

Fosterline
0800 040 7675
your fostering advice service

www.fosterline.info

Annual Report

1st May 2017 – 30th April 2018



FosterTalk
Oak Tree House,
Waterside, Hanbury Road,
Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove,
Worcestershire, B60 4FD
Tel 01527 836910
www.fostertalk.org

Funded by



Department
for Education

Ministerial Foreword



I would like to congratulate FosterTalk on their successful delivery of Fosterline in England this year on behalf of the Department for Education.

FosterTalk has delivered Fosterline since 2013 - a free, confidential, impartial helpline and website, offering advice and information for current and prospective foster parents on a broad range of issues.

*Between May 2017 and April 2018, Fosterline was contacted over **129,700** times – whether by telephone, email or via the website. It is particularly encouraging to see that more people are expressing an interest in becoming a foster parent.*

This government is as committed as ever to promoting the best possible outcomes for children and young people in the care system, and supporting foster families to perform this crucial role within our society. Foster parents are incredible people – opening their homes and hearts to some of our most vulnerable children and young people in the country – and I commend them for their dedications, skills and expertise. We know this can be a challenging vocation, as exemplified by the range of complex queries Fosterline has received over the past year. We also know that the system is not perfect and that foster parents will welcome improvements. Insight from Fosterline helps to inform our decisions about where we can make the most difference.

I am delighted that we can continue to support Fosterline to deliver such high quality and much valued advice to prospective and current foster parents. I look forward to another year of partnership with FosterTalk as we implement our commitments from Fostering Better Outcomes to bring about better outcomes for children and young people living in foster care.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Zahawi', written in a cursive style.

Nadhim Zahawi

Minister for Children and Families

Introduction

Welcome to the Fosterline England Annual Report 2017/18. Fosterline is delivered in England by FosterTalk on behalf of the Department for Education.

FosterTalk completed its fifth year delivering the service for all foster carers and prospective foster carers in England on 30th April 2018. Fosterline aims to support the recruitment and retention of foster carers by providing free, confidential, advice, support and information about fostering and the many issues that foster carers face.

Fosterline's service user engagement via website and helpline has grown year on year with over **384,700** engagements achieved by the end of Year 5.

Fosterline has had the privilege of sharing the opinions and issues experienced by the foster carers who have used the service to both the Education Committee's Inquiry into Fostering in England and the Department for Education's review of Fostering. The findings reflected in the government report have all been discussed on a regular basis by the Fosterline advisors and service users. Fosterline maintains a position to provide unbiased information on these subject matters and those that were not able to be included in the findings report.

Fosterline has focused communications into the public domain during 2017/2018 on the recruitment of more foster carers from specific backgrounds to meet the needs of children and young people entering the care system. Fosterline has seen the growth of their National Recruitment Noticeboard offering fostering services the opportunity to advertise recruitment events for free on the Fosterline website.

Fosterline has continued to see a large number of service users looking for information on becoming a foster carer. Historically national statistics have not seen a large net increase in the number of foster carers. This has not only been due to foster carers leaving the vocation but also a large number of prospective foster carers failing to complete the assessment process. Large numbers make the initial enquiry but this number drops off rapidly from enquiry to application to approval. Fosterline have introduced additional systems to try to understand the reasons why the conversion from enquiry to approval is so low.

In 2017/18, **15%** of all website searches on www.fosterline.info were to pages containing information on how to become a foster carer or actively searching for a fostering service near them or a recruitment advert. Additionally, the helpline received **15%** of all calls from people enquiring about becoming a foster carer.

Fosterline supports the retention of existing foster carers by offering impartial advice and support to empower carers to make informed decisions. Surveys showed that **93%** of service users would recommend Fosterline to a friend or colleague with **86%** of service users rating Fosterline as good to excellent.

Foster carers are incredible in the role they perform. They provide the opportunity for vulnerable children and young people to develop within a safe and nurturing environment, often not previously experienced before entering the care system. I am proud that Fosterline is able to provide advice and support to encourage working alongside other professionals to achieve the best possible outcomes for the children being looked after. As expressed by the communications Fosterline receives, fostering can be very challenging at times and it is heartening to see the impact Fosterline has for the service users. FosterTalk will continue to develop the service in line with the needs of the fostering community to ultimately benefit the children and young people within our care.

Steven Stockley – Fosterline Manager

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Executive Summary

Fosterline provides free confidential, impartial advice, information and signposting on issues of concern to foster carers and prospective foster carers in England. With the increased need for good quality placements for the number of children entering the care system outweighing the recruitment and retention of foster carers, Fosterline provides a service to empower foster carers and encourage prospective foster carers to come forward for assessment for the right reasons, to try to alleviate some of the pressure on fostering services that need to recruit more foster carers.

Fosterline is funded by the Department for Education and delivered by FosterTalk. FosterTalk is a not-for-profit independent foster care support organisation, offering comprehensive membership packages to support fostering services and their foster carer households.

Fosterline consists of a **Freephone telephone helpline** operating between the hours of 09:00 and 17:00, Monday to Friday. Callers can speak to skilled, trained, and experienced Fosterline advisors in complete confidence.

Out of hours, or if the lines are all busy, a recorded message will invite the caller to leave a voicemail message, this message will also direct them to the Fosterline website where they can request a call back from an Advisor. All calls and messages are returned on the same or the next working day.

The telephone helpline also operates a text-phone system to support those with hearing impairment and we offer interpretation services via a language line facility for callers when English is not their first language.

Fosterline also provides a **dedicated, interactive website** - www.fosterline.info

The Fosterline website is packed full of information of interest to foster carers and prospective foster carers. It provides a mapping facility to enable users to “find a fostering service”. Visitors to the website are able to engage with other services users via our online forums, and users can also contact our Fosterline advisors via web-forms, emails, call back facility and simple contact forms – all of which are responded to on the same or next working day. Website users are also able to contact a Fosterline advisor through live chat messaging weekdays between 10:00am and 15:00pm

Key Findings

The Fosterline annual report covers the period from 1st May 2017 to 30th April 2018 and reflects the impact that Fosterline has had upon users of the service.

The report takes into account information received from both prospective and current foster carers with consideration to the following:

- Measurement against agreed KPI's
- Call statistics
- Information recorded on database
- Demographics supplied by enquirers
- Analysis of issues identified by enquirers
- Analysis of the visitors to the website www.fosterline.info
- Service user feedback via web-forms
- Survey of prospective foster carers who took the fostering criteria questionnaire on the Fosterline website
- Survey of fostering services (both local authority and independent agencies)
- Mystery shop

In producing this report FosterTalk has sought to establish the effect Fosterline has on encouraging prospective foster carers to complete the assessment and approval process, and to analyse the issues raised by current foster carers in order to inform and influence future policy.

Data will be provided on:-

- Number of service users
- Their role in fostering
- Key issues raised
- The impact of advice given by Fosterline.
- Where the service might be improved.

Fosterline has been accessed via the Freephone helpline, website, email, live chat and web-form on over **129,700** occasions in the reporting period, May 2017 to April 2018. A dedicated encrypted database is used by advisors to record information from engagements with the service and helpline calls are recorded on a separate encrypted voice over internet system. FosterTalk maintains all records electronically and these can only be accessed by senior managers. These records serve as quality assurance and management oversight of the service as a whole, and comply with Data Protection and Department for Education IT security requirements as set out in the contract.

Fosterline is contacted on a wide range of issues and many of the discussions are both complex and sensitive, requiring knowledgeable, empathetic and attuned helpline advisors who are able to listen and not judge or offer personal opinions.

Enquiries from foster carers to the service are ordinarily due to the enquirer facing difficulty of some sort. It is important to recognise that due to this Fosterline receives more communications from foster

carers in crisis, under stress, insecure or unsure and this is reflected in the discussions and advice provided. In general the foster carer has exhausted their usual support network which includes their fostering service without the outcome they require. For these reasons the service user's emotions are often heightened and it is important to remember Fosterline only receives the perception of the service user and is not always privileged to a balanced account of the situation. Fosterline advisors are required to manage the expectations of the service user as foster carers do not call Fosterline with the expressed interest to praise their fostering service.

Fosterline is able to provide a high level of support and understanding and is recognised as providing a low cost, early intervention mechanism that empowers foster carers and promotes positive outcomes for children and young people who are fostered. This has been highlighted in the independent SROI (Social Return On Investment) carried out during the reporting period. It returned that for every **£1 invested, Fosterline creates £7.76 of social value.** (Page 29)

The main topic of enquiries to Fosterline has again been from prospective foster carers although there has been significant increases in discussions regarding special guardianship orders and kinship foster care. From surveys and interaction on the website, it is clear that despite the continued provision of information and positive case studies the same myths about fostering still prevail each year. These myths include that you must be married, own your own home, have had your own children and are reflected in the fostering assessment criteria survey available on the Fosterline website and reported on page 25. There has been an increase in the number of people taking the survey with a criminal record and people that have suffered mental illness.

Fosterline's role in promoting the recruitment of foster carers has seen **15% of helpline enquiries and 15% of web traffic** obtain information either from the Fosterline website or the Fosterline Advisors on almost **19,500** interactions resulting in a significantly large captive audience of potential new foster carers. The challenge for Fosterline going forward is to aid fostering service to convert more of these interactions into approved foster carers. Fosterline has introduced additional systems to capture the experiences of prospective foster carers from the point of enquiry to the approval (page 26).

Fosterline continues to play a fundamental role in encouraging the positive communication between foster carers, fostering services and other relevant professional in the ultimate goal to provide the best possible environment for the child or young person in care. Fosterline provide a responsive service with attuned advice from highly trained well informed helpline advisors who have experienced and understand the role of foster carers, their views and perspectives, needs and requirements as well as the legislation and good practice required to achieve good foster care.

Fosterline has received service user feedback to evidence that the advice provided has helped to re-motivate and focus foster carers back into the role and support the best outcomes for the children and young people in placement.

Review of Fosterline performance & statistics

Fosterline Helpline

Callers are able to access support and advice from qualified and experienced fostering advisors via the Freephone number 0800 040 7675, on Monday to Friday from 9 am to 5 pm (except Bank Holidays)

Of the **1,968** hours that the service was advertised as open, Fosterline achieved **100%** availability. Fosterline closed only on public holidays as recognised in England and on predetermined and advertised training days for the Fosterline advisors. Outside the advertised hours an answerphone message invited callers to leave a voicemail or encouraged callers to use the website, web-form and appointment call back facilities.

Advice is provided by fully trained, experienced Fosterline advisors and all advice provided is impartial and confidential. The quality of advice is monitored and assured through regular consultation, supervision and training with its origins firmly embedded in legislation, regulations and good practice guides for fostering in England.

