

“Keep on going – what keeps foster carers motivated?”

A small scale practitioner research project to find out what foster carers find motivating and supportive in their work with foster children.

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Abstract

Most children accommodated by the Local Authority live with foster carers. According to Edinburgh's Carer's Handbook, there were 878 children and young people accommodated full time in Edinburgh at the end of August 2010. Of those, 478 were placed in foster care. As foster carers are our largest resource to have a positive impact on the lives of our fostered children, it is crucial to know how to best support our carers and how to keep them motivated. This paper aims to investigate what factors foster carers within the City of Edinburgh Council find motivating and supportive in their work with their fostered children. It thereby can help to improve or adjust the support we give to our carers and might be a tool for the Council to improve its service.

Foster carers' views of factors that keep them motivated and support they perceive as helpful were examined using a questionnaire (open-ended questions, paper-and-pencil administration). From their answers, the following principle themes emerged: some factors motivating carers were intrinsic, such as their own resilience, beliefs, faith, humour or being satisfied by seeing positive changes made to a child's life. Other factors were external, tangible factors such as social work support, carer support groups, support by CAHMS or school. Support from family and friends was also found immensely supportive and important to stay motivated to foster, as over three-quarter of all respondents stated.

Generally social work support was highly valued, 92% of all respondents rated their satisfaction (on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being very satisfied and 5 being not satisfied) with the support they currently receive by their supervising social worker as 1 or 2. But it seems that this satisfaction is rather on an individual basis than seen as a Council service as most factors mentioned as being de-motivating had to do with service provision, such as the length of processes, not feeling that services are child centred but rather paperwork driven or feeling that they have not been involved in decision making.

Most prominently, all carers felt that it were child related factors which have kept them motivated over the years since they started fostering, such as seeing a child's progress, making a positive change, experiencing positive outcomes, just to mention a few.

The findings from this small scale research point out what we already do well, especially when it comes to the support foster carers receive from social workers. It also highlights that most carer motivation is intrinsic and child related. But it also suggests that there are areas for improvement, especially when it comes to time related, administrative and managerial

aspects, such as long time scales and carer involvement when making decisions, effective and respectful communication or timely payments.

Good support certainly improves foster carers' satisfaction. With the current need to recruit and retain new carers in mind, our foster carers perceptions / views of what they find supportive and motivating are important to consider, especially in regards to carer retention.