



Statement of Purpose and Function

This document complies with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 Regulation 3

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Charities Commission registration no: 1084124

Introduction to Community Foster Care

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, issued by the Secretary of State for Education under sections 22(1), (2)(a) and (b), (e) to (j), (6), (7) (a) to (h) and (j) 34(1), 48(1)(a) and (c) to (f) and 118(5) to (7) of the Care Standards Act 2000 (1) and sections 22C(11), 26(1) and (2), 31A(3), 59(2) and (3A) and 104(4) of, and paragraphs 12A to 12G of Schedule 2 to, the Children Act 1989(2) which govern the work of fostering services providers throughout England and will be used in the inspecting and registering of fostering agencies.

Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards and Regulation 3 (1) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 require a fostering agency to produce a statement of purpose which contains a range of detailed information as set out in Standards 16.1 and 16.2.

This statement has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and will be a useful source of information to Community Foster Care's staff, foster carers and prospective carers and young people who are placed with Community Foster Care.

This statement is reviewed and updated on a regular basis, at least annually, and modified as necessary.

Community Foster Care is an independent foster care agency, established to provide professional foster care for Looked after Children. Community Foster Care was set up as a Company Limited by Guarantee in February 1999 - company registration number 3719101.

Community Foster Care is also a registered Charity - registered charity number 1084124 and a not-for-profits community business. Any surplus above expenditure is reinvested into the charity, to benefit Looked after Children as well as foster carers and also to aid social and economic regeneration into the local communities. Community Foster Care operates as a social enterprise and was awarded the Social Enterprise Mark in September 2009.

In accordance with the Companies Act 1985 and 1989, Community Foster Care has produced a Memorandum and Articles of Association. Copies of these have been made available to Ofsted, the regulatory authority for independent fostering agencies.

Our Status and Constitution

Community Foster Care is Charity and Social Enterprise which means we are 'Not for Profit' and have no shareholders and all our resources are reinvested to expand the services we offer to our beneficiaries. We use our resources to expand the services we offer to children and young people, support to foster carers including training as well as practical support. We also develop new services to meet the needs of the placing authorities.

We are governed by a Board of Trustees made up of people with skills and knowledge needed to oversee the work of the charity and includes a foster carer who is the foster carer's representative.

The Board meets regularly and is responsible for determining:

- The values to be promoted
- The strategic direction for Community Foster Care
- The company's organisational structure
- The business plan
- Financial decisions
- Management policies.

Statement of Overall Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

The essence of our work at Community Foster Care is commitment to facilitate real personal growth and development in young people for whom we care. Whilst we are experienced and effective at working with difficult behaviours, we do not allow our work to be restricted to the realms of mere containment for young people; we are very clear that we act as "Agents of Change" in their lives.

It is through this strong professional orientation that we are able to state unequivocally our expectations that previously unchanged behaviours such as non-school attendance, violence, substance abuse, self-harm and lack of commitment to change, are not acceptable to Community Foster Care. Whilst being a powerful statement of expectations and outcomes, our stance is essentially optimistic, since the connection is that individuals can take control of their behaviour - and if they can take control of themselves, then Community Foster Care with all the environmental and personal support structures to help, insists that they do!

We believe that the prime movers in this process are not systems, dogma or institutions, but people. The keystone of Community Foster Care is a commitment to this principle; consequently we place young people with foster carers of compassion and strength.

Our commitment is to individuals. Our goals and expectations reflect the belief that we can achieve the very best for the young people in our care; our professional practice is a dynamic expression of this, our basic philosophy. Therefore, we strive continually for individual solutions to individual problems within a framework that is 'Needs Driven' rather than 'Resource Driven'.

In our own young people we want to see developing individuals who are integrated both personally and socially and who can stand on their own two feet and cope with the ups and downs of life.

Our aspirations are no lower with foster carers - whatever it takes in terms of enabling growth, change and development towards these goals, we consider it our responsibility to produce it for every individual in our care at Community Foster Care.

Our Principles

Community Foster Care acknowledges the principles embodied in the Children Act 1989 and recognises that children and young people are best cared for within their immediate or external family whenever possible. All services and provisions will be developed within the spirit of the UK National Standards for Foster Care, the European Convention on Human Rights, UK Human Rights Act 1998, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Fostering Regulation Standards and Guidance & NMS 2011/2014/2015.

