



CRISIS IN FOSTER CARE

GMB EVIDENCE FOR
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO FOSTERING



There is a crisis in fostering due to existing foster carers resigning and local authorities being unable to recruit new foster carers. Foster carers enter the profession for the looked after children (LAC). They stay for the LAC. They do not stay for the financial rewards or relationships built with the fostering team. The whole fostering system needs a major overhaul if the issue of recruitment and retention is to be addressed effectively.

The GMB surveyed its foster carer members about their experiences. Some positive feedback was given, although the majority was negative.

The aim of this report is to feed into the Education Committee Inquiry into Fostering with concerns about the current state of the fostering system.

Outlined below are concerns and thoughts given by GMB members who currently foster. In addition to the thoughts of foster carers, where appropriate we have included responses from LAC. All the children are based in the same London Borough and have been in long term foster care. Child S is 15yrs, Child E is 14yrs and Child M and Child A are both 17yrs.

GMB RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Foster carers should be classified as professionals, with access to full working rights including; annual leave (where proper respite care is provided), sick pay, pensions, skills payments/fees and access to trade union representation.
2. Foster carers and LAC would benefit from greater standardisation of working practices across local authorities.
3. To encourage greater numbers of long term foster carers, retainer fees, skills payments or annual leave should be considered when foster carers do not have a LAC.
4. Expenses should be paid to foster carers without delay and the process of claiming should be simplified and standardised across local authorities.
5. Relationships between the fostering team of foster carers, local authorities and social workers need to be strengthened, invested in and better supported.
6. Communication between all relevant parties needs to be more collaborative, understanding and without fear of 'blacklisting' style practices.
7. Successful models of communication and partnership working between the fostering teams should be shared as best practice.
8. Greater cross- authority work should be encouraged and limits on foster carers working with just one authority should be reviewed, especially in the case of neighbouring authorities.
9. Potential foster carers should be given access to full, high quality training in preparation for the role, with honest information given at the recruitment stage – with the involvement of existing foster carers.
10. Exit interviews should take place with foster carers who leave, resign or retire.
11. Greater consistency is needed; joined up working and better terms and conditions within local authorities will prevent an increased reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies.
12. Placements must be suitably matched in terms of geography (between schools & contact), culture, gender, birth children, needs and/or language – with full information about the LAC shared with foster carers, regardless of whether they are placed in the long or short term.
13. Greater consideration and understanding of the needs of the foster carers' families are essential to increasing the chance of providing a successful, stable long term placement.
14. Social workers and local authorities have been subject to drastic cuts in funding and greater investment is needed to fully support foster carers and LAC.
15. Foster carers should have on-going access to training and support, with a focus on training more specialist carers so LAC with particular or special needs can be appropriately placed.
16. The costs of adapting homes should not fall to foster carers and local authorities should be adequately funded to assist with adapting homes for LAC with disabilities.
17. Where appropriate and when possible, LAC must be included in the decision making process.

THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FOSTER CARERS AND THE CURRENT CAPACITY OF THE FOSTERING SYSTEM.

- **Lack of support:**

There was a general consensus that there is an overwhelming lack of support from the fostering team with little recognition of the work they do professionally, emotionally and financially. Foster carers feel undervalued.

Foster carers are not seriously listened to. They have the best interest of the LAC in mind and heart and yet are not treated as an equal member of the fostering team.

They are often given no support with LAC behaviour. They are not to be challenged on their behaviour which means they grow up outside of society norms. Reports of a LAC's behaviour are not always believed. When the correct support is not provided, this has a detrimental effect on the LAC and foster carer.

Foster carers need to be given more support and shown respect as the professionals they are.

There is very little support for foster carers when things go wrong. They feel isolated.

- **Relationships with the fostering team:**

There is a general lack of trust between foster carers, local authorities and social workers. The trust has deteriorated due to rushed placements, lack of clarity and/or truthfulness regarding placements and promised support which never materialises.

Many foster carers report that they feel bullied by social workers who think they know best or who are desperate to place LAC. This can lead to placement breakdowns.

