



<u>Committee and Date</u>

<u>Item</u>
<u>Public</u>

## **Annual Fostering Service Report April 2021-March 2022**

**Responsible  
Officer**

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### **1. Synopsis**

This report provides an overview of the activity, data and performance of Shropshire Councils Fostering Services known as Children's Placement Services from the 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. This report is for information and no decisions are required.

### **2. Executive Summary**

2.1 Fostering services are a regulated activity provided by either a Local Authority or an Independent Fostering Agency. The service is regulated under The Children Act 1989 & 2004; Care Standards Act 2000 and the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

In line with the increase in children looked after by Shropshire Council, there has been a significant increase in work for the fostering service, especially from a connected carer perspective.

The service has succeeded in recruiting 7 mainstream foster carers to provide care for children looked after, this is lower than for the overall number of mainstream foster carers recruited during 2021-2022. This mirrors a national trend in lower numbers of people coming forward to foster. In contrast the service approved 39 connected carer households who are now providing care and accommodation for 63 children related or connected to them. In addition, there were 12 households approved to provide supported board and lodgings placements to young people who are post statutory school age.

At the end of the financial year, there were 70 mainstream fostering households and 112 connected carer households.

The growth in connected carer arrangements is further evidenced by the number of new connected carer viability requests. A viability assessment is a short assessment that assesses the viability of an applicant having the required knowledge and skills to be assessed as a connected carer for a child known to them. It considers their relationship to the child, their understanding of the family circumstances and their ability to provide safe care for a child in the short term whilst a more in-depth assessment is completed. For this period there were 230 requests, which is a 15% increase on last year's number of 200 viability referrals and a 142% increase on 2019/20 figure of 95 viabilities.

There were 5 resignations from mainstream households, resulting in a small net gain in placement capacity.

9 children were matched long-term to their foster carers at fostering panel and 14 Special Guardianship orders were granted for children looked after.

Key strengths of the fostering service continue to be an experienced and robust workforce, the availability of wrap around support to foster carers and our developed training offer to mainstream and connected person foster carers. This all aids placement stability for children looked after and prevents unplanned moves for children and young people.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 Cabinet is requested to consider the information in this report and support the work of Shropshire's Fostering Services (as set out in more detail within the Appendix) in fulfilling the Council's statutory and regulatory requirements.

## **REPORT**

### **4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

*(NB This will include the following: Impact on Children and Vulnerable Adults, Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community and other Consultation)*

#### **4.1 Impact on children and vulnerable adults**

Children and young people should have the opportunity to remain living in their local community close to their family, friends, schools, and recreational activities. To meet the needs of these children and young

people fostering recruitment is targeted to those living in Shropshire and in the immediate surrounding area.

#### **4.2 Risk Management**

Foster carer provision is a key aspect of our safeguarding responsibility for Shropshire children and young people. Without a clear focus on foster carer recruitment and retention, the risks from a financial and legal perspective would be significant. We would see a significant increase in cost for foster placements from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and an increase in our use of external residential provision and we would be unable to deliver on the statutory requirements and regulations governing local authority fostering services.

#### **4.3 Human Rights**

Children and young people have a right to be safe and to feel safe. If this can't be achieved within their birth family, we must provide high quality foster placements so children can be safeguarded.

Foster carers have the right to receive a good service from their fostering provider, this includes the provision of timely assessments, robust support and training, access to independent support and advocacy and where appropriate help and assistance for them to secure permanence for the children they are caring for.

#### **4.4 Equalities**

All children and young people requiring a foster placement need foster carers who can support their access to health services, educational placements and support their ongoing relationships with birth family members and peers.

Connected carers are entitled to the same level of service provision as mainstream foster carers, but their support needs are often different, and so there needs to be flexibility in the system to be able to respond to the different needs of all carers.

Shropshire is a provider of regulated fostering services. In addition to our statutory duties to children looked after, there is also the requirement to legally respond to Shropshire residents who request an assessment for private fostering or an assessment for special guardianship to secure permanence for a child residing with them.

#### **4.5 Community**

Fostering recruitment provides opportunities for the community to become foster carers offering care to children and young people from within their own community.

## **4.6 Consultation**

The Fostering Service consults widely with carers on the introduction of any changes to service delivery, this is supported by Shropshire Foster Carer Association (SFCA)

Young people are always consulted on their care plans and whilst the children in care group (CiC) was seriously disrupted through Covid, low level activity and consultation has continued.

## **5 Financial Implications**

5.1 . The placements budget which includes spend on fostering placements is closely monitored by our finance business partner and through our internal placement monitoring panels. In addition to improved outcomes for children and young people, fostering placements are generally delivered at a lower cost to the Council than alternative approaches.

## **6 Climate Change Appraisal**

6.1 There is a wider benefit to having children living locally in local approved foster homes. This reduces the need for excessive mileage and carbon costs to travel to see children living at distance and reduces the time needed to undertake such visits.

## **7 Background**

### **7.1 Remit of the fostering service**

Fostering Services are highly regulated. The remit is recruitment, assessment, and support of mainstream and connected person fostering households. All foster carers require the approval of the Agency Decision Maker following a recommendation from fostering panel on their suitability to foster and all are subject to an annual review of their suitability to foster. An agency decision maker is defined as being a senior social work officer in the local authority who is qualified and suitably experienced to make decisions on suitability of applicants to foster. For Shropshire, this position is held by both the service manager for fostering and the Assistant Director.