All Fosterline Advisors are required to attend regular training and are provided with up-to-date information reinforced by legislation and information obtained from the Department for Education and FosterTalk's Professional Advisor. Quarterly training days address specific issues and topics encountered from enquiries and bespoke external training has also been provided by the Helplines Partnership, Epect, The Training Hub and Education specialists.

Fosterline performance data

In addition to providing monthly management information to the Department for Education, FosterTalk meets quarterly with the Department to review performance against KPI's.

During our quarterly reviews with the Department, Fosterline's management team share and discuss key issues of concern raised by Fosterline users in order to inform policy and practice.

Fosterline often receives enquiries from fostering service staff, social workers and non-related fostering personnel. These enquiries are signposted to other relevant sources of information and support in line with the Department's contractual requirements.

What foster carers value most about Fosterline



Independent evaluation SROI report 2017

Fosterline call volumes

Fosterline saw 'becoming a foster carer' the most discussed topic by Fosterline advisors during the reporting period with **15%** of all calls answered by advisors providing information related to the assessment process or finding a fostering service. Finances was the next most discussed topic by Fosterline advisors with **12%** of all calls answered by the advisors having financial implications.

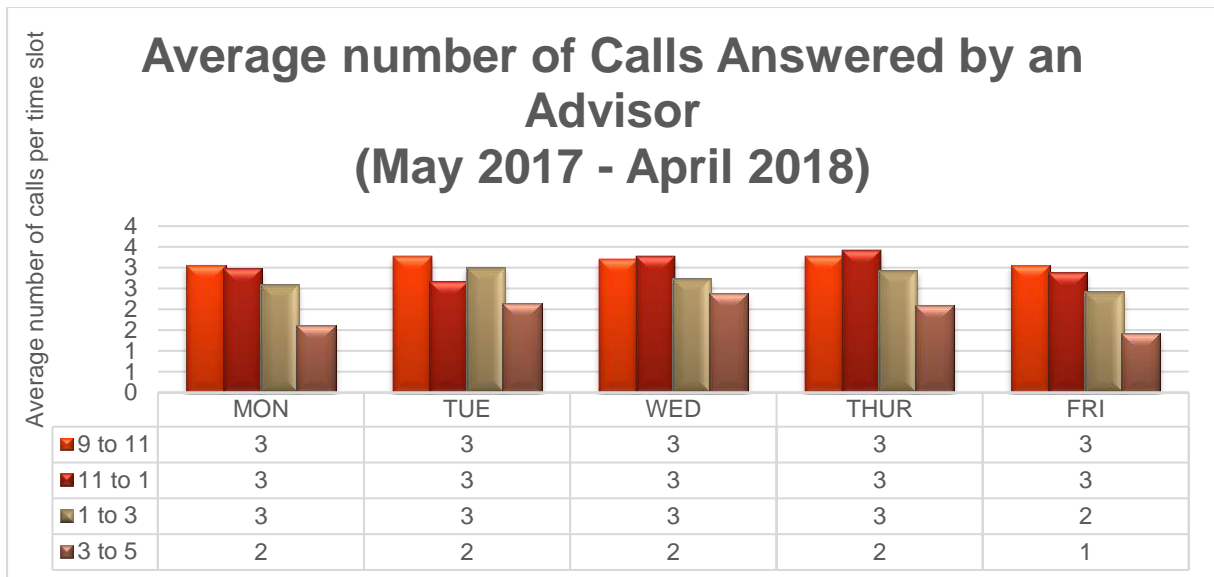
| | Calls Received | Calls received out of hours | Call back appointments | Voicemails left in hours | Voicemails left outside operating hours |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Quarter 1 May 2017 – July 2017 | 1,249 | 214 | 49 | 62 | 13 |
| Quarter 2 Aug 2017 – Oct 2017 | 1,037 | 169 | 52 | 54 | 13 |
| Quarter 3 Nov 2017 – Jan 2018 | 1,117 | 96 | 59 | 62 | 11 |
| Quarter 4 Feb 2018 – April 2018 | 1,125 | 132 | 51 | 78 | 4 |
| Annual Total | 4528 | 552 | 211 | 256 | 41 |

79.25% of all calls to Fosterline were answered **within 1 minute** (including time taken to listen to the automatic initial voice recording (IVR))

Fosterline peak call times

Call patterns remained consistent throughout the reported period. The highest volume of calls to the service is received between 09:00 and 13:00 each day. On average the service is contacted outside the advertised opening hours 46 times a month. This equates to 1.5 calls each day outside the opening hours. Analysis has identified that many of these calls are within the first half an hour before the service opens and half an hour after the service closes. Those that call just prior to the service being available tend to try again once the service is open.

There is no evidence to support the service hours being extended at this time.



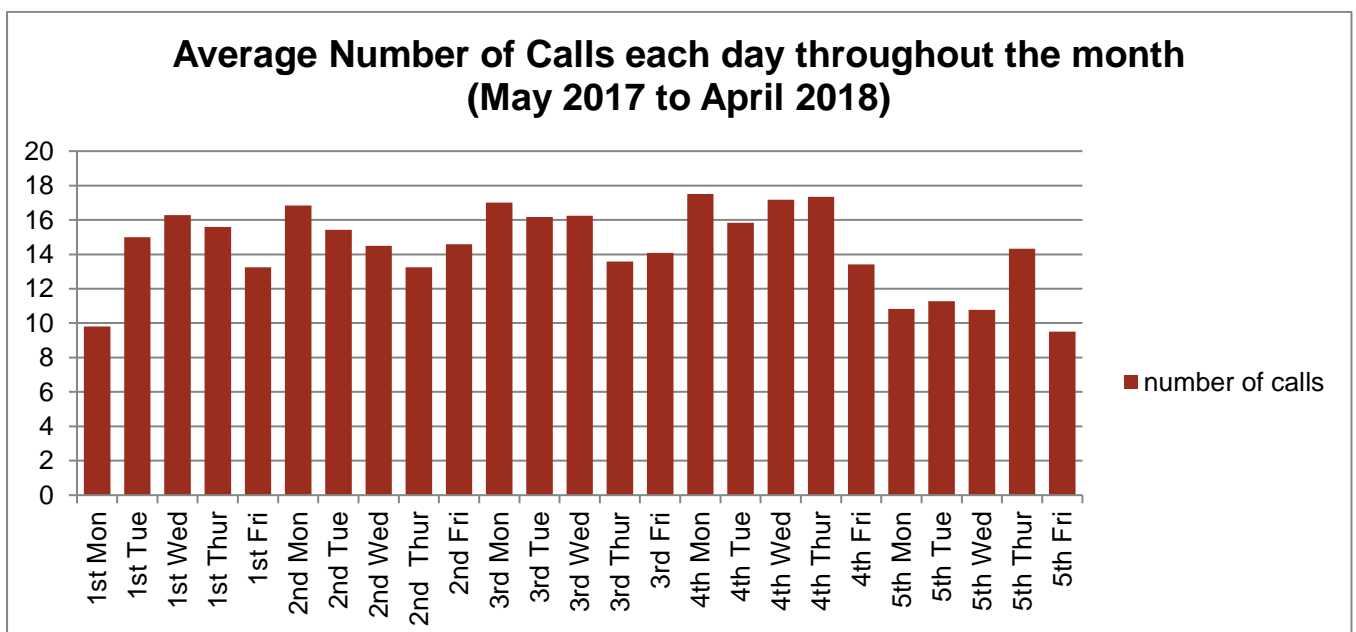
Fosterline call analysis

Call patterns have remained consistent throughout the reporting period for each month. Calls tend to peak weekly around Monday to Wednesday and the fourth weeks of every month being the busiest period for incoming calls.

School holidays affect the volume of calls to the service as calls are more confidential and less likely to be interrupted when the children and young people were in school or not within the home.

When callers telephone Fosterline they are greeted with an initial voice recording (IVR) advising them that their call will be recorded for quality monitoring purposes. At this point 6% of callers end the call.

The average call to Fosterline lasts 32 minutes giving enough time for complex issues to be discussed fully with an advisor.



Fosterline website

Visitors to the Fosterline website continue to rise. The number of visitors has increased **35%** from the previous reporting period to **128,163** visitors. Website content is regularly reviewed and updated in line with changes in legislation, guidance and good practice including information and current news items promoting the role of fostering to the community as a whole.

Fosterline advisors are able to direct callers to the website as a reference tool confirming information given during phone line engagements. Callers to the helpline are also encouraged to use the website for reference, for example; to access fostering legislation and regulations information.

During the reporting period the Fosterline website has seen the removal of the open forum due to a lack of use by website visitors. Service users prefer to discuss their enquiry direct with a Fosterline Advisor as they feel the issue is specific to them and prefer not to put their enquiry into the public domain.

Fosterline website visitors and social media

The Fosterline website has been operational for 100% of the time over the past year. A total of **100,444 new users** have visited the website over the past year with over **27,719 repeat users**, an increase of **38%** and **28%** respectively. Email and social media campaigns such as the Fosterline National Recruitment Noticeboard campaign (supporting the recruitment of foster carers) have driven people to specific information on the website. Social media has been an inexpensive and valuable means of promoting relevant messages to foster carers and raising awareness about fostering in the wider community.

| | New Users | Returning Users |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Quarter 1 May 2017 – July 2017 | 22,214 | 7,407 |
| Quarter 2 Aug 2017 – Oct 2017 | 23,758 | 7,159 |
| Quarter 3 Nov 2017 – Jan 2018 | 25,713 | 7,359 |
| Quarter 4 Feb 2018 – April 2018 | 28,759 | 5,794 |
| Annual Total | 100,444 | 27,719 |

Fosterline web-forms and emails

| | Web-forms | Emails | Live Chat |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Quarter 1 May 2017 – July 2017 | 82 | 205 | 31 |
| Quarter 2 Aug 2017 – Oct 2017 | 85 | 246 | 42 |
| Quarter 3 Nov 2017 – Jan 2018 | 88 | 189 | 29 |
| Quarter 4 Feb 2018 – April 2018 | 190 | 193 | 21 |
| Annual Total | 445 | 833 | 123 |

Live Chat

Live Chat is available between 10:00 and 3:00 weekdays. Live Chat users are able to contact the service in a more discrete form of communication without alerting other people that may enter their vicinity.

For some complex issues the Fosterline advisors are able to obtain a telephone number from the service user and call them back at their convenience to discuss the matter further if required. It is often the case that the initial concern raised has many aspects and can take the advice and information into a number of different directions.

