

Practice guide

Family Help & Children's Social Care

Children in care - Pause and Reflect Fostering

Background, purpose and rationale

Lancashire County Council's Pause and Reflect (PAR) Fostering arrangements ensure the fostering service can meet its sufficiency duty to provide the right homes for children, regardless of the complexity of their needs, amidst a national foster carer shortage. The journey to creating PAR began in 2022 with recognition of the need for a responsive and supportive system to offer immediate stability and emotional support to children, regardless of complexity of need, reducing the need for out-of-area and high-cost homes. The development process involved extensive research and consultations with experienced foster carers. A gradual increase in carers offering PAR, combined with feedback from these initial experiences, was instrumental in shaping the final, effective, and practical PAR model. Launched in February 2024, it provides enhanced fostering arrangements for children with complex needs. It offers a stable home for up to 28 days to allow children to reduce dysregulation and express their needs, promoting empowerment in their care journey.

What we did to improve children's outcomes and experiences

Application and assessment- an additional application process by potential foster families ensures suitability to offer PAR arrangement as carers need to be able to offer care to almost any child regardless of complexity of need. PAR professionals and foster families have time to understand the child and assess their needs informing longer-term care searches. Ensuring the right home is identified and the child is prepared and supported for this next planned move.

Policy and Support - a clear policy was devised for PAR arrangements, with a consistent multi-disciplinary support package for both the child and foster family and agreed parameters for when PAR arrangements would be offered ensuring effective resource management.

Evaluation - tools were created to capture the impact of PAR arrangements, including feedback from children, carers, and key professionals. This helps understand impact and ensures continuous improvement to the delivery of PAR arrangements, keeping them adaptive to needs.

What was the impact?

Since February 2024, PAR has provided homes to 29 children, predominantly living with their families prior to PAR experience, aged 8-17. PAR provides children with time and space to

pause and reflect on their experiences, helping them develop a better sense of self and understand their circumstances. Children feel safe and secure, with early therapeutic support supporting healthy attachments, leading to positive changes in behaviour and emotional stability, providing a more suitable emotional foundation for transition to a longer-term home. 90% of children achieve stability following PAR, demonstrating effectiveness in providing immediate, short-term care that facilitates smoother transition to more permanent arrangements. Children often maintain relationships with their PAR foster carers, providing ongoing support and stability even after the 28-day period.

Foster carers are given a voice as experts, providing a crucial role, enhancing decision-making for the child's best interests and ensuring they feel they have made a difference. A community of foster carers share experiences, work collaboratively with multi-agency teams and receive regular support to promote resilience and retention by helping carers manage challenges effectively. PAR also provides experienced foster carers an opportunity to use their skills without committing to long-term care plans, helping retain valuable carers who might otherwise consider retirement.

Pause and Reflect Fostering has provided a crucial safety net allowing for notable reduction in crisis situations and more thoughtful decision-making ensuring that children live in the most suitable homes without the pressure of immediate crisis intervention. By reducing the need for emergency bespoke arrangements and high-cost residential provisions, since February 2024 the service has saved 2.7million by providing 786 days of care within supportive family environments. Learning from PAR's collaborative support package is enhancing the wider fostering support approach and consideration is being given to how it could be reflected within Lancashire's residential service.

Resources

[One Page Summary for a Child](#)

[Expression of Interest Form](#)

[PAR Process Map 2025](#)

Find out more

Emma Bottomley, Family Finding Team Manager

E: emma.bottomley@lancashire.gov.uk