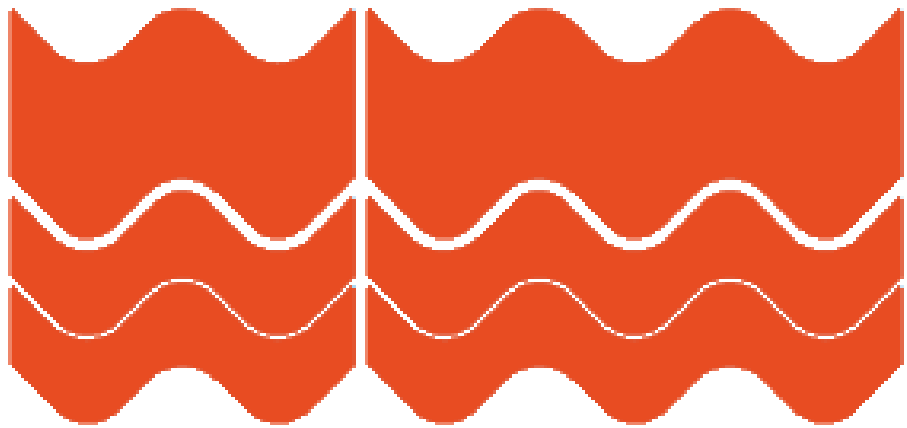


**East Sussex  
County Council**



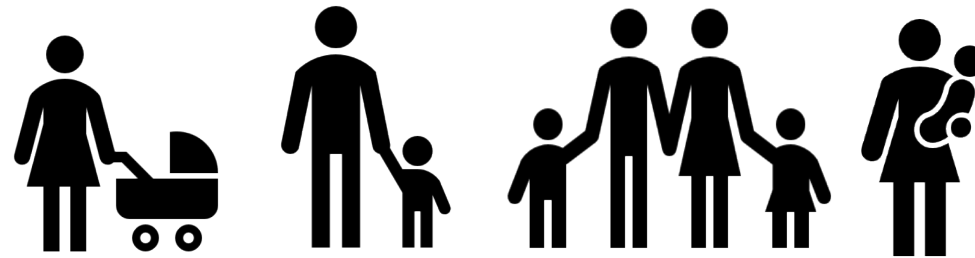
**East Sussex Fostering Services  
Annual Progress Report  
2021/22**

# Fostering Duty

**424** placements were made during 2021/22

**84%** of these placements were in house

The data provided is a snapshot as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.



The Placement Duty Service enhanced their excellent record of **in-house placements (84%)** in 2021/22 with a **5%** increase on 2020/21 (79%)

- ❖ **79** Bridging placements
- ❖ **519** Placement matches (95 ultimately not required)
- ❖ **393** Completed referrals

Statistics	2021-2022	2020-2021
Matching referrals completed	519	461
Agency foster placements	68	74
In-house foster placements	356	277
Not required	95	110

## High Intensive Supported Accommodation

High Intensive accommodation is for young people who may require significant support whilst in placement. It has been coordinated since March 2020 by the Fostering Service. Access to the service has been via Placement Duty.

**155** High intensive referrals were received during 2021/22 (**76** East Sussex Children and **79** Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children).

**124** Young people were placed and matched in supported accommodation during 2021/22. (**53** East Sussex children and **71** Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children)



# Fostering Recruitment



The data provided is a final snapshot as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021  
**14** new foster homes, **21** placements created

East Sussex’s recruitment activity during **2021/22** mirrored the challenges experienced by fostering services nationally. East Sussex Fostering Service has proactively implemented new measures to maximise the conversion of enquiries to approved foster carers for 22/23:

- **Appointment of dedicated Marketing and Communications Officer**

This new role has been commissioned to enhance partnership working between between ESCC’s Fostering and Communications departments.

Leads on fostering recruitment strategy, East Sussex County Council’s fostering website, marketing tools and the use of social media.

- **Referral and Transfer “Incentive Schemes”**

As an incentive, East Sussex will reward foster carers who refer or transfer, with a **£500 payment** on the approval of the referee, and a further **£500 payment** when a young person is first placed with the referee.

Recruitment	Households		
	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
Enquiries	200	227	268
Screening calls	68	92	114
Initial visits	32	42	71
Skills to foster training (STF)	15	37	21
Applications for assessment	36	53	35
Closed	7	7	7
Withdrew	9	13	6
Total allocated but did not progress	16	20	13
Approvals	14	20	22
Placements	21	30	39
Conversion rate Enquiry to approval	6%	9%	8%
Conversion rate Screening call to approval	16%	22%	19%
Conversion rate Initial visit to approval	34%	48%	31%

The percentage drop in conversion rate can be attributed to the quality of enquiries. Towards the end of the pandemic, there were a significant number of enquiries from applicants looking for alternative sources of income. However, many were sufficiently informed by the initial assessment process, to make the decision that fostering was not for them.

