Case study: Jane

Jane is a newly qualified social worker who is employed in a fostering team; she has previous experience of working in this team as a final year student. She has completed several Form F assessments as part of her work, initially with close supervision from her line manager, Balbir, and more recently working independently. Balbir is also Jane’s supervisor for her ASYE and will be responsible for her ASYE assessment.

Jane’s evidence
Jane provides Balbir with a copy of a Form F assessment [see evidence 1] she has undertaken as evidence of her achievement against the ASYE domains.

Balbir’s assessment of Jane’s capability will require him to see the work she has done in its context. For example in relation to Domain 5 – ‘Knowledge: Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory’ Jane has stated that she has used theories of parenting derived from her knowledge of psychology and sociology in order to assess the couple who wanted to be foster carers. Balbir is interested in both what theories she used and how those theories are relevant to the work of the team. Balbir is a qualified and registered social worker and from his experience he understands which theories are relevant to this case and can make a judgement about how Jane has applied them.

In their supervision meeting he asks Jane about other ideas that she might have used and other assessments that she has undertaken. Jane talks about her experience of assessing a single, gay man to be a foster parent, identifying different ideas which informed her thinking and how she saw these as more relevant in that context. Balbir is interested in how Jane makes decisions about which ideas she uses and they talk about seeing evidence as a fluid concept which is tested and changes over time. Jane is able to give a good account of her thought processes and identify how her evidence base is evolving as she develops her own body of knowledge. Balbir makes a record of the discussion in his supervision notes [evidence 2].

What if things had gone differently?
If Jane had backed up her claim for achievement with a statement that she only uses one theory of parenting and when questioned had suggested that she only ever used that theory in all of her assessments, Balbir may well have had concerns. In interrogating her assessment of a single, gay man, he may have found that Jane had attempted to fit him to the theory and may have concluded that he was not a suitable candidate for foster care as a result. This may have led him to consider that Jane had not passed Domain 5 and indeed may not have passed other domains either.

This contextual knowledge provides evidence of capability. The important issue is not ‘does Jane use a theory to inform her practice?’ which might have been assessed at qualifying level, but ‘how does she use different ideas to inform her understanding of her social work practice?’ The knowledge domain of ASYE is more concerned with developing an understanding of the
range of theories and ideas that may inform specialist practice and applying them effectively than knowing one theory in detail and using it regardless of context.

**Holistic assessment of capability**
Producing evidence in the form of documentation provides a starting point for a discussion about the meaning behind the decisions that were made and allowing the candidate to reflect on and explore their understanding of the practice with which they are engaged. The role of the assessor is key to enabling this to take place.

A further complexity to consider is that assessment of capability should take place across all of the domains. Jane’s evidence of completing a Form F might apply across all 9 domains of the PCF at this level. For example Jane has stated that in assessing a single, gay man as a potential foster carer she had to be aware of ideas about sexuality, discrimination, and disadvantage. She may have put in place a strategy to bring such consideration to the fore and to address discrimination within her own work and that of others. This might have helped her to challenge ideas that came from others in the context of her work, e.g. comments from a teacher about the man submitted in a reference. This might cover evidence relating to Domains 2,3,4,6 and 7.

Balbir is interested in how Jane has made sense of the issues of sexuality, discrimination, and disadvantage and how by addressing them she has joined up the separate elements to develop a comprehensive method of practice. He might talk through with Jane issues such as ‘why did you challenge that?’ to see if she can provide a comprehensive narrative of her ideas, thoughts, feelings and actions. Her evidence of development as a relatively new social worker may include the fact that this is the first time she has encountered this situation as a practitioner and is testing out her own ideas to develop a model for her practice.

At the end of this conversation Balbir might conclude that Jane has sufficient evidence of achievement across six different domains of the PCF and is practising at a level consistent with the expectations of a new social worker in the fostering team. Jane can use this evidence and the record of her supervision meeting with Balbir as part of her Continuing Professional Development (CPD) record and, as she adds to the CPD record, she will want to show evidence of development against the other domains.

