



Statement of Purpose



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Introduction

This statement of purpose for Children First has been developed in accordance with appropriate legislation and guidance:

- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011
- Fostering Services: The National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Children Act 1989, guidance and regulations volume 4: fostering services (referred to as statutory guidance) 2011
- The Children Act 2004
- The Care Planning Placement and Case review (England) Regulations 2010
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) regulations 2013

This Statement of Purpose is provided to and made available to employees, carers, Local Authorities children and young people in placement and to the general public via the Children First web site www.children-first@cfa.co.uk or in hard copy when requested. The statement of purpose is reviewed and agreed annually, by the Registered Manager and Senior Management Team.

Children First was initially founded in April 1999 and became part of the National Fostering Agency Group as a partner agency, in 2009.

Children First provide local placements to children and young people. We have approved foster carers across a large geographical area including London, Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire & Bedford. We have fully qualified social workers and staff strategically located in these areas to ensure that our foster carers are fully supported, and that new applicants can be quickly assessed.

As of January 2019 Children First has 70 children and young people in placements and 72 approved carers.

The agency's latest Ofsted Inspection was in January 2018 and the agency is rated as "Good".

- **Children First holds the Gold Award for Investors in People (IIP).**
- **Children First have been awarded the Customer Services Award**
- **Children First have received LILAC accreditation**
- **All our Carers have membership to The Fostering Network**



Vision, Mission and Values



children are the heart of everything we do®

Our Vision

We will build incredible futures by empowering vulnerable young people in the UK to be happy and make their way in the world.

Our Mission

Every day we improve the lives of thousands of young people, their families and communities through a relentless focus on caring and learning.

Our Values

Deliver Promises

- Be accountable.
- Take responsibility.
- Focus on outcomes.

Inclusive Spaces

- Create safe, nurturing environments.
- Care about what we do and each other.
- Value diversity.

Open & Honest

- Be fair and transparent.
- Do the right thing.
- Act respectfully.

Dream Big

- Believe you can.
- Make positive changes.
- Inspire and innovate.

OneTeam

Together we inspire trust, happiness and an infectious passion to accomplish our vision.

nfagroup



Company Status

Children First Fostering Agency is an independent fostering agency established in April 1999 which aims to provide fostering placements for children and young people from birth to 18 years, and if necessary Staying Put beyond their 18th birthday.

Children First Fostering Agency forms one of the partner agencies of the National Fostering Agency Group. Whilst Children First Fostering agency is one of the partner agencies, the agency retains its own identity and is responsible for its own day-to-day operational duties and responsibilities. The agency provides long-term, short-term and respite, bridging, emergency placements, in addition to parent and child placements. Children First are centrally managed from its head office in Basildon, Essex.

Senior Management Objectives

The Senior Management Team, are responsible for strategic planning for the company including its business plan, in line with service user needs, direction and aims, organisational structure, policy and procedures, to incorporate new legislation, guidance and regulations, and financial commitments - our financial management ensures best value for our stakeholders.

They are also responsible for setting performance targets and the subsequent monitoring, in addition to ensuring the legal compliance of the organisation.

Children First is registered with Ofsted URN SC034253.

Children First is the preferred provider for a number of local authorities and provides placements in London, Essex, Bedford, Suffolk and Hertfordshire areas.

Ofsted inspected the agency in January 2018 and judge the agency as "Good".



Committed to Equality and Valuing Diversity

Children First recognise the diverse society and communities in which we all live and work. We embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity. We aim to recruit people from all backgrounds to reflect the demographics of the regions we cover.

We are aware however, that discrimination, prejudice, unfairness and oppression exist in every aspect of daily living, including education, employment, health and social care. We are committed to enabling all children and young people, foster carer's and employees to reach their full potential as individuals, unimpeded by discrimination, unfairness or oppressive behaviour within the organisation.

We want all children and young people in our placements, our foster carers and employees to feel valued and treated equally and fairly in Children First. Our goal is to ensure our values are embedded in our day to day working practices with all our stakeholders and service users.

As an agency we celebrate difference and annually acknowledge Black History Month with our diverse group of carers, children and staff to embrace and learn about each other's culture, traditions and food.



