

Marketing Strategy & Plan

2017 - 2020

Fostering Recruitment

Today's Family Tomorrow's Future



Derby City Council

Contents

Background	2
Marketing Strategy	2
Objectives.....	3
Business Analysis.....	4
Target Market	5
Key Marketing Messages	5
Extended Marketing Messages.....	6
Marketing Activities	7

Background

Derby City Council Foster Care Service is a public sector fostering service which provides foster placements for Derby children in Local Authority Care. Derby City as part of “the East Midlands Framework” also commissions independent fostering agencies (IFA’s) to provide foster carers for the children in its care. Whilst Derby City has a close and good working relationship with the IFA’s, it is also in competition with them in terms of recruiting new foster carers. Derby City Fostering Service and the Independent Fostering Agencies recruit from the same pool of prospective foster carers.

Derby City Council need to reduce the current reliance on using Independent Fostering Agencies as at this time it would be more cost effective and would result in less children being placed out of the area to which they were born.

Derby City Foster Care service has many unique selling points on which it needs to build a solid reputation in order to carve its niche in the market and achieve its objectives over the next two years.

This marketing strategy identifies opportunities and challenges as it outlines a course of action to meet challenges head-on in order to achieve annual targets.

Marketing Strategy

This strategy for 2017-2020 is informed by the findings of iMPower’s a Family Values Project 2016 work and the findings of the 2016 State of The Nation’s Foster Care Report and takes into consideration the available human and financial resources and a review of what worked and what didn’t in the 2013-2016 strategy.

All marketing activities will centre around three marketing ‘peaks’ each year to recruit more foster carers. These peaks are major activities which will require full participation by all Fostering staff with support from other relevant departments across the Council.

Between these peaks will be other routine marketing activities which should be paced and the content rotated so that the audience doesn’t become so familiar with them that they become oblivious to the message and take no action.

The focus will not be on fees or money – though these will still be addressed in ongoing marketing - but the focus will be on the quality of service, the needs of children as the primary concern, and meeting the needs of foster carers.

Three key selling points and marketing messages are:

1. *“Local homes for local children”* as the Council wishes to move away from placing children with families in other cities and regions or assigning foster carers supervising staff which are also located elsewhere.
2. Foster carers are *“part of an important professional team”*. In 2016 research revealed that foster carers do not feel valued as professionals.
3. The assurance that *“we are there for you”*. The 2016 research revealed that foster carers want improved communication and support from their fostering service.

Underpinning the strategy will be the quality and appropriateness of the website which will be a purpose-built window with automated functions to increase conversion rates. The current website does not adequately support the Council’s Fostering business requirements and puts the service at a distinct disadvantage when compared to its 48 competitors in Derby.

The Fostering Service has also undertaken a research project looking into a payment for skills structure for foster carers and this will involve a review of our current fee payment scheme. Consideration will be given to linking Foster Carer training and development to financial remuneration.

Objectives

- 1) Make Derby City Council’s Fostering Service the preferred and premier foster care placement service in Derby City by foster care families.
- 2) Recruit at least 15 fostering households each year for the next three years (2017 to 2020).
- 3) Recruit a diverse range of fostering households from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds to meet the cultural, ethnic and diverse needs of children in our care.
- 4) Recruit households which are willing and capable of caring for all children but especially those aged 5-11, whole sibling groups and children with disabilities and other complex needs.

- 5) Increase the rate of conversions from the enquiry stage to application within no more than four days.
- 6) Ensure effective monitoring and analysis of the data around fostering enquiries, applications and approvals in order to meet changing demands.
- 7) Reduce Derby City Council's reliance on independent fostering agencies for placements.
- 8) Maintain the current number of enquiries and increase the number of qualitative queries.

Business Analysis

At the end of March 2017, Derby City Council Fostering Service had 111 fostering households offering time-limited or long-term and respite placements; 13 approved to offer care as a 'relative or friend' and 15 approved to provide short break care to disabled children.

