THE FOSTERING NETWORK

PIONEER PROGRAMME EVALUATION

January to March 2024

CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Broad conclusions

1.1 The overarching finding from this evaluation is that where the Pioneer Programme has been successfully embedded, there is an enhanced culture of equality and mutual respect between all members of this extended team. This relates to everyone participating as part of a true 'team around the child'. This has then led to co-productive ways of working, that value everyone's skills, knowledge and experience.

1.2 It is still early days for the Pioneer Programme (the Programme), with Local Authorities at various stages of development. This ranges from those who have embedded the Programme into their routine ways of working, those at early stages of development, and a few who feel they already engage with their foster carers in similar ways and do not need the benefits the Programme offers.

1.3 Where Authorities have not engaged there are sometimes consultation mechanisms in place, together with foster carer involvement in activities such as recruitment events etc. It is our view, however, that this often does not equate to coproduction. One of the main differences between these two approaches is that consultation mostly involves decisions and/or strategies being developed, and then people being consulted. Coproduction involves everyone being valued and treated as equal partners from the very start.

1.4 None of this ignores the fact that different people within the team around the child will have different responsibilities, often defined by statute. This may then lead to boundaries in terms of what different people are able do within this extended team. However, this does not obviate against ways of working that value everyone's unique contributions equally.

1.5 The second key finding is that where Local Authorities have fully embraced the Programme, the structure and support provided by the Fostering Network has been of clear value. Whilst these ways of working could be replicated without the input of the Network, the benefits that this Programme brings in terms of shared learning and processes, promotion, and status, provide demonstrable added value at no direct additional cost to each Authority.

1.6 The detail of the findings are contained within the full report, and these have been based on trends and patterns within the responses from the questionnaire, focus groups and one to one meetings. We are confident, based on the feedback we received, that they provide a consistent and common understanding of the experiences of people involved in the Programme to date. Some of the additional key themes that have emerged are as follows.

Key themes

1.7 In order to maximise the impact of the Programme, commitment and time is necessary from the Local Authority teams. This 'pump priming' of resources up front, may then bring about a range of longer term (and potentially sustainable) benefits to foster carers and the teams who support them.

1.8   Some Pioneers working in Local Authority areas where the role is in early development, remain confused about their role and boundaries. In some cases, people say that the perception of the role has put other foster carers off being involved. Views on this range from people wanting a more structured role description, to others who see the need for flexibility to adapt to individual's skills and interests.

1.9   Methods of communication and the effectiveness of these are varied across Local Authorities. In addition to emails, solutions such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups are being used. However, there is no consistency in terms of how these are implemented. In some cases, the Local Authority set these mechanisms up and are involved in them, in other examples foster carers and/or Pioneers have set groups up themselves. This inconsistent approach to communication extends beyond the Pioneers themselves, into the wider foster carer community. In some cases, these systems are working well, in others it remains underdeveloped, with more work needed to ensure more effective methods of communication.

1.10   The additional training and networking opportunities that the Pioneer Programme offers is valued by everyone. The great majority of people thought this was worthwhile and would like more of this. Everyone valued the networking, within each Local Authority, regionally, and across all Pioneers in Wales. This networking was seen as providing more opportunities to learn from others, particularly in relation to activities that Pioneers have been involved in, communication and renumeration.

1.11   Methods of recompensing Pioneers for the additional time and responsibilities varies across Local Authority areas. Broadly people either receive time credits, which they can exchange for local services and events, or they receive financial payment. Feedback about the time credits was almost universally negative and everyone thought that there needed to be a standard way to pay Pioneers for their time. Evidence from those areas where payments are made indicate that the overall costs of implementing this is low, and that the benefits to the service far out way the cost.

1.12   Based on feedback, none of the Local Authorities had developed any standardised way of measuring the impact of the Programme. In some cases, Pioneers did prepare regular reports on their work, but there was no apparent standardised way of doing this, or ways in which these could inform judgement on impact and outcomes.

1.13   There are a range of recommendations in the main report that centre on the Fostering Network continuing to support all Local Authorities to develop the Programme. This would be in a way that motivates and supports foster carers in this enhanced role, ensuring that they receive the right messages about expectations, the range of opportunities open to them, support, and communication.

1.14   There are also messages to Local Authorities in terms of the added value that this type of programme can bring, in terms of empowering foster carers. This has the potential to not only benefit the foster carers, and the young people they support, but to also provide greater resources to the social work teams.

1.15   Finally, it is also clear that many services are under various degrees of pressure due to resourcing issues, and this has often led to vacancies in teams and/or increased turnover. In some cases, this has been a factor in the Programme not receiving the level of focus that fostering teams would have liked.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1   This independent evaluation was carried out by Roger Rowett and Donna Thomas from Here2there.me Ltd, on behalf of The Fostering Network. The evaluation methodology, and focus of the work, was agreed through a Terms of Reference document.

2.2   The Pioneer Programme is part of the Fostering Wellbeing initiative, this is described by the Fostering Network as:

Fostering Wellbeing is an innovative programme, funded by Welsh Government and delivered by The Fostering Network. The programme recognises that to improving outcome for children and young people, multi-agency working through a partnership framework across social services, health and education is essential. Fostering Wellbeing has been designed specifically for professionals working with looked after children and young people.

2.3   The Fostering Network outlines the benefits of this programme including:

- It promotes equality of status for everyone involved in the 'team around the child';
- It encourages professionals to work together, with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes for children and young people;
- It creates a shared language for professionals, bringing people together and sharing best practice across service boundaries with an aim to embed a shared approach;

2.4   The two key elements of the Fostering Wellbeing initiative are the Masterclasses and the Pioneer Programme.

2.5   The Masterclasses offer 5 core training workshops, delivered online to cohorts from all roles within the Team around the Child. The objective of each masterclass is to enable foster carers and other professionals to gain the skills and confidence needed to help inspire children and young people to fulfil their potential through a one team approach.

2.6   The Pioneer Programme involves the Fostering Network, working in partnership with local teams in each Local Authority, to recruit foster carers as 'Pioneers'. These Pioneers will be experienced foster carers, who in addition to the skills and experience they will bring to the role, receive training and support to help them cascade learning within their service.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESPONSES

COMMUNICATIONS

3.1 The following communications were sent to all Local Authorities in Wales:

- Initial emails went out from Foster Wales to key contacts in all 22 Local Authorities in Wales, see Appendix 1.
- Follow up by emails from Here2there (H2t), see Appendix 2. The emails from H2t (see Appendix 2) invited people to be part of one of six online focus groups, and/or, to complete a questionnaire.
- Local Authorities who did not respond to the initial standardised email, were then sent individualised emails to encourage them to take part in the evaluation, see sample in Appendix 3.

In addition:

- Regional Development Managers and two other key links for the programme were contacted again to arrange an additional Focus group. In total 4 of the 6 RDMs attended a focus group. One RDM is currently on sick leave.
- Three Local Authorities where there was felt to be specific learning were contacted to arrange a joint focus group.
- Through informal networks, meetings were held representing the views of two foster carers within a Local Authority who weren't participating in the Pioneer Programme.
- The Head of Foster Wales was interviewed about the Programme.

FOCUS GROUPS

3.2 Six two-hour online focus groups were arranged for both Pioneers and Local Authority representatives. Each workshop was attended by more than one Local Authority based on people's choices of dates. Four of these were during the day, one during an evening, and one on a Saturday morning. Local Authority representatives included:

- Fostering Team Managers
- Principal Social Workers
- Fostering Wales team
- Recruitment and Development Officer
- Interim Manager
- Regional Development Manager

3.3 A Total of 22 people attended across all these workshops. The numbers at each workshop ranged from two to ten.

3.4 In addition, three meetings were held with single Local Authorities (Gwynedd, Flintshire and RCT) in order to spend more focused time reviewing their experiences with the Programme.

4. RELATED EVALUATIONS

4.1 The overall Fostering Wellbeing Programme was the subject of an evaluation by CASCADE at Cardiff University in 2022. This focused on the Masterclasses and involved interviewing participants from the workshops, observing workshops, surveying participants, interviewing managers within Local Authorities, interviewing workshop facilitators, and running focus groups.

4.2 In terms of messages from the wider fostering services in Wales, Foster Wales carried out a survey for 2022/23. Foster Wales worked with the Cardiff Research Centre to develop a questionnaire to understand the experiences and attitudes of the foster carers it supports. The findings from this survey provide a useful 'barometer' of the support needs of foster carers more generally and this is a central role of many of the Pioneers.

CASCADE

4.3 The findings from the CASCADE evaluation are included in Appendix 5 of this report. These are wide ranging and extend beyond just the Pioneer Programme. The areas identified that have particular relevance to the Pioneer Programme are listed below, together with a reference to the number from the full list in Appendix 5.

Pioneer Programme as a natural extension of the Masterclasses (24)

4.4 The report talks about the Pioneer Programme being at an early stage of the development but with great signs of promise based on their feedback. This demonstrates an early 'buy in' of the concept from those people from across Wales that were consulted.

Foster carers being part of the Team Around the Child (12, 19)

4.5 This states that '*the main messages of the importance of bringing the foster carer in to the team around the child and related decision making has been received and taken on board. Delegates reported that both education and foster carers are now routinely included in meetings around the child*'. This very much mirrors the main finding from this evaluation in terms of empowering foster carers through the Pioneer Programme, and subsequently working with them in a co-productive way.

Engagement of Professionals (20, 21)

4.6 Both these points emphasise the importance of professionals (i.e. social workers and related professionals from other services) buying into any programme that seeks to value and empower foster carers, and leading by example in this way of working. Without this buy-in and engagement, the Pioneer Programme (and its underlying ethos) cannot flourish.

Foster Wales Annual review

4.7 Findings that have relevance to this evaluation have been included in Appendix 6 of this report. Based on feedback from 455 foster carers (during 2022/23) from across Wales, the survey indicates the following:

Support to Foster Carers by the Fostering Service

4.8   Just over half (53.2%) of foster carers feel totally supported by the fostering service, the rest feel somewhat supported (31.5%), or not at all supported (12.2%). Reasons given by those who did not feel supported included:

- *'By listening to Carers and respecting them. Treating them as Professionals.*
- *'Listen to what the carers say as they live with the children 24 hrs a day'.*

4.9   Whilst these views are selective, and there is no weighting in terms of the numbers of people who said this, they concur with the messages from this evaluation in terms of valuing foster carers as part of the team around the child.

Support to foster carers from other foster carers

4.10   This was rated on a 0 (no support) to 10 (fully supported) scale. The average score was 6.7 with variances across regions. Because the scales are not the same, it is not possible to make an accurate comparison with the support received from the Fostering Service. However, it is clear that peer support is valued, and that this plays an important part in 'sustaining' foster carers in their role.

4.11   There are also statistics for out of hours support, but it is not clear what role peer support plays in this. However, feedback from this evaluation indicates that support from other foster carers out of hours is valued, and often more readily available.

