

# STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

2020 - 2021



Changing children's lives

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# Our family roots

Next Step started in 1988 offering provision for looked after children and has been providing high quality Fostering services since 1995, promoting positive experiences and nurturing journeys for all its young people. Foster Carers are provided with professional support, monitoring and training that is creative, comprehensive and personalised. Next Step aims to provide a complete Fostering service, attuned to both the needs of children and their Foster families.

Next Step is a child centred agency and only promotes those individuals who have a child's interest firmly at heart to be Foster Carers. We continue to ask that our Carers have the insight and skills to develop their Foster Care standards to exceed those required of professional excellence.

## Teamwork

There is a strong culture of team and collaborative work throughout the Next Step Fostering. Every member of staff plays a part in the overall performance of the service. Every role matters and managers aim to be motivational and lead by example.

# Our Vision

To give looked after children the stable and nurturing childhood they deserve, so they may grow into confident, positive and valued members of society.

# Our Objectives

Recruiting, training and supporting professional Foster Carers who are committed to providing young people with positive, nurturing family homes and positive childhood experiences.

# Our values

- Working with honesty, respect, understanding, integrity, dedication and compassion.
- All children should be treated as individuals and supported to achieve their full potential.
- Each child is unique and their welfare paramount.
- There is no compromise in the provision of high-quality individualised care.
- Children have a right to feel safe; be protected; be treated with respect and dignity; be encouraged, nurtured, supported, helped and looked after; have their heritage promoted; be consulted and considered; and be helped towards a personal sense of worth, wellbeing and independence.
- The parents, Carers and relatives of looked after children have a right to be kept informed, involved and consulted as appropriate. They have the right to be treated as individuals with respect and without prejudice.
- Individual care planning is imperative at the outset of each placement, followed by regular reviews to ensure that all the needs of the child are being met.
- Children have a right to expect the very best professional care from Foster Carers. Next Step Fostering is committed to the provision of quality support, supervision, advice, consultation and training to enable Carers to meet each child's needs. In addition, there is 24-hour support available to Carers from staff and a manager to cover on-call decisions.

- The National Fostering Group (see pages 18-20 for more information about the companies that comprise the group) actively self-regulates its work and maintains openness to ongoing critical evaluation. It welcomes comments from the young people, carers, staff, independent workers, placing authorities, panel members and any who have a contribution to make.
- The Group has a commitment to remain appraised of developments in Fostering so that appropriate changes are regularly made to ensure the continual improvement of the service.

# Company registration and legal position

Next Step Fostering is a preferred provider to a wide range of placing authorities and we are regularly involved in local steering groups, national forums and working parties - undertaking government and Local Authority consultations; to contribute to the ongoing development of children's services.

Our local and national management teams meet regularly:

- To review the company's position in the sector and ensure Best Practice Standards are met
- To review the *Statement of Purpose*
- To review critical policies such as safeguarding
- To conduct business planning and development strategies
- To review and approve companywide policy developments
- Review the company's financial position.
- To consider impact of service on positive outcomes from children

Next Step Fostering is a Member of the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP) and The Fostering Network.

Next Step Fostering is registered with Ofsted under the **URN number: SC036540**.

Next Step Fostering is registered as a Private Limited Company known as **Next Step Fostering Services Limited. Registration number: 05160087**.

# Equality & Diversity

We believe in equality and diversity in the workplace, in Fostering and in our communities and society. No employee, Foster Carer, child or young person or anyone who comes into contact with our service will be placed in a position of disadvantage as a consequence of their race, gender, disability, sexuality or any other reason.

We embrace diversity and believe that all employees and the Fostering households benefit from it. Next Step Fostering is committed to its **Equal Opportunities Policy** and to working in a manner that is anti-discriminatory in practice. Any discriminatory behaviour will be challenged and dealt with appropriately.

## Services offered to Local Authorities

Next Step Fostering works with a number of Local Authorities across London and the South East and has a growing number of Carers at each sub office, ethnically and culturally reflective of the local area.

### Tendering and Commissioning

Next Step Fostering is committed to entering into any commissioning process that it deems commercially viable and falls within its geographical area.

### Referrals Staffing

All members of the Referrals Team are experienced in communicating effectively with Local Authorities, Foster Carers and key professionals, in order to make well informed matches, which is fundamental in enabling positive starts and stability in children's lives.

