

HOW

ACTION FOR  
CHILDREN

WORKS

# Statement of Purpose

## Action for Children Wessex Fostering Service

Action for Children: Wessex Fostering Service

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### Mission Statement

Action for Children supports and speaks out for the UK's most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in order to bring about positive changes in their lives.

At Fostering Wessex, we aim to provide safe, secure and stable family placements within the community so that children and young people can experience a positive model of life for the future. Fostering Wessex provides a variety of foster homes to children and young people aged 0-18 years old. It provides long and short term foster homes to children and young people who have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect. As a service, we provide standard and specialist foster homes which utilise an Attachment Therapeutic Approach. Our therapeutic foster carers, and children and young people, receive a bespoke intervention drawn from several theoretical components which include: Early Trauma, Attachment Theory and PACE.

We have successfully recruited and will continue to recruit and develop skilled and experienced foster carers, who are able to offer mainstream and specialist placements in the community to children and young people as an alternative to residential living, or on a welfare basis. Typically, these young people have complex backgrounds, display challenging behaviour, and have high level needs, including but not limited to;

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorders and attachment difficulties
- Self-harming
- Eating disorders and unhealthy lifestyles
- Autism and Asperger's Syndrome as well as other diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disabilities
- At risk of sexual exploitation
- Engagement in offending behaviour
- Engagement in anti-social behaviour

### Achieving positive outcomes for young people.

Action for Children is committed to supporting children and young people to achieve their full potential and achieve positive outcomes. All Action for Children staff,

including foster carers, are focussed on supporting the children and young people to succeed and do well while they are in their foster placements, with a view to inspiring them to have high aspirations for themselves for the future. We aim to ensure children and young people are equipped with practical day to day skills, increased emotional resilience, and a sense of achievement.

Our Foster carers are seen as an extension of Action for Children's professional fostering family and the key to ensuring children and young people achieve positive life outcomes. Carers are supported throughout each stage of their foster care journey, from initial assessment, pre-approval training, and especially when children are placed, so that they can best meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.

### Our Aims

We aim for our foster carers to be strong advocates for the children and young people they care for, ensuring the child in their care has a voice through meetings attended and decisions made.

Action for Children supports and speaks out for the UK's most vulnerable and neglected children and young people to make a difference in their lives.

The service continuously aims to provide safe, secure and stable family placements within the community so that the young person can experience a positive model of life for the future. We strive to ensure that we understand our children and young people and their childhood experiences to provide a tailored plan to support their needs, in particular their emotional needs to ensure they are able to build positive attachments with others.

All foster carers are given guidance by Action for Children through the foster carers' electronic handbook, through their initial assessments and the Skills to Foster training, of their role in supporting young people to achieve positive outcomes, as well as how to monitor progress. This ensures the focus on reaching their full potential is always at the heart of the foster home.

Young people who have been cared for in our foster homes have told us:

***" [The foster carer] gave me so much confidence and I couldn't be more grateful to her. Before [the foster placement] I was sectioned inside the hospital and I cannot express how much she helped my mental state and how much of a different person***

*I am after being with her. If it wasn't for her I will never have went for my GCSE exams... I wish for you to recognise what an amazing help she was to me. I cannot thank her enough for what she has done."*

*"She definitely has my interests at heart, she shows genuine care for me. She is very interested in my education and health, is funny and makes me laugh. She reminds me of my nan which gives me comfort."*



At Action for Children, young people's participation is highly valued and is at the forefront of our practice. Young people are involved in recruitment of staff and foster carers. A number of activities, such as Art Workshops, a yearly 'Fun Day' as well as regular celebrations take place to give the young people opportunities to meet with all of the team and other looked after children.



## Status and Constitution.

Action for Children, the children's charity, Registered Charity No.1097940, helps the most vulnerable children and young people in the UK, break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential. Action for Children has a network of projects around the UK delivering a range of high quality, successful foster placements, which meet and exceed

the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and 2013.

All of Action for Children's fostering services also implement the therapeutic attachment approach within their service delivery to ensure all foster carers and staff working with the children and young people truly understand the early experiences and traumas faced and experienced by the children and young people accessing the service.



Fostering Wessex was initially set up to provide remand foster care as an alternative to remand in secure accommodation or custody. However the service has developed over time to provide prevention of offending, post custody, Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) foster placements, alongside standard fostering. The service merged its registration in November 2015 with the Intensive Fostering Wessex service, which was providing Intensive Fostering placements, using the TFCO model. This model was initially grant funded by the Youth Justice board and was later solely funded through placing authorities.

