

Foster Wales - CIPR excellence awards – Public Sector Campaign

30-word description

Foster carers are urgently needed for 5,000 children in Wales. Co-developed with 500 young people, carers and professionals, 'Bring something to the table' increased enquiries by 36% in one month.

1000-word entry

Brief:

Across Wales, there are over 5,000 children in foster care but only 3,800 foster families.

More foster carers are urgently needed.

Between 2020 and 2022 local authorities reported a 10% net loss in the number of people enquiring to become foster carers.

In January 2022 Cowshed were onboarded by Foster Wales - the national network of local authority fostering services - to support marketing and PR outputs.

In early 2023 development began on a fully integrated campaign to turn the tide on falling enquiry numbers. The campaign launched in January 2024.

Campaign Objectives:

- 1) Recruit 800 local authority foster carers. *(by 2026)*
- 2) Involve 25 real foster carers in campaign development.
- 3) Attract 30,000 new users to website *(by April 2024)*
- 4) Increase YOY brand awareness of Foster Wales +5%
- 5) Increase YOY positive sentiment towards local authority fostering +5%

Idea, research, and planning:

The campaign was informed by a year of insights gathered with Wales' diverse fostering community, to ensure authenticity and reduce barriers to application.

Insights gathered highlighted three key barriers to enquiring:

- 1) Not feeling skilled or experienced enough to make a 'big' difference to a young person's life.
- 2) Not feeling fostering could fit into current lifestyle (i.e. having children at home, having a full-time job.)
- 3) Misconceptions around criteria to become a carer (e.g. age, marital status, income.)

To combat these barriers, the campaign needed to signal support and professional development offered by local authority fostering teams, represent the diversity of carers, highlight the flexibility of foster care to meet a range of lifestyles, and focus on human attributes to instil confidence within those considering applying.

In addition to the in-person insights, 355 foster carers responded to an online survey, revealing the long-lasting impact that limited access to regular food and/or mealtimes has on a young person. This showed 65% of foster carers introduce a child to eating meals at a table.

Strategy, creativity, and innovation

Combined insights led to a creative concept using a table as a metaphor to indicate everyone has something to 'bring to the table' as a foster carer.

The campaign was planned with full integration across PR, television, radio, digital, and out of home. Integration went as far as discussions with Pobl Y Cwm script writers, months ahead of launch, to advise them on an upcoming fostering storyline, and ensure the storyline would feature on the day of campaign launch.

Three television adverts were developed, inspired by a real foster carer's experience, and each advert had an accompanying case study video featuring the foster carer in question.

The adverts were re-purposed for radio and digital output, with key images from the adverts used for out of home and printed collateral.

To ensure messaging uniformity across Wales, an additional 250 assets were created for every local authority, taking total number of assets produced to +400.

The PR strategy focused on the stories of foster carers featured in the adverts, and the statistics gathered via the insights and survey.

A launch event held at Newport Market brought each element of the campaign together, with foster carers treated to a live cookery demonstration by Celebrity MasterChef Winner, Wynne Evans, who developed recipes informed by findings of the survey.

Delivery/implementation of tactics:

January 2023: Consultation with foster care 'champions'

June 2023: Bi-annual YouGov Survey with 1,000 members of public.

July-August 2023: Focus groups with social workers, foster carers, care leavers.

September 2023: Campaign consultation with +100 foster carers at annual conference.

September - December 2023: Creative production, design, PR.

December 2023: Foster Wales online survey, 355 respondents.

January 8th 2024: Television live, radio live, PR live, digital and social live, local out of home live.

January 18th 2024: Launch event attended by +100 members of fostering community.

February 1st 2024: 1 month reporting, including latest YouGov results.

Measurement, evaluation and impact

In one month, the campaign has delivered the following results against objectives.

1) Recruit 800 local authority foster carers by 2026.

35.8% increase in fostering enquiries.

*One local authority reported **12 enquiries** progressing to home visits within a week (signalling quality enquiries)*

*Current forecasts indicate that by April 2024 the YOY net loss of enquiries will shift to **10% net gain**, putting us on course to exceed our target of +800 foster carers by April 2026.*

2) Involve 25 foster carers in campaign development.

*Over **500** foster carers, social workers and care experienced young people contributed to outputs. (+2000%)*

3) Attract 30,000 new users to website

***16,466** new users to Foster Wales website in Jan 24*

*+**51.9%** traffic to local authority websites*

*Forecasted to achieve **50,000** new users by April. (+166%)*

4) Increase YOY brand awareness of Foster Wales by 5%

*Jan 24 YouGov results show **+14.9%** brand awareness over 2 years, +7.5% YOY (+2.5%)*

5) Increase positive sentiment towards local authority fostering 5%

*Jan 24 YouGov results show **+5%** positive sentiment over 12 months (**KPI achieved**)*

In addition, the campaign has received **65 pieces of coverage**, amounting to **+120m OTS**, including extensive coverage in Welsh media, Metro, Mirror, Daily Star, and LBC Radio. This OTS is from earned media alone.

21 local authorities have shared campaign assets, with 5 LAs investing in additional out-of-home activations (bus campaigns, divi-vans, 6-sheets, billboards, and regionally targeted digital ads.) Stakeholders have extensively shared support for the campaign including The Fostering Network, Foster Wiki, Children and Young People Now and Week in Care. The campaign has been widely shared and praised by the Welsh Government who are using the campaign to shape the national narrative.

Meetings have been held with the UK Government's Department for Education to discuss how they could adopt the messages.

We have received 100% positive feedback from current foster carers and care experienced young people about the approach.

Ultimately, the 35.8% increase in calls in the first month of the campaign means there are now 143 more foster families going through the process of becoming foster carers.