

HOW

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

WORKS

Statement of Purpose

London and Ramsgate Fostering Projects

May 2017



Fostering South East is a long serving and well established service that has provided high quality family placements to some of the most vulnerable children and young people since 1997.

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 is an established provider of Fostering Services. The charity has a network of projects around the UK delivering a range of high quality services including successful foster placements.

Achieving positive outcomes for young people.

Action for Children is committed to supporting children and young people to achieve their full potential. Our focus is to work in partnership with foster carers, relevant professionals, children and young people to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people placed with our foster carers.

Our staff and foster carers strive to provide secure, nurturing placements which facilitate and support children and young people in achieving their full potential and improving their life chances both within our foster placements and beyond. We aim to inspire children and young people to have high aspirations for their futures whilst learning practical, day to day skills necessary for adulthood, giving them a them a sense of achievement.

We involve children and young people, their placing local authorities, families (where appropriate), foster carers, other professionals/services, in planning and goal setting. Foster carers are given clear guidance and support from staff in addition to training and resources such as the foster handbook and literature which highlights the importance of identifying, monitoring and reaching individual outcomes for children and young people.

Young people who are placed or have been in placement with our foster carers have told us:

*"I'm happy now and Is like a Mum to me. She looks after me a lot better than all my other carers."
"It has made me more independent and less angry and has opened my eyes to my aims in life."
Even though I have left care I come back to see the staff because you still help me and make me feel better.
.... and have changed me. I feel like a different person. I now see the bigger picture. is the Father I never had.*



Registration.

Name	Position Held	Qualifications	Date Commenced Working for Action for Children
Laurie Long	Responsible Individual Operational Director for Fostering Services Full Time (37 hours)	Bsc (Hons) Sociology and Social Work M.Phil Criminology Diploma in Social Work Diploma in Management	2009
Kevin White	Registered Manager	DipSW Dip in Welfare Studies Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management in Social and Health Care (Children).	June 1995

Registered Office.

Fostering South East
Dundee House
26 Albion Place
Ramsgate
Kent
CT11 8HQ
Tel: 01843 584540

Central Office.

ACTION FOR CHILDREN
3 The Boulevard
Ascot Road
Watford
WD18 8AG
Tel: 01923 361500

Principles.

In our work with children and families we:

- Put children and young people first.
- Encourage children and young people to develop respect for themselves and others.
- Provide families with support, when they need it, to carry out their caring responsibilities.
- Listen to the views of children, young people and their families, of foster carers, relevant professionals and of our own staff in planning and carrying out all our activities.
- Deliver services that recognise and build on the strengths of children and young people from all cultures and religious backgrounds, ensuring the care provided meets their needs and enables them to achieve their potential.
- Provide information about our services to all children, young people and families who are entitled to receive them, in ways that are appropriate to them.
- Work in partnership with families and the professionals committed to supporting them.
- Where this is not possible, we aim to create a positive experience of family life through foster care.
- Work to ensure that when children and young people are placed with foster carers, their identity including contact and ties with their birth family members are preserved if this is in the best interest of the child.
- Identify and plan for ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender and disability needs of children and young people in the process of matching them with their carer's.
- Ensure that children and young people who are looked after have the opportunity to develop a positive identity and high self-esteem.
- Believe that where possible, children and young people should be placed within a family of their own racial, cultural and religious background with common language.
- Believe that all children and young people should have access to adults from a similar ethnic origin, operating from positions of strength and authority giving the opportunity to develop strong identity and positive self-esteem, and to develop their skills in dealing with prejudices which they may experience during their lives.
- Are aware of all the needs of disabled children and young people and seek their views and active participation in their care plans wherever appropriate.
- Will consult and involve children and young people regarding decisions which affect them, as fully as possible.
- Believe that children and young people have a right to be protected from harm.
- Strive to ensure that children and young people are able to develop in a healthy environment to achieve their potential including accessing and participating opportunities available in the community as responsible citizens.
- Aim to ensure that all young people prior to leaving foster care are prepared for independence by providing support for the transition into adulthood.
- Will review the service and care which is being provided to children and young people on a regular basis and consider ways of improving services and will strive for continuous improvement.
- Are developing information systems to monitor our performance and to measure outcomes for children because it is important to us that our services are supporting children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Are committed to working co-operatively with other agencies to ensure comprehensive and co-ordinated services for children, young people and their families.
- Endeavour to establish a positive care environment which reflects Action for Children's ethos to ensure the care provided is tailored to their needs utilising the therapeutic approach.