4.12   In relation to Local Authority priorities over the coming 12 months, peer support and mentoring was the second highest ranking area, behind fees and allowances. This again is a very strong message in support of the peer support process, which is central to the Pioneers' role. Comments about this included:

"Improving the service and support you actually provide foster carers. Perhaps if this was the case you wouldn't have to focus so heavily on recruitment. I'm fed up of being asked to come to recruiting events".

"If you looked after the FC that you have you wouldn't need to be trying to recruit so many new FC. It's basic business".

4.13   The full survey report is available from Foster Wales.

4.14   As part of this evaluation, the Head of Foster Wales was also interviewed. He was very supportive of the Pioneer Programme and said that there had been some real benefits, particularly in relation to mentoring foster carers who were new to the role and supporting those foster carers who were struggling. He said that Pioneers are also able to help with retention, and play an active part in the fostering service. In addition, he spoke about the ability of Pioneers to be able to access external funding pots in order to offer additional services to foster carers. Finally, he supported the embedding of the Pioneer Programme in all Local Authorities across Wales.

5. RESPONSES – PIONEERS QUESTIONNAIRE

5.1 All Local Authorities and linked Pioneers were invited to complete an online questionnaire. The full detail of the responses are listed in Appendix 7. The following key themes emerged and have also been linked to the findings in the following section on the focus groups.

Benefits

5.2 Excellent training programme with subsequent increased knowledge across a range of areas.

5.3 Establishment of WhatsApp and Facebook groups to improve the dissemination of information.

5.4 More open dialogue with the fostering team with regard to how new foster carers are supported.

5.5 Involvement of foster carers in an improved recruitment process.

5.6 A wider support network for foster carers that benefits the fostering service more widely.

5.7 Improved one to one support for foster carers as an alternative to a social worker.

5.8 Pioneers working in a proactive way that has helped services drive service improvement and wider engagement of the fostering community.

5.9 Foster carers more able to talk to Pioneers in cases where they may not want to 'bother' their social worker. No 'glossing over' problems in order that resolutions can be found. Supporting foster carers emotionally and enabling them to 'vent' how they are feeling.

5.10 Pioneers running a range of activities including coffee mornings and baby groups. These have often benefitted foster carers who have felt isolated.

5.11 Supporting other foster carers with particular challenges, such as behaviour issues in relation to their children.

5.12 Signposting to other areas of help and support.

Challenges

5.13 Communication and spreading the word about the Programme.

5.14 Lack of consistency about what the 'offer' is.

5.15 Lack of clarity about the role of the Pioneer.

5.16 Took a long time to get the Local Authority to take the role seriously and decide how they wanted to use Pioneers.

5.17   No reimbursement for Pioneers time, and time credits not working well. Lack of budget to support the Programme.

5.18   Pioneers being trained but then not being used.

5.19   Getting foster carers involved in the Programme, some do not like the name 'Pioneers'.

5.20   Staffing challenges within the social work teams. Also turnover of staff within the teams.

5.21   Encouraging foster carers to take up the service offered by the Pioneers.

5.22   Time to support Pioneers effectively.

5.23   A perception from some Local Authorities that they are already providing what the Programme offers.

Ideas for changes for the future

5.24   Improved communication within teams and between teams and Local Authorities.

5.25   Greater promotion of the role and how Pioneers can be used. Understand the boundaries. Local Authorities 'pushing' for it to succeed. More clarity and proactive planning.

5.26   Follow through in terms of action required to move the Programme forward.

5.27   More events that people can attend.

5.28   Financial incentives rather than Tempo Time Credits.

5.29   Making everyone a genuine part of the conversation, working in a co-productive way. Empowering Pioneer and giving them freedom to act.

5.30   Knowing how others do it. Learning and building on good practice.

5.31   Ongoing support from the Fostering Network.

On a scale of 1 (no change) to 10 (significant positive change) how would you rate the Pioneer Programme?

● 1	2
● 2	1
● 3	1
● 4	1
● 5	5
● 6	2
● 7	4
● 8	6
● 9	2
● 10	6
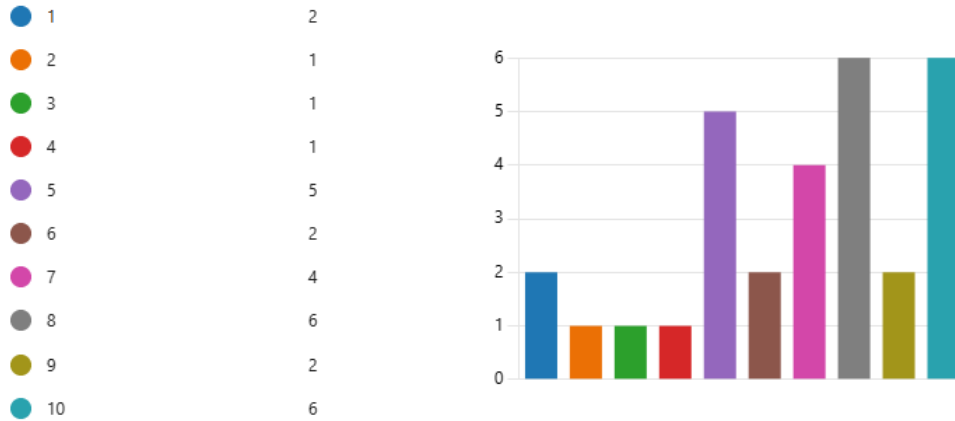
6. OVERALL FINDINGS

6.1 The findings from this evaluation are based on subjective feedback from a range of respondents who have been involved in the Pioneer Programme from across Wales. They have resulted from the responses to the online questionnaire (previous section) and a series of focus groups and one to one discussions.

6.2 The programme is still at early stages and no hard data was available in terms of impact on children and families (see recommendations).

6.3 There were also very variable levels of response rates and feedback from different Local Authorities, ranging from no response at all, through to responses from both Local Authority representatives and Pioneers. We made a number of efforts to obtain feedback from those Local Authorities who didn't respond to our communications, this included Authorities who had engaged in the Pioneer Programme and those who had not. We felt that the latter group were particularly important in order to gain some insight into recommendations going forward for the development of the programme.

6.4 Attendance at mixed focus groups – Pioneers and Local Authority (LA) representatives.

Bridgend	Pioneer
Caerphilly	Pioneer/LA
Conwy	Pioneer
Flintshire	Pioneer
Merthyr	Pioneer/LA
Ynys Mon	Pioneer/LA
Newport	LA
Neath Port Talbot	Pioneer/LA
Rhondda Cynon Taf	Pioneer/LA
Swansea	LA
Torfaen	Pioneer/LA
Vale of Glamorgan	Pioneer
Wrexham	LA

6.5 Attendance at single Authority focus groups

Gwynedd	Pioneer/LA
Flintshire	Pioneer/LA
Rhondda Cynon Taf	Pioneer/LA

6.6 In addition, RDAs covering the following Local Authorities attended focus groups sessions.

Anglesey
Cardiff
Carmarthenshire
Conwy
Denbighshire
Flintshire
Gwynedd
Pembrokeshire
Powys
Vale of Glamorgan
Wrexham

Detailed findings

6.7 Findings have been written with a headline judgement, followed by supportive narrative.

Culture

6.8 Where the Pioneer Programme has been established, Pioneers and Local Authority representatives report a culture of belonging, empowerment, equality, respect and co-production. This is very much in line with the aim of the overarching Fostering Wellbeing programme – to 'promote equality of status for everyone involved in the team around the child'.

6.9 This may have built on a culture that existed prior to the Programme, and/or a more substantial change to a pre-existing culture. There are certainly strong indications, however, that the Programme has at the very least provided a formalised structure that has supported foster carers to be recognised and valued for the experience and expertise that they bring to the wider service. This in turn has had a positive impact for everyone involved.

6.10 Comments from participants in the evaluation made comments such as…

"We want carers to be seen as professionals and feel that way" – LA rep

"We are a small group of foster carers and we know each other well, there is a real sense of belonging" Pioneer

"The role was being done before but not recognised. Used to be 'you're just a foster carer' but now we are part of a team" - Pioneer

"We are a community, supporting everyone" - Pioneer

"There has been a definite shift from them to us" - Pioneer

"Pioneers are an integral part of the team" – LA rep

"We want carers to be seen as professionals and to feel that way" – LA rep

"We were individuals and now a team. We understand because we do the role" - Pioneer

"Pioneers are integral part of team. We work in co-production with Pioneers" – LA rep

"Pioneers can help shape the role. They want to be treated as professionals" – LA rep

"*Everyone is really excited about it*" – Pioneer

6.11 These feelings of being valued as part of a wider professional team have clearly had an impact on individual's levels of motivation and willingness to be involved in a wide range of activities. These include greater involvement in foster carer interviews, support (one to one and groups), training and broader activities. Again, whilst some of this may have been in place prior to the introduction of the Pioneer Programme, the formalisation of the role has brought more structure, recognition and momentum.

6.12   Where Pioneers do not feel a genuine part of the service and valued as equals (i.e. experts by experience), they may not feel motivated enough to step up in terms of taking additional responsibilities. This is one of the most important messages coming out of this evaluation, and something that has impact on many other areas. The culture of the service needs to reflect these values of respect, trust, valuing etc. This then drives the co-productive delivery that is necessary for the Programme to work at its best.

> *"It's a largely one size fits all programme - I'm more interested in how we make systemic improvements to our services - I appreciate the value of providing peer to peer support to other foster carers, but it's not my skill set, and lets the service provider off the hook unless young people and foster carers are genuinely part of the conversation, and co-produce the solution"* – Pioneer

> *"The Pioneer Programme is a great idea and is a valuable tool. It doesn't feel that it's value is being consistently recognised across all of Foster Wales"* - Pioneer

Added Value and Resources

6.13   Where the Pioneer Programme has been fully embraced, and structured support is put in place, there are clear benefits to everyone involved. Even in cases where foster carers had been involved by the social work teams in contributing to the development of the overall service, the formalisation of this through the Programme has added value for those Local Authorities who have done this.

> *"The formalisation of what we used to do has really benefited us. Communication has opened up, there is less informal gossip, walls between teams has broken down, we work together as one big team".*

6.14   However, the added value of the Pioneer Programme appears unclear to a small number of Local Authorities in Wales. They have a view that they are enabling and supporting foster carers currently, and the Pioneers Programme is not necessary. In addition, there are varying levels of resource pressures on many teams, and these would appear to have an impact on some Authorities with regard to providing the initial time required to introduce and manage the Programme.

6.15   Some of these Authorities are of the view that the Masterclasses Programme are sufficient in terms of engaging with, and educating, new foster carers. Consultation groups were also referenced as a means with which an Authority engages and consults with, foster carers.

6.16   We spoke to one very enthusiastic Pioneer who had trained as a Pioneer on her own initiative, but the Local Authority had not engaged with the Programme at all. She said that "*I have told them I have done it, but nothing has ever happened*".

6.17   During this evaluation it was difficult to get a response from some Local Authorities in order to fully understand their lack of engagement. This was despite a number of communications. However, based on a couple of responses, these issues of perceived added value and lack of resources did emerge as factors. There may well be other issues at play, but we were unable to get sufficient responses to fully ascertain these.