There is a fear amongst foster carers that if they speak out against things they are not happy about they will be 'blacklisted' from fostering.

Foster carers know that the profession is not easy. What they expect however is that they will be treated as an equal partner in the fostering team and the team will be honest about LAC needs.

Communication between the fostering team and the foster carer is poor.

- **Financial:**

Financial support for foster carers is constantly being eroded. Fostering needs to be more financially viable in this 24 hour a day, 7 days a week, profession.

LAC are less likely to be in stable education which means that foster carers are expected to be available throughout the day. This impacts on the foster carers' ability to earn extra income. Fostering does not pay a big income and so financial worries are something many foster carers have.

Many foster carers spend their money on the LAC as the child's allowance often is not enough. Sometimes they may have to claim for expenses. Some local authorities delay and often refuse expense claims resulting in the foster carer being out of pocket.

LAC present more challenging behaviour than previously and there are hidden costs which are not recognised: wear and tear on property and possessions, loss and theft, damage, activities costs, more mileage, costs of contact sessions, repairs and replacements.

The prospect of no income security is preventing new foster carers coming into the profession. Lack of income security is why foster carers are resigning.

Some local authorities have seen the fostering as an easy way of saving money due to austerity measures and budget cuts.

- **Annual leave:**

Entitlement to annual leave varies between local authorities. Some currently have an entitlement to 28 days per year, some have less, and some have no entitlement. But these are being reduced and eroded as local authorities attempt to make cuts to foster carer terms.

Local authorities are requiring foster carers to always be available for the LAC and state that by allowing foster carers annual leave, this has

a negative impact on the placement. They say it makes the LAC feel not wanted and is disruptive to their care if they are re-homed with another foster carer whilst annual leave is taken.

Most foster carers do not currently access their annual leave entitlements, choosing to take the LAC away with them. However, it is a necessary safety net for the foster carer. It is the knowledge that it is there should they need it, for essential rest, health and welfare.

Annual leave entitlements also allow foster carers essential time with their own families or birth children which is sometimes needed. It is not always possible for family members to be expected to care for the LAC if a break is needed. Family members are put in a vulnerable position themselves if they take care of a LAC, putting themselves at risk of allegations.

Some local authorities do not pay any retainer fees or skills payments when a foster carer does not have a LAC. Annual leave entitlements can be used at these times to 'plug the gap' in income if required.

More respite carers are needed who would be able to assist when foster carers need to take a break. Three examples of how important good respite carers are were given by the LAC interviewed:
 Child E- *"It weren't great but at least [foster carer's name] got a well-deserved break!"*
 Child M- *"It was good. It was good for my foster carer too as she got a break."*
 Child A- *"...they covered whilst she went on holiday and when her mum died."*

GMB believes that all foster carers should be entitled to paid annual leave entitlements, possibly in line with the working time regulations. They should be able to carry over unused annual leave entitlements for when the placement ends.

- **Increasing demands:**

Local authorities are not acknowledging the increasing demands on foster carers. LAC present much more challenging behaviour than they did 10 years ago. This directly impacts on the birth children and families.

LAC are arriving in the fostering system with more complex needs and demands. For these to be managed effectively, placements need to be appropriate.

There are expectations on foster carers to provide school transport between their homes and the LAC school, irrelevant of the distance or hours spent travelling, at both the start and the end of the day.

There is more public awareness of the increasingly challenging behaviours of LAC which in turn has an impact on the recruitment of foster carers.

- **Turnover of Foster Carers / Staff:**

New foster carers are not sufficiently prepared for what to expect during the recruitment process. If they were better prepared, more of them would make it through the first year.

New foster carers are still recruited with an idyllic view of it all being about caring for the LAC with no reality given.

There is not enough information given during the recruitment process about the possible impacts on the foster carers birth children and family. No detailed explanation is given as to how parenting will be different towards the LAC with lots of imposed rules, expectations and sanctions.

Foster Carers and Social Workers do not have as much time to be spending with the LAC as they would like, due to too much paperwork.

Foster carers experience is not valued and they are constantly pushed to accept placements outside of their profiles. Expectations of foster carers are changed and become more unreasonable.

