

# FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

### **Mission Statement**

At Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW) our aim is to promote the welfare of children in the “looked after” system. We believe that all children and young people should have the opportunity to benefit from family life. For those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot live within their own family, for either short or long periods of time, an appropriate alternative should be available to them.

We believe that children who have been badly affected by severe abusive and neglectful experiences can still benefit from what life in a family has to offer. In order to sustain such placements, however, it is necessary to provide 24 hour support to our Professional Carers and a flexible package of short-term breaks and other resources, including education and health support, to ensure the best possible outcome for the child or young person.

We aim to provide a wide range of placement resources for all age groups and to address the need to recruit families for children from different cultural and ethnic minority groups. Placements will vary in length and aim, from emergency and short-term placements through to long-term placements. Some placements will be specifically task centred with the aim of bridging a child or young person to adoption or permanent placement. For others the aim will be a return home to their family of origin. We are committed to working in partnership to enable children in placement to return to their own parents or other family members where this is the plan.

We understand that children and young people who must live apart from their own family have a great need to maintain close and positive links with their parents and other family members and with their friends during those periods. Our staff and Carers are committed to furthering positive family contact and will work in partnership with local authorities and with parents to enable contact to take place.

Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW) does not aim to duplicate fostering services already in place within local authorities. We see ourselves fulfilling a specific role in working alongside local authorities, to fill the gaps in provision which are needed in order to cater for a group of children and young people who remain “difficult to place.”

To this end we are committed to maintaining and strengthening our already well established working relationships with local authorities primarily within the North West, North Wales and surrounding regions.

## **Status & Constitution**

Foster Care Services Limited is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985 (Company Number 5448746) trading as Foster Care Services North West.

Foster Care Services North West is registered as an Independent fostering Agency with the new OFSTED, formerly The Commission for Social Care inspection.

## **Management Structure**

The Agency is managed by two Directors, one of whom is the Registered Provider. The Directors have the guidance and support of the Fostering Panel in all matters relating to the Agency's provision of services. The Directors chair the Management Meetings.

The Principal Manager has the responsibility for the development and management of Foster Care Services North West and the service provision. The Principal Manager is the Agency's Registered Manager.

The Deputy Manager has the responsibility for management in the Principal Manager's absence.

The Social Work Team Manager is The Deputy Manager, and has responsibility to manage the team of Social Workers, support services and co-ordination of training.

The Business Development Manager has responsibility for managing the contracts for service provision, insurances and liability, publicity and liaising with authorities requesting to commission fostering placements.

The Deputy Team Leader and Project Manager has responsibility for managing the recruitment of foster carers, and to deputise in the Social Work Team Manager's absence.

The Management Team will normally convene monthly; the meetings will:

- Review performance and set targets
- Plan service developments
- Receive reports in respect of recruitment, placement referrals, advertising and publicity, specific service areas, representations from staff members.

Regular operational meetings are held as described below:

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| ▪ Fostering Panel  | - | monthly with prepared agenda and reports, chaired by independent person |
| ▪ Staff Meeting  | - | weekly for all staff, chaired by Principal Manager                      |
| ▪ Social Work Team Meeting   | - | monthly, chaired by Team Manager  |
| ▪ Inter-agency Meetings between FCSNW & National Teaching & Advisory Service | - | Half-termly, chaired by Deputy Team Manager                             |

## **The Service Provision:**

### **Fostering Placements**

FCSNW provide a wide range of placements with foster carers for children and young people of all ages. Placements are 'matched' to promote the best possible outcomes for children and young people, taking into consideration their needs and the skills and experience of the foster carers, to meet those needs.

All placements are provided at the request of the child or young person's responsible authority, who will initially provide details to our duty system.

Foster Care Services North West are members of a number of local authority accreditation schemes and these include:

Placements Northwest, which has 21 participating authorities, West Midlands (13 authorities), and Children's Commissioning Support Resource (22 Welsh authorities). In addition, local authorities in the East Midlands, Yorkshire and London.

We have a designated Business Manager who will be the first point of contact for commissioning our service.