Balbir may also look for corroborating evidence in other work that Jane submits for consideration, so that he is confident that Jane is developing a consistent and capable level of practice within her work.

**Index of evidence for this case study**
1. Form F assessment copy p3
2. Balbir’s supervision notes p7
Case study ‘Jane’, evidence 1: Extract from Form F – Section B

Written explanation of the case

Joe and Sarah are aged 37 and 34 respectively. They have been together for 15 years but have never married. They have one son, Thomas, who is 12 years old. They have brought up Thomas together and have shared their parenting responsibilities. They both enjoy being parents and both have a love of children.

Joe is an IT specialist for a large computer firm; he works full time. Sarah works in customer service for a bank in the town where they live. She works part-time from 10.00am to 2.00pm during the week. Sarah was a registered childminder for five years. During this time she regularly cared for three children under the age of five during weekdays and also did school pick-ups for a number of older children. I have seen Sarah’s Ofsted reports from her time as a childminder and her inspections showed that she offered a good standard of care to the children.

Joe and Sarah first began thinking about becoming foster carers several years ago and they think that now is the right time for them as a family to begin the process of applying.

I met Sarah and Joe on ten occasions. They have had no contact with social workers before so I took my time to get to know them and gain their trust by carefully explaining my role to them and what the process of applying to be a foster carer would entail.

This was my third prospective foster carer assessment. The first two were completed with my line manager, Balbir; however Balbir thought that I was ready to work more independently on this case. I was confident about doing this but also aware that I was likely to need advice. I arranged to meet Balbir regularly so that I had the opportunity to reflect on and explore my approach to the case with him.

This case has allowed me to demonstrate my capability against a number of the PCF domains at ASYE level:

- Professionalism: Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development
- Knowledge: Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory
- Rights, Justice and Economic Wellbeing: Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic well-being
- Diversity: Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice
- Intervention and Skills: Use judgement and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse.
Analysis, evaluation and summary of key factors leading to the recommendation. This should identify the strengths, vulnerabilities and any areas for the applicant’s further development as foster carer/s.

Sarah and Joe are both well-educated, professional people who have been successful in their parenting of Thomas to date. Sarah clearly has a love of children which is evidenced through her time working as a childminder and her close bonds with Thomas and her brother’s children. She shared her childminding Ofsted reports with me and these confirmed that she is able to care successfully for children. She is informed about attachment theory and various theories of child development and she also demonstrated an understanding of the challenges that having a child looked after by a childminder can bring to child and parent. She gave several examples of how she had dealt with children who had felt “lost” initially when placed in her care and how she had dealt with one mother who, three months into an arrangement, had said she felt guilty about “abandoning” her child to a childminder. Sarah gave one of her former clients, whose child had felt “lost”, as a character reference. I confirmed Sarah’s success in integrating this child into her childminding setting when I visited the client.

I used my knowledge of parenting theories to understand how Sarah and Joe’s parenting experiences to date may be indicative of how they might parent a fostered child. The family have a routine: they have set mealtimes, rules about bedtime, they share household tasks and ensure that Thomas is involved in these. Joe and Sarah have recently begun to negotiate the sharing of household tasks with Thomas and they say this is beginning to work well. Thomas is supported by both parents to complete his homework at set times and is encouraged and supported to take part in extra-curricular activities. Based on this I concluded that Joe and Sarah have a good understanding of basic child care in terms of their parenting skills which suggest that they are able provide a secure, stable and safe home environment for a child. They also show that they work together as a family unit, for example through shared activities and tasks and having good routines. Their relationship with Thomas demonstrates good attachments exist.

However, I have concerns about Joe and Sarah’s lack of experience in caring for children with additional needs or behavioural problems. Neither Joe nor Sarah has had any experience of dealing with children with additional needs or behavioural problems. Thomas is achieving well at school and has no history of disruptive behaviour or truancy. They have only ever needed to use minimal discipline with him and he has not had any medical or emotional problems other than normal childhood illnesses. Parenting Thomas does not appear to have presented many significant challenges, as he is a well-behaved child who is achieving academically.

