



Introduction

From the support of FCAV, Katie Hooper attended this conference in Dublin. It was a great opportunity to learn about other programs, network with others from across the world and reflect on my own practice as a carer and as a professional within the sector.

Following are notes and my reflection on six of the sessions I attended.

1. Moving on again....An analysis of foster care breakdown from an insider's perspective

Danielle Coady

Country: Republic of Ireland

The first session I went to was a powerful presentation from a 25 year old woman who had experienced the care system in Ireland. She had been in 8 different foster placements between the age of 9 and 21 years of age. The strongly expressed themes of this moving presentation were

- ✓ the guilt she felt about leaving her siblings and mother and the responsibility she felt for the care of her younger siblings. She said the hardest thing about going into care was leaving her little brothers and sisters, as well as her mother
- ✓ the importance of family contact (even when other's perceived it to have a less than positive impact on her emotionally). She talked about the lifelong strong link she felt to her birth family and the importance of foster families and the care system maintaining this link
- ✓ how the birth children within a placement can make or break a placement for a foster child. If the birth children were supportive and welcoming – the placement was a success.
- ✓ A success for her was learning to write in a diary. A foster carer bought her her first diary and it was a really successful tool throughout her life
- ✓ She recalls a foster carer in one of her first placements saying "I don't want a daughter, I don't want to be your mother, I just want to be here and help you". This was supportive for Danielle as she couldn't imagine what these people's motivation was for being a carer

2. Sharing our stories to make a difference: The National Youth in Care Network's digital storytelling workshops

Yvonne Andrews, Angie Cross and Nicole Herbert

Country: Canada

I also heard from the National Youth in Care Network (Canada) www.youthincare.ca. They are a Canadian organisation that voice the opinions and concerns of youth in and from care and promote the improvement of services for them.

They reminded me a lot of CREATE and had some great messages that we should remember

- ✓ young people want to be included in decision making that effects them
- ✓ they ask (their members), they listen (to the young people) and they believe the young people (believe what the young people tell them and also believe in young people in cares potential)
- ✓ Digital story telling is a great way of telling a young person's story in a strategic way and can be a healing tool. Viewing of digital stories is useful for carers/ workers.

3. Contact – Journey of a foster family

Jillian Wain

Country: Australia

Jill Wain, Melton Foster Care gave an inspiring presentation on the importance of not only maintaining but attempting to make links and find birth families of young people in long term or permanent care.

4. The professionalisation of foster care: Transforming outcomes

Sheila Patel and Hazel Halle

Country: United Kingdom and Northern Ireland

Staff from the UK's Fostering Network gave a thought provoking presentation on the **Professionalisation of foster care**. While the word professionalisation may not be the best term, until they come up with a better term it is what they are using. Themes included

- ✓ The transition that the UK foster care system is going through, from a volunteer foster carer "workforce" to a position where carers are paid a fee on top of the caregiver reimbursement
- ✓ That a more professional foster care system would be one where learning development and support were prioritised. This would include an increase in standards for the care system
- ✓ To be more professional would mean greater valuing of the role of foster carers and recognising that carers are the key to the care team

5. Allegations in foster care – the case for mediation

Debra Gibbs Baker

Country UK

Deb works for Fostering Support Ltd – they provide independent support for fostering households subject to allegations and serious concerns.

Independent support covers

- info and advice about the process and rights and responsibilities of all parties,
- emotional support for foster carers and their families
- mediation – the purpose of an investigation can put strain on the relationship between foster carers and their foster service
- advocacy – some foster carers may wish for their independent supporter to advocate on their behalf in meetings

Fostering supports Ltd standards are

- 24hr 7 day a week response
- One:one support, mediation and counseling
- Visits, usually next day, within 3 days
- Chases up dates, meeting times and reports
- Help to compile responses from carers to reports
- Attendance at interviews and meetings
- Restorative justice mediation

Fostering Networks stats

1:3 carers faced allegations in their career

1:5 investigations took more than 6 months, 1:10 took more than 12 months

1:3 children were removed

Deb reflected that an allegation can happen to anyone. She suggested that it was most likely to occur after 8 years of caring. She indicated that carers reported feeling isolated. While you cannot prevent an allegation you can be assisted through the process.

Deb believes that minimizing the risk of an allegation can happen through

1. Getting supervision – establishing relationships and communication and being supported
2. Attending training, as well as considering critical points in the child and families path (while still being child centered)
3. Annual reviews and sharing responsibility for good practice (having practice standards)

6. The supervision of foster carers

Jane Asquith

Country: UK

Workshop on supervision for foster carers was conducted. This covered the importance of supervision of foster carers. It indicated that supervision should cover the aspects of managerial, educational and support.

There was much discussion in the work shop regarding the importance of having supervision as a formal, separate task to any meetings in relation to the children/ young people and separate to support sessions.

Discussion occurred regarding the importance of the following aspects of supervision

- Explain to carer what the purpose of supervision is
- Have a contract / agreement regarding supervision
- Explain supervision as a priority
- Prepare an agenda for supervision
- Use appropriate skills to optimize the outcome of the session ie. Active listening, record keeping
- Give and receive feedback from the session
- Record main points, file them
- Use power and authority appropriately
- Evaluate the sessions

Discussion occurred regarding the need for different expectation for volunteer foster carers and “professional” foster carers. Having said that, all carers deserve respect for their role and status.

Katie Hooper
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