Call back appointments

The Call Back facility allows website service users to access a calendar and to then book an appointment from a Fosterline advisor between 10am and 4pm Mon-Fri. The Call Back facility allows the service user to schedule a call back to them from an advisor in a half an hour slot from available times on the booking form. This can reduce the anxiety from service users that have questions and issues raised outside operating times by reassuring them that a Fosterline advisor will contact them at a specific time.

| | Number of Call-back appointments |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Quarter 1 May 2017 – July 2017 | 49 |
| Quarter 2 Aug 2017 – Oct 2017 | 52 |
| Quarter 3 Nov 2017 – Jan 2018 | 59 |
| Quarter 4 Feb 2018 – April 2018 | 51 |
| Annual Total | 211 |

Safeguarding issues

A total of 4 potential safeguarding issues were highlighted during this reporting period. Fosterline is subject to FosterTalk's robust safeguarding policy and procedures and these were acted upon on each occasion resulting in 2 of the issues being recorded and reported to the relevant local authority and 2, which did not meet the safeguarding criteria, recorded with no further action required.

FosterTalk maintains a Safeguarding Log on which any concerns, the action taken, and outcomes are recorded.

Key issues arising from enquiries

Overview:

Enquiries to Fosterline reflect similar topics each month although items represented in the news also have an impact on enquiries to the service.

Enquiries to the service also have seasonal trends. For example more enquiries focus on tax during October and January with benefits enquiries more frequent during April. January also sees an increase in calls regarding pupil premium as this has become a traditional time to re-evaluate personal circumstances.

Fosterline have actively promoted the recruitment of prospective foster carers with the number of enquiries from prospective carers retaining the top reason members of the public contact Fosterline.

Finances

Finance and tax issues have consistently been discussed during the reporting period and more often than not the majority of issues discussed with the Fosterline Advisors will have an element of finances about them. Fosterline Advisors will not give detailed advice on benefits and finances but the general expectations and then signpost to relevant HMRC and DWP sources for specialist advice or information.



Finance will have implications in the discussions around Kinship Care, Special Guardianship Orders, Disability Living Allowance, state benefits, private fostering and Staying Put arrangements. Foster carers regularly express concerns that fostering services are making decisions based on budgetary constraints rather than in the best

interests of the child in care.

The fostering allowance is recognised as an enabler for a person to provide foster care but Fosterline have frequently been told that foster carers feel that their allowance is shrinking in real terms and that the full cost of providing for the child in care is not being realised. There is ambiguity in what constitutes reasonable costs incurred for a child or young person to pursue reasonable leisure activities as per NMS 28. Kinship foster care continues to raise the financial support not being in line with standard foster care as per the Tower Hamlets judgement with some local authorities refusing to recognise this.

Enquiry themes

Tax and National Insurance

- Some foster carers are unaware of their responsibility to register as self-employed, their obligation for national insurance payments and the requirement to return a tax self-assessments.
- Foster carers often required specialist benefit advice especially when seeking additional income when without a placement
- Foster carers have been unsure what the taxable income from their fostering allowance
- Some foster carers have requested Fosterline to complete their tax returns for them.

Benefits

- Foster carers made enquiries about whether additional benefits such as free school meals applied to their foster child.
- Many foster carers making enquiries to the service believe that they are entitled to the pupil premium plus and how to spend the funding
- Foster carers call to explore any potential benefits that they can claim either while fostering or for when they are between placements
- The topic of additional hour's free childcare has been discussed as the foster carers are not understanding that this is a policy for aiding the ability for adults to be in work rather than a child focussed policy

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

- A number of foster carers are unaware how to account for the spend of DLA to the benefit for their child or young person and are unaware of hidden costs
- Some fostering services have instructed the foster carer to save the DLA payments into a bank account for the young person to access when leaving care
- It is becoming more evident that local authorities are asking for more accountability from the foster carers when the child in placement is receiving DLA payments
- More than one foster carer has used the DLA funding to purchase a caravan to enable the child to experience time away from the foster home. Issues arise with the ownership of the caravan
- A number of foster carers are looking to claim carers allowance for the LAC to supplement the funding they receive

Fostering allowance

- The issue of equality of payment for kinship foster carers and standard foster carers has been raised regularly
- A significant proportion of foster carers have stated that their fostering service has expected and instructed them to pay respite carers from their fostering allowance rather than this payment being made at source from the fostering service to the respite carer
- A number of foster carers from different fostering services have expressed that their fostering service have restructured their payment levels with some removing some skills payments associated with different levels without any consultation or notification before the policy came into place. This has resulted in a reduction to the fee received by the foster carer to provide a service
- Many foster carers are still confused between the proportion of the fostering allowance is provided to cover the cost of the placement and what proportion is the reward element for the foster carer. NMS 28.5 expects fostering services to have a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers distinguishing between the allowance paid and any fee paid
- A small number of foster carers were adamant that they were employed due to the fact they received monies from the fostering service for looking after children

Kinship and Family and Friends Foster Care

- The issue of equality of payment for kinship foster carers and standard foster carers has been raised regularly
- A number of calls expressed that they had been ill-informed or not informed that they were entering into a private fostering arrangement and were experiencing financial difficulties as the Local Authority were not supporting the placement

Staying put

- Some foster carers have sought information on funding or grants to help extend their property to accommodate staying put young people but to then have the room to continue to foster
- The 16-19 bursary and higher education grants have been discussed for young people leaving school. There is a lack of support from any personal advisors and inclusion in any pathway plan

Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)

- Foster carers are often not provided with the necessary information to make informed decisions regarding SGOs and do not realise they are means tested
- A number of local authorities have instructed special guardians and adopters that their allowances have been removed due to the fact they receive a fostering income from placements of other children. Many have not been informed of the changes prior to this being implemented
- Foster carers entering special guardianships needed information on how this would impact on their benefits and would the allowance effect their tax returns

Allegations

The majority of calls received from foster carers on the subject of allegations, are primarily from foster carers that have just been informed that an allegation has been made against them. They have often seen their supervising social worker take a step back from providing support and have very little options in the way of information and advice.



In the initial stages many of the enquiries require emotional support, as well as advice about the process. Fosterline is able to provide advice about the investigative process and the expectation of the foster carers to receive independent support in accordance

with NMS 22.12. Fosterline also promotes relevant communication between the foster carer and the service provider during and after the process.

Enquiry themes

Information on procedure

- A number of foster carers felt that counter allegations had been made following the foster carer giving notice on the placement

- Foster carers are reminded by the Fosterline advisors that they will be unable to transfer to another fostering service while an investigation is in progress
- Many foster carers have been advised by their fostering services to resign while under investigation and the allegation will go away and they will be able to foster with another agency or local authority
- A small number of foster carers have expressed that they feel the fostering service has blocked their attempt to transfer fostering service following the conclusion of an allegation
- Foster carers are often not informed of the role certain individuals perform during an investigation. Many foster carers believe it is the role of the LADO to keep them informed during the allegation process and become frustrated when they are unable to communicate with them and quite often confuse the designated senior manager conducting the investigation with the LADO
- Information and reports were not provided in a timely fashion to foster carers in some cases, leaving them without representation to panel
- A large number of foster carers feel that the birth parents are at liberty to make malicious allegations repeatedly against the foster carers, increasing the pressure on the foster carers. Foster carers are held up as a metaphorical punch bag for families to make allegations without the support or defence from the fostering service. This leads to foster carers giving notice on placements and leaving foster care as there is no productive way to hold the accusers to account for their malicious actions
- A number of foster carers feel that the person making the allegation is beyond reproach despite the upheaval caused to the foster home
- A number of foster carers called with concerns of how this would affect other roles they have such as coaching children in sports clubs
- Some foster carers fail to understand that if they resign then the investigation will continue to a conclusion without their input
- A number of foster carers feel allegations receive information centred around the child and the foster carer is expendable and acceptable collateral damage

Independent support

- Independent support is not offered to foster carers as a standard practice when faced with an allegation
- Foster carers that are registered with IFAs have stressed that they feel unsupported by their agency and that the agency are more attuned to protect their interests with the local authority rather than provide the necessary support for the foster carer resulting in many callers not being aware of NMS 22.12 and the call for the provision of independent support
- Most foster carers that have been offered independent support from within their fostering service do not perceive this to be independent. They are uncomfortable when provided with a mentor, foster carer or social worker within the same fostering service. Foster carers express they feel more confident with totally independent support from outside the fostering service
- Some foster carers believe the cost implication for fostering services to provide independent support compromises the offer of support. They feel the support offered by the fostering service is insufficient and disproportionate to the crisis they are facing.

Removal of children

- Foster carers are concerned that children moved in what they express as a knee-jerk reaction are rarely returned to the placement and feel this has a detrimental effect on the child Many foster carers have seen their placements removed and feel that children are removed in a knee-jerk reaction and due to the length of process

- Foster carers have expressed that when children are moved they are not told the true reasons for the move and feel that this can increase the anxieties for the children. For instance a child that has been removed and told that the foster carer is no longer fostering as a conscious decision made by the foster carer can heighten the risk of the child feeling as if they have been abandoned or unwanted
- A number of foster carers have experienced unfounded allegations and the process has been completed but 4 to 6 months later they have still not received any placements

Information gathering

- A large majority of callers facing allegations express to Fosterline that they feel they are not given the opportunity to give their account of the incident and feel they have been pre-judged
- Some callers felt that even though they had their allegation concluded as unsubstantial felt that the fostering service would make referrals to the DBS to have information recorded onto their record
- Many foster carers have expressed that they feel the way in which information and notification of the allegation was alerted to them was unprofessional and disrespectful. They believe the attitude of the social worker was one of guilty of the allegation before any investigation had taken place
- A number of callers wanted to challenge the information they believed to be false on Post Allegation Review Reports
- Many foster carers are not receiving summaries and conclusions of their allegation as would be expected from the designated officer as per National Minimum Standards 22.7

Payment during investigation

- Lengthy investigations increase the financial pressure on the household and can lead to resignations.
- There is a disparity between fostering services whereby some pay a retainer during investigations and others do not.

Timescales

- The lack of any recognised timeframes for the investigation, frustrates foster carers
- The stress of an allegation is often reflected in the health of the callers to Fosterline, resulting in foster carers not being able to attend scheduled meeting and hence their opinions are not received
- Fosterline advisors make the carers aware that even if they resign, the process will continue with the outcome being recorded on their fostering file.
- Many foster carers feel that issues could be resolved earlier if they were able to give their account of any situation at the first possible opportunity

Becoming a foster carer

Fosterline receives a high number of enquiries from prospective foster carer's each year. Fosterline actively promotes the recruitment of foster carers. **15%** of all of the enquiries responded to by the advisors and **15%** of visitors to the website seek information on becoming a foster carer.



This gives a potential of approximately **19,500** prospective foster carers looking for information. It is interesting that the same myths about who can foster continue, despite the plethora of information available to the contrary.

