

Cambridgeshire Foster Carers Association

Foster Carers Supporting Foster Carers

Education Survey

December 2020



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on behalf of the CFCA Committee
supported by: Kim Green from Virtual School
21st December 2020

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About the CFCA (Cambridge Foster Carers Association)

Formed in 2018 the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers Association (CFCA) is a voluntary organisation set up and run by Foster Carers to provide support for all our carers; in turn, the children and young people we look after. The main objectives of the CFCA are to; raise the profile of Foster Carers and ensure that carers are viewed as professionals, work with the Fostering Service Managers to improve our support, services and remuneration. All with the drive to enable us to provide the best possible care for all of the children and young people that we look after.

Our Annual General Meeting was held on 10th November 2020 virtually via zoom, this was very successful and we had our highest number of Foster Carers attend. The Officer positions for the coming year were agreed by those present and resulted in the following positions: Kevin Arrowsmith – Chair, Suzi Jackson – Secretary, Anna Williamson – Treasurer.

The past year has seen its challenges for carers and the Local Authority, mainly due to the COVID pandemic, coupled with a restructure within the Local Authority bringing greater alignment with Peterborough City Council. However, in the later part of the year we created a Foster Carer survey to assess the effectiveness and performance of the CFCA over the past 12 months, the main objective being to highlight areas for improvement; thus enabling the officers and committee to continue advocating the voice of all Foster Carers. The over-riding outcome of this survey was that the CFCA need to improve on their communication back to Foster Carers and transparency and we look forward to working with the Fostering Service on the findings of this survey.

Fostering Network offer a Foster Carer Association support group for CFCA, the chair attends the support groups bi-monthly where experiences are shared between other FCA's within neighbouring counties. For example, the last support group included a representative from Suffolk, Peterborough, Bedfordshire and Thurrock plus ourselves. This has proved very useful to gather ideas from other carers and their experiences outside of our local authority.

As a committee and on behalf of all Foster Carers we are thankful to the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee for allowing the CFCA a place and voice in this forum. We are very committed and will endeavour to assist the committee in all aspects of improving outcomes for our children and young people in care.

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Purpose of this report

This is the first report for the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee that officially collates the voice of all foster carers using an open survey platform to gather views. We hope that the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee find it useful and informative. As a committee and on behalf of Cambridgeshire's foster carers we are always looking at ways to improve the association and also our practice, if there is anything that we could include or change within any of our reports we would welcome suggestions at any time.

Our report is intended to bring together the views of Foster Carers who completed the Virtual School survey in relation to Education. In addition, views gathered from CFCA Foster Carer Meetings over the past few months have also been included to support the report and our findings. The survey was a collaboration of ideas between the CFCA and the Virtual School; to gather Foster Carers views on Education in relationship to the Children and Young People whom they are caring for.

Foster Carers were also given the opportunity to receive specific feedback from the survey comments should they wish to include their email address or contact details.

