



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST

PRIVATE FOSTERING

ANNUAL REPORT

2018-2019

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This annual report gives an overview of activities in relation to privately fostered children in Birmingham from **1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019**. Birmingham Children's Trust is commissioned by Birmingham City Council to carry out its duties and functions in respect of private fostering. This report details how the Trust has delivered its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and how the welfare of privately fostered children has been safeguarded and promoted during the last 12 months period. This report also outlines the activities which have been undertaken to promote awareness of the notification requirements regarding children who are privately fostered.

2.0 Legal Definition

2.1 The Children Act 1989 defines private fostering as occurring when a child under 16 (or under 18 if the child has a disability) is cared for, and provided with accommodation, for 28 days or more by someone other than a close relative, guardian or someone with parental responsibility. Parents and carers have a legal duty to notify the local authority when entering into a private fostering arrangement; local authorities are then required to carry out an assessment and to monitor the arrangement.

2.2 Some examples of private fostering include:

- A teenager moves in with a friend's family because of a breakdown in relationships at home, or parents move out of the area.
- A child is left with the unmarried partner of his/her parent because of the imprisonment of the parent.
- Host families looking after children at language schools or boarding schools during the summer holidays, where this is longer than 28 days.

3.0 The Local Authority's Duties and Functions

3.1 The responsibilities of the local authority are outlined within the Private Fostering Regulations ('Regulations') and the Private Fostering National Minimum Standards (NMS) 2005¹.

3.2 There is a duty placed on anyone involved in a private fostering arrangement to notify the Trust. The Trust needs to be satisfied that the welfare of privately fostered children, or children who are likely to be privately fostered, is being safeguarded and promoted. The Trust is responsible for all privately fostered children who reside in their area.

3.3 The duties of the Trust are to:

- Raise public and professional awareness with regards to what constitutes a private fostering arrangement and the duty to notify Birmingham Children's Trust

¹ Statutory guidance, Regulations and National Minimum Standards published in 2005 - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/274414/Children_Act_1989_private_fostering.pdf

- Assess the suitability of private foster carers and their households
- Monitor private fostering placements
- Ensure compliance with the National Minimum Standards
- Enable Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) to have oversight of the effectiveness of private fostering arrangements.

4.0 Progress in respect of private fostering duties and functions during 2018-19

Raising public and professional awareness

4.1 The service has undertaken the following awareness exercises:

- The Trust continues to ensure that our colleagues and professionals are aware of private fostering citywide. For example, awareness workshops have been delivered to social workers, staff in Education at a conference held in Birmingham last summer and an International Language School in Birmingham. Communications are regularly sent to all the managers in Children's Advice and Support Service (CASS) and Assessment and Short-Term Intervention Teams (ASTI) to ensure they are aware of the duty helpline which enables workers to ring and enquire about any potential private fostering arrangement in Birmingham.
- Private fostering reflective groups have been set up for the Family and Friends Service to ensure we are sharing good practice and developing our knowledge in this specialist area.
- Private fostering literature and posters have been circulated to Social Care, Education and Health Services to promote awareness in the community and with other agencies. GP's in Birmingham now receive a newsletter which outlines their duties in regard to private fostering.
- Continued work with International language schools (DSL) with presentations throughout 2019 to raise awareness of private fostering.

4.2 The PF Co-ordinator regularly attended the national Private Fostering Special Interest Group and Birmingham Children's Trust has hosted the bi-annual meetings up until June 2019 when this Department for Education withdrew their funding to support the group.

Case Study

Child A (aged 15) is an international student from Armenia, who had been in the UK to study for his GCSEs at a college in Edgbaston. Whilst in the UK he was residing with his private foster carer, who provides homestay through Oxford Guardians. A private fostering assessment was completed which concluded that the arrangement was suitable and meeting child A's needs. He is a confident young man with ambitions to work as a lawyer in the USA. Child A worked hard at college, and there were no concerns regarding his behaviour or emotional wellbeing. He settled well into the arrangement; he advised that he got on well and that he felt happy and comfortable. The private foster carer communicated well with Child A's parents, giving them regular updates. Child A left the private foster care arrangement in June 2019.