### **Range of placement provision**

The foster carers will be able to provide a wide range of placement type:

- Long-term/permanent placements
- Bridging placements
- Assessment placements
- Temporary/task centred placements
- Emergency placements
- Parent and baby placements
- Specialist placements

### **Placement monitoring and regulation**

All placements of children and young people are made in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations which means that:

- All foster carers are approved, have signed Foster Carers' Agreements and are individually reviewed.
- Each placement will be made using an individual 'Foster Placement Agreement', which will include essential information, placement planning and identification of specific tasks.
- Wherever possible, pre-placement planning is completed and will include introductions between foster carer and child/young person. In emergency situations, the placement planning will be done immediately, and information requested to complete the placement agreement as soon as possible within the legislation.

## **The Services**

Service delivery from:

- the social work service and support workers.
- the education support service.
- The specialist health promotion.

Foster Care Service North West started in 1998 and since then has been able to demonstrate to local authorities with whom we work, a service that consistently attains positive outcomes for children and young people.

## **The Social Work Service**

The delivery of social work services is managed and led by the Social Work Team Manager. The team's membership comprises Deputy Manager/Project Manager, five full-time and one part-time Supervising Social Workers, two Foster Carer Support Workers who work part-time.

The Team Manager, Deputy and Supervising Social workers are skilled and experienced in the field of Child & Family social work, and all hold particular expertise in the provision of fostering services to children and young people. They are qualified in social work, registered with the General Social Care Council and have evidence of continuing professional development.

The Social Work Team bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our service.

Every fostering household is supervised and supported by a Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker provides supervision to each foster carer following an agreed contract and formal agenda.

The level and frequency of social work contact for supervision and support will be determined by the circumstances of each household and needs of the individual placement. Regular meetings are held to review and monitor each placement, and records are provided six-weekly of the placement's progress and outcomes.

The Social Worker will maintain records in respect of each foster carer and each placement they are allocated.

The Social work Team and Social Work managers provide via a rota, a 24-hour advice and support service to all our foster carers and all their placements.

## **Additional Support**

- a) Foster Care Support Workers are appointed to provide relief to the fostering household, usually to undertake specific activities with the placement to enable the foster carers to have time for their own family.
- b) Support groups for foster carers are organized on a regional basis, facilitated by a Supervising Social Worker. Every foster carer attends their local support group, which meets 6-weekly.
- c) Short-term breaks; specifically recruited and approved foster carers will provide placements to enable full-time carers to take annual leave, where appropriate, and to provide relief to enable a demanding placement to continue.
- d) An Agency holiday is arranged and provided by the Agency. This will be at a U.K. destination and enables fostering families to meet together socially and to strengthen their support systems. Fostered children and young carers also have the opportunity to meet and network.
- e) Social events, organized by the Agency staff to enable fostering families, children and young people and staff to meet informally.
- f) Junior Carers are encouraged to meet for mutual support; meetings and activities are organised by the Project Manager to facilitate this.

## **The Education Support Service**

FCSNW considers that the quality of educational opportunities afforded to children and young people should be given paramount importance. Our experience of the impact of educational failure on children in the care system generally, and on fostering services in particular, has been a major motivating factor in re-appraising the level and nature of services we provide to children and careers. We have witnessed the damaging effect of educational failure, which is endemic in the care system, and the extent to which school breakdown and disruption lead to placement breakdowns and intolerable burdens on foster carers. We are mindful, too, of the retrospective concern of many adult care leavers with regard to their educational experiences whilst being looked after by local authorities. FCSNW invests heavily from within its own resources to ensure that all children placed with us, regardless of their previous educational experiences, not only attend school regularly but realise the highest possible levels of educational achievement. To this end we have a Contract for Service with The National Teaching and Advisory Service.

The National Teaching & Advisory Service (NT & AS) is a national organization for looked after children and children in need. This service provides the practical means through which children facing significant difficulties are successfully included within mainstream schools and are able to access high quality education and the opportunities this brings.

The contract we have with NT & AS to provide a full education casework service ensures the children and young people in our placements achieve consistently high outcomes in education compared to the national average for looked after children.

