



Statement of Purpose

Next Step Fostering

URN Number: SC036540

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Introduction

This Statement of Purpose for

Next Step Fostering Services

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 parents, 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.

Responsible Individual

Neil McCarthy
41 Stone Street
Faversham
Kent
ME13 8PH

Registered Manager

Clement Deniran
41 Stone Street
Faversham
Kent
ME13 8PH



Company Status

Next Step is an independent fostering agency with a genuine family feel. We look after children and work with foster carers in the South East, around the M25, Croydon and into Essex. Founded in 1989, we have been part of the National Fostering Group since 2020.

Our relatively small size means that we are able to get to know all of our foster carers, foster children and staff individually. The whole team works together to support one another and help the young people and foster carers to grow and develop.

We offer a full range of fostering opportunities for approved foster carers, including short term, long term, respite, plus fostering types that demand special skills, such as parent and child, children with disabilities and unaccompanied minors.

Next Step Fostering Services Limited reports to the National Fostering Group Executive Team and Senior Management Team.

Senior Management Team (SMT) Objectives

The Senior Management Team (SMT) are responsible for strategic planning for the company. This involves business planning which is in line with service user needs, company aims and objectives, financial commitments, organisational structure, and policy and procedure (which incorporates any new legislation), guidance and regulations. Our financial management ensures the very best value for our stakeholders.

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

The Registered Manager meets with the Regional Director/Responsible Individual on a monthly basis to discuss the performance and quality of the agency and review the business objectives in line with the agency's annual development and business plans.

Central support services within the National Fostering Group include: Human Resources, Finance, Training, Quality Assurance, Compliance, Fostering Enquiry Centre & National Assessment Service, and contribute to the effective operations of the agency on a day to day basis.



Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision

We will build incredible futures by empowering vulnerable children and young adults in the UK to be happy and make their way in the world.

Our Mission

Every day we improve the lives of those we educate and look after, their families and communities through a relentless focus on learning and caring.

Our Values

Open & Honest

Be fair and transparent.
Do the right thing.
Be respectful.

Deliver Promises

Be accountable.
Take responsibility.
Be committed.

Dream Big

Make positive changes.
Aspire and Achieve.
Be ambitious.

Be Inclusive

Value diversity.
Create safe, nurturing environments.
Care about each other and what we do.

OneTeam

Together we inspire trust, happiness and an infectious passion to accomplish our vision.

Aims and Objectives

“Putting children at the heart of everything we do”

Aims and Objectives

We strive to deliver high standards of quality care and the best possible outcomes for the children and young people placed with us.

The agency is committed to the delivery of a service that exceeds the standards of care compatible with statutory and regulatory requirements. The agency is inspected on a regular basis by Ofsted and copies of inspection reports are available via the Ofsted website. In addition, a number of the local authorities that we work with carry out checks to ensure we are meeting our mutual contractual requirements and obligations.

Primary aims:

- To provide a high-quality service and the best possible outcomes for fostered children and young people of all ages, whose needs have been assessed by the Responsible Local Authority as being best met by them living with a foster family
- To ensure fostered children are only placed with foster parents who have been recruited, assessed, approved and reviewed in accordance with legislation and statutory guidance
- To support, supervise, and provide on-going training to parents to enable them to meet the individual needs of the fostered children placed with them
- To continually strive to develop and improve our services through evaluation and feedback on our work

Objectives:

- To ensure the provision of the highest possible quality care and outcomes to fostered children in a physically safe and emotionally secure family home
- To meet the fostered child's individual needs and enable the best possible outcomes, in accordance with their care plan
- To have 24-hour support for foster parents and fostered children 365 days a year

- To value diversity and promote equality, by recognising the importance of fostered children's ethnic origin, religion, cultural and linguistic background; and to consider fully their gender, sexuality and any disability they may have
- To develop the fostered child's sense of identity and self-worth
- To promote the fostered child's health and wellbeing, including their physical, mental and emotional welfare
- To promote the fostered child's educational attendance, achievement, attainment, with the aim of their potential being reached
- To promote and support the fostered child's important relationships, to include agreed contact with their family and friends, in accordance with their care plan
- To prepare fostered children for age appropriate independence
- To seek the views, wishes, opinions, and aspirations, of fostered children and to promote participation alongside, their families and foster parents
- To facilitate learning opportunities to foster parents that enables them to develop their skills, knowledge, and understanding to better meet the needs of the fostered children they are caring for
- To offer foster placements that carefully consider and match the needs of the fostered child to the foster parent's skills and experience
- To support the stability of foster placements and minimising the damaging effects of unplanned endings for fostered children and foster families
- To maintain the skill and knowledge base of staff, managers and foster panel members by providing effective training and staff development programmes
- To monitor and review agency policies, procedures and practice on a regular basis
- To use experience, best practice, and research to inform practice