Once a foster carer has decided to resign, no one from the fostering team talks through the issues to see if they can be resolved.

- **Inconsistencies:**

Terms of fostering, payments, expectations and standards vary widely between local authorities. These should all be the same, irrelevant of where you live and foster. Everyone should be given the same message.

- **Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA):**

These will continue to increase as foster carers are forced out of fostering for local authorities because of abuse and lack of respect and support. Using IFAs is more costly. Local authorities end up picking up the cost of not supporting their foster carers.

Some local authority placement teams are not operating adequately. Some foster carers face lengthy periods with empty beds. The local authority is not aware of who has empty beds or how to place a LAC efficiently and effectively. This results in an increase in their reliance on IFAs.

- **Recruitment:**

There was some positive feedback given about the current recruitment processes, but improvements are needed as most foster carers stated in their survey answers.

Foster carers are not consulted on recruitment. It appears that there may be fears that existing foster carers will discourage potential foster carers by explaining the reality of the profession. This is not the case though.

An existing foster carer is able to give a true picture; the good and the bad. New foster carers will then not enter the profession with false expectations and be better prepared for the challenges and demands.

THE STABILITY OF FOSTERING PLACEMENTS, INCLUDING THE IMPACT OF THE 'STAYING PUT' INITIATIVE SINCE IT WAS INTRODUCED.

- **Placement stability:**

Placements must be matched correctly and appropriately. Local authorities desperate to place LAC pressurise foster carers into taking a LAC who may not be suitably matched for a variety of reasons.

These could be an inappropriate distance from school or contact, age, not appropriate due to age or gender of birth children, language or cultural reasons (this is increasingly the case with refugee children or asylum seekers).

Foster carers' views and opinions on placements should be taken seriously, but are not. This ultimately will lead to the placement breaking down.

Information about the LAC is withheld by the fostering team. This makes it difficult for foster carers to make an informed decision about whether they are the right foster carer for the LAC.

Short term foster carers are given very little information with regards how long the LAC will be placed with them and when or if they will return home or be adopted. This makes it difficult to plan anything.

Placements will be more stable if a foster carer is allowed to treat the LAC like their own child. If there are no care issues let them stay over with friends, go on day trips with other families, without all the paperwork and them being made to feel that they are different.

Placements breakdown in most cases due to a lack of support from the fostering team. Foster carers need to serve notice or resign for their requests for support to be taken seriously. Foster carers come into the profession to make a difference and help the LAC, but they undermined and under supported by the fostering team and social workers who have all the power.

There are not enough respite carers to assist in making placements stable. Request for support or respite are sometimes perceived as foster carers being unable to cope and the LAC is removed.

Incorrect or false accusations by others lead to a placement breaking down without sufficient investigation.

All the LAC interviewed agreed that stability was very important with Child S, stating - *"It takes time to trust new people, my foster family are like my real family."* They added the negative impact of changes of placement had on them, with major concerns for their own education:

Child S- *It makes me feel unsettled and it's really hard to process*

Child E- *Big time. Adjusting to new people and new surroundings is hard. It's even harder if they change my school too*

Child M- *In many ways. I get worried about my education as that can change too. It's a really difficult transition because you get used to your environment and then it changes.*

Child A- *A lot. My education is effected and I lose my friends.*

- **Staying Put:**

Although this initiative can be a positive for both the LAC and foster carer in long term placements in terms of stability, there has been some criticism.

There is a presumption that a foster carer will automatically participate, without being asked, even if the LAC has only been placed with the foster carer short term. Foster carers are sometimes pressurised to continue and life can be made difficult if they refuse. There is also very little real information given about how it works.

This initiative is just a new name for supported lodgings. Foster carers are not made aware of the changes and ramifications that this brings.

There is no incentive to agree to this. Single foster carers with single placement capacity will not be able to do it as it would be financially impossible. Outside employment as a way of earning an income is frowned upon and is difficult to maintain.

Income is reduced resulting in a large pay cut for the foster carer. Questions about this are ignored and the true picture is not given. The 'staying put' money covers bills only.