Aims and Outcomes.

Aims.

The aim of Action for Children Fostering South East is to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable children and young people through the provision of high quality foster placements for 'Looked After' Children and the necessary training and support services to maintain and develop these placements.

We also aim to:

- Use our resources responsibly and efficiently.
- Work to high professional standards within a culture of continuous improvement.
- Act as a good employer by providing staff with the training, management and support they need to carry out their tasks effectively
- Lobby and campaign for public policy changes in the best interests of the people with whom we work, in pursuit of social justice and social inclusion.

Objectives.

Action for Children Fostering South East seeks to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people in society through the provision of safe, secure and successful foster placements.

The best interests of the children and young people involved are paramount and their safety is the first duty of the fostering service. Prospective foster carers are carefully and thoroughly assessed by means of a competency based assessment, in a way that is fair, transparent and respectful.

A wide range of potential foster carers are welcomed to the process. We believe that we should include all groups of suitable people for consideration as foster carers, by doing so we are better able to achieve a good match between the strengths and parenting abilities of foster carers and the needs of the children referred to the service.

Once a child or young person is matched with a foster carer, our services are designed to promote the success of the placement by providing support to meet the particular needs of the child or young person, in order to maintain the placement successfully.

Action for Children Fostering South East is provided by highly skilled, professional social workers, who have chosen to specialise in the field of foster care. They receive supervision from experienced managers and engage in continual learning and development in order to provide the best possible service to the children and young people in their care.

Finding the right families for children and young people is often a complex task, involving a number of different organisations. Action for Children Fostering South East is committed to working co-operatively with other agencies to help achieve best practice and good matching, thus creating positive outcomes for children and young people.



Safeguarding.

Action for Children Fostering South East employs robust processes when recruiting foster carers to ensure that the placements we provide are safe for children and young people. As part of the assessment process, applicants have to undertake all required statutory checks and we also ensure any required additional checks such as ex-partner references, additional referee checks and a second opinion visit are completed. We undertake thorough referee visits and to ensure that we have robust information about applicants.

Our service is committed to sound planning when making placements and will ensure that relevant and detailed information is sought from referring local authorities in order to inform the matching process. The service works with referring social workers to complete a comprehensive assessment of risk and matching pro-forma which will identify appropriate placement matching for the child or young person. The service endeavours to involve children and young people within the matching process by seeking their views where possible.

Every fostering family has a Safer Care Plan which takes into account the specific needs of the child or young person placed and the members of the fostering family. This plan along with a detailed Risk Assessment and Health and Safety Checks are updated and reviewed regularly.

Our supervising social workers make sure they have time alone with the children and young people placed on a regular basis. They form meaningful relationships with children and young people which allows them the opportunity to share their feelings

and thoughts about their care and potentially disclose any concerns. Every child and young person is given verbal and printed information about how to make complaints or raise concerns if there is anything they are unhappy about.

We seek feedback from children for the foster carer's initial six months and subsequent annual reviews, using different methods appropriate to a child's age, understanding and level of engagement. We undertake two unannounced visits to our foster carer households every year, although this number can be increased if we feel the situation warrants this.

Our staff and carers undertake Safeguarding and Child Protection training modules. Our Registered Manager has systems in place which provide oversight of and compliance with both Schedule 6 Monitoring and Schedule 7 Notifications (Fostering Regulations).



Care for Young People.

Children who run away or are missing from care.

The safety and welfare of the children and young people in our placements is paramount and we treat any incidence of a child or young person missing from placement with the high priority and concern. We provide information and written guidance to carers and members of staff regarding reporting and recording procedures for such eventualities.

