

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting:	14 September 2021
Report Title:	Cheshire East Mockingbird Family Model
Report of:	Ged Rowney, Director of Children's Services
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Fostering Service's implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model.
- 1.2.** The Mockingbird Family Model is based on building and strengthening relationships between children, young people, foster carers and birth families. The aim of Mockingbird is to build a small community by bringing together a group of 6 to 10 foster carers, children and young people to provide support, strengthen relationships, improve placement stability, and safeguard children. This links directly to the Council's Corporate Plan aims and objectives to care about and empower people.
- 1.3.** Our Mockingbird model in Cheshire East has linked individuals from the Virtual School and the in-house therapeutic support team to enable a consistent approach for any children requiring support for education or with additional needs. Within the Mockingbird family, the carers work together to promote the best outcomes for all the children living within their Mockingbird family network, supported by the Mockingbird Team within the Fostering Service. This is consistent with the council's objectives to support communities, work together to strengthen communities, safeguard children, and ensure children can access and achieve good educational outcomes.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1.** The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1.** This report is to inform members of the development and progress of the Mockingbird Family Model in Cheshire East.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1.** Not applicable as this is an update report.

5. Background

5.1. The Mockingbird Family model was originally developed by the Mockingbird Society in America in 2004. Mockingbird is an evidence-based practice model based using a philosophy of 'It takes a village to raise a child'. In 2015 the Fostering Network successfully began their first pilot scheme of the model in the UK with the support of the Department for Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation programme.

5.2. An opportunity arose in 2019 for Local Authorities throughout the UK who were able to evidence that they fulfilled the criteria requirements to obtain DfE funding, join the Mockingbird Programme and become part of a further evaluation. Cheshire East were successful in our application and began implementing the model in 2020 in conjunction with the Fostering Network.

5.3. The Mockingbird model aligns closely with our Signs of Safety and Stability model to further develop our strength-based approach and networks across all areas of service. We believe that this approach will improve placement stability for the children, young people, and the fostering family to help them to build and sustain lifelong relationships and support networks.

5.4. The model requires there to be a 'Hub Home', and then a further 6-10 satellite fostering families around the Hub Home, and all the people in all of those households are part of the 'constellation'. The Hub Home Carer is an experienced carer who coordinates and supports all the satellite carers in their hub.

5.5. We work closely with the Fostering Network and have a Fostering Network 'coach' who is tasked in supporting the development of Mockingbird in Cheshire East, and ensuring we continue to meet the required criteria (or fidelity) to enable us to use the terms associated with the model, these are:

- 6-10 satellite homes in a constellation
- Each constellation provides care for 6-18 cared for children and young people, and constellation members (both adults and young people) should be diverse in terms of age, background, ethnicity, experience, strengths, and needs.

- The constellation is supported to build a micro community based on an extended family concept.
- The Hub Home is geographically close to the satellite homes.
- The Hub Home has two spare Mockingbird beds available for sleepovers for children in the constellation.
- The Hub Home carer is available nearly 24/7 but does have days off and annual leave also.
- The Hub Home carer hosts monthly constellation meetings and provides planned and spontaneous opportunities for social events and interactions between the hub home and the satellite families.
- The 'Mockingbird Liaison Worker' role is a Supervising Social Worker from the Fostering Service and is a key support for the Hub Home carer to prevent burnout.
- Collaborative working is important, the service must support the Hub Home carer and members of the constellation to problem solve (e.g. deciding when to offer crisis respite, delegation of authority, etc.)

5.6. We are required to feedback monthly evaluations of our constellation and we are subject to quarterly fidelity checks by the Fostering Network to ensure that we remain committed and consistent in meeting the fidelity.

5.7. We currently have one established constellation in Cheshire East, which we launched in November 2020. The Constellation covers the areas of Alsager (Hub Home), Sandbach and Crewe. The constellation is made up of the following Satellite homes:

- Mainstream experienced carer couple (deputy for Hub Home Carer) – 17-year-old in placement (unaccompanied asylum-seeking child), 16 year old (unaccompanied asylum seeking child) and recently increased their capacity to take one other UASC.
- Mainstream carer couple – 14-year-old long term matched placement and offering regular day care and sleepovers when required to a 10-year-old boy.
- Mainstream single carer – 3-month-old baby.
- Newly approved mainstream single carer – care of 2 siblings, aged 15-year-old and 12 years old.
- Single male connected carer – 15-year-old step-grandson.
- Single female connected carer – 5-year-old granddaughter.
- Mainstream carer couple – 1 baby placed 4 months old.