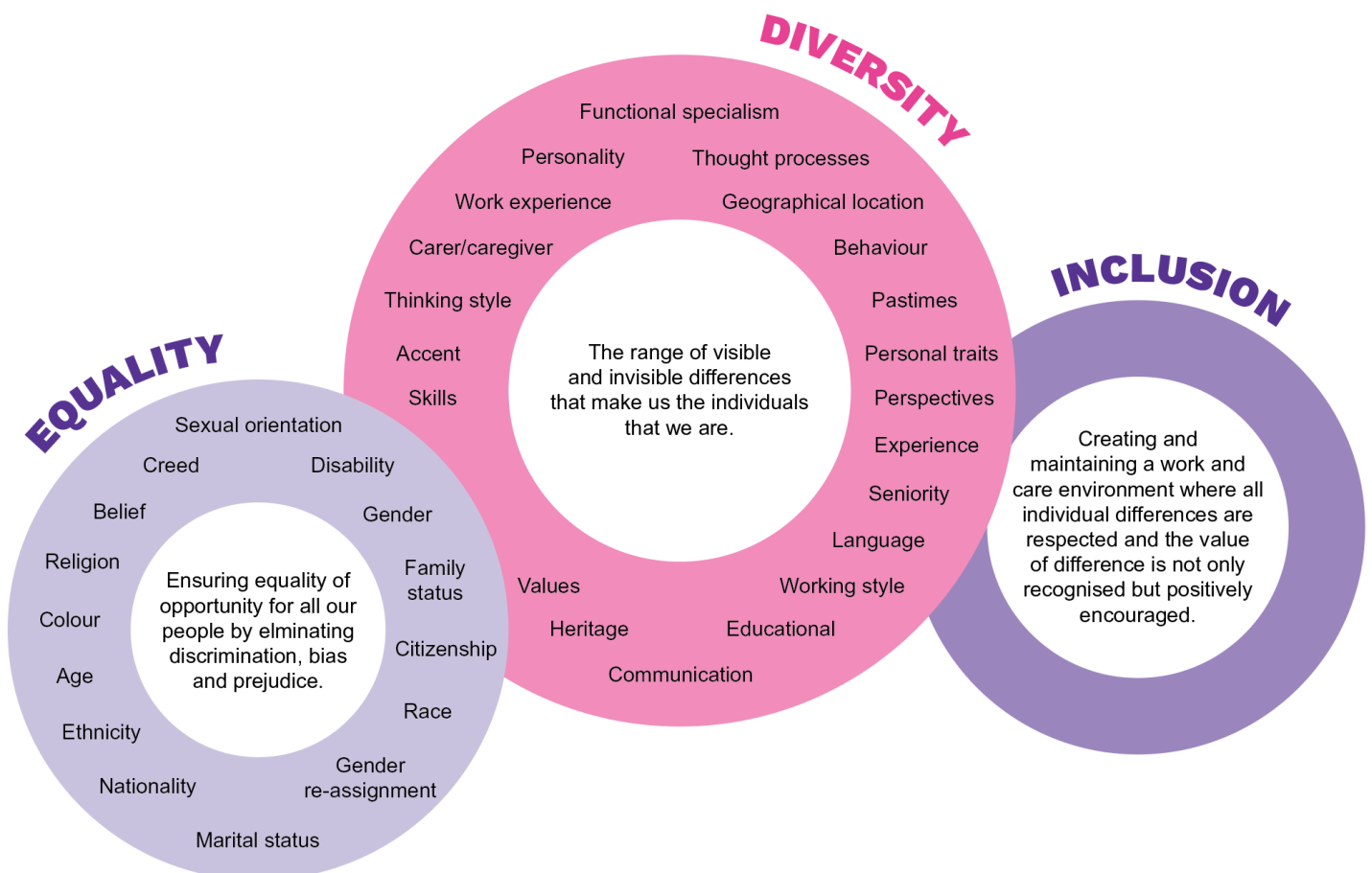
Commitment to Equality and Diversity

At Next Step we recognise the diverse society and communities in which we all live and work. We embrace and celebrate diversity, respect difference and promote equality of opportunity. We aim to recruit staff and carers from all backgrounds to reflect the demographics of the regions in which we operate, and to meet the diverse needs of the fostered children we care for.

