

Foster Carer Peer Support Policy

Supporting Foster Carers Through Peer Engagement

Introduction

Foster carers play an indispensable role in providing stability and care to children who are unable to remain with their birth families. Recognising the multifaceted challenges they encounter; the Foster Carer Peer Support Policy aims to establish a supportive network that enhances their well-being and efficacy. This policy delineates the principles, objectives, and strategies for fostering peer support among carers. The purpose of this policy is to outline the various ways in which Bury Council supports foster carers through peer support.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the Foster Carer Peer Support Policy are:

- To offer emotional and practical support to foster carers.
- To promote the sharing of experiences and expertise among carers.
- To mitigate feelings of isolation and stress experienced by foster carers.
- To enhance the overall quality of care provided to foster children.

Principles of Peer Support

Peer support is predicated on the belief that individuals who share similar experiences can offer invaluable assistance to one another. The principles guiding this policy include:

- **Mutual Respect:** Foster carers should value each other's experiences and perspectives.
- **Confidentiality:** Discussions and shared experiences within the peer support network should remain confidential.
- **Empowerment:** Peer support should enable foster carers to feel more confident and capable in their roles.
- **Accessibility:** Support should be readily accessible to all foster carers.

Policy Statement

To ensure the effective implementation of the Foster Carer Peer Support Policy, several strategies are in place:

Peer Support Groups

- Regularly scheduled meetings for foster carers to discuss challenges and share solutions.
- Facilitated by experienced foster carers or social workers.
- Opportunities for carers to form connections and build a support network.

Mentorship

- Experienced foster carers paired with new or less experienced carers.
- One-on-one support and guidance tailored to individual needs.
- Encouragement for mentees to become mentors as they gain experience.

Online Support Platforms

- Dedicated forums and social media groups for foster carers to connect and share resources.
- Regular updates and information on best practices and training opportunities.

Foster Carer Ambassador Roles:

- There are four foster carers who serve as ambassadors for Bury Council's fostering service. Their primary role is to support the recruitment of new foster carers.
- Ambassadors are linked to the Regional Recruitment Hub and may attend initial visits with potential carers to provide a realistic view of fostering in Bury.
- Ambassadors include single foster carers, Asian carers, and couples, and they can be matched with enquirers as appropriate.
- They also support recruitment activities; champion Bury fostering service in the community and may participate in media activities such as press interviews.

Mockingbird Constellations:

- Mockingbird constellations are built on peer support. Bury currently has two such constellations.
- The Hub carer is available out of office hours to offer a range of support, including personal support, advice on managing challenges with a fostered young person, and providing sleepovers.
- This support helps prevent situations from escalating to the point where a carer can no longer offer a home to a young person.
- Additional advantages include:
 - Providing a carer or young person from a similar cultural background in transracial placements.
 - Building relationships with other young people in care who have shared experiences.
 - Enabling siblings who cannot live together to participate in social activities together within the constellation.
 - Supporting single carers by building a support network.

Training and Development

Ongoing training is essential to the success of the peer support program. Foster carers will be offered:

- Workshops on effective communication and peer support skills.

- Training on understanding and managing the emotional needs of foster children.
- Continuing education on relevant policies and best practices in foster care.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure the policy's effectiveness, a system for monitoring and evaluation will be established:

- Regular feedback from foster carers on the impact of peer support initiatives.
- Periodic review of the policy to incorporate carers' suggestions and improve support mechanisms.

Conclusion

The Foster Carer Peer Support Policy represents a commitment to valuing and supporting the dedicated individuals who provide care to vulnerable children. By fostering an environment of mutual support, respect, and continuous learning, the policy aims to empower foster carers and ensure the best possible outcomes for the children in their care.

Review:

This policy will be reviewed and updated as necessary. The next review is scheduled for March 2026¹.