

HEADS OF CHILDREN'S ESTABLISHMENTS MEETING (CITY) - 24th April 1979at FOREST LODGE.

Present: Mr. Huddlestone
Mr. Jones
Miss Hockley
Mrs Moseley
Mr. Fitch
Mr. Belfitt
Mr. Holman
Mrs Melbourne
Mrs Edwards

Representatives from all the Homes were present with the exception of Crocus Fields.

2) Matters arising from the previous meeting.

Mr. Shields stated that his request to read rota visit reports had received no reply.

Mr. Huddlestone told the meeting that Mr. Caudell was still examining the issue of charges being laid in the event of violence in a Community Home.

Mr. Saul asked about the provision of more care staff. Mr. Huddlestone replied that M.S.U. are currently considering the structure of City Division Headquarters and it was hoped that any proposed changes would improve the quality of care. He commented that staff should be able to contain a child if the admission were planned and thus suitable for the Home concerned. He drew the attention of the meeting to the planned range of specialised foster parents to be used in an emergency. Mr. Egan felt that children previously beyond the age of Local Authority responsibility now have to be contained within the compass of normal child care.

Mr. Jones entered the meeting.

3) Fostering Unit

Mr. Huddlestone introduced Mrs Sally Melbourne, Leader of the City Fostering Unit.

Mrs Melbourne explained that the Unit had been established in the middle of last year, was based at Whiston Gate, and held responsibility for developing fostering care. A great deal of effort was expended on publicity.

It was hoped to involve Unit, Area and residential staff in the recruitment of foster parents. Residential staff were held to play an important part both in the decision to place and in the matching of a child to a foster home.

Action

Mr. Caudell.

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Mrs Melbourne stated that the Unit aimed to make fostering accepted as a common practice using features in the Nottingham News and local radio programmes which aimed to portray the child realistically. It was planned to distribute posters and leaflets in the community. Mrs Melbourne distributed examples of this literature to Officers-in-Charge and asked that they add either their own telephone number or that of the Unit (Nottingham **DPA**).

During assessment (which lasts approximately for three months) prospective foster parents are interviewed six or seven times both singly, together and with their own children. Family backgrounds are examined closely and it is hoped to attract flexible knowledgeable couples.

After the initial investigation a second opinion is sought from another social worker and the two reports are discussed by a panel which includes representatives of the Area and the Division. A preliminary matching is then made.

A foster care assessment form is completed by the social worker giving the history, behaviour and a pen-picture of the child. Physical attraction is felt to play an important part both in the matching process and in overcoming difficulties which may arise later in the relationship.

The foster parents are then invited to visit the residential establishment, not specifically to meet the child, but as visitors to the Home. They are encouraged to take out groups of children during three or four visits. A slow introduction on the child's own territory is felt to be most important, progressing to contact on mutual territory with initially little commitment from either prospective parents or the child. This is felt to reduce the chances of a subsequent breakdown.

Heads of Homes were warned that foster parents may feel anxious when confronted with experienced professionals and Mrs Melbourne asked for a sympathetic and supportive approach from establishment staff. She stressed the importance of residential staff in the build-up to fostering and asked that they discuss any anxieties they may feel about the placement with the social worker.

After a child has been fostered, the Unit maintains support for a minimum of three months. During this time, the foster parents may feel the need to telephone the Home to seek advice on the handling of the child or the child may wish to return briefly to the establishment.

Mrs Melbourne requested that staff examine the potential of a child for fostering preferably 9 months before they feel it would be appropriate as it may take 6 months to find & assess suitable parents, and three to six months to develop the relationship.

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She informed the meeting that there were at present several long term vacancies in the 6-12 age range and a "steady trickle" of applications for children between the ages of 10 and 14. She reported that the Unit was still experiencing difficulties in finding placements for families and that splitting had inevitably to be considered, providing regular contact between the children was maintained. Response to publicity had proved so far, disappointing. It was felt that this was due in part to the generally depressed mood of the country. She mentioned the planned reciprocal arrangements between City and County and introduced the foster care Newsletter.

Mr. Columbine asked why the Unit did not use the resources of the Evening Post for publicity purposes, Mrs Melbourne replied that the Evening Post would only consider personal column advertisements. Mr. Jones confirmed that this practice was standard editorial policy in respect of voluntary organisations.

Mr. Alexander felt that children in Community Homes were treated by social workers as low priority cases. Mr. McGucken did not agree.

Mrs Kelly asked if married couples only were considered as foster parents. Mrs Melbourne stated that single ladies and even, exceptionably, co-habiting couples were considered. Mr. Jones commented that under present regulations, a single man could not be approved.

Mr. Huddlestone felt that some Officers-in-Charge may consider certain children unsuitable for fostering. Mrs Melbourne expressed the Unit's view that no child is unfosterable, although groups of children could be so considered and a great deal of financial incentive may be necessary in some cases. It was felt that professional foster parents could have an important role to play.

Mrs Melbourne asked that Officers-in-Charge contact her, should they so wish, by telephoning Nottingham DPA

Mr. Huddlestone thanked Mrs Melbourne for informing the meeting on such a vital subject.

Mr. Jones reminded Officers-in-Charge to add an address and telephone number to the distributed posters.

Irrelevant