Senior Management Structure

Name and Address of Responsible Individual

Responsible Individual – Patricia Jarrett, Operations Director

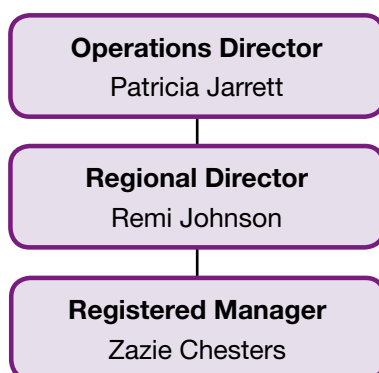
- National Fostering Agency, 71 Cowley Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 2AE
- Email address: info@nfa.co.uk

Senior Management and Directors

The Agency's Registered Manager of Children First Fostering Agency meets with the Directors on a monthly basis to discuss developments that have taken place in the agency and to look at the progress that has been made in line with the annual Business Plan.

Management Structure

The Children First senior management group have a wealth of experience and expertise in the field of fostering and social care. The Regional Director and Registered Manager all hold management qualifications and are qualified social workers registered with HCPC. The senior management group meets monthly and is responsible for all strategic and operational aspects of Children First. The Registered Manager is responsible for the overall operation of the agency and of the services to foster carers, children and young people.





Agency and Staffing

Employees Qualifications and Experience

The Children First employs 13 staff.

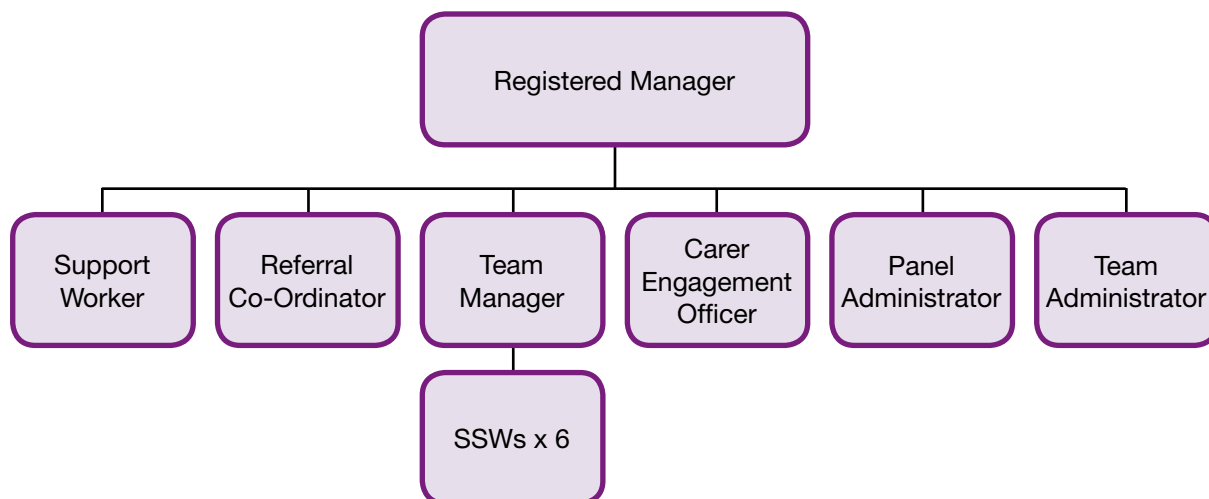
Children First's Head Office is based in Basildon, Essex, where the Administration and Carer Recruitment Team are based as well as the Registered Manager, Team Manager, 4 office-based Supervising Social Workers who cover Essex, and a support worker.

The other 2 Supervising Social Workers, work remotely, covering the Hertfordshire, Bedford and London areas.

Finance, Human Resources, Quality Assurance and Training support are provided to Children First from qualified and experienced staff centrally based within the NFA Group.

We have a designated Referrals Coordinator managing placement referrals from the NFA Group Placement Team Hub.