We are aware that discrimination, prejudice, unfairness and oppression can exist in every aspect of daily living, including education, employment, health and social care.

We are committed to enabling all fostered children, foster parents and their children, and employees to reach their full potential as individuals, unimpeded by discrimination, unfairness or oppressive behaviour within the organisation.

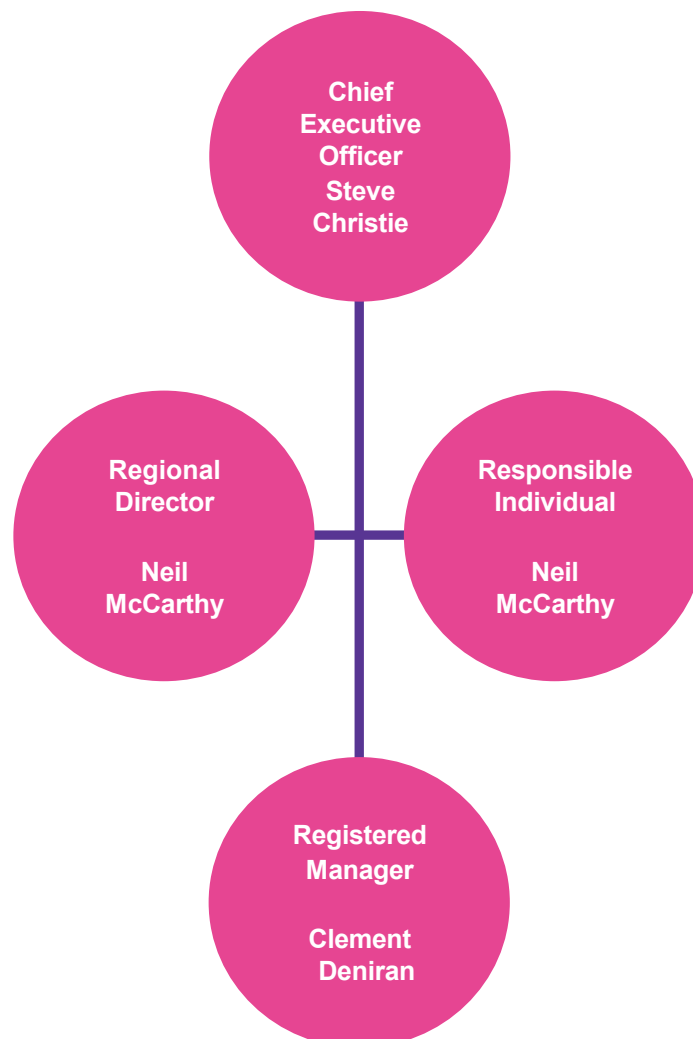
At Next Step we want all fostered children in our care, our foster carers and employees to feel valued and treated equally and fairly. Our goal is to ensure our values are embedded in our day to day working practices with all our stakeholders and service user groups.