This means that:

- Every child and young person will be respected as an individual and will be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential.
- Each child and young person should be enabled to lead as independent a life as possible within their home or in the community of their choice. Individuals should have the right to make decisions regarding their own lives, as appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Community Foster Care operates within a clear management structure with shared accountability, management and monitoring of people who have appropriate skills and qualifications.
- Community Foster Care will work in partnership with Local Authorities, Health Authorities, voluntary organisations, users and foster carers to develop services and ensure their provision is coordinated efficiently and effectively.
- During the assessment of any child or young person, carers, social workers, staff, children and young people and family members will be consulted.
- Community Foster Care will work with parents, statutory and voluntary agencies in assisting children to thrive and achieve their full potential.

Community Foster Care believes that all children and young people have a right to:

- Affection, love and understanding
- Nutrition and medical care
- Education
- Leisure opportunities
- The fullest possible social integration and special care if they suffer with a disability
- Be an active citizen within their community
- Have their individual abilities developed
- Enjoy these rights regardless of ethnicity, social origin, disability, gender, sexuality and religion
- Have their welfare considered to be of paramount importance
- To be placed with their siblings whenever possible
- To have meaningful contact with their birth family and significant others whenever possible
- Protection from neglect, abuse and exploitation
- Expect stability, security, continuity and consistency of foster care
- Expect their identity and care needs will be reflected in the provision of a foster placement within Community Foster Care
- Due consideration of their views
- Preparation for adult life and independent living.

Support and Services Provided to Foster Carers

Community Foster Care embraces the National Standards of Foster Care (UK) 1999, the Fostering Services Standards and Regulations 2011 (England), volume 4 Children Act 1989 Fostering Services and the Care Planning and Review Regulations 2010. Community Foster Care recognises these as minimum standards and aspires to exceed them. Every policy and procedure will incorporate the documents listed. Every foster carer is issued with a copy of the Foster Care Handbook, Safer Caring (Fostering Network) and the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. All carers are enrolled with the Fostering Network.

Supervision

Foster carers will receive regular supervision from a named appropriately qualified social worker and has access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice to enable them to provide consistent, high quality care for a child or young person placed in their home.

Positive working relationships are the essence of Community Foster Care's fostering service. Foster carers understand the importance of communicating with the fostering services enabling any issues to be dealt with in an efficient and effective manner. Equally, supervising social workers understand the importance of supervision, support and the management of foster carers, which enable young people placed to enjoy safe and consistent foster care.

Training

All foster carers receive pre and post approval training. Post approval training programmes include Training, Support and Development Standards Workshops, Child Development Training comprising child development, attachment, resilience, safe caring and challenging behaviours, First Aid and Child Protection, including Child Exploitation and Missing from care. All approved foster carers receive Annual Reviews, the first is presented to the Foster Care Panel together with any subsequent reviews where changes are requested or where there are concerns. Carers then attend Panel every three years.

Foster Care Handbook

When approved all foster carer's are provided with a login to a secure site on Community Foster Care website where they can access Community Foster Care's Handbook. The Foster Care Handbook contains information required by the foster carer including policies, procedure and finance. Paper copies of the handbook are also available.

Out of Hours Support

We have an 'Out of Hours' support and advice telephone line for foster carers which is staffed by the fostering team. This means that foster carers can speak to a social worker 24 hours a day throughout the year including weekends and all public holidays. There is always a Manager on back up to assist with emergency situations.

Foster Carer Support Groups

Support groups have been set up to provide additional support and advice to foster carers in each region. They also act as networking opportunities and also to 'buddy' new foster carers. The Cumbria and Lancashire branches hold support groups every month using half the session for peer support and half for informal training.

Annual Reviews of Foster Carers

All foster carers are reviewed at least annually and the thoughts and views of all children and young people placed are taken into account. This is done either by a child writing their views or drawing a picture and they are assisted by our Placement Support Workers who work with all our children and young people. We also ask for the views of all social workers who have placed children and young people with our foster carers as well as other professionals involved with the child as appropriate.