The Registered Manager and Team Manager hold recognised professional social worker qualifications and all supervising social workers hold a recognised professional social work qualifications and HCPC registration. Children First social work employees are all experienced practitioners with a wide range of post qualification experience in the private voluntary and statutory sectors.





Agency and Staffing continued

Regional Director

The Regional Director is responsible for the management of service in a defined geographical area. This includes the supervision and management of the Regional Manager and overall responsibility for Children First. The Regional Director is also involved with the development and implementation of the strategic aims and objectives of the organisation, and meets monthly with the Registered Manager.

Registered Manager

The Regional Manager is responsible for budgetary control in their area and for producing the area business plan. The Registered Manager is responsible for the overall operation of the agency and the development of services to foster carers, children and young people. The Registered Manager is a qualified social worker, experienced in Statutory and Voluntary sector as well as inspection and regulation.

Team Manager

The Team Manager is responsible for overseeing quality and compliance as well as the supervision and management of Supervising Social Workers. The Team Manager will assist the Registered Manager as appropriate, including the recruitment, training and management of independent assessors and for quality assuring their work in producing Form F's.

Supervising Social Workers (SSW's)

The 6 SSW's undertake the assessment, support, supervision and annual review of foster carers. They support with carer recruitment activities including initial visits to applicants. The SSW will also work in partnership with the LAC's social worker and develop relationships with the children to ensure good outcomes. SSW's also support training and development and run support groups for foster carers. The SSW's provide 24/7 Out of Hours support to our foster carers.

Team Support Worker

The role of the support worker is to assist and support the SSWs, carers and children to ensure placement stability. To coordinate and contribute to the activities and events arranged by the agency and support young people with independence skills and consultation.

CEO (Carer Engagement Officer)

The CEO is responsible for implementing the recruitment and marketing strategy, organising recruitment events, activities and the screening of potential foster carers. The CEO works closely with the Registered Manager, Team Manager, Placements Officer and the NFA Group Carer Recruitment Manager.

Administration

The administrators are responsible for the administration of the office, team and fostering panel and assist the Registered Manager as appropriate.

Referral Co-ordinator

The referral co-ordinator manages incoming referrals and works with local authorities in identifying the most suitable placements. They operate the CHARMS system, a computerised management system which provides initial matching of referrals with foster carers using a wide range of criteria. They are also responsible for collating data including placement outcomes and coordinating the contracts and finance for placements.

Education & Therapeutic Support Services

Education and Therapeutic support to the agency, carers and children is delivered by on an individual basis according to need and provided by suitably qualified and experienced professionals commissioned to undertake the work.



Complaints

Children First complaints procedures aim to deal with complaints received in a prompt and equitable manner. The Registered Manager, Team Manager and NFA Group Quality Assurance Manager are responsible for monitoring complaints and their outcomes.

Children First Complaints Policy

All the children and adults with whom this company comes into contact have the right to receive a good and professional service. If they do not feel they have received such a service, they have the right to complain and have that complaint listened to. If it is possible to identify a way forward with a complaint which is informal and therefore easily resolved, this should be the preferred option. We would encourage all complainants to talk to the person with whom they have a complaint wherever possible as we find most complaints can be resolved at this point. Where this is not possible there will be a meeting between the complainant and the line manager of the person/s being complained about. A letter of resolution will be issued by the Manager detailing how the outcome was arrived at.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome at the initial stage, or if at the outset they require the matter to be dealt with by another employee of Children First they will be asked to write to the Registered Manager who will then contact the complainant within five working days to advise that the Quality Assurance Manager has been instructed to investigate the complaint. A QA report will be made available to the complainant outlining the outcome of the investigation. The Registered Manager will invite the complainant to a meeting to discuss the report.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the QA report they must confirm in writing their reasons for their dissatisfaction to the Registered Manager who will arrange for the complaint to be reviewed by an Independent panel within 28 days. Once the panel has reached a decision the complainant will be advised of the outcome within 7 days.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied they may take advice from the Regulatory Authority.