Enquiry themes

Who can foster

- A number of callers have asked what criminal records will prevent them from fostering
- Issues have been raised by callers whose partners refuse to be assessed as foster carers and maintain that even though they are within the household they will not have any responsibility or contact for the looked after children
- Some prospective foster carers have been concerned regarding the information contained on their DBS and wish to know how to challenge this information
- Prospective foster carers have been enquiring about the basic allowances paid to foster carers
- Many enquiries came from callers wishing to foster babies but without the facility of a spare room
- Some callers believe we are able to direct them to a fostering service on our recommendation
- Many of the prospective foster carers want to discuss their suitability to foster in general with a number of them wishing to know what courses or experience they should have before entering the application process
- A small number of callers think that they can qualify for better or different accommodation if they are approved as a foster carer and believe it would entitle them to be provided with suitable accommodation to foster by the local authority
- A few prospective foster carers have asked how they could foster children from their own family from another country here in the UK
- Prospective foster carers want to know if they can apply to more than one fostering service

Application process and appeals

- A large number of callers discussed the assessment process with some prospective foster carers already in the assessment process, unaware whether they were in stage 1 or 2 of the assessment process
- There have been a number of frustrated callers that are angry that they are unable to appeal the termination of their application whilst still in stage one of the process
- A number of callers wanted to know how to make the first steps to enquire with agencies about fostering
- A small percentage of callers do not have the appropriate accommodation to continue an application to foster including:
 - No spare room
 - Seeking new accommodation from which to foster

- In the process of asking the local authority for larger rented accommodation
- Living with parents or other individuals that do not wish to foster
- Do not have permanent residence in the UK
- Some callers want to know the effect on their universal credit once they become approved and begin to receive placements
- Some callers are confused if they should become self-employed as a single person, couple or a partnership
- Callers were unaware of their right to have the assessment heard at panel if in stage 2 and/or to appeal.
- Some fostering services failed to notify the prospective foster carers in writing of their decision not to proceed with the assessment process

Health

- Fosterline has seen more enquiries from prospective foster carers that have previously had mental illness that in previous years
- A few prospective foster carers have challenged the rejection to become a foster carer on the medical evidence revealed to the fostering service about them
- Calls to the service have discussed specific disabilities and health issues that prospective foster carers have, both historically and currently and the possible preclusion from an assessment

Care planning for looked after children

Foster carers have expressed that they feel under-represented in the care planning process. Foster



carers feel that they are in a privileged position and feel able to provide vital information in the care planning for the child or young person they are looking after but often feel overlooked. Foster carers state to the Foster carers have reported to Fosterline that they are

asking to be treated equally alongside the professionals making the decisions for the child/young person and not to be dismissed or overlooked.

Many of the issues in the care planning of looked after children and young people stem from what would appear to be a lack of communication and quality supervision between the fostering service and the foster carer.

Enquiry themes

Communication and relationships

- The recurring theme from month to month quarter to quarter is reflected as the foster carer fails to be involved in the care planning for the child and feel they are dismissed by relevant professionals but feel they have a great deal to offer as they care for the child on a 24/7 basis
- A large proportion feel that following complaints about a particular SW an allegation or a standards of care concern follows as a result
- A large majority of foster carers have decisions made regarding the child in placement without being consulted if the activities, appointments or contact times are acceptable to them. These

activities often clash with the foster carers own birth children's appointments, school collection and arrival times or leisure activities. When highlighted to the CSW the attitude is for the foster carer just to deal with it to the detriment of the foster carers own birth children and accusations from the fostering services that the foster carer is not working with or cooperating with professionals

- A number of foster carers feel that the only option they have is to give notice on placements due to their feeling of lack of support and understanding
- Some foster carers fail to understand that discussing the details of their placement with other foster carers from their own fostering service or another fostering service is a breach of confidentiality
- Some foster carers have reported that care planning and court hearings have been delayed due to assessments not being completed within the timescale and in a small number of cases the wrong child's information or profile has been submitted to court
- A number of foster carers have reported that family holidays that were agreed by the fostering service have needed to be cancelled due to a change in social worker or care plan
- Some agreed family holidays have been cancelled or the looked after child entered respite care as a result of the child's social worker failing to ensure the passport for the child has been obtained
- Many foster carers feel that they do not receive all the relevant information regarding the placement in the placement plan and hence the safe care plan for the child is compromised or the foster carer is placed at risk of allegation. A number of foster carers have said they would not of taken the placement if all the details had been known in hindsight
- A small but significant number of foster carers felt that the social worker allocated to the child didn't know the history for the child with examples quoted including a social worker taking a 12 year old child into the bedroom and closing the door to speak with her which evoked memories of the historic abuse she had suffered in a closed bedroom and caused a great amount of stress and anguish for the child
- More than one foster carer felt it was acceptable to use CCTV within the home to capture the child's movements and behaviours in the home
- Concern has been raised around supervising contact with birth family members by foster carers both in the home and at contact centres. Foster carers are uncomfortable with the situation and have not been trained into what reports or information they need to record
- Foster carers have expressed that they feel intimidated by certain family members during contact sessions especially when support from social workers is withdrawn or not provided in the first place
- Foster carers have expressed that they are very rarely consulted when contact is agreed with the social worker, court and the birth family which can impact on the placement and the mandatory actions and tasks of the placement. For instance an out of area placement chosen to support a baby having contact arranged four days a week (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday) for 4 hours at a time leaves very little opportunity for the foster carer to maintain health visits and any social interaction for the child at mother and baby groups or sensory and first start centres
- A number of callers have said they feel under supported by their SSW and fostering service when trying to carry out the care plan. Often this has led to supervision issues and ultimately standards of care complaints when a little support at the appropriate time could have avoided certain situations
- Some callers have said they feel like the go between for professional services such as the guardian and the CSW. The Guardian is asking the foster carer to produce information and send to the CSW and is then challenged by the CSW for the information being sent. Both parties use the excuse that they can't get in contact with each other
- A high proportion of foster carers have expressed that the care planning for the LAC doesn't take into consideration the birth children of the foster carer. Contacts are arranged when the

FC has school runs supporting their own children and there is a hard line taken by many social workers as this is not their problem and the FC has to find a way to accommodate the requirements of the care plan

- FCs have stressed that the expectations agreed in the care plan can often change such as contact and this can be on a daily basis but the same flexibility is not afforded to the FC even when they are experiencing particularly difficult situations such as illness of a close family member and in some cases death of a family member
- A number of FC have had their integrity questioned when taking the decision on whether or not to send a child to contact due to the child's illness
- Multiple changes of the child's social worker leads to an inconsistent approach to the care planning for the child or young person, often resulting in tasks being neglected, not started on time or even dismissed altogether.

Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

- Some foster carers are unable to contact the IRO between reviews and feel that their role is not as effective as it should be
- A number of callers that are seeking support over the care plan neglect to see the IRO as a source of support

Compliance with regulations and standards

- Some foster carers are being asked to carry out activities that would be expected of the CSW and not the foster carer such as finding alternative education in PRUs or challenging exclusions
- Foster carers are unsure of the role of the IRO and many challenge the independence of the position and feel that they need to fulfil their role of ensuring the LA carry out their duty towards the care plane. Many feel there is a lack of accountability for the IRO with a number of them chairing the LAC reviews are more of a tick box exercise
- Foster carers call the service seeking advocacy for the children and young people within their care as they feel that the child or young person is underrepresented in the care plan and often their wishes and feelings are not taken into consideration as expected in NMS 1
- Foster carers have reported that their fostering services have become angry when the foster carer has supported the child or young person to find an advocate to get their wishes and feelings expressed as per NMS 1
- A number of foster carers have reported that they are not supported adequately by their SSW and a lot report not having a SSW
- A number of foster carers have been without a SSW for long periods of time and have felt they have had to advocate for the child on their own and a number of foster carer site this as a major contributing factor for standards of care issues raised at a later date

Pathway planning

- Pathway plans are consistently being highlighted as inconsistent and failing expected timeframes with a number not even being put into place. The quality of these plans varies considerably with only some being provided with personal advisors and information into independence

Staying put



A high proportion of foster carers still believe that they are foster carers for the young person entering the staying put arrangement and believe they are still regulated by fostering legislation. The staying put arrangements still appear to be ambiguous with many social workers not aware of the local authorities own policy and obligation to provide support beyond 18 years for the young person.

Enquiry themes

Finances and benefits

- Callers feel that they are unable to support the staying put arrangements with the financial support that is on offer
- A number of foster carers fail to understand the contribution the young person is to make to the arrangement from benefits, their allowances and earnings to support their own accommodation
- From the calls received confusion exists around the financial support available to the carer and the young person when they attend higher education and reside away from the foster home
- A number of staying put carers have arrangements put in place where the young person is in receipt of housing benefit and has to pay the whole of this amount to the local authority and the local authority then pays a small proportion of this back to the carer as part of their fee
- A small number of callers have said the LA have misled them on the payment they were to receive as a staying put carer with some LA agreeing beforehand that they would receive the same fees as they did as a foster carer

Pressure felt by the foster carer

- Some foster carers are experiencing a lack of clarity from the LA if the placement that continues after the 18th birthday of the young person is either staying put arrangement or supported lodgings including shared lives care
- Some foster carers have expressed the lack of parity between the young person entering the staying put arrangement and their peers. The policy was to support young people during the transition from care to independence but birth children will often leave the family home but return if the exploration into independence hits problems. This is not currently an option for young people in staying put arrangements
- Many foster carers supporting young people towards independence state that the pathway plan is non-existent or delayed with a lack of engagement of a personal advisor

Fostering regulations

- Some foster carers believe they are being offered the wrong arrangement to support the young person beyond 18 in that supported lodgings or shared lives would be better options
- Some foster carers have complained that the transition into leaving care is allowed to drift if the young person has not had any pathway planning prior to 6 months of their eighteenth birthday. Foster carers feel that nobody wants to take responsibility for the support of the young person and hope that the adult team would then be responsible for any ongoing support.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)



From the number of calls to the service that have discussed SGOs it seems evident that this is a preferred form of legal permanence by many local authorities. Although there are many recognised benefits for the child or young person in care a high proportion of the foster carers and kinship foster carers have expressed the view that SGOs are being used as a tool for budgeting rather than a permanence option in the best interest of the child. Foster carers have reported being pressurised, threatened or bullied into taking an SGO with the removal of the children being stated if they failed to comply.

The financial support on offer to special guardians is expressed as erratic by the foster carers, with many unaware of the financial impact of means testing and the lack of an offer in writing.

