

## Person Specification - Mockingbird Hub Carer Role

- **Mockingbird Hub Carer Roles and Responsibilities**

As part of our Mockingbird programme, Portsmouth Children Services are recruiting a full time, Mockingbird Hub Carer. The Mockingbird Hub Carer will offer sleepovers, peer support, emergency support, joint planning and social activities to satellite homes within their geographical area. Mockingbird uses the concept of a "constellation" which is where 6-10 "satellite" families of foster carers live in close proximity to a dedicated hub home offering this support.

- **Building a sense of community and belonging**

The hub home is at its most effective when children and young people see themselves as part of the household rather than as guests. Satellite carers must also feel comfortable in the hub home and should feel a valued member of the constellation community. The relationships formed within this constellation are central to Mockingbird, with the hub carer and satellite carers all working in partnership with one another. The hub empowers families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate, and offers children a more positive experience of care through a wider support network of adults. The hub also builds links with other families important to the children's care plans and to resources within the wider community which can provide them with enhanced opportunities to learn, develop and succeed.

The role of the Mockingbird hub carer is crucial to the success of the programme. It can be rewarding but also demanding and unpredictable. It is a full-time role for approved foster carers in view of the organisation and planning needed to make a constellation work effectively and the 'hands on' day-to-day care of children and young people staying at the hub home for sleepovers or being reintegrated back into their satellite fostering. Hub home carers will have completed their preparation training, post approval induction period and the national Training Support and Development Standards. They will have experience of creating comfortable home environments and will need the ability to develop relationships with children of different ages, ethnicities and genders. They must be prepared to build a strong and collaborative professional relationship with the liaison worker.

A key factor in the success of the hub home service is the Mockingbird hub carers' understanding of the constellation as a form of extended family and their own role as one of leadership and as a model of good practice. Mockingbird hub carers act as the glue that unites the satellite families into a community.

- **Stable relationships**

Hub home carers need to be energetic and resourceful with emotional stability and adequate sources of support. Mockingbird is about working to foster a sense of community, with Mockingbird hub carers facilitating a constellation to act as a resource for itself, offering hope, a sense of belonging with the reassurance that comes with that, sharing information and ideas about how best to support children and young people's development and how best to respond to challenging behaviour.

- **Advocacy**

The need for advocacy skills may arise in many ways. Mockingbird hub carers may need to advocate to a foster carer on behalf of a child or young person, or to the Fostering Service or Child Care Team on behalf of members of the Constellation. They may ask to participate in family meetings or reviews about a particular child or young person's needs. The task of being supportive while remaining neutral towards everyone in the constellation can be a complex balance requiring reflective skills and a willingness to seek advice.

The Hub Home and foster families have to communicate effectively to ensure there is continuity in safer caring practice and in what behaviour is expected of children and young people while they are at the Hub Home.

- **Flexibility**

Hub home foster carers will often have to adjust their plans to deal with unpredictable events. Examples of the type of flexibility that might be required:

- Accommodate requests for urgent support care from satellite families which can include sleepovers for the child
- Accommodate children and young people's schedules
- Provide transport for families to attend activities at the hub home
- Host contact sessions for birth families
- Work around satellite families schedules when setting up times to talk

The Mockingbird hub carer role is usually undertaken by foster carers who have a considerable amount of spare time due to the 24/7 nature of the work. Like all foster carers they should have stable and healthy relationships with everyone already present in their home including any foster child already in placement.

Those in the role will often face challenging and emotionally exhausting situations and often see foster families seek a great deal of emotional and practical support from the Mockingbird Hub Carers. To cope with these demands the Mockingbird hub carers need, if they are a couple, to be confident in their own relationship and able to seek support from other sources when necessary in order to maintain the energy and creativity needed to support the constellation. However, this role can be undertaken by a single carer if they have a good support network around them.

- **Ability to plan, organise and implement**

Hub home carers must be able to plan, co-ordinate schedules and organise events. They need to be creative and flexible in encouraging satellite home families to participate in events.