# Fostering Recruitment (Continued)

- **Google Adverts - Covid Recovery Funded Project**

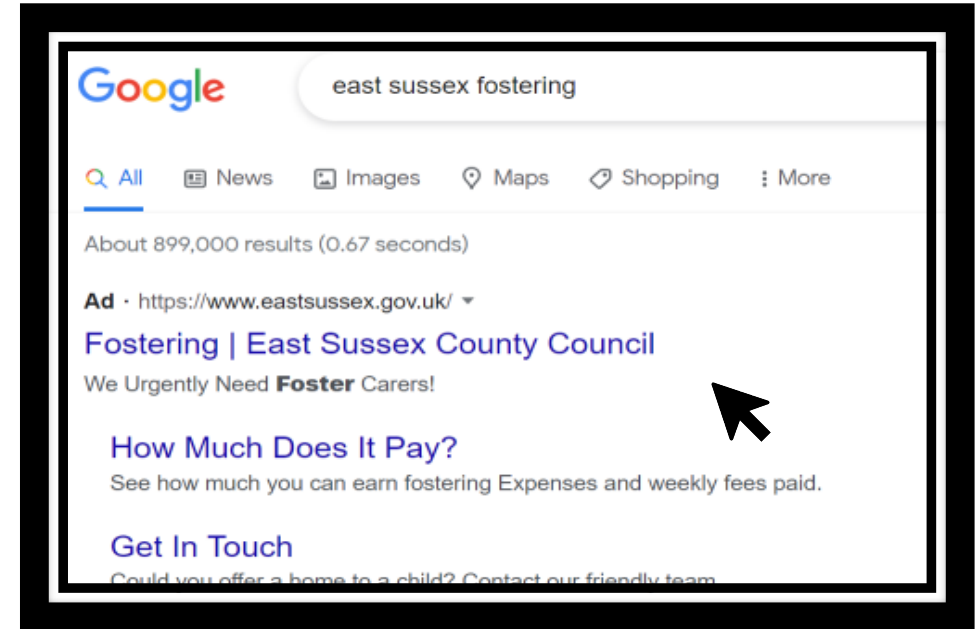
East Sussex has invested funding to improve ESCC Fostering’s position on “Google Ad Keyword Searches”.

Carers transferring to ESCC had often advised that the presenting order of Google search results was a factor in their previous decisions to enquire with agencies.

- **Fostering Friendly Employer Scheme**

In conjunction with ESCC HR department, we are currently looking into whether ESCC can adopt Fostering Network’s policy which would help aid recruitment and retention of foster carers from ESCC’s workforce. This would more generally demonstrate that ESCC is a supportive and flexible employer.

- **Other initiatives existing and targeted for 2022/23**



# Fostering Recognition and Retention

2021/22 - was the second year of the pandemic and a time where a number of carers applicable for retirement decided to make that move.

- The age demograph of East Sussex's Foster carers, as common with a number of Local Authorities and fostering agencies, had left us vulnerable to losing carers through retirement.
- The majority of these retiring carers were holding onto older young people through to independence.

243

Fostering  
Households  
Caring for 417  
looked after  
children

As of  
31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

265

Fostering  
Households  
caring for 424  
looked after  
children

As of  
31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Ongoing  
supportive SSW  
relationships to  
keep building  
"team" ethos

Regular email  
newsletter  
with content  
for carers

Birthday cards  
and gift  
vouchers sent  
to all "children  
who foster"

Retention of  
foster carers



£500 Covid  
recognition  
payment to  
all households



Foster carer  
picnic and  
"thank you"  
dinner

Personal  
development  
opportunities  
for carers and  
providers





# Supported Lodgings

The data provided is a snapshot as of 31st March 2022.

**The were 43 registered supported lodgings providers.**

- 32 of these providers cared for young people aged 16+ only.
- 10 of these providers were also approved as “hybrid” (approved as foster carers and supported lodgings providers)
- 1 Provider was being assessed as a “hybrid” foster carer.

East Sussex Fostering Service has been one of the first Local Authorities to extend the registration of appropriate supported lodgings providers to become foster carers. Hybrid foster carers are able to provide placements for young people under the age of 16.

**46 Young people were placed in Supported Lodgings during 2021/22.**

- 10 of these young people were Homeless
- 10 were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- 26 were Looked After Children.



# Support and supervision of foster carers



## ”Pod-based supervision / Support system”

- Provides an opportunity for Supervising Social Workers to have an understanding and overview of carers supported and supervised by their colleagues.
- interim and emergency support to cover sick leave and annual leave can be provided by other SSWs in the absence of the allocated worker.