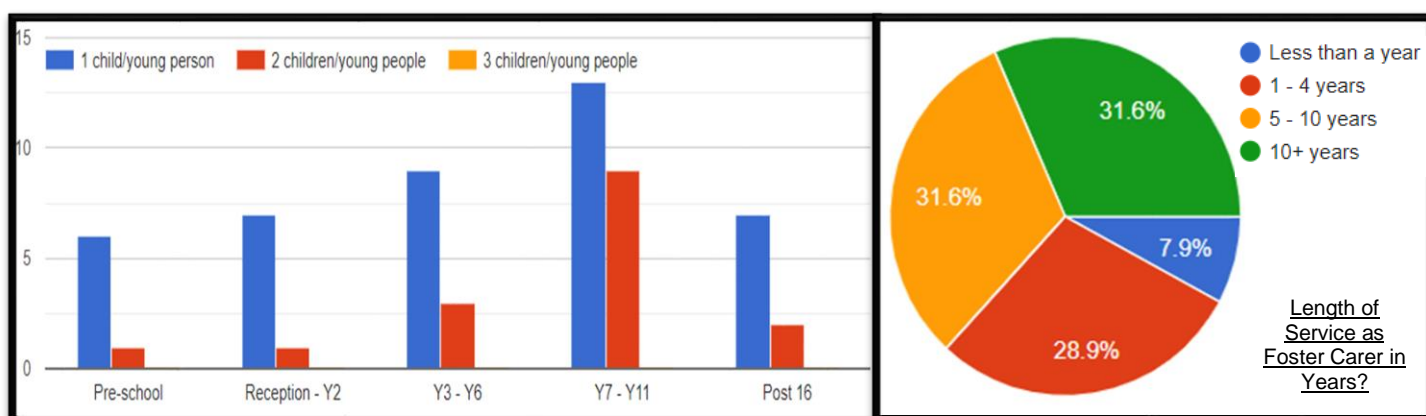
Results

There were a total of 38 responses from individuals, plus additional data collected from meetings. Where the data has been quantitative, there is a graph included with a summary where appropriate. For qualitative results an overview of themes that have arisen have been formed and quotes cited if it is felt necessary.

After the results had been compiled by the Virtual School, a meeting was arranged to discuss the findings between Kevin Arrowsmith (CFCA Chair) and Kim Green (Virtual School Advisory Teacher – Foster Carer link). Additional ideas and processes were discussed in order to produce a balanced report of foster carer views in regards to the current education provision for our Children and Young People in Care.

N.B. During the report the following abbreviations may be used; LA (Local Authority), VS (Virtual School).

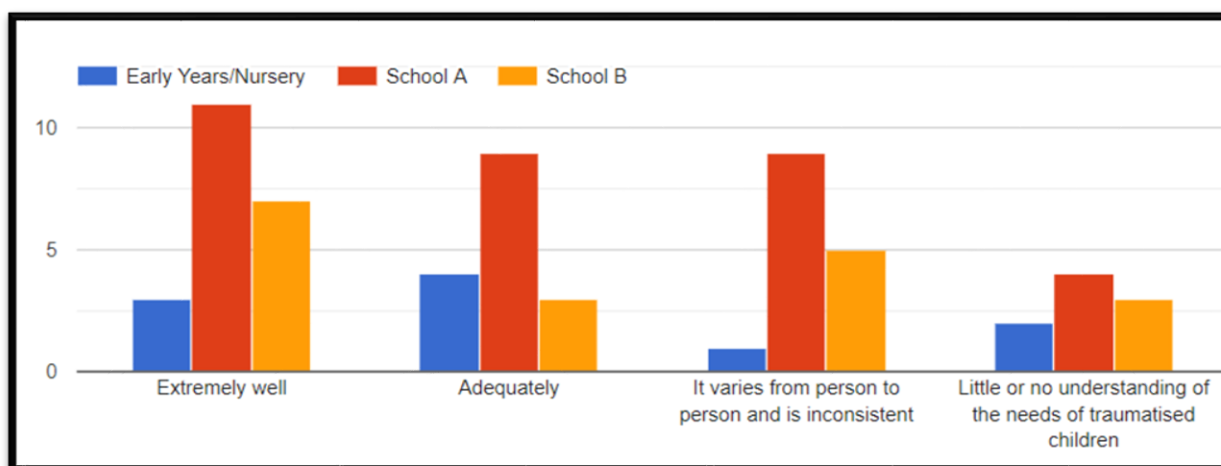
Question A: “Age of the Child in Care & the length of time that you have been a Foster Carer?”



More than 50% of the carers answering the survey care for young people over the age of 11, the spread of experience is reasonably even in carers length of service as a Foster Carer.

