

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE & CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE INFORMATION

Recent regional analysis and national publicity has pointed to increasing demand pressures on children's services. The North West region and the North generally has seen rising numbers of children in care over the past 12 months, especially children and young people in older age groups with very complex social and behavioural issues. Blackburn with Darwen has moved towards the regional norm with a marked rise in the number of children in care and the number placed in the most costly residential placements.

The number of cases open to Children's Social Care has risen through the autumn and winter and currently stands at 1660. The number of Children in Care is 394: 60 higher than the equivalent period 12 months ago. There has been a fall in the number of children subject to child protection plans – down to 256 having been as high as 370 during the late Spring. Over 500 children are being supported by Early Help services, 17 children have been adopted since April 2017 and 17 children are currently placed in adoptive placements.

REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY LAUNCH

The Regional Adoption Agency 'Adoption NoW' launched on 20th November and has brought together adoption services from Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside, as well as incorporating voluntary agencies Adoption Matters and Caritas Care. Many staff will continue to have Duke Street as their main base but will share some central resources in Bolton.

Adoption NoW will cover adopter recruitment, post adoption support and family finding for children. The aim is to pool resources so that more specialist recruitment of adopters can take place to increase the number of adopters available. There is a real need for new adopters to come forward for children of all ages and level of need, but particularly for sibling groups. With an increase in adopters, it is hoped that this will decrease the amount of time that children are waiting for the right family and increase the number of in-house matches.

CHRISTMAS ROUND UP

- *Secret Santa*

Thank you to all who have donated to the local charity, Secret Santa, which has worked to raise money over the past 12 months to provide 700 new Christmas gift bundles to children and young people in need across the borough. The children's centre network was used as a distribution point with age appropriate gift sets shared with children and young people aged 0-16+, of which 500 sets were gifted to children supported by Children's Services. Other beneficiaries included children, young people and families supported by Nightsafe, the WISH Centre, Maryvale Mother and Baby Unit, the Homeless Families Unit and the Foster Carers Association.

Thank you also for the generous gift donations from Council staff, Lions Club Darwen, PM & M Chartered Accounts, Hollins Grove Congregational Church, SAM's Charity, St Silas' Church, St Bartholomew's Church and Rucomfy bean bags.

- *Children's Centres Activities*

In December, Great Places Housing and the Kingdom Outreach charity delivered 'cooking on a budget' workshops in children's centres for 50 families open to social care. Across the 2 hours families discussed 'cooking on a budget' and took part in a demonstration on how to prepare a roast dinner and then had a meal together. As a thank you for taking part, the families received a food shopping voucher on 22nd December and pantomime tickets.

Each children's centre nursery held a carol or nativity concert where parents were invited to come and sing along with their children. Across the children's centre network children also enjoyed Christmas parties and on 14th December the community cafes served Christmas lunch.

- *Foster Families Christmas Party*

Foster Families enjoyed a visit from Santa at their annual Christmas Party on 17th December at Longshaw Sports & Social Club, with additional gifts from the Secret Santa charity. Highlights included an entertainer and a raffle and all proceeds from the event will support future Foster Carer Association activities.

- *Special Education Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Forum Christmas Party*

15 children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities who are members of the SEND Forum, enjoyed a fantastic Disco and Magic Show Christmas party with their parents and siblings at Cherry Tree Cricket Club. The forum consults with children and young people about local SEND provision and development including leisure and social opportunities, health, education, and social care experiences.

At the last forum the children and young people made their own clay Christmas tree decorations which were presented to them as gifts at the party in addition to a selection box and Christmas pencils from Santa.

CARING DADS PROGRAMME

A multi-agency Caring Dads programme is providing opportunities for fathers in the borough to make positive changes in their relationship with their children and the mother of their children. The approach recognises the importance of working with fathers in order to change controlling, abusive and neglectful behaviours. Research indicates that men are more likely to engage with services to address their abusive behaviours if they think it will benefit their relationship with their children.

The 17 group work sessions encourage participants to reflect on their own childhood experiences, consider how they want their children to feel, and what they need to do as parents to ensure that their children can experience safety and emotional warmth. Models and strategies include child centred parenting, cognitive behavioural therapy, and goal-centred and solution focused approaches.

LITTLE HARWOOD REMEMBRANCE DAY

Young people under the supervision of the Youth Justice Service team received praise for their work on the Little Harwood War Memorial and Darwen Cemetery in preparation for the Remembrance Day service in November. As part of their Court Order and to contribute to paying back communities for their offending behaviour, seven young people and two volunteers weeded, cleared leaves and tidied the area over a 2 month period.

GAME CHANGER EVENT FOR CHILDEN IN CARE

In November, I attended a 'Game Changer' event at Blackpool Pleasure Beach with staff and five Blackburn with Darwen young people in care and care leavers to explore experiences of being in care and what could be better. We were among 200 young people and professionals from across 17 local areas who took part in the Youth Focus North West event. On the day Children England, which supports children's charities, fed back on a survey of children and young people in care across the region. The top priorities voiced by Blackburn with Darwen children and young people were contact with birth brothers or sisters; having a key trusted adult to talk to; not being made to feel different because you are living in care and having the same opportunities and rules as children who are not in care. This feedback was used to shape discussions on the day.

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION WEEK – NOVEMBER 2017

The Engage Team kick started their Children Sexual Exploitation (CSE) awareness activities by launching a CSE screening toolkit to Designated Education Safeguarding Leads. The toolkit can be used by any professional working with children who are at risk of or being sexually exploited. The theme of CSE Week 2017 was to improve the education of young people around the risks of CSE and across the week awareness sessions were delivered to parents of children with disabilities, foster carers and pupils at Witton Park Academy.

Social Workers got involved by learning more about trauma bonding, healthy relationships and consent, and bespoke training was offered to local pharmacies and GP surgeries via health colleagues.

Council officers and the police visited local hotels and guest houses to highlight the responsibilities of the sector and offered support. The police also shared awareness raising posts on social media and across the week seven arrests were made.