



Statement of Purpose

Children First

URN Number: SC034253

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Introduction

This Statement of Purpose for Children First Fostering Agency has been developed and produced to meet the requirements of the following legislation and guidance:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 4: fostering Services (2011)
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- The Care Planning, Placement & Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The Care Planning, Placement & Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Assessment & Approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations, Volume 4 Fostering Services (July 2013)
- Children and Families Act 2014

This Statement of Purpose is submitted to Ofsted. It is provided and made available to employees, foster carers, local authorities, children and young people placed and their parents via our website

A hard copy can be provided if requested. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed and agreed annually by the Registered Manager and the Senior Management Team.

Children First was initially founded in April 1999, and became part of the National Fostering Agency Group as a partner agency, in 2009.

Children First provides local placements to children and young people. We have approved foster carers across a large geographical area including London, Essex, Kent, Hertfordshire, Bedford & Norfolk. We have fully qualified social workers and staff strategically located to ensure that our foster carer's are fully supported, and that new applicants can be quickly assessed.

As of August 2023 Children First had 64 children and young people in placement and 50 approved carers.

The agency's latest Ofsted Inspection was in February 2022 and the agency is rated as "Outstanding".



Aims and Objectives

“Children always come first”

Children First will help all children and young people placed to feel safe, nurtured and happy, so they can enjoy their lives and reach their full potential.

The primary aim of Children First Fostering Agency is to put children and young people first, by offering a child-centred service. At Children First the physical and emotional safety and wellbeing of the child or young person in care is always our priority. We offer a high quality and professional service, having built up good relationships with our stakeholders, by ensuring careful selection and management of foster carers, and through careful matching of children and young people.

We are dedicated to measurably improving children and young people's lives and future outcomes through:

- Giving the children we work with a voice
- Working openly and in partnership with commissioners and local authorities
- Ensuring we recruit skilled, committed and personable staff, and foster carers
- Providing outstanding support to carers and children
- Ensuring staff have strong engagement with both the children and foster carers
- Committing to the continued development of our professional team of staff and foster carers

Children First Fostering Agency aims to support the statutory framework and the associated codes of conduct. All the policies and procedures are written and subsequently monitored and reviewed, with reference to these codes and legislation and this is embedded into all aspects of practice, training and development.

Children First Fostering Agency provides a range of child-centred activities and events for both children in care, birth children, and our foster carers. We also offer carers individual activities to reward them for their hard work and commitment. We value spending quality time together building and maintaining relationships.

Our Objectives Include:

- Working creatively and in partnership, with local authorities and agencies to find the right caring solutions for children and young people
- Broadening the choice of services on offer to children, young people and their families who are in need of support, responding to need, for example recruiting Parent & Child carers, and carers who are able to accommodate large sibling groups
- Promoting the health and welfare of all children and young people placed with the agency in line with The National Minimum Standards, which underpins our practice
- Providing a workforce who is appropriately qualified, experienced and registered with the professional regulatory bodies. The agency is committed to continuous professional development for all employees and foster carers.
- Offering a service to carers and young people so that they will be supported 24 hours a day and 365 days a year by the supervising social workers, backed up by the Team Manager and Registered Manager of the agency.

Company Status

Children First Fostering Agency is an independent fostering agency established in April 1999 that aims to provide fostering placements for children and young people from birth to 18 years, and if necessary, Staying Put beyond their 18th birthday.

Children First Fostering Agency forms one of the partner agencies of the National Fostering Group. Whilst Children First Fostering agency is one of the partner agencies, the agency retains its own identity and is responsible for its own day-to day operational duties and responsibilities. The agency provides long-term, short-term and respite, bridging, emergency placements, in addition to parent and child placements. Children First is centrally managed from the head office in Basildon, Essex.

Senior Management Objectives

Children First Fostering Agency reports to the National Fostering Group Executive Team and Senior Management Teams.

They are also responsible for setting performance targets and the subsequent monitoring, in addition to ensuring the legal compliance of the organisation.

Children First is registered with Ofsted URN SC034253.

Children First is the preferred provider for a number of local authorities and provides placements in London, Essex, Bedford, Kent, Hertfordshire and Norfolk areas.

Ofsted inspected the agency in February 2022 and judge the agency as "Outstanding".



Commitment to Equality and Diversity

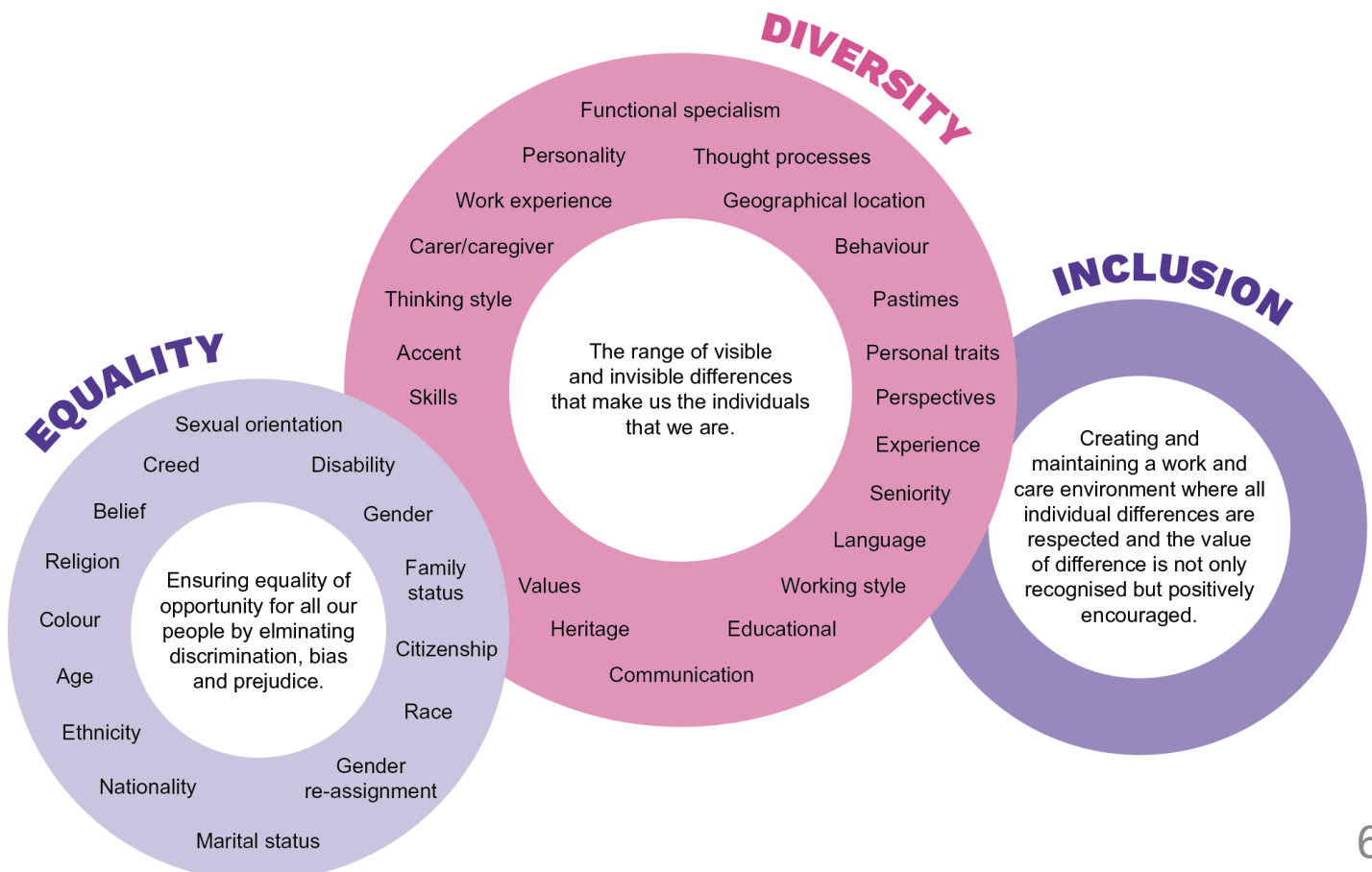
At **Children First Fostering Agency** we recognise the diverse society and communities in which we all live and work. We embrace diversity and promote inclusion and equality of opportunity. We aim to recruit people from all backgrounds to reflect the demographics of the regions we cover.