All children in placement receive the services of a named casework teacher, where appropriate, and agreed by the placing local authority. The individual support is reviewed on an ongoing basis so that the services are tailored to the changing needs of the looked after children in our placements.

Reports and ongoing data in relation to outcomes in education is maintained on our files and sent to the placing authority.

The contract with NT & AS also ensures the provision of expert advice, training and development on educational matters to foster carers and Agency staff.

Full details of the NT & AS service is provided with our Prospectus and to each purchasing local authority.

We are fully committed to continue this partnership approach that has been successful in supporting children, carers and social workers with the educational issues known to impact on looked after children.

It is important to note that the contract with the National Teaching and Advisory Service does not provide alternative educational facilities, such as separate schools or schoolrooms. We know from our experience that the provision of such facilities usually serves only to prolong the exclusion of children in the care system from mainstream schools and from normal school experiences.

### **Specialist Health Provision - Promotion and Monitoring of Health Care**

The impact upon the health care of children as a result of their experiences prior to and during their period in the looked after system is well documented. We are mindful of the number of children and young people whose health care needs have not been sufficiently well monitored or met over the years and who have suffered in their physical development as a result of this. We are also mindful of the support young people and their carers need to address such issues as sexual health and development of relationships, drug and alcohol abuse etc.

We have a Child Health Care Specialist who is a member of our Fostering Panel. The Child Health Care Specialist is also available to provide advice and consultancy on health matters and to assist us in monitoring health care provision and the outcomes.

The Health Care Specialist will assist the agency in providing training opportunities to carers and staff which focus on the health care needs of children and young people in placement.

## Number of Foster Carers

### Foster Carers - 1.4.07 to 31.3.08

The Agency currently has 48 registered Carers. This includes 5 Carer families who offer short term care to children placed with the Agency's full time Carers. There have been 4 Carer families recruited over the last 12 month period. There have been 5 Foster Carers who have resigned/retired over the same period.

Approximately 50% of our carers have fostered with us for 5 years or more.

We are currently recruiting to meet the ongoing and increasing need for skilled Carers. Recruitment is via advertising, open days, drop in centres and other opportunities which we are able to develop in particular areas and communities.

### Number of Children Placed As At 31.3.08

**Total = 65**

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
0 - 4	2
5 - 10	28
11 - 15	26
16+	9

Inclusive of 1 Mother & Baby

Number of boys placed – 42

Number of girls placed – 23

### Number of Children Placed Between 1.4.07 and 31.3.08

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
0 - 4	5
5 - 10	10
11 - 15	16
16+	2

Inclusive of 1 Mother & Baby

### Number of Children Left Between 1.4.07 and 31.3.08

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
0 - 4	11
5 - 10	8
11 - 15	13
16+	6

Inclusive of 1 Mother & Baby

## **Emergency and Planned Placements**

During the period 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2007 and 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2008, the Agency has taken 33 placements of which 23 were made on an emergency basis. There were 10 placements made in a planned way.

During the same period, 33 children left in planned moves and 5 had unplanned moves.

Currently 45 placements are approved as the permanent arrangement for the child. 66% of children have been in placement more than 2 years, and 18 have been in placement for 5 years.

## **Procedures & Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Carers**

As an Agency, we promote fostering and we encourage both general enquiries about foster care and specific applications to be approved as a foster carer for us.

A member of the social work team co-ordinates recruitment and is able to deliver an immediate response to enquiries, following this up with a personal contact visit.

### **Steps followed:**

- On receiving an enquiry, initial information is taken and a pack is sent out giving details about the Agency including a job description for foster carers.
- Continued interest will be followed-up by a Social Worker visiting the home and having an initial discussion with the prospective carers.
- An application form is completed that provides detailed information (we use the form provided by Fostering Network).
- Pre-approval checks and enquiries are completed.
- Skills to Foster Induction Training is provided. This is mandatory for all applicants.
- An assessment of the application is completed by a Social Worker with the prospective carers. The format we use for this is the BAAF Form F. A written report is prepared alongside a portfolio of evidence of the applicants' knowledge, skills and experience.
- The application is presented to the Fostering Panel. Applicants will attend Panel with their assessing Social Worker.
- The Panel will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to be approved and the terms of appointment of each application.
- The Agency Director will make an approval decision based on the Panel's recommendation.
- The applicants will be informed verbally of the Panel's recommendation and they will be informed in writing of the decision.
- When a Foster Carer joins our Agency, we provide a number of services and benefits that will support them. This includes a level of financial support that values the skills of Foster Carers and recognises the job they do. They will be members of Fostering Network, which provides information, advice and guidance on all fostering related matters.