### Assessments

The National Fostering Group can undertake a range of assessments as directed by the Courts or requested by the Local Authority including parent and child assessments. Next Step Fostering has specialists within our in-house assessment team and access to third party professionals where required.

# Where we Foster

The National Fostering Group, now including Next Step Fostering, has a number of offices across the South East of England. Our Carers look after children across a number of Local Authority districts, from Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire to London, Surrey, Sussex, Kent and East Anglia.

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# Recruitment & Assessment

## Recruitment

The National Fostering Group runs targeted recruitment campaigns for each group agency and individual office, meeting Local Authority needs across all catchment areas. Next Step Fostering has the opportunity to benefit from the national recruitment activity of the National Fostering Group, giving scope to increase our numbers of Foster Carers and offer exceptional care to more children.

## Assessment

Next Step welcomes suitable Foster Carers within the context of its **Equal Opportunities Policy** and subject to consideration by the agency's independent panel. Next Step Fostering operates a robust assessment process with multiple review points, to ensure high quality practice and effective decision making.

# The Fostering journey

## Panel and Review

The Next Step Fostering Independent Panel is constituted of a diverse cohort of members from a wide range of backgrounds. Next Step regularly reviews the work, practice and training of all Carers and this forms part of their Annual Review, presented to Panel on a regular basis.

# Fostering Specialisms

## Standard Fostering

The National Fostering Group works with young people from all Local Authorities. Next Step Fostering specialises in working with Local Authorities across London and the South East offering high quality foster homes with a firm focus on placement stability and performance.

## Children with disabilities (CWD)

The National Fostering Group provides a number of placements to children with disabilities and provides a range of specialist support services for these families.



*Thank you for always supporting me and wishing me to do new things every day. I have grown up so much as a person thanks to your help.”*



## Parent and child services

In addition to the close supervision that all our families receive, Next Step Fostering has developed a Parent and Child Fostering service - designed to provide enhanced support and supervision. Foster Carers who receive the specialist Parent and Child training provide weekly reports and a package of care that has been tailored to the parent and their child's individual care plan.

## Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (UAS)

Located near the main port of Dover, the Agency has a great deal of experience responding to the needs of unaccompanied asylum seekers. Next Step Fostering offers specific training, guidance and expertise to our families working in this area.

## High-Needs Fostering

Foster Carers are equipped to provide therapeutic Fostering for young people who display challenging behaviour. They receive professional support and supervision to manage these challenges and help children manage their own. The National Fostering Group runs a very successful 'step down' from residential care for children and young people called Bridge to Foster, and Next Step carers are well placed to offer this provision. Carers who offer 'Bridge to Foster' receive bespoke packages of support aligned to the child's needs and additional therapeutic training and support.