- Single female connected carer – 2 grandchildren, a boy aged 2 year and a girl aged 10 months.

5.8. Our current Mockingbird Constellation has celebrated some recent successes as follows:

Case Examples

Two related children were referred into the Constellation. We approached one of our Mockingbird Satellite carers, who was initially worried that she did not have the experience to meet the identified needs of these two children. The Fostering Service and the Children's Team worked closely with the Mockingbird constellation to explore the needs of the children and the needs of the carer. That same day we arranged both children to visit the carer's home so they could all meet and then sourced tailored training for the carer. This meant both children could stay together, locally in Cheshire East, with a tailored support package through the Mockingbird Constellation. The children have settled remarkably well, and the carer has continued to develop her skills, knowledge and confidence in providing a high standard of care to both children using the support available through Mockingbird.

Recently a young primary aged child was referred into the Children's Team. The child and his father had travelled over from another country approximately 2 years ago, sadly whilst residing in the UK the child's father has become terminally ill. The Fostering Service received a referral for day-care and possible sleepovers within a fostering family who can develop a relationship with the child and his father. Again, we approached one of the satellite families and they and the Hub Home carer are now linked to this little boy and his dad. Dad is reassured that the child is building a relationship with the same carers who will be able to step in in an emergency who know the situation and the family background. The child is Vietnamese, and an added benefit is we have an older young person living with one of the other Satellite families who is also from Vietnam this has enabled familiarity in relation to their culture for both this child and the young person and also assisted in communication.

5.9. As well as strengthening those relationships for children and young people, Mockingbird has strengthened relationships between the foster carers, so it really is like a Family Network. Earlier this year 2 of our Mockingbird Carers informed us that they were in a relationship together and they are now undergoing a Fostering Assessment as a couple. Pending the outcome of the assessment, they will remain with the constellation, and this means we can invite another newly approved carer to join the constellation.

- 5.10.** The Constellation enjoyed a Summer Celebration in July, which all carers and the Mockingbird Team attended, Kerry Birtles Director of Children's Social Care was also in attendance and the event was a huge success. The Satellite carers were delighted to have opportunity to talk to Kerry about the Mockingbird Project and Fostering in general – pleased that “Managers are interested in Fostering and what Foster Carers do”. Following the event one of the carer commented, “It was nice to see you are all just normal people, and do things normal people do” referring to walking in on a member of the Mockingbird Team washing dishes in the kitchen at the event.
- 5.11.** The children and young people also had opportunity to meet face to face for the first time, the teenagers enjoyed engaging in a game of pool and have asked to have sleepovers at each other's homes. The younger ones enjoyed having a family 'party' and eating party food and cakes. We are looking forward to further social events in the coming months, including brunch at the Hub Home at the end of the summer.
- 5.12.** Finally, we have recently advertised and interviewed for a second Hub Home Carer and successfully appointed our second Hub Home Carers, a couple with 20 years fostering experience caring for all age ranges of children and experience of working within residential settings. The second constellation will cover the Crewe, Nantwich and Middlewich areas and we aim to launch this by October.

6. Consultation and Engagement

- 6.1.** We shared our vision for implementing the Mockingbird Model with foster carers prior to the implementation stages and invited foster carers to express an interest in finding out more details about the model and/or becoming involved in the implementation of the programme
- 6.2.** We have a multi-agency Steering Group which meets every month. The group is made up of local authority officers and foster carers who are actively involved in the implementation and development of the Mockingbird programme. The Steering Group also hold the Fostering Service and wider directorate accountable for ensuring we continue to meet the fidelity criteria for Mockingbird.
- 6.3.** We have two in-house foster carers in our Mockingbird Steering Group. A key requirement at the time of recruiting these carers was that in opting for this role, they were putting themselves out of consideration for being either the Hub Home carer or part of the constellation. They are active members of the group and are involved in the policy development for

Mockingbird, problem solving and sharing ideas in relation to both the further development and implementation of the model.