## **Review of Approval**

Systems are in place to review the appointment of FCSNW Carers on an annual basis. Circumstances may arise to indicate the need to review at less than the 12 months interval i.e. the outcome of a complaint investigation or other significant change in the household.

The review will determine whether the household remains suitable and if there should be any change in the Carers' appointment.

As part of the review process, and before the review meeting is held, reports are requested from the following: the Carer/s, the FCSNW Supervising Social Worker, the Social Worker for the child/ren in placement and the NT & AS teacher working with the child/ren in placement. These, together with post-placement reports from the previous 12 month period, are considered at the review.

Administration systems are in place to update all statutory references and medical examinations every three years.

The review meeting is chaired by an Independent Social Worker, employed on a freelance basis by FCSNW.

The Agency has four Independent Social Workers who undertake this role, all who have experience of family placement and management.

The review is held at FCSNW offices and is attended by the Carer/s, their Supervising Social Worker and the Reviews Administrator. The Chair records the outcome and makes recommendations for action and approval for the next 12 months. The first review of approval is presented to the Fostering Panel who make a recommendation as to the Carer/s approval for the next 12 months.

The annual review document is sent to the Carer/s and retained in the FCSNW Carer file.

Relevant Local Authorities are notified about the Carer/s approval.

The Agency has a Foster Carer Appeal Procedure to follow if a Carer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the annual review, or a decision of the Fostering Panel.

As part of the Agency procedures to support and supervise Carers, the Supervising Social Worker visits on a regular basis, this, as previously described, being no less than one visit each 2 months. This forms the basis of the monitoring of care. Internal Planning Meetings to review and plan the work being undertaken with and on behalf of the child take place on a regular basis as the need arises. Agency monitoring forms are completed quarterly to record placement outcomes and inform ongoing plans.

## **Training provided for Foster Carers**

Training is provided for Foster Carers and is an important part of the support made available. Training needs will be identified during the pre-approval assessment, and on an ongoing basis post-approval as part of Carers' continuing professional development, and to meet specific demands to manage placements.

The majority of our training to Carers is provided to small groups at out offices, delivered by specialist trainers courses. Delivered in the period April, 2007 to April, 2008 were:

- HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, MRSA & TB – 1 day X 2
- Recording Skills for Foster Carers – ½ day X 4
- Childhood Bereavement 2 days X 1
- Safe Handling & De-escalation Skills – 2 days X 1

Carers can, in addition, access training locally with our support, for example NVQ Level 3, First Aid, Parenting Skills and Managing Disability.

We can be flexible with arrangements to meet different needs.

## **Quality Assurance**

The Complaints & Representation Procedure at Foster Care Services North West encourages and places an emphasis on resolving complaints at a local level. The process for handling concerns and complaints is explained in leaflets for all Foster Carers, Staff, Service Users, Children and Young Persons, and full details are provided in company publications.

The Fostering Panel, which has five Independent Members, meets monthly, and fulfils an advisory function to all aspects of the service delivery. Foster Carer applicants attend the Panel Meetings. The Panel receives regular information about young people in placement.

The Agency has a contract with RateUs, an Independent Provider of an evaluation system that enables all children, young people and staff to rate our service. This is a confidential system with the ability to alert management to a serious complaint.

Feedback about our service is encouraged during the Foster Carers' annual review process, which is chaired by an Independent Social Worker. We also regularly evaluate the views of Foster Carers by using questionnaires.

When complaints are received that cannot be resolved at a local level, or where the complainant has elected to invoke stage 2 direct, an Independent Investigator is appointed.

In the period 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2007 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2008, two complaints were received; one was resolved at local level and one is currently unresolved.

**April 2008**