- **Confidence in mediating and dealing with conflict**

Hub home carers provide support care to satellite families in times of conflict. This support may happen in the hub or satellite home and may include an unplanned sleepover with the intention of

the child or young person returning to the satellite home as soon as the conflict is resolved. Emergency support is offered through clearly defined delegated authority and under appropriate supervision.

The hub home offers a neutral, safe space where children and young people and their satellite carers can work out where they are in their relationship, express their feelings in appropriate ways and communicate in a potentially fraught situation.

- **Regular contact with satellite home families and safer caring for everyone**

The hub home carer will be proactive in maintaining contact and regularly checking in with satellite home families. By maintaining regular contact, hub home carers will be aware of changes in the satellite home families, new problems or escalating difficulties that need to be discussed with all relevant members of the team around the child. They will be able to plan and offer support with the aim of averting crisis situations or placement breakdowns.

- **Organising activities and events**

The hub home carers will be responsible for maintaining and coordinating a calendar of monthly events, meetings, social gatherings, training, support session's activities for children and young people, and their own availability for sleepovers and planned respite. These shared events build and sustain a community. The following activities are essential components of Mockingbird:

- Monthly constellation meetings or training and support sessions
- Social get-togethers
- Children and young people's activities

The constellation calendar also may include relevant local community activities or school events that families may want to attend.

- **Support care and sleepovers**

The hub home carer needs to subscribe to the idea that some time out away from the intensity of close family relationships, as well as the need to have different positive individuals in our lives, is normal and healthy. It also promotes stronger, healthier relationships with the people that we are closest to.

This sort of distancing has a healthy developmental and restorative function, even when relationships are unproblematic. Many individuals achieve this through solitary activities such as reading, exercise or listening to music. However, looked after children and young people may have less freedom for their own protection and may have many more scheduled activities (contact, CAMHS, care planning, PEP meetings and others) which all combine to a very busy life and can create tensions. Therefore it is important that children and young people and their carers should have access 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to planned and emergency support care.

- **Planned support care**

Satellite home carers can arrange planned respite care provided by the hub home family. The hub home carers should plan ahead to let satellite families know when they will not be available to provide this service. This includes overnight sleepovers and shorter periods, for example, after school or transport to and from activities.

- **Crisis support care**

The satellite home carers may call the hub home carers directly in a crisis situation to request urgent respite. The hub home can offer it on the basis of agreed prior delegated authority for decision making. The model is designed to enable immediate support to satellite families, while increasing the ability of everyone to work effectively during the crisis. Examples of short notice respite situations may include a satellite carer's need to:

- drop off one child/young person while another child/young person is taken to an emergency doctor appointment
- Drop off children/young people while dealing with own health emergency
- Have children/young people picked up from an external event and taken home for a few hours while dealing with a short-term crisis
- Have a few hours of respite to recover composure when a child/young person is being very challenging
- Arrange for a child or young person to stay overnight at the hub home due to unforeseen emergencies or the escalation of tensions in the satellite home.

- **Temporary placement in a disruption**

The hub home is the preferred location for children and young people whose placements have to end suddenly or prematurely whatever the reason. Children and young people may stay in the hub home for an agreed extended period of time while a new placement is being agreed. In this situation it is hoped that the new placement may be with a family already in the constellation, or a new family may be able to join the constellation. This enables the young person to maintain important links with the hub home and other adults, children and young people in the constellation.

- **Keep connected**

Maintaining good relationships matters more than anything else for children in care, it can be damaging to children when strong relationships are broken. This can occur when children and young people move into a permanent placement, return to their birth family, through adoption or by leaving care. In some instances young people and previous foster carers are prevented from maintaining contact against both their wishes.

The Mockingbird programme provides stable environments and secure attachments for children in short and long term placements and hub home carers can play a vital role advocating for children and their former foster carers to maintain a relationship. Hub home carers, in discussion with the fostering service, may also be able to support this ongoing connection by inviting young people and their families to occasional constellation social events. This enables a lighter touch connection,

allowing children and young people to transition to a new living situation without experiencing loss of important relationships.