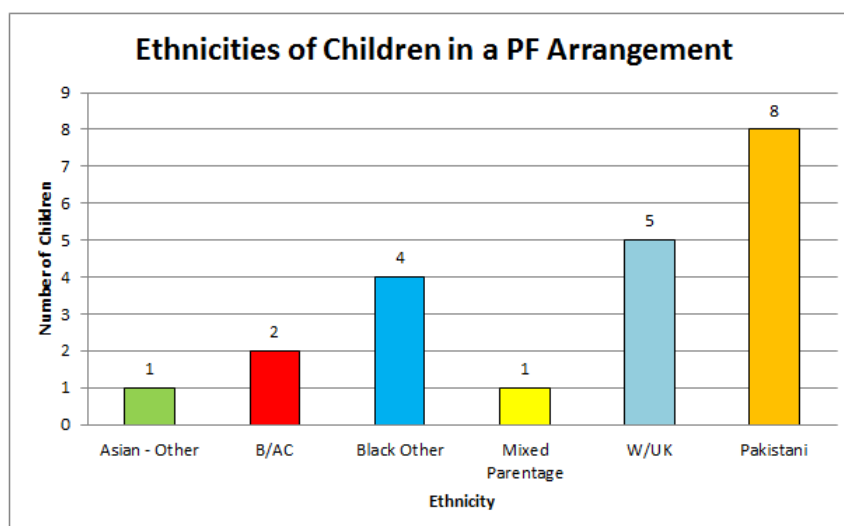
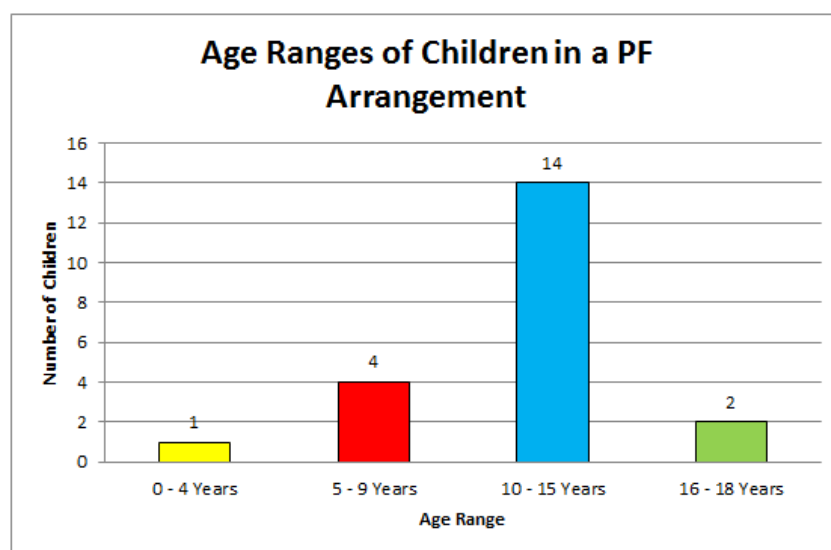
Private Fostering arrangements