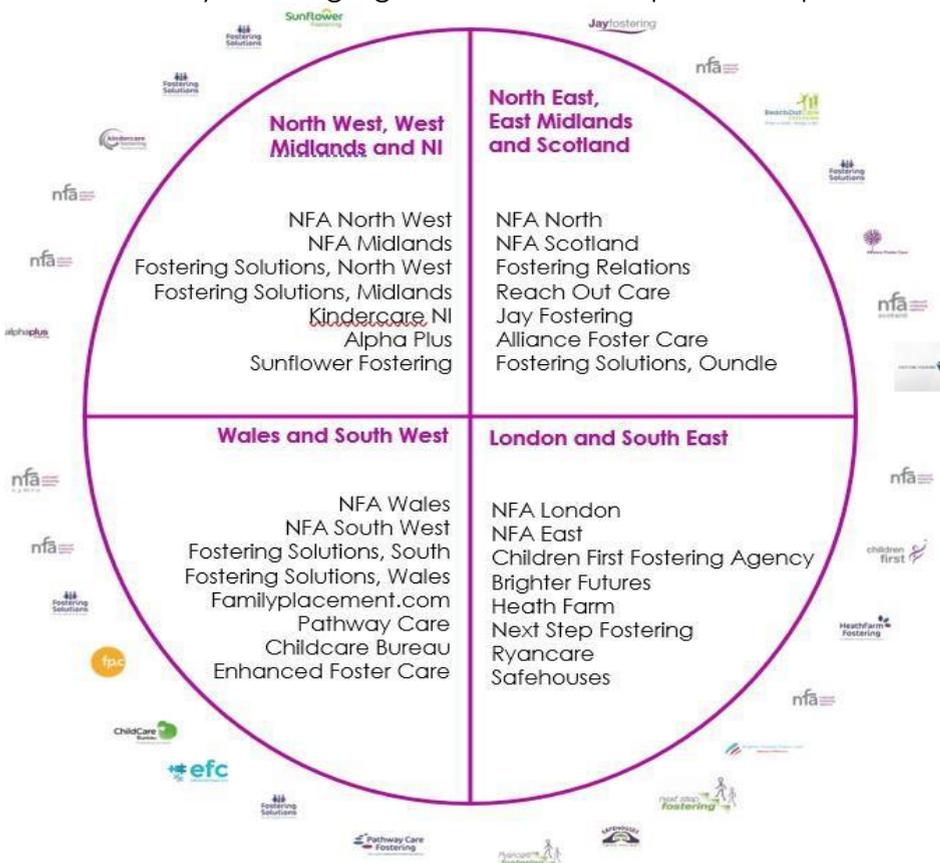
# Company structure

Next Step Fostering is a medium sized independent agency that operates from its Kent-based headquarters and is managed by a broad-experienced team.

Next Step Fostering is part of the National Fostering Group, which has its head office in Bolton. Some of the necessary tasks for Next Step Fostering are carried out by the team at the Group head office including:

- Quality Assurance
- HR Management
- Finance Management
- Assessments of Prospective Carers
- Strategic Planning and Recruitment
- Commissioning and Tendering
- Training
- Outcomes for Children Resource and Tracking

There are thirty fostering agencies in the Group under separate Ofsted Registrations.



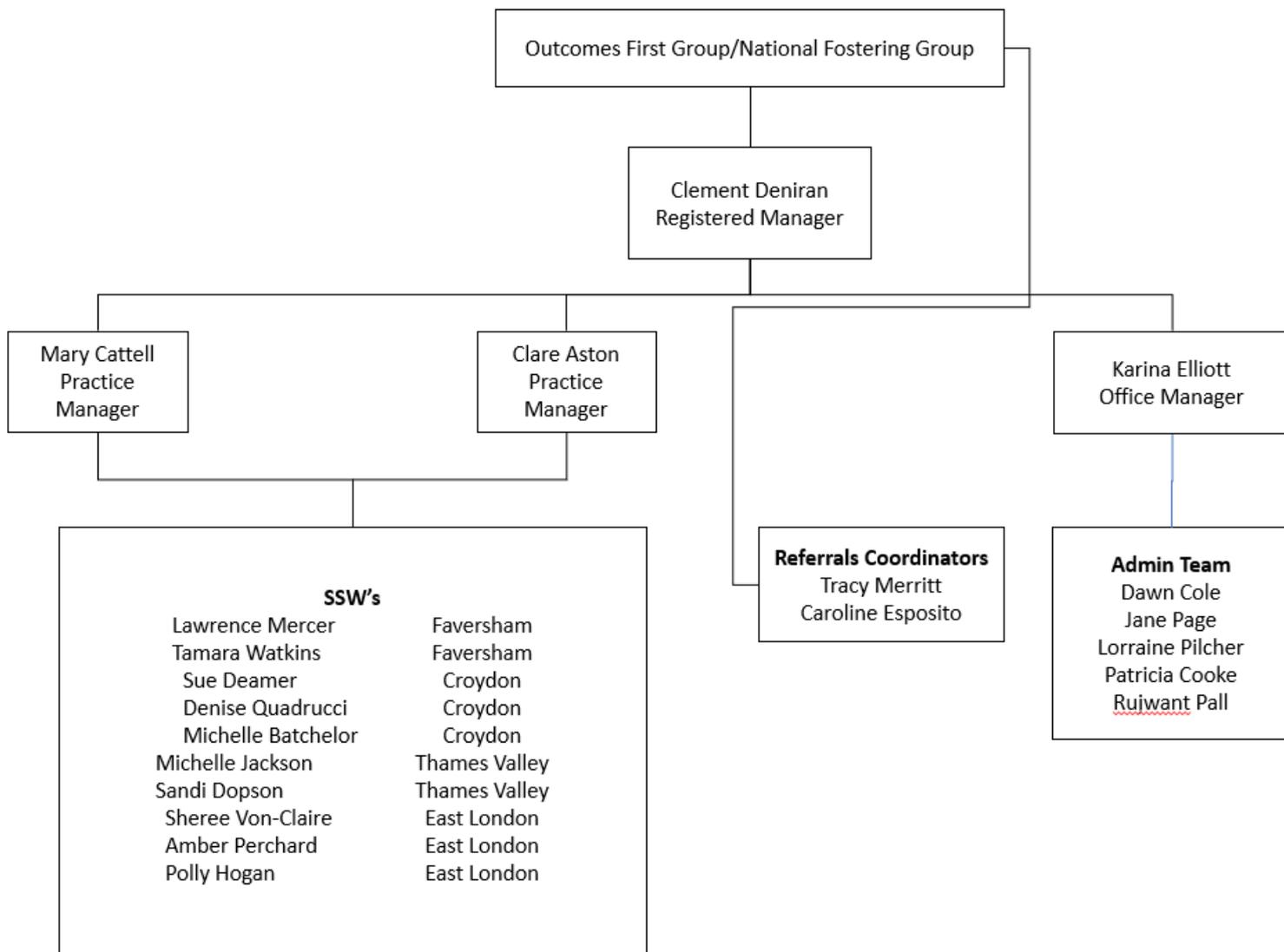
This Statement of Purpose is applicable only to Next Step Fostering Services Limited.