"My LA does not operate the Pioneer Programme. We've recently reinstated a Consultation Committee which has been out of action since before COVID. There will be some crossovers, when things are up and running, meaning my LA have not introduced the Pioneer Programme. The Consultation Committee does not include any training for the Foster Carers. The Pioneer Programme has huge amounts of support too; locally, across North Wales and the whole of Wales. The support is essential for recruitment and retention, also for when comparing to private FCAs". Pioneer

6.18   Within some Local Authorities who have not engaged with the Programme, there are sometimes consultation processes in place, and Pioneers are involved in aspects of the wider service, such as recruitment. However, our view on this is that this falls short of truly co-productive ways of working.

Recompense

6.19   **There is no consistency in the way that Pioneers are rewarded for their time across the different Authorities and the Tempo Time Credit system is not popular for many.**

6.20   Local Authorities have either introduced a financial payment to Pioneers, which is typically £15 per hour with a maximum of 5 hours a week paid, or a reward and recognition scheme (Tempo Time Credits). These Credits can be exchanged for a range of services and activities provided by Temo's local and national 'recognition partners'.

6.21   The feedback on the time credits was generally poor, with people saying that the activities, products or services were often not that useful, or local enough. Pioneers who received these were also aware that some Pioneers within other Local Authorities were receiving hourly payments. Whilst people were often quite pragmatic about this, and monetary reward was not a big influencing factor, the lack of consistency and a perceived element of unfairness was clearly an issue. Comments from the focus groups included…

"We give up our time without anything in return. We do have Tempo time credits but they haven't really been used much. When we heard another area was paying it seems unfair. We need to ask Pioneers what they have an interest in – then develop it. The programme needs to be Pioneer led – they have a lot to give and they often give time over the weekend.". Pioneer

Communication

6.22   Improved communication was a consistent feature within those Local Authorities that had embraced the Pioneer Programme. However, there were also issues in relation to how problematic this whole area could be across the wider service.

6.23   Because the Pioneers were a recognised role, with some element of defined responsibilities (see next section on role descriptions), this was then seen as a catalyst for the introduction of an agreed method of communication within this group. Examples of this included email and/or WhatsApp groups, through to regular in-person or online meetings.

"We have got a WhatsApp group and it works really well. It promotes equality for all to see the messages. We discuss all sorts of things including asking if others can help out. It's just for Pioneers, but it was set up by our Team Manager" - Pioneer

"Wider support, communication and learning from pioneers in other local authorities would be very beneficial to us all, especially those who are more advanced with the programme than we are"

6.24   WhatsApp groups were mentioned by a lot of people, however, there was a lot of variance in terms of how these groups were implemented and sanctioned. Some Local Authorities do not sanction their use at all, but in some cases, the wider foster carers have set up their own groups without reference to the Local Authority. Some Authorities set them up themselves, just for Pioneers, and some set them up for both Pioneers and the Social Worker team.

6.25   It is clear that these types of groups can be problematic if they are not planned and supported in a diligent manner. Potential issues include confidentiality breaches. However, it is also clear that when they are well planned and moderated, they can be beneficial to aid communication. This communication can also be far more immediate and responsive than relying on emails. An example of where this can be very effective is in terms of providing support, often out of hours.

6.26   Comments from participants on communication included:

"We had some issues in X, no social workers were involved and people said some of the messaging was inappropriate. It was shut down then a new one was set up, but it includes Social Workers now" - Pioneer

"X have a Pioneers WhatsApp group but does not include all foster carers, we have around 200 carers. But we also send emails out to people to communicate, that has been received really well by foster carers to keep them informed. We also have a Facebook page but that's not for Social Workers and team members, it's a closed group for foster carers and is monitored by one of the Foster Wales team, but it is only us that can post" – LA rep

"Sometimes SW's can feel threatened by us and get defensive often stating we need to stick with in the bounds of confidentially. We point out we are not interested in the children's cases but are interested in supporting the foster carer" - Pioneer

6.27   Concerns were also expressed about GDPR, relating to the confidentiality issues mentioned above and other areas. People felt there should be guidance around this.

Clarity of roles, responsibilities and boundaries

6.28   A few Local Authorities have clear role descriptions for Pioneers. However, there is a lack of clarity about the role of the Pioneers in many cases. This includes where boundaries lie in terms of the activities and functions they are involved in.

6.29   This was a consistent topic from many people we spoke to, predominantly Pioneers, but also some Local Authority representatives. People were asked about their understanding of the role at the beginning of all the focus groups, and this message came through strongly.

6.30   A number of people did reference a role description provided by the Fostering Network (see appendix 4), but others were not aware of this. A small number of people thought that the expectations in this role description could be off-putting for some. One comment from a Pioneer was…

> *"There are three of us but I have got an awful lot on my plate. I was petrified re expectations, it was quite off-putting. We are just carving our role"* - Pioneer

6.31   In one Local Authority Pioneers said that the Authority did not really know what to do with them or what should be expected of them.

> *" I support/manage support groups which is my primary role, and am available for 1-1 support. Also support recruitment and attend cluster training for new carers. I help plan celebration events on an annual basis. I'm in the office one day a week to touch base with staff. I Liaise with other children's services and link the LAC Education team"* - Pioneer

> *"We need to make the role a bit more formal, more educated , so that carers who are providing support are protected. We need structure. But we do need support from someone who is living it*" - Pioneer

6.32   When we discussed this in more detail there was a general view that any role description needed to be flexible enough to allow for individual foster carers to work to their strengths and interests. This may need some guidance to Authorities and a revised template role description.

> *"We want to do a skill scan for Pioneers plus areas for development. A bit like a one-page profile*" – LA rep

6.33   Some Pioneers did not like the term 'Pioneers' and in one Local Authority they had used the term 'Support Advocates'.

> *"People still don't really understand what the Pioneer role is"* - Pioneer

6.34   A number of Pioneers spoke about concerns about boundaries, rather than the role description more generally. There was a view that more guidance was needed in this area.

> *"If I get a phone call, and there has been an allegation made and we are asked to support the carer with very little information, this is a worry. We can be piggy in the middle. And the carer may not want you to know the information"* – Pioneer

> *"I'm hoping the Pioneer Handbook and the success of the Pioneer Programme in other LAs will help my LA to see the gaps in the service which a Foster Carer could help to fill. I see the Pioneer Programme as a great part of the harmonisation of LAs across Wales"* – Pioneer

Maximising resources

6.35   **In some Local Authorities, Pioneers were in place, but the programme had not been fully developed. There was a consistent view from many of these Pioneers, and some cases Local Authority representatives, that there was still some way to go in order to maximise the potential of the Programme and the foster carers involved.**

6.36   The reasons for this were varied. In some cases it was due to the amount of time that foster carers had been doing the role. In others it was due to a lack of clarity about their role and boundaries. There were also cases where the Local Authority had not had the time to fully develop the potential that was clearly there (in terms of people's commitment and enthusiasm).

6.37   As mentioned elsewhere in this report, capacity and sustainability within the Local Authority teams was reported as a challenge. This is even in cases where the Pioneers Programme is embedded. However, these are also strong indications that the effective development of a strong Pioneer team mitigates against this in the medium to longer term.

6.38   One of the most consistent areas of feedback was in relation to foster carers often feeling more able and willing to talk to other foster carers about their problems and issues. Examples were given where this occurred on a one-to-one basis, or in groups.

> *"Foster carers will always talk to other foster carers first rather than LA. Foster carers want to be included and recognised."* Pioneer

6.39   Where the Programme had not been fully implemented, or was still in early stages of development, there were some concerns raised about the processes and support systems in place to drive it forward. Examples were given where communication was slow, and decisions took a long time. This frustrated Pioneers who were keen to move forward and develop.

"Morale is low. The length of time from query to outcome of query. Nobody can make a decision. Frustrates all our carers. Nobody seems to have the authority to make a simple decision. Meeting after meeting" - Pioneer

Training and networking

6.40   Both the Masterclasses, Pioneer training, and networking events were valued by everyone spoken to. People felt that the Masterclasses provided a good grounding in terms of knowledge, whilst the Pioneer training allowed for further learning and reflection as the foster carer become more experienced and had the capacity to support others.

6.41   Some Pioneers said they would like more access to Pioneer training on an ongoing basis, with some variances in how many training sessions they had received (from one to one a month).

6.42   Pioneers also said that they valued opportunities to speak to other Pioneers from other Local Authorities, in a similar way to the focus groups within this evaluation. This could allow for sharing of good practice and ideas. It is also a way to provide more informal opportunities to network.

"The training has been wonderful and getting together with others. There is a lot of training – one session a month and it's great training. And the opportunity to meet with others is really useful" Pioneer

"The training has been wonderful and getting together with others. Is a lot of training – one a month – great training. And meet with others". Pioneer

"Pioneer training blew my mind – is incredible" Pioneer

"New Pioneer training is a couple of hours introduction, it used to be 4 two-hour sessions. Pioneer

"One 2-hour session introduces the role and key skills – then we have ongoing training programme". Pioneer

"You can't become a Pioneer unless you attend Masterclasses first. Pioneer training was only two hours" - Pioneer

"It would be good to have a WhatsApp group or communication network for Pioneers – more formal than informal. With somebody from the Fostering Network". Pioneer

"When we do training, we don't chat. These more informal get togethers can be more valuable. A bit like virtual coffee mornings". Pioneer

Structured support

6.43   Structured professional support to Pioneers is inconsistent. Some Local Authorities provided structured support for Pioneers over and above any support provided to other foster carers, some do not and are also looking at developing this area further.

6.44   Further guidance on this would be useful, together with examples of good practice. If Foster carers do take on an enhanced role, particularly where this involves peer support and all the additional skills that this involves, more opportunities for professional support would clearly be beneficial.

> "*The Supervising Social Worker should provide one-to-one support. We do have a successful buddying scheme and looking at developing this further. The ideal would be that each Pioneer has an individual learning and development plan. Pioneers also have an annual review*" – LA rep

> "*We are looking at group supervision quarterly and one to one where required*" – LA rep

6.45   In addition, as referenced above in the quote from the Local Authority representative, this support could extend to an individual learning plan. This would give the Pioneer more confidence to deliver the role, and to develop their skills into the longer term.

Processes and guidance

6.46   Enhanced processes and related guidance to support this new programme needs to be developed. During this time of learning this is an ideal time to do this.

6.47   One group thought that there needed to be an agreed way to record activities and other more structured ways of doing things. One Pioneer said that this could '*help with regard to safeguarding ourselves*'. There was a view that it would be useful to learn from other Authority areas in terms of this.

6.48   This feedback linked with the comments about the need to understand and have clear guidance / protocols around boundaries in terms of Pioneer's activities.

Measuring impact

6.49   There is no agreed **process in place to measure the impact of the Pioneers Programme. Even if this was limited to the collation of case studies and stories, this could assist in making some longer term judgements about the value of this way of working**.

6.50   None of the participants in this evaluation were aware of any mechanisms in place to measure the impact of the Pioneers programme in a structured way, or how this could be done. Some Pioneers spoke about recording their activity on a regular basis, but it was unclear how this was being used to measure outcomes at any level.