We are aware however, that discrimination, prejudice, unfairness and oppression exist in every aspect of daily living, including education, employment, health and social care. We are committed to enabling all children and young people, foster carers and employees to reach their full potential as individuals, unimpeded by discrimination, unfairness or oppressive behaviour within the organisation.

We want all children and young people in our placements, our foster carers and their birth children, and employees to feel valued and treated equally and fairly. Our goal is to ensure our values are embedded in our day to day working practices with all our stakeholders and service users. As an agency we celebrate difference with our diverse group of carers, children and staff to embrace and learn about each other's cultures and traditions.

Our Equal Opportunities Policy and Strategy aims to raise awareness of discrimination at all levels. It clearly explains how everyone is responsible for ensuring their behaviours and actions are in accordance with the policy. We educate and equip carers and colleagues with the knowledge and tools to promote anti-racism and value diversity and inclusion. All employees and carers complete a mandatory Diversity and Inclusion training course.

Diversity is a variety of characteristics and we want to continue to develop different ways of thinking and working. Evidence of discriminatory behaviour will not be tolerated and will be dealt with swiftly and appropriately. We will continue to review and monitor our performance as an equality-focused organisation. We know that diversity, as well as different perspectives and backgrounds, will strengthen our ambition to deliver positive outcomes. We share a belief in coming together to support each other and to take action to build incredible futures for the children and young people we care for and educate; and for all our colleagues. We are at our best when we are unified as One Team.



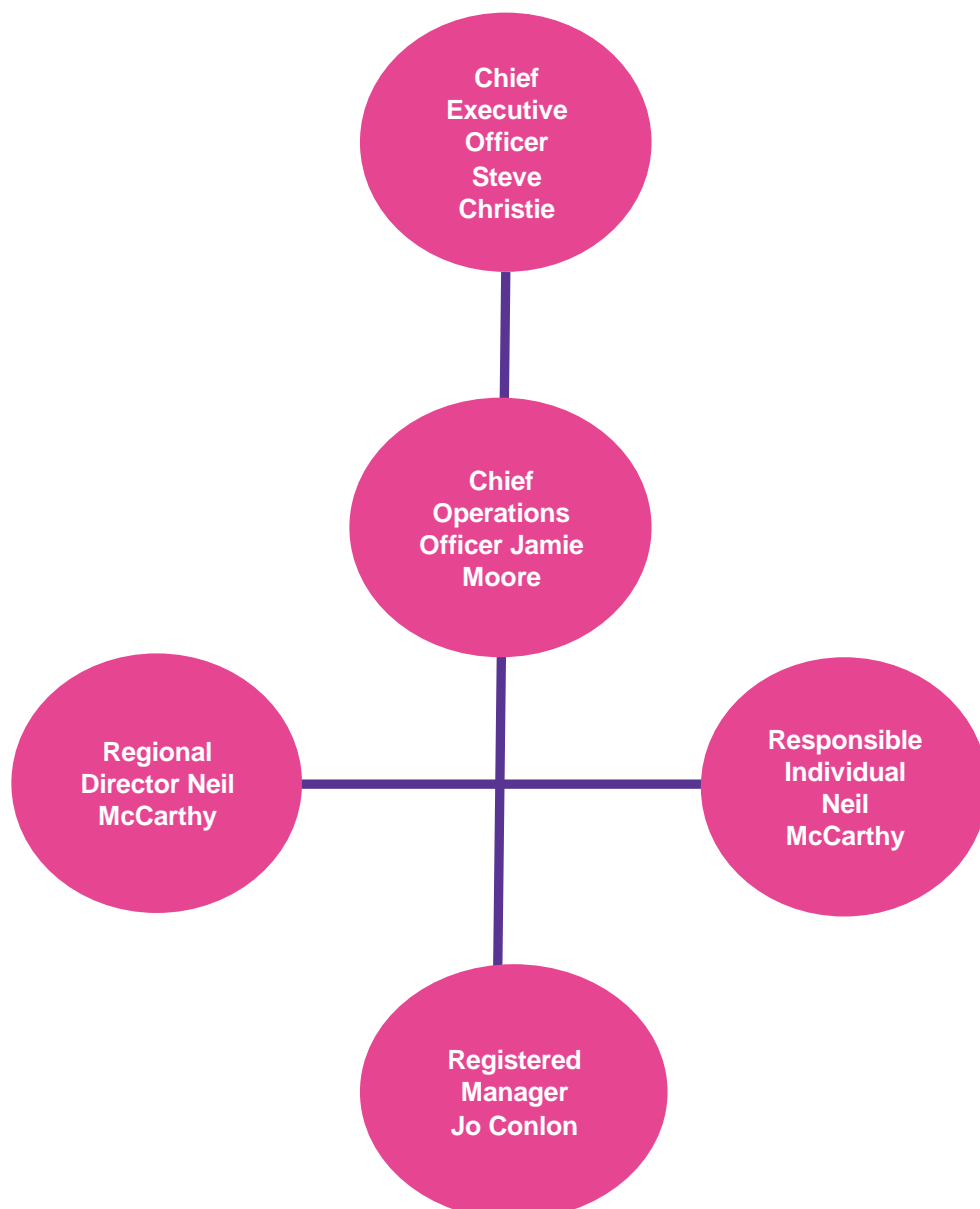
Management and Regional Team Structure

Senior Management and Directors

The Registered Manager of Children First Fostering Agency meets with the Regional Director on a monthly basis to discuss developments that have taken place in the agency and to look at the progress that has been made in line with the annual Business Plan. A Business Review meeting is also held annually with the agency's Social Work staff, Team Manager, Registered Manager, the Regional Director and the Chief Operations Officer of the National Fostering Group.

Management Structure

The Children First senior management group have experience and expertise in the field of fostering and social care. The senior management group meets monthly and is responsible for all strategic and operational aspects of Children First. The Registered Manager is responsible for the overall operation of the agency and of the services to foster carers, children and young people.