# Management of National Fostering Group

The National Fostering Group has a **Strategic Group Leadership Team** which meets regularly at both regional and national level to determine the direction of the business as a Group. Next Step Fostering continue to meet regularly to make locally based decisions on recruitment, growth and business-related issues such as contracts, services, logistics and utilities as well as the wider group perspective. Local initiatives and needs remain our priority.



The **Senior Management Team at a local level** direct Next Step Fostering in terms of social work recruitment goals and resolving practice or system issues. Meetings have a full agenda which include items from staff, children, Foster Carers and customers. The Panel Chair is also invited to give feedback to the Management Team. These meetings contribute to regional and national discussions and initiatives.



# Services offered to Foster Carers

## Training to Foster Carers

Next Step Fostering provides a comprehensive training schedule of mandatory courses in years 1 and 2 for all Foster Carers and training up to equivalent diploma level is provided as part of the service. Accomplishments and experience are rewarded with progression through four assessment grades. The training matrix used in the Group offers second Carers access to courses through e-learning as well as weekend and evening opportunities.

## Supervision and Support to Foster Carers

Considered the core element of the business, Foster Carers receive regular personalised and comprehensive support from experienced Supervising Social Workers (SSWs). SSWs work closely with the Local Authority to provide reports and communication regarding their young people. Unannounced visits are carried out to obtain a good insight into the dynamics of our households and ensure compliance and safeguarding are maintained.

## Foster Carers' Charter

Next Step Fostering subscribes to the Foster Carers' Charter.

## Therapeutic Support

Next Step offers therapeutic approaches to Fostering as well as providing access to counselling, to all carers. Where needed, child-centred therapy can be sourced from a range of qualified external therapists and as part of the regional therapeutic hubs.

## Respite Provision

All families are entitled to paid respite. This provision is in place to provide families with time when children's needs or behaviour present a significant challenge for the family. If respite is not taken, or only partially taken, then a payment is made to the Carer. As an agency that values normal family life, Next Step regard taking respite as an emergency precaution and place a high value on a family remaining together, where possible Next Step encourages our carers to use their own support network.

## Consultation groups

Foster Carers have access to supervision groups and nominated members can report to the quarterly consultation group. Direct access to the Registered Manager, allows our Foster Carers to have a voice in how the company is run and where improvements can be made.

## Other standard services offered include:

- 24-hour Support for Foster Carers
- Membership to Fostering Network
- Travel allowances
- Access to a suite of additional benefits including educational aids and high street discounts.

# Services offered to young people

Next Step Fostering provides Fostering services to young people from 0-18 years old and from any cultural or ethnic background. This age range is further widened by the addition of Parent and Child placements and our determination to embrace the 'Staying Put' principles (The Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers Regulations and Guidance 2010 and the Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011 (Children Act 1989)).

The services provided to Foster Carers are supplemented by services provided directly to children and young people across all our agencies.

## Welcome Pack

Every child who joins Next Step Fostering receives a pack containing our Welcome Guide, individual Safer Caring Policy and useful information on their rights and health matters; along with other publications and leaflets aimed at young people.

## Additional children's support

Next Step provides additional support for children and young people, to have their voices heard and another person to offer appropriate advocacy where required.

