

Siblings Forever Annual Report 2019

To: **Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee**

Meeting Date: **20 November 2019**

From: **Olly Grant
Independent Reviewing Service Manager**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Purpose: **To give an overview of the activity of the Siblings Forever Project for 2019.**

Recommendation: **The Sub-Committee is recommended to note the report.**

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Summary:

This report gives a summary of the structure and purpose of the project, and the children's experiences and feedback.

Two trips were held in 2019; one in May half term and one in October half term.

A new source of funding needs to be identified in order for the project to continue.

Outcomes are not formally measured for the project, but an informal evaluation is completed after each trip. The feedback from children and carers is very positive overall.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Siblings Forever is a project that brings brothers and sisters together who have been separated through at least one sibling coming into care. The children get together for a short residential trip for two nights and three days at Grafham Water.
- 1.2 This project has been running since November 2013. Olly Grant (then Consultant Social Worker with children in care) developed the idea with Victoria Bartle (then Area Inclusion youth Worker for Huntingdonshire), to create a space for children who have been separated through care to have some time together that allows them to be siblings first, and everything else second. Since then there have been 10 trips and a total of 97 Cambridgeshire children have participated so far. Some young people have attended more than once and almost all have asked to come back again.

2. MAIN ISSUES**2.1 Structure of the project**

Olly Grant continues to manage the project, and since Victoria's departure in 2018 this has been alongside Tracy Grant (Cambridgeshire's Duke of Edinburgh Manager) who manages the trip on-site at Grafham Water.

- 2.2 2019 year has seen the positive establishment of a committed team of volunteers who staff the project on-site. The volunteers are all Cambridgeshire County Council staff who offer their time over the residential weekend as part of their broader commitment to young people in need of support. The staff team is comprised of individuals from across children's social care, including social workers, a team manager, a clinician and a child practitioner.

2.3 The children arrive at Grafham Water on a Friday afternoon and they leave on Sunday afternoon. They sleep in small same-sex dormitories, split into sibling groups. The weekend is packed during the day with challenging activities led by specialist instructors which include High Ropes, Archery, Powerboating, Raft-building and climbing. One evening is spent doing an outdoor group-work activity and during the second evening children are able to do crafts and make photo collages of their trip so far for them to take home.

2.4 **Funding**

Each trip, on average, costs £3,000, though it varies slightly in relation to the number of participants that attend. Costs relate to the Grafham facilities, specialist instructors, craft and photography resources. All staff volunteer their time without cost.

2.5 Since August 2017 the funding has been provided through the Troubled Families budget. However, there is uncertainty whether this will continue into 2020 and therefore, for the project to continue an alternative source of funding will potentially need to be secured.

2.6 **Siblings Forever May and October 2019**

Two trips were held in 2019; one in May half term and one in October half term. In total 24 children benefitted from the trips. This included:

- Sibling groups ranging from two to 5 children
- Children aged between 9 and 17
- Children who now live out-of-county
- Sibling groups where some of the children were still living with birth parents or other relatives
- Children who were very new in care
- Children with additional needs

Outcomes are not formally measured for the project, but an informal evaluation is completed after each trip.

2.7 **Feedback from children**

“I liked it a lot. All of the activities I enjoyed. And being with my brothers and sisters was good. I’ve brought home my photo collage and it’s on my chest of drawers in my bedroom.” – 9 year old

“I absolutely loved it. It was so nice to spend some time with my siblings and I loved meeting new people. My favourite part was the Grafham Challenge because I managed to get through a tunnel, and I absolutely hate tunnels. Second, I liked the rock climbing, and then all the art and crafts. One thing you could do to make it better? Give us a week would be better – though it would be tiring. Maybe just a bit longer next time, so we could experience things it all for longer.” – 14 year old

“It was brilliant. Just seeing my brother and sisters was the best thing. We never got to sleep because my brother was texting my sister in her dorm. Jeff (staff) had to come in and tell us to whisper! I didn’t like the wall climbing and the high ropes but I liked the crate stacking and I’d done it before in scouts. Driving the speedboat was so fun – it was so fast! Thank you Olly for the trip.”
– 10 year old

2.8 **Feedback from carers**

“L loved it. He said he felt like he "fitted in". He was bursting on the way home, he told me all about the activities. He worries when he’s not with his sisters so it was good for him to be with them. It was absolutely brilliant.”
Foster carer

“Oh My Gosh he had an amazing time. Such a wonderful time, he had so much to say when he got back. It was really good for him to have more positive relationship with his siblings, which they haven’t been able to have in the past. He talked about falling in the water, all the things that a young man should enjoy. He came home with wet muddy items, which is exactly as it should be.”
Foster carer

2.9 **Conclusion**

Irrespective of the reasons that they enter the care system, the impact of being separated from birth family has a profound effect on a child’s emotional wellbeing, on their sense of identity and on their capacity to cope through times of stress.

It is hoped that Siblings Forever will continue at the same pace as it has done, so successfully, over the past six years. There are opportunities for it to extend into a shared project with Peterborough, and also for it to potentially contribute to further research and policy development around siblings. Ultimately the benefits of this project are for the brothers and sisters, providing them with the precious opportunity to just be together.

3. **ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

Report authors should evaluate the proposal(s) in light of their alignment with the following three Corporate Priorities.

3.1 **A good quality of life for everyone**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 **Thriving places for people to live**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 **The best start for Cambridgeshire’s children**

The report above sets out the implications for this priority in **paragraph 2.9**.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 n/a

Source Documents	Location
None	