



FAIM Funday Consultation Report: What Young People Want From A Foster Care Service - Summary

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Background

FAIM (Fostering Adolescents in Merseyside) is a new service established in September 2002 by Barnardo's, in partnership with Local Authorities across Merseyside. FAIM aims to provide the best quality foster carers for 8-18 year olds who local authorities are finding hard to place within their own resources. In order to meet this commitment it was clear that those most qualified to speak about current problems - young people who had experienced the Looked After system in Merseyside – should be consulted. On Saturday 15th February 2003 FAIM invited young people who were Looked After in Merseyside to the FAIM Funday – a consultation day to find out what young people thought should be provided by a foster care service.

Objectives of the evaluation

The aim of the FAIM Funday was to gather information from the young people to inform:

- A person specification for a FAIM foster carer
- A job description for a FAIM foster carer

- The competencies required to be a FAIM foster carer (in addition to those set out by BAAF)
- A protocol/process for matching, introductions and moving placements to be put forward to local authorities.

Methodology

How young people came to be involved

- Participation workers from 8 Local Authorities (Cheshire, Halton, St Helens, Warrington, Sefton, Knowsley, Liverpool and Wirral) were asked to invite 8-10 young people:
 - from both foster and residential care
 - aged between 8 and 18 years old
- Participation workers were sent letters explaining the aims of the FAIM Funday and encouraging them to support young people in deciding whether to attend. They also received packs of information to give to each young person including:
 1. **An information leaflet** explaining: why the FAIM Funday was being held, what information would be gathered at the FAIM Funday, where the information from the FAIM Funday would go, why it was important that young people were involved in the FAIM Funday and contact details.
 2. **A letter** inviting the young people to the FAIM Funday and asking them to inform their participation worker if they would like to attend.
 3. **A questionnaire** asking young people: their age, which type of activities they would be interested in getting involved in, what sort of food and drink they would like and how they would like to receive feedback from the FAIM Funday.
 4. **A 'Sorry I can't make it form'** for those young people who could not come to the day but still wanted to participate in the consultation. The form gave the young people the option of being consulted via e-mail, phone or postal questionnaire.
- Participation workers were then contacted (and re-contacted where necessary) to establish how many young people would be attending, how old the young people would be and if they had any specific needs.

Who attended the FAIM Funday

- A total of 27 young people attended.
- Young people attended from 5 local authorities: St Helens, Knowsley, Sefton, Liverpool and Warrington.
- Young people came from both residential and foster care – however numbers from each were not recorded.
- Young people ranged in age from 9 to 17 years old.
- All the young people, apart from one, were white. One young person was of dual heritage.

FAIM Funday Consultation Activities

The FAIM Funday was on the 15th February, 2003 and ran from 11am until 4pm. The day was based at a venue that provided:

- sufficient space for the young people to be involved in various activities as well as a large central area for all the young people to come together at the beginning and end of the day and at lunch
- a location that was fully accessible by both public and private transport for all the young people attending

One of the key aims of the consultation day was to ensure that it was a *fun* experience for all the young people involved while at the same time collecting consistent and relevant information from all the activities.

The fun-day activities aimed to address 2 key questions:

- **What should a foster carer/family be like?** attitudes towards young people; skills/experience; qualities; sense of humour; family structure/size (couple/single, sexuality, number of children, age of other children); lifestyle and interests; ethnicity; age; class
- **What should happen when young people move placement?** who should be involved in the moving process?; how do young people feel about moving?; how can young people be prepared for moving?; how do young people want to be involved in moving?; what support and information do young people need about moving and from whom?

4 different types of consultation activity were provided in both the morning and afternoon sessions, suitable for all age groups and abilities: art, computers, drama and discussion. The young people were invited to decide which activities they would like to participate in during the morning and afternoon sessions.

Throughout the day there were additional (optional) consultation activities for young people to do in their free time:

- **The Obstacle Wall:** young people were asked the following questions:

What stops a foster placement being good? (each answer written on a brick to create a wall representing the 'barriers' to good foster care placements)

What could make foster placements better? (each answer written on a leaf to create a vine to overcome the barriers to good foster care placements)

- **The Big Brother Room:** Young people were invited to attend the Big Brother Room (either by themselves or with a friend/support worker). Each young person was asked the following questions:

Do you live in foster care or residential care?

Some young people really like foster care, others do not – what do you think about it, and why?

Have you got a message to give to the people who are setting up this new foster care service?

Do you have a message of inspiration for other young people in foster care?

- **The Super Foster Carer Questionnaire:** questionnaires were available in each room for young people to complete. The questionnaires asked young people to draw or write about the following three areas:

The Super Foster Carers super powers

The people the Super Foster Carer would live with

The house where the Super Foster Carer would live

Key findings of the evaluation

The aim of the FAIM Funday was to gather information from young people to inform:

- A job description for a FAIM foster carer including:
 - a person specification for a FAIM foster carer
 - a set of competencies required to be a FAIM foster carer
- A protocol/process for matching, introductions and moving placement.