We provide our carers with a copy of the missing person protocols for their own locality, that of the child's local authority and our own guidance. Our actions would include completing Schedule 7 Notifications, informing relevant parties, e.g. police, local authority, Ofsted, parents (if appropriate), etc. Once the child or young person is safely back in their placement, we ensure they are debriefed and involve their local authority in planning to try and prevent further incidents occurring ensuring a return to placement interview is held.

Promoting good health and wellbeing.

Children and young people living with Action for Children foster carers are all registered with a local GP and dentist. Exercise, which is fun and a healthy diet are encouraged. 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 or young person's welfare; parents, placing social workers, teachers and health workers so that they have a full picture of the child or young person's background, needs, preferences and priorities and are able to work together to support the young person.

Leisure Activities.

Action for Children foster carers look for a child or young person's unique talents and support him/her to explore and develop. Children and 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. All activities are undertaken safely, taking account of his/her needs and abilities.

We are supported by fundraisers in the local community and the money they raise for use enables us to help children and young people engage in sporting, leisure, academic activities, etc. through the provision of equipment, membership fees, etc. Some children or young people may also wish to become involved in voluntary work activities, such as fundraising, supporting others or environmental work; and Action for Children foster carers encourage and support all of our children and young people in becoming active and positive community conscious citizens.

Children or young people with additional needs are supported to access community based activities and have a full range of childhood experiences.

With support from corporate funders, Action for Children offers annual arts based activity events for children and young people in our foster placements, which are fun, as well as an opportunity for children and young people to express their ideas and wishes through creative media. We also organise joint participation outings/events for Children/ young people, foster carers and members of staff. These are very popular with our young people and carers and have proven helpful in enabling young people to meet and make friends and for carers to build support networks with their fellow carers. We also use these as a vehicle to seek children and young people's views on our service.

Promoting educational attainment.

Action for Children understands that many looked after children and young people face obstacles to maintaining high achievement levels in school. We make it a priority to give all the support, encouragement and practical help we can to remove the obstacles.

Taking learning from research in practice, we monitor placements to make sure that carers and staff are employing all the strategies shown to work in supporting fostered children and young people's education and have high aspirations for all of our children and young people.

Action for Children staff and carers work closely with schools, to help teachers understand how best to support our children and young people in the classroom and school environment. If necessary, foster carers will act as 'pushy parents' to advocate for the child or young person to get the support they deserve and need.

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

Where this is an agreed part of the Care Plan, children and young people may have access to private tutors if they are not in full time education or in some cases even if they are in FTE. We advocate proactively on the child or young person's behalf for these resources to be put in place.

Promoting independence and adult life skills.

As a service we have/have had a high ratio of young people who having reached the age of eighteen continue to remain with their foster carers through 'Staying Put' arrangements until they are ready to move on.

However, this is not always possible or appropriate and 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 to do so. 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.

Action for Children has a well-developed toolkit and training manual called 'Key to the Door', which foster carers are supported to use with young people. This

manual can be used to enable young people to gain credits and qualifications recognised by accommodation providers, as evidence of their ability to manage a tenancy. It is also used to evidence where the gaps are in a young person's independent living skills, to inform pathway planning and help to plan for the most helpful way forward.

Our foster carers have access to our Barclays sponsored Money Skills Training and materials, which provides them with guidance on how to develop a young person's budgeting and awareness of financial issues. Recently we have successfully accessed funding from Balfour Beatty to purchase all of the essentials for several young people moving to independent living for the first time.



Providing High Quality Foster Carers and Placements.

Recruitment of Foster Carers.

Action for Children Fostering South East seeks to recruit foster carers throughout the South East of England, predominantly in Kent, London, Essex and Hertfordshire.

The Marketing Officer 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 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.

The interests of the children and young people are paramount, their safety and well-being is the primary consideration of the fostering service. As a consequence, prospective foster carers are carefully and thoroughly assessed by means of a competency-based assessment in a way which is fair, transparent and respectful. A wide range of potential foster carers are welcome (except in the case of those with certain criminal convictions). Our recruitment process enables us to approve a variety of safe, skilled carers who offer a range of strengths and parenting abilities.

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 Training explores the following areas:

- Why children come into care
- 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
- Legislation
- Child development/Attachment and Resilience

We include views of young people and experienced foster carers in the foster carer preparation training.