6.51   There was discussion about measuring recruitment and retention as two indicators of impact, but again there were no mechanisms in place to monitor this in any formal way in relation to the Pioneers Programme.

6.52   A number of participants spoke about their perception of how the Programme had benefitted various areas of the service, these included:

- Improved recruitment events (we help to provide a 360-degree view of the role);
- Being part of the recruitment process;
- Support to new foster carers;
- Delivering training, as part of the programmes for Pioneers;
- An improved range of organised activities for foster carers, and Pioneers either leading on these or supporting them;
- Intelligence in terms of what is 'going on' on the ground. This can support the Local Authority to be able to respond to issues at an earlier stage;
- Out of hours support;
- Giving talks on the role of foster carers, including in schools;

"We need to be more evaluative, to be able to measure impact"

"We support new carers who may have questions, with their first placement, the nitty gritty that they should know, but don't want to ask the social worker" - Pioneer

6.53   The area of measuring impact can be very problematic, and any process that is introduced needs to be meaningful and not involve burdensome processes of recording. There is a difficult balance to strike here. It would also be a challenge to attribute any specific outcomes (e.g. retention) to one specific intervention (i.e. in this case the Pioneer Programme).

Value for money

6.54   Where the Pioneer role has been fully embraced and supported within Local Authorities, the Programme has provided value for money, even at this relatively early stage. This is based on the examples of activity provided by Pioneers and Local Authority representatives, the quality and perceived value of this work, and the cost to the Authority in terms of time and money.

6.55   Pioneers are undertaking activities that were previously carried out by social workers, or others within similar roles, and this has been seen to enhance the effectiveness of the service overall. What it appears is missing is some measure of impact, as referenced above.

6.56   The key question for The Fostering Network, and those involved in the Pioneer Programme, is does the programme offer value for money. In our view, after receiving feedback from Pioneers and Local Authority representatives, it does. Even at this early stage in its development, when the Programme is well embedded and supported, the benefits and outcomes outweigh any time spent and/or financial costs. Section 6.64 of this report provides more detail on this.

6.57   Having said this, there is clearly some more work to do to extend and develop the Programme, and this varies from area to area. In those areas that are most advanced, there is still some work to maintain the momentum and embed the Programme even more into standard ways of working. For those still at early stages of development, there is more work to agree standard processes and systems of support. And for those who have yet to embrace the Programme, there is a need to share the learnings from this evaluation in order for them to re-evaluate their involvement.

Good practice examples

6.58   There are good practice examples in a number of Local Authorities where they have embraced the Programme and developed responses to implement new ways of working. Everyone is at different stages and hence this is an excellent time for learning across Wales.

6.59   We spent additional time with three Authorities, Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT), Gwynedd and Flintshire, in order to explore this in further detail. Many of the finding replicate the areas covered above, but there were also some additional learnings that came out of this.

Rhondda Cynon Taff

6.60   RCT was one of the first Local Authorities to engage with the Pioneer Programme and they were regularly referenced by other Authorities, during this evaluation, in terms of their good practice. They have developed a range of policies and procedures to support the Programme, including a draft of a Pioneer Handbook, in collaboration with the Fostering Network. This draft will form the basis of a document that will be shared with all authorities later in 2024.

6.61   RCT were also the first Authority to pay Pioneers for their time, up to a maximum of 5 hours a week. This is the maximum amount that is allowed based on the Regulations. Many of the other Authorities spoken to during this evaluation said they wanted to move to this model, rather than use of the time credit system.

6.62   Much of the early work of Pioneers in RCT centred on work with local schools to support children looked after (CLA). This linked to the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) programme and was coordinated through the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) who also attended the Pioneer's training. This is one example of the Pioneers being supported to work in a joined-up and strategic way with other services, in this case education.

6.63   The work of the Pioneers now covers many aspects of the Fostering Service in RCT, as outlined throughout this report. This has included:

- Recruitment and retention, including facilitating events with the recruitment officer and supporting the development and delivery of support groups for carers;
- Supporting new foster carers and carers facing challenging situations. This has included mentoring and support to carers going through assessment, and peer support around learning and development;

- Championing and advocacy, working as valued co-professionals in the team around the child to promote understanding of fostering and to improve relationships across services (an example being the CLA programme referenced above);
- Supporting change by working proactively with the fostering service to identify new ways of working together to improve the wellbeing of children looked after;
- Organising and promoting a range of events, including to review how the service is progressing;
- Sitting on fostering panels.

6.64   The Service has also carried out some useful work in relation to costs associated with paying Pioneers. From April 23 through to January 24, Pioneers have provided 576 hours of work at a total cost of £8580. This would indicate that a full year would be circa £10,000, representing excellent value for money for the service. Feedback would also indicate that Pioneers generally work more hours than they are paid for – i.e. on a voluntary basis.

6.65   Feedback from RCT also identified a number of other learnings over the time of the Programme, this included the importance of:

- Somebody within the service having a clear vision and passion about how the Programme should be delivered;
- Effective support to Pioneers. This is delivered as part of the supervision process with the Supervising Social Worker and takes place formally every 12 weeks, with a 'touching base' every 6 weeks;
- Effective communication, including a WhatsApp group specifically for Pioneers and lead social workers;
- Formalised and professional processes, including such things as the Pioneer application process and use of timesheets etc;
- Breaking down the 'walls' between services. Pioneers have been a key part of this;
- Being clear on boundaries and checking these out within support and supervision;

Gwynedd

6.66   Gwynedd spoke about how they had launched the Pioneer Programme through an event which foster carers were invited to with nearly 50 people attending. Lunch was provided and there was an emphasis on ensuring the session was delivered in an informal and accessible way. At this stage 4 Pioneers had already been recruited and the event resulted in an additional 8 people joining the group. A lot of the focus was on the message that everyone has something to offer, and that those things can be different, based on each person's interests and strengths.

6.67   There was also a focus on Pioneers being able to shape what the role became, and the importance of being non-judgemental. Everyone's views were valued.

6.68   Gwynedd also has a dedicated WhatsApp group for Pioneers and a closed Facebook group for foster carers.

6.69   As with some other Local Authorities, Gwynedd have developed a pen-picture / one page profile for Pioneers. This provides a useful introduction for other foster carers in order to break down the barriers to initial communication. Two examples are provided in Appendix 8.

Flintshire

6.70   Flintshire are unique in Wales as they also run the Mockingbird programme. This is based on communities of 6 to 10 'satellite' families who support each other. However, feedback from Flintshire indicated that the Pioneer Programme does provide a different model which provides a more extended level of support across all foster carers. This allows Pioneers with particular skills and experience to reach out to all carers across the Local Authority area, and to connect with Pioneers across Wales for further learning and support if required.

6.71   Flintshire have 5 Pioneers at the time of this evaluation, but are in the process of recruiting more. They really valued the peer support element of the programme and said that groups delivered by Pioneers have been very successful, with a more informal and 'chatty' approach to meetings with foster carers. They said more people were now attending these meetings, and people felt more at ease.

6.72   As in other areas, Flintshire Pioneers organise a range of activities, and also attend local events such as the Food Festival in order to promote fostering and aid recruitment. Baby groups are also popular and again people attending value a more relaxed and informal approach to these. This has resulted in a tripling of numbers of foster carers attending.

6.73   Issues that occasionally arise such as confidentiality breaches were discussed, and training and support has been provided to Pioneers on how to manage difficult conversations.

6.74   Currently, Pioneers in Flintshire do not have formal supervision, and everyone said that further guidance on this and other areas would be beneficial.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 These recommendations are focused on steps that the Fostering Network can take to help move the Programme forward over the next two years. There are also implicit messages for Local Authorities in terms of actions they could take to help create added value within a service that is under great pressure and demand. Creative solutions are needed in order to maximise resources, and there is little doubt in our mind that Foster Carers are a valuable resource, often involving highly motivated people who are willing and able to give more.

Sharing this evaluation

7.2 Decisions will need to be made about how the findings from this evaluation are shared, external to The Fostering Network. Hopefully, apart from making useful reading (albeit at an early stage) in terms of the progress of the Pioneer Programme, the findings can also be a catalyst for further action within Local Authorities, particularly those who have not engaged, or are at an early stage of development.

7.3 On this basis a considered communication strategy to the 22 Local Authorities, incorporating key elements of the report (or possibly all of it), needs to be agreed. In addition, it would also be useful for the Fostering Network to include how they intend to respond to the recommendations. This will demonstrate that the evaluation exercise is not just a means to justify the programme to date, but also part of their commitment to continue to support and improve the Programme.

Best Practice

7.4 In order to further drill down into the elements that contribute to best practice within the Pioneer Programme, it is recommended that further work be carried out to explore the Pioneers 'journey' where it has been most successful. This may include up to three or four Local Authority areas.

7.5 Whilst much of this has been touched on within this evaluation. this will review in more detail, how Pioneers have been identified, recruited, trained, and supported. It will explore the systems and processes put into place to enable this, including messaging, role descriptions, training programmes (including how these are delivered), payment, supervision, record keeping and impact assessment.

Pioneer Handbook

7.6 To produce two Pioneer Handbooks that enshrine all of the above, one for Local Authority fostering teams in terms of how to introduce, manage and develop the Programme, and one for Pioneers. The Fostering Network already have plans in place to implement a handbook.

7.7 The Local Authority Handbook should cover all of the structural, logistical, and administrative elements of the Programme, but should also have strong messaging about the importance of the values that underpin this programme in terms of empowering foster carers (who wish to become

Pioneers), trust, co-production etc. This will include some of the findings from this evaluation, including quotes from Pioneers and Local Authority representatives.

7.8 The Pioneer Handbook should be written in a highly accessible and engaging way. It should be short, clear and relevant, focusing on those areas that have been proven to be most important to Pioneers (and Local Authorities). It should strike a critical balance between providing enough structure to enable the reader to understand what the role involves, whilst also stressing the flexibility in terms of adapting to individual's strengths and interests.

7.9 The Handbook can also include a sample role description that builds on the document that has already been distributed by The Fostering Network.

Payment

7.10 Local Authorities that have paid foster carers for their time report that the cost of doing this is not prohibitive. Guidance needs to be produced on this in terms of rates, and any other mechanisms that could be put into place to support the process.

Communication tools

7.11 Two elements of communication need addressing going forward. One in terms of advice and guidance around the use of existing communication tools within the Local Authorities (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook groups). The other in terms of communications from the Fostering Network to Pioneers and those involved in the Programme.

7.12 Guidance on the use of existing tools can be refined during the further work looking at best practice (as above). This can be one of the lines of enquiry during this phase.

7.13 Consideration of methods of communication from the Network out to Local Authorities, needs more consideration and planning. This needs to review how best to enable effective communication in terms of the proposed Pioneer Handbook, and other possible regular updates (e.g. newsletters). It should also consider how best to facilitate dialogue with the Pioneers and others within each Local Authority, and between those people across Authorities (this came out strongly in this evaluation).