Enquiry themes

Pressure felt by the carer

- Family and connected persons have contacted the service with the complaint that they will not be considered as foster carers but they will be considered as special guardians
- A small number of foster carers have expressed that they are to be de-registered by the local authority but the local authority would support an application to the court for SGO
- A number of callers have said they are being encouraged/pressurised to move from the independent fostering agency to the local authority or risk the placement being removed from their care
- Many of the callers express that they went into special guardianships without investigating them fully as they felt they were doing the right thing for the child but failed to see the impact it would have going forward

Finances

- The allowance paid to special guardians and the means testing of these payments are often discussed on the helpline
- Foster carers require advice on how to build the support package for a SGO and are advised to seek legal support
- A small number of special guardians have contacted the service to complain that their SGO allowance is to be removed because they receive an allowance for fostering. The local authority fail to acknowledge that the fostering placements are not constant throughout the year and the whole allowance is taken into consideration and not just the fee element paid to the FC
- Callers ask entitlement special guardians have to benefits and allowances and the impact of means testing.
- Many callers that are or have entered a SGO fail to have the financial details of their allowances in writing and often they are surprised to find allowances fail to continue beyond 2 years.

Ongoing support

- Some callers that have taken out guardianships are struggling to manage the expectations of birth parents and maintain authority over the contact and decision making

- Fosterline advisors are frequently asked to explain the position of who holds parental responsibility in a SGO and the limitations of certain decisions such as leaving the country for more than three months, or name changes
- A number of special guardians do not realise the leaving care support under special guardianship is not available to the child when they reach 18 as a young person leaving foster care.

Private fostering arrangements

Private fostering arrangements and kinship care arrangements for non-looked after children are



frequently reported to the Fosterline advisors. Family members and connected persons often look to provide support for children known to them that can no longer remain in the birth parents care. There is an expectation from these carers that if they provide the support the local authority will provide financial assistance because they were known to the local authority but the child has not entered care.

Family members will often provide the accommodation when they believe a child is at risk before the local authority has made a decision to take the child into the care system. Many of these carers feel the stigma of the child being in care or the risk to the child is too high and they feel they can't wait for social service involvement so act in what they believe to be the best interest for the child.

In many of the cases the local authority are involved or are aware of the situation but have no obligation to provide financial support as the child has been accommodated in a safe environment under the relatives own volition. The local authority will then follow a private fostering regulation as opposed to fostering regulations and will have a much more reduced role.

Enquiry themes

Finances

- The vast majority of callers that have entered into a private fostering arrangement are seeking financial support to help maintain the child or young person with them
- Many of these callers require additional support to help ensure the child remains within the family but are wary of the local authorities involvement for fear of the children being taken into care
- A number of private foster carers have had to give up their employment
- Fosterline advisors have discussed the difference between a child being looked after and a child in need under section 17.
- A large number of the calls from private foster carers are from carers that are unaware that they have entered into a private arrangement and that there is the expectation that the local authority should be financially supporting the situation as they believe the child would have entered the care system if they had not stepped in to support the child
- Fosterline has received a small number of calls from family members looking to provide accommodation for nephews, nieces and other connected young people from abroad to come and live in England under a fostering arrangement. They believe the state would fund this arrangement.

Local Authorities responsibility

- Many private foster carers were unaware of the need to inform the local authority that they had entered into a private fostering arrangement.

Caller enquiring about funding for private fostering arrangements are reminded of the responsibility of the birth parents and the application for child benefits. In certain circumstances the advisors will highlight the possibility of a section 17 assessment of a child in need.

Feedback

Fosterline received feedback from service users via web-forms and email feedback response forms. Many callers to the service will verbally praise and thank the Fosterline advisor at the end of the call.

Examples of feedback received are as follows:

59271:- Calm, supportive, informative, non-judgemental

60164:- He pointed me in the right direction and gave me some very helpful advice, so much so, my problem was solved within 4 days and the nightmare I was living has been removed,

60500:- listened to me and showed empathy and understanding to my situation

60164:- He helped me through a difficult period and pointed me in the right direction and took all the unknowns away by telling me who I could speak to and where these people were. Doing the job my late wife and I did was to try to improve other's lives, what a shock, when it all comes back to you as an allegation you cannot defend on your own.

62006:- Very helpful, Informative, knowledgeable, gave me time I wasn't rushed, advice was clear and fully explained.

66075:- Was professional, polite, and I felt very knowledgeable and confident afterwards, providing me with the information I needed, this was very much appreciated.

75113:- Explained everything in a clear and concise way.

78330:- I have gained more information from the lady who helped me today than I have within the last 5 weeks from our social services team.

Fosterline User Surveys

Fosterline conducted three specific surveys during the reporting period.

1. Fosterline website service users had the opportunity to take a fostering assessment survey during the review period. Fosterline wanted to get an overview of the people that were thinking of fostering and explore what they believed would preclude or allow them to apply to be assessed. The survey was available on the Fosterline Home Page from 1st May 2017 to 30th April 2018.

The survey was completed by 268 people.

2. Fosterline sent a feedback survey to all service users that were willing to provide an email address to enable them to be contacted by the service during the reporting period 1st May 2017 to 30th April 2018

The survey was completed by 136 people

3. Fosterline began the gathering of information from prospective foster carers to understand their experiences, motivation and journey from enquiry to approval
Alterations to the data collection system meant that this was initiated in March 2018 and data is currently not large enough to make significant conclusions and will be an ongoing study.

Interactions were initiated with 239 prospective foster carers

1. Fosterline assessment criteria survey

An online survey was made available on the “Thinking of Fostering” section of the website in conjunction with additional webpage intent to dispel some of the myths still upheld regarding who can or can't be assessed to foster.

All responses were confidential and the identity of the respondents remain anonymous.

The following results were obtained:

- 7% believed they were too old to foster
- 7% believed they were too young to foster
- 18% did not have a spare room
- 52% did not own their own property
- 3% believed they needed to be married
- 7% believed that being LGBT precluded them from assessment
- 69% had children of their own
- 32% had a disability, medical condition or had suffered a mental illness
- 37% believed they had to be a British Citizen
- 6% had been convicted of a criminal offence
- 31% had had previous financial problems

Following the survey

- 48% next step was to contact a fostering service provider
- 20% next step was to book a call from a Fosterline advisor
- 14% next step was to start the assessment
- 16% next step was to postpone the assessment
- 2% felt that fostering was not an option for them

Some of the reasons given to postpone the assessment were

- Still a student and would look to foster as soon as graduated
- Did not have the room to foster
- Needed to do more research
- Concerned about the impact on own birth children
- Children from a previous marriage were taken into care and doesn't have the confidence to be assessed
- Financial uncertainty
- Partner does not want to foster

47% provided emails to consent to Fosterline contacting them in the future to follow up their progress towards assessment and approval.

2. Fosterline service user feedback survey

An email survey was sent to all the service users that had given Fosterline their email addresses during their contact with the service throughout the reporting period.

All responses were confidential and the identity of the respondents remain anonymous.

The following results were obtained:

- 42% were directed to Fosterline from their fostering service
- 28% found Fosterline via internet search
- 24% were directed to Fosterline by FosterTalk
- 7% were directed to Fosterline by the Fostering Network
- 52% used Fosterline more than once

Fosterline was rated:

- 4.2 out of 5 on advisor knowledge
- 75% said Fosterline had helped to resolve the situation
- 12% said that their issue was still ongoing
- 93% would recommend Fosterline to a friend or colleague
- 86% rated Fosterline as good to excellent

3. Fosterline prospective foster carer survey

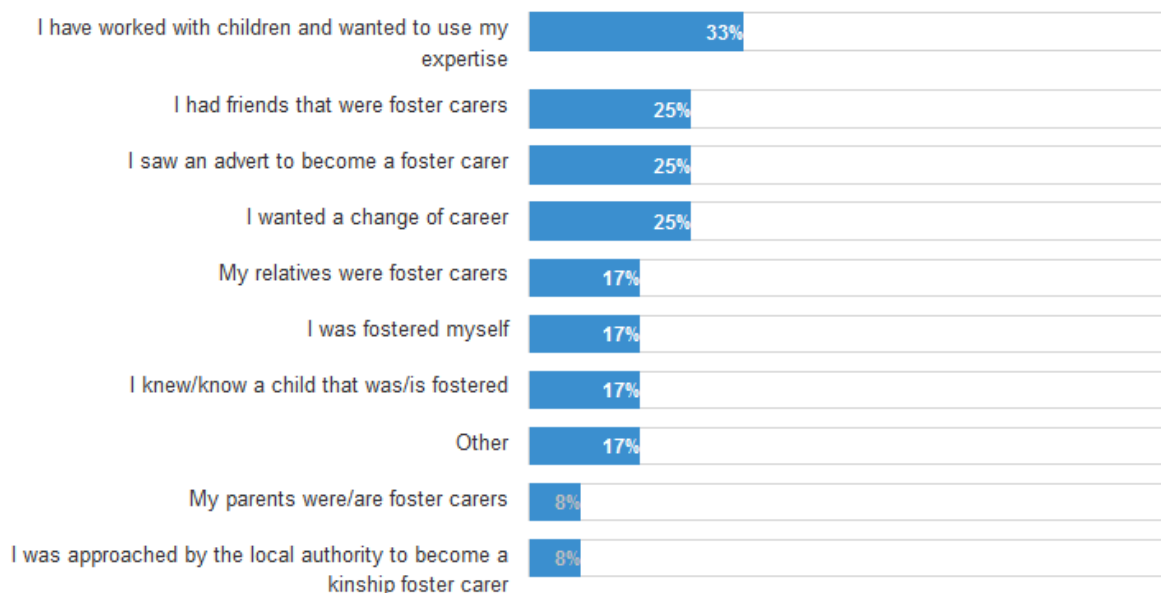
On initial enquiries to Fosterline in March 2018, 239 callers were identified as prospective foster carers. Of these 43 agreed to have a follow up call from an advisor to gauge progress and from there

9 prospective foster cares agreed to stay in contact with email correspondence and survey throughout the assessment process.

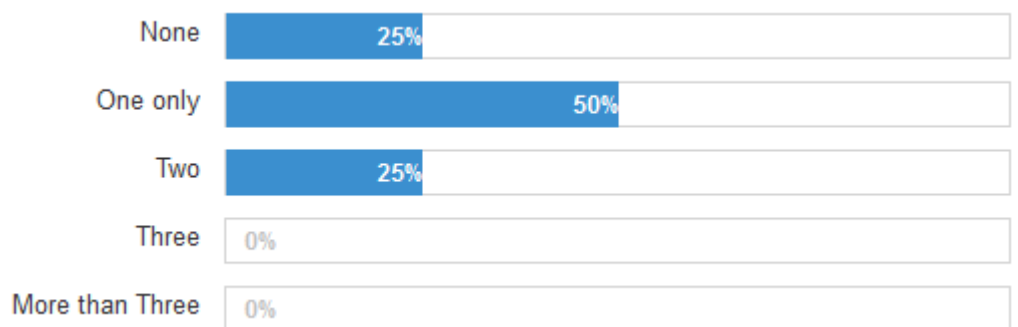
From the initial enquiry the call back is made one month later so information at this point is sparse within this reporting period but will continue into the next reporting period of May 2018.

