

## ***Local Area Forum.***

### ***Buckinghamshire County Council Family Placement Service.***

#### **Introduction**

Buckinghamshire County Council Family Placement Service sits within the Safeguarding division of the Children Services Department. There are six teams in the service; Fostering, Adoption, Adoption Support, Take a Break, Family & Friends and Carer Recruitment. I would like to talk to you this evening about the need we have for an increased number of foster carers in this community.

#### **Statistics**

There are currently in the region of **380** children and young people currently 'looked after' by Bucks County Council. Some of these are living in residential care homes, some live with family members and others with foster carers. Approximately **280** children and young people are living with foster families. We do not have sufficient 'in house' foster carers to meet demand and so some children and young people are placed with foster carers from the independent sector. This can mean they are living a distance away from their home community, family, friends, school and social activities. For most children and young people it is preferable if they can remain living in their locality. We are therefore continuing with our campaign to recruit more foster carers from all parts of the Buckinghamshire community.

Over the last two years we have successfully recruited **33** new foster carers. They have provided us with a total of **43** new fostering placements. However, we need more. We need more foster carers who can provide temporary short term homes for babies, teenagers and sibling groups. We need foster carers who can provide homes for primary school aged children and teenagers on a longer term basis, until they reach independence.

#### **Types of Fostering**

There are three different types of fostering we are able to consider applicants to undertake:

Respite – Can be overnight or up to a couple of weeks to support another carer or to minimise chance of family breakdown and a child coming into the care system

Short term – Overnight or up to three years, until the court have made a decision on the child's long term plans.

Long term – Once the court has decided a the long term plans for a child, if not returning to birth family or to be adopted a child will need a long term, permanent foster placement.

## **Process – Five Steps**

The process to become a foster carer is a rigorous one. We need to ensure applicants are motivated to care for children and young people for the right reasons, that they are well prepared for the task ahead of them and are well supported and trained once they are caring for a looked after child or young person.

The process begins with an **initial enquiry** from a member of the public. Should they meet our initial criteria, we arrange to make an initial **home visit** where a preliminary assessment is undertaken. If both parties agree to progress, the applicants are invited to a three day **prepatory training** course. Following the initial training they are allocated to a social worker for a fostering **suitability assessment**. This involves a number of meetings with the applicants in their own home, assessing their skills, experience and motivation for the fostering task. We undertake a range of background checks and take up personal references.

The assessment process typically takes six months to complete and to present to our **fostering panel** who will make a decision as to whether or not the applicants are recommended for approval. A senior manager will then make the final decision as to whether or not approval is granted.

## **Support & Training**

Once a fostering family is approved, they are allocated a supervising social worker who will support them through their fostering career. Becoming a foster carer is demanding, it can be challenging but it can also be one of the most rewarding things an individual or a family will ever do. All foster carers are encouraged and expected to undertake ongoing training to support them with developing new skills to meet the needs of the children they are caring for. We operate a payments for skills scheme where foster carers are given a financial incentive to reward them for developing their skills and knowledge. All foster carers receive a fostering allowance which is provided to meet the cost of caring for a child or young person.

We need your help to raise the profile of foster carers. To talk to members of the public about fostering. What it entails. The rewards. The benefits.