Management and Regional Team Structure

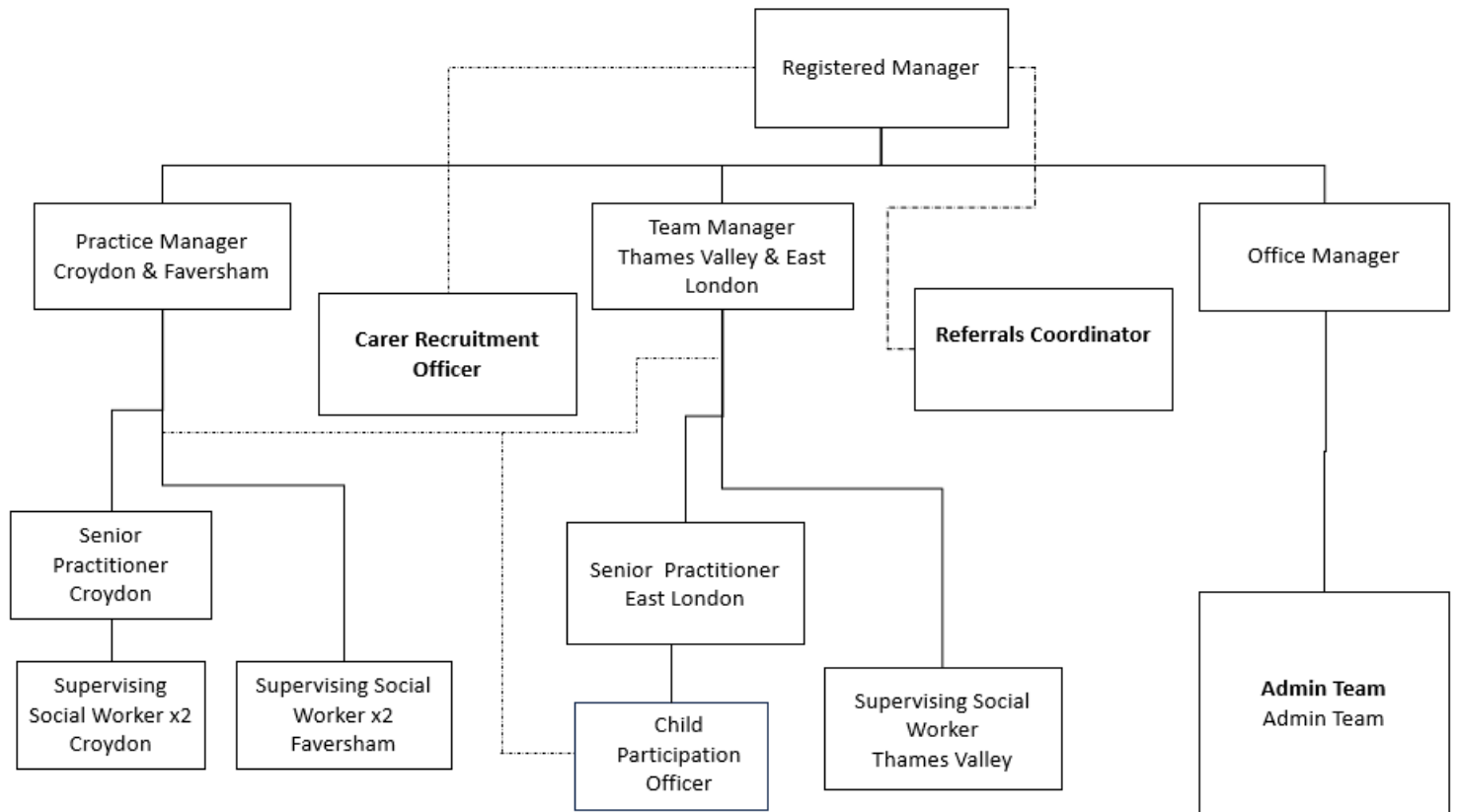
Management Structure

National Fostering Group senior management team have a wealth of experience and expertise in the field of fostering and social care. CEO, Regional Director, Registered Manager and Social Work Practice/Team Managers are mostly qualified social workers registered with Social Work England. The management group meet on a regular basis and are responsible for all strategic and operational aspects of the agency. The Registered Manager is responsible for the overall operation of the agency and the development of services to foster carers, children and young people. The Registered Manager is a qualified social worker.



Management and Regional Team Structure

Team Structure



Management and Regional Team Structure

The Staff Team

The registered office is based in Faversham covering a wide geographical area across the South East, around the M25, Croydon and into Essex.

The Supervising Social Workers & Support Team, and Carer Recruitment Officer can work remotely to ensure that we meet the needs of our foster carers and children and young people. All our Social Workers hold recognised professional social work qualifications and are registered with Social Work England.

The Regional Director

The Regional Director has a key strategic role and is responsible for developing and managing all aspects of fostering resources and support functions in all registrations within their allocated region.