Management and Regional Team Structure

The Staff Team

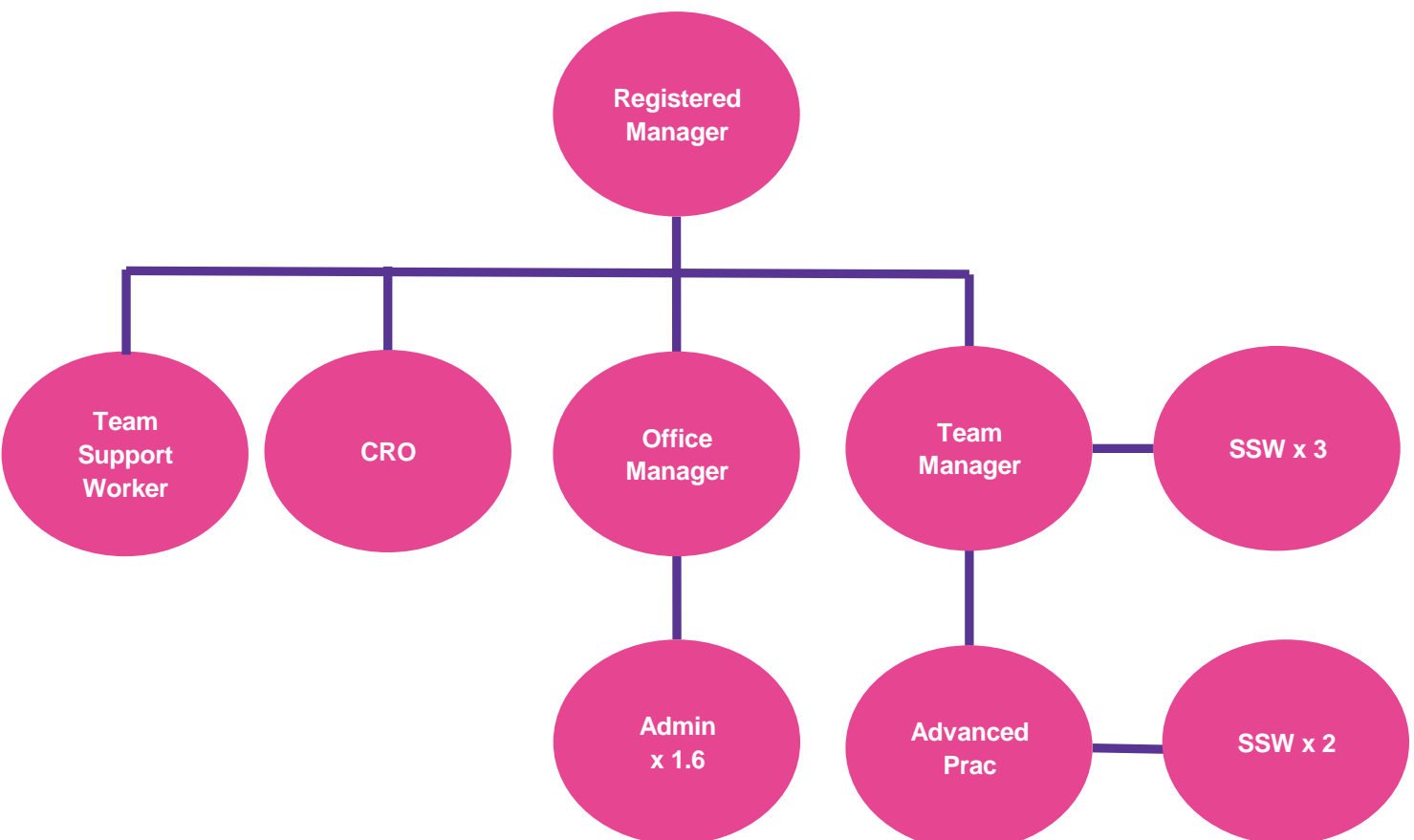
The registered office is based in **Basildon, Essex** covering a wide geographical area across London, Essex, Kent, Hertfordshire, Bedford & Norfolk.

The Children First Fostering Agency Head Office is located in Basildon, Essex, where the Office Manager and administrators are based, as well as the Registered Manager, Team Manager, Advanced Practitioner and Supervising Social Workers who cover all areas, working on a hybrid basis. The agency also has a Carer Recruitment Officer and Team Support Worker who are involved in child and carer engagement and carer recruitment activities.

Finance, Human Resources, Quality Assurance and Training Support are provided to Children First Fostering Agency from qualified and experienced staff centrally based within the National Fostering Group.

The agency has a designated Referrals Coordinator managing placement referrals from the National Fostering Group Placement Team Hub.

The Registered Manager and Team Manager hold recognised professional social work qualifications and all supervising social workers hold a recognised professional social work qualification and Social Work England registration. Children First Fostering Agency social work employees are all experienced practitioners with a wide range of post-qualification experience in the private, voluntary and statutory sectors.



Management and Regional Team Structure

The Regional Director

The Regional Director is responsible for the management of the NFG's fostering service in a regional area. The Regional Director is the Responsible Individual and is involved with the development and implementation of the strategic aims and objectives of the organisation as a whole, and they meet monthly with the Registered Manager for 1:1 Supervision.

The Registered Manager

The Registered Manager is responsible for the overall operation of the agency, including producing the agency's Development Plan which includes business plans, achieving key business, safeguarding and service delivery outcomes whilst maintaining budgetary control. She is also involved with the development and implementation of the strategic aims and objectives of the organisation and meets monthly with the Regional Director. The Registered Manager ensures that all practice is in accordance with agency policy and procedures and contributes to the review and updating of these. The Registered Manager oversees auditing and monitoring of the service to ensure it is of the highest standard. She also monitors and advises on serious complaints and allegations and ensures the appropriate procedures are followed and safeguards are in place.

The Team Manager

The Team manager supports the Registered Manager with all aspects of operational responsibility in the agency. They are responsible for the matching and management oversight on cases and ensuring foster carers, children and young people are supervised and supported to promote positive outcomes. In conjunction with the Registered Manager, the Team Manager undertakes auditing, ensures compliance with Fostering Regulations and Guidance, and a high level of consistency and quality with regard to all service provision. They manage the social work team and contribute to learning and team development.

The Advanced Practitioner

The Advanced Practitioner manages SSWs in the team and runs monthly SW Practice Clinics which promote therapeutic, trauma-informed practice, and learning through reflection and group supervision. She supports all aspects of service delivery in conjunction with the Team Manager, including monitoring compliance, the SSW duty system, case management and daily functions. She has been with the agency for 16 years.

Supervising Social Workers (SSWs)

The SSW's undertake the assessment, support, supervision and annual review of foster carers. They support with carer recruitment activities and complete Form F assessments. The SSW's work in partnership with the LA social workers and develop relationships with the children to ensure good outcomes. They attend all meetings for fostered children. SSW's also support training and development and run support groups for foster carers. The SSW's provide 24/7 Out of Hours support to foster carers with management oversight.

Carer Recruitment Officer

The Carer Recruitment Officer is responsible for supporting the Registered Manager with implementing the agency's recruitment strategy, organising recruitment events and carer activities. They screen potential foster carers and see them through their fostering journey and ensure they have a buddy carer in place to support them.

Team Support Worker

The Team Support Worker assists and supports the SSWs, carers and children to ensure placement stability. They run the Children and Young Persons Council and coordinate and contribute to the activities and events arranged by the agency, including recruitment tasks. The Team Support Worker supports young people with independence skills, produces the agency's quarterly newsletter and works with the Registered Manager to promote consultation with children and foster carers.

Office Manager

The Office Manager has been with the agency for 23 years and her responsibilities include oversight of the administration operations within the agency, including managing the administration staff, completion of all admin and compliance tasks, data reporting, panel functions, and delivery of an outstanding service to children and foster carers.