In November 2016, a review of the service was completed regarding the stated needs of local authorities, commissioning frameworks and the children and young people we serve. We were aware of the increasing need for a therapeutic approach to address issues of early childhood trauma and abuse. Fostering Wessex moved to establishing a therapeutic approach utilising our expertise and knowledge to meet the needs of the children and young people being referred to our service.

As part of this fostering approach, the service has access to a Psychotherapist. Therapeutic Attachment training is delivered to our foster carers and staff, which directs Attachment Planning which is a unique, evidence-informed approach, to developing care planning for children and young people. This approach focusses on the recovery from developmental trauma and broken attachment to ensure children and young

people are understood by their foster carers and those working with the child. Care is based on, and attuned to, the child's emotional developmental needs. This approach informs the child's care plan and statutory reviews.

### Operational management of the service

Action for Children Fostering has policies and procedures which are followed by all staff members within the service. All the policies, procedures and standards of Action for Children are implemented, and our fostering services are supported by the Children's Services Directorate, including line management support, financial management, human resources and physical asset management. Our head office is based at: 3, The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford, WD18 8AG, telephone 01923 361500.

The Fostering Service Manager and the Team Manager meet regularly to plan and coordinate the work and future development of the service. Staff members are also involved in team meetings, practice meetings, and periodic service development days to seek and gain their feedback on the service and how best this can be further improved.

Foster carers and staff are trained in accordance with our Fostering Learning and Development framework and provision. Training is also delivered at venues local to the foster carers, most often at the offices in Fareham.

## Service Provision

Fostering Wessex provides individual family-based placements in the community to support young people and children who have experienced significant trauma and abuse. A move to this type of care was initiated in April 2016 as described above. Whilst the therapeutic approach is geared towards supporting young people through longer term care our previous experience of provided short term care through the TFCO model is also utilised to support children needing short term, complex placements.

The fostering service has also been successful in securing a place on the South Central Framework which consists of 14 local authorities. The aim is to access therapeutic foster placements for children and young people for up to 2 years in duration a view for these to

become permanent homes. Through these foster placements, the children and foster carers receive bespoke individualised intervention, giving particular attention to the early trauma and childhood experiences of the child placed. These foster placements are well planned, with the Team Manager carefully considering each referral, ensuring the completion of a detailed matching process which is informed from a pre-placement meeting. Once a foster carer is identified and the placement commences, the care planning meeting and care given to the child is provided in response to the child's early experiences of trauma and abuse which is impacting on the child's presenting behaviour.

The Team Manager will devise a Therapeutic Plan and coach the carers in appropriate safe techniques to promote positive emotional warmth/attachment, agree consistent/firm boundaries and routines which support them to provide high quality and stable placements. This approach will also be shared with the school, if appropriate, ensuring a holistic approach to further support stable homes.

The child is also given time to heal and recover from the trauma and the foster placement is well supported through the fostering social workers and clinical supervision provided through the Psychotherapist. Art and play therapy can also be provided to the child if required. The Psychotherapist we work with has extensive training and experience in working with children and families and is registered with the British Association of Psychotherapist (BACP).

### Size of service.

Fostering Wessex covers the Hampshire County area including Southampton, Portsmouth, and Isle of Wight, although we currently have no foster carers on the island. We also have a small number of carers in West Sussex and Dorset.

### Numbers of foster carers

As at March 2019, Fostering Wessex has 20 approved fostering households in total.

Out of these 20 fostering households, 17 are approved to provide full time care and 3 to provide respite care.

## Assessment and Approval

### Foster Carer Recruitment

We aim to recruit foster carers with demonstrable skills in caring for children with a high level of need and offer a professional level of remuneration in recognition of the high level of commitment and qualities needed. The service aims to recruit carers from a wide range of backgrounds to ensure the greatest possible choice of appropriate placements and in an endeavour to reflect the demographics of the local population. The Marketing Officer and Recruitment and Assessment Manager makes best use of local and internet-based resources to promote the fostering service, dispel myths and recruit skilled and interested people. An information pack is sent to the enquirers, which details the recruitment, preparation and approval processes. This is followed up by an initial visit and then allocation to an assessing social worker, if appropriate.

### Preparation of foster carers

Prospective foster carers who proceed with an application undertake the Skills to Foster Preparation course which is delivered in modules. The Skills to Foster Preparation course explores the following areas:

- What do Foster Carers do?
- Identity and Life chances
- Working with others
- Understanding children in foster care
- Safer caring
- Transitions
- The voice of care experienced young people

### Assessment of foster carers.

Foster carers are rigorously and comprehensively assessed using the Coram BAAF competency based assessment format. The service has experienced social workers who undertake all assessments on prospective carers who are managed by an experienced Recruitment and Assessment manager. All applicants in assessment are also seen by the Manager for a 'Second Opinion Visit' and where gaps or concerns are noted from this meeting, the manager ensures these areas are addressed before presenting the full assessment to the Fostering Panel. As per Fostering Regulations 2013, all of the assessments undertaken within the service follow the Stage 1 and Stage 2 processes.