It is important that Sarah and Joe have a good understanding of different behaviour problems, possible triggers and the strategies they have used, or would adopt, for managing behaviour needs. I have recommended that they explore this within the Choosing to Foster course that they are attending. I have also given them a number of resources including reading materials, such as the written policy on managing behaviour, and DVDs to support their understanding. We agreed that they will use these resources to think about the behaviours they could encounter, how they might feel or
what the impact could be on their family life. I have also asked them to think about what they believe they will be able to cope with and what they will not be able to cope with.

I told Sarah and Joe that once they have completed the Choosing to Foster course and discussed the materials that I have given them, I could arrange a face to face conversation with local foster carers who have a child with such needs and who will be able to act as a mentor and support network. I recommend all this takes place before their foster carer application proceeds to the next stage. I also talked to them about the advantages of undertaking one of the Webster-Stratton courses run by a local voluntary agency.

Sarah gave up childminding due to financial pressures that the family had at the time. This initially raised concerns for me about the family’s financial situation so I explored this further in my next meeting with the family. It is important that a child is placed in a family that want to be foster carers for the right reasons and not for any financial gain, so I wanted to explore whether their application was financially motivated. I explained to Sarah and Joe what the fostering allowance will and will not cover. We have discussed, and I have checked, their mortgage stability and proof of earnings to ensure that any child placed with them would not be going into a financially unstable household resulting an unnecessary move later.

Joe and Sarah have been very open with me about their reasons for wanting to become foster carers. Both Sarah and Joe come from families that have close bonds, and see children as a central part of family life. Sarah has knowledge of the benefits of foster care from her mother’s experience as a child. These reasons were also apparent when I met and spoke with their extended family. Sarah and Joe have a large network of supportive family members, including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins who all live within the local community. I have met both sets of grandparents and Sarah’s brother and wife. They are all very supportive of Sarah and Joe’s application and are able and willing to help them. I am confident that this network will support the family on an on-going basis.

Sarah and Joe have clearly spent a lot of time in advance of their application thinking about how their family might be able to support a foster child and this is evident through their consideration of how their family life might need to adapt to accommodate another child. We were able to build on their initial thinking and explore this further through discussion about work-life balance, meeting the needs of children with different cultural backgrounds and how they might care for a child with additional needs.

Sarah and Joe’s son, Thomas, is a shy child and overall I have concerns about how he might engage with another child and how he might feel about a foster child becoming part of his close knit family at what can be a difficult age, based on my knowledge of child development theories.

I spoke to Sarah and Joe about my concerns and they agreed that I could meet Thomas on my own to gain a better insight into how much he understands about the application and how he feels. I met Thomas at his school so that he had space to talk to me openly without being interrupted or having to worry about being overheard. I thought it might take Thomas a while to feel comfortable talking to me so I gave him some questions to
read before we met so that he knew what to expect. In the meetings I took my time to get to know him and asked him about his likes and dislikes. Our meetings left me more reassured but I still think that Thomas may need support if the family are successful in their application. I have found out about support groups for birth children of foster carers and have shared these with Joe and Sarah. I am reassured that Joe and Sarah, with Thomas, have agreed to get involved with one of the groups that is in their local area, and I propose that this becomes an established activity before their application proceeds further.

Overall I think that Sarah and Joe have good prospects for being approved as foster carers. If following further discussion and meetings as described above they show evidence of a good understanding of caring for a child with behavioural problems or additional needs, I recommend that Sarah and Joe are supported to undertake training in positive care and control, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes, to improve their skills and understanding. The family also needs to be sure that Thomas will adapt to life in a foster family and I recommend that Thomas attends the support group for 6 weeks before this application proceeds to the next stage.
Case study ‘Jane’, evidence 2: Balbir’s supervision notes

Date:
Worker: Jane
Supervisor: Balbir

1) Welfare Check – inc A/L and TOIL

Workload – Jane feels she is coping with the level of case work allocated to her, she feels confident about the move to working more independently. Balbir has noticed that she is not coming to him so often with questions on legislation or to discuss her assessments and is able to make appropriate decisions on what she needs to ask guidance on immediately and what can wait for formal supervision.