Administration

The Administrators are responsible for the administration of the office, team, foster carers and fostering panel and assist the Registered Manager. They undertake all tasks essential to the daily functioning of the agency as directed by the Office Manager.

Referral Co-ordinator

The Referral Co-ordinator works within a central hub, based in London. They are responsible for managing incoming referrals and working with local authorities in identifying the most suitable placements. They operate the CHARMS system, for initial matching of referrals with foster carers, using a wide range of criteria. They are also responsible for collating data and coordinating the contracts and finance for placements.

Education & Therapeutic Support Services

Education and Therapeutic support to the agency, carers and children is delivered on an individual basis according to need and provided by suitably qualified and experienced professionals commissioned to undertake the work. The education of fostered children is monitored and where necessary, support is provided to foster carers through guidance and attendance at PEP meetings if necessary. Clinicians offer consultations and direct work with foster carers, these interventions are dependent on the needs of the carers and/or the children they are caring for to enhance their skills and resilience in meeting the needs of children and young people placed.

Services Provided by the Agency

Children First Fostering Agency works closely with a number of Local Authorities to understand their specific needs relating to foster placements in particular areas. The agency look to recruit foster families from a range of backgrounds who are able to provide the best possible homes for fostered children in the care of Local Authorities. The types of placements provided are:

Emergency

Many of our foster families can provide unplanned emergency placements for individual children or sibling groups. Referrals can be made both within office hours, and through our Out of Hours service.

Respite/Short Breaks

We have a number of foster carers that can provide respite placements either on a regular basis or one-off holiday breaks.

Short term

Short term foster placements vary in duration but can be for up to a couple of years as they are often linked to further assessments of the child, family or connected persons. Often short-term foster placements can involve court processes that consider the long-term plans for fostered children, which can take time.

Bridging

Many of our foster families can provide placements with foster carers who are experienced in bridging children to adoption, permanence or independence. Bridging placements form part of the long-term plan for the child and usually last up to 2 years.

Long Term/Permanence

Many of our foster families like to offer long-term stability for fostered children by offering long-term or permanent care for them .i.e. until they are 18 and through into adulthood.

Parent and Child

Some of our foster families can offer support to children and their parents for periods of time. Typically, in these scenarios foster carers will also be assisting Local Authorities with their assessments by providing information relating to parenting capacity/capabilities.

Solo Placements

If the placing authority requires the child/young person to be the only placement, this would need to be clearly identified and discussed at the referral stage to enable appropriate matching with skilled foster carers.

Sibling Placements

Many of our foster carers have the skill, experience and accommodation to care for large sibling groups, enabling fostered children to stay together. This is always undertaken in line with matching considerations and the care plan for the children.

Unaccompanied Children and Young People

Some foster carers have developed the skills and experience for providing placements to fostered children who are unaccompanied from overseas, enabling these children to settle and engage in education and positive family experiences.

Staying Put

Refers to the arrangements whereby young people aged 18 and older that were previously looked after remain living with their former foster carers. This is discussed with the young person and agreed with foster carers who want to continue to support them to adulthood.

Bridge to Foster

Bridge to foster is a specialist wrap around package of support and clinical input to support children and young people transitioning from residential to live in a family. Set across four stages, the package reduces in support and levels of clinical input as the child settles and the placement is felt to be stable. Increased social work support ensures foster carers can share any concerns and develop new approaches to working through the challenges of helping children adjust to family life.

Invictus

A specialist placement providing clinical assessment and work directly for the child and foster carer/s. Children and young people sometimes need extra support through work with a clinician and this usually is a referral to an external clinical resource such as CAMHS. Accessing such services can bring delays in the foster carers obtaining the extra support needed for the child. With a dynamic training package, Invictus aims to equip foster carers with the knowledge to build on existing skills.

Matching

All Children and Young People are closely matched to ensure that their needs are met by our skilled and experienced Foster Carers. At Children First we recognise that all children and young people are different and thus all placements are unique.

Our dedicated Referral Co-ordinator is on hand to assist Local Authorities in finding the right match for children or young people, they work closely with the Supervising Social Workers, Foster Carers and Local Authorities to ensure the best possible matches are made.

The robust matching process will consider the child's needs especially regarding the following key areas:

- Safeguarding
- Schooling/Education
- Expectations around contact, particularly in relation to the foster carer's part in facilitating and/or supervising such contact
- The child's identity/race/culture/religion
- The child's history
- The child's behaviour
- The child's health
- The focus of the placement
- Risk Analysis

The matching process will also consider the carer's availability and:

- Their experience / knowledge / skills
- Their address and the distance from the foster home to the child's school / local authority
- Any other children in the placement
- The foster carer's own children and other family members

Children First Fostering Agency will not propose a placement if the assessed needs of the child cannot reasonably be provided for by the potential foster carers.



We match using a sophisticated database against many criteria and in consultation with our experienced social work staff, so that the placement offered is matched as closely as possible to the child or young person.

All matches are signed off by a qualified social worker and manager.

National Fostering Group

Children's Pledge

Our Pledge To You. We Will:

Keep you safe and care well for you

Ensure you live in a safe and homely place
Listen to you, particularly when you raise concerns about your safety or the quality of your care
Ensure that those people who care for you are trained and supported to keep you safe
Make sure you are prepared for the next stage of your life – including managing money, looking after your health and taking care of where you live

Help you get a good education (achieve and enjoy)

Make sure your education meets your needs
Help you to attend your education provision and make good progress
Have high expectations for your potential
Celebrate your educational achievements
Help those who care for you to have the right advice to support your education

Help you be healthy and enjoy life

Help you to be physically and emotionally well
Support you to take part in clubs and/or hobbies that interest you
Support you to make healthy eating decisions and to cook healthy food
Help you to socialise with your friends (as long as this is safe)
Support you to take part in exercise and have fun

Support your future and your next adventure

Help you to take part in positive activities
Support you to undertake work experience
Help you to find employment, an apprenticeship or to study further
Support you to take part in an adventure when you reach sixteen

Small steps, big outcomes.

Consultation and Support for Children and Young People

Children & Young People's Rights

As a partner agency of the National Fostering Group, Children First supports UNICEF's mission statement to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. In doing so, the agency, its staff and foster carers will uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Participation and Consultation

Children First is committed to the inclusion of all stakeholders in the review and development of its services. The views, wishes and feelings of children and young people are vital to ensuring the services meet their needs and remain relevant in a changing environment. Consultation takes various forms either through questionnaires, online surveys, consultation events, activities and feedback forms for carer annual reviews and CLA reviews.

Support for Children in Our Care

Children placed with Children First come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences and it is imperative that they receive the highest standards of care to enable them to aspire and achieve in our care. To this end Children First follows a clear online manual of policies and procedures that outlines the standards expected from all foster carers and staff. In addition, when the Local Authority and agency have agreed that an identified foster carer can meet the needs of a child; a placement contract is made agreeing the duration and objectives of the placement. Wherever possible The Local Authority Social Worker, the child and their parents (if considered appropriate) are invited to a pre-placement meeting. This gives an opportunity to meet and create a Foster Placement Agreement/Care Plan. It is expected that the Child's Social Worker will bring documentation to the meeting.

All children and young people placed will receive a copy of the Children's Guide at the time of placement and will be supported to understand the contents of this via their foster carer, or the SSW. Supervising Social Workers will see each child placed on a regular basis (at least quarterly) to ascertain their views about their care and placement. During these visits, the Supervising Social Worker will also inspect the child's bedroom to ensure that it is as it should be and appropriate to meet their needs.

