



## **Lancaster University Social Work Visioning Project.**

### **Foster Carers:**

Two foster carers, who currently input into social work teaching, sought the views of other foster carers in the region through attending foster carer support groups. In total they spoke to 25 foster carers.

The following themes emerged from the group discussions:

- 1. The importance of social workers possessing good communication skills**
  - *“Social workers need good communication skills some talk to you as though they are reading from a textbook they are not able to deal with real life situations”*
  - *Some social workers don't have skills in communicating with children yet need to be able to relate emotional material in a sensitive way.*
  - *Social workers need active listening skills*
  - *Social workers need to be able to convey empathy*
  
- 2. The importance of building and working within a relationship with service users and carers**
  - *Social workers need to get to know carer and develop a working relationship*
  - *The relationship between social workers and foster carers is vital (leads to a more stable secure placement*
  - *We need to try to keep consistency of social worker*
  - *Some social workers can be too regimented in their approach not treat people as individuals*
  - *We need a supportive, trusting relationship with social workers*
  - *Social workers have too many cases to be able to deal with them effectively, they need to be able to get to know the young people etc demands placed on them are too high ( problem with the system )*
  - *Social workers are too task orientated e.g. checking bedrooms etc and miss or overlook the issues that are important to the child and carers*

### **3. Social workers need to be prepared to share power**

- *Be open minded and honest, admit if don't know something*
- *Social Workers need to recognise professionalism of foster carer as person who knows the child best*
- *Social workers need to listen to and involve carers in decisions (especially around contact)*
- *Ability to delegate responsibility to carers*
- *There seem to be 2 different agendas that of the foster carers and those of the local authority - nor necessarily working together to meet the needs of the child*
- *A workable partnership, respecting each other*
- *Social workers need to be more inclusive of foster parents*
- *Value placement information and feedback regarding child in placement*
- *Cares opinions can be overlooked (not valued)*
- *Consider feelings of carers/ birth family- be valued*
- *Treat carers as professionals and with respect*

### **4. Reliability**

- *Attend the meetings they have arranged!!*
- *Good communication skills- responding to emails etc.*

### **5. Honesty and transparency**

- *Honesty and integrity is important- i.e. doing what was promised*
- *Truthfulness when placing a child or young person, working with honesty and integrity.*
- *To honest with carers when placing a child in foster care or adoption.*
- *Ability to be honest to yourself and accept constructive criticism*

### **6. Showing Respect and Compassionate Understanding**

- *Be a buffer between the carers and parents when parents are hostile or threatening to the carers.*
- *Treat carers with dignity and respect. Recognise that a fostering family has needs to.*
- *Understanding the importance of manners and courtesy*
- *Ethos : I think the most important thing for a social worker to consider is 'what would I want for this person if they were my family'? That is how I work as a carer I think if my niece and nephew had to be placed in care as I was not there if needed then what would I want someone to provide for them. E.g. love, warmth, security, educational opportunity*
- *Personalise practice to meet the needs of the child*
- *Social workers not answering queries and concerns and yet these can be very important to the young person. Constantly chasing for decisions*
- *Social workers need more awareness of the demands placed on carers and birth children (often overlooked until crisis point)*
- *They need to be more understanding of the roles/responsibilities/difficulties of being a foster carer in our society and impact of fostering on the family and birth children*

- *When in a carers' house the social worker should deal with the young people in a way that is complimentary to the views of the carers. For example not letting them do things which contravene the household behaviour management strategies.*
- *Carers can feel defensive if feel being ignored undervalued etc as they are the ones doing the job 24 hours a day 7 days a week with no let up, dealing with difficult situations and distressed children*
- *Respecting carers and recognising that it is a 24/7*
- *To show compassion and positive regard*
- *There is a need for social workers to understand the demands placed on the foster family*
- *Awareness of impact of contact at carers home and school*

#### **7. Giving Support and Being Available**

- *Not making promises you can't keep*
- *Providing adequate support*
- *When dealing with the local authority there is a tendency for carers to feel isolated and like they are on their own and that the social workers are too busy fire fighting to deal with them.*
- *Social work is too bureaucratic too many higher level management staff not enough doing the job.*
- *Concern for demands placed on newly qualified social workers.*
- *Fosters carers feel that if they are competent and doing a good job then the social workers " switch off*
- *It undermines the carers when social workers make decisions and don't tell them what is going on or happening especially if this is done in front of the children. Social workers will override the rules and boundaries within the foster carers home.*
- *Social workers take children to McDonalds whether been good or misbehaving.*
- *Social workers do not treat carers as competent and responsible adults.*
- *Carers and young people need more time with their social worker than they currently get.*
- *Fostering needs to be higher on the agenda*
- *Need a bit of time to listen to carers*
- *Provide practical help and support*

#### **Values**

- *Moral compass to uphold the values of the particular society.*
- *Social Workers need to ensure that a person has their human and legal rights.*
- *Should understand and accept that everyone is different and have different views and values etc*
- *Ensure vulnerable are given a voice and listened to and kept free from exploitation and abuse.*
- *Ability to look after yourself and accept limitations placed on you by the bureaucratic system and financial resources.*
- *Positive sense of self and self worth*

- *Social workers should challenge the system and poor practice.*
- *Should be self regulatory and work to a recognised code of conduct.*
- *Should be a disciplinary committee like the general medical council with the powers to de register.*
- *Strong personal morals and value base.*

### **Knowledge and training**

The groups felt it was important for social workers to have sound knowledge of law and that there should be increased emphasis placed on foster caring and understanding role of foster carer and an awareness of the pressures and demands faced by the foster carer. In addition they made the following comments:

- *Specific training on how to write court reports and give evidence to promote a positive outcome*
- *A lot of social work practice seems to be routine and not best practice. Is there an evidence base for why things are done a certain way?*
- *In depth knowledge of child development and attachment and the distressed child. Understanding and experience of very challenging behaviour.*
- *An understanding of different models such as family placement model*
- *Knowledge regarding expenses and practical issues*
- *Awareness of challenging behaviour that carers might experience*

### **Increased emphasis on practice:**

Many comments were made with regards to the need for an increased emphasis on practice within social work education.

- *Students should have shorter but more varied placements*
- *When students are on placement, you need to balance the needs of the degree course with the carer. E.g. some carers can find it difficult to work with students as it can cause disruption yet others love it as the students have extra time to help and undertake bigger pieces of work*
- *Social workers students should have practical experiences on the course such as workshops*
- *Due to lack of experience there are a lot of social worker decisions made with no understanding of the impact it will have on the child or the foster placement*
- *Student social workers said that current courses are very academic, all theory not much practice, could work in an area with no experience if not a placement. Mire agencies should get involved with student social workers.*
- *Some more opportunity needed to deal with complex conversations, caseloads etc.*
- *More experience of multi agency working*
- *Placement in a emotional behaviour school or residential setting as the move is for more of these young people to enter foster care ( residential migration ) and their behaviour can be extreme*
- *Ensure they have good recording skills*

### **Management of self:**

The foster carers also commented on need for Social Workers to possess the following self-management skills;

- *Assertiveness - able to challenge superiors appropriately to meet needs of service user.*
- *Understanding of accountability*
- *An ability to be creative and think outside the box? Whilst considering legal constraints*
- *Reflective skills understanding of reflection in action and on action*
- *Too many issues with stress and burn out - maybe need some training on self preservation, relaxation techniques etc*
- *Personal experience i.e. recruit people who have experienced the system- looked after children etc*