

Quick recap

The meeting began with discussions about an upcoming event and personal matters before transitioning into concerns about the South East Organization's poorly organized provider event. The main focus was on professional conduct and social media usage among foster carers, including discussions about maintaining appropriate boundaries, managing digital communications, and addressing unprofessional behavior. The group explored various approaches to handling challenging situations and concluded with plans for upcoming meetings focused on communication with children and fostering regulations.

Next steps

- Hannah to organise next week's session on talking to children where English isn't their first language and creative communication methods for children with disabilities.
- Marie and Harvey to prepare a session on staying put for the following week.
- Hannah to consider implementing monthly open forum sessions as the first Friday of each month.
- Marie to email Hannah details about the Monday meeting within half an hour.
- Seamus to have follow-up conversations with the foster carers involved in the inappropriate Whatsapp group exchange.

Summary

Event Attendance and Dog Discussion

Hannah and Marie discussed Hannah's upcoming attendance at an event on Monday, where she expressed uncertainty about her contribution but noted her willingness to listen. Marie and Hannah also briefly talked about Marie's dog, describing its appearance and behavior.

Improving Provider Event Coordination

Marie expressed frustration with the South East Organization's poorly organized provider event, highlighting issues such as incorrect dates, unprofessional conduct, and a lack of coordination with local authorities. She emphasized the need for better

planning and suggested that including local authorities in the event would be more beneficial for fostering meaningful dialogue between providers and local authorities. Despite the challenges, Marie and Hannah discussed the potential for partnership working and coordination during the event, which will focus on risk management and involve group activities with hypothetical referrals.

Open-Ended Meeting Discussion

Hannah explained that Catherine was absent due to unforeseen circumstances and that the meeting would proceed as an open-ended session to discuss any topics and share good practices. Hannah requested attendees to introduce themselves in the chat and mentioned that Catherine would cover a specific topic at a later date. Marie helped Hannah manage the meeting, and Sarah Richardson joined remotely due to her daughter's GCSE exam.

Open Forum Evolution and Purpose

The meeting focused on the history and purpose of open forum sessions, which were established during COVID-19 to provide weekly check-ins and support for providers. Marie explained that these sessions evolved from support-focused meetings to topic-based discussions, allowing participants to share challenges and best practices confidentially. Hannah highlighted the importance of showcasing successful practices to local authorities and during meetings with Ofsted and the Department of Education, emphasizing the need for examples of good practice, particularly in managing allegations. The group discussed the possibility of bringing in external experts for specific topics and encouraged participants to suggest future session topics or experts.

Foster Carer Professional Boundaries Debate

Seamus raised concerns about the boundary between his personal life and his role as a foster carer, particularly in the context of inappropriate behavior by two foster carers in a WhatsApp group. Jodie discussed similar issues with carers expressing views in public forums, emphasizing the importance of maintaining professional boundaries. The group debated whether foster carers' conduct outside their professional role should impact their ability to participate in supervision and training, with Jodie suggesting that public expressions of personal views could be problematic.

Social Media Policy for Foster Carers

The group discussed concerns about social media and WhatsApp usage by foster carers, particularly regarding public domain content and professional boundaries. Jodie emphasized that retweeting mainstream media articles without proper privacy settings violated their social media policy, while Sarah focused on maintaining professional standards and cultural values through respectful communication. The discussion highlighted the need for clear expectations around professional conduct in WhatsApp groups, with Sarah suggesting that fostering representatives should manage these groups and address concerns when necessary.

Social Media's Impact on Carers

The group discussed the challenges of social media and its impact on professional carers, focusing on the difficulty of balancing personal values with professional standards. Glen raised questions about how social media content might affect the quality of care and whether it could become a standards of care issue. Alison shared their experience with WhatsApp groups for carers, which they eventually disbanded due to GDPR concerns and the need for clearer boundaries. The discussion concluded with a reminder that social media checks are part of the process for prospective carers.

Professional Boundaries in Foster Care

The group discussed the challenges of maintaining professional boundaries, particularly for foster carers, in both face-to-face and digital environments. They explored how social media and digital platforms can influence individuals to act impulsively without immediate repercussions, contrasting this with the need for foster carers to maintain professional conduct at all times. Marie highlighted a recent incident involving a councillor's inappropriate comments about children in care, prompting a discussion about how leaders and organizations manage such situations. The conversation also touched on the importance of clear contracts and guidelines for employees and foster carers regarding their conduct both personally and professionally.

Foster Carer Social Media Guidelines

The group discussed the challenges of fostering and the blurred line between work and personal life for foster carers. They explored the implications of foster carers

sharing potentially offensive views on social media or in closed groups, emphasizing the need for clear guidelines and respect for children's safety. Glen shared his agency's approach to managing such situations, highlighting the importance of safeguarding children and the complexity of assessing foster carers' behavior on a case-by-case basis. The discussion underscored the need for foster carers to be mindful of their public communications and the potential impact on children in their care.

Professional Conduct in Social Care

The meeting focused on professional conduct and social media use among foster carers and social care staff. Glen Pereira discussed the need to address unprofessional behavior at different levels, emphasizing the importance of carefully reviewing situations before taking action. Kevin highlighted the risks of social media use, noting that once content is shared online, it can be difficult to control and may have serious consequences for employment. The group also discussed the importance of setting clear ground rules and boundaries for professional interactions, both online and offline.

Understanding Foster Carer Behavior

The group discussed the importance of understanding the root causes of unwanted behavior in foster carers and staff, including personal values, misinformation, and stress. Seamus emphasized the need to challenge received wisdom and encourage critical thinking in training, while also addressing the broader impact of inappropriate behavior on the fostering community. Sarah Richardson highlighted the vulnerability of foster carers who engage in such behavior and the challenge of upholding standards while offering support. The discussion concluded with a focus on the need for serious conversations with foster carers who engage in unacceptable behavior and the importance of maintaining standards within the fostering agency.

Fostering Regulations and Social Media

The group discussed fostering regulations and social media challenges, with Seamus suggesting an approach of asking foster carers what they think should be done in difficult situations. Hannah shared a personal experience about inadvertently agreeing with an adoption breakdown post on social media, which led to unintended consequences. The team planned upcoming meetings, including one next week about communicating with children who have English as a second language or have



disabilities, and another session the following week about "staying put" arrangements for young people in fostering. Marie suggested implementing monthly open sessions to provide flexibility and reduce pressure on regular meetings.