Services available for children can include:

- Support to find a hobby, sport, interest
- Support with the development of independence skills
- Bespoke individual 1:1 work to address an assessed need
- Group work to address thematic issues e.g. use of social media
- Social events and activities for both children looked after and those who foster e.g. arts and craft activities, cookery competitions, festival celebrations.
- Life story work.

Physical Environment

At Children First, we pride ourselves on the standard of our foster homes providing safe, stimulating, caring environments, where there is a focus on health, education, protection, continuity, diet and stimulation. All children have their own bedroom unless the Placing Authority has given permission for them to share (in the case of siblings or holiday accommodation). Children are encouraged to individualise their rooms.

It is a requirement that all children are provided with a quiet area for study within the foster home and have access to a computer and the internet (where appropriate). All foster homes are assessed for a healthy and safe environment on an annual basis, which is routinely monitored through monthly supervisory visits. Play areas are safe and enclosed and all play equipment is checked to ensure it is in good working order.

Consultation and Support for Children and Young People

Boundary Setting

Each foster home has their own Family Safer Caring Plan which highlights boundaries and expectations within each home. Risk assessments and strategies relating to each child's circumstances and behaviour are agreed in the child's Placement Agreement & Care Plan, and incorporated within their risk assessment, which is completed at the commencement of the placement.

Policies on sanctions control, restraint and complaints procedures are available to children, parents and professionals as required. These policies are imperative to ensure that behaviours are responded to in a consistent and fair manner. Any form of corporal punishment is forbidden. Foster carers strive to offer a consistent environment and the role models that children require.

Healthy Care

In partnership with the foster carer, Social Worker and Health Authority, the individual health needs of each child in the agency are met consistently. Wherever possible fostered children will continue using their own health resources, but if this is not possible children will be:

- Registered with a GP
- Registered with a dentist
- Registered with an optician

Children First Fostering Agency has policies on keeping, administering, and the recording of medication which each foster carer is expected to adhere to; this is monitored by the foster carer's Supervising Social Worker and the Registered Manager. Foster carers encourage children to eat a varied diet. Special dietary requirements are written into the child's Placement Plan/Care Plan. Foster carers encourage children to participate in regular exercise to ensure the development of good physical, emotional and psychological health. Children are encouraged to attend out of school activities to enable them to widen their social circle and develop any talents, interests and skills they may have.

Our foster carers will:

- Encourage children to eat a varied diet – any special dietary requirements are written into the Child's Plan/Care Plan
- Encourage and enable children to participate in regular exercise to ensure good physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing
- Ensure that fostered children attend routine and required health appointments and annual health assessments, dental and optician appointments
- Ensure that fostered children receive all required childhood immunisations
- Ensure that young people have access to sexual health information and advice to make informed decisions and choices
- Take the time to listen to young people, giving them an outlet to share emotions, thoughts and feelings to promote positive emotional wellbeing.

Therapeutic Support Services

We believe that children and young people have a right to access therapeutic provision from Local Health Authorities. We have developed good working relationships with health colleagues in each local area and will access local provision wherever possible. If children cannot access local provision due to the timescales involved, or the complexity of the situation; the agency can commission the services of suitably qualified, experienced and accredited professionals to undertake the work e.g. play therapists, child psychologists, art therapists.

Education

At Children First, we believe that all children and young people have the fundamental right to experience an appropriate education which enables them to meet their potential. Our aim is to ensure that every child placed has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in place which is monitored and reviewed at regular intervals by the child's school, social worker and carer. Foster carers should be fully included in this review process. In addition, the agency will work with schools and placing authorities to ensure that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), have been appropriately assessed to determine the need for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Consultation and Support for Children and Young People

Educational goals are important to build a firm foundation of academic and social learning to enable children to aspire and achieve their full academic potential, including formal qualifications. Where possible, children are enrolled at local schools and have the opportunity to form friendships and participate in extracurricular activities in the local community. The agency expects the Local Authority to provide teaching hours/alternative educational provision for those children without a school placement or can source bespoke educational packages at additional costs.

Contact with Friends and Relatives

Children First ensures that each child in our care is encouraged to maintain contact with those most important to them. We can provide facilities, by arrangement, to ensure a child is able to meet with their family, friends, or professionals involved with them, in privacy. Contact arrangements form part of the child's overall Placement Plan/Care Plan. We would expect to be informed of any changes by the child's Local Authority. Transport to and from contact locally is the responsibility of the foster carer but needs to be negotiated to ensure each child's needs can be met by the foster carer (particularly if they have other children in placement) and that all parties remain safe.

Foster carers encourage children to make positive lasting friendships and will facilitate friends for visits and outings when appropriate. Foster carers contribute to informal contact arrangements with siblings looked after by other foster carers.

In accordance with applicable legislation, standards, regulations and guidance, the agency looks to work with the fostered child's parent(s) and significant others. We understand the importance of meaningful involvement and the significant impact that this can have on the child or young person's life. Our staff members and foster carers are experienced in working with birth families in a way that positively recognises and respects their involvement.

Unauthorised Absence and Missing

All foster carers have access to the agency policy on children who go missing. If there are issues of risk, vulnerability or child sexual exploitation, then a strategy will be discussed and agreed with the Child's Social Worker, young person and foster carer. This is to ensure appropriate safeguards and supervision are in place, to further improve risk awareness and facilitate risk reduction. The agency will request the Local Authority conducts Return Home Interviews following all missing episodes.

Safeguarding Procedures

Children First has safeguarding procedures in place which are in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children to safeguard and protect the welfare of all children. All staff and foster carers are required to fully adhere to these procedures. Where there is a need to review any safeguarding practices to ensure safe care is provided, this will be done in consultation with the Children's Social Worker, foster carer, and fostered child (where possible). The agency will respond immediately to any safeguarding concerns, prioritising the safety of children and communicating with the Local Authority and all other necessary professionals involved in the care of children and young people. Safety Planning and Risk Management Meetings ensure a child-focused way of managing risk collaboratively and involve the child or young person where appropriate.

Consultation and Support for Children and Young People

Outcomes Support – details of additional support offered to children, young people and foster families

The statistics available tell us that care-experienced children and young people are less likely to achieve well in their studies, more likely to suffer from mental health issues, more likely to enter the criminal justice system or, as an adult, other social care systems. At the National Fostering Group, we are working hard to change this bleak picture on an individual basis for children and young people in our foster homes, and have dedicated support to help boost and improve outcomes. The additional resources can be accessed at any point, and the support offered aligns with our pledge to children and young people in one of our fostering families.

Education Support

The Group Education Lead can support with any education enquiry, big or small, from a simple question which needs answering, to getting directly involved in a case where a member of staff or a foster carer has been unable to get a suitable or appropriate educational outcome for their child or young person.

- Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND) support
- Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) support
- Support with exclusions, Personal Education Plans (PEPs), new schools, transition etc

This work is always sensitively undertaken, with the needs of the child and young person and a sense of what the desired outcome should be, at the heart of the support delivered.

Contact: Hannah Burson - hannah.burson@nfa.co.uk

Careers and Employability Support

This service can provide high-level support to social workers or foster families trying to find appropriate further opportunities for our young people. The service can also provide 1:1 Careers Advice and Guidance where necessary.