From the survey of 139 prospective foster carers over the reporting period the following was obtained

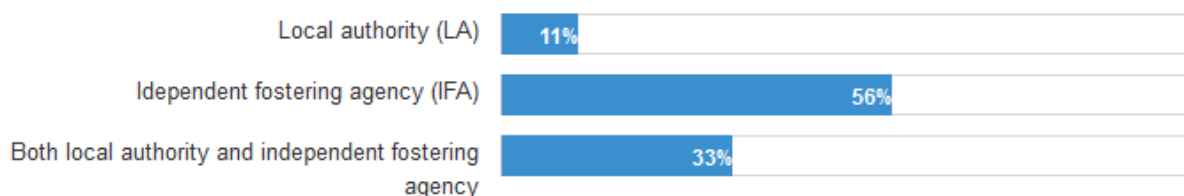
Why did you decide to look into becoming a foster carer?



How many fostering services did you contact?



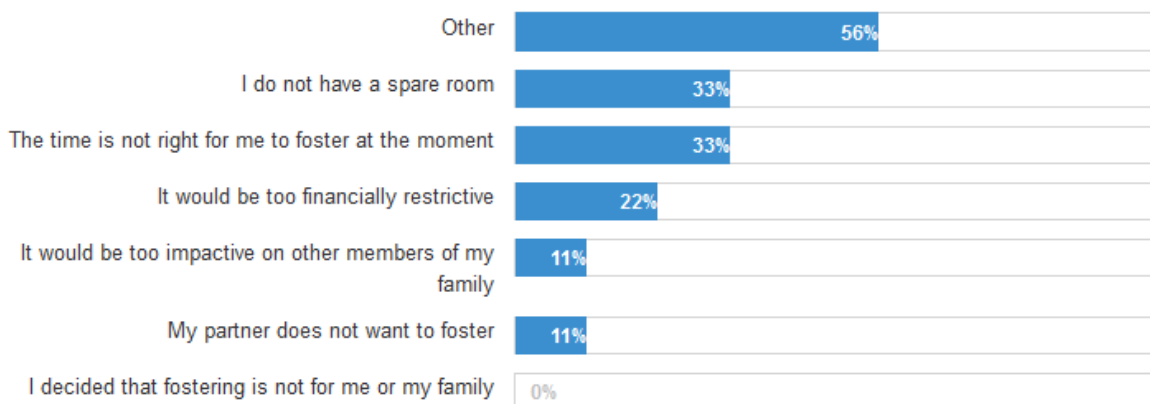
What type of fostering service did you contact?



From this cross section of 139 prospective foster carers only 2 identified that they continued through the process to be approved and both were approved for children from birth to 2 years.

Both assessments were completed between 6 to 8 months

From those that responded to the survey 75% decided not to make an application. The reasons given why they decided not to proceed were as follows:



The reasons given under other included the following:

- I was never contacted
- I was told that I didn't have enough rooms but I could consider mother and baby placements
- The level of supervision was too high and the monetary reward was not sufficient
- Not having the indefinite leave to remain in the UK
- Still require more information
- Time to be approved is too long
- Put off by attending informal information sessions to be greeted with training there and then

The results from this survey has not returned a high enough response to identify anything significant but the responses echo the discussions that the Fosterline Advisors have been involved in.

The further investigation and engagement of prospective foster carers will hopefully provide a better picture. It does however indicate that many of the enquiries in the initial stages are not followed up with any conviction.

Independent Evaluation of Fosterline

Independent evaluation on the social return on investment (SROI) of Fosterline

FosterTalk commissioned an independent evaluation of the Fosterline service concentrating on the social return on investment in support of the sustainability of the service.



This independent Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis explores and puts a monetary value on the full breadth of social value created by Fosterline for its key stakeholder groups during the period from May 2016 until April 2017.

This SROI analysis shows that the Fosterline service is highly effective and has created social value for each of its stakeholder groups. The analysis shows that during the period from May 2016 until April 2017, Fosterline received Department of Education funding and **generated a social return of £7.76 for every £1 of investment**. This figure is based on rigorous research and best assumptions.

The full report can be read on the Fosterline website <http://www.fosterline.info/about-fosterline/social-return-on-investment/>

Fosterline has the potential over time to influence foster carer's decisions to enter or stay in fostering. This brings about the achievement of multiple outcomes for fostering services including the recruitment and retention of foster carers. In addition to these benefits, Fosterline's work leads to significant personal outcomes for existing and prospective foster carers in relation to their knowledge, ability to move their situation forward and indeed their overall well-being.

The sum of benefits created by Fosterline across all stakeholder groups is £2.3 million. As shown in the table below, the stakeholder group that benefits most (in monetary value terms) from Fosterline's work is fostering services (local authorities and independent fostering agencies), with a 78 per cent slice of the total impact sum. This is unsurprising given the responsibility of fostering services to recruit new and retain existing foster carers and the significant costs involved in achieving this (the recruitment and training costs for new carers and the impact where carers opt to leave and fostering services then need to attract more carers). It follows that where Fosterline is able to assist in the retention and recruitment of new carers, the value of these outcomes is high.

| Stakeholder group | Benefit (social value £) |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fostering services | £1,832,166 |
| Existing carers | £424,767 |
| Children and Young People | £41,430 |
| Prospective carers | £20,132 |
| Fosterline staff | £12,263 |
| Department for Education | £1,575 |
| Total | £2,332,333 |

Findings from the investigation were:

- 86% of existing carers feel more knowledgeable about their situation after contacting Fosterline.
- 93% felt they had a better understanding of their rights, role and responsibilities after contacting Fosterline.
- 79% felt reassured about their situation after contacting Fosterline.
- 93% felt more confident about making an informed decision after contacting Fosterline.
- 71% felt less stress and anxiety after contacting Fosterline (with an average 25% reduction in stress after receiving support).
- 57% of carers stated that they contacted Fosterline when they felt that no-one else would listen.
- 79% of carers felt that after speaking to Fosterline they were better able to communicate with their fostering agency or supervising social worker.



Partnership Working

Carers and fostering services reported improved communication and professional relationships as a direct result of Fosterline's support

Fosterline Delivery Plan 2017 – 2018

Regular monitoring and review of Fosterline service delivery takes place against the Delivery Plan, Marketing Plan, KPIs and service aims and objectives.

The website is regularly monitored and updated to include new information of relevance to foster carers and to ensure ease of use. Helpline staffing kept under review in line with call patterns and to ensure a consistent and efficient service.

FosterTalk outlined the following Delivery Plan for Fosterline for 2017 – 2018.

We proposed to: Increase and develop Fosterline's online presence and social media networking

We achieved:

- Fosterline had a large social media presence during Foster Care Fortnight with a thunderclap
- We promoted cultural events such as Eid, Ramadan, Christmas, Easter, Black history week and Hanukah
- Fosterline launched maintained #OneMoreHome recruitment campaign promoting the recruitment of foster carers for specific groups of children and young people
- Fosterline produced articles for various publications websites and social medias including SEN magazine, LinkedIn and Fostering Information Exchange
- Foster carers features in short videos released on social media discussing recruitment

- We engaged with an advent calendar for recruiting foster carers leading up to Christmas

We proposed to: Develop the service in response to the requirements of the service users

We achieved:

- Introduction of a data information collection system to gather more information on the process from enquiry to approval for prospective foster carers
- The re-approval of The Helplines Quality Standards Accreditation
- The re-approval of the Customer Service Excellence award
- Annual Fosterline user survey
- Removed the forum as a result of feedback from service users and introduced a blog
- Introduced specialist landing page to the website to track campaign success

We proposed to: Increase Fosterline's presence in the media and community

We achieved:

- Radio interview on BBC Radio 4 Womens Hour to discuss the role of fostering
- Radio interview on Asian unity radio to promote the need for more foster carers from the Muslim community
- Attended FosterTalk's fostering roadshows to promote Fosterline
- Upgraded the link to Fosterline on the terrestrial television broadcasters action lines
- Attended conferences and support groups such as NAFP conference and the East Midlands Consortium
- Engaged with volunteers to distribute Fosterline posters in public places, libraries, sports centres, health centres etc
- Contacted high net worth individuals and prominent businesses raising the profile of Fosterline

We proposed to: Increase the information available to visitors of the website

We achieved:

- Addition of downloadable report from the Education Select Committee Enquiry into fostering
- Addition of downloadable report from the Department for Education Enquiry into Foster Care in England
- Additional page informing on 15-30 free child care for working foster carers
- Additional page informing GDPR
- Additional page informing about terrorism and tips for foster carers
- Additional pages informing on how to support Fosterline
- Additional links added to:
 - National Crime Agency's CEOP
 - Counter terrorism internet referral unit
 - Radicalisation of young people through social media

We proposed to: Support the recruitment and retention of foster carers in England

We achieved:

- Fosterline ran specifically targeted campaigns # OneMoreHome to all fostering service recruitment teams as well as the general public.
- Promoted the first National Recruitment Noticeboard for fostering services to advertise for foster carers making this a free to access service
- Fostering criteria survey ran for the reporting period on the website
- Evolving the management recording system to obtain the facility to capture prospective foster carers information during the assessment process

We proposed to: Reflect the views of the service users to the Department for Education regarding policy and legislation

We achieved:

- FosterTalk submitted information to the Department for Education Enquiry into Foster Care in England
- Fosterline reported issues and statistics produced from the delivery of Fosterline, England via monthly management information and quarterly contract reports
- FosterTalk help focus groups with foster carers in the presence of the Department for Education to provide information for policy

We proposed to: Communicate with all fostering service providers from both local authority and independent services to develop the support of Fosterline.

