

CVAA Practice Sharing Event

14 July 2016

Learning from VAA and LA
Partnerships

&

Role of Foster Carers in Supporting
Transition to Adoption

Case Study

LA1

The delivery approach

- ❑ Emanating from service management partnership showing improved results for children
- ❑ Incorporating Recruitment & Assessment, Family finding and Post Adoption Support
- ❑ Integral links with child care teams early permanence
- ❑ Embodying LA and VAA staff in one team including transfer of VAA operation
- ❑ Theory of change outcomes for children and shared responsibility ethos placements & national agenda
- ❑ Evaluation built in at early stage

Project Management

Joint Steering Group

- ❑ Senior matched roles including DCS, CEO, Directors, Operational & project Leads, Elected Member, HR, Finance, Legal, Communications,
- ❑ Project Sponsor and Chair: VAA CEO
- ❑ Reporting to VAA Trustee Board, LA governance and DfE

Work streams

- ❑ Staffing and Human Resources (union consultation)
- ❑ Finance
- ❑ Operational and Transition
- ❑ Communications

Board of Trustees:

- ❑ Chaired by ex DCS / membership of LA DCS, Legal, Finance, Adopters by experience and expertise and Operational directors in attendance.
Own Articles of Association

Critical Milestones

- ❑ Ofsted Registration
- ❑ New governance arrangements
- ❑ Configuring the Service – what is retained by LA?
- ❑ Recruitment and TUPE transfer of Staff
- ❑ Incorporating VAA branch
- ❑ Gaining Cabinet Agreement (public facing)
- ❑ Implementation of CHARMS (shared operating systems)
- ❑ Service Framework Agreement (standard but different)
 - IP and Data Sharing Schedule
 - Financial Schedule
 - Service Specification Schedule

Financial

Finance Focus

- ❑ Principle of funding follows the child
- ❑ Different cultures of financial operation and planning between VAA (sustainability) and LA (spread and hidden costs)
- ❑ Allow for inter agency placements despite increased pool of adopters (timeliness)
- ❑ Staffing 100% permanent (50 at inception of service)
- ❑ Surplus and Deficit Planning (Risk Sharing Agreement)
- ❑ Market volatility and levels of operation and placements

Staffing

- ❑ Migrating staff from two key services
- ❑ Leading and supporting change underpins all activity
- ❑ Beyond formal consultation – walking the floor
- ❑ Expect anxieties, myth bust, act on spirals of concern
- ❑ Create certainty where possible? Be honest if not know?
- ❑ Tackle identity issues – are we a VAA or a LA?
- ❑ Deliver on promises – step by step change with staff engagement
- ❑ Mutually agreed messages aids consistency

Stakeholders

- ❑ Mobilise engagement from the start – transparent and open
- ❑ Build communications into existing channels where possible
- ❑ Agree a joint communications protocol
- ❑ Agree a joint media strategy
- ❑ Adopt multiple approaches, letters, focus groups, website updates, FAQs
- ❑ Pace communications – key moments linked to critical milestones
- ❑ Diversity of stakeholders and interests

Procurement, Agreements and Partnerships (multiple LAs)

- Routes/ thresholds
- Elected service improvement partner (on request)
- Established service partnerships
- New service partnerships and public procurement
- LA delegated powers for partnership agreements /financial thresholds
- Risks and benefits analysis and financial and legal clearance
- Process of engagement and clarification of terms

Financial vulnerability in securing low priced tenders with high expectations for whole service transformation (Improvements including cultural shifts)

Hub and Spoke

Multiple LAs to one hub
Different needs and profiles
Key focus on improving outcomes
Access to wider pool of adopters
Gateway to Adoption Support
Flexible approaches

Addendum learning products

- ❑ Case Study of LA1 and VAA Partnerships
- ❑ Training on attachment for carers and staff –evaluation of a clinician facilitated training across 2 LAs.
- ❑ Understanding the role of Foster Carers in supporting children in transition to adoption
- ❑ Learning from the experience of an in-house post adoption support team as a delivery model

Understanding the Role of Foster Carers in Supporting Transition to Adoption

Jeff Mesie – Head of Impact & Evaluation

Overview

- Aims
- Approach
- The local authorities
- The responses

Aims

- The foster carers' experience
- The demands placed upon foster carers
- Foster carers' understanding of the emotional impact on the children.
- How foster carers were able to help children making a transition to adoption
- The support that foster carers received and any additional support that they felt they needed

Local Areas

LA 1

- Southern England
- 1.5m population
- Mix urban and rural
- 140 LAC placed a year

LA 2

- Southern England
- 522,000 population
- 30 LAC placed a year

Approach

- Two local authorities
- 18 Interviews up to 90mins
- Two different researchers, same topic guide
- Experience of transition in the past 18 months
- Foster carer perspective - not challenged or tested

Sample

- fostering for 3 years to 23 years, average of 10 years
- all had experience of moving at least one child on to a placement for adoption
- several had moved multiple children on to adoption
- knowledgeable and committed

“When they first come to you they have a sense of loss, emotional issues and anxiety. After you have worked with them and see little changes it is very rewarding”

Emotional effect on foster carers

- Sadness at seeing the children go – “it’s like a bereavement”
- Growing tension, anxiety and feeling of loss within the home as introductions progress and the date for the child to move grows closer
- Wider impact: *“Hardest is to see my children get emotionally attached and get emotionally affected. But in the end all of us want the child to be in a safe and happy family”*

Emotional Effect on the Child

- Some children cope well, others less so – not always overt
- Whatever their initial reaction, most children engage with the process as the plan progresses, and eventually embrace the prospect of a move to adoptive parents

“The transition does affect the children emotionally. They are upset about the transition but do not necessarily say it. They do have behavioural triggers like throwing a tantrum or latching on to me”.

Preparing the Child

- Talking about the changes that will be occurring and the proposed timescales
- Sharing information about the adopters
- More time apart little by little
- Memory box/life-story work
- Range of 'goodbye' events
- Pre-match messaging about temporary care
- Relationship between f carer and adopter

Professional Support

- SW as most important source of guidance and support inc books and advice on how to handle the transition better
- SW key in promoting the relationship between the foster carer and the prospective adopter
- Foster carer support group
- Adoption course

Areas to Improve

- Clarity on who is responsible for leading the transition process
- Better communication with foster carer
- Consult and actively seek the views of foster carers about the introduction plan
- Adopter to visit foster carer to establish relationship and share information prior to seeing child
- Social worker should spend some dedicated time with the child to get a better sense of how they are responding to the transition process
- Flex timeline when needed

Later Contact

- At least one contact with the foster carer after a placement for adoption
- The value for foster carers in seeing the child has settled
- Important for the child to know that s/he has not been 'abandoned' by the foster carer and that they still matter care about them
- Reinforcement for child that carers are comfortable with them being with their adoptive family.
- Closure for both the foster carer and child

Summary

- Really want the best for the children
- See themselves as the experts on children's needs
- Really want to influence who is matched
- Had misconceptions about policies and timescales
- Not very focused on consequences of delay for children
- Takes a heavy emotional toll – may need time to recover before taking on another child