This is particularly important if:

- the young person is not currently in an education provision (NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training) or between education provisions
- the young person's current educational setting has not provided guidance at a suitable or appropriate level
- if opportunities for career guidance were missed by the young person/adult

Contact: Hannah Burson - hannah.burson@nfa.co.uk who will refer you to the service

Adventures Support

The National Fostering Group can support young people to:

- Undertake an award with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at the three levels of Bronze, Silver or Gold
- Join an expedition adventure with British Exploring Society

These opportunities allow young people and adults to acquire essential personal and social skills. It connects them to their communities and the great outdoors in a positive manner. These activities can help to support and boost other outcomes for young people.

Contact: Angela Golland – angela.golland@nfa.co.uk

Carer Recruitment, Assessment and Approval

Recruitment

Children First Fostering Agency are passionate about providing quality care and services based on mutual respect.

We pride ourselves on finding the closest possible match when children need to be placed in foster care. Each carer is rigorously assessed and constantly supported, trained and monitored to ensure the best possible outcomes for each child. We provide the following flexible services:

- Short and long term fostering placements
- Bridging and respite care placements
- Parent and child placements
- Sibling group placements
- Emergency placements
- Unaccompanied Minors Placements
- Disability placements
- Staying Put arrangements
- Form F Assessments
- Bridge to Foster arrangements

We underpin our placements services by:

- The recruitment of a diverse range of carers throughout Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedford and Norfolk areas
- Ensuring the assessment of carers is a robust and comprehensive screening process lasting between three to four months
- Statutory checks, including medicals and enhanced DBS checks
- Taking up extensive references (minimum of 3)
- Holding an Independent Fostering panel for recommendation for approval of potential carers

- Providing ongoing support to carers via a dedicated emergency support system provided by the Supervising Social Workers, Team and Registered Managers. The carers can access this facility 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year
- Regular training and development for carers, held in four different locations. Including a range of online training courses, virtual classrooms and face-to-face courses
- Holding regular support groups in 3 different locations

We work in close partnership with the Local Authorities ensuring we provide:

- Management, support, supervision and monitoring of placements, including placement planning meetings, PEP's and regular reviews
- Continuous assessment of carer's, including annual household reviews and updating of references, health & safety, medical checks, educational checks, household checks etc.
- Risk assessments and safe care policies which are regularly reviewed
- Special events and activities for carers, their own children, and for children in care



Carer Recruitment, Assessment and Approval

Recruitment

Children First is committed to recruiting a diverse range of foster carers who can meet and match the needs of our children and young people. The agency recruits individuals and families from different ethnic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds and from all areas of the regions in which we operate who can bring a variety of skill, knowledge and experiences to the fostering task.

Application Process

Children First website provides prospective parents with information, to help them make informed choices about fostering with this agency. Enquiries can be made online or by telephone, and a Pre Initial Visit Screening Call will be undertaken by a Carer Recruitment Officer within 2 days of enquiry and this information will enable a decision to be made about whether or not to proceed with the enquiry and send out an Enquiry Pack.

All applicants must:

- Have a spare room
- Be over 21 years of age
- Be able to provide transport for children e.g. school, contact
- Be able to keep detailed records relating to children placed
- Be able to attend all relevant meetings
- Actively promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- Have some IT skills

Initial Visits

Following the Initial Enquiry Screening Call, the Initial Visit (IV) will be arranged to take place at the prospective applicant's home by a suitably qualified and skilled member of the team. This provides an opportunity for the agency to share more detailed information with prospective carers around the realities of fostering, to answer any of their questions, and to view and assess the accommodation. The discussion will include an exploration of skills, knowledge and motivation to foster, and any practical requirements. Following the visit, a report is completed by the visiting worker. All IV reports are reviewed by a manager, and outcomes are shared with the prospective applicant, at which point an application to be assessed as a foster carer could be invited.

Transferring foster carers

We recognise that foster carers have choices and that in some instances decisions are made to move between approving agencies. In these circumstances, the Fostering Network Protocols are followed, and the agency works closely with responsible Local Authorities to ensure that the care experiences of any children in placement are not detrimentally affected by the transfer. It is not uncommon for foster children to remain with their foster carers following an agency transfer.

Annual Reviews

Each Fostering Household will have an annual foster carer review (AFCR), unless there are significant changes to their circumstances in which case we will conduct an early review at that time. These circumstances include:

- After the final strategy meeting of a Section 47 Child Protection Investigation involving a carer(s)
- Where allegations have been made regarding a carer(s) child care practice and no Section 47 investigation is pursued
- Where there has been a breakdown in the approved carer's relationship resulting in one carer moving out of the household. In this instance both carer's will be subject to review except where one/or both carers has given notice of an intention to resign
- Where a carer has started living with a new partner
- Where there have been significant changes to the carers' lifestyle
- Where a carer has been diagnosed with a serious illness
- Where there has been the death of a carer • Where a carer is not working in partnership with the agency, including a lack of engagement and attendance with training and continued professional development

The Supervising Social Worker is required to prepare a detailed report for the AFCR, in consultation with the foster carers. The report will seek and take into account feedback from the child/young person, their Social Worker, school, and other professionals involved in the child's care, including birth family (if appropriate). In addition, it should include the views of the carer's own children too, in particular those residing in the fostering household. The report should cover how the carers have met and progressed the outcomes for children and provide a clear picture of how the carer works with children and young people in their care.

The AFCR provides an opportunity for both the agency and foster carer to reflect on the past year and plan for the year ahead. This includes a full review of the individual carer's training and development needs, detailing any actions for the year ahead. The report makes a clear recommendation regarding continued approval, or any changes to the terms of approval, including the rationale and evidence to support those changes.

Following approval, the foster carers' first review report and every third annual review will be presented back to the Fostering Panel for their recommendations. All recommendations are presented to the Agency Decision Maker for decisions, and carers are notified in writing of those decisions



Supervision and Support of Foster Carers

Each foster carer has a named Supervising Social Worker whose role is to provide them with advice and guidance in relation to a child's care plan and placement plan. This professional relationship is valued by foster carers who welcome regular communication and time to discuss the fostering task, and the challenges and successes this brings. At Children First, we pride ourselves on the support provided to foster carers because we know the positive impact this will have on our children and young people.

Children First Supervising Social Workers have four principal functions:

- To work with foster carers in developing and supervising their skills as well as offering regular structured support
- To represent the agency in our relationship with Placing Authorities and to seek to ensure that care plans are made and followed for children in placement
- To review foster carer's skills and achievements on an annual basis
- To promote and participate in training aimed at foster carers, their birth children and children in placement

Supervising Carers

The relationship between Supervising Social Workers and foster carers is professional and aimed at achieving the best interests of the children in placement. Problems and concerns are openly addressed with a view to reaching a satisfactory resolution in accordance with fostering regulations and agency policies. It is important that Supervising Social Workers see the children frequently and seek their views in relation to the care they receive.

Supervisory Visits

Foster carers have a supervision visit at least monthly by a qualified social worker whose role it is to support the foster carers and monitor the standard of care they provide to children. The visit concentrates on the foster carer's professional development, family dynamics, safe caring and the tasks required of them by the Agency. It also focuses on the child's plans, progress, achievements and development. Supervising Social Workers carry out a minimum of one unannounced visit each year and a Health and Safety Check to be completed annually, prior to the foster carer's annual review.