The Assistant Regional Director supervises the Registered Manager and supports them in delivering a high-quality service demonstrated by the results of external inspections, stakeholder feedback (Local Authorities, carers, children and young people), internal audits and key performance indicators. The Regional Director ensures that operating objectives and standards of performance are understood and owned by the whole staff team, seeking to continuously improve performance across all areas of service delivery and delivering aspirational outcomes for children and young people.

The Registered Manager

The Registered Manager is responsible for the overall operation of the agency, including the supervision of the Team Manager, Business Manager and the Carer Recruitment Officer.

The Registered Manager is responsible for producing the agency's business plan, achieving business objectives and maintaining budgetary control of the agency. They are also involved with the development and implementation of the strategic aims and objectives of the organisation and meet monthly with Senior Managers and Directors. The Registered Manager ensures that all practice is in accordance with agency policy and procedures, and contributes to the review and updating of these.

They oversee the completion of ongoing auditing and monitoring of the service to ensure the fostering service is of the highest standard. The Registered Manager monitors and advises on serious complaints and allegations and ensures the appropriate procedures are followed and safeguards are in place.

The Practice Manager/Team Manager

The Practice Manager/Team Manager has line management and supervisory responsibility for the agency's Supervising Social Workers and Senior Practitioners. The Practice Manager/Team Manager oversees the day to day support offered to the agency's foster carers and fostered children and makes case decisions accordingly as part of this. The Practice Manager/Team Manager oversees the matches undertaken on fostered children referred to the agency, along with supporting positive outcomes being achieved for all children placed. In conjunction with the Registered Manager the Practice Manager/Team Manager undertakes auditing, ensures compliance with the Fostering Regulations and Guidance, and strives to achieve good outcomes for children. The Practice/Manager/Team Manager oversees the assessment and review of the agency's prospective and existing foster carers.

Senior Practitioners (SPs)/Supervising Social Workers (SSWs)

The SP's/SSWs have responsibility for the assessment, support, supervision and annual review of foster carers. In addition, they work in close partnership with the Looked After Children's Social Worker and will attend Looked After Reviews and Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings with the foster carer to ensure the very best outcomes are achieved for children placed with our carers. SP's and SSWs are responsible for monitoring the continuous professional development and training of foster carers.



Management and Regional Team Structure

They ensure that all foster carers complete the necessary Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDs) and maintain an ongoing portfolio; working closely with the Learning and Development Team to facilitate this. In addition, SP's and SSWs co-ordinate and deliver support groups for foster carers and provide the frontline delivery of Out of Hours Services to carers.

Carer Recruitment Officer (CRO)

The CRO is responsible for implementing the recruitment and marketing strategy, organising carer recruitment and retention activities/events and the initial screening of prospective foster carers. The CRO works closely with the regional management team, referral coordinators and panel administrator and more widely across the National Fostering Group with the Head of Carer Recruitment to ensure the 'carer journey' is personal, timely and effective in recruiting and retaining foster carers.

The Referrals Team

The Referral Team manages all incoming referrals and keyworking relationships with Local Authority placements teams in order to identify potential foster placements for looked after children. The Referrals Team liaises with foster carers and works closely with social workers and managers to ensure that good matching takes place by qualified social work staff; coordinating all arrangements through to placement.

The Referrals Team has responsibility for collation and initial analysis of referral and placement data, and works closely with the Registered Manager to agree contracts and financial arrangements for foster placements.

Office Manager

The Office Manager oversees the administrative team within the agency, sets up and monitors administrative systems to ensure compliance with organisational and regulatory standards and requirements. The Office Manager oversees all IT systems within the agency and ensure buildings meet all health and safety requirements.

The Office Manager works closely with the Registered Manager to ensure effective monitoring of finances and compliance systems and agency Ofsted readiness.

Senior Administrator/Administrators

The Senior Administrator/Administrators have responsibility for maintaining the relevant checks for foster carers, adult household members and their support network e.g. DBS, Medicals, LA checks. They also have responsibility for the collation and distribution of all Annual Review and Fostering Panel paperwork, room bookings, food and refreshment.

Counselling Services

Next Step has a qualified in-house counsellor who is available to provide counselling to foster carers within the agency to improve their resilience in caring for children and young people.

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.