## Partnership working

- Strong partnership working with Looked After Children’s Teams, LACAMHS, Virtual School and Placement Support Service.
- Important in supporting foster carers, sustaining placements and attempting to meet the complex needs of looked after children and young people.

## Buddy Scheme

- Experienced foster carers provide much needed support and mentorship to foster carers coping with the challenges of issues such as attachment behaviours.

## Out of hours Advice Line (365 days per year)

- The Service deals with a range of issues such as placement disruptions, young people missing from placement or advice in managing young peoples behaviours.
- In **2021/22**, the advice line supported with **132** out of hours requests.



# Support Groups

- Monthly online support groups offered, including guest speakers from other key agencies such as the Virtual School, EDS & Placement Support
- Targeted monthly online meet-ups for Connected Persons Carers, Respite Carers and local areas trialled
- A survey sent to all carers asking their views on support groups including locations, times and themes. Responses from this used to inform future planning.
- Monthly in-person 'coffee meet-ups' hosted in the East and West of the country from the Autumn, initially in 'covid-friendly' outdoor terraces and then moving towards indoors
- Young People Who Foster Council - Monthly Meetings, Newsletters, Online Activities and Competitions.





# Foster Carer Training 2021/22

- **699** Foster Carers accessed virtual training courses (April 2021 to March 22).
- Regulated qualifications framework Level 3 Diploma and all mandatory foundation courses were maintained. **This included an online Paediatric First Aid.**
- The training offer was adapted to reflect challenges for Foster Carers during the pandemic. New courses were introduced: **The Resilient Foster Carer; Introduction to Meditation; Fostering All Ages; Managing Your Child's Anxiety**
- New webinars were introduced: **Parenting the traumatised child; De-Escalation; A-Z Therapeutic Parenting and Strategies on Managing Adolescent Behaviour**



# Future developments of our training offer

- **A review of the current training offer** and consultation with carers and social workers - April 2022-August 2022.
- Improvements to the **infrastructure** around training and development and giving carers **ownership** and **ease** of access.
- There will be a **re-launch** in September 2022 to focus on 4 key areas:
  - ❖ **Mandatory training** - bolster safeguarding, clarity of expectations
  - ❖ **Wellness** - mindfulness, targeted support, self reflection
  - ❖ **Bitesize** - Fostering Atlas resource bank, variety of formats to suit different learning styles, smaller time commitment training
  - ❖ **Deep Dive** - Externally commissioned half/full day courses, specialisms, responsive to the needs of carers.



# The GRACES model:

**G** - Gender, Gender Identity, Geography, Generation

**R** - Race, Religion

**A** - Age, Ability, Appearance

**C** - Class, Culture, Caste

**E** - Education, Ethnicity, Economics

**S** - Spirituality, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation

# Equality, Diversity, and the identity needs of our looked after children, foster carers, and supported lodgings providers



- **Anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice embedded throughout the service - training, resources and seminars disseminated during 2021/22.**
- Encouraging and supporting staff to challenge discrimination.
- **Staff practicing the GRACES model to explore what identity means to their supported lodgings providers/foster carers and how they can meet the identity and diversity needs of our children.**
- Staff ensuring that they speak with supported lodgings providers/foster carers about assumptions, prejudice and 'unconscious bias and any implications for fostering.
- **Open discussions about our own unconscious bias in practice and ongoing discussions re: identity needs in supervision.**
- Redevelopment of “caring for Black and Ethnic Minority Children” booklet.

# Placement Support Service

Placement Support has continued to ensure that the most vulnerable young people and their placements, continue to receive face to face support during the ongoing Pandemic.

The Placement Support Service has benefited from having the usage of 'Little Dunbar' over the past couple of years. This will now be our permanent base in the future.

The Placement Support Service continues to offer support to some young people who are living in our residential homes, some young people who are on the 'edge of care' (EOC), care leavers, and in partnership with the Virtual School, those on a reduced school timetable or excluded.





# Placement Support Service

(continued)

**142**  
Packages of  
Support  
Delivered

- Placement Support - **90** support packages
- Special Placement Scheme - **5** support packages
- Parent & Baby - **2** support packages
- Through Care Team - **40** support packages to care leavers
- Edge of care - **3** support packages to families
- Agency - **2** support packages

*“Our Placement Support Worker is amazing, ‘M’ enjoys his time out each week”.*

## Feedback from foster carers:

*“The Placement Support Workers really seem to ‘get’ R, they are great at communicating with us and we value their support”.*

*“He talks to his Placement Support Worker about things he doesn’t talk to us about, like girlfriends”.*

*“Without the support from our Placement Support Worker, we wouldn’t still be looking after our young person”.*



# Children in Care Council

- **SUSS it (Speak up Sessions)**

29 activities giving 59 young people the opportunity to speak out and speak up if they wanted too. Through this engagement 21 young people have asked for help with individual issues.