Once foster carers sign up to 'staying put' they are no longer classed as foster carers, which results in loss of support from social workers.

They also lose all other terms of fostering such as annual leave / respite. However, foster carers are still expected to follow the old rules of fostering.

The fostering team do not respect boundaries, which leads to the destroying of 'staying put' schemes.

There are inconsistencies around the legislation for young people to remain in education longer and their status regarding being in foster care or in a 'stay put' scheme.

If a child turns 18 in September the foster carer is expected to care for the child throughout the remainder of the school year without fostering allowance.

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY AND INDEPENDENT FOSTER CARER PROVIDERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS AND COOPERATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

- **Financial:**

The use of outside agencies and independent fostering agencies costs local authorities huge amounts of money which should be spent on the children.

Reforms need to be made in allowing these independent providers profiteering from fostering.

If local authorities managed their in-house foster carers better and with more respect, they would better be able to recruit and retain them. This in turn would save local authorities a great financial expense.

A lot of decisions about care come down to money, rather than what is best for the LAC. If a LAC is going to create more of an expense due to more complex or therapeutic needs, they may be placed with agencies, for them to deal with. This affects the recovery of the LAC and impacts on the relationships they go onto have.

- **Competition:**

Foster carers are attracted to these agencies as they generally pay more.

Agencies will continue to grow until local authorities can make themselves more attractive to foster carers.

Bad experiences with local authorities and a perception that they are bullies has driven foster carers to join agencies instead.

- **Quality of care:**

It has been reported that when a LAC has been returned to a local authority from an agency their belongings have not been kept in a good condition.

Different standards as to clothing wear and tear.

- **Positives:**

If a child needs to be moved out of the area these can be used as a way of doing these speedily. Agencies are needed as local authorities are failing to recruit the numbers or types of foster carers needed.

There may be an option to foster for an agency to plug gaps when local authorities do not place children.

THE FOSTER CARE MARKET, INCLUDING COSTS OF COMMISSIONING OF SERVICES AND FINANCIAL INCENTIVES IN THE RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS.

- **Financial incentives:**

Local authorities have different skills, payments, incentives and service bonuses. Some offer little or no 'extras' such as holidays. Foster carers may be attracted to other local authorities or agencies where better terms are offered.

The public have been encouraged to see this as dishonourable, yet in other childcare professions, moving on for better terms and financial reward is not seen as a bad thing. This should be the same for foster carers and work needs to be done educating the public about the reality of fostering.

These should be improved and consistent across the country.

New recruitment initiatives need to be implemented, which include financial rewards, without this being portrayed as negative thing.

The LAC allowance is not always enough. Foster carers are constantly being expected to use some of their skills payments or fees to provide sufficiently for the LAC. Foster carers are made to feel bad or embarrassed to approach the local authority if they need financial support for a particular LAC.

Many people cannot afford to give up work and become a foster carer if sufficient financial incentives are not offered. 52 week pay for foster carers could settle a lot of financial insecurities.

Time between placements need to be paid so the foster carer can continue to pay the bills so that there is a home for a LAC to arrive at. This money is also needed to redecorate or repair the home once one LAC has left and before the next LAC arrives.

Access to an employer contribution pension scheme would be a financial incentive which would retain and recruit foster carers.

'Recruit a Friend' initiatives are useless in the current climate of fostering. Disillusioned foster carers will not encourage friends and family to become foster carers when they are being treated the way they currently are.

- **Other incentives:**

More support and understanding of a foster carers' own family are essential.

A lack of employment rights discourages potential foster carers. Self-employed status, but subject to reviews, personal development expectations, care plans to follow, regular reporting, terms and policies and procedures to adhere to.

Essentially, foster carers are employees without sick pay, pensions and holidays in some cases. This bogus self-employment is a way of getting the quality care that is needed for the LAC by cheap means.

Existing foster carers are the best tool for recruitment. A lot of money is being spent by local authorities trying to recruit new foster carers. Look after the existing foster carers and the rewards will be seen by increased recruitment.

What a foster carer is promised and what they actually receive are completely different. Agencies are naturally taking advantage of the discontent, chaos and crisis within local authority fostering departments.

