

13 January 2014**Agenda Item: 4**

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

ADOPTION & FOSTERING RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN EVALUATION

Purpose of the Report

1. To report on the evaluation results for the communications and marketing campaign 2012/13 to recruit foster carers or people willing to adopt.

Information and Advice

2. This evaluation report relates to activity carried out by the communications and marketing team in collaboration with the adoption and fostering services during 2012/13.
3. Reporting for 2012/13 was delayed to allow a more comprehensive evaluation of enquiry to approval conversions.

Background

4. The recruitment of foster carers is critical for the authority in order to minimise the cost of care and improve the quality of placements. There remains a shortage of foster carers with the number of children needing carers exceeding the number of Council-approved carers available. This has resulted in the use of private placements at a weekly cost of £802 per child [£41,704 per year] compared to £447 per week, per child, [£23,244 per year] for a Council-approved placement.
5. Previous marketing activity has seen fostering enquiries increased from 695 (2010/11) to 764 (2011/12).
6. In comparison, adoption enquiries declined. 130 (2010/11) to 109 (2011/12). It is important to reduce or reverse this trend to improve both the quality of life for children and reduce the Council's costs for care.
7. However, while the number of enquiries for adoption and fostering is important, the figure that matters most is the number of those enquiries who go on to actually foster or adopt. As a result, an approach was agreed with the adoption and fostering service to take a more targeted approach in order to improve the quality of enquiries. The intention was to improve the conversion rate i.e. the number of those that enquire that actually went on to complete the adoption or fostering process.

Brief and objectives

8. During 2012/13 four campaigns ran during key recruitment times (determined by spikes in enquiry): Fostercare Fortnight – May 2012; Back to school – September 2012; National Adoption Week – November 2012; New Year – February 2013.

9. The primary objective of activity was to achieve an overall enquiry to approval conversion of 10% across both adoption and fostering.
10. A secondary objective was to increase overall fostering and adoption enquiries by 2% compared with the figures from 2011/12 (873 adoption and fostering).

Research, planning and evidence

11. To support a more targeted approach, profiling information about potential carers and suitable adoptive families was used to identify the most likely audiences and also help target some groups who would have a greater potential fit for some of the harder to place children and young people.
12. The strategy included the delivery of four headline campaigns that were rolled out during key recruitment times. Thought was given about how to tailor the key messages and imagery in order to attract the target groups. At the same time there was a full review, redesign and rebrand of the service literature.
13. Campaign activity designed to deliver the strategy's objectives included: Facebook adverts; Google Adwords; digital TV screen advertising; case studies and testimonials of existing foster carers and adoptive families used in the local media; targeted advertising on bus shelters and bus backs; a distribution plan for service literature and campaign materials; internal communications; face-to-face recruitment events.
14. Some examples of the campaign artwork can be seen in appendix 1.

Evaluation and impact

15. After the 12 month campaign, evaluation has shown that there were a total of 753 enquiries and 101 approvals resulting in an overall enquiry to approval conversion of 13% - three percentage points higher than the primary objective target of 10% See Appendix 2 for a detailed breakdown and comparison.
16. The secondary objective was to increase the overall number of enquiries generated by 2%. Over the period of the campaign the total number of enquiries was 753 (adoption = 175; fostering = 578). This showed a decrease of 13% compared to the previous year. Despite this, approvals have increased as a result of improved targeting.
17. Compared to the previous year (2011/12), adoption enquiries have increased by 60% (2011/12 – 109 enquiries; 2012/13 – 175 enquiries).
18. Fostering enquiries decreased by 24% compared with the previous year (2011/12 – 764 enquiries; 2012/13 – 578 enquiries).
19. One of the service improvements has been much better tracking and monitoring of enquiries allowing conversions from specific activity to be made that will help inform improved targeted strategies in the future.

Value for money and cost effectiveness

20. The campaign was judged to be of high importance against the criteria that were agreed by members in the Transforming Communications and Marketing report to the Policy Committee (16 October 2013). The key criteria identified were its 'strength of potential to save money'.

21. A budget of £35,000 was set aside for the 12-month campaign which came in under budget with a total of £22,797 spent.
22. This represented £30.27 per enquiry received (753 enquiries during 2012/13).
23. There were 101 approvals across adoption (47) and fostering (54) representing £225.71 per recruit. This figure does not include salary costs for communications and marketing or adoption and fostering.
24. Based on 101 recruits, the overall potential savings for the council are as follows:
- ADOPTION: 47 recruits = approximately £18.3m*
Example savings made over 12 years through the successful adoption of a 6 year old is approximately £389,688 (figure calculated using an average cost for care per year).
- FOSTERING: 54 recruits = approximately £1m*
Example savings made over 1 year by reducing the number of external placements needed.
- *See appendix 3 for a detailed breakdown summary.
25. Comparing approvals for 2012/13 (during the campaign period) to the previous year (2011/12) there were an additional 17 approvals (1 fostering; 16 adoption) resulting in an increase in potential savings and avoidable cost of £538,044 per annum. This means for every £1 spent on the campaign, the council has potentially saved £23.60 (£538,044 divided by £22,797). However, over a 12 year period, this additional recruitment to adoption would save approximately £6.2m.
26. While the financial benefits of this campaign are clearly demonstrated, the longer-term benefits of successful adoption to the health and overall wellbeing of the child should not be underestimated. In addition, placing children with council fostering placements means they're closer to their own community – private placements tend to be in and around Nottingham City which can cause greater disruption to the child. Also, children are less likely to go missing.

Summary

27. The campaign achieved its primary objective to increase adoption and fostering approvals. This has resulted in a potential saving of £538,044 for 2012/13 and contributed to a longer term total potential saving for the County Council in excess of £18.3m.

Other Options Considered

None.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

For information only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

28. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) The evaluation report is noted

Martin Done

Corporate Director Communications and Marketing

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Paul Belfield, Group Manager Marketing. Telephone 0115 9774542 or email paul.belfield@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (NAB 12.12.13)

29. The report is for noting only. There are no immediate legal issues arising. Children and Young People's committee is empowered to receive and consider the report.

Financial Comments (SEM 16/12/13)

30. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All