Services Provided by the Agency

Next Step works closely with a number of Local Authorities to understand their specific needs relating to foster placements in particular areas. As an agency we then 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 placement 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 parents 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 placement can involve court processes that consider the long-term plans for fostered children which can take time.

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 with Child

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

Solo/Complex Needs and Enhanced Placements

Every child is an individual with individual needs and in some circumstances these needs can be complex. The Agency is able to offer a number of placement packages to meet needs that are identified by the placing Local Authority as requiring additional support. In such circumstances a personalised package of support can be provided which will add additional resources to the placement and provide a greater likelihood of achieving successful outcomes for the child. Additional support may come in the form of extra input from a qualified Social Worker or Support Worker or through guidance and consultation to the Foster Carer.

Sibling Placements

Many of our foster parents 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

Many of our foster parents 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.

Matching

Matching fostered children to the best possible fostering family is a carefully considered process. We recognise that getting it right is critical and will advance the progress, experience, and outcomes for fostered children, increase placement stability and retention, and provide fostered children and foster families with positive outcomes.

At Next Step we recognise that fostered children are individuals, with a diverse range of experiences, needs, and talents, requiring fostering parents that are equally unique. Our foster parents have a diverse range of skills, knowledge and experience, and our task is to carefully match fostered children, with those foster parents who have the best possible experience, knowledge, skill set, and approach to meet their individual needs.

The Referrals Team are on hand to assist referring Local Authorities in finding the right match for fostered children. They work closely with the agency's Supervising Social Workers, foster parents and Local Authorities to ensure the best possible matches are made.

Next Step will not propose a placement if the assessed needs of the child/young person cannot reasonably be provided by the proposed foster parents.

During the referral and matching process foster parents are provided with all information made available to the agency in order for them to make fully informed decisions about whether they can meet the foster child's known and potential future needs and care plan. Foster parents are fully involved in the matching process will ultimately make the final decision in conjunction with the Registered Manager and/or the Practice/Team Manager as to whether, or not, they can offer the fostered child a placement in their home.



Next Step also offers an emergency placement service outside normal working hours. Referrals in these instances will be managed by one of the agency's Supervising Social Workers, in conjunction with an agency duty manager, who will review the needs and circumstances of the fostered child referred and any suitable vacancies with the agency's foster families and match these to carers approved for emergency foster placements. The Supervising Social Workers have full access to carer information outside working hours, so quality matching is maintained in the same way as it is within office hours.

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, Next Step 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

Next Step 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 LAC reviews.

Support for Children in our Care

The children placed with Next Step 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, Next Step has established 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 visit the foster home for 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 via a 1:1 session with a member of staff from the agency. 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 to 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 development of independence skills
- Bespoke individual 1:1 work to address an assessed need
- Social events and activities for both children looked after and those who foster.
- Life story or permanence preparation

Physical Environment

Next Step pride themselves on the standard of their 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, establish the individual health needs of each child in our care. Wherever possible fostered children will continue using their own health resources, if this is not possible children will be:

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

Next Step 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 parent's Supervising Social Worker and the Registered Manager. Foster carers encourage children to eat a varied diet. Special dietary requirements are included in 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 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

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 parents 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

Next Step Fostering 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 parent, 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 parents encourage children to make positive lasting friendships and will facilitate friends for tea visits and outings when appropriate. Foster parents contribute to informal contact arrangements with siblings looked after by other foster parents.

In accordance with applicable legislation, standards, regulations and guidance, 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 parents are experienced in working with birth families in a way that positively recognises and respects their involvement.

Further Support

Emergency Support (On-Call Service)

All Foster Carers have access to our emergency out of hours support service which is staffed by a qualified social worker and always supported by a manager. This is available outside office hours every evening, weekend and Bank Holidays, ensuring our Foster Carers have 24-hour support and advice at all times, and that Safeguarding concerns and placement challenges are responded to in a timely manner.

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

Next Step 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 parent, and fostered child (where possible).

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 parent 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 stakeholders, 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 Careers Guidance were missed by the young person/adult

Contact: Hannah Burke – hannah.burke@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

Next Step Fostering 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 socio-economic 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

Next Step Fostering website provides prospective carers with information, case examples and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) 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 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 shared with the prospective applicant, at which point an application to be assessed as a foster parent could be invited.

Transferring Carers

Next Step recognises that foster parents 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 work 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 fostered children to remain with their foster parents following an agency transfer.