- **Commissioning of services:**

The cost of commissioning services that some LAC need is expensive and very difficult to get authorised. There is a lot of red tape around evidence submission as to why the LAC needs a certain service. The length of time this takes is unacceptable.

In the time it takes for Local Authorities to authorise access to services, the needs of the LAC may have changed.

THE RECOGNITION, SUPPORT AND RECOMPENSE GIVEN TO FOSTER CARERS.

- **Recognition:**

Foster carers are not recognised as professionals or given the respect they deserve.

Foster carers are made to feel guilty and mercenary for asking about money or referring to being a foster carer as their job.

The government needs to recognise the challenging role foster carers fulfil.

Some foster carers have been made to feel worthless and of no value, with little thanks given.

- **Support:**

Many foster carers report that they would feel more supported if they had employment rights and were entitled to trade union representation.

Where there is an active local foster carers association or network, this is always reported as being of fundamental value to foster carers.

Support from the fostering team has declined. Rather than deal with the request for support, the foster carer is often blamed for mismanagement of a problem and penalised if something goes wrong. There is an increasing feeling of it being 'us' against 'them'.

There are good and bad social workers. A good social worker can make a huge difference in placement stability and meeting the needs of the LAC and the foster carer. There are major inconsistencies between social workers and the message and support they give foster carers.

Many complaints about social workers include lack of support, bullying and threatening behaviour, a feeling of being powerless against them. When a foster carer says no to a social worker there is a feeling that they gang up on the foster carer, stick

together to cover their own backs and fabricate negative feedback for reviews, resulting in deregistration and 'blacklisting'.

The caseloads of social workers are too big for them to be able to offer the sufficient level of support to all of their foster carers. Many leave or go off work sick due to the unmanageable workloads and stress. This impacts directly on the LAC and foster carers.

If a foster carer gives notice on a placement, this is often ignored by the fostering team. This causes distress and unrest for the LAC and the whole foster family.

Support offered to foster carers is wholly inadequate. Robust support packages are needed: access to regular respite if needed, emergency help, therapeutic support for foster carers and LAC.

The 'mockingbird' model of support has worked well in some areas and it allows the LAC to get to know their respite carers.

Local authorities do not have enough respite carers. This is due to there being few financial incentives. A foster carer may actually lose money whilst offering respite. The respite may be out of school hours and therefore results in an increased financial burden due to costs of activities and entertainment.

It is expected that foster carers will have their own support network of family and friends. However, these would need to face criminal checks and place themselves at risk of allegations. They would also be expected to provide free childcare, which is unrealistic.

When asked if the LAC we interviewed felt their foster carers were well supported, there was a mixed response, but they put forward some ways in which their carers could be better supported:

Child S- *They should listen to her. They should be there 24/7*

Child E- *It should be easier for her to get in contact with my social worker. We should have a foster carer's council like we have our children in care council.*

Child M- *They should give her more money as sometimes she has to pay for me out of her own pocket.*

Child A- *More income. She has to pay for things herself.*

- **Recompense:**

There was a feeling that current terms, access to training and pay are constantly being eroded, with concerns that there is no access to an employee pensions scheme. Some local authorities are failing to offer financial support through sickness.

Foster carers told us that entitlement to paid annual leave varied between local authorities, with some foster carers having no annual leave.

It was noted that there was insufficient access to expenses if damage has been incurred in the home. Being told to claim on the house insurance is not acceptable as this increases premiums for the foster carer at their expense.

FOSTER CARE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIFIC OR CHALLENGING NEEDS.

There are not enough specialist carers so LAC are often placed incorrectly. More specialist carers are desperately needed. Without these carers, LAC often end up in children's homes.

Insufficient training is provided to assist foster carers in giving the essential care for each individual LAC. There is limited training available, if any. Foster carers are very much left alone with their only support coming from other foster carers. It is often the LAC that suffers the most due to local authority inadequacies.

Where foster carers accept a LAC with specialist needs, they often do not get full details of needs or guidance and recommendations on support or training available, this adds to the difficulty of getting a diagnosis for a LAC as they should not be labelled.