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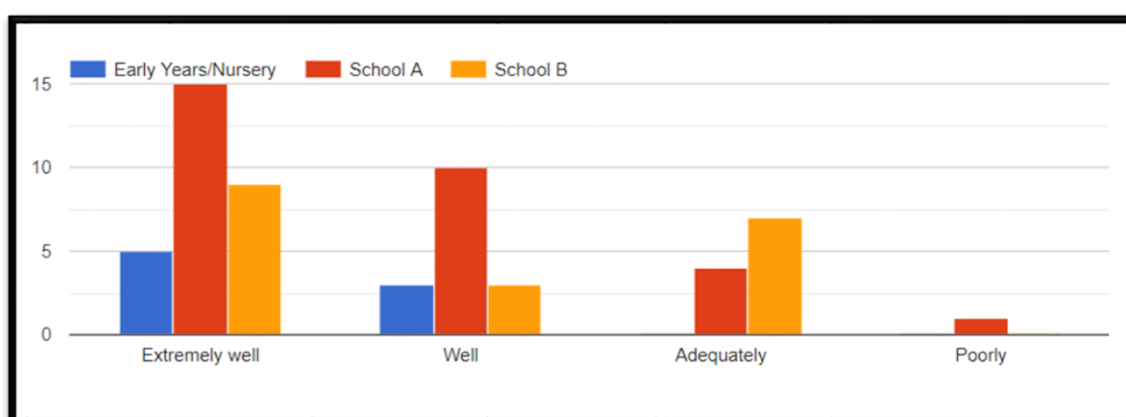
Question B: *“How Well does the school understand the needs of care experienced children?”*



Whilst the data would suggest that schools fall into either understanding extremely well or adequately, the comments give some consistent themes for consideration:

- Teachers and Schools could improve their understanding of attachment difficulties.
- More understanding of trauma and working in a trauma informed way in schools.
- Schools often focus on progress rather than realising full potential, as children in care present us with more challenges within education, a more flexible approach is often required.
- STEPS approach to behaviour management has proven to work well in schools when utilised effectively. It offers great links to therapeutic parenting model, creating a joined up approach between home and school.
- Some schools could invest more in the long-term future of the children as they can move on if in proceedings or move to adoption, etc.
- Length of time from assessment to receiving additional help can be a lengthy process, there does not seem to be a fast-track system for children in care.

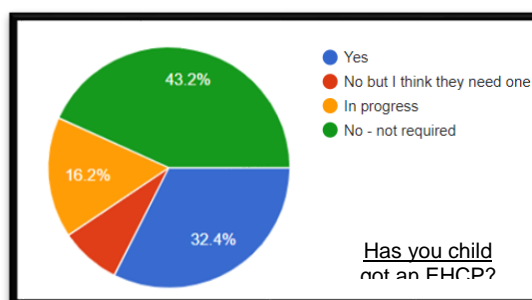
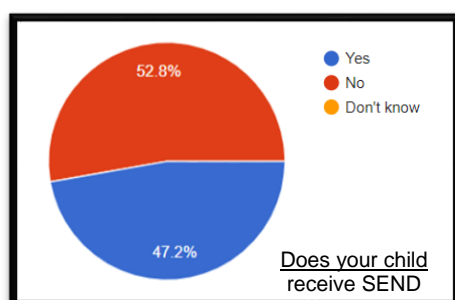
Question C: *“How well does the school communicate with you?”*



- Varied themes from the results, generally secondary schools prove more difficult for establishing positive communication, however this may be due to the nature of the secondary school model.
- Some foster carers felt that they have to find the right people within the school to improve communication.
- The general theme was that communication is a two way street, some carers reporting emailing the school about out of school situations that may have an impact on behaviour and this being well received and reflected back.

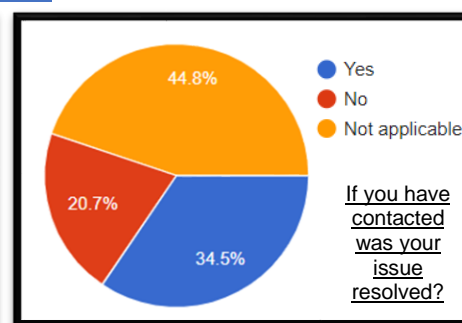
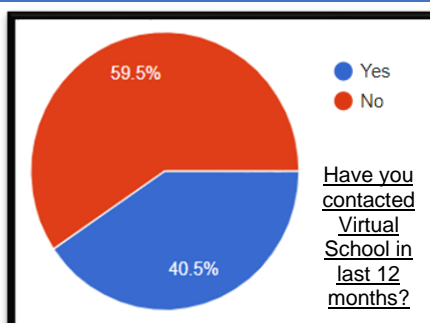
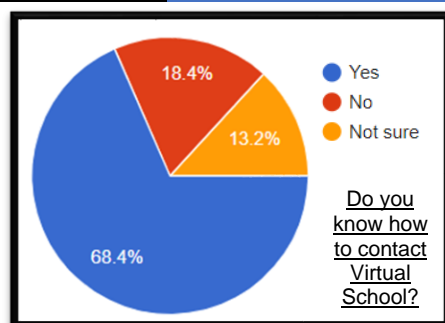
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Question D: “SEND Support and EHCP (Educational Health and Care Plan).....”



