



**CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019 GOLD WINNER**

**Category:** Public Sector Campaign

**Company:** Middlesbrough Council

**Entry title:** Fostering Campaign

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**Brief and objectives:**

The number of children going into care over recent years has increased at an unprecedented level, with significant impact for local authorities including Middlesbrough Council's Fostering Service. In order to meet these increased demands the Council had relied heavily on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's), who often placed children outside of the Middlesbrough area. This not only impacted on the emotional and mental wellbeing of the child, at a time when they need familiarity and stability, but also on the Council's budget as the cost of an IFA carer is significantly higher than if the child was fostered via Middlesbrough Council.

Responding proactively to this challenging situation, Middlesbrough Council's Marketing Service researched and subsequently developed a strategy aimed at delivering the following objectives:

- To raise awareness of the need for foster care placements in Middlesbrough
- To create interest in becoming a foster care placement in Middlesbrough
- To generate enquiries from a more diverse audience to meet the diverse needs of Middlesbrough's children in care
- To increase the number and range of foster care placements in Middlesbrough, with an emphasis on:
  - Young people - 11-16 years
  - Emergency placements
  - Sibling groups
  - Mother and child placements.

## **The idea, research and planning:**

Idea:

Six case studies would be written and made into short films which depicted emotive, situational fictional stories of typical foster children with different needs such as teenagers, young children and young mothers, as well as a film about an existing foster carer. Each case study would be representative of a Middlesbrough foster child, brought to life through emotive films. The films would be distributed to local and regional media with accompanying press releases. A website which would include an online quiz dispelling perceived barriers to becoming a foster carer would house the case studies and become the main source of enquiry generation.

Research:

Conducted by the Council's marketing team working collaboratively with the Council's Fostering Team to understand perceived barriers and motivations of potential Foster Carers.

Findings showed that overwhelmingly, the motivation to foster was derived from a need to help and make a positive contribution to children's lives and to the community. Meetings with Children's Services staff gave real life examples of children currently in care and the challenges they faced. Previous PR and communications activity had been un-coordinated, rooted in traditional media and lacking strong focus on the motivating factors evidenced through research.

Planning:

The team wrote case studies and corresponding story boards, liaised with a local film producer and local acting agency to create a bank of films. Press releases accompanied by films would be distributed to regional media and co-ordinated across social media platforms.

## **Strategy, tactics, creativity and innovation:**

Strategy:

We created a series of emotive films using local child actors to engage regional media which conveyed the primary message of 'bringing Middlesbrough children home' and which highlighted the struggle faced by local councils.

Tactics:

Storyboards used emotive and persuasive language, incorporating the key messages of the campaign.

Creativity:

The case studies were brought to life by the young, local actors talking directly to their audience about what they would like from a Foster Carer and in identifiable Middlesbrough locations. The distinct Middlesbrough accent matched with the softness of a child's voice resonated with viewers, the voices they heard could be their own sibling/child/grandchild.

Innovative:

The strong emotive messaging of 'bringing our children home', strategic, time bound social media and PR and the use of film is a new approach for the Council.

### **Delivery:**

The PR campaign was delivered in three stages based on the distribution of three key press releases and accompanying films:

Stage 1 - Introduced theme of the campaign, the children's characters and highlighted the role of the Foster Carer.

Stage 2 - Built on the emotional impact of stage 1 and highlighted two siblings in need of a Middlesbrough foster home.

Stage 3 - Seasonally led, based on Alfie, a 6 year old boy who wanted a family for Christmas. Released for maximum impact in December with the messaging 'bring a child home for Christmas'.

### **Measurement and evaluation:**

The campaign was positively received by regional media and received substantial coverage in the Teesside Gazette, BBC Tees, and Tyne Tees news. Collectively the five films were viewed over 18,000 times evidenced through social media analytics. The seasonal Alfie film generated the greatest response resulting in media coverage and a prime time feature on Tyne Tees news. The film was viewed almost 7,000 on Facebook alone.

Since the campaign launched in June 2018 there has been a total of 280 new enquiries from potential new foster carers from Middlesbrough, an increase of 180% on the previous annual period.

Of these enquiries, 75 have progressed to the fostering process. . The length of time of the fostering process (9 months) is now resulting in an increase in new foster carers, a child has now been placed with a new Middlesbrough foster carer who responded to stage 1 of the campaign, this is a child from Middlesbrough who no longer needs to be placed outside of the area, with potential huge impact on their social, health and mental wellbeing. It also saves the Council a substantial amount of money each time a child is placed in a local home.

### **Budget and campaign impact:**

Investment into the PR campaign totalled £10,400.

The campaign was positively received, generated extensive coverage and generated enquiries resulting in one child being placed and more foster carers currently in training.

The campaign delivered high ROI, cost per enquiry is £37, which given the life changing context of becoming a Foster Carer delivers significant VFM. The campaign impact will be

measured via the Council's budget, with the reduction in use of the IFA carers. We are 'bringing Middlesbrough children home'.