with the Brent Learning and Development Team to manage, monitor and facilitate training of foster carers approved by Brent Council in line with the National Minimum Standards.

The dedicated post will ensure that a high profile of carer training is maintained within the Placements Service and that the training provided is reflective, responsive and reactive to carer and child care needs.

Quality Assurance and Agency Advisor (Placements)

The Quality Assurance and Agency Advisor has overall responsibility for the deployment and monitoring of Training Programmes delivered by the Brent Placements Service Development Team. Additionally this person has overall responsibility for the agreements of Training expectations, Specialist Resource Carers and the recommendation of Approval statuses through the Fostering Panel.

Team Manager/Deputy Team Manager (Fostering Support Team, KAFA Team)

The TM/DTM of FTS and KAFA are responsible for ensuring that all SSW/ASW are able to assess the Learning Needs of Carers and plan appropriate Personal Development Plans that are SMART¹⁰ and that fit within the needs of the Placements Service.

Fostering Reviewing Officer

The FRO as part of the Annual Review process for each Carer is expected to ratify the Personal Development Plans for each Carer, and any adult children within a household. Additionally the FRO holds a responsibility to recommend specific training opportunities to Carers that haven't previously been addressed by the SSW.

Supervising Social Worker/Assessing Social Worker

SSW/ASW is responsible for the assessment of the Learning Needs of Carers and plan appropriate Personal Development Plans that are SMART¹¹ and that fit within the needs of the Placements Service. SSW/ASW are also responsible for ensuring that Carers are fully aware of the expectations the Brent Placements Service Development Team has in regards to attendance at learning opportunities.

¹⁰ SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Scaled.

¹¹ SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Scaled.