- 6.4.** Information sessions have been offered to all in-house foster carers run by the Mockingbird Team Manager and the Hub Home Carer. The aim of these sessions has been to increase overall knowledge in our fostering community and for carers to consider whether it's something that would work for them in the future.
- 6.5.** Our Mockingbird constellation has two Supervising Social Workers linked to it, one has the role of Liaison Worker and offers direct support to the Hub Home as well as some of the other satellite homes. Both the social workers and the Hub Home carer are involved in continuing to develop the model within the current constellation and moving forward in the development of the next constellation.
- 6.6.** Information about the Mockingbird Model is shared within the Fostering Service and across the wider directorate and partner agencies through Practice Workshops, drop-in information sessions and is also discussed during decision making panels exploring options for permanence for children and young people.

7. Implications

7.1. Legal

- 7.1.1.** There are no legal implications. Any children or young people who become part of the Mockingbird programme is cared for by the local authority under the Children Act 1989.
- 7.1.2.** The Corporate Parenting duties for Council Officers and Elected Members continues as it would do for any child or young person in our care.

7.2. Finance

- 7.2.1.** All carers within the constellation are paid in line with all other foster carers in Cheshire East. The Hub Home carer is paid a fee in line with the Cheshire East Specialist Fostering fee.
- 7.2.2.** Cheshire East receive match funding from the Department for Education for the duration of the programme. Once the programme has ended (March 2022) Cheshire East will be responsible for sole funding of our programme.

7.3. Policy

- 7.3.1.** The current policies for Foster Carers are applicable also to Foster Carers who are part of Mockingbird. There are some additional Mockingbird policies and procedures which link specifically to the fidelity criteria of Mockingbird.

7.4. Equality

- 7.4.1.** There are no implications in relation to equality, our constellation has a diverse group of carers and children. Any carer can express an interest in becoming part of a Mockingbird Constellation, though the viability of that is dependent upon their proximity to the Hub Home.

7.5. Human Resources

- 7.5.1.** There are no implications for Human Resources.

7.6. Risk Management

- 7.6.1** The implication in relation to risk management is that we must ensure that we consistently meet the fidelity requirements for Mockingbird. Failure to meet the criteria for fidelity would impact on the success of the model and would mean that we would be unable to be part of Mockingbird.

7.7. Rural Communities

- 7.7.1.** The Mockingbird Model includes foster families in the towns and rural communities across Cheshire East dependent on their proximity to the Hub Home.

7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 7.8.1.** The Mockingbird Family Model will consider any children who could benefit from becoming part of the constellation. Evidence is clear that whilst there are many benefits for children, young people and foster carers, the model will not suit everyone. Therefore, any decision to include or exclude a child or young person will follow a careful matching process which involves all the professionals around the child, and a view from the Hub Home Carer and Liaison worker who will have good knowledge of children and families already part of the constellation.
- 7.8.2.** Where children and young people are part of Mockingbird or may become part of Mockingbird, their views will be sought during their statutory visits and cared for reviews completed by their allocated social worker, including prior to becoming part of a Mockingbird Constellation.

7.9. Public Health

- 7.9.1.** The first constellation was set up during the Covid pandemic and over the time of its operation, the levels of Covid restriction have varied. During normal times, the Hub Home carer would arrange monthly face to face meetings for all carers, young people and children, this would revolve around things such as barbeques, picnics and so on.
- 7.9.2.** During the last 6 months this has not been able to happen, however the Hub Home carer has been very resourceful in being able to ensure that all of the carers have met the other carers face to face whilst ensuring

that the Covid restrictions have been observed. This has made things a little more difficult, but we believe that this has worked well, and we hope that as we move forward that the monthly events can now begin to happen in a way that keeps everyone safe and enables relationships and support to prosper.

7.10. Climate Change

7.10.1. In developing the constellation, we considered the geographical area of the Hub Home and ensured that each Satellite home is within a 30 minute travelling distance of the Hub Home and each other to minimise the travel distance.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Sarah Probert, Mockingbird Team Manager Sarah.probert@cheshireeast.gov.uk 07500 975492
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None