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Merton Council

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

3 November 2021

Supplementary agenda

7 Departmental Update - Mockingbird Update

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Mockingbird Family Model (MFM)

Sadi Atim

Fostering Supervision Manager

Merton

Mockingbird Family Model



What is Mockingbird?

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using the Mockingbird Family Model. This is an extended family model that provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.

Mockingbird's underpinning principles

- active child protection
- birth family viewed as partners and future support
- community-based care
- continuity of care
- cultural relevancy, identity and belonging
- foster carer support
- normalisation of care
- unconditional care

Key Roles

- Hub home carer
- Liaison worker
- Satellite carers

Key elements of the model

- Foster carer led advice, guidance and emotional and social peer support
- Planned and emergency sleepovers
- Formal and informal training and development opportunities
- Whole community social activities
- Support to permanence – birth family, long term placement, adoption, independence
- Support with sibling and birth family contact

Mockingbird fidelity

Mockingbird is an evidence-based model supported by clear fidelity criteria.

Key components of the Mockingbird fidelity checklist include:

- 6-10 satellite homes in a constellation
- Each constellation provides care to 6-18 looked after children and young people and constellation members (both adults and young people) should be diverse in terms of age, experience, strengths and needs.
- Constellation supported to build a micro community based on an extended family concept.
- Hub home is geographically close to the satellite homes
- Hub home has two spare Mockingbird beds available for sleepovers by the constellation
- Hub home carer is available nearly 24/7
- Hub home carer hosts monthly constellation meetings and provides planned and spontaneous opportunities for social events and interactions between the hub home and the satellite families
- The 'Mockingbird liaison worker' role is a key support for hub home carer to prevent burnout
- Collaborative working – the service must support the hub home carer and members of the constellation to problem solve (e.g. deciding when to offer crisis respite, delegation of authority, etc.)

Evidence from Loughborough Study

- DOE. Loughborough University Evaluation (2016)
- SUCCESSES-Similar findings to USA, one to one support from Hub home and Peer support- foster carers gained re assurance and an opportunity to share
- Placement stability improved.
- Retention improved, no foster carers left during the pilot phase.
- Access to and uptake of respite worked well
- RECOMMENDATIONS-clarity of hub home role, hub carers needing time off, Stakeholder buy in, data protection and confidentiality awareness , training.
- LIMITATIONS- One year not enough time, limited evidence of education outcomes and transitions to permanence

The Merton Journey

- We invited the Fostering Network to offer training in Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) to staff in the summer of 2018.
- There was unanimous decision within the Directorate to go ahead and implement this model in Merton. However the AD left the department and so the agreement with Fostering Network stalled.
- Under the auspices of a new Director, RW, this project was revived in December 2019
- We applied for funding from the Merton Improvement Board and were awarded £53,000 this went towards paying Fostering Network for 3 years providing a coach, training materials, supervision and guidance to ensure we remained in fidelity.

The Merton Journey cont'd

- We set up an implementation working group in January 2020 made up of social work managers from department, 1 social worker, 2 foster carers and a care experienced young person. These meetings were guided by a coach from Fostering Network.
- We mapped out our steps to launch setting out a communication strategy, meeting with key stakeholders, attending support group meetings and team meetings and offering lunch time briefings in the department.
- We invited foster carers in a constellation from other local authorities such as Barking & Dagenham and Tower Hamlets to attend Foster Carers Forum to discuss their experiences.
- We shared a child/young people friendly video on MFM with our looked after children.
- We also attended external training events with other local authorities learning and sharing experiences of implementing the MFM.

A good communication strategy ensured that the MFM was understood by stakeholders.

The Merton journey cont'd 2020

- We were able to appoint a liaison worker within our cohort of supervising social workers.
- We advertised for the position of a hub home carer in line with Fidelity guidelines, this took a long time to fill. It was not until Dec 2020 that we were able to name the hub home carers (a couple) who met the criteria. The key stakeholders were pleased with the appointment as the foster carers were very experienced.
- We then identified satellite families for the constellation, this was mainly done via recommendation from the children's social workers.

The Merton Journey cont'd 2021

- We continued our activities virtually and this had a number of challenges eg we could not meet socially due to the national lockdown and some meetings were interrupted by network issues. We however persevered through these challenges.
- By April 2021, the constellation had met fortnightly on four occasions with the Liaison worker and the Implementation working group felt we could proceed to launch.
- We were required to have a theme and those within the constellation identified themselves as families living in a village. Because it takes a village to raise a child.
- We launched on 3rd June 2021.



Mockingbird in Merton

What Mockingbird means to me

To me it means an extended family / support system for carers and children in care.

Alet

Mockingbird is my foster family where I find support, friendship and security.

Michael

To me the Mockingbird Scheme is very apt and useful.

It provides support, care and opportunities for the foster carers and children to get to know each other. Very necessary at this time.

Ancil

Mockingbird..
The family of all families..where we held, care, love and nurture ♡☐

Lina

Mockingbird Launch 03 June 2021

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Positive outcomes

- 'Normalisation' of care- extended family
- Improved placement stability, reduction in placement breakdown
- Our children make friends with other children & carers
- Sleepovers' relieve pressure on carers
- Siblings see each other, retain strong links- family time at the hub home.
- Foster carers feel supported, grow in confidence , role satisfaction, less isolated.
- 24 hour hub home support valued.
- Robust and resilient structure-, Fidelity to model is key.
- Building upon the relationship model of social work practice

Challenges

- Simple in essence , complex to set up.
- Pressure from placement team to place children outside Mockingbird with hub carer
- It doesn't suit all families, some carers (3 families) left after launch.
- Personality mix of foster carers in Constellation crucial .
- Stakeholder buy in - lack of understanding can breed negativity
- Hub home recruitment takes time.

Big Hart Lane
Lucy



United Kingdom

Caring Avenue
Ancil



Guyana



Iran



Afghanistan

Love Lane
Stella



Nigeria



Kenya



Ghana

Liaising
Social
Worker

Hub Carer

Satellite
Carer

Vacant

Community Square
Michael



United Kingdom

Hope Village
Lina



Italy



Afghanistan

Sunshine Crescent
Alet / Jimmy



United Kingdom



South Africa

Aspiration Lane
Janet / Stephen



United Kingdom



Jamaica



Trinidad & Tobago



Afghanistan



Ghana

Links Close
Vacant

Happiness Road
Vacant

Umbrella Lane
Vacant

Just like any other village, we have some families moving away. We are ready to welcome anyone who would like to join.

It takes a village to raise a Child.
We are fortunate that ours is a global one.



Mockingbird in Merton



We Are The Village

References

- Department of Education (2016) Mockingbird evaluation . available at: <https://www.gov.uk/.../mockingbird-family-model-evaluation>
- Department of Education (2018) Foster care in England. Sir M.Narey, M.Owers. available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foster-care-in-england>
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