Jane has 10 days A/L left and has not accumulated any TOIL. Balbir feels she is able to manage her workload appropriately. Jane agreed with this, she does have to make home visits to foster carers in the evenings sometimes, but she makes sure she manages her diary to use her hours flexibly, for example: following a late visit one night, she will come in later the next day.

Balbir agreed 5 days Annual Leave dates xxxxxxxxx

2) Training and Development

Jane has attended two in-house training courses since her last supervision

2a. Multi-agency Workshop with Health Visitors – half day

Jane explained that the purpose of the workshop was to get each service to understand the others duties and also as a networking and improving communication process between social care and health visitors.

Jane found the workshop very useful – she learnt a lot about what the Health Visitor Service provided in relation to support to under fives. She will use this knowledge when her carers need support with under five placements.

Jane also felt it had given her the opportunity to network with social workers from the Referral & Assessment and Safeguarding Teams. When looking at a case study, Jane was able to contribute to the discussion a foster carer’s perspective of including a parent in attending health visitors appointments or having the parent come to the home when the health visitor called.

2b. Communicating with Children – one day

Jane found the course was more focussed towards social workers working with children who were service users. Although she recognised that she would be meeting children on her visits to foster carers, they were not her clients. However, she found some of the direct work tools would be appropriate for working with prospective foster carer’s birth children. On reflection, she felt that these tools would have been really helpful in
working with Thomas (S & J’s son) because he was very shy. She had used a list of questions, but realises now that this might have been equally uncomfortable. Jane is going to use these on the new case she has been allocated where there are two children (discussed in more detail in Case discussion).

3) Case Discussion – Update on case since last supervision & discussion.

3a J & S Form F assessment

Last supervision actions

1. B had asked J to look at the issue of J&S’s understanding of the different behaviour problems children might present when coming into care and how they might need to deal with them differently from the strategies they have used with T.

Jane has used her study time this month looking at Neglect and Attachment Theories reading material. One in particular - Neglected Children: issues and dilemmas - has given her insight into how neglectful care contributes to children’s behaviour. On reflection, she feels that S’s experience of childminding does give evidence of her understanding of separation from birth families and how children need support in managing different boundaries, values and expectations in a foster home setting.

Jane has arranged to meet with J&S to explore this further. She is going to look at attachment development using Falberg’s theory of attachment and how this might manifest in children of different ages.

Action

1. Home visit to J&S to look in more depth at their understanding of behaviours problems, triggers they could encounter and what strategies they might use – timescale 2 weeks

2. Form F to be updated from the outcome of the home visit – timescale 4 weeks

3) Case Discussion – Update on case since last supervision & discussion.

3b Choosing to Foster Group

J is shadowing two social workers in the team who are running the preparation group. She has attended the first session – Introduction to Fostering Legislation

J found the opportunity to shadow experienced workers very helpful; she found she was nervous waiting for the prospective carers to arrive in case they asked her questions she wasn’t able to answer. However, when they arrived she was surprised to find that she had more knowledge than she realised and if she didn’t know an answer, she felt OK about telling them she didn’t know and asking one of her colleagues. B explored with J why she felt nervous. J said she thought they would expect her to know and if she didn’t, it would question her professional competence.
B discussed how this linked to professional development of skills and knowledge appropriate to experience.

B feedback that the workers felt J had shown good engagement skills with the carers. In the feedback session at the end of the evening J contributed good points of observation of the prospective carers, particularly in relation to an issue of a value based comment one person had made. J explained the person had said that ‘they were sure that a child would love to be in a family where they were loved and looked after’.

**Action**

1. J to continue to attend the Group

2. J and B to look at J preparing to co-work a Choosing to Foster Group within 6 months – to be discussed at next supervision.