Regulated activity comprises of the following key components; annual foster carer review or sooner where there are concerns, supervision and support visits, frequency determined by the individual needs of the carer, unannounced visits, regular renewal of DBS and medical checks, completion of personal development plans and monitoring of up-to-date training.

In addition to foster carers who directly care for children looked after, as a statutory service, there is also a duty to work with private fostering and members of the public seeking a special guardianship order for a child in their care.

## **7.2 Service Growth**

There has, in line with the growth in numbers of children looked after been significant growth in activity for the fostering service, and this is particularly evident in the growth of the number of connected carer viability assessments and approvals. Connected carers are usually grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings of close friends where often there is a level of disfunction in the family dynamic which has necessitated the involvement of children's services. These placements require high levels of support, supervision, and oversight. The judiciary will always be involved in connected carer placements, and as a result, this work takes priority over the approval and support of mainstream fostering.

To ensure we also continue to grow our mainstream foster carer resource, the service is always striving to recruit more carers by using innovative marketing campaigns and by ensuring we are competitive with independent fostering agency agencies with competitive pay rates, robust training packages and regular support and supervision.

The significant rise in the number of connected carer arrangements has required service investment to create a team to work specifically with this cohort, the primary objective is to progress as many connected carer arrangements as possible through to the granting of a Special Guardianship order, which secures legal permanence for children and young people.

Service priorities for the coming year 2022-2023 include the launch and embedding of Mockingbird, launch and embedding of the new Kinship to Permanence Team, the progression of permanence plans for children and young people, to retain a skilled and robust workforce and to grow our internal foster care resource to provide more local placements for the children and young people of Shropshire. Explanation of Mockingbird can be found in the body of the annexed report.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Kirstie Hurst-Knight

**Local Member**

All members

**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Fostering Service Annual Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

**APPENDIX 1**



Children's Placement Service  
Annual Report  
2021-22

May 2022

**Team Managers:** Karen Scardifield and Karen Pountney  
**Service Manager:** Lisa Preston

## **1. Introduction**

Children's Placement Service (CPS) continues to be a busy service. We have continued to maintain our core of skilled and dedicated foster carers and an equally dedicated and skilled team of social workers. The combination of these two factors continues to provide excellent outcomes for our looked after children that are placed with our foster carers. There have continued to be some challenges, most notably the rise in the connected carer assessments which are court directed. Whilst the team continues to rise to this challenge, this can detract from the recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers.

The purpose of this report is to provide further context to this but also to give an overview of activity and updates to practice initiatives such as permanence forum and Mockingbird

## **2. Overview of Activity of CPS**

i..1.1.1 The purpose of the service is to provide a comprehensive range of safe and stable foster placements with approved foster carers to meet the needs of children who are looked after by the local authority.

i..1.1.2

i..1.1.3 To achieve this, the service aims to recruit, assess, train, support and supervise foster carers who have the appropriate skills or experience to provide quality placements.

The pool of Shropshire foster carers continues to include placements for a wide range of children and young people, from pre-adoption babies, through to the more challenging teenagers, and respite carers and placements specifically for children with disabilities called Family Based Shared Care.

In addition to assessing and supporting in house mainstream foster carers, the service also assess Family and Friends connected person's foster carers. To do this, the work is timetabled and completed within Public Law Outline timescales and court directions.

The service also assesses potential Special Guardians and produces Special Guardianship reports for Looked after Children and Non-Looked after Children, as well as managing private fostering referrals and assessments.

## **3. In House Foster Carer assessments & Recruitment**

There have been ongoing developments to the fostering recruitment process over the last 12 months. The digital approach to information events has been maintained and enhanced as this proved successful through covid 19.

We have enhanced new digital mediums, new access-points to engage with the prospective carers and increased child specific recruitment and step-down campaigns for children needing to move out of residential care.

### **3.1 Multi point for entry**

We have continued with information sharing events for perspective new carers on a digital platform offering a virtual information event and 'drop-ins' via social media platforms.

The response to this approach has also shaped the specific marketing campaigns that have been developed for this year and the following year.