Support

Support is a combination of listening, understanding and helping to find practical solutions/ways of coping with challenges. A successful Supervising Social Worker/foster carer relationship allows foster carers to talk openly and honestly about their own family problems as well as the difficulties/challenges they are having in caring for children they look after. The foster carer is supported in achieving the care plan for the children as part of a team. It is essential that carers feel supported by the agency and at Children First, if the Supervising Social Worker is not available, a member of the team is always there to respond to carers, who may just need reassurance, which is easily accessible.

The Supervising Social Workers work on a rota basis to provide Out of Hours support to foster carers on a 24/7 basis. There is always a Duty Manager also, who provides back up to the Out of Hours service ensuring both staff and carers can access all the support and information they need as quickly as possible. This is crucial for carers who need advice and guidance in challenging situations and for ensuring the safety of our children where there are safeguarding concerns.

Additional support services to assist in meeting the needs of children placed could include:

- Respite (of varying duration)
- Day Care
- Structured activities
- Contact between children, their family and friends.
- Team Support Worker involvement.

Developing Skills

Developing skills means encouraging foster carers to attend training, helping them to put that training into practice, using resource material such as literature, guided reading, national legislation and agency policy. In addition, looking at placement led training for carers with children who have specific needs which require specialist skills and knowledge, to ensure carers are fully equipped to meet the child's needs.

Information and Record Keeping

Foster carers have access to a comprehensive online manual of procedures. The manual contains information and procedures on all aspects of the fostering task and is updated regularly to ensure it remains a relevant reference document. Foster carers are expected to maintain records of events and information pertaining to the child or young person in placement.

Supervision and Support of Foster Carers

Events

At Children First Fostering Agency we hold a wide variety of events to support carers in building relationships with other carers and staff, to acknowledge the achievements of carers, and to participate in charitable fundraising activities e.g. Macmillan. Our events include informal carer coffee mornings and lunches, support groups, activities and celebration events. The diversity of events allows everyone the opportunity to contribute and participate, enhancing relationships with each other, and the agency.

Support Groups

Children First Fostering Agency facilitates Carer Support Groups in several locations throughout the operating region to make them as accessible as possible to all foster carers. The groups are facilitated typically by Supervising Social Workers and provide a great opportunity for information sharing, exploring thematic issues or learning from research, discussing changes in practice, policy and legislation, and generally for foster carers to interact in a social environment with other foster carers and derive peer support.

Newsletters

Children First Fostering Agency produces an internal quarterly newsletter for staff, foster carers, and children which shares information and celebrates achievements. All recipients are encouraged to contribute to the newsletters content. The National Fostering Group also produces a quarterly newsletter for all foster carers to share information on Group wide information and developments.

Membership

Once approved all foster carers are registered with The Fostering Network who provide support to Foster Carer households. This includes high quality specialist support, advice and information, legal expenses insurance, and rewards for foster carers with access to a huge range of discounts.

Insurance

Children First Fostering Agency has a comprehensive insurance package in place which fully covers all agency activities. This cover includes Personal and Public Liability, Employers Liability, Professional Indemnity and satisfies the insurance requirements for all fostering framework contracts awarded to the agency.

Fostering Clinical Services

Clinicians working in Fostering Services are qualified Psychologists and Psychotherapists with experience of working with families and with children with histories of trauma including neglect, violence, and abuse. They bring to the roles an extensive knowledge and experience of child development, trauma, and interpersonal dynamics within families, as well as understanding of the psychology of individuals. The focus of much of the work for clinicians in fostering is on supporting Carers to use therapeutic approaches, including managing their own responses to difficult situations they are in; this is to support the child to feel safe, to develop and to flourish.

To achieve this, Clinicians offer consultations with Supervising Social Workers to develop understanding of families and children and develop next steps, and consultations with families. Direct work with children can also be provided where this is needed. Training is offered to both carers and to Supervising Social Workers to support their knowledge and practice in working with families. In addition, support groups with carers are offered, as well as reflective practice sessions with Supervising Social Workers. These are examples of what can be offered; at other times, a more extensive assessment may be needed for the child. What is provided will be driven by developing an understanding of what the child and the carers need, and this will be approached by working collaboratively with both Carers, Supervising Social workers and other professionals involved with the family to offer a full multi-disciplinary approach.

Training and Development

Children First recognises that our Foster Carers play a crucial role in the lives of the children and young people we care for. We want our Foster Carers to feel confident, knowledgeable, and ultimately be the best they can be for their foster children.

Our training courses are available to all our foster carers – completely free and delivered nationally, locally, and digitally. They range from the mandatory core courses for new Foster Carers, through to tailored training for specialist types of foster care such as Parent and Child.

Our Approach to Training at the National Fostering Group

With modern technologies at our disposal, training is delivered through a blended learning approach. This includes online learning, workshops/seminars, digital resources, and self-directed learning as well as face-to-face classroom sessions. This means we can support all of our Foster carers, wherever their location.

We also have a skilled and dedicated Learning and Talent team who work alongside and collaborate with our clinical psychologists to develop and deliver high-quality learning solutions.

Training audit data is regularly reviewed to assess regional compliance and identify any gaps. Foster carers have a Personal Development Plan which is reviewed as part of ongoing supervision and annual appraisal.

Skills to Foster Training

The journey usually begins with the Skills to Foster Pre-approval course, which prepares new applicants for fostering.

The course focuses on the practical, day-to-day skills that all foster carers need. It links into the Training, Support and Development Standards in England, other professional development qualifications, as well as a competency-based assessment process. It is relevant UK-wide. The course also provides our applicants with an opportunity to meet other applicants, experienced Foster carers, who can share their expertise and some of the key people who will be supporting them throughout their journey, such as Supervising Social Workers and Registered Managers. And it goes without saying that our training is fun, informative and offers real insight into what lies ahead.

Core Training

Skills to Foster is just the beginning. We have a number of additional courses that are mandatory for all Foster Carers. Please refer to the Foster Carer Mandatory Training Pack for details of each course.



Training and Development

The Foundations for Therapeutic Parenting Programme

We are fully committed to becoming the provider of choice for child-centred and trauma informed practice within children's services – enhanced by further specialist support and training around learning disabilities and other complex diagnoses. We want to create a consistent shared language and golden thread that runs through all our Fostering services that focus on the primary task of building healing relationships with our children and young people.

The programme is three-phased – Introduction, Foundation and Advanced courses – to ensure that professional and practice development is extensive and ongoing for all our teams. This means that our Foster carers can expect to share the classroom and their experiences and knowledge with National Fostering Group colleagues as well as other foster carers.

Each course focuses on keeping concepts accessible and understandable – and on developing the ability to put theory into practice.

The key areas are;

- The impact of complex trauma and adverse childhood experiences on children's development
- Understanding behaviour as a form of communication
- Building therapeutic relationships through PACE approaches
- The importance of reflective practice.

We also provide access to a significant amount of online research resources. Learners can then develop at their own pace as well as having somewhere to research or explore ideas they want to know more about - in their own time or with their Supervising Social Worker.

Continued Professional Development

As professionals, we all share a responsibility to develop our skills and knowledge. Legislation, child research and policies are continually changing and evolving, therefore our continued professional development offer is essential.