Measuring Impact

7.14 Ideally some method of agreeing how impact can be evaluated needs to be reached. Any system has its benefits and drawbacks, and none will be foolproof. For example, even if recruitment and retention went up, there is no way this can be fully attributed to a single factor (in this case the activities and input of the Pioneers).

7.15 However, there are approaches that can provide some form of systematic way to do this, including story-telling approaches such as Most Significant Change Technique (MSC). This could then be triangulated with other quantitative methods such as data on recruitment and retention – as above.

7.16   This all needs further discussion and for a consensus to be agreed with the Local Authorities. This work could also have wider impact in terms of learning across LAC services.

Appendix 1 – Fostering Wales initial email

As you know, the Fostering Wellbeing Pioneer programme has been growing and developing across Wales over the last couple of years and we are excited to embark on an all Wales evaluation to measure the impact pioneers are having. During this process we will also look to identify challenges, barriers, and areas where we can improve going forward.

This email is an introduction to Roger and Donna from Here2there who will be making contact with all services and pioneers from across Wales, they will be inviting you to contribute to this evaluation work. It is really important that we gain insight from as many services and stakeholders as possible, regardless of current engagement levels with our programme, in order to get a realistic and honest review.

Roger Rowett will be leading on the work, supported by Donna Thomas. Roger has an extensive background in services to young people and was an Inspector and Professional Advisor for Children's Services for CSIW. He has also carried out a range of independent evaluations over the past 15 years.

Roger and/or Donna will be contacting you over the course of the next 3 months, starting now. This will be primarily to arrange a series of focus groups (we will only ask you to attend one) and possibly a one-to-one online conversation. You will also be asked to complete an online survey and provide details of any other people you know who may be in a position to comment on the programme.

We really appreciate your involvement in the Pioneer Programme to date and this evaluation will be a wonderful opportunity to identify and celebrate what has worked well, and understand more about what can be improved going forward. We will also be able to share this learning across Wales and provide accountability for improvement actions for the future.

Any feedback you provide could be used within the final report, but we will not be identifying people by name without their permission.

If you have any further questions please let me know, or contact Roger or Donna during the course of the evaluation.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Appendix 2 – H2t initial email

Following Gemma Struthers email to you last week we would like to introduce ourselves and provide information about planned activity we have arranged during February.

We have arranged six focus group during February, four running from 10-12 on a weekday, one during an early evening, and one on a Saturday morning. We are hoping that most people will be able to attend one of these groups which will be run remotely on Teams.

We have also attached a link to an online questionnaire. This covers the areas we will be discussing during the focus groups, and will serve two purposes. Firstly, it will enable you to think about the questions before the group sessions. Secondly, it will enable us to ensure we have captured everyone's views, and that these can be attributed to the correct person and Local Authority area.

In summary, can you please:

a.   Respond to this email and indicate which focus group you (and others if they wish to take part) would like to attend from the list below (just one) by **Friday 2nd February at the latest**.

b.   Complete the questionnaire (link below) by Friday 9th February. If you cannot attend a focus group, this will make the questionnaire even more important.

https://forms.office.com/e/UQNyHZUhmv?origin=lprLink

Your involvement in this evaluation will be critical in ensuring we have as many perspectives as possible on the Pioneer Programme, both in terms of what has worked well, and what could be done differently going forwards. Attendance at the focus groups will also enable you to hear from other Local Authority areas in terms of good practice and ideas.

FOCUS GROUP DATES
Thursday 8th – 10:00-12:00
Wednesday 14th – 10:00-12:00
Saturday 17th – 10:00-12:00
Tuesday 20th – 10:00-12:00
Tuesday 20th – 18:00-20:00
Thursday 22nd – 10:00-12:00

Teams invites will be sent closer to the date of your chosen focus group

Thank you very much for your involvement to date in this programme, and in anticipation, for your time contributing to this evaluation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Appendix 3 – H2t follow-up email

Hi X, you will have received a couple of emails about this, firstly from Gemma (Fostering Network), and then from Donna (H2t), with information about our online focus groups and questionnaire.

We haven't had any interest in the focus groups or response to our survey, from X. It would be really useful to get your feedback on the programme in order to inform how it develops going forward.

Would you be happy to provide some feedback by return email, or via a phone/Teams chat? Just to explore your views about the programme, both in terms of what is good about it, and what could be better. Even if you don't intend to get involved this would be helpful.

Many thanks - Roger

Appendix 4 – Pioneer Role Description (The Fostering Network)

What is Fostering Wellbeing
Fostering Wellbeing brings together all the professionals involved in supporting children who are looked after, including Foster Carers. It promotes equality of status for everyone involved in the 'team around the child'. Fostering Wellbeing will encourage professionals to work together, with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. It will create a shared language for professionals, bringing people together and sharing best practice across service boundaries with an aim to embed a shared approach across the region.

What is a Pioneer?
The Fostering Wellbeing Pioneers will be an important part of the programme as it expands across Wales. They will be experienced foster carers who will use their skills and experience to help us cascade the learning from the masterclass programme throughout their local authority. The pioneers will support colleagues across social care and education to embed the wellbeing principles in their day-to-day work with a particular emphasis on raising the wellbeing of looked after children and young people.

In addition to attending the masterclasses, Pioneers will receive additional training and support from The Fostering Network.

What will the Pioneers do?
Here are some of the activities you might get involved in as a Fostering Wellbeing Pioneer:

- Peer Support - act as a focal point for foster carers to help them understand and maximise their role in supporting children and young people's wellbeing. This might include sharing information about Fostering Wellbeing at a support group for foster carers.
- Championing and advocacy - work with education and other professionals to help them to engage with the project aims. This might include visiting twilight sessions at schools in your area or attending meetings to share your experience of the Fostering Wellbeing Programme
- Support change in your service - work proactively with fostering services to identify new ways of working together to improve the wellbeing of children looked after. This might include attending training or representing Fostering Wellbeing at strategic meetings with other co-professionals.

Pioneer Person Specification

Knowledge / Experience / Understanding

- Experience as a foster carer or in supporting care experienced children and young people.
- Understanding of the barriers that exist for looked after children and how to support their social, emotional and learning needs.
- Understanding of how foster carers and the team around the child can work together to best support the needs of children and young people.

Skills / Abilities

Pioneer Evaluation March 2024

- Be passionate about improving outcomes for children looked after.
- Ability to work on own initiative as well as being an effective team player.
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills, including listening to and understanding the views of others, and the confidence to speak in front of small groups of co-professionals.
- Ability to work proactively with foster carers, social workers, education, health and other professionals involved in the team around the child.
- Ability to identify appropriate sources of help and support for foster carers in keeping with the objectives of the Fostering Wellbeing programme.
- Good organisational skills including the ability to gather evidence and maintain records.
- Ability to maintain confidentiality as appropriate.

Additional Information

The Fostering Network will support you by providing:
- an induction pack containing all the information you need to get you started
- access to a wide variety of information, training and other resources.

Appendix 5 – Findings from CASCADE evaluation

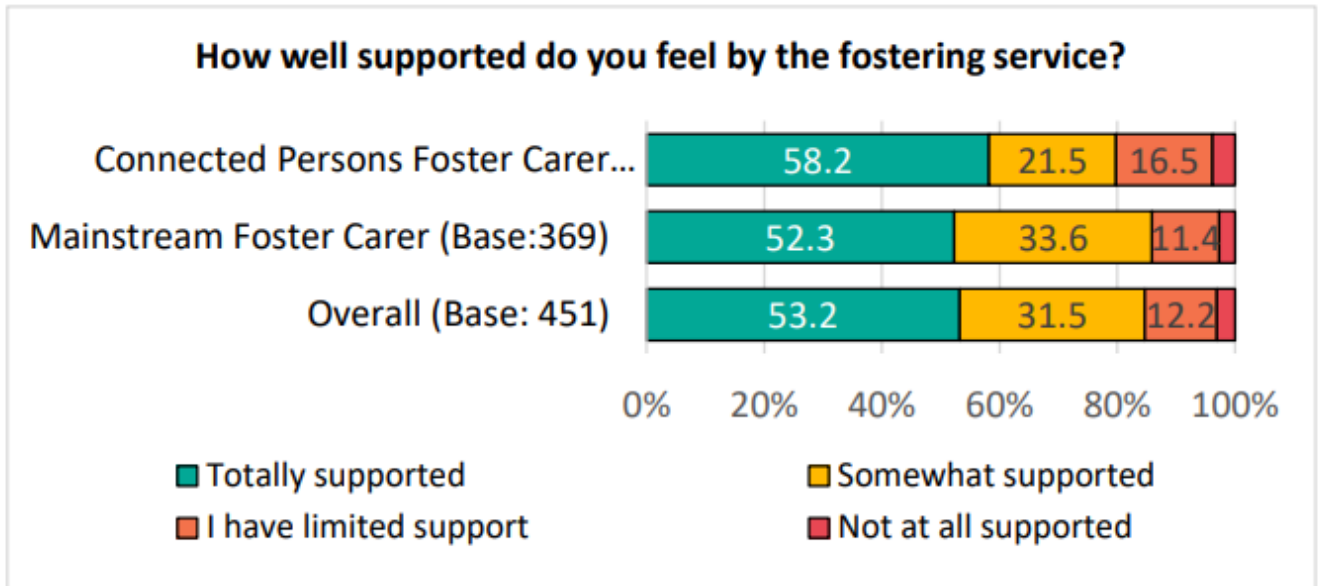The following findings have been taken directly from the CASCADE report.

1. The masterclasses commenced face to face but were stopped due to Covid lockdown restrictions. During the initial lockdown phase, the masterclasses were honed, recalibrated and regionalised so that they could be delivered on-line, and represent an excellent example of effective virtual delivery.
2. The delivery team attended social pedagogy training during the initial lockdown period and this has been embedded far more clearly within the content.
3. The content has been overwhelmingly well received and is supported by a range of handouts and supplementary materials. The content is much improved on the 2019 pilot.
4. The facilitation is experienced as engaging and interactive. The skill and passion of the facilitators has been positively commented on.
5. The on-line delivery has made attendance much more feasible for busy foster carers and co-professionals.
6. The presentations by Heads of Service have been widely commented on and are seen to give the training gravitas and endorsement.
7. The masterclasses have drawn upon speakers who are experts from a wide range of disciplines working with children looked after, including speech and language; these have been particularly well received. Many of the speakers are local, as masterclasses are bespoke to each region.
8. There have been fewer speakers who are care experienced than in the previous pilot.
9. Many commented on the need for more time in discussion-type break out rooms.
10. On-line working provides fewer opportunities for networking.
11. The multi-disciplinary nature of the training is highly valued. Increased respect among team members is reported.
12. The main messages of the importance of bringing the foster carer in to the team around the child and related decision making has been received and taken on board. Delegates reported that both education and foster carers are now routinely included in meetings around the child.
13. There are many examples of the skills and learning being taken into practice and forming the basis of discussion between foster carers and practitioners in the field.
14. More trauma informed approaches have been adopted.
15. Delegates report increased reflexivity as a result of attending the masterclasses.
16. Delegates reported increased levels of empathy for children.
17. Delegates have a strong sense of the underpinning ethos of social pedagogy and the notion of working with the whole child. Much of the learning and understanding of the importance of children's prior experiences has also been retained.
18. The programme has embedded a clear understanding of the role of the corporate parent as being everyone's responsibility.
19. Foster carers have felt empowered to become stronger advocates for the children in their care and have been able to provide us with many examples of this.
20. Co-professionals have not attended the masterclasses as extensively as was hoped, especially those from education and health. Where they have attended, many did not attend all five sessions.