We achieved:

- All fostering service providers were informed about the activities of Fosterline throughout the review period via monthly email campaigns
- Fosterline information has been shared on some local authority and independent services websites and communications to their own foster carers
- Provided all fostering services in England with posters of the Fosterline service to display on their noticeboards and in public areas

We proposed to: Ensure we continue to provide an efficient, effective and responsive support service to prospective and current foster carers

We achieved:

- **79.2%** of all calls to the service were **answered within 1 minute**. Feedback has remained positive throughout the review period
- Over **95%** of all emails and voicemails are answered on the same day of receipt with **100%** having been answered by the following working day
- Feedback reported that
 - **86%** felt the service was good to excellent
 - **93%** would recommend the service to a friend or colleague
- FosterTalk commissioned an independent evaluation of the Social return on investment for Fosterline
 - For every **£1** invested Fosterline **creates £7.76** of social value
 - **93%** of carers felt more confident to make an informed decision

Fosterline Foundation aims and objectives

Within the original tender for Fosterline Foundation aims were:

- To secure the long-term sustainability of the Fosterline Freephone number and website to continue to offer advice and information to foster carers and those interested in fostering
- To help to shape the future of fostering by listening to and consulting with those who foster
- To support foster carers to achieve better outcomes for looked after children
- To recruit and maintain a team of volunteers and advisors with experience of fostering to help support and advise their peers at national level

What we did:

- Received donations via the Fosterline website
- Received funding via supporters purchasing items through a social media shopping website
- Scoped local and national businesses to raise funds via public donations
- Scoped trust and grant applications
- Approached celebrities and sporting clubs for donations for auction
- Contacted high net worth individuals

The original terms of the Fosterline contract were to look at the service becoming self-sustaining by the end of the current contract period. Extensive research and scoping was invested to work towards a self-sustained Fosterline service, however substantial and significant investment was unable to be found within the timeframe. The Department for Education made the decision to invoke the clause within the contract to provide continued funding, recognising the importance and value of the service within the current fostering landscape. It was consented to reinvest the monies accrued within the foundation to support the development of the service within the current contract

Appendix

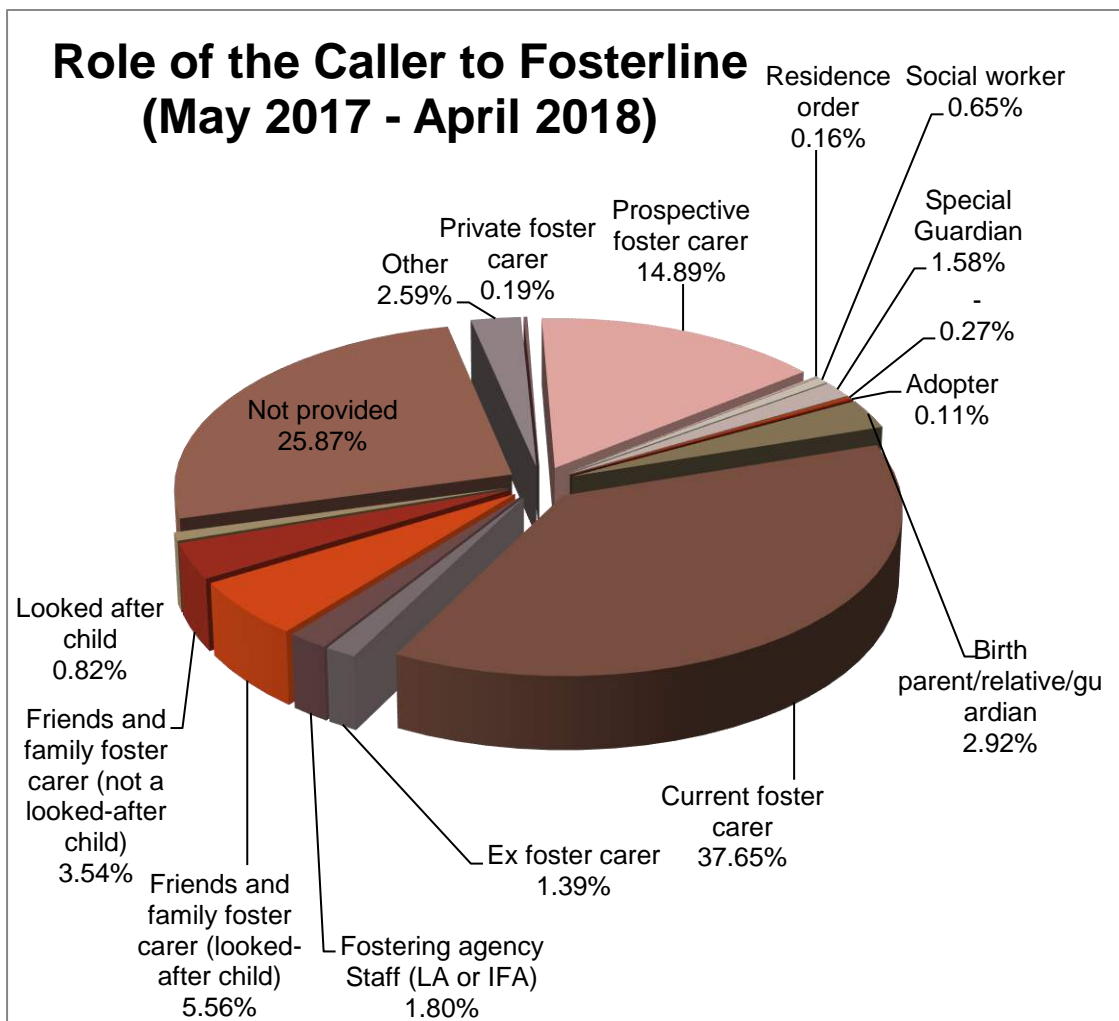
Fosterline demographics

Demographics are collected for each caller wherever possible, although there is no requirement for callers to divulge any personal information to Fosterline.

Advisors are also able to use their discretion as to whether or not to collect the data due to the nature of the call. Advisors will not increase or cause stress and anxiety to any caller whose situation is of a sensitive nature and they believe it would make the caller feel uncomfortable. Enquiries via web form and email invite users to provide demographic information but the option is not always taken, hence all the following results are from the information available and not from 100% of the contact with Fosterline.

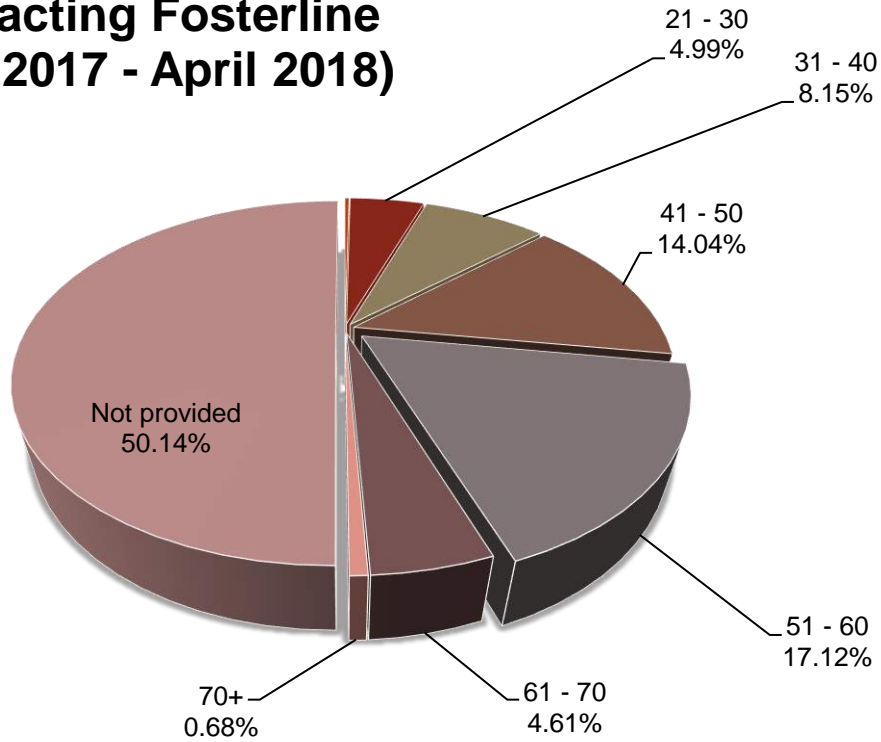
Role in fostering

The majority of callers to the service are existing foster carers yet the main reason for calling the service is to become a foster carer. This is because the topics of concern to foster carers are so vast these calls and communications are spread far and wide. The information gleaned from the role of the caller to Fosterline demonstrates the service is reaching the intended audience.



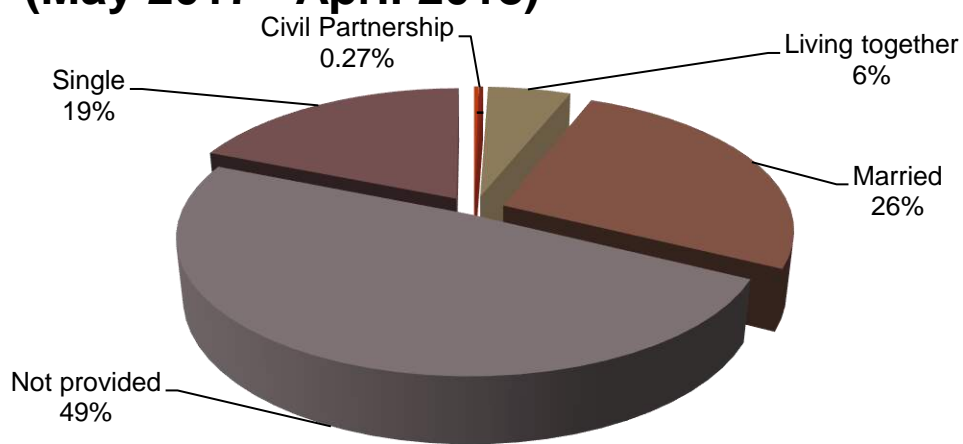
Age of enquirer

Age Range for service users contacting Fosterline (May 2017 - April 2018)