Reviews are undertaken in the foster carers home and whilst the past year is discussed and all the views listened to we also discuss what training, resources or support is needed for the next period and make an action plan which everyone agrees to. This is then reviewed and discussed in the usual supervision meetings.

On the first annual review following approval foster carers are invited to attend our Foster Care Panel. Thereafter they are invited to attend every three years.

Placements

We offer a range of placements as follows:

- Emergency/same day - these are to assist children who are in crisis where they need to be looked after immediately to prevent any further distress to them for various reasons which will be discussed with foster carers.
- Short term - these placements are designed to give children and young people security and stability whilst their long term plans are discussed, often within the Court arena. The placement can last a few weeks or months or can be up to two years.
- Long term - often referred to as our 'forever families' these are placements which offer permanence to children who cannot return home to their families.
- Respite care - a valuable resource to support our own foster carers and this can be a weekend or a few weeks care in the summer holidays.
- Parent and child assessment placements - these placements are usually for teenager mums who require parenting support in order to care effectively for their baby. Foster carers need to attend additional training before they can be approved to take on these tasks centred placements.

Matching

All information received by Community Foster Care is shared with the foster carers who are approached to look after a particular child. We approach only foster carers who we feel can meet the needs of the child(ren) and by that we mean having the necessary skills and experience. We also look at the needs of any other child in placement and will discuss the effect of having another child placed with all placing social workers. Every effort is made to match children with foster carers who can meet their religious, cultural and diversity needs. Any gaps in knowledge are fully discussed and documented with an action plan at the Placement Planning Meeting.

Foster Carer and Placement Numbers

In August 2016 Community Foster Care in the North had a total of 14 approved foster carers in Lancaster and Cumbria.

We had 18 children placed, 3 sibling groups and 8 children over the age of 10.

There is an even mix of either gender and the ethnicity of the children is mainly white British.

Children's Information

Children's Guide

We have two Children's Guides one for under 11 years and one for 12 years plus. These guides give age appropriate information to children and young people and include how to make a complaint and how to contact Ofsted. Children's Guides are given to children when they are placed with us along with a welcome gift.

We regularly consult with children/young people during the year regarding their fostering experiences and views.

Education Provision

We have an absolute commitment to the importance of education. Our very clear starting point is that education for children and young people in foster care is non-negotiable. Children and young people are expected to attend school. We acknowledge the very real problems that many of our young people have had with school in the past and our foster carers are actively involved with the child's education programme and have positive links with their school in order that issues can be addressed efficiently and effectively.

We also support young people who have left Community Foster Care to continue with education or develop life skills. Applications for assistance can be made for tuition, exam costs and books/resources needed to undertake a course or for driving lessons.

Activities

Our Placement Support Worker based in West Cumbria and our Supervising Social Worker based in Lancashire provide group activities for our children and foster carers as well as one to one sessions with the children which might involve a trip to the beach, a library or to plan a group activity. Our Placement Support Worker and our Supervising Social Worker have links with social services as well as community groups and will be able to advise foster carers on which suitable community groups are available for children to take part in.

The Placement Support Worker and our Supervising Social Worker will undertake a risk assessment in the activity planning stage as well as desired outcomes from the event. Following the activity their documents will be updated detailing whether outcomes were met or not and this is used to inform social workers of the progress children are making whilst being placed with our foster carers.

Participation

We have regular consultation events during the year including one annual event with the Fostering Panel Chair to ascertain the children's and young people views about what they feel about the Agency and any changes they would like to see happen.

Our children in the Cumbria region have contributed to a 'children's voices' recording where they spoke about their experiences of being looked after and what was important from a foster placement.

Training and Development for Foster Carers

Foster carers are our most valuable resource and we are committed to providing professional training throughout their career with us. We monitor the attendance of foster carers to training events and whilst the majority are during the daytime we do run some at weekends and evenings. Foster carers are aware of the commitment to their training programme required during the assessment process.

Our preparation training is delivered over three full days at a weekend (or three full days during the week) and is based on the Fostering Network's Skills to Foster programme. It is then followed by a separate session for birth children of potential foster carers. Our preparation training covers:

- Why foster with Community Foster Care?
- Why children and young people need to be fostered
- The tasks involved in foster care
- Listening to children and young people talking
- Listening to the views of foster carers
- Safeguarding and what does this mean for foster carers
- Safer caring
- Behaviour management
- Child Development and Attachment
- Working together with other professionals
- Promoting contact
- Anti-discriminatory practice

Experienced foster carers attend the course as well, we also intend to use the 'Children's Voices' recording in order to share our children's views with those applicants interested in pursuing their interest in fostering.