### Approval of foster carers.

The service has access to two fostering panels, one based in Fareham and one in London and both panels are arranged to take place at alternate months to ensure there is a Fostering Panel taking place in the region every calendar month. The Acting Fostering Service Manager also undertakes the role of Panel Advisor for both panels to ensure its functions continuously meet the stipulated legislation. Our Fostering Panels are constituted in keeping with the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations, with representation from Action for Children social workers and independent representatives including a foster carer, an adult with previous care experience, retired health and educational professionals along with local authority social workers. The fostering Panel is chaired independently. Prospective foster carers are invited to attend part of the panel meeting where their application is being considered.

Foster carers' approval is subject to annual review and additional carer reviews will be held where any complaints or allegations arise, where there are significant changes or at the request of foster carers. All Foster Carer Reviews will consider the views of placing social workers, young people who have been placed or are in placement as well as the carers and their supervising social worker.

### Support and Development of Foster Carers

All approved foster carers within our service are supervised and visited at least monthly by their allocated social worker and will receive additional support visits where required. The supervising social worker also maintains regular phone contact, at least once a week to check on the carers and the child or young person. All foster carers can also access an on call social worker during out of office hours and the service has a rota for accessing on call management support should this be required. Foster carers providing the therapeutic foster placements also have access to the Psychotherapist during monthly clinical supervision sessions, along with support offered from the Team Manager when required.

All foster carers have access to monthly support group meetings. All foster carers have access to the Foster Carers' electronic Handbook. This provides them with guidance on key policies, procedures and expectations of their role, as well as signposting them to resources

and information to support their learning and development.

The following is some of the feedback received from some of the foster carers about Fostering Wessex:

*This is an excellent service, with very good support. The support received from my social worker and on call workers, has made my job so much easier."*

*"Action for Children Fostering Wessex is an excellent service. The team is always ready to support and offer advice, and everyone is so easy to approach about any placement issue and you don't feel judged when asking for support. Action for Children staff always go above and beyond to support."*

*"There is always someone at the end of the phone 24/7 and the advice given is always helpful. Not only that, the team also followed up after placement ended, to ask how things were and this is the 'Rolls Royce' of the service. I did not expect that but could not be happier about it."*

### **Matching and Making Placements.**

When matching children to foster carers, the fostering service will endeavour to match the needs of the child or young person to the skills, abilities and experiences of available foster carers. The family structure, as well as the location of the fostering household, is also considered when matching the young person with available foster carers especially when the young person is still at compulsory education.

All referrals received for therapeutic foster placements will be considered and managed by the Team Manager who would also coordinate a pre-placement planning meeting. This provides an opportunity to liaise with the professionals working with the child to support family finding and subsequently the matching process.

## **Care for Young People**

### **Promoting positive behaviour and relationships.**

Within the fostering service, extensive training is provided on the therapeutic approach to foster carers, staff, and panel members. The Team Manager has access to the full dyadic training that is based on Dan Hughes PACE model. Foster carers also have access to a 4-day training on the Attachment Therapeutic Approach with the possibility of having access to an accredited course. Training on hypervigilance, secondary trauma and mindfulness is also available to carers and staff along with having access to behaviour support training.

Supervision sessions held with Foster Carers as well as discussions held at Support Group and Clinical meetings are reflective to enable the carers to identify particular issues and to be solution focused. Carers are supported to attune their responses to the child's needs and stage of development, providing them with a safe space and environment to grow and develop and to build and sustain healthy attachments with others and to engage in pro-social behaviour.

### **Safeguarding young people.**

Action for Children aims to take great care in recruiting carers to ensure that the placements we provide are safe for children. As part of the assessment process, applicants have to undertake Disclosure and Barring Checks. Checks are also made with the local authorities and health authorities where applicants have resided. We undertake thorough reference visits and contact ex-partners to ensure that robust information is received on the applicants in assessment. Applicants will also be subject to a medical check, the outcome of which will inform the assessment process.

The service is committed to sound planning when making placements and will ensure that good levels of information are sought from referring local authorities to inform the matching process. The service will work with referring social workers in completing an assessment of risk and a comprehensive matching pro-forma. The Service tries to involve children and young people within the matching process and seeks their views where possible.