Next Step obtains feedback from the children, through a variety of consultation groups and forums, including a child-friendly feedback app 'Youth Voice', for review at management level.

## **Sessional Staff Support**

Children and young people who are not in mainstream education or who are embarking on their first steps to independence may be provided with additional daytime support by one of our sessional staff. This support is aimed at the 8-16 years age group, although tailor-made support packages are available to children and young people of all ages. Children awaiting school places can also be supported by the National 'Acorn Children Learning' resource which offers additional schooling to children who may be out of school and to those needing support in 6, 11 and 13.

Children and young people including our 'children who foster' also have access to online learning resources through 'Britannica'.

## **Holiday Activities**

Next Step arranges activities for young people during the school holidays. These are often open to birth children too and provide an opportunity for all young people to mix and enjoy fun activities led by our staff team.

## **Adventure Opportunities**

As part of the National Fostering Group, all children in our fostering households have the opportunity to complete Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) awards at the three levels of bronze, silver and gold. Our young people can also get involved with The British Exploring Society thanks to our partnership with them. In recent years, young people in the care of the National Fostering Group have been on expeditions to the Scottish Highlands, Canadian Yukon and the Amazon. In more recent times, our young people enjoy virtual adventures via 'Wildestan' on survival skills, wildlife and conservation.

## **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.

## **Educational Achievement Award (EAA)**

Young people who either make significant personal achievements in school or make positive efforts in education can be nominated for our EAA. The award highlights up to four separate areas where a young person can receive an award. Awards are in the form of vouchers and a certificate which are issued annually.

# Social Work Management & Quality Standards

Next Step Management Team provide planned supervision to the Link Workers and Supervising Social Workers in respect of all social work matters with additional support given by the Registered Manager. Professional support, advice and consultation is provided where required.

## Theoretical Models and guiding principals

Next Step looks towards new and innovative approaches to social care and embraces creative approaches to achieve positive outcomes.

The Group employs a range of theoretical models in order to achieve the best outcomes for young people.

## The Therapeutic approach

All Next Step Carers receive the training support and supervision to provide this specialised approach in a nurturing environment. Next Step considers every family who Foster with us to be providing a therapeutic environment. To support this approach Next Step provides many of the key characteristics often associated with therapeutic social care.

- Specialised training.
- Realistic caseloads for our Social Work staff
- Comprehensive matching process.
- Regular supervision and access to therapeutic consultation.
- Facilitation of access to therapeutic services for children.
- Co-ordination of all required services by Supervising Social Workers.

## **Best Practice and Steering groups**

Next Step Fostering employees are regularly involved in steering groups, through NAFP and The Fostering Network, local, joint and national forums and working parties undertaking government and Local Authority consultations; all to contribute to the ongoing development of children's services as a whole.

## **Delegated Authority**

Next Step Fostering fully embraces the statutory right for Foster Carers to be given the required Delegated Authority to make decisions regarding aspects of care and decision making for young people in their care.

## **Safeguarding**

Next Step Fostering is committed to the highest standards of child protection and safe care. The Agency keeps its Safeguarding Policy under review to ensure it is maintaining Best Practice. The Agencies have effective and established procedures around safeguarding with key members of staff in positions of responsibility. FosterCarers and staff are provided with the agencies' Safeguarding Policy and Procedures as part of their induction and when there are updates.

# **Complaints & Compliments**

Records of all complaints made against Next Step's Foster Carers; other associated professionals; and its own service are kept in the complaints log and used to develop Best Practice and improve our quality of service.

The complaints procedure is clear and robust and the company is in a strong position to investigate any complaints made. Liaison with the LADO's and safeguarding boards is maintained throughout these processes, as appropriate.

Children are supported when they need to make a complaint by their Carer, the SSW, the Children's Champion or an independent member of staff. We have a child-friendly complaints policy which is made available, to support children in understanding the process of making a complaint.

Complaints are monitored and assessed and used to inform developments to help improve the Agency. Compliments are celebrated and also contribute to the continuous development of Next Step Fostering.

# GDPR Regulations

Next Step Fostering works in accordance with GDPR and this is reflected both in the handling of sensitive data relating both to children and young people, Foster Carers and its workforce. Foster Carers and Staff undergo annual training to ensure we stay up to date with GDPR guidance.



The National Fostering Group is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and Foster Carers to share this commitment. All information is correct at time of going to print.

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