Following approval all foster carers are supported to complete the Training Support and Development Induction Standards for Foster Care which is commenced during the Form F assessment process.

Community Foster Care provides core training which is mandatory for all foster carers and then additional training courses to meet special and individual needs or which Community Foster Care feels will benefit foster carers. All foster carers are asked to discuss their training needs at their annual review.

Some of our post-approval training courses are:-

- First Aid
- Safer Caring
- Child Protection/Safeguarding
- Sexual Health
- Healthy Living
- Child Development/Attachment/Promoting Resilience
- Recording and report writing
- Equality and Diversity
- Understanding and managing behaviour.
- Children Missing from Care
- Child Sexual Exploitation

Recruitment and Assessment

We have foster carers who come from different backgrounds and had different experiences before they approached us to discuss becoming a foster carer. We need to have a variety of foster carers in order that we can meet the individual needs of the children and young people requiring a placement. We do not discriminate against anyone because of their age, race, gender or sexual orientation.

We are looking for people who have the potential to grow and develop their skills and who can provide a safe placement for a child or young person. One person must be available on a full time basis to care for any child placed and all children must have their own bedroom.

We do not accept applications from anyone who has been convicted of an offence against a child or a serious offence against an adult.

Please go to the FAQs page of our website for commonly asked questions and more information.

Application and Assessment

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 state that all agencies must have safer recruitment practises in place for the recruitment of foster carers. This means that all enquiries are screened and visited by a qualified social worker who is experienced and skilled in foster carer recruitment.

Community Foster Care will only proceed with applicants who it feels can provide a safe, health and supportive foster home for children. Following completion of the Skills to Foster course, suitable applicants will proceed to Stage 1 of the application process and be allocated a qualified social worker.

Following receipt of satisfactory statutory checks, medicals and references, applicants will proceed to Stage 2 of the process (on occasion Stage 1 and Stage 2 will run alongside each other - this would be decided on a case by case basis and be dependent upon circumstances). Stage 2 information is collated by way of a home study assessment using the BAAF Form F assessment pro-forma. The assessor will visit the home regularly and compile the report. All birth children, external family and any other person living in the home will be interviewed as well as an assessment being undertaken on pets and the environment.

All families are required to produce a family book of photographs during the assessment stage which will then be used to introduce children to the family if successfully approved. We have also recently introduced the use of DVD's in the North as another way of providing information for children prior to their placement.

Applicants are allocated a qualified social worker who will conduct a Home Study and Community Foster Care uses the BAAF Form F Assessment proforma. Statutory checks, medicals and references are undertaken. Once these checks are returned and the applicant is deemed suitable to proceed, the Assessor will visit the home regularly and compile the report, and look at the applicant's motivation to foster. All birth children, external family and any other person living in the home will be interviewed as well as an assessment being undertaken on pets and the environment.

Foster Care Panel and Approval

Once the Form F is completed and the assessor and applicant are happy with it the next step is to be presented to the Foster Care Panel. Currently the North's Foster Care Panel is held in Lancashire. The Assessor is present with the potential foster carers during their interview with the Foster Care Panel.

Fostering Panels are convened from the membership of the central list and are chaired by an independent and experienced chair with the relevant skills and work experience appropriate to the role. The Panel consists of a number of professionals and independent members who all have the relevant experience of working with looked after children the Fostering Services Regulations requires.

Following the consideration of all the information presented to Panel members a recommendation is made regarding the approval and category of approval to the Agency Decision Maker. Community Foster Care's Agency Decision Maker is the Chief Executive of the Fostering Service.

Complaints and Representations

We had one complaint during 2016 from a Local Authority Social Worker regarding one of our foster carers, which was upheld in part.

Please contact any of our offices for a copy of our complaints policy.

We do have a book in each office for press cuttings and compliments which we are pleased to receive from our children and young people, foster carers and other people who have come in contact with Community Foster Care.