We have an extensive suite of courses that aim to address specific training needs, here is just a small sample of topics:

- Introduction to Neurodevelopmental Differences
- Various Contextualised Safeguarding Topics – including CSE, County Lines, FGM, etc.
 - Parent and Child
 - Bridge to Foster

Our Foster carers' training is managed via a world-class Learning Management System (LMS). This means that they can see at a glance what training is required for their role, check their own progress, enrol on classroom and virtual courses and access hundreds of online learning modules.

These include the following suites of courses:

- Care Certificate
- Communication and Social Skills
- Cyber Security
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Health and Safety
- Health and Wellbeing
- Finance Skills
- Food Hygiene
- IT Skills
- Personal Development

There really is something for everyone and content is added regularly.

Finance

Children First Fostering Agency Foster Carers receive a weekly fostering allowance, paid directly into the Foster Carers bank account fortnightly.

The allowance paid to foster carers includes a maintenance payment with additional payments for clothing, pocket money, birthdays and seasonal allowances.

Foster carers are provided with Finance Guidelines to help them better understand how the allowances are calculated and how the allowance is divided into a Carer Fee and a Child's Maintenance Element. Whilst the Child's Maintenance Element gives a guide to how the money should be spent, every child's needs are different and each contract with a Local Authority for a child is also likely to be different.

Savings for children in care are deducted at source and saved in individual accounts administered by the National Fostering Group.

When a child leaves a foster placement, the SSW will make arrangements to transfer the savings to the young person's Local Authority, and they will support the foster carer to calculate any money accrued from the children's element of the allowance to go with them, such as clothing allowance, money allocated for festivals or birthdays and so on.

Foster Carers are self-employed and must seek their own advice on liability for Income Tax and National Insurance. All foster carers are provided with membership to The Fostering Network, who are able to provide advice and support around TAX.

Local Authorities should contact Children First Fostering Agency for information pertaining to our charges for the different types of placements and support services offered.

Bonus payments

Children First pay our foster carers a bonus payment following a positive Annual Foster Carer review, which demonstrates good practice in the day-to-day care for children, working in partnership with the professionals and families, a commitment to self-development through attendance at foster carer support groups and completion of mandatory and supplementary training within specified timescales.

We also incentivise foster carers and staff to recommend us to others, by paying a bonus to anyone who refers someone who goes on to be approved as a foster carer for Children First Fostering Agency.



Complaints

Children First Fostering Agency's complaints procedures aim to deal with complaints received in a prompt and equitable manner. The Registered Manager, Team Manager and NFG Quality Assurance Manager are responsible for monitoring complaints and their outcomes.

Complaints Policy

All the children and adults with whom this company comes into contact have the right to receive a good and professional service. If they do not feel they have received such a service, they have the right to complain and have that complaint listened to.

All complaints will be acknowledged within seven working days and will indicate whether it is resolvable at Stage 1 or will require Stage 2 investigation.

Stage 1 Complaints – Informal Resolution

Where possible, we aim to resolve complaints informally, at a local level, and this should be the preferred option. Complainants are encouraged to talk to the person with whom they have a complaint in the first instance as this allows the opportunity to explore the issue and seek any clarification, which often leads to an informal resolution. Where this is not possible, a meeting will be convened between the complainant and the line manager of the person/s being complained about. A letter of resolution will be issued by the Registered Manager detailing how the outcome was arrived at. If the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 1 outcome, or at the outset, they require the matter to be dealt with by another employee of the National Fostering Group; they will be asked to write to the Registered Manager who will contact the complainant within seven working days to advise that the Quality Assurance Manager has been instructed to investigate the complaint.

Stage 2 Complaints – Formal Consideration

The QA Manager will undertake a formal investigation and provide a written response within 21 days outlining the outcome of the investigation. The Registered Manager will invite the complainant to a meeting to discuss the report, where necessary and appropriate.

Name and Address of Inspection Body

All the activities of the NFA Group are inspected and regulated by Ofsted who can be contacted at the following:

- Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD
- General Enquiries: 0300 123 1231
- About Concerns: 0300 123 4666
- Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Children's Commissioner

Children and Young people may also make a complaint to the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, based in England. They can do this by going to the appropriate website –

- www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk – for England

Complaints

Support

It is the policy of Children First Fostering Agency to make its complaint procedures accessible, effective, fair and independent as possible.

Sometimes children and adults need help and support to make a complaint. The child may have support from his or her parent, social worker, Independent Visitor or foster carer.

A child who wishes to make a complaint about any aspects of his or her care should receive assistance to access independent advice and support from their Independent Reviewing Officer. Any complaint made by a Looked After Child will also be referred to a recognised advocacy service if the child wishes.

Foster carers may enlist the help of a supporter or advocate or their Supervising Social Worker, as appropriate, to make a complaint about the agency under this policy or where appropriate, about the placing authority under the relevant local authority's complaints procedure.

Allegations of Abuse

If any complaint is made to any employee of Children First Fostering Agency that is clearly of a child protection nature, that complaint will be immediately passed on to the relevant Local Authority LADO, the responsible authority and Ofsted will be informed.

If at any time during an investigation into a complaint it becomes clear that there may be child protection implications, the current investigation will be halted and the relevant Local Authority LADO will be notified immediately, the responsible authority and Ofsted will be informed.

Where a complaint is made against the Registered Manager, the complaint will be investigated by the Regional Director.



Professional Membership

CoramBAAF

As a partner agency of the National Fostering Group, Children First has a corporate membership with CoramBAAF. CoramBAAF promotes the highest standards of child-centred policies and services.

It influences policy-makers, helps find new families for children and supports professionals, adoptive parents and foster carers.

The Fostering Network

As a partner agency of the National Fostering Group, Children First has a corporate membership with The Fostering Network which is the UK's leading charity for everyone involved in fostering. This means that they are uniquely placed to bring people and organisations together to improve the lives of children in foster care.

The Fostering Network works to raise the profile of foster care through lobbying and campaigning for improvements in foster care at UK, national and local level.

Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP)

NAFP is a not-for-profit company formed in 2008 comprising of independent and voluntary sector fostering providers. This trade association acts as one voice and is therefore able to campaign and represent the sector more effectively. In addition, it allows members to share knowledge and experience within the sector and provides formal representation in national forums and sector developments.

Research in Practice

Our Social Workers and Managers have membership of Research in Practice which brings together academic research and practice expertise. This ensures our staff have access to the latest research, policy, case law, legal updates and resources to support and enhance their professional practice.

Contact Details

Children's Commissioner

Address:

Children's Commissioner for England,
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street,
London SW1P 3BT

T: 020 7783 8330

E: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Free and confidential contact lines for children and young people:

T: 0800 528 0731

E: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Coram VOICE

This is a national charity that enables and equips children and young people to hold to account the services that are responsible for their care. They uphold the rights of children and young people to actively participate in shaping their own lives.

Helpline: 0808 800 5792

Email: info@coramvoice.org.uk

Web: www.coramvoice.org.uk

OFSTED

Children First Fostering Agency is regulated and inspected by Ofsted.

Address:

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street,
Manchester,
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231

General Enquiries Email:

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Name and Address of Registered Manager

Jo Conlon

Registered Manager

Children First Fostering Agency

**3 Lords Court,
Cricketers Way,
Basildon,
Essex**

SS13 1SS

Website: www.cffa.co.uk

T: 01268 567330

E: jo.conlon@cffa.co.uk



“We are part of National Fostering Group. By supporting foster carers to create safe, secure, nurturing environments, we help vulnerable children and young people to thrive and settle into education, giving them the great start in life they deserve.”

Children First Fostering Agency

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