- Length of time to achieve an EHCP is often lengthy.
- Social and Emotional needs, however often without a label of a specific condition e.g. ADHD, can prevent access to the help required as not specifically labelled.
- Children in Care often arrive with general difficulties and the assessment process can take three terms, which can mean a child who is already behind with education continues to lag behind. Schools need to feel more empowered to prioritise assessments and complete in shorter time frames with the Virtual School.

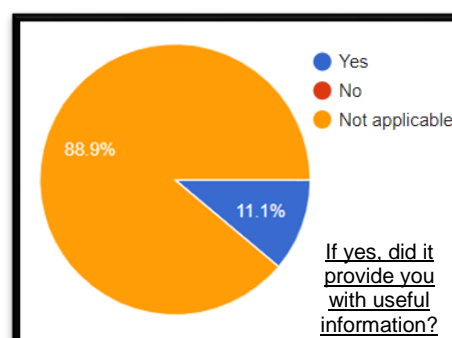
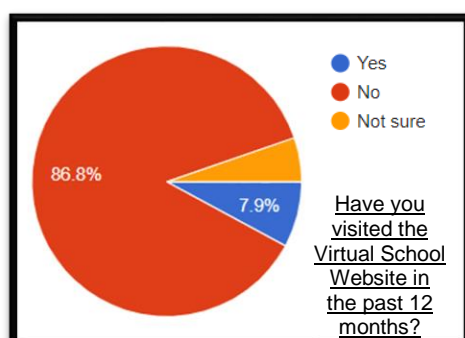
Question E: “Contact between Virtual School and Foster Carers.....”



We received varied feedback from foster carers as follows:

- Some carers felt that during lockdown they could have had more proactive contact from the Virtual School.
- Other carers felt that the Virtual School provided excellent input and advice.
- Feeling from some carers that the Virtual School has a lack of exposure as now not attending the Personal Education Plan meetings. Some commented that schools are not receiving support behind the scenes and ask where the Virtual School are.
- Some carers felt that more support is required for children to “aim higher” and not just meet age related expectations.

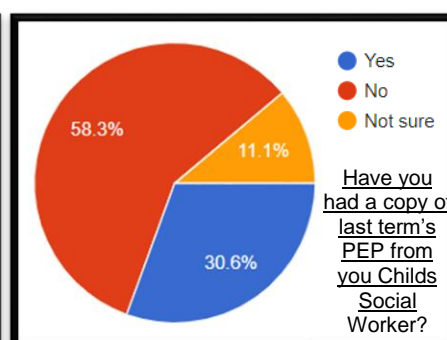
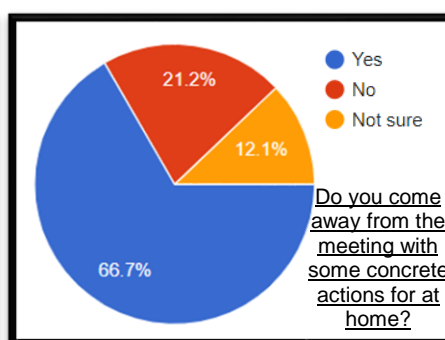
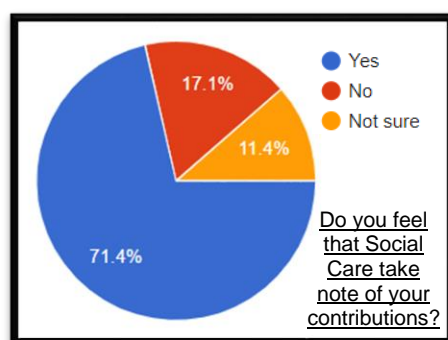
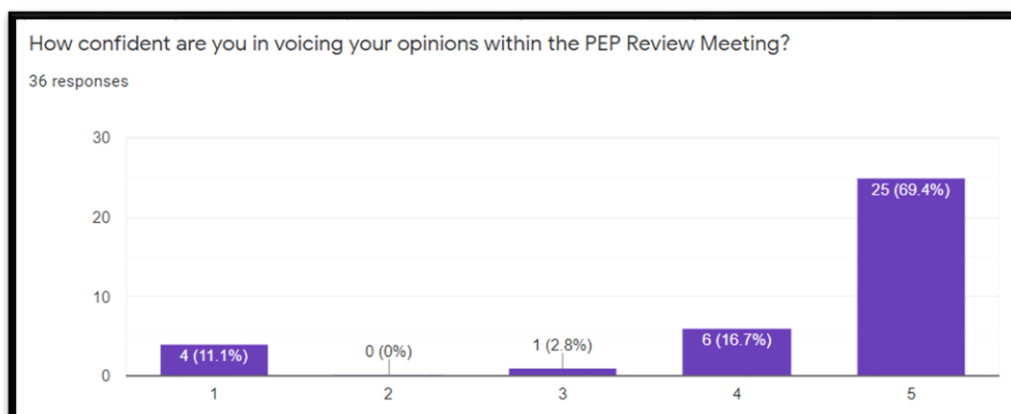
Question F: “Virtual School Website.....”