Staff Recruitment

Community Foster Care use safer recruitment practices ensuring equality and diversity compliant with Working Together 2010 to ensure that we only recruit staff suitable to work in a fostering agency. We complete a range of statutory checks on all staff including references and telephone follow up calls and enhanced DBS checks.

All social work staff are expected to hold a recognised social work qualification and maintain their HCPC registration.

All other staff are required to hold the relevant qualifications appropriate to the work they are undertaking.

All staff receive regular supervision, an annual appraisal and ongoing training to ensure they are able to carry out their tasks to the highest standard and are kept informed of practice development and new ways of working. Community Foster Care holds Investors in People status and this was renewed in March 2015.

Quality Standards

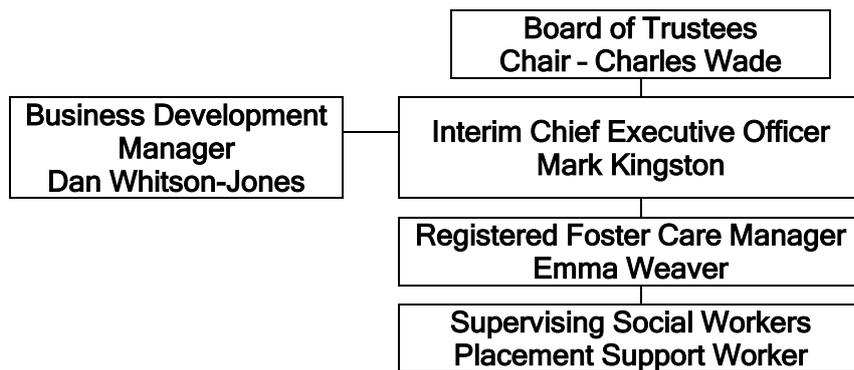
Community Foster Care has to continually challenge the way it works and strives to continuously improve. All staff, foster carers and managers are accountable for the work they do and they receive regular support, guidance and supervision.

The Board of Trustees and the Registered Manager for the Fostering Services all lead on quality assurance issues via auditing information, the monitoring of operational practice and management information. The Chief Executive, alongside the Senior Management team reviews the Policies and Procedures every year.

In addition the Foster Care Panel plays a vital role in quality assurance and does so by providing feedback to the agency regarding the standard of the assessments presented to them. Foster carers have access to independent support services, where they are under investigation of allegations of abuse of misconduct and this is provided by the Fostering Network. Independent social workers are used to investigate serious complaints.

Community Foster Care is a member of Fostering Network, BAAF, Children England and Fostering through Social Enterprise. Community Foster Care holds the Social Enterprise Mark trading for people and planet.

Management Structure of the Fostering Services



Staff List for the North Region

Community Foster Care currently employs:

- Interim CEO - (based in Gloucestershire)
- One Business Development Manager (based in the South)
- One Registered Manager (North) based in Lancaster
- One Supervising Social Worker based in Cumbria
- One Placement Support Worker (part-time) based in Cumbria
- One Placement Support Worker (part-time) based in Lancashire
- One Office Manager based in Lancashire

The service in the North is managed by a Registered Manager. Community Foster Care works hard to ensure equality and diversity in its workforce and supports staff who are also mothers with their career aspirations. The Registered Manager has responsibility for the supervision staff members, the Form F Assessors and holds budget responsibility. Community Foster Care allows for flexible working arrangements where this does not adversely impact on the needs of the service.

Office Accommodation

Cumbria - we have a small project office in Workington, West Cumbria which has additional resources including a training room which can be hired and we use this for our preparation training and foster carer support groups.

Lancaster - this is our main office for the North and we have an office for staff as well as a large training room at The Gatehouse, Lancaster. Although we have our training room we also occasionally use community venues for training for both preparation and post approval as well as for support groups. This approach supports the ethics of Community Foster Care in helping to sustain communities by using local resources whenever possible.

Ofsted Inspections

Community Foster Care is inspected regularly by Ofsted and is currently on a three year cycle of inspections. Our rating in July 2012 was deemed to be 'Good' and this was confirmed in our most recent inspection in 2015.

A copy of all our Ofsted reports can be found on our website www.communityfostercare.co.uk.