Name and Address of Inspection Body

All the activities of the NFA Group are inspected and regulated by Ofsted who can be contacted at the following:

- Ofsted, Picadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD
- General Enquiries: 0300 123 1231
- About Concerns: 0300 123 4666
- Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Children's Commissioner

Children and Young people may also make a complaint to the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, based in England. They can do this by going to the appropriate website –

- www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk – for England

Support

It is the policy of Children First to make its complaint procedures accessible, effective, fair and independent as possible.

Sometimes children and adults need help and support to make a complaint.

The child may have support from his or her parent, social worker, Independent Visitor or foster carer.

A child who wishes to make a complaint about any aspects of his or her care should receive assistance to access independent advice and support from their Independent Reviewing Officer. Any complaint made by a Looked After Child will also be referred to a recognised advocacy service if the child wishes.

Foster carer's may enlist the help of a supporter or advocate or their Supervising Social Worker, as appropriate, to make a complaint about the agency under this policy or where appropriate, about the placing authority under the relevant local authority's complaints procedure.

Allegations of abuse

If any complaint is made to any employee of Children First that is clearly of a child protection nature that complaint will be immediately passed on to the relevant Local Authority LADO, the responsible authority and Ofsted will be informed.

If at any time during an investigation into a complaint it becomes clear that there may be child protection implications, the current investigation will be halted and the relevant Local Authority LADO will be notified immediately, the responsible authority and Ofsted will be informed.

Where a complaint is made against a registered person, Ofsted will be notified; both of the nature of the complaint and of the outcome. This action will be undertaken by the Registered Manager of Children First.



Carer Recruitment Assessment and Approval

We are passionate about providing quality care and services based on mutual respect.

We pride ourselves on finding the closest possible match when children need to be placed in foster care. Each carer is rigorously assessed and constantly supported, trained and monitored to ensure the best possible outcomes for each child. We provide the following flexible services:

- Short and long term fostering placements
- Bridging and respite care placements
- Parent and child placements
- Sibling group placements
- Emergency placements
- Unaccompanied Minors Placements
- Disability placements
- Staying Put arrangements
- Form F Assessments

We underpin our placements services by:

- The recruitment of a diverse range of carers throughout London, Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedford areas
- The assessment of carers is through a rigorous and comprehensive screening process lasting between three to four months
- Statutory checks, including medicals and enhanced DBS checks
- The taking up of extensive references (minimum of 3)
- Independent Fostering panel for recommendation for approval of potential carers
- Ongoing support to carers is via a dedicated emergency support system provided by the Supervising Social Workers, Team and Registered Managers. The carers can access this facility 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year
- Regular training and development for carers, is held in five different locations. Including a range of online training courses
- Regular support groups in five different locations
- 24 hour placement service to Local Authorities

We work in close partnership with the Local Authorities

- The management, support, supervision and monitoring of placements, including placement planning meetings, case conferences, PEP's and regular reviews
- Continuous assessment of carer's, including annual household reviews and regular updating of references, health & safety, medical checks, educational checks, household checks etc.
- Risk assessments and safe care policies are regularly reviewed
- Special events and activities for carers and their children
- Activities and events for children in care. Including working with the Princes Trust and local community resource

Prospective Carer Pack and Registration of Interest Form

Individuals who contact this agency, or who we contact as part of our recruitment programme will undertake a screening call within 2 days of the enquiry with the Carer Engagement Officer. This information will enable a decision to be made whether or not to proceed with the enquiry and send out an Enquiry Pack.

The Prospective Carers Enquiry Pack contains the following documents:

- Introduction letter
- Statement of Purpose
- Information on Children First Fostering Agency
- Cases Studies
- Complaints procedure
- Foster Carer Journey flow chart
- Registration of interest form

The CEO or a Supervising Social Worker will make contact by day 4, if not sooner, of the enquiry, to set a date of an Initial Visit which should be completed by day 7. Following the initial visit the applicant is advised of their success or otherwise, the Manager will allocate an assessing social worker who will start the checking and assessment process, which is expected to take a maximum of 4 months.

Assessment Process

All fostering assessments will be undertaken in accordance with the National Minimum Standards, based on the Coram BAAF Form F, equal opportunities policy and any other relevant legislation and or policy in force at the time of the assessment.

The assessor will assist the applicant in completing all relevant statutory check forms including the