Assessment of Foster Carers.

Foster carers are rigorously and comprehensively assessed using the BAAF competency based assessment format. We encourage applicants to contribute directly to the gathering of evidence to demonstrate competencies.

Approval and Review of Foster Carers.

Action for Children has Fostering Panels which meet in London on a bi monthly basis. We also have access to Wessex Fostering panel based in Fareham. Our Panels are constituted in keeping with the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and has representation which includes Action for Children social workers, managers, and independent representatives including a foster carer, an adult care leave, a former local authority manager, a retired paediatric consultant, a retired teacher and a medical advisor. The Fostering Panels are chaired independently.

Representatives from amongst our looked after young people have met with our panel members to discuss the panel process and to give their input into what qualities constitute a good foster carer. Prospective foster carers are invited to attend part of the Panel Meeting where their application is being considered. Foster carer approval is subject to annual review and additional carer reviews will be held where any complaints or allegations arise 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.

In December 2013 we started the process of carrying out Internal Annual Reviews for carers. This involves the Supervising Social worker presenting their reports and supporting feedback, checks, etc. to a Fostering Manager (from another service) to ensure the reviews are reviewed independently. The carers meet with the supervising social worker (SSW) and the manager for the purpose of the review. Carers, SSW's and the manager have found this type of review allows for more in depth discussions with the

carers and gives a more complete insight into their fostering role. Every first and third annual review will continue to go to panel.

Any CP issues, complaints, requests for change of approval status, etc. will be presented to panel and cannot be dealt with through internal reviews. Both fostering panels and internal reviews can only make a recommendation as to approval, deregistration, etc. This recommendation is then forwarded with all the documentation, reports and minutes to an Agency Decision Maker for a decision to be made. The ADM is a Senior Manager within Action for Children who is not associated with Fostering South East. This provides impartiality and senior management oversight of the process.

Support and development of foster carers.

Approved foster carers are supervised and visited at least monthly, and will receive additional support visits where required. Out of office hours support is provided to foster carers by qualified social worker operational staff with management back up who are available on a rota basis during evenings, weekends and bank holiday periods. Foster carers' support groups meet regularly in Ramsgate and London.

The Service is committed to encouraging the ongoing development of its foster carers and works with foster carers to identify learning needs. The service has implemented a carer induction programme and supports carers in achieving completion of the TSD Foster Carer Induction and training standards, within 1 year of approval. The service delivers a relevant Training Programme each year which includes elements of core training and more specialist post-induction elements. A number of our foster carers have achieved NVQ Level 3.

Matching and making placements.

Action for Children Fostering South East aims to provide a range of placements so that children and young people can be appropriately matched with foster carers with the appropriate skills, knowledge, family structure, ethnic background and geographical location. We work in partnership with children and placing authorities to increase the range of choice in placements.

Our foster carers.

As of April 2017, Action for Children Fostering South East has 29 Approved Foster Carer households, based in London and SE England. The foster carers

are representative of the diverse ethnic communities where children and young people live. Different religions are also practised and different languages spoken.

The range of needs Action for Children is able to meet.

We successfully have recruited and will continue to recruit and develop skilled and experienced people as professional foster carers, who are able to offer specialist placements in the community to children and young people who have complex backgrounds and needs, including:

- Children and young people with disabilities, additional and complex needs, children and young people requiring short breaks, task centred and long term placements
- Children and young people with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Children and young people with post-traumatic stress disorders and attachment difficulties
- Children and young people who self-harm
- Children and young people with eating disorders
- Children and young people with autism and Asperger's syndrome
- Children and young people who may have engaged in sexually harmful behaviours
- Children and young people who have entered a cycle of offending behaviours
- Young people who are pregnant and require support with parenting skills
- Children and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation
- Vulnerable young children placed with their parents

Complaints.

The 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 provided.

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 on the service can also be made directly to our Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted
National Business Unit, Piccadilly Gate
Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD
Tel: 03001231231
www.ofsted.gov.uk

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

Signed:



Kevin White
Registered Manager



Laurie Long
Operational Director
for Fostering Services