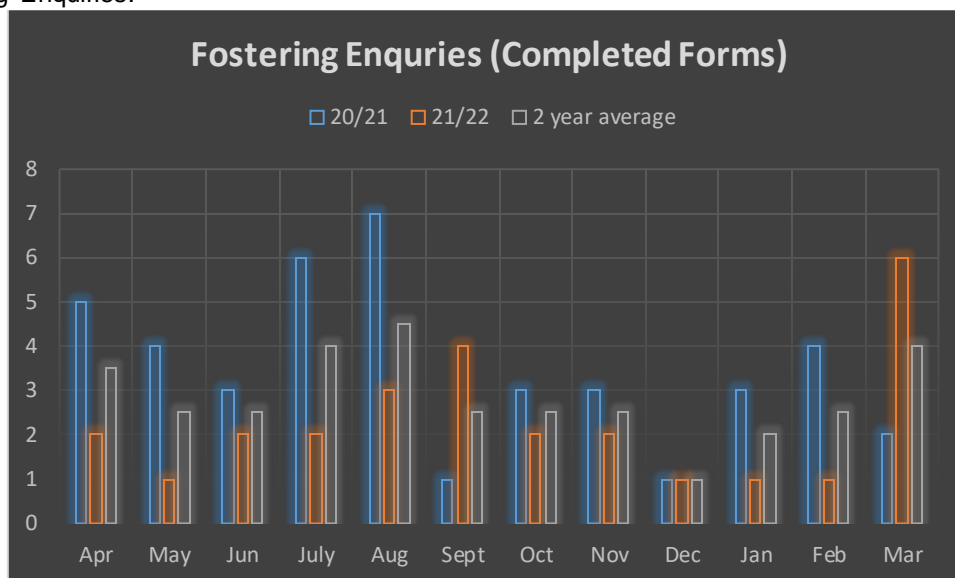


**Digital**

Digital marketing continues to be our main source of activity. We have maintained some pay-per-click marketing to endeavour to appear as high as possible on Google search. Twitter but more specifically Facebook has been used to really develop micro targeted communications.

Targeted adverts within the Facebook platform utilising geographic targeting, demographic targeting and behavioural targeting have been utilised. These adverts present themselves also in sister platforms such as Messenger and Instagram. There will be a mix of 'low-interest' and 'high-interest' self-populating enquiry forms, Messenger-click-throughs and also tailored sub-landing pages. This approach makes fostering recruitment more personal, more tailored and more cost effective. The graph below highlights the growth we have had this year in foster carer enquiries.

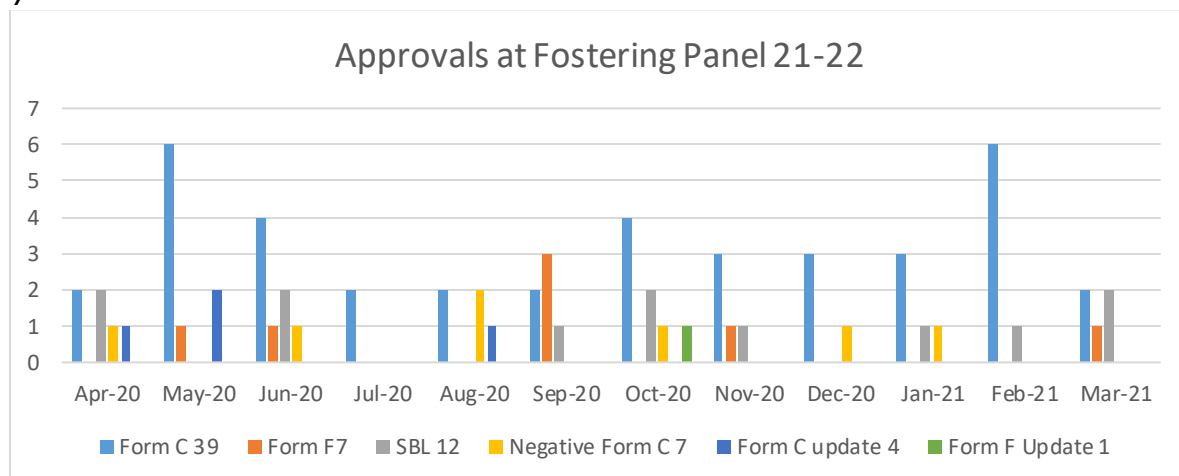
Fostering Enquiries:



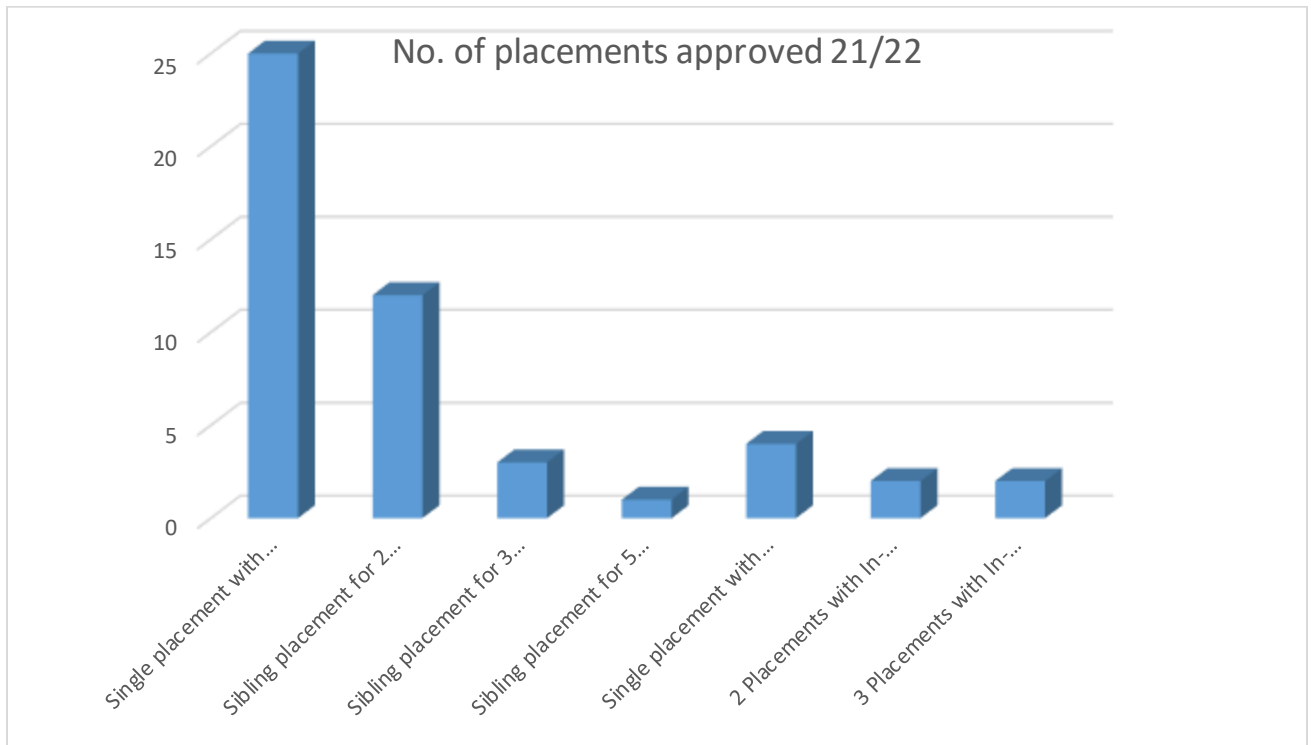
**4. Approval Data**

6 mainstream Foster Carer households were presented at Fostering Panel during this time compared to 39 Connected Person Foster Carer households. This demonstrates the on-going challenge in being able to use resource to recruit and assess mainstream carers when there is such a high demand for connected person foster carers. The connected person foster carer assessments are often complex and within very tight court timescales, it is inevitable therefore that these are prioritised. However, they often take up the majority of social worker's time. Also shown below is the number of SBL approvals.

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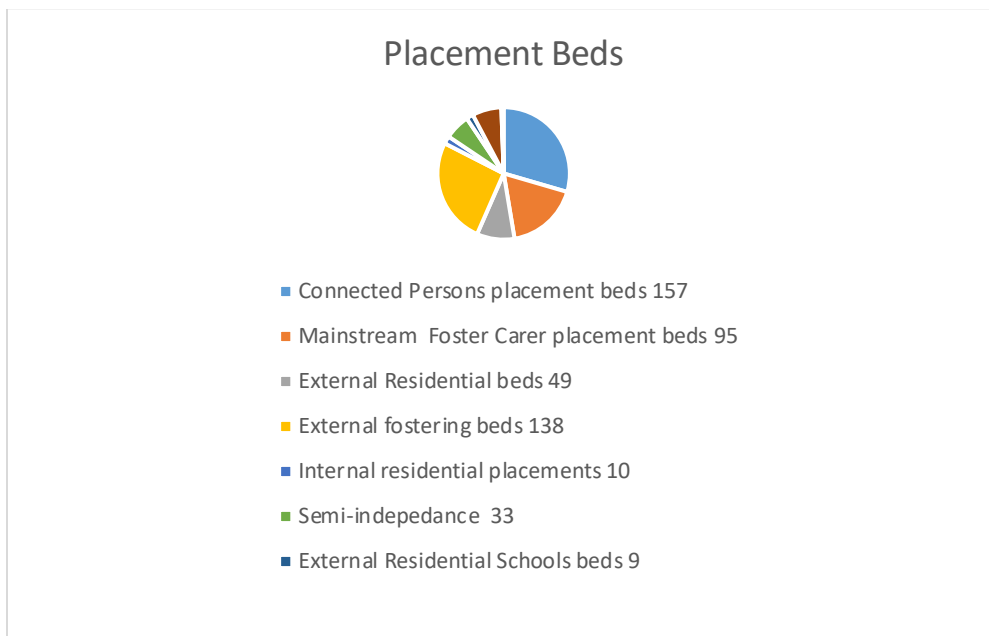
In this period placement availability in fostering households was as follows:



This chart shows us the high number of looked after children that have been able to be placed within the wider family due to the assessment of connected persons. This has been in line with the children's care plans. In total, 63 looked after children were able to be placed with connected person foster carers. Negative fostering assessments are also required under regulations to be presented to panel if they have entered stage 2. In this period, we have had 7 negative outcome assessments presented to panel, reasons have included collusion with birth parents, lack of motivation and lack of insight and engagement.

There remains a consistent need for carers for teenagers, sibling groups and disabled children. We alter our recruitment drives and questionnaires to meet the needs of a wide variety of children, but these key areas prioritised. We are also doing this in line with recruiting carers for our Stepping stones project. Our Shropshire Foster Carer Association (SFCA) continues to be a driving force in Foster Care development. The SFCA were not able to run face to face events during COVID restrictions and this had an effect on foster carers ability to share peer support and interaction. However, since COVID restrictions were relaxed face to face events have taken place and more key events planned. The SFCA continue to meet regularly with the service management team to contribute to developments and advocate for the carers. The SFCA representatives will also be involved in new projects that are emerging bringing the foster carer voice to the fore.

There were **182** Fostering Households on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 (including in house foster carers and Connected Person foster carers). This is divided into 70 mainstream fostering households and 112 connected person households. This overall number did not include 26 connected persons foster carer households which are under Reg 24 temporary approval.



### **5. Connected Persons Foster Carer Assessments**

Prior to the presentation of a Connected Person foster carer household to panel, a viability assessment will have determined if they can meet the basic requirements of fostering regulations. If this is positive, then they will proceed to the full assessment which can last from between 12 weeks to 16 weeks. During this time a child may be placed with the applicant/s under Temporary Approval, but this cannot last beyond 16 weeks.