Carer Recruitment, Assessment and Approval

Assessment Process

All fostering assessments are based on the BAAF Form F, completed by qualified, registered social workers, and undertaken in accordance with relevant legislation, guidance and policy. The 2-stage assessment process (Stage 1 & 2) is expected to take a maximum of 4 months.

The assessment includes completion of a number of relevant statutory checks and references including: DBS, Local Authority Checks, Medical, Ex-Partner References, Personal References (x3), Employer References, Health & Safety checks and Letting Agent consent etc. The assessor will also agree a schedule of visits to complete the assessment in a timely, focussed manner. The Applicants will be invited to undertake Skills to Foster Training, delivered by in-house trainers, and this feedback will form part of the assessment process. The assessment is comprehensive and evidence based, producing a report that covers individual profiles, past and present relationships/partnerships, support networks, interviews with children and adult members of the household, lifestyle, parenting capacity and experience, valuing diversity. The report will make recommendations on the terms of approval e.g. number of children, age range, placement types, and will be presented to the agency Fostering Panel. The applicants will also be required to complete a Safe Care Policy, Fire Evacuation Plan and Carer Profile.

Following completion of the assessment, the applicants are invited to attend the fostering panel with their assessor, whereby the panel will make a recommendation on approval. The fostering panel membership is made up of both agency staff and independent members, and their experience is derived from a variety of backgrounds including health, education, and social care and fostering and includes members who have experienced the care system. The function of the panel is to provide an independent quality assurance role, to consider the approval of applicants and the continuation of approval of existing carers.

Following panel presentation, the applicants will be notified immediately of the panel's recommendation in respect of their application. However, the final decision as to the applicant's approval will be made by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). If applicants are unhappy with the ADM decision, they have a right of appeal, which can be made direct to the agency, or the Independent Review Mechanism within 28 days.

If, at any time during the assessment, the assessor feels the application falls short of the standards required, this will be discussed with the Team Manager immediately. Any areas of shortfall must be fully explored and where training or support will not bring the applicant up to acceptable standards, the assessment will be ended in line with the relevant fostering legislation and guidance. The assessor will inform applicants of this decision and the reasons within 48 hours and present a brief report for consideration by the fostering panel.

Post Approval

The applicants become known as newly approved carers and will receive written confirmation of their approval. In addition, they will receive a Foster Carer Agreement detailing their responsibilities, and the agency's responsibilities, which must be signed. The agency will allocate a dedicated Supervising Social Worker to each fostering household, who will have responsibility for new carer induction and training plan, and for supporting the carers with completion of the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDs) which must be completed within the first 12 months post approval.

Annual Reviews

Each fostering household will have an annual foster carer review (AFCR), unless there are significant changes to their circumstances in which case, an earlier review will be conducted. These circumstances could include:

- After the final strategy meeting of a Section 47 investigation involving a carer(s)
- Where serious allegations have been made regarding a carer(s) child care practice and no Section 47 investigation is pursued
- Where there has been a relationship breakdown in the approved carers' relationship resulting in one carer moving out of the household. In this instance, both carers will be subject to review except where one or both carers have 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, 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 carers' first review report and every third annual review will be presented back to the Fostering Panel for their recommendations. All review recommendations are presented to the Agency Decision Maker for decisions, and carers 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.

Next Step 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 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 should be professional and aimed at achieving the best interests of the children in placement. Problems and concerns should be 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.

Supervisory Visits

Foster carers will have a supervision visit at least monthly by a qualified social worker whose role is to support the foster carers and monitor the standard of care received by a child. The focus of the visit is twofold. The first part of the visit should concentrate on the foster carer's professional development, family dynamics, safe caring and the tasks required of them by the Agency. The second part of the visit should concentrate on the child's plans, achievements and development. Supervising Social Workers will carry out at least one unannounced visit each year and a Health and Safety Check List 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.

The Supervising Social Workers work on a rota basis to provide a local Out of Hours support to foster carers on a 24/7 basis. A Manager also provides back up to the Out of Hours service ensuring both staff and carers can access all the support and information they need.

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.

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.

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 Next Step 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. Our events include informal carer coffee mornings and lunches, support groups, award & celebration events. The diversity of events allows everyone the opportunity to contribute and participate, enhancing relationships with each other, and the agency.