The results here are self-explanatory, a low number of carers have accessed the website, however of those that did, they found the information useful.

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Question G: “Personal Education Plan Meetings (PEP’s).....”

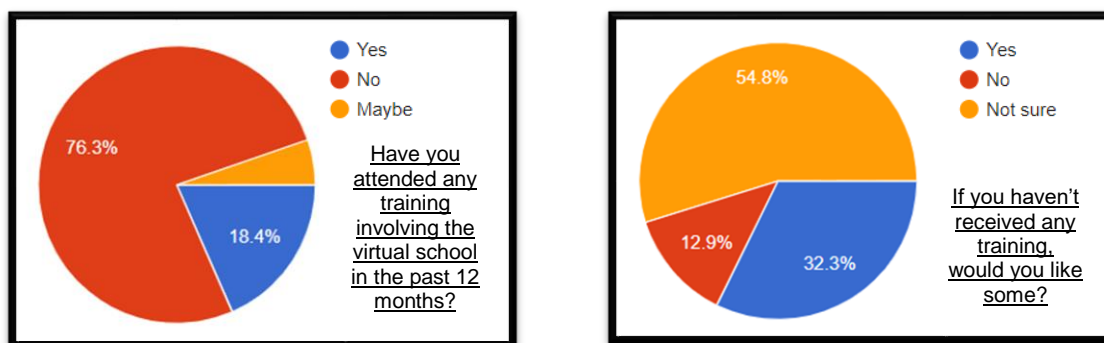


The feedback from Foster Carers included:

- Foster Carers do not have access to the system unlike Schools, Social Care, Virtual School and Health, therefore unable to track and assess targets mid-term.
- A high number of Foster Carers had not received a copy of the child's PEP.
- Often the meetings can feel rushed which can make them feel like a tick box exercise.
- PEP's have worked really well virtually.
- "It's a shame that the virtual school do not attend PEP's when in other LA's, they still do".
- Schools ensure that the PEP's are relevant and informative with appropriate targets and useful discussions.
- Foster Carers are not necessarily trained or experienced to assess the most suitable interventions that are being put in place by schools, therefore when agreeing in the meeting, they may not be appropriate, hence Virtual School need to be involved to ensure that schools are implementing appropriate strategies and interventions.
- How much information do schools receive on a child or young person in care? Are they fully aware of the entire background and therefore able to make sense of their trauma and presentation? Is this for the Foster Carer to share the information if it has not been shared by the Local Authority?
- Children in Care transferring from one school to another, may experience significant delays in the new school receiving the hand over paperwork from the old school. This varies from school to school and also can be dependent on how proactive the new setting is.