We have again assessed an increasing number of Connected Person Foster Carers throughout the 2021-22 period and continue to experience a high demand for viability assessments. The number of new connected carer viability requests for this period is 230 which is a 15% increase on last year's number of 200 viability referrals and a 142% increase on 2019/20 figure of 95 viabilities. There continues to be requests for viabilities and assessments for families which are located out of county and sometimes out of the country.

The Regional Connected Carer protocol agreed by the local Family Justice Board members continues to be difficult to embed with pressure to complete assessments in an unrealistic timeframe.

### **6. Supported Board and Lodgings**

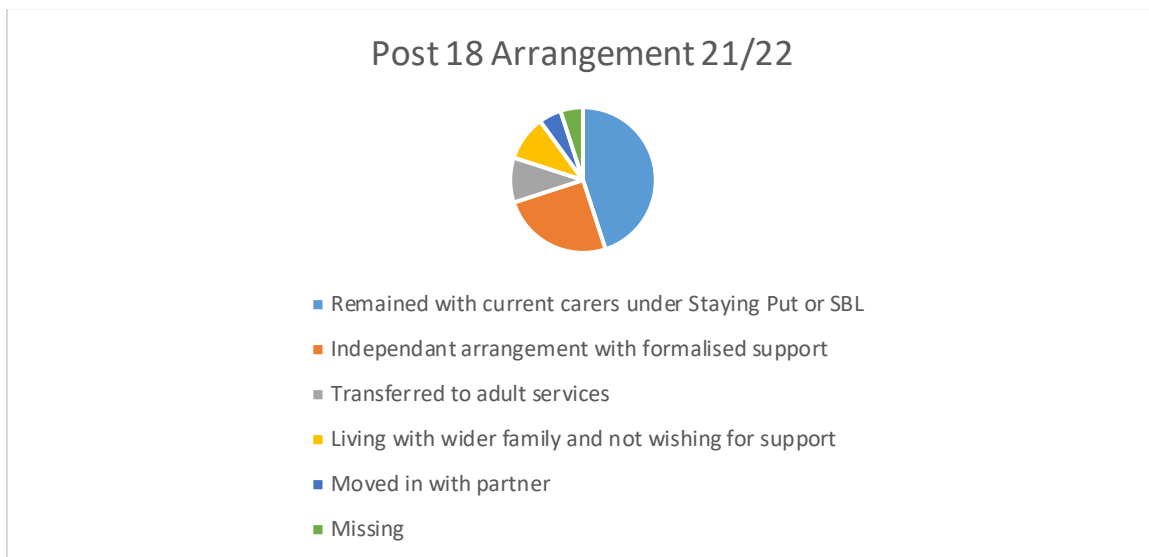
This type of provision falls outside both children's and adult's regulatory frameworks, due mainly to the emphasis on "accommodation-based support" rather than "care." It is used as a stepping stone to independence, and only ever when it's in a child's best interests. For some children, it's the right choice such as those who do not wish to live with a foster family or in a residential home. For some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children this can be the right option, but not for all.

During this period 12 (11 for specific young people/transferred from foster carers) households were approved at panel to become SBL providers.

### **7. Staying Put**

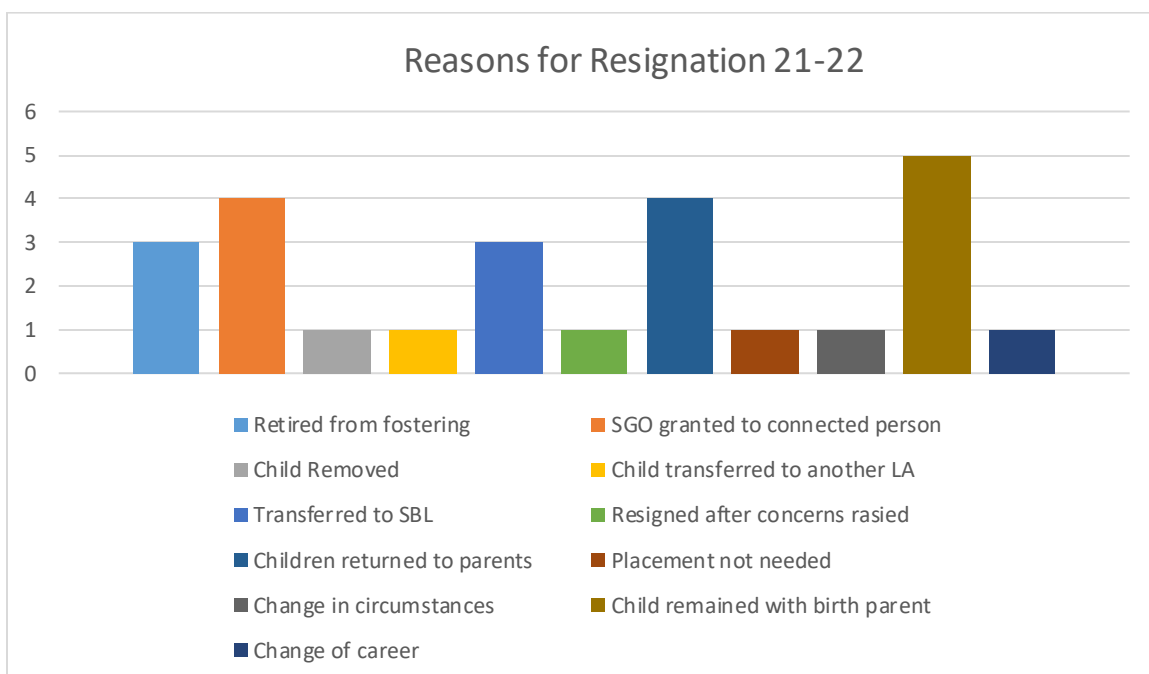
Staying Put is where young people over the age 18 remain in the care of their foster carers until the age of 21. This is not the same as a foster placement. The young person staying put, who must be a former relevant child, is no longer a looked after child. They are a young adult and a care leaver. They are entitled to support as a care leaver and will be allocated a personal advisor who is part of the Leaving Care Team. The foster carer is no longer acting in the capacity of foster carer for that young adult; they are their 'former foster carer'.