21. Management support is deemed vital for encouraging enrolment, reinforcing the value of the training and galvanising attendance. All three managers we interviewed had attended the masterclasses, leading by example. All three were promoting the programme.
22. Further follow up sessions to the masterclasses may help to consolidate and implement learning, and further extend and embed new skills and practices.
23. Service support and action plans are yet to be fully developed and implemented. This is an area of on-going work.
24. The pioneer model is in the early stages; 57 have been recruited and the majority have received training and are actively involved in developing the role. It is anticipated that the pioneer role will help to provide a network of support for foster carers. The model shows great signs of promise.
25. Fostering Wellbeing is an effective way of promoting social pedagogy, wellbeing and the team around the child, mirroring governmental priorities.

Appendix 6 – Responses to Foster Wales Annual Review

This is an extract from the full report which is available from Foster Wales on request. It only contains the areas that are deemed pertinent to this evaluation.

Support

How well supported do you feel by the fostering service?

	Totally supported	Somewhat supported	I have limited support	Not at all supported
Connected Persons Foster Carer…	58.2	21.5	16.5	
Mainstream Foster Carer (Base:369)	52.3	33.6	11.4	
Overall (Base: 451)	53.2	31.5	12.2	

6.75   Where respondents felt they were not supported comments included.

Communication
*   Learn to communicate better, return emails and calls – inform when you are on holiday. Don't go.
on holiday all the same time.
*   I have no confidence that management are listening and responding as we keep having to raise the same issues all the time.
*   By listening to Carers and respecting them. Treating them as Professionals.
*   Listen to what the carers say as they live with the children 24 hrs a day.

Support and Guidance
*   Just to check in more regularly when a placement is new or is experiencing difficulties.
*   The support is inconsistent and not always there at the point that you need it.
*   Some more structured advice before taking on a young person and indication of remuneration.
*   Better out of hours support.
*   Our new social worker is fantastic; however, he has an unsustainable caseload and has to prioritise emergencies, leaving him with little time to carry out standard statutory obligations.
*   More respite, day care when needed.

Recruitment and retention
- Retain social workers and foster carers.
- Please stop making so many team changes so often. We've had 3 social workers in 8 months!
- Keep a social worker for more than a year

6.76   Out of hours support
How well foster carers feel supported out of hours on a 1 (No support) to 10 (fully supported) scale by region.
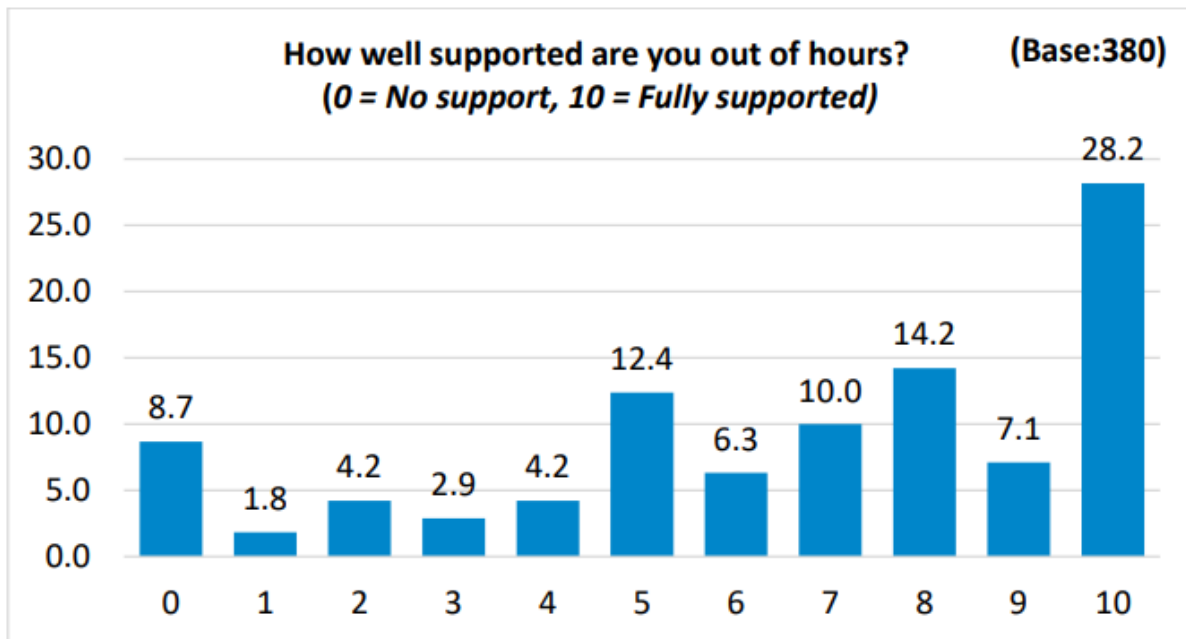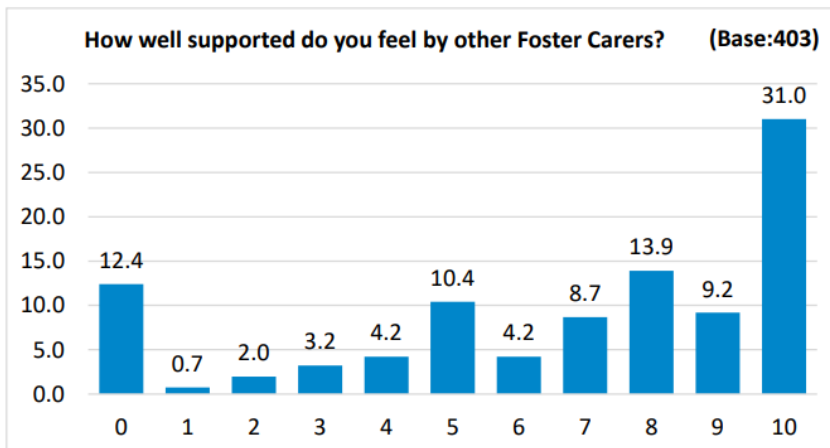

When viewed by region, the average scores varied from 7.9 in Gwent to 5.0 in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.

Region	Average Score
Gwent (Base:35)	7.9
West Glamorgan (Base:101)	7.1
North Wales (Base:103)	6.9
Cardiff & Vale (Base:43)	6.6
Mid & West (Base:51)	5.8
Cwm Taf Morgannwg (Base:47)	5.0

[Caution must be taken when interpreting data with low base numbers]

6.77   Support from other Foster Carers

Average score by region was broadly consistent with that of the overall findings. However, respondents from Cardiff & Vale recorded an average score of 8.0, this is 1.3 points above that of the overall findings (6.7).

Region	Average Score
Cardiff & Vale (Base:36)	8.0
Mid & West (Base:58)	6.9
North Wales (Base:112)	6.8
Gwent (Base:36)	6.7
Cwm Taf Morgannwg (Base:54)	6.7
West Glamorgan (Base:101)	6.6

[Caution must be taken when interpreting data with low base numbers]

6.78   Nature of support

	No.	%
Allegations	124	29.9
None of these	124	29.9
Out of hours	102	24.6
Peer support	93	22.4
Peer Support suitable for working carers	71	17.1
Learning and development	65	15.7
Duty	56	13.5
Something else	26	6.3
Total Respondents	**415**	**-**

Support in relation to 'Allegations' (29.9%) was perceived as the main help respondents would like to receive by other foster carers. The same proportion of respondents cited 'None of these'.

6.79   What do you feel your LAs should prioritise over next 12 months?

	Score (Out of 7)	Ranked most important	Ranked in the top three
Fees & allowances	5.0	41.9	68.3
Peer support & mentoring	3.9	13.7	50.6
Allegations	3.6	14.2	43.9
Recruitment	3.5	16.5	43.6
FC Charter	3.0	7.5	35.2
Social events	2.4	2.7	20.7
Something else	0.9	3.5	9.2

Comments included:

"Improving the service and support you actually provide foster carers. Perhaps if this was the case you wouldn't have to focus so heavily on recruitment. I'm fed up of being asked to come to recruiting events".

"If you looked after the FC that you have you wouldn't need to be trying to recruit so many new FC. It's basic business".

Appendix 7 – Pioneers' online questionnaire

The following responses were received from respondents via an online questionnaire. All the responses have been included, as written.

What is your role?

	Role	Count
🔵	Pioneer	20
🟠	Fostering Team Manager	3
🟢	Regional Development Manager	1
🔴	Local Authority Contact	4
🟣	Other	4

Local Authority

🔵 All	0
🟠 Anglesey	0
🟢 Blaenau Gwent	0
🔴 Bridgend	3
🟣 Caerphilly	2
🟤 Cardiff	0
🩷 Carmarthenshire	1
⚫ Ceredigion	2
🟡 Conwy	2
🔵 Denbighshire	0
🔵 Flintshire	4
🟠 Gwynedd	1
🟢 Merthyr Tydfil	2
🔴 Monmouthshire	2
🟣 Neath Port Talbot	3
🟤 Newport	1
🩷 Pembrokeshire	1
⚫ Powys	1
🟡 Rhondda Cynon Taff	2
🔵 Swansea	1
🔵 Torfaen	3
🟠 Vale of Glamorgan	0
🟢 Wrexham	2
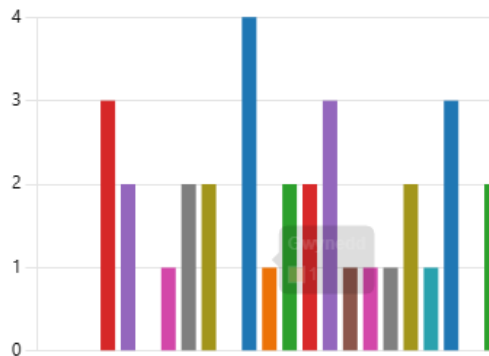
How have you been involved with the Pioneer Programme?

- Four years
- I was the first Pioneer for Foster Wales Monmouthshire
- By attending the meetings, and online training so far
- Helping to get ours up and running. Attending online events and meetings. Went to Cardiff for the book trust event
- Yes
- I have attended
- Yes
- I have just started the Pioneer Programme
- Well-being pioneer
- I am a North Wales Pioneer.
- I completed the Pioneer training in September but yet to get involved with any Pioneer activities or support.
- I am the contact with the Torfaen fostering team for our pioneers. I provide support for the pioneers and have regular supervision sessions with them as well as promoting them

throughout the service. I am responsible for awarding Tempo Time Credits to our pioneers for the support that they provide to other foster carers and the fostering service. I engage with the pioneers in respect of potential support that can be provided to the fostering service.

