



NW Concurrent Planning Service For Babies 0 - 3 years

Annual Report 2016/17



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The North West Concurrent Planning Service is a partnership between Caritas Care and Adoption Matters which was established in April 2014. The Service currently has a contract with 13 local authorities in the North West;

Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Bolton, Bury, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton, Knowsley, Oldham, Rochdale, Tameside, Trafford, Salford and Stockport

As well as spot purchase arrangements with **Calderdale, Wigan and Manchester**.

What is Concurrent Planning?

Concurrent Planning is a route to early permanence for babies and young children where rehabilitation to birth family is a possible outcome but the more probable outcome is a plan of adoption. Concurrent Planning Carers, who are motivated to adopt a child, are prepared, assessed and dually approved as both foster carers and prospective adopters. They are prepared to take a placement under Fostering Regulations whilst the care proceedings and assessment process is ongoing. Children receive high quality care whilst they are at their most vulnerable and carers have the opportunity to care for a very young child. Birth family and carers have regular meetings at the contact handover point and have the opportunity to establish a positive working relationship.

Contact is a fundamental part of concurrent planning and further information is provided later in this report. If the final care plan is rehabilitation, then carers work with the service and local authority to progress that plan. Should the final care plan be placement for adoption, the birth parents have the reassurance of knowing the people who will care for their child and the carers have lots of first hand information they can share with their son or daughter as they grow up which will help them to develop a strong sense of their identity. We also believe that post-adoption contact links will be more meaningful to all parties.

The Third Year

Following on from the success of the first two years in which **33** concurrent planning families were approved and **27** children placed, the service has continued to see high levels of interest from prospective families and from local authorities. In 2016-17, a further **17** families were dually approved as both foster carers and prospective adopters and another **21** children (ranging in age from **1 day to 2 years 4 months old**) benefitted from early permanence through a concurrent planning placement with us. All placements have been of single children so far although we have had a number of carers who are prepared to take siblings and so continue to hope that a sibling placement will be made in the near future.



The Service has expanded to meet need over the last year and now comprises of a full time Service Manager, a full time equivalent Practice Manager, **6** full time equivalent social workers, a social work assistant, **2** contact workers (plus a number of sessional workers) and an administrator. We remain based in Salford and have a contact venue as well as office space. The location is easily accessible by public transport as well as road links and has good parking facilities.

Contact – how it works

One of the benefits of Concurrent Planning is the consistency of contact supervision and support that is involved. Part of the task for carers is to facilitate contact. They are committed to bringing the child to contact and to participate in a handover with parents at the beginning and end of each session. This helps to develop a positive working relationship between carers and parents. The contact supervisors are present during the handover to ensure that confidentiality is not breached and to help to facilitate communication where necessary. In addition, carers are expected to complete a contact book, in respect of the child's routine, for parents who are in turn encouraged to write something about the contact session for carers.

At the end of every contact session, after the child has left with the carer, the supervisor will give feedback to the parents on how the session has gone; as well as giving them positive feedback, the areas which need to be worked upon are discussed. This enables parents to have a clear understanding of the issues and practical tips and support to overcome them but also provides social workers with evidence of parents' capacity to change through the written record which is provided.

Outcomes

Of the 48 placements made in the three year contract period, 24 adoption orders have now been granted in favour of the child's Concurrent Planning Carers. Six children have had plans of reunification with birth family; Four children have returned to the care of their parents and two more children have been placed with relatives under fostering or SGO arrangements.



Two of the children who were rehabilitated to the care of their parents subsequently returned to their concurrent planning carers (after 5 and 9 weeks at home. Their care plans are now adoption). Six children are now placed under adoption regulations having been matched with their concurrent carers by the local authority matching panel and another three children have a final care plan of adoption pending the final Court hearing.

The remainder of the families have placements of children for whom the care planning and assessment process is ongoing.

What Parents say

"[The Concurrent Planning Team] is very helpful, easy to talk to and has great advice. [They] have listened to our opinions and gave good advice. We are very happy with the care provided for our child. We feel we are kept informed by The Concurrent Planning Team, and we feel like we have been kept up to date with [our child's] progress."

What Parents say

"I have been helped and supported by the Concurrent Planning Team all of the time. I've learnt new things that I didn't even know."