In the year 2021-2022, 20 young people who were looked after turned 18 in this period, 4 males and 16 females. 9 of these remained as 'staying put' or SBL with their former Foster Carers.



## 8. Resignations

Resignations from Fostering come from both In House Foster carer and Connected Person Foster carers for a variety of reasons. Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, we had 25 foster carer households' resignations from 20 Connected Person Households, and 5 In House Foster Carer Households.



## 9. Foster Carer Annual Review

All approved fostering households are required to have an annual review of their suitability as carers within one year of their approval. Thereafter reviews should occur each 12 months or whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary or appropriate to safeguard the welfare of any child who has been placed with that carer, but at intervals of not more than a year. 131 reviews took place between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 and the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. 57 of these reviews which took place outside of timescales, however for some this was only a few days. The reason for this has been due to carer forgetting the reviews, some carer ill health, 2 carers reviews delayed due to having cancer treatment not being well.

### **10. Matching**

In this period, 9 children were matched with their carers. Out of these 3 children were matched with in house foster carers, and 6 children were matched with external foster carers which continues to demonstrate the commitment to the permanency of the children in local authority care which is in line with our Permanence policy and demonstrates the foster carers commitment to the children in their care.

### **11. Placement moves**

During this period, there were 17 children who had experienced more than 2 placement moves. Children who experienced 2 placement moves may have been moved from an emergency placement to a short/long term placement, moved from a foster care placement to a family member or moved from a short-term placement to a long term or permanence option therefore this data is only covering those children who have experienced more than 2 moves.

The data from this period does not lead us to any solid conclusions around age and placement disruption and has shown that there is little evidence that gender plays a part on placement disruption. However, it is noted that babies under 1 year of age have experienced the most placement moves in this period.

### **12. Private Fostering**

Private Fostering is an arrangement made for a child under the age of 16, or under 18 if a child has a disability, to be cared for by someone other than a close relative for 28 days or more.

A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him has done so for fewer than 28 days and does not intend to do so for longer than that. Privately Fostered children are not deemed to be 'looked after' and are not necessarily a child in need.

By the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, there were 4 private fostering arrangements on-going from the previous year, and a further 2 new PF arrangements assessed between 1st April 2021 and the 31st of March 2022.

Out of the 2 Private Fostering arrangements assessed in 2021/2022

- 1 was closed as it was not deemed a PF arrangement due to no parental consent as both birth parents were deceased. The adult caring for the young person went onto apply for an SGO.
- 1 Private positive fostering assessment completed and presented to suitability panel.

There has been a reduction in requests for assessment of private fostering arrangements. There has been no request from educational placements which may be an indication of the impact of COVID on international students.

### **13. Special Guardianship Orders**

The service undertakes Special Guardianship Assessments for children in our care and this is their identified permanence option or if directed to do so by the Court. In addition, where children are not Looked After and reside within Shropshire, the service will undertake Special Guardian Assessments upon request.

Post Order support is available for all Special Guardians, this year we have grown the support offer to include access to 'Kinship' organisation and have recruited to a permanent senior practitioner to support the existing social work post. Assessments for therapeutic work can be funded through the Adoption Support Fund for children who have been previously Looked After prior to the order being granted.

Between 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 18 SGO's were granted and of these 14 were for children looked after.

## **14. Foster carer training 2021-22**

### **Pre-approval Training**

All prospective foster carers making an application to foster are required to complete a preparation course entitled Skills to Foster as part of the assessment process.

Whilst face-to-face training was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we continued to offer Skills to Foster training on a virtual platform – this was delivered to 7 delegates. All potential carers were assessed and approved at fostering panel, however two carers have since resigned from fostering.

The activities and exercises that are completed during the Skills to Foster programme, along with the home practice activities, account for 40% of carer's Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS). These must be completed by foster carers within their first year of fostering.

Skills to Care training has been delivered for all pre-approval connected carers. This training has been well received, with 48 delegates attending on either a face-to-face or virtual basis. We have experienced an increase in the number of connected people attending induction training courses since the pre-approval programme was first introduced. Delegate feedback is that the training helpful, supportive and a positive way of meeting other people who are going through the same process. This has encouraged connected carers to engage in further training following their approval at fostering panel.

### **Induction Training**

Induction training, for both mainstream and connected carers, currently consists of 8 key courses, all to be completed within the first 12 months following panel approval. First Aid and 'Raising Awareness of Safeguarding and Protecting Children' are normally the first two areas of training we encourage new carers to complete.