- 4.3 There were **21 children privately fostered** as of 31st March 2019, compared to **33** in 2018, **19** in 2017 and **22** in 2016. There was only one external referral in this period; all other referrals were from social workers within Birmingham Children's Trust.
- 4.4 Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, **26** notifications of potential private fostering arrangements were received. Of these notifications **20** progressed to a private fostering assessment. There is some evidence that awareness raising work undertaken within children's services has proved to be effective as there is a higher proportion of notifications that resulted in an assessment compared to the previous year. In terms of the 6 notifications that did not progress to an assessment, the reasons were as follows:
- 4 notifications related to arrangements where the child was living with one of their parents
 - 1 child returned to their country of origin
 - 1 of the private fostering arrangements was outside of the area.
- 4.5 Once the Trust is notified, a social worker should visit the child within 7 working days of the notification to assess their welfare and whether or not the circumstances do constitute a private fostering arrangement. These visits are undertaken by the ASTI Service. Of the 26 notifications, 12% of visits took place within timescale, 88% took place outside of the timescale. Whilst the majority of children who were visited within 2 weeks of notification, the timeliness of visits is an area for improvement for the Children's Trust in ensuring that children's needs are assessed in a more timely manner.
- 4.6 Once it is confirmed that the child is living within a private fostering arrangement, a social worker from the Family and Friends Service will undertake an Assessments. These should be completed within 42 days. Of the 20 assessments initiated between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019:
- 6 assessments did not require completion due to a range of reasons, for example, the child having a parent to come to reside with them or the child returning to birth family or their country of origin
 - 1 assessment was put on hold due to a bereavement within the family
 - 1 assessment was held open due to safeguarding concerns culminating in the child not remaining with the carer
 - 5 assessments were completed within the timescale (42 days)
 - 7 assessments were completed out of timescale. Two of the assessments required inter-country checks being undertaken which caused significant delay in their completion. The process has now been amended to allow visits to take place (known as Regulation 8 visits) pending the outcome of checks and references.

Case Study

Child B (aged 13) came to England to live with his private foster carer in December 2018. The reason was so he could complete his education in England. Child B's mother has remained in Bermuda. The private foster carer knows the family and is already caring for her two grandsons so was happy for Child B to stay with her. It is envisaged that Child B will continue to live with her until his Uncle comes to live in England and it is then envisaged that he will go to live with him. Child B reports that he is happy living with his private foster carer. Child B is due to be going to Bermuda to visit his mother during the summer holidays. The private foster carer is also going over to Bermuda. Child B has daily contact with his mother and his mother provides money for his upkeep.

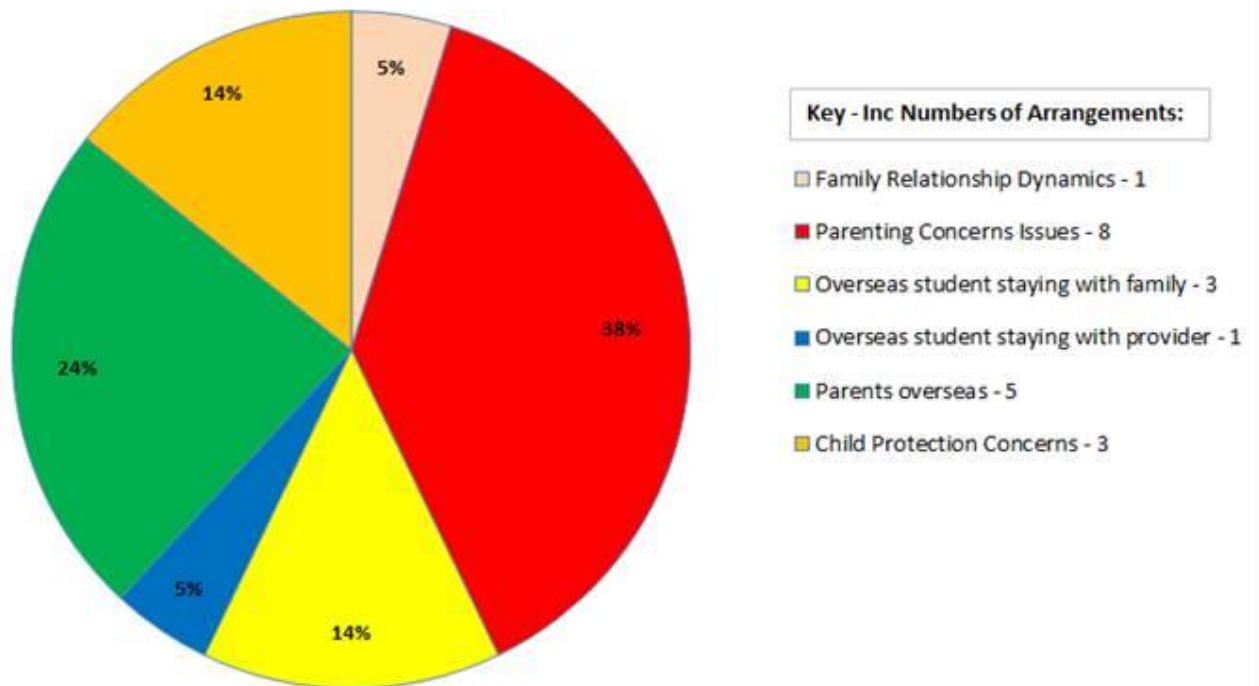
- 4.7 Regulation 8 visits are completed by a social worker from the Family and Friends Service.² These visits should take place every 6 weeks or every 12 weeks where the arrangement is assessed as well established and the child is settled.
- 4.8 There were 120 Regulation 8 visits undertaken during the year. 88% of these visits took place within the timescale of 6 weekly, compared to 73% in 2017-18. This reflects work to better track cases within social work supervision and emphasis by the Trust to ensure that these children are seen regularly. There is good evidence that the child is seen alone by the social worker and their views are sought, the child's health and development needs are kept under review and support is provided to secure more permanent arrangements. Some children remain subject to a Child in Need Plan³
- 4.9 The majority of children in private fostering arrangements continue to be between the age of 10-15 years. Of the children living in private fostering arrangements as at 31st March 2019, 52% were male and 48% female. There has been a reduction in the proportion of very young children in private fostering arrangements. They are from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds.