The aim is to add 45 foster care household by the end of the 2019 fiscal year and the success in achieving this objective depends largely on how it manages the challenges and opportunities it faces:

- 1) Derby City Council commissions independent fostering agencies (IFAs) to provide foster carers for our children which places undue financial pressure on the Council. Although we work with IFAs to place children, in terms of fostering recruitment, they are our competitors. The Council competes with about 48 IFAs operating in Derby City which control 55 per cent of the market. Some of these are nationally recognised names which are frequently the go-to agencies, for comment, by the national media which makes them a recognisable and reputable brand. Most have larger financial and human resources and significant experience in marketing their services.
- 2) Derby City Council Fostering Service operates with seven social workers and one recruitment officer. This will require a high degree of speed and accuracy to achieve the key objective as the workload increases in the next two years.
- 3) Larger national IFAs can mean that supervising social workers may not be local to Derby and Derby children could well be placed with families outside of the region while a key priority for the Council is to reduce the number of children placed outside of its area.
- 4) The IFAs which are commissioned are part of the East Midlands Framework and they offer a greater financial package than is offered by the Council. The level of financial

allowance was cited as one of three top factors concerning foster carers in the 2016 State of The Nation's Foster Care Report. Only 42% of foster carers (nationally) felt their allowance covered the full cost of looking after fostered children which meant that more than half of all foster carers are having to dip into their own pockets to cover the cost of looking after the child.

- 5) In that report, other things that foster carers said they would like to change to help them improve the lives of the children they care for were: (1) improving communication and support from their fostering service and (2) being treated more as a professional.
- 6) The number of enquiries is stable but the conversion rate is low. The 'front door' of generating enquiries and converting into applications and assessments is the critical point of weakness. The 'front door' is the Council's website which is not effectively supporting fostering recruitment marketing. This in turn is putting the Council at a disadvantage when compared to the market-driven websites of the 48 IFAs against which the Council competes in terms of fostering recruitment.

Target Market

The ideal foster carer that Derby City Council aims to recruit is one who has strong moral ethics, cares deeply for the welfare of others, has a can-do attitude, is creative and solution-oriented but at the same time recognising they do not have all the answers. Classified as 'pioneers' by iMPower which conducted a Family Values Project for the Council's Fostering and Adoption Service in 2016, pioneers are more likely to be found among, but not restricted to, professional groups such as those in:

- 1) local government
- 2) police
- 3) health sector and
- 4) faith groups.

Key Marketing Messages

- 1) On average every 20 minutes a child comes into foster care in the UK and we need local foster families for local children.
- 2) Providing what's in the child's best interest is our passion. We believe that every child deserves a childhood.
- 3) We do not just place children; **we *carefully match* local children to local families.**

- 4) Foster carers are guaranteed of the highest level of support and training 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We are there for you.
- 5) Foster carers working for Derby City Council Fostering Service become part of a professional team.
- 6) Derby City Council is a public service-led fostering agency; it is a non-profit making service.

Extended Marketing Messages

- 1) On average every 20 minutes a child comes into foster care in the UK, and we need local foster families for local children.
- 2) Providing what's in the child's best interest is our passion, we believe that every child deserves a childhood irrespective of their circumstance and we are seeking foster care families who are of similar mind.
- 3) We do not just place children; we *carefully match* local children to local families so that their needs are met, whether these are culture or ethnic. It is also to ensure that they have a safe, comfortable and loving home in the familiar city environment in which they grew up.
- 4) Foster carers are guaranteed the highest level of support and training and there is 24 hours a day, 365 days a year on call support services. Foster carers are given the chance to complete a professional qualification, attend support groups and have their own social worker local to them. Foster carers with Derby city are given a tailor made training programme to help support them.
- 5) Foster carers working for Derby City Council Fostering Service become part of a professional team which is concerned about changing children's lives for the better.
- 6) Derby City Council is a public service-led fostering agency; it is a non-profit making service.