- **Digital Ambassadors**

Involved in the digital care project being run by East Sussex County Council to train, update and promote resources for keeping cared for children safe and resilient online.

- **Partnership working**

Working in partnership with Ramshackle productions and Eggtooth, two community-based art companies, CICC Members were involved in creating a youth led social media channel for young people's positive online content. The CICC made a film entitled '10 things you don't say to people in care'.

- **Youth Cabinet**

The CICC and the youth cabinet joint together for a team day at Bushy wood. They worked together consulting on various campaigns and services within East Sussex.



**the children in care council**

# Children in Care Council (Continued)

- **Buddy Scheme**

Four CICC members attended four weeks training, to become buddies for the buddy scheme that we have piloted this year. The scheme provides support to children entering care from a buddy who is already care experienced.

- **Volunteering**

All CICC members have received framed certificates for the volunteering hours they have completed this year for their CICC role and work in their local communities. In total, as a group they have completed **964** volunteering hours over the past **12** months.

- **Funding**

CICC have secured an extra £1288.30 in extra funding this year from the HAF and COMF Government scheme. This has been used for two, enriching team building activities - Ice Skating at Christmas and Ninja Warrior in February half term. Both activities were thoroughly enjoyed by everyone involved.

Further funding applications will be submitted during the year to buy in more training and qualifications for cared for young people to enhance their CV's.





# Digital in Care Project



In 2021 ESCC Fostering Service was successful in their bid for a “**Digital in Care Project**” funded by Nominet.

## Rollout of “Mind of My Own”

A communication tool that helps young people express their views in a way that suits them.

- Over 90 practitioners trained
- Over 150 worker accounts
- Over 150 statements submitted

## Offer for “high risk” young people

Provided consultations for high risk / complex cases relating to online issues:

- County Lines
- Device / screen addiction
- Parental controls



## Digital ambassador network established

11 young people (care leavers, children in care and young people who foster).

11 Practitioner (LAC, Through Care, UASC)

3 Foster Carers

## Information Sessions

Held monthly for carers and practitioners

- Parental controls
- Ask the awkward
- Preparing for Christmas devices
- Mental health
- Cyberbullying
- Criminal exploitation and County Lines
- Gaming

## “Digital Hive” Launches in July 2022

This will be the one stop shop for all training, resources, signposting, advice and support for all carers, adopters, practitioners and young people

Quote from a foster carer:

*“We as foster carers find the information sessions really meaningful and help us to feel supported not just by the project but also each other. And its not just me that’s getting involved as a Digital Ambassador one of the young people I am caring for and my grandchild are also involved and finding it really empowering. I am really looking forward to being part of the training programme when it launches.”*

# Priorities for 2022/23

A revised  
recruitment and  
retention strategy  
jointly with comms

Review of our  
sufficiency statement  
in light of the national  
shortage of placements  
for looked after  
children

Partnership working with  
locality and LAC teams in  
order to ensure children  
are placed in the right  
placements for the right  
amount of time

Recommissioning of our  
semi-independent  
provision in light of  
legal changes to  
regulation and  
inspection framework

# Glossary (ESCC Fostering Service) - Part 1 of 2

**Fostering Duty** - Team who oversee placement finding for looked after children and young people.

**Assessment, Recruitment and Retention Team (ART)** - Responsible team for advertising and recruitment of ESCC Foster Carers (enquiries to approval) and retention.

**Assessing Social Worker (ASW)** - undertakes assessments of potential foster carers.

**Children In Care Council (CICC)** - A group of East Sussex looked after young people aged between 13 and 18. They meet up regularly to have their say on issues that matter to young people in care.

**Connected Foster Carer** - Carers approved for specific child, often a family member.

**Edge of Care** - Proactive work with vulnerable families to prevent children and young people becoming looked after.

**High Intensive Supported Accommodation (HI)** - Supported accommodation for older young people (16+).



## **Glossary (ESCC Fostering Service) - Part 2 of 2**

**Placement Support Service (PSS)** - Service that provide packages of support to placements through a combination of both individual and group work to encourage young people to develop positive trusting relationships/attachments.

**Special Guardianship Order (SGO)** - Permanence option. Foster Carers can apply to be Special Guardians of their Foster Children after 1 year.

**Special Placement Scheme (SPS)** - Service that offer long-term Foster placements to particularly hard to place, troubled Young people who can benefit from a therapeutic parenting style.

**Supported Lodgings** - Placements for young people aged 16 and above who are homeless or living in care.

**Through Care Team (TCT)** - responsible for supporting young people across the county while they prepare to leave care and after they leave.

**UASC** - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

**Young People Who Foster Council (YPWF)** - Birth children of Foster Carers.