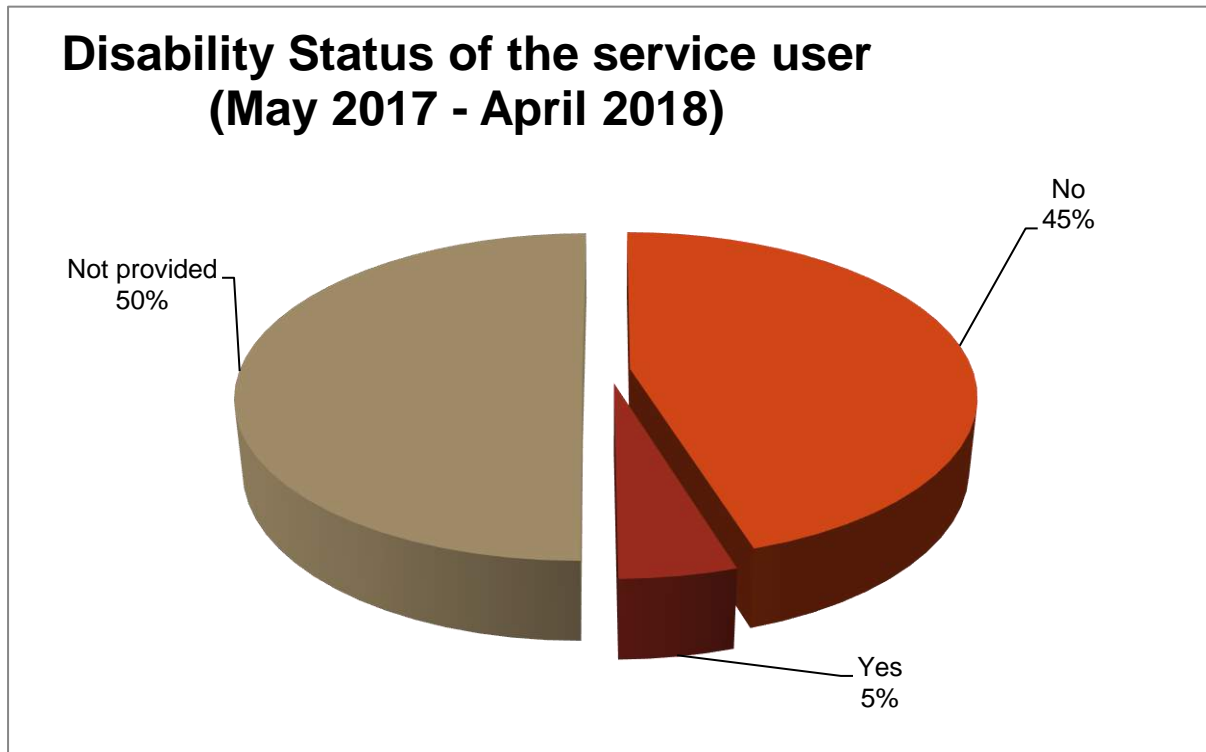
Marital status

Marital Status of the Caller (May 2017 - April 2018)



Disability

Disability is not defined when taking demographics. The enquirer defines their own status and the



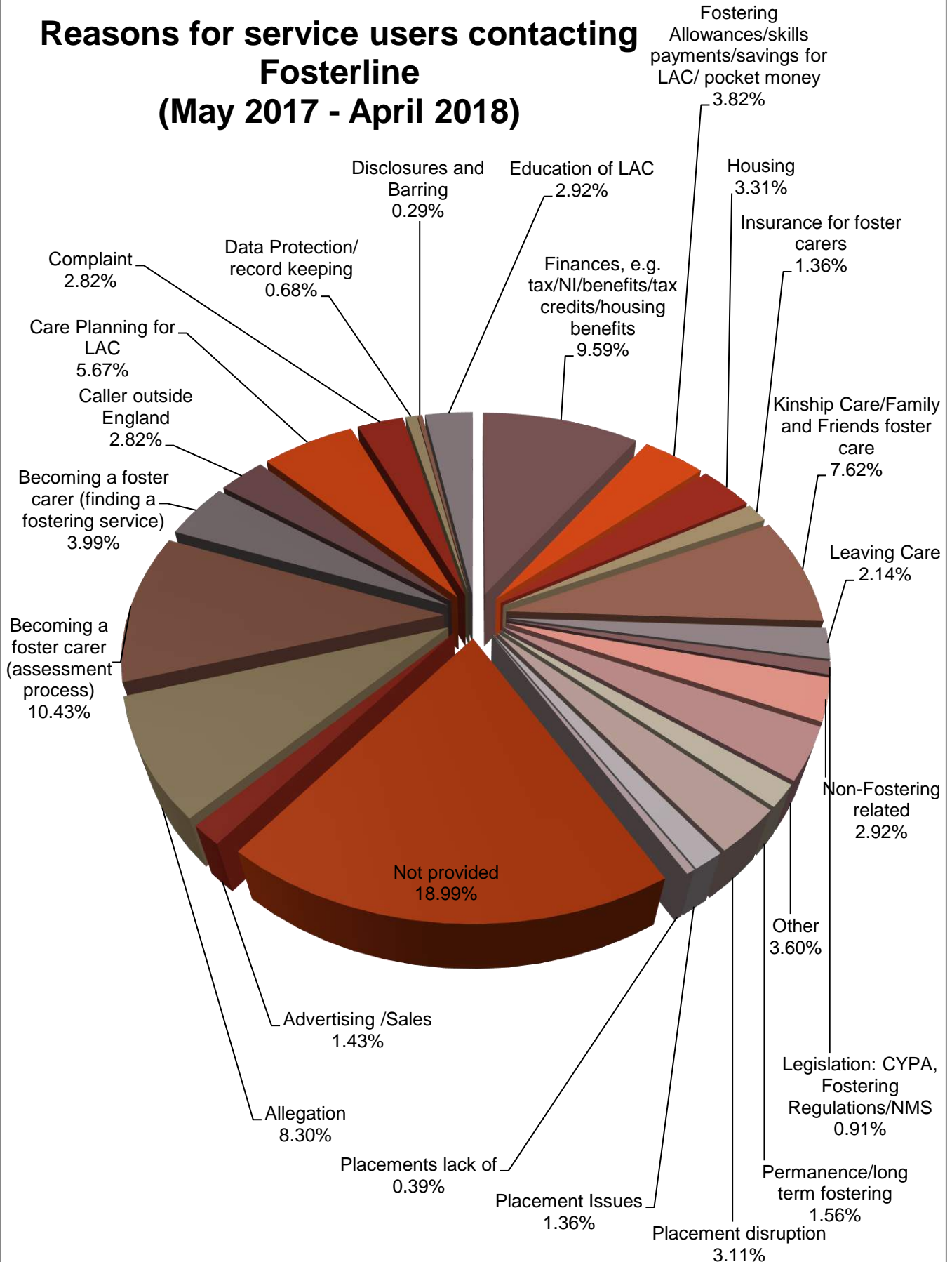
question is optional.

Reasons for contacting Fosterline

Fosterline has responded to a very broad range of enquiries of concern to foster carers and often they do not fit into discrete categories. The following represents a general description of the topics and many cross over into the realms of another topic.

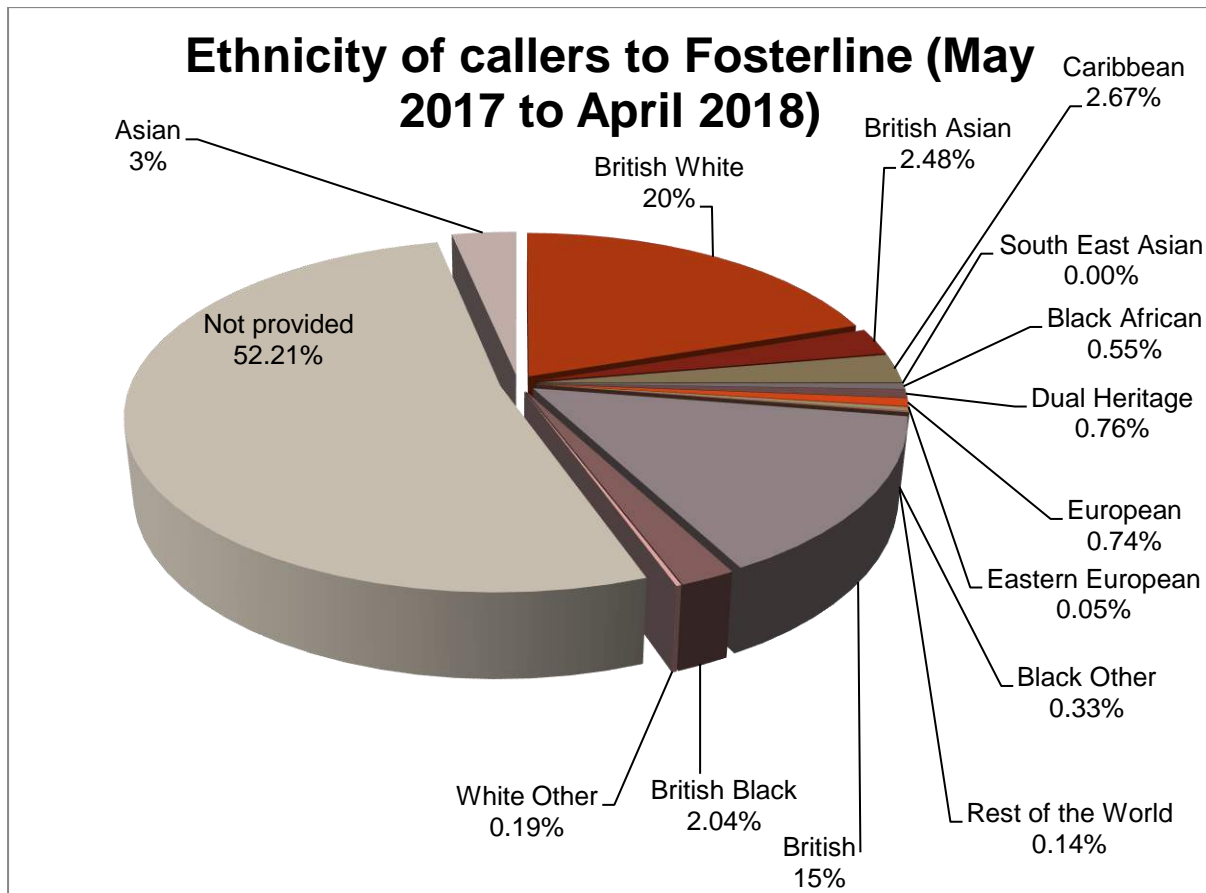
Although the top ten recorded topics that are enquired about remains fairly constant the frequency with which they are raised fluctuates according to: the time of year, the news items relating to foster care and legislation changes, and also media coverage such as dedicated television documentaries and topics on popular soap operas.

Reasons for service users contacting Fosterline (May 2017 - April 2018)



Ethnicity of Fosterline service users

Figures shown below represent the caller's own description of their ethnicity. Callers are free to decline to answer this question.



| | |
|------------------|---|
| Asian | includes Indian/Pakistani/Bangladesh |
| Asian British | includes anyone that describes themselves as British Muslim/Pakistani/Indian |
| Black Other | includes American/Australian/Caribbean/African |
| British | includes UK where white/Black has not been given |
| British Black | includes anyone that describes themselves as British African/Caribbean |
| Dual Heritage | Includes anyone that describes themselves as any definition of mixed race |
| Eastern European | includes Polish/Czech/Romanian |
| European | includes German/Greek/Cypriot/French/Spanish |
| Middle Eastern | includes Persian/Syrian/Iranian/Afghan |
| Not disclosed | Where information is not given or the enquirer refuses to provide information |
| South East Asian | includes Chinese |
| White British | includes English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish |
| White Other | includes American/Australian/Caribbean/African |

(Spam and Advertising has been removed when calculating ethnicities)