Many LAC have an attachment disorder which has very similar to some of the other recognised needs like ADHD and Dyspraxia. Many of them have suffered other outside influences (drugs, alcohol, physical and mental abuse) which also have similar outward signs as other disorders.

Many of these LAC need to be treated in a very structured way. It is sometimes difficult to access the support needed for the LAC. Some foster carers report requesting specialist support for the LAC which never materialises and years pass.

The foster carers feel it is a constant battle trying to get the necessary support for the individual LAC. It is ultimately the LAC that suffers as a result of this lack of support. Child E, when talking about her foster parent's experience said, *"She has to fight to get anything done, it took her four years to get me extra tuition."*

The cost of providing necessary support is often prioritised over the needs of the LAC. If it is too costly the LAC has to go without. This leads to placement breakdowns when foster carers can no longer cope. This results in the LAC being constantly moved between placements, which is damaging for the LAC.

The local authorities' strategy is usually to make foster carers just feed them and water them. Foster carers are told not to challenge them at all, let them do whatever they want, don't make them wash, clean rooms, earn pocket money, follow sanctions that enable them to be members of society. The fostering team insist they will deal with the LAC and their issues, but they do not.

Some foster carers have been expected to cover the cost of adapting their homes to the needs of LAC who have disabilities. Some foster carers have had to cover the costs of specialist equipment such as wheelchairs and stairlifts.

Social workers are not equipped to deal with specialist needs. There are not enough social workers to cope with the number of LAC. Many leave or are regularly off sick as a result of workloads and stress. This directly impacts on the foster carer and the LAC.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR CARE, INCLUDING THEIR ROLE IN DECISION MAKING.

It is very important to let LAC have a say in their care. It must be done correctly for this to be worthwhile. The LAC should be listened to and given details of all options. It can work well if the process is correct.

Older children appear to get some influence over decision making. Each LAC needs to be treated as an individual. Not all LAC of the same age are capable of making decisions regarding their care.

Access to contact with family and friends is reported as being the biggest barrier to allowing LAC to make their own decisions regarding their care. Not all LAC are at risk from family or friends and should be allowed to see them.

Some foster carers have reported that 'Children's Rights' put a lot of effort into ensuring they get the opinions of the LAC.

Younger LAC should not be given major decisions to make. Foster carers are encouraged to give LAC a 'normal' childhood but yet are unable to treat them as their own children and are expected to let them make big decisions.

Working groups are available for young people but foster carers report that LAC perceive this to be a waste of time and that they are not really listened to. The LAC feel they are not given true reasons as to why their requests could not be met.

Foster carers and LAC feel that no one acts on their suggestions or requests. Generally, foster carers report that this process is a waste of time.

LAC are not always invited to be a part of the foster carers review.

A perception that the local authority will only agree to a LAC request if it suits them. Generally, neither the LAC nor foster carer is really involved in the decisions. All decisions are made by the social workers or local authority.

Unsurprisingly the LAC interviewed had strong views about whether and how they should be involved in decision making:

Child S- *Yes, I mean come on, you should at least know in advance what's happening to you.*

Child E- *No, some kids are not capable. I sometimes forget because I'm quite mature but other kids aren't mentally able to cope with that sort of thing.*

Child M- *Yes, because some young people have different requirements*

Child A- *Yes- they tried to place me with someone with a dog and I do NOT like dogs!*

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONSIDER IN ITS STOCK TAKE OF FOSTER CARE.

The government should consider all of the comments made under all of the previous headings in this report.

The fostering system is in crisis. Recruitment of new foster carers is essential. Too much emphasis is being put on the recruitment need. More emphasis needs to be given to the treatment and terms of existing foster carers, in order to stop them leaving.

Fostering has changed. More children are arriving with more challenging behaviours. More demands are being made on foster carers without an increase in support being offered.

- **Treatment of foster carers:**

Foster carers will leave if they are not treated with respect and as the professionals that they are.

Foster carers need to be recognised and respected for the 24 hour a day, 7 day a week job that they do. The role is very demanding physically, mentally and emotionally.