Support Groups

Next Step Fostering 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 providing an opportunity for foster carers to interact in a social environment with other foster carers and derive peer support.

Newsletters

Next Step produces an internal monthly newsletter for staff, foster carers, and children that 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

Next Step 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

The National Fostering Group (NFG) 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.

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, this 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 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 services – Fostering, Education and Residential Care – that focusses 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 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:

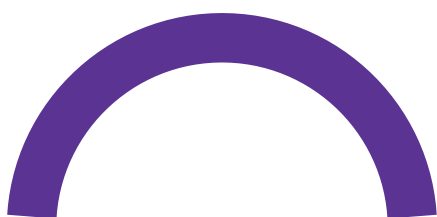
- Introduction to Neurodevelopmental Differences
- Various Contextualised Safeguarding Topics – including CSE, County Lines, FGM, etc.
- Parent and Child
- Bridge to Foster

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 from our partners at Litmos Heroes – all for free!

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 to our LMS regularly.



Finance

Agency Finances

Next Step has arrangements in place to control and supervise the agency's finances, which are based on sound financial principles and recognised good practice. Monthly finance meetings are held between the Registered Manager, National Fostering Group's allocated Finance Manager and the Assistant Regional Director to always ensure complete financial oversight.

Young People's Finances

Pocket money, clothing and other allowances as well as savings are provided to every child and young person. The distribution of this money is determined by the young person's age and understanding.



Complaints

Next Step complaints procedures aim to deal with complaints received in a prompt and equitable manner. The Registered Manager and the Quality Assurance Manager are responsible for monitoring complaints and their outcomes.

Complaints Policy

All children and adults with whom the company comes into contact have the right to receive a quality, 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 local level, and this should be the preferred option. Complainants are encouraged to talk to the person with whom they have a complaint with in the first instance as this allows opportunity to explore the issue and seek any clarification, which often leads to 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.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the QA report, they must confirm the reasons for their dissatisfaction, in writing, to the Registered Manager who will arrange for the complaint to be reviewed independently within 28 days.

Stage 3 Complaints – Independent Review

If the complaint has not been resolved at Stage 1 or 2, and the reasons for this are made clear in writing; the complaint will proceed to Stage 3 for independent review. This is often conducted by the Director of Quality Assurance or other Senior Director, allowing 28 days for investigation and every effort will be made to achieve complaint resolution. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may take advice from the Regulatory Authority.

Name and Address of Inspection Body

Next Step is regulated and inspected by Ofsted
Address: Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store
Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

General Enquiries Email:
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Children's Commissioner

Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: [020 7783 8330](tel:02077838330)

Complaints

Support

It is the policy of the Next Step 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 Next Step Fostering that is clearly of a child protection nature that complaint will be immediately passed on to the relevant Local Authority Designated Officer (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,

Next Step Fostering 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 professions, adoptive parents and foster carers.

The Fostering Network

As a partner agency of the National Fostering Group,

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.

NWG

As a partner agency of the National Fostering Group, Next Step Fostering has a corporate membership with NWG which is a network tackling child sexual exploitation. They also provide high quality training that our staff members attend.

Each staff member has a membership to NWG (purchased by the National Fostering Group) so that they may receive advice and support on individual cases.

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.

Restraint Reduction Network

We are members of the Restraint Reduction Network – the world leading restraint reduction charity. Our membership demonstrates our commitment to reducing restrictive practice. It provides staff with the opportunity to learn from sector leaders and access news, guidance and resources to inform their work with children, young people and their carers.

Contact Details

Essential Addresses and Contact Details

Children's Commissioner

Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: [020 7783 8330](tel:02077838330)

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

Next Step is regulated and inspected by Ofsted

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

Tel: 0300 123 1231

General Enquiries Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Next Step Fostering Services

41 Stone Street
Faversham
Kent
ME13 8PH
Tel: 01795 521 739

Moore House
127 Addington Road
South Croydon
CR2 8LH
Tel: 020 8768 3888

Oak House
5a Wellington Road
Wanstead
E11 2AN
Tel: 01708 209 227

Email – info@nextstepfostering.org



“We are part of National Fostering Group. By supporting foster parents 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.”

Next Step Fostering

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