**3) Case Discussion – Update on case since last supervision & discussion.**

**3c Assessment of D**

D is a 29 yr old single gay man who would like to foster older children. He is a professional artist who has a studio at home. He lives in a three bedroom house which he owns outright.

J has started the assessment and made two home visits. She has used the ‘Why you want to foster’ questionnaire with D.

D has described a childhood where he felt isolated within his family due to his recognising at an early age that his sexuality was different from others’. His teenage years were particularly difficult as he began to explore his sexuality and following his coming out to his parents and extended family there was a period of two years from 17 to 19 yrs where he had no contact with them. They have now come to terms with his sexuality and he describes the relationship as good, but contact is infrequent.

D would like to foster older children who are dealing with issues around their sexuality in particular, as he feels he can offer support which was not available to him when he was a teenager.

J discussed with B her feeling that she lacked sufficient knowledge or awareness of the issues of sexuality. J wondered how others would interpret D’s wish to specifically foster young people exploring their sexuality. J also felt she had initially had concerns about this wish in looking at the vulnerability of young people at this stage of their development. She feels uncomfortable bringing this up with D.

J asked if it was possible to co-work this case with a more experienced worker and also whether there was any specific training available where she could explore further her own awareness and thinking around issues of sexuality and gender.
Having discussed this case in more detail, B agreed that co-working the case would be appropriate.

**Action**

1. B to identify a worker in the team to co-work the case – timescale 1 week
2. J to identify an external training course with an agency specialising in sexuality and gender training – timescale 1 month.

**3) Case Discussion – Update on case since last supervision & discussion.**

**3d B & C – Link Fostering case**

B (60) & C (62) having been fostering for 25 years. They have had two children aged 5 & 7 placed with them for 3 years. J took over the role of link supervisor when she joined the team.

J made a supervising visit last week. She has identified 2 possible concerns that she wanted to discuss in supervision.

1. B & C did not express any concerns about the placement but whilst she was there she observed the children being very demanding and B looked tired. She told B she looked tired and B said that she had been feeling tired lately and had been to see her GP who had prescribed her a tonic. She also admitted that she was finding the children more difficult to manage and they had discussed retiring from fostering when these children left them. She said this in front of the children although they were watching tele at the far end of the room.

2. When C came home from work he made a comment to the children ‘If you aren’t quiet, Auntie B will be ill’. J felt this was inappropriate, but didn’t feel able to challenge him at the time.

**Discussion on:**

1. B asked J what were her concerns. J felt that the children’s behaviour could be attributed to their anxiety about B’s health and whether they would have to leave. C’s comments would have compounded this. Escalation of their behaviour will impact on B’s health and the possibility of the placement breaking down.

2. B asked why J felt unable to challenge C. J explained that on an earlier visit she had challenged C about a comment he made with regard to ‘If the children were rude to him at any time of the day, they would have to go to bed 1 hour early’. She had tried to discuss with him whether a 5 year old would understand a punishment at the end of the day for something that occurred in the morning. C had dismissed her point of view stating that he was an experienced foster carer and nobody had challenged this before, he felt it was a good parenting approach.

**Actions**
1. J will speak to the children’s social worker and undertake a joint visit to talk to B about her present situation and look at possible additional support for a period. – Timescale 2 weeks

2. J to ask the social worker to discuss with her manager undertaking a piece of direct work with the children on their feelings at present – Timescale 2 days

3. B and J to role play how J will manage challenging/raising concerns with C for her next visit. J to use the visit to re-visit attachment theory with B&C to discuss how the current situation might be affecting their behaviour. – Next supervision.

4) AOB including General issues

B would like J to feedback to the team about the multi-agency workshop – agreed for next Team Meeting.

J has two Form F’s ready for checking – agreed she will send them to B by the end of the week.

**Next Supervision**      **Date:**              **Time:**

**Signed by**    Social Worker:         **Date:**

**Signed by**    Supervisor:          **Date:**

This fictional case study is provided by Skills for Care and the Department for Education, © 2012. It can be copied for the purposes of administering the ASYE, but must not be published for sale.