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Question H: “Training offer from Virtual School”



The majority of foster carers have not attended training provided by the Virtual School. However, to improve communication, representatives from the Virtual School has attended some foster carer support groups over the past year. The overall theme in reference to training is that Foster Carers are not clear as to the training offer that is available to them from the Virtual School as opposed to the offer that schools receive directly. Of those foster cares that have attended training, the majority found it useful.

When asked to comment as to training ideas for Foster Carers the following ideas were raised:

- Training to help with complex needs in Education setting.
- On-going training to keep Foster Carers up to date with new procedures, new findings and more training on e-training.
- Support on mental health issues within school settings.
- Refresher from Virtual School as to how trauma experienced children can receive education.
- Up skilling Foster Carers to advocate for their children in the absence of Virtual School at PEP meetings.

Question I: “Any other comments.....”

- Review of the therapeutic schooling provision
- Some Foster Carers are not aware of the PEP process and the 16-19 bursary now that this has changed. School helped to access the post 16 fund.
- Some schools are flexible and will adjust their expectations depending on the overall picture, particularly when taking into account the emotional well-being of a child.
- It is important that education systems have high expectations and not just review progress. Analysing a child's full potential and then planning and assessing progress would far better meet their needs.
- There is a need for a slicker system to enable Children in Care to access additional support e.g. EHCP and immediate funding for schools, rather than a long wait time for the process to conclude.

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Concluding Points

Strengths

- A good number of schools understand the needs of children and young people in care.
- STEPS approach to behaviour management in schools is felt to have worked well.
- Some schools have good communication with carers and this works well.
- The Virtual School have provided excellent support for some carers during lockdown.
- New Virtual School model of supporting schools outside of PEP's has allowed more focus on the schools training needs, this is reflective in the Virtual School model in Suffolk, Norfolk and Hertfordshire.
- The Virtual School will continue to work in partnership with the CFCA to empower Foster Carers to advocate for the children they care for at the PEP Meetings through training and advice.

Areas for development

- Some foster carers are often not receiving the completed PEP paperwork following the review.
- It was felt that some schools could benefit from additional training and greater awareness to improve their support of children with attachment difficulties.
- More training for schools on trauma and its impact on children accessing education.
- A child's potential to be at the forefront and not just measuring progress.
- EHCP's take a considerable length of time to be completed and approved, consideration to be given to a fast-track system for Children in Care.
- Some carers felt that there could be more support from Virtual School in PEP meetings.
- Greater understanding of the roles of different professionals within the PEP meetings, specifically that of the foster carer and child's social worker.
- The process of transitioning and transferring between schools requires additional focus to ensure that this is managed smoothly for Children in Care.

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Actions / Findings from Report

1. Swifter access to completed PEP information for Foster Carers

- a. Currently Foster Carers cannot access the e-PEP system
- b. It is recognised that Foster Carers are often not receiving important information in a timely fashion

The Virtual School have agreed to look at how Foster Carers can directly access a child's PEP

2. CFCA to facilitate a question and answer interview with a representative from the Virtual School

- a. Foster Carers are not always clear on the role of the Virtual School and where to find advice and guidance around education matters
- b. Foster Carers would welcome a more interactive platform rather than receiving emailed leaflets and information

The Virtual School has identified a representative to work with the CFCA and the Fostering Service to support this, it is anticipated this can be delivered early in 2021.

3. Virtual School Training

- a. Foster Carers would like to receive additional training from the Virtual School on specific topics that relate to the educational needs of the children they look after.
- b. Training is currently being offered via Fostering Service for all school stages termly.

The Virtual School will review their current training offer and work with the CFCA and the Fostering Service to contribute to the on-line training programme, which feeds into Foster Carers Personal Development Plans.

4. Trauma Informed - Behaviour Management Training

- a. Foster carers would value gaining an understanding of the trauma informed approach to Behaviour Management Techniques and models utilised in schools so that children have the benefit of a consistent approach between home and school.

The Virtual School is part of a planning group, which is working to create workshop materials to introduce Foster Carers to the STEPS programme in order to raise awareness and improve understanding of how schools use it. The Virtual School and Fostering service will work with the CFCA to disseminate materials to Foster Carers.

END OF REPORT
