**Spotlight on Services – David Stephens 28/6/2023**

PFBA held a Spotlight in Services event on 28/6/2023 at Carlisle Business Centre. David Stephens, Service Manager Children’s Complex Health or Disability Team came along to give a presentation about his service and answer any questions that parents may have. We were lucky enough to have two young people join us at the event along with their parents.

Here are the questions that were asked and the responses that were given.

**Q: Are there any social workers that work in the preparation for adulthood (PfA) team?**

DS: Yes there are social workers that work in the PfA team. When a child gets to 16 the CCHDT team should refer to the PfA social workers. At this point, the child should have two social workers. One from each team. They should be involved in the annual review. Then, when the child gets to 18 the adult social care team take over. There is also the parenting and family support team. This service is involved with the children who don’t meet the criteria for statutory involvement. David is aware that there are gaps with SEND and the team try to advise other teams when the child they are working with don’t meet the CCHDT criteria. Starting in September, there is a new panel system where professionals can attend if they are stuck and don’t know what to do. The aim is to look at joined up working so people families don’t have to go through assessments.

**Q: Why are foster carers treated so badly?**

DS: We provide short breaks and personal budgets but there is a disparity between agency staff and personal assistants. The system has become impacted on the prioritisation of ability to work through agencies. It has to be needs led but our budget is overspent. We wouldn’t stop a support package but it has to be proportionate to need. It needs to be fair and equitable.

**Q: What exactly is a short break and why can’t we access one?**

DS: A short break can be anything from an activity to an overnight stay but it has to flow through the system. You have a right for a short break assessment. The SEN team has a short break team within it. If you have an EHCP you have a legal right to an assessment. Being honest, if you rang the front door today, SEND short breaks wouldn’t be in a position to offer anything. The short break offer is currently being looked at with Stu Barret of the SEN team. There are gaps between level 2 and level 4. The short break statement needs to be looked at as it doesn’t account for children with ASD and if all these extra children do come in to the service we need to think about where we are going to find the money and activities to cover this. There is a needs analysis being done to look at the entire offer for short breaks as lots of money is being spent on agency staff and there is a lack of PA support. This money would be better spent on running other school and holiday clubs.

**Q: Where does CCHDT come into the picture?**

DS: If a family is wanting a social worker assessment, contact the integrated front door. Speak to someone about what needs there are. They will be asked about the child and why a social worker assessment is needed. They are trying to find if needs can be met without having to go through the process of an assessment. If you’re struggling with complex needs, what are the impact of the needs and if an assessment is wanted and needed, they will get one. The conversation has to look at alternatives first such as early help. Early help needs to be better or we are going to end up with more unnecessary assessments. There are a shortage of PA’s and activities. We have gone from having 4 children’s homes to 2. There is a staffing issue. The offer has been impacted by limited resources and it has become quite a journey through assessment. There shouldn’t need to be an assessment to be referred to a behaviour service.

**Q: Are we moving away from having to prove that my child does this 100 times a day to be listened to?**

DS: Yes. The approach is moving away from needing a social work assessment to parents having support to avoid this. The system disempowers parents. There has to be a graduated approach and access to lower level care needs to be much easier in order to be able to identify the children with more complex needs who may require a social worker. Emma Hughes has been tasked to look at sleep and behaviour services. She is trying to bring together little pockets of work so that there is a universal and specialist offer that is easy to access so an assessment is not needed.

**Q: What happens when you are fully funded but need social care?**

DS: This hasn’t been decided yet. The two services work together but are built very differently. I have faced these scenarios before with complex cases. Young people get to age 17.5 and become 100% health funded. The rate of pay for carers is going up faster than the LA rate. We need to find and value PA’s more and pay them good money. Personal budgets are meant to give more control to parents.

**Q: I was offered a 1 day short break or 3-4 hours per week care package. Should I only get one? I had to pick**

DS: The social worker does the assessment and identifies what the child needs. Outcomes would have been looked at and a support plan completed. The offer goes to panel and agreed. Case will be closed. If needs have changed a new referral would need to be put in. The offer should be about quality of provision not hours offered. Money needs to be redirected to have better quality clubs and groups