To support Training, Support and Development Standards, and ensure that they are completed in a timely manner, the following induction courses have been matched to both sets of TSDS requirements:

- Family Time
- First Aid
- Raising Awareness of Safeguarding and Protecting Children
- Safer Caring
- Solihull Approach – Understanding your Child

The remaining areas of mandatory training are provided as online learning, via our account with The Training Hub – these are:

- Medications
- Online Safety
- Reporting and Recording

### **Core Training**

There are 12 'core' training courses within our training and development strategy:

- Allegations
- Attachment
- Challenging Behaviours
- Children's Health
- CSE
- Domestic Abuse Briefing
- Education and SEN
- Exploitation
- Learning Disability Awareness
- Loss and Bereavement
- Moving Children on to Adoption
- Solihull Approach – Understanding Trauma

Education and SEN training has been on hold, pending the reorganisation of the Virtual School Team. However, four new courses have already been agreed for the 2022/2023 training and development programme – see ‘future plans’.

All other areas of core training have been well attended over the past year -via face-to-face and virtual training. Evaluation feedback from each of these core courses demonstrates that carers find them useful and informative:

Our enhanced training is available to all carers, and covers some more specialist areas of delivery:

- Cultural Awareness and Separated Children
- Life Story
- Resilience
- Self-Harm
- Staying Put
- Working with Transgender young People

Evaluations suggest that carers continue to find the enhanced training element of the offer very useful and supportive in their understanding their roles.

### **Future Plans**

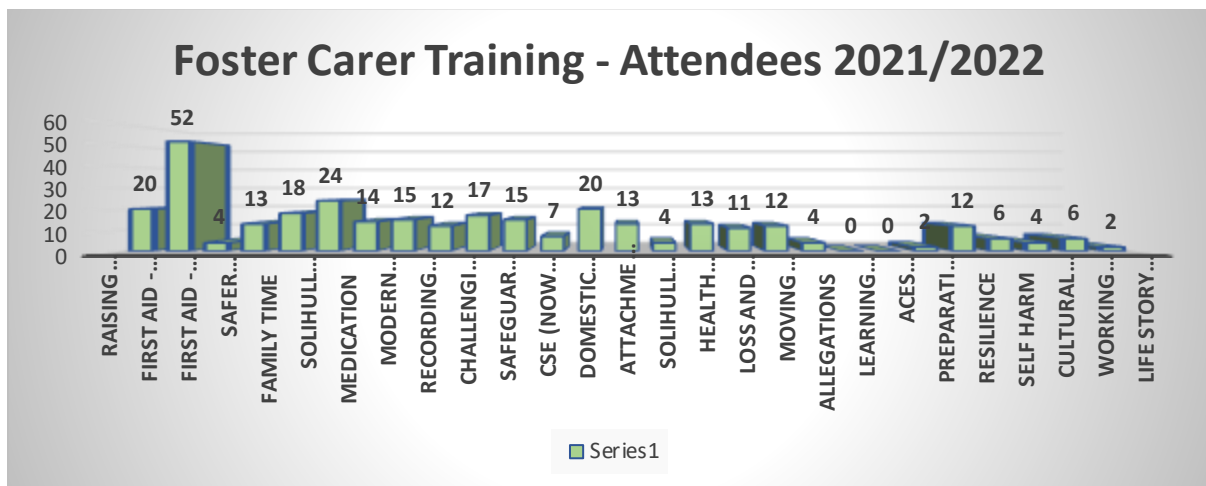
Although most of our training has returned to face-to-face delivery, we have recognised the importance and benefits of virtual training over the last couple of years. Therefore, in the future we will continue to include an element of virtual training, making engagement easier for our out-of-county carers, and those with travel difficulties or work commitments. We continue to recognise face-to-face training as the most effective platform for learning, so this is encouraged wherever possible.

New training has already been agreed for the 2022/2023 training and development programme – this is mainly in response to gaps in our plan, current needs which have been identified, and requests from our carers. New training includes:

- Dream, Believe, Achieve (aspirations beyond school)
- Emotion Coaching
- Making a Difference at PEPS
- Non-Violent Resistance (replacing Behaviour Management)
- The ABC of Special Educational Needs
- Therapeutic Play

### **Other plans for 2022/2023 include:**

- A return to our ‘partnership’ work with other authorities.
- A review of our training evaluations – how we can better measure the impacts of our training.
- Collaborative work – investigate ways of sharing training with other areas of the Learning and Development Team, and with colleagues from the adult training sector.
- Attendance – investigates ways of improving attendance levels for connected carers (non-mandatory training).
- Data Reporting – review the ways in which our training data is captured and recorded.
- Review ‘Reporting and Recording’ training, with a view to replace it with something that is more personal to Shropshire.
- The purchase of iPads has been approved to support some carers who have not been able to engage in any virtual training, due to a lack of appropriate equipment.
- Annual Training Questionnaire for Carers – distribute and evaluate responses.
- Review all training for effectiveness and suitability on an on-going basis.



**16. Participation**

Throughout the lockdowns and restriction period young people continued to be supported 1:1, walking outdoors was the main activity although some young people chose home visits when possible. Peer Supporters met monthly to complete the training programme; then continued to meet to maintain contact and support each other. Groups gradually started to meet again from Aug 2021, we met for walks; 1:1 support continued.

Vouchers purchased from Jump-in as we went into lockdown were used with 2 small groups of young people during Sept-Oct 2021.

