

East Sussex Foster Care Association

Report to Corporate Parenting Panel October 2015

Preamble

This is my last report to the Local Authority Corporate Parenting Panel as I am standing down from my charity responsibilities effective from our Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 12th October 2015. During my tenure I have been privileged to lead an organisation that has unswervingly focussed on the children and young people in the special care of our members. This focus has manifested in a myriad of activities and actions that have sought to create enduring memories for those in our special care and in various way helped to transform lives. The children and young people we care for are the most vulnerable in society and I remain supremely confident that the charity Trustees and supporters will maintain and grow the momentum that is revealed by our actions and aspirations.

Governance and Financial Considerations

East Sussex Foster Care Association, incorporated in 1993, is both a charity registered with the Charity Commission and a company limited by guarantee and registered with Companies House. The charity is overseen by a Board of seven Trustees all of whom are registered foster carers for East Sussex. Our constitution permits a maximum of twelve Trustees and we are quorate with four Trustees. All meetings and decisions have always been implemented in full compliance with our constitutional requirements.

Our financial affairs are overseen by our Treasurer, Helen Barham, who is both a foster carer and practicing Chartered Accountant. In addition our accounts are independently audited by external accountants and all filings with Companies House and the Charity Commission have been timely. I have attached to this report our extracted Profit and Loss report for the year ending 31st March 2015 which remains in draft format pending approval at our forthcoming AGM. Our financial position remains secure and the slight contraction in incoming monies reflects the absence of our fund raising staff member on maternity leave, who has since returned to her responsibilities in September. Accordingly I would expect this contraction to be reversed in the forthcoming year.

The Trustees review our indemnity insurances annually and consider all requisite cover to be in place for adequate sums. All Trustees continue to undertake their role in an entirely voluntary capacity with no emoluments being paid or sought and no expenses claimed. There has been no declared conflict of interest by any Trustee on any matter discussed by the Trustees throughout the past year.

We maintain the employment of two part time staff who are engaged in fundraising, event organisation and administrative capacities. They continue to work under the direction of Trustees and are based at St Marks House, Eastbourne in shared accommodation with fostering team members. This location works to the benefit of all with ease of communication being apparent.

Panel members will appreciate that the support offered by Children's Services executive management includes the provision of office facilities and £20,000 to defray our operating

costs. This support is both valued by the Trustees and considered essential to maintain our operation. Given the financial constraints now imposed on local authorities the Trustees acknowledge the need to demonstrate real value for this investment, which will be discussed further below.

Achievements over the past year

Our raison d'être remains as improving life experiences, opportunities and outcomes for the most vulnerable in society, being the children in the special care of our members. In addressing this aspiration we continue to support our three identified stakeholder groups being; Children in Care, Foster Carers and their Birth/Legally Given Children. We remain independent of Children's Services with a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship, whereby shared aims and aspirations are fulfilled through our different roles and autonomous actions.

We have served the needs of our stakeholders over the past year through varied actions and events which include;

- An adventure weekend at PGL for children in care involving 29 children.
- Inspire Performing Arts Project where approximately 50 children were encouraged to build on self esteem through drama, singing and dance performances.
- A visit to the west end production of 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' for 39 cared for children.
- Christmas pantomime in Eastbourne attended by 200 of our stakeholders.
- Christmas party for children in care and children who care attended by 120 children.
- Conference staged at Battle to enhance the professional development of foster carers attended by approximately 100 carers.
- The support of carers through advocacy where standards of care/allegations may arise.

Our plans and aspirations for the current year include;

- The continuing delivery of residential adventure experiences at PGL.
- The staging of a professional conference in 2016.
- A series of family day trips including visits to Port Lympne Safari Park, Bowling, Cuckoo Trail Bicycle Ride, Indoor Climbing, and visits to London Attractions.
- A repeat performance of all popular perennial activities including Christmas Party, Pantomime, Inspire Performing Arts Project et al.

Funding sources

In now considering our funding we have secured support from 'Happy Days Charitable Trust' and various other sources which account for much of our income. However I wish to formally acknowledge our sincere appreciation of the support we continue to receive from Children's Services executive management. This has comprised the allocation of £20,000 to defray our administrative costs together with the provision of office facilities. This essentially allows us to function and devote our time to critical fundraising and the staging of events as above. I also wish to again acknowledge the support we have received over the past year from Lewes Soroptomists. The Soroptomists elected to support us through attendance at our Christmas party and provided extensive gifts. Their support continues to be particularly memorable given the innovation and careful thought they always provide.

Other considerations

As advised last year the Trustees have undertaken an 'away day' to address how we work, enhance team cohesion and begin to formulate our aspirations for the future. This was facilitated professionally and allowed the Trustees and other interested parties to consider how we can individually commit to realising our collective vision.

Amongst many points considered was the need we have identified to work more in cohesion with Children's Services. To achieve this we recognise the need to formalise our professional relationship through an agreed commitment to events and actions that detail in advance the return on Children's Services investment. In pure financial terms, our ability to leverage our charitable status and access funds not available to Children's Services has historically produced approximately a 300% return on the investment. However our role and 'value add' extends far beyond a commercial return. In particular, our ability to mediate between Children's Services and Foster Carers is self evident, together with an acknowledgement of our role in supporting and enhancing the professionalism of Foster Carers.

Concluding points

In summary I would note the ongoing need to prepare and equip Foster Carers for many of the challenges they experience. From a purely personal perspective but supported by anecdotal feedback it seems more of the children we now care for present with extremes of behaviour that fully test the resilience and professionalism of carers. The ongoing support they require to transform lives is self evident and this reality completely militates against any cuts or diminution to support services and Children's Services in general.

In conclusion, I continue to remain optimistic for our future and our ability to meet the needs of our stakeholders providing the austere times that are evident do not impact on the essential services that are required.

Fred Livings

Outgoing Chair

East Sussex Foster Care Association

September 2015