- I am the point of contact for the pioneers in Swansea.
- Supervising foster carer who is a pioneer.
- I have become a pioneer within the last year.
- Took over lead and supporting role when manager went on sick leave a year ago.
- I have led the development and implementation of the programme in RCT and worked with the fostering network to support other LA to implement it. I am on the steering group with fostering network.
- Yes from the beginning with my LA.
- No-I am the Interim Team Manager and this is a new role for me
- I have been the lead in Flintshire to get our pioneer programme off the ground (With the huge help from Gemma Struthers)
- In Flintshire we have started a baby group and taken responsibility for the coffee morning. We haven't done as much one on one support as we have mockingbird which covers lots of carers.
- Helping and supporting other foster carers also running the monthly coffee mornings and baby groups within Flintshire.
- Promoting to Local Authorities, explaining benefits and unpicking challenges to implementing. There was initially a huge expectation my role would support regionally with time and funding, however I have no regional budget or team as in some other regions.
- North Wales Pioneer attending meetings and training.
- Over 12 months.
- 3 years.
- We've had regular meetings regarding how to promote the Pioneers in our area.
- I have attended a few masterclasses and training sessions put on by the fostering network.
- Completed all the training and am now one of the 1st pioneer FC in Wrexham.
- Kinship liaison. Go to coffee mornings, child mind/babysit (where possible), support other carers, set up a charity with other liaisons to raise funds for the children.

What positive changes have directly resulted from the Pioneer Programme, who has benefited and how?

- WhatsApp and Facebook groups. Better dissemination of information.
- More open dialogue with the fostering team in regard to how new foster carers are supported. Foster carers involved in the recruitment process.
- I am fairly new to the pioneer role and haven't been involved in much else as yet.
- ATM we are in the early stages of development and we seem to be focused on moving amongst the community to encourage fostering recruitment.
- I personally haven't seen any changes yet.
- I believe it has become shorter which this is better for foster carers.
- We reached newly approved foster carers as they were going through the last stages of assessment and as they were approved. New foster carers appreciated the support.
- We have just started in our area and we are trying to recruit and retain foster carers in our area giving them the tools and knowhow.
- I have been able to take part in an excellent training programme.

- I have attended lots of training sessions and increased my knowledge in many different areas.
- As above - no activities undertaken.
- We have a small number of foster carers who have undertaken the required training to perform the pioneer role, which is benefitting the fostering service by providing another support and advice option for our foster carers. Our foster carers know that they are able to contact one of the pioneers if they have questions or require support that does not require their Supervising Social Worker, therefore, our foster carers have benefitted which, in turn, benefits the service as a whole. Our potential foster carers attending our Skills to Foster course have benefitted from a pioneer attending part of the course to give a true reflection of fostering for Torfaen and the pioneers have been able to answer any questions that the attendees of the course have. Our recruitment process has benefitted with pioneers helping out at recruitment events and engaging with members of the public about fostering.
- We have very recently started our Pioneer programme and it's yet to take off the ground. We have not yet been able to get involved in anything as it's very early days and very recently had the training for them.
- Carers supported changes in support groups, supported carers with IT and training, attends recruitment etc to give views from carers point of view.
- I have been reaching out to carers who have needed 1 to 1 support/advice from a fellow carer rather than a social worker.
- It is mostly newly approved generic foster carers that have benefited as one of our Pioneers has supported their induction, alongside their supervising social worker.
- The pioneers in RCT are so proactive they have helped us to drive service improvement and engage the fostering community.
- More support offered within our fostering community.
- The recruitment officer and previous Team Manager had more involvement with this.
- Our foster carers are responding well to the pioneers. They feel more able to talk to them about thinks they don't want to bother their social workers with. The pioneers are now running the foster carers coffee mornings and more recently they have set up a baby group.
- Bringing carers with young babies together is invaluable as we can become isolated with that age group. The baby group is new but going well.
- We haven't been up and running long but already our coffee mornings and baby groups are having good turn outs. The feedback from other foster carers is they feel more relaxed run by pioneers rather than social workers.
- Too early to say other than real enthusiasm from Foster cares to get involved in things.
- I've gained a lot of knowledge from the training sessions. I've met some lovely people and we are able to support each other.
- I have been able to support a few new carers who had been placed with challenging children. However I feel I could be utilised more.
- I feel more confident as a foster carer when speaking to other foster carers. That's what I am saying comes from training. It is nice to share problems with others in the LA and to an all wales group and to see they are similar problems across the country. The support from other pioneers is lovely and we all help each other. There is no glossing over of problems and more often than not a resolution is found amongst the group.

- Early days for us so we are still trying to get the role is starting to become clearer for the services involved and for the carers themselves to understand. Foster carers are starting to use the support, mentoring and opportunities we can provide word out.
- I myself have benefitted by feeling equipped to support other FC.

  I am now a link between FC and the LA. I attend FC support group and I have facilitated FC social events to get them taking to each other. I have also set up a FC forum. This is a quarterly meeting between 2 fostering team managers and 4 FC. Different FC each time. Purpose is to have a discussion around how FC are feeling at that time. Any suggestions from them and what support is needed. Also the LA can request input from FC on strategy etc. From this I will set up a working party to gather input from FC on the new LA FC handbook.

  I am also a member of the LA Corporate Parenting Panel for FC recruitment & retention. From this i got the idea of the FC forum. There is a lot of unrest with FC and they feel they are not being listened to, that consistency in processes is needed and they are not being listened to. I have worked with Head of Service and Fostering team manager to advise FC of a communications pathway sharing email addresses of Head of Service and Fostering Team Manager so FC can contact them directly with individual concerns.

  I am trying to encourage FC to speak up themselves when they need to rather than through me.

  I am supporting FC when they don't know what to do. I signpost them to get additional help and support as needed.

  I have set up my own WhatsApp group for LA FC. Just FC. Somewhere to share ideas, ask questions and ask for support. This has grown significantly since I started it n September. When new FCs are approved I contact them, introduce myself and add them to the WA group. This helps connect them in and is a place of support moving forward.

- Supported other carers emotionally, so they feel able to vent and then carry on supporting their children. Babysat for a family could go out for the evening together as they don't have many babysitters available. It helps them spend time with other family members without young children needing their attention. Coffee mornings to help support other carers or offer advice.

What have the challenges been in terms of the introduction and operation of the Pioneer Programme?
- Communication
- Was very difficult to get the LA to decide how they wanted Pioneers to be used. It felt like they took a long time to take the role seriously and to understand how valuable Pioneers could be.
- None as yet.
- It seems fairly slow going. I thought we would have more mentoring opportunities hopefully this will be the case when we are up and running. Additionally we have yet to be reimbursed for our time, commitment and energy and this was a big incentive for me giving my free time.
- Introduction has been good. But my local authority has not referred anyone to me.
- Trying to get foster carers involved. Foster carers have commented they do not like the name Pioneers it puts them off.

- Staffing challenges - our consultant social worker took a lead on this area of work, but when she left her hours were taken a budget savings. No capacity in the team for anyone else to take a lead. Foster carer engagement - hard to find foster carers who wanted to attend the masterclasses or were interested in becoming a pioneer. We did quite a bit of awareness raising but little response.
- We are just starting up so trying to get people interested.
- No buy in or commitment from WCBC - this could be due to capacity within the service, failure to recognise opportunities.
- Conwy have not taken up the Pioneer Programme yet. I am the only Pioneer in Conwy.
- Not clear on what the Pioneer role is in Caerphilly.
- The challenges have been:
  * Getting foster carers interested in undertaking the required training and becoming a pioneer, although, we have recently had 4 more foster carers join this scheme so there has been a turnaround
  * Encouraging foster carers to use the pioneers for advice and support. Despite regularly reminding foster carers that the pioneers are there to help, there is very little uptake of this service.
  * Keeping the pioneer engaged and enthusiastic as they feel that they are under utilised.
  * Coming up with ways of utilising the pioneers other than supporting foster carers and recruitment. I feel that our pioneer are not used to their full potential but do not know how this can be rectified. It is useful to attend pioneer events to hear what other local authorities are using their pioneers for so that I can pick up ideas.
- For the introduction it was hard to get everyone free at the same time. We managed in the end but took longer than we thought.
- Lack of clarity in what is the pioneers role, how best to utilise these skills etc.
- For me personally, the challenges have been carving out a role that meets the needs of the carers in Merthyr. I have replaced 2 previous pioneers and have found it difficult to engage with some carers who have been fostering for many more years than I have. A lack of understanding by other carers of my remit as a pioneer.
- Lack of interest from foster carers - the biggest challenge has been to recruit more Pioneers and retain the ones we have trained.
- Time to support the pioneers effectively.
- Covid.
- I cannot comment on this.
- It took a while to get the programme off the ground. The pioneers lacked confidence and the fostering team took a while to get going with promoting this programme. After presentations, and discussions about the pioneers at numerous team meetings the team eventually invested in the programme.
- Like I said many of our families are supported by Mockingbird so we don't have the need for as much one on one here.
- The challenges have been just getting the pioneers up and running and spreading the word to other foster carers.
- When I joined FW in April 22 the pioneer programme had not been introduced, with many staff changes in teams its been difficult to establish in all four local authorities. There has been a great deal of confusion around language between this and the peer mentor commitment as part

of Foster Wales national commitment and the cost implication has been prohibitive to date as we have no identified budgets in our region. Each local authority has been tasked with developing their own scheme which means we have four different offers.

- My LA does not operate the Pioneer Programme. We've recently reinstated a Consultation Committee which has been out of action since before COVID. There will be some crossovers, when things are up and running, meaning my LA have not introduced the Pioneer Programme. The Consultation Committee does not include any training for the Foster Carers. The Pioneer Programme has huge amounts of support too; locally, across North Wales and the whole of Wales. The support is essential for recruitment and retention, also for when comparing to private FCAs.
- Unsure of what the role is, rules and expectations. Some social workers unaware of the Pioneer role and have felt I've been interfering.
- Due to constant managerial changes the pioneer role is not always recognised and handed over. So at each support group we have to re introduce our selves. Sometimes SW's can feel threatened by us and get defensive often stating we need to stick with in the bounds of confidentially. We point out we are not interested in the children's cases but are interested in supporting the foster carer. That our role is purely support of the foster carer.
- For us, it's making people aware of what the role of the Pioneer is and how it's different to Mocking Bird.
- Understanding of the role, lack of knowledge and clarity of what our role is. Barriers with professionals as they don't understand or feel threatened/undermined by our role.
- Biggest challenge is I didn't know what my role was and neither did the LA so nothing happened. After joining the Corporate Parenting Panel I have just started doing the things above off my own back. I am definitely just driving it myself. I am meeting resistance from LA when i try to support FC. I am told to just refer them to their SSW. As a result of this 2 FC less than 12 months serving have left the service. I have now requested that my role be defined. They were happy with most that I am doing but I have asked for a meeting to discuss my supporting FC through issues. I feel FC need an advocate at times to help them walk through issues and be heard whilst doing so. I want to be there for them but am meeting LA resistance.
- I personally feel more involved with fostering. I think if all carers would get together, it would feel more like a community and would have a better support system.