² This arrangement has now changed whereby as from 1st April 2019 these visits are undertaken by a social worker from the Safeguarding Teams

³ A Child in Need is defined within the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled. In Birmingham, guidance thresholds for deciding how agencies deliver effective support for children and their families is known as 'Right Services, Right Time' - for more information go to <http://www.lscpbirmingham.org.uk/index.php/delivering-effective-support>

Reasons for Private Fostering Arrangement as of 31.3.19

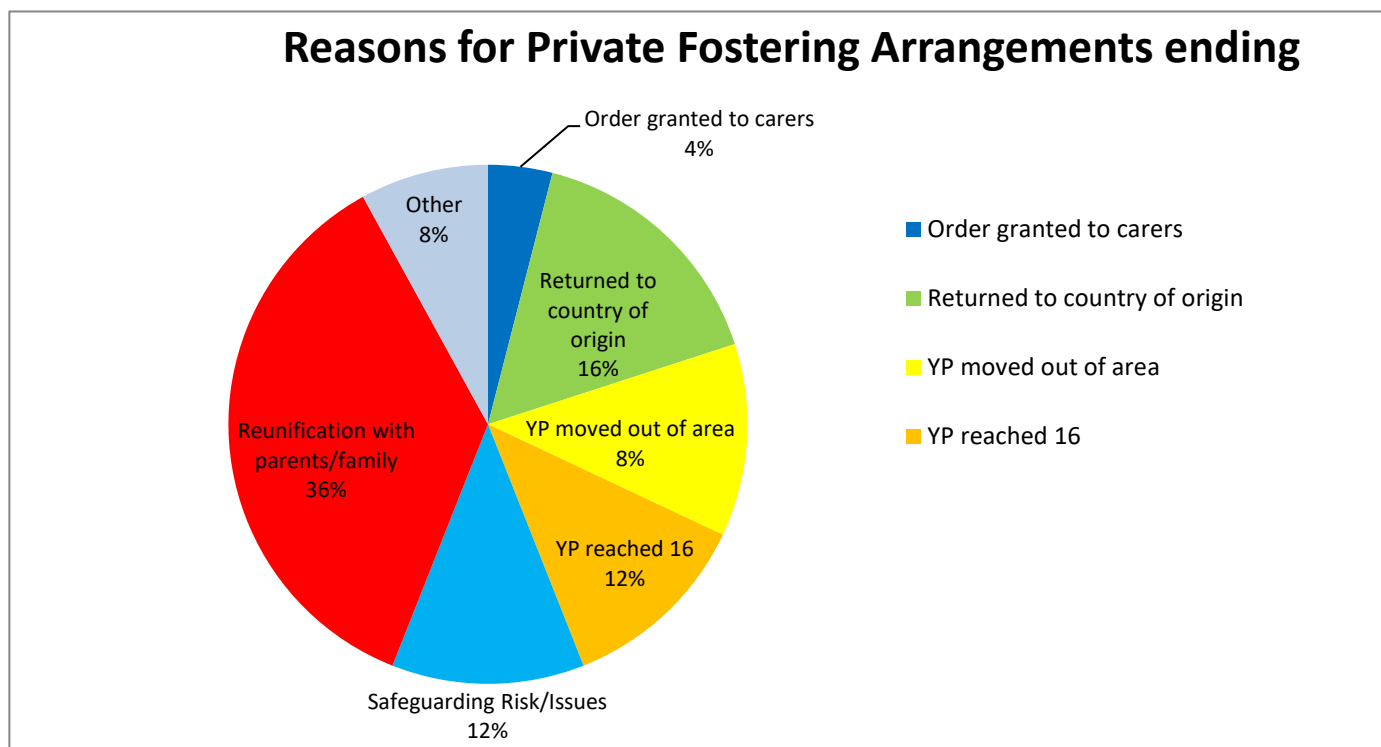


- 4.10 The above chart provides an overview of the key reasons why children were being privately fostered as at 31st March 2019. 57% of such arrangements were as a result of either family relationship dynamics, issues in respect of parenting or child protection concerns. 43% of children were either an overseas student staying with non-immediate family or with a provider or placed due to their own parents having moved to live overseas.

Case Study

Child C (aged 15) was transferred to the Family and Friends Team as a private fostering arrangement, as he was living with a family friend due to falling out with his father. Child C had previously been subject to child protection and child in need plans. A private fostering assessment concluded that this arrangement was unsuitable for Child C. There were concerns regarding the private foster carers mental and physical health, her history of involvement with children's services and her inability to provide appropriate boundaries. A positive DBS showed that she is currently barred from working with children and therefore should not be a private foster carer. Child C made it clear that he would not move from the private foster carers address and that he did not wish to return to the care of his father. He had been permanently excluded from school due to being caught on two occasions in possession of cannabis and weapons whilst on the premises. The case was referred back to safeguarding and kept open by Family and Friends until the transfer had taken place. A child & family assessment was then completed.

4.11 25 private fostering arrangements ended during 2018-19, the reasons for which are shown in above chart.



