

New support for foster families to overcome trauma

Foster families will benefit from projects offering short breaks, mentoring, emergency sleepovers and social activities with other families to help create stability as they adjust to their new lives together.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has today (Thursday 3 October) launched fostering projects in 10 new locations, helping hundreds more foster families with practical and emotional support and advice, helping them tackle the day-to-day challenges of taking in a vulnerable young person from care and create a stable environment for them to live in.

The 'Mockingbird Family Model', delivered by The Fostering Network, brings foster families together in groups, centred around one experienced foster carer who lives nearby to act as a mentor. This builds a network on which they can rely in difficult moments, in the same way that families who are together from birth often rely on the support of extended family, friends or neighbours, and helping them cope with challenging behaviour or problems caused by trauma before they escalate.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Foster parents give stability to children who have often experienced nothing but trauma and chaos at home, giving them opportunities that most of us take for granted. The unique circumstances they face in becoming a new family means they need daily support from people who understand the challenges, offering them much-needed advice and respite when they feel isolated or alone.

Expanding the Mockingbird Family Model into new areas builds on a programme we know has real value to foster families, helping them to form vital communities so that parents can rely on one another through tough times and vulnerable children get the safe, supportive home life they deserve.

The expansion to 10 new areas, part of the Department for Education's Supporting Families; Investing in Practice programme, acts to keep families together safely and provides a community environment that understands and shares their experiences. It comes as findings from the Mockingbird programme show that foster families assisted through the programme built stronger relationships and became more resilient.

Alongside this additional help for foster families, the Department for Education has also today launched new projects in 18 council areas to support vulnerable children coping with chaotic home lives as a result of their parents' problems with mental health, domestic violence or addiction.

Announced in April and backed by £84 million secured in last year's Autumn Budget, these projects reaffirm the core principle of the Children Act 1989 that where possible, children are best brought up with their parents.

Kevin Williams, Chief Executive at The Fostering Network, said:

We're delighted that the government is showing confidence in the Mockingbird programme and the difference it is making in the lives of fostered children and young people, as well as the foster families caring for them. This extra funding will allow us to bring the benefits of Mockingbird's extended family model to many more foster families across England and to get further insight into the impact of the programme.

The expansion of Mockingbird Family Model builds on investment worth nearly £500,000 in seven regions to explore new approaches to fostering, helping local authorities understand and meet the needs of children in their area. The funding will help with recruitment and support in the seven fostering partnerships, making sure they are enough foster families, in the right place and at the right time, to offer children the best possible home to meet their needs.

Michael Sanders, Executive Director of What Works for Children's Social Care, said:

I'm really excited to be part of this project, which will see a large expansion of the Mockingbird model to 10 new areas, while continuing to build on an already promising evidence base that will help local authorities and young people into the future.

Mockingbird will be expanded into Sheffield, East Cheshire, Wakefield, Warrington, South Tyneside, Barnsley, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Stoke-on-Trent.