Peer supporters and the Band-build group joined together for a Christmas Dance Party. Peer Supporter used this as a trial run for a session they planned to deliver for younger children during Feb half-term; unfortunately, this had to be postponed as the Christmas event for Foster families was rescheduled for the same date.

Between Dec 21 – April 22 a small group of young people participated in the Hidden Waterways Project – this was an Intergenerational project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund focusing on creatively interpreting people’s memories & stories and community history to encourage community engagement and increase investment and positive attitudes towards the canal restoration. Young people (11-17 years) were invited to combine archival information with cutting edge technology such as animation, film making, photography, traditional arts; and music in creative workshops. The group chose to do a Photography project; two professional photographers worked with the group; on Sunday afternoons we walked the old canal paths taking photographs of the changing landscape.

Another application to Youth Music was submitted in conjunction with the Hive; this was successful, and young people are starting to put their names forward to join the next Podcast Project due to start in June this year and run until Summer 2023.

We are now in the process of recruiting for the next Peer Supporters.



## **17. Permanency**

Permanency Forum has been up and running since April 2018. Permanency Forums have been established to support social workers in their permanence planning for children.

### **Impact of Covid on Permanency planning.**

The analysis indicates the following impact where Covid restrictions on family and community-based supports and capacity in the system to progress plans:

- An increase in the number of children becoming looked after, including through police powers and emergency protection orders
- Capacity of social workers impacting on discharge of Care Orders in favour of SGO
- An increase in the number of children remaining at home under ICO for longer than the 26 weeks' timescale whilst final plans are made

### **Impact for children**

Permanence planning is well embedded in practice in Shropshire and is effective in preventing delay. Planning for our children who are unable to live safely with their parents is progressed speedily and where there are delays, the reasons for this are known.

Permanency forum has enabled senior managers to have oversight of both permanence decisions and the progression of care plans.

The presence of the Senior IRO enables the link to be maintained with IRO's oversight of plans.

The Permanency Co-ordinator continues to meet with individual social workers and their managers where any drift or delay has been identified to assist in putting plans back on track. This may be through advice or 'hands on' support to family find for children who are not yet in their permanent placement, or to complete CPRs or Together or Apart assessments.

## **18. Mockingbird**

Together4Children Regional Adoption Agency are piloting Mockingbird in all four partner agencies. Mockingbird is a new way of supporting foster carers and empowering them to support each other through the development of constellations with 8-10 families in each with one hub carer and one liaison worker supporting them all. Telford were the first to go live, we have three foster families linked into this constellation, so far feedback has been extremely positive with children and carers enjoying making new relationships and attending new social events. We appointed our liaison worker at the end of March 2022, and we are now in process of recruiting our hub carer to support a Shropshire constellation which will have three Telford families linked into it. This is an exciting development for Shropshire and one where we are expecting really good results in the support of more foster carers.

## **19. OFSTED**

In February 2022, Shropshire council underwent its ILACS inspection. The overall judgement was 'Good'. The children looked after judgement, which focuses specifically on fostering was judged to be 'Good'. Inspectors found; that increasing numbers of children were benefitting from SGO's, viability and connected carer assessments were timely and SGO plans were tailored to enable children to stay in their wider family and that overall children lived with foster carers who are well trained and skilled to meet individual needs. Foster carers were given the opportunity to inspectors and all spoke highly of the support they had received from the service.

## **20. Conclusion**

The service continues to retain a skilled and dedicated cohort of In-House Foster Carers, who like all, have had to deal with the pressures both practically and emotionally of COVID. We continue to have growing numbers of viabilities with a 100% increase and a growing number of connected persons assessments which prevent the service being able to concentrate on recruitment of mainstream carers. With the continuing high numbers of connected persons assessments this can also lead to a requirement of a high level of placement support from the fostering support worker, targeted youth worker and carer intervention specialist support. If a connected family are not able or willing to proceed to permanence through SGO then this support continues for a number of years. We continue to offer a good training package to our new and existing carers, and feedback on this is positive.

## **21. Our priorities in the coming year will be:**

### **Team**

- To retain settled teams and to embed a new growth area for a Kinship to Permanence Team. The aim of this team is to provide a clear focus on progression to SGO in a timely way with dedicated workers supporting families on this journey.
- To continue to embed the Mockingbird model of practice and to make this more available to even more carers.
- To maintain the physical safety and emotional welfare of the staff during and post COVID and to gradually move back to a balanced model of home working and office base.

### **In House Fostering**

- To continue to increase the amount of Foster Carers to meet demand. This will be achieved with the introduction of an apprentice post to support marketing and recruitment activity.
- To review our use of social media-based technology to develop our marketing strategies.
- To encourage, where appropriate, families to seek permanence through SGO with the appropriate support.

### **Permanence**

- To continue to make full use of the permanency tracker and permanency coordinator, and permanency forum to ensure all children's plans are tracked, progressed and monitored.

### **Foster Carers**

- To ensure that all foster carers, including connected persons foster carers are completing TSD's within the allotted time frame
- To continue to encourage and enable foster carers to participate in and see the importance of attending training to develop their knowledge and skills to support the children in their care.
- To ensure that carers are supported through the COVID period and the period of readjustment that will follow. This will entail a move back to physical events, most notably training events and social events for children and young people and their carers.
- To encourage foster carers to be ambitious for their fostering career and recognise the difference they can make to the lives of all children from 0- 18 years.