5.0 Action planned in respect of private fostering in 2019 – 2020

5.1 In addition to the work outlined in Section 4 of this report, Birmingham Children’s Trust will:

- Continue to work with key partners to ensure awareness across all agencies and organisations with regards to identifying and notifying the Trust of children who are believed to be ‘privately fostered’ to include:
 - Reviewing and updating its Communication Strategy to ensure that all mediums are utilised to raise awareness of private fostering across the children’s and adults’ workforce and communities, targeting such information where necessary;
 - Considering the business case for a dedicated Private Fostering Co-ordinator to support and implement the work of the Trust and with key partners
- Ensure there is sufficient focus on conducting initial visits to children reported as being private fostered and that assessments of such arrangements take place within relevant timescales by:
 - Establishing a Private Fostering Task Group to oversee the implementation of an Action Plan focusing initially on practice and performance of the Trust;
 - Conducting audits and evaluation of practice and making improvements if necessary.
- Work with key partners to ensure that children who are private fostered and carers who are privately fostering children are in receipt of the appropriate advice and support to include:
 - Reviewing the experience of privately fostered children through a range of consultation processes and making improvements where necessary;

- Reviewing arrangements to directly support carers who are privately fostering a child;
- Reviewing arrangements to ensure that children living within a private fostering arrangement are properly monitored via Regulation 8 visits and where necessary a Child in Need Plan;
- Ensure that the Private Fostering Annual Report is duly presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and Safeguarding Children's Partnership during autumn 2019.

If you would like any further information with regards to private fostering visit Birmingham Children's Trust website - https://www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/downloads/download/9/private_fostering