Every fostering family has a Safer Care plan which takes into account the specific needs of the fostered child and the fostering family. This plan along with the risk assessment and health and safety checks are updated regularly ensuring this is specific to the child.

The Support Worker will have some time alone with those children they are working with and through engagement of participation activities organised by the service, At the start of the foster placement, young people are given Action for Children Young People's Guides which have been localised with the carers' and teams' information. We also seek feedback from children for the foster carer's reviews, using different methods appropriate to a child's age, understanding and level of engagement. We are always looking to find ways of improving how we seek the views of children and young people to inform the review process. We also undertake at least two unannounced visits to our carer households every year.

### **Children who have run away or are missing from care.**

The service provides information for children on what to expect if they go missing from their foster care placement. Foster carers are provided with clear

guidance on what to do in this eventuality and 24 hour support is available from Action for Children. Each incident of a child going missing is risk-assessed to determine the level of risk and concern appropriate. The local Running Away and Missing from Care protocol for the relevant local authorities is known to staff and foster carers.

### Promoting good health and wellbeing.

Children living with Action for Children carers are all registered with a local GP and dentist. Foster carers are provided with training on healthy eating, first aid and substance misuse.

The service builds good communication and relationships with adults who are key to the child's welfare; parents, placing social workers, teachers and health workers so that they have a full picture of the child's background, needs, preferences and priorities and are able to work together to keep the child at the centre.

### Leisure activities.

Action for Children foster carers look for a young person's unique talents and support him/her to explore and develop. Young people are encouraged and supported to take part in diverse leisure activities helping them to find out what they like to do and try new things.

Foster carers will encourage and support all our fostered young people in becoming active and positive community citizens.

### Promoting educational attainment.

Action for Children understands that many fostered young people face obstacles to doing well in school. Staff and carers work closely with schools, to help teachers understand how best to support our young people in the classroom and school environment. When required, carers will also act as advocates for the young person to get the support they deserve and need.

Education staff are invited to be part of the attachment sessions to provide consistent care from home to school.

Carers work patiently and creatively with young people to support them with their school work. Extracurricular activities are supported and creative ways are found to engage children who may have had negative experiences with school or who struggle to keep control of their feelings and behaviours in a classroom setting.

Where resources allow, young people are supported to access private tutors if appropriate and agreed with the placing authority. There is also an education policy in place organisationally.

### Promoting independence and adult life skills.

We recognise that the reality for most young people leaving care is that they have to face the challenge of independent adult living, often before they are ready or fully equipped with the required skills. Action for Children foster carers and support workers work hard to prepare young people for this by teaching them 'life skills' from as early as possible, for example, helping with the shopping, cooking, saving regularly in a bank account throughout the time living with the foster carer, right through to learning about tenancies and benefits when they are approaching independence. Carers are often able to provide care post 18yrs to provide continuity of family life for those who are not yet ready for independent living arrangements.

### Audit and Quality Assurance

Here at Action for Children we see Safeguarding children as a continual learning process which can always be improved. Systems for audit, data tracking and quality assurance are used alongside policies so as to better evaluate our performance, improve the quality of care we provide, and drive standards forward.

### Complaints

This Service utilises Action for Children's complaints procedure. The context for our complaints procedures is effective customer care, with service standards and service level agreements where appropriate, and with regular dialogue and review with customers of the service.

The purpose of our complaints handling procedures is to ensure that we:

- Listen and are responsive to people who raise an issue with us.
- Respond swiftly and at a level close to the point of service delivery.
- Are fair and consistent.
- Offer solutions and/or explanations.
- Offer complainant's recourse to someone more senior/more independent if they wish.
- Ensure that staff who are mentioned in complaints receive support.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Record complaints consistently and monitor what we record.
- Use complaints positively as an opportunity for learning and improvement.

Any complaints about the service can also be made directly to our Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street,  
Manchester

M1 2WD

Tel: 03001231231  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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Children and young people can also contact the Children's Commissioner for England if they wish to report any concerns or make complaints. The contact details for this are as follows:

The Office of the Children's Commissioner  
Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street  
London, SW1P 3BT

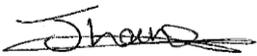
Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: [info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)

### Whistle Blowing

Action for Children supports an open culture to ensure individuals feel safe to raise concerns about harassment or bullying, or victimisation. This is supported by our Dignity at Work policy which sets out the procedure for any such complaints in line with the Code of Conduct framework. There is also dedicated phone line which employees have direct access to so as to make complaints and raise concerns.

Signed:



Jamie Heane  
Acting Fostering Service Manager

March 2019

Signed:



Stacey Burnett  
Responsible Individual

March 2019