"The contact worker has been extremely helpful answering lots of questions. If it would be an adoptive placement I would be very happy for them to continue to care for her and I wouldn't want anyone else. The contact worker is very supportive and has made us feel at ease and welcoming and we appreciate that."

"The contact worker is ace and very supportive. I can tell my son is looked after. The Concurrent Planning Service keep us more involved than other services."

"When I am unsure of something I usually get support in what to do. I feel that my daughter's best interests are always made priority. I am usually always contacted when something has changed or happened. I am happy with the service provided and feel like my daughter's best interests are always met."

"Wouldn't change anything. They are very helpful and supportive if you need them."

"I am always kept updated and listened to."

"I am extremely pleased by the care of my child from her carers, they are amazing with her. The staff at the centre are diamonds and make me feel at ease and comfortable, they explain everything really well and have made this experience a lot easier than it could have been."

What carers say

"The Service is an absolute delight to work with. Friendly, knowledgeable and efficient."

"The team were very supportive and are available with advice as and when needed. Would recommend them as a service without hesitation."

"Our feedback is nothing but positive. Our experience of concurrency and the team to date has been excellent. We been given a high standard of training and education and are always offered advice and support as needed. In particular our social worker, has consistently been warm, caring and approachable"

What carers say cont/...

“Over the past year or so through the concurrency process we have dealt with so many of the team and each of you has been supportive and fantastic. Thank you so much for helping us on this journey, it really is appreciated.”

“It is thanks to you that we have our precious daughter and sister and we will always be grateful. Thanks so much for all the help and support you have offered us over the last year.”

What professionals say

“[The child] has been taken to all health appointments and his carers are meeting all of his health needs. He is being stimulated in the home environment and carers are meeting [the child]’s needs to a very high standard.” Local Authority Social Worker 13.10.16

“Carers meet [the child]’s needs to a high standard and she receives plenty of stimulation in the home. There are no areas of concern. [The child] is having her needs met to a good standard and making good progress. She is thriving in her placement and is displaying positive attachment behaviours towards her carers.” IRO 17.10.16

“[The child]’s needs are wholly met by carers. There are no issues. He is thriving and his needs are being met.” IRO 04.11.16

“All [child’s needs] met to a good standard – no concerns. [The child] goes to groups and is well stimulated. She is given opportunities to develop.” (LA Social Worker – March 2017)

“Carers have responded to all of [the child’s] health needs. [The child] attends swimming and loves the water. She also attends a local music group and is very content being there, she is mesmerised by the sounds. Carers have provided lots of opportunities to enable [the child] to reach her full potential.” (IRO – March 2017)

“ [The child’s] health needs are always met to a high standard and there are no concerns in the level of care she receives to this effect. [The child’s] needs are met to a high standard, no concerns raised. [Carers] are dedicated to [the child] and have worked really well with the LA to ensure her life story work is completed to a high standard.” (LA Social Worker – January 2017)

Training and Support for Professionals

Workers for the service have been involved in a range of training for local authority partners, offering presentations to social workers at all stages of the care planning process, fostering and adoption teams, conference and reviewing officers, legal departments and panel members. This training is free of charge to local authorities within the contract and under a service level agreement. Training is also offered to local authorities who wish to spot purchase placements at a cost.

In addition, presentations have been given at a wide range of conferences and events, including CVAA Best Practice events, in order to raise awareness of the service and of early permanence more widely. Our service manager is also a member of the Manchester Courts Adoption Sub Committee and one of our Practice Managers sits on the equivalent forum for the Lancashire Courts.

The Future

The contract in its existing form was due to come to an end in March 2017 however, it has been extended temporarily (to August 2017) to allow for a new commission to be put out to tender. The Regional Adoption Agencies have been in discussions with each other as to their need for Concurrent Planning Placements going forward and we hope to be successful in a bid to continue to offer this service to them.

At the time of writing, we don't have the detail of this new contract but understand that the four Regional Adoption Agencies in the region have come together which will inevitably mean the scaling up of our service provision. We look forward to the opportunity to work more widely across the region and hope to be able to work with the Regional Adoption Agencies to look at ways we can innovatively and creatively meet their needs.

The Future cont/...

The Service continues to be the largest of its kind in the country, working with more local authorities and providing more placements than any other service. It continues to grow and strengthen; we feel passionately that we are undertaking some excellent work and offering a high standard of service to parents, carers and most importantly of all, the children.

**For more information about the Service or to raise any questions,
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