

Item No. 10.	Classification: Open	Date: 8 November 2016	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Foster Carer Training	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director, Children and Families	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the corporate parenting committee notes this report, which sets out a response to queries raised at the 12 July 2016 committee.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. In July 2016 the corporate parenting committee considered in detail training for foster carers. The committee had the following questions:
 - That the committee receives an update report to its March 2017 meeting, including progress on the workshops planned with Southwark virtual schools on the secure base model and involvement of wider family members.
 - That in reference to the on-going evaluation and surveys that are sent to Carers 9 months following interviews, that the committee receive a report to its November meeting on the results produced from this next data gathering exercise.
3. This report sets out the response to these requests.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Update on the workshops with Southwark virtual schools on the secure base model and involvement of wider family members

4. Initial discussions have commenced with the new virtual school head, with provision for an introductory workshop for virtual school staff in January 2017. Members of the virtual school team have developed an interest in the model and the fostering service is keen to look at how this approach could be adapted for use in Southwark schools. The aim would be to support all looked after children, who may be anxious and find it difficult to manage learning and relationships.
5. Over the past two years the fostering service has adopted the secure base model as an approach to care giving which is based on attachment theory. Attachment theory can also explain some of the difficulties a looked after child may have at school - insecure children are also anxious children. Anxiety makes it difficult to concentrate and learn and a lack of basic trust makes relating to others difficult.
6. Key to helping children to learn, relate to others and to enjoy school, is reducing their anxiety. Parents and staff need to be aware of how a child's different

behaviours may be a sign of anxiety. This can help pinpoint actions which may reassure and calm a child so that she or he can settle in the classroom.

7. Professor Gillian Schofield who developed the model is currently working with Southwark to extend its scope and is interested in developing resources for schools and education staff. Her guidance and expertise will be invaluable in enabling Southwark shape the approach to integrate education partners.

On-going evaluation of empathic behaviour management

8. There have now been three separate cohorts of carers who have undertaken the training and participated in follow up reflective practice sessions. In order to evaluate the impact of training on foster carers abilities to respond empathically; the first cohort of participants were asked to fill in a survey and to take part in one-to-one interviews, before and after the training. Unfortunately, none of the surveys were returned by carers after they had completed the training. However seven carers from the first cohort were interviewed in September/October 2015, and interviewed again in October 2016, giving in-depth qualitative feedback. These interviews were analysed to produce the findings below.
9. The evaluation shows that the skills of carers who participated in the training were enhanced. Specifically, EBM helped them to change their parenting styles to become more empathic. Carers were able to put themselves in the shoes of their child, to understand why they might feel sad, angry or lash out at other children.
10. They also spoke about how the training allowed them to personalise the child's behaviour; that often challenging behavior exhibited towards them was a reflection of the child's developmental trauma, not their feelings about their carer. A carer said she had learned through EBM that her child's behavior was not about her, that it was about what had happened to him previously, and the fact that he did not choose to become looked after, or be removed from his birth family. The two most extreme outbursts he had which included physical violence to the carer were when his father did not turn up for contact.
11. Carers said that they were able to be reflective and understand the root causes of a child's challenging behavior. One carer said she realised that her child was very anxious about where he would be living permanently. It took a long time for the court processes to decide that he would be moving to his grandparents. The move was well planned and as soon as the child knew what was happening, his behaviour improved. The carer said: *'Before EBM I might not have realised that it was a great weight off his mind. It allowed me to be reflective and look at the bigger picture.'*
12. Carers said that EBM helped them to communicate more effectively with their children. An example of this was a carer explaining to a child why he had to do things that he did not want to do and recognizing how the child visibly relaxed. This was because he had never really had any boundaries when he was with his birth parent. Another carer spoke about giving her child a voice, which he had never had before. She said, *'Initially he was trying to please us, then he trusted us enough to voice his dissent. There was a permission there to have a dialogue.'*
13. Carers were encouraged to allow children to express and explore sad or difficult emotions. Pre EBM training, a carer reflected on how she would try to move her child gently onto happier subjects; acknowledging how EBM training gave a different perspective and insight in to the value of letting him talk about his

sadness. She encouraged him to write a letter to his stepfather who had died, where he expressed the emotions he felt about him.

14. Carers were also encouraged to make the children in their care feel secure and valued. Several carers spoke about consistently reassuring their children that they were safe from harm and that they loved and cared for them. A carer explained: *'You have to reach out and comfort the child, to go back to them even if they have been screaming at you to go away. Even if you feel that it is getting you nowhere, by going back to the child you are showing them that you still love them and you are going to keep them safe.'* Another said: *'I say to her I care for you so much, I'm here for you. You have to reinstall things into their mind; you have to repeat things over and over.'*
15. All seven of the carers interviewed said that they liked the way the EBM training was delivered. Having two full days learning in a classroom setting was enhanced by the reflective practice sessions which took place over the next three months. Being in a group of other foster carers was beneficial in that it allowed participants to speak honestly about their experiences. They shared the impact that using EBM techniques and strategies had on the children in their care, making the learning tangible.
16. Very few suggestions for improvements were given. One carer said that maybe the groups needed to be mixed up a bit, to allow carers who were enthusiastic about EBM to encourage those carers who were less sure about it. Another carer said that social workers should be required to do the training, to enhance their practice. There was also a suggestion that the training should be extended to three days.
17. It is clear from the interviews that all carers who participated in the full EBM programme benefitted enormously from doing so. It is also evident that the impact was felt by the children in their care. As well as changes in their behavior, many of the children's academic progress improved, they were able to make and sustain more friendships with their peers, attend after school activities independently and also found it easier to cope with significant life events such as moving home or changing schools.

Conclusions

18. Early discussions are currently in progress with how the secure base model can be extended and implemented with education. Workshops for virtual school are scheduled for January 2017 with a view to evaluating the impact and implementation phase of this model for virtual schools.
19. Feedback from foster carers highlights the successful impact of EBM training for Southwark Foster Carers and empowers Carers to promote and instill emphatic care giving for children and young people in their care. Analysis and application of this approach highlights the positive impact it is making for children and young peoples well being, by noted improvements in behaviours, social, emotional and educational development.
20. Professor Scholfield is facilitating a workshop with Southwark permanence service on 21 October to explore how the secure base model can be extended in social workers supervisory relationship with foster carers and their families.
21. Representatives from across children's services are invited to develop an awareness of the model and how it may be implemented across other service areas.

Community impact statement

22. Foster care training is an important aspect of Southwark fostering provision both as a recruitment incentive to attract prospective foster carers but also to equip our carers with the right skills and experience to foster children in the borough. Where appropriate children who require fostering are best placed to remain in their borough or within a 20 miles radius of their home where they have an identity and sense of belonging, of which contributes to placement stability. It is hoped that a good training and support offer for foster carers makes an important impact on the community enabling more children and young people to be cared for within or near those communities.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children and Families	
Report Author	Vanessa White Head of Service, Permanence	
Version	Final	
Dated	27 October 2016	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	27 October 2016	