The summary of findings is presented as a series of recommendations within each of these areas – as identified by the young people who attended the FAIM Funday.

The huge amount of information generated by the young people at the FAIM Funday provides a clear indication that Looked After young people have specific and individual ideas about what they want from a foster care placement and should be given the opportunity to voice their opinions and be directly involved in decision making.

1. Recommendations For FAIM Foster Carer Person Specification

- **Personality:** young people identified the following characteristics as essential qualities for foster carers to possess: friendly, loving, funny, kind, understanding, honest and happy.
- **Additional children:** the majority of young people said that they would prefer there to be other children living in their foster care placement so that they had people of a similar age to relate to and spend time with. Those young people who did not have other children in their foster care placements said that they had felt lonely being the 'only' child.
- **Marital status:** the majority of young people referred to foster carers as a heterosexual couple. Young people in the drama and discussion groups said that they would accept a single foster carer, although they had reservations as to how well s/he would be able to cope. Young people in the drama group also agreed that a homosexual couple should be able to provide foster care placements.

- **Age:** age was not highlighted as an important criteria. However, young people in the discussion group felt that the older the foster carer the more experience they would have to offer in providing effective care and support to young people.
- **Property:** the majority of young people felt that the type of foster care was more important than the type of house or income a foster carer had. Despite this, young people in both the drama group and Big Brother Room said that they would like a wealthy foster family who would be able to provide them with *'loads of things'*. Young people in the discussion and drama groups identified having adequate space to keep belongings and ensure privacy as important considerations when selecting foster care placements.
- **Ethnicity:** ethnicity was not identified as an important criteria for the selection of foster carers. However, young people in the discussion group felt that a Black child may not be able to feel included within a white foster family.

2. Recommendations For FAIM Foster Carer Competencies

- **Ability to listen to young people:** young people in all the activities recognised the need to have foster carers who could listen effectively. Asking young people what they want and showing a willingness to listen were identified as essential skills for foster carers.
- **Experience of caring for children and young people:** young people felt that foster carers should have had some experience of bringing up children in order to provide sufficient support and understanding.
- **Ability to provide support:** young people thought that foster carers should be able to provide support to meet the individual needs of children and young people – for example, special educational needs. One young person said that receiving support enabled young people to *'feel better about themselves'*.
- **Ability to compromise:** it was felt that foster carers should be able to reach amicable, fair decisions through compromising with young people to avoid arguments.
- **Ability to provide some discipline:** although young people had varied views on the subject of discipline, the ability to provide *some* rules was identified as a positive skill. Young people identified: bedtimes, curfews, behaviour and chores as areas where some discipline was required. Young people thought that strict disciplining and grounding should be avoided.
- **Ability to treat young people as 'part of the family':** young people identified the need to feel 'part of the family' while they were living in a foster care placement. Involving young people in family activities such as holidays was seen to be a particularly positive attribute.

3. Recommendations For Protocol/Process For Matching, Introductions And Moving Placements

- **Provide young people with sufficient information prior to moving placement:** young people said that they often felt confused when moving placement and unsure about what to expect from their new home. Although some young people had had negative experience of social workers, the majority of

young people agreed that social workers should provide them with the following information prior to moving placement:

- **when** they have to move
- **why** they have to move
- **where** they are moving to
- **who** they are going to live with
- **whether** they have to leave their current school

- **Opportunity to say 'goodbye' to present foster carers:** young people in the discussion group said that they would like the opportunity to say 'goodbye' to their current foster carers and that their foster carers should be both encouraging and supportive about their move, offering to keep in contact.
- **Opportunity for young people to choose their own foster carer:** the majority of young people said that they wanted to have a say in deciding which foster family to live with – for example, having the opportunity to visit the family before making a decision.
- **Provision of information by new foster carers:** young people thought that their new foster carers should provide them with sufficient information about their new home including: introductions to all the members of the family, whether they can use the telephone, directions to school, where the nearest shop is, where their bedroom is, where the bathroom and toilet are and where the fridge is.
- **Ability to make own choices in new foster care placement:** young people identified a number of choices that they would like to be able to make about their new foster care placement:
 - whether or not they would like to move school (young people in the drama, discussion and art groups were concerned that moving school would separate them from their friends)
 - whether or not they would like contact with their birth family and how often this contact should be
 - what they would like their new bedroom to be like
 - what they would like to take with them when they move (young people identified possessions such as clothes, photographs, money, jewellery, computer, music, bed and teddy, as well as people such as their brothers and sisters and friends)
- **Provision of ongoing support and information from social worker in new foster care placement:** young people emphasised the need to have consistent, ongoing support from social workers once they had moved into their new placement. They said they would like to have the opportunity to contact their social worker when needed so that they could ask questions and be listened to.

Contact for further information

For more information about the project visit the Children's Services Directory
FAIM Merseyside www.barnardos.org.uk/who/what/faim

Full report available from

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