Going forwards, what changes do you think could be made to improve how the Pioneer Programme works?
- Communication.
- Greater promotion of the role and how Pioneers can be used.
- Focus on a goal and take action to make the changes that have been voiced to us by other Foster Carers.
- More events we can attend.
- To encourage pioneering work and local authority should be doing the pushing for it to succeed.
- Not sure looking at ways to attract carers.
- We had some feedback from a foster carer who thought there should have been a financial incentive to be a pioneer rather than tempo time credits.
- Not sure.

- It's a largely one size fits all programme - I'm more interested in how we make systemic improvements to our services - I appreciate the value of providing peer to peer support to other foster carers, but it's not my skill set, and lets the service provider off the hook unless young people and foster carers are genuinely part of the conversation, and co-produce the solution.
- Rolling out the Pioneer Programme in Conwy.
- More clarity and proactive planning.
- I am not sure how we can develop the pioneer programme further but I am open to hearing how others do this.
- We need to establish clear boundaries and finalise all the small things.
- More connections with other pioneers so we know what other LA's are doing, chances to share ideas.
- Sharing in the knowledge and expertise of other more experienced pioneers. Being introduced to all new carers as part of the assessment process.
- Not sure - The Pioneer Programme has not been a success story in MCC and I think the reasons for this are wider, i.e. very small team, fragmented fostering community not recovering after the pandemic, lack of cohesive leadership, general sense of apathy amongst foster carers that have been with the service for years etc.
- Ongoing support from fostering network.
- Learn from what we are doing. Move forward.
- I will be attending the upcoming discussions
- I would like to give our pioneers more freedom. Empower them to run with the programme. Although they have made great steps forward they are still resistant to develop the programme without my guidance. They are a great bunch of people with so much experience. I do feel more training and meeting up with other pioneers will help them.
- We're a new pioneer team so still finding out feet, I'd feel better informed to answer this in the future.
- More of involvement with other foster cares then maybe they will feel they can talk to us.
- Head of Service sign up to secure budget allocation in the current climate would be helpful for us. Language clarity between programmes, it is also happening with Fostering Friendly and our own Foster Wales partners.
- I'm hoping the Pioneer Handbook and the success of the Pioneer Programme in other LAs will help my LA to see the gaps in the service which a Foster Carer could help to fill. I see the Pioneer Programme as a great part of the harmonisation of LAs across Wales.
- A more defined role, being involved more in the training of potential new foster carers.
- Promotion, workshops introducing us to the LA. Training given to the SWs about our role.
- We all need to be working the same.
- A clear guide to the type of work our role covers and to support new potential pioneers. Knowledge within social services of the support we offer the carers.
- A Pioneer handbook would be a free resource outlining to all parties how the role could look taking into account a FC skill set and LA requirements.

  A written agreement template offered to get what is agreed in writing. Generic information with sections to be completed after a meeting with LA around agreed roles. It can then be signed by LA & FC and everyone knows what is expected of them. I am trying to arrange a meeting to discuss my role but they are trying to sort it via email. This does not bring value to the role.

Additional Fostering Network Development sessions for Pioneers to meet to talk about how things are going, share best practice, see what other LA are doing etc. Just to discuss what has worked, what hasn't etc. Look at some case studies together and glean from each other.

6 monthly meetings with LA and Pioneers and fostering network to see how the programme is going and any tweaks needed. As an evaluation. How many pioneers, what differing roles are support needed. That kind of thing. Etc

- Kinship carers to be more involved, it's difficult trying to reach out as most carers 'get on with it' and don't reach out for support when they need it.

On a scale of 1 (no change) to 10 (significant positive change) how would you rate the Pioneers Programme?

● 1	2
● 2	1
● 3	1
● 4	1
● 5	5
● 6	2
● 7	4
● 8	6
● 9	2
● 10	6
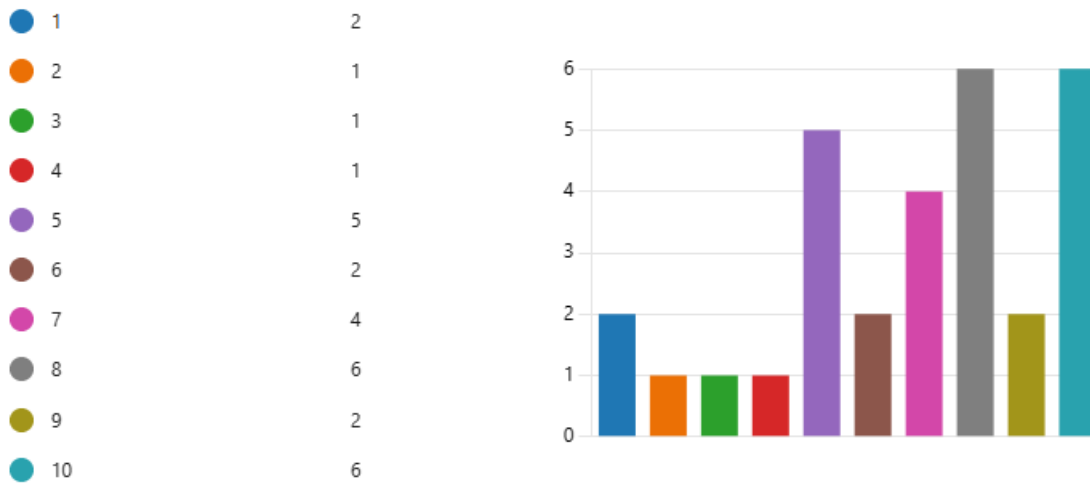
5.1 Do you currently measure the impact of the Pioneer Programme in any way – if so how?
- No.
- No.
- We don't as yet.
- ATM we are still in the planning stages.
- No as of yet I have not had any referrals.
- No
- No.
- I don't know the answer.
- No
- I am enjoying the training sessions and meeting other Pioneers.
- N/a.
- No we do not measure this currently.

- Not yet as we are yet to actually involve them in anything. Very early days but very soon to see an improvement.
- From a personal point of view I would consider the positive comments from other carers, pioneer and staff.
- Not personally, have had some positive feedback from individuals I have supported via my supervising social worker.
- No.
- Yes, we are calculating the financial costs to the LA and obtain feedback from pioneers, carers who access support and social workers who utilise them.
- I have seen the programme evolve and grow into the success we have at RCT.
- Unsure.
- We get feedback from other foster carers during supervision sessions. The feedback has been positive.
- Not yet, we're still learning about how we can be used.
- No.
- Not as yet as very new in Mid & West Region, energy has been spent on setting up master classes etc to date and getting sign up from Local Authorities.
- I've gained a lot of expertise by attending training sessions.
- Not being utilised very much, not able to support during meetings because of confidentiality.
- Yes, at support groups I often have to deal with a range of problems and address them to the wider group sometime anonymously for the cares involved. I am glad foster carers see me as some one who can be in their corner.
- No
- We currently have monthly meetings with our manager to discuss our role, any issues that need addressing for our carers, training, events and engagement opportunities.
- I do so by working to action changes requested. I have more FC joining my WA group and attending social events I arrange. I don't know if the LA do anything. I will request a meeting to discuss measuring the impact with my LA.
- Feedback of what I do per month to the fostering manager in BCBC.

Other comments
- The Pioneer Programme is a great idea and is a valuable tool. It doesn't feel that it's value is being consistently recognised across all of Foster Wales.
- Unfortunately our efforts in Foster Wales Newport were hampered by reduced staff capacity and a lack of engagement from foster carers.
- I have made some great Pioneer friends in other counties.
- It's early days for me and there has been a lot of other challenges going on for us but would love to get involved.
- I feel that we are still at the beginning stages of the pioneer programme although we should be further developed than we are. This is not from lack of motivation to get this off the ground but due to limitations in what pioneers are able to offer and how we are able to use this skills and knowledge.
- The pioneers in Swansea are very excited to start their role - they have made it clear that they want to engage with the recruitment of foster carers and also help the existing ones with

anything that they may need. Furthermore, focusing on the new carers coming in to Foster Wales and enabling them to have an easier transition.

- I am still very new to the role and feel that I am slowly making inroads with carers on an individual basis. I'm taking a slow and steady approach, thinking more long term and trying to gain people's trust rather than getting 'in people's faces' if that makes any sense.
- I've very much enjoyed meeting and discussing roles with pioneers from other counties, we have some very capable women in Wales doing great things!!
- I love being a Pioneer and hearing about the Pioneer Programme in other LAs. I'm excited for the Pioneer Programme to grow! Thank you
- I feel once running effectively in a LA the pioneer programme will bring value & worth to the voice of FC and LA alike. Collaboration and effective communication are key to the retention of happy, valued FC. We are not a tick box exercise!!!!

Appendix 8 – Pioneer Profiles (from Gwynedd)

maethu cymru | foster wales
Gwynedd

The Fostering Network
Y Rhwydwaith Maethu

pioneer profile

Karen Phillips

Karen, together with her husband Steven, has been a registered Foster Carer for Gwynedd for over 22 years. Karen is one of the latest members to join our cohort of Well-being Pioneers in Gwynedd. She is fluent in Welsh and English

what people appreciate about me

Karen is described as a caring, relaxed and approachable character. Her fellow carers and colleagues respect her ability to reassure others in difficult situations. Karen enjoys bringing people together; whether by organizing monthly meetings between foster carers or by serving a weekly Sunday lunch to her family of 10! Karen is a reliable person, always ready to help. She is a caring mother, a fun grandmother, a loyal friend (and the 'go-to dog sitter!').

what is important to me

Giving and receiving honesty as a means of clear communication, understanding and solving problems and moving forward.
Supporting others, while also feeling supported myself, and family.

how can I support you

As an experienced Foster Carer, Karen will be able to direct you to the right people for support, advice and services (information and contacts).
Karen is also available as a 'buddy' to support her fellow foster carers who are facing new, difficult or challenging experiences with children and young people.

Pioneer Evaluation March 2024

pioneer profile

Kaynat Sheikh

Kaynat and her husband Nadeem, were registered as Foster Carers in Gwynedd in August 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

What people appreciate about me

Kaynat describes herself as "very chatty but while talking I do talk about very serious issues in a very discreet way and strive to find solutions." Her fellow Foster Carers and colleagues in the fostering service describe her as kind, considerate and family orientated. She is very open, honest and approachable. Kaynat will talk with everyone and will always help anybody in need. She found great support in online peer support through the Pioneer programme and is eager to provide new Foster Carers the same support she received.

What is important to me

"Women/ female mental health is very important to me. I also believe every child should get a positive learning environment and nurturing atmosphere, especially babies during their initial years, and that they live a healthy and happy life. But there can be trauma anytime in their life and that needs nurturing and reversing the old to build new memories."

How I can support you

Peer support – Kaynat can offer support to newly registered Foster Carers as well as supporting carers to work collaboratively with birth families, support with asylum seeking children and young people and caring for babies.

Advocate on behalf of other Foster Carers – listen to their views and make their voices heard. "Some people are very reluctant or shy to share their views/problems and let that problem consume them for years and years but sometimes the solution is right in front of you. I strongly believe that there is always a solution to a problem."