Recognition that foster carers may have birth children and family that are equally as important as the LAC.

If something goes wrong, foster carers quickly become unemployed / black listed. Foster carers have no rights or income should this happen. Foster carers need income security the same as anyone else, irrelevant of occupation. More support is essential.

- **Fostering team:**

Foster carers should be treated as an equal part of the fostering team.

Foster carers should have more power with regards what is best for the LAC in their care. It is essential that they are listened to.

Local authorities need to improve how they treat foster carers and what they offer. This is the only way they will be able to compete with the more costly IFAs.

Foster carers fear that if they speak out they will 'blacklisted' and prevented from fostering again.

A high turnover of unhappy social workers is directly impacting on foster carers and LAC.

- **Representation:**

Foster carers want the right to be represented fairly.

Employment rights would offer some security and improved terms and entitlements.

- **Terms:**

Attacks and cuts to foster carers terms of fostering and skills payments needs to stop. Foster carers cannot continue to take cuts. They will be forced to leave fostering and find alternative, paid and secure employment.

Fostering is like being employed, but with stricter terms and policies to adhere to; it should offer remuneration and rights as if employed.

Retainer fees should be provided for periods between placements. This is essential for foster carers to be able to continue fostering.

- **Training:**

More training is needed, with a focus on both frequency and quality. Foster carers need more professional development opportunities to enable them to meet the increasing demands of the LAC. Foster carers should be able to progress to higher levels of fostering which attract higher incentives.

ANY OTHER COMMENT.

"As a foster carer we take children in to be part of our family, it is hard sometimes especially for our children, they have to share us, watch us been verbally or even physically attacked and they don't get credit for this. I love what we do but the main difficulty is dealing with the authorities and not having a say in what happens. This is very apparent at the moment and recruiting more foster carers will be difficult as if this happened in any other profession you would simply look for another job!"

"We previously sent information to the GMB and KFN regarding issues around fostering. Some of these issues have been addressed with the help of GMB. We would like the GMB to be able to work on our behalf in the future. We feel alone and very vulnerable when facing some of the problems we encounter as foster carers."

"I was a carer for 24 years it is the only childcare profession where we are not valued as professionals. We are expected to gain qualifications but are not valued for them. We cannot call it a job, talk about remuneration as we are branded as heartless and money grabbing. We save the state a fortune a year in residential fees and provide thousands of children with loving and secure homes and experiences that we fund ourselves, often by working outside the home. When the children leave us and have problems as adults they do not return to Social Services for help as they have little faith in them, they come back to us their foster family as we do what our title says 'Care'. Foster caring is also the only childcare profession I know where violence towards us is accepted and tolerated, are we not worth a 'Zero tolerance' policy? We are always on duty, it is a profession in which we work 365 days, and 24 hours a day. It is nowhere near the government minimum wage in fact at my rate it is £1.65 per hour so no one can say we do it for the money."

"The need for support increases with placements of refugees - need for training around cultural expectations, language, legal implications. Extra help with therapeutic care."

"The fostering service is in need of a huge shake up. But more important, in fact this is CRITICAL! Mental health services for LAC. LAC are in mainstream schools with teachers that have no clue how to teach or look after these very damaged children. Therapeutic schools for LAC. Someone needs to be strong enough in parliament to say enough is enough. Foster carers take control at times acting in the best interests of the LAC and because of this they get a reputation for being, quote 'gobby'. I ask questions and fight for the children in my care. I never thought eleven years ago when I decided to become a foster carer that it would be the local authority that I would have the most issues with, not the birth families, certainly not the LAC, but the authoritarian authority."

“Fostering services is a sinking ship!! Nobody to listen to us or lead with example.”

“Even though every organisation states that the foster carer is the most important part of the puzzle when looking after the children in care most of the time we never feel that way. You are left in the dark with little or no communication, left hanging waiting for expenses and even though they are crying out for carers many are without placements.”

“Fostering needs to change rapidly or there will be a bigger shortage of carers as we are fed up and we will all leave.”



GMB

GMB@WORK

WWW.GMB.ORG.UK
INFO@GMB.ORG.UK