Marketing Activities

These activities are designed to avoid ‘over-marketing’ by setting a manageable number of events with due consideration to the financial and human resources available. The plan comprises a maximum of three marketing **peaks** each year interspersed by digital and traditional advertising activities to maintain a market presence. The annual flagship event will held be in June and promoted during Foster Care Fortnight each May. The second peak event will target one interest group per year, which may be linked to key calendar days such as Father’s Day, Mother’s Day, New Year’s Day or Ramadan. During the first year (2017/18) marketing should focus heavily on children’s voices and through the eyes of the child. This approach should be reviewed in March 2018 and refocused, if required, in 2018/19.

Activities for 2017/18					
Date	Event / Activity	Marketing Mix	Budget	Lead	Measurement
April - May	1) Development of Fostering & Adoption website 2) Installation of an automated information pack email response system 3) Joint collaboration with West Midlands Local Authorities to produce Fostering recruitment video.	a) Template of the landing page changed to a more appropriate one b) A landing page with purpose-written text to make full use of Search Engine Optimisation techniques in order to level the playing field with competitor websites c) Custom-written meta title and meta description tags d) Contact form which triggers an autoresponder with an information pack attachment as well as entry to an HTML version of the pack – this HTML version should not be accessed by direct URL but only through referral from the contract form e) Contact form sends an email to the recruitment officer with the contact details of the enquirer f) A guidance plan for response times and approaches g) Custom-designed light-weight PDF information pack h) Digital banners i) Email address j) Promote fostering recruitment video		VB & PM	1) A 50% increase in website visits where the user journey starts on the landing page and progresses to the HTML version of the information pack 2) A 50% increase in conversion rates 3) Recruitment of no fewer than five foster families
Sat 8-21 May	4) Foster Care Fortnight	a) Advertising material and sign-up forms for June event b) Promotion packages to be updated with first person compelling voices from children c) Pitch a weekly radio show using the real life stories of foster children and their parents in each target group (5-11, siblings & complex needs) with the ultimate aim of driving audiences to the website and being invited to the June event. (<i>The actual children & parents are not required ... just their stories</i>). d) Derby Telegraph website advertising & Derby Newsroom articles from the perspective of a foster child as well as from foster dads and foster mums e) Capital FM radio advertising f) Separate Facebook & Twitter adverts on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 5-11 group ii. Sibling groups 			A 25% social media engagement 200 click-thrus to Fostering advert At least 15 families (30 people) signed up for June event

Activities for 2017/18

Date	Event / Activity	Marketing Mix	Budget	Lead	Measurement
		iii. Complex needs iv. All children g) Use hashtag #FCF17 (fostering fortnight 2017) h) Mail drop to selected sub-urban homes with advert for June event - <i>The Secret to Becoming a Foster Parent</i> i) E-Shot j) Confirm venue by end of March.			
June 24	5) <i>Fostering Recruitment Event</i>	a) Attendance if possible by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Fostering b) Foster parents speakers c) Successful person(s) who were fostered d) Information package including children voices material e) Social media promotion f) Radio advertising			Recruitment of no fewer than five foster families
September xx	6) <i>Fostering Recruitment Event</i>	a) Attendance if possible by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Fostering b) Foster parents speakers c) Successful person(s) who were fostered d) Information package including children voices material e) Social media promotion f) Radio advertising			Recruitment of no fewer than five foster families
Quarterly	7) <i>Fostering in Derby e-shot</i>	a) Updated prospects mailing list			An open rate of at least 60% and a 25% engagement rate with recipients
Quarterly	8) <i>Digital advertising</i>	a) Social media or Google AdWords, alternating ads focusing on different age groups ... try not to repeat ads in order to avoid the 'Gorilla in the Room' syndrome -			
March	9) <i>Council Tax insert mail drop</i>	a) Recruitment postcard – children's voices style			Recruitment of no fewer than five foster families
January	10) <i>Fostering Recruitment Event</i>	a) Attendance if possible by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Fostering b) Foster parents speakers c) Successful person(s) who were fostered d) Information package including children voices material e) Social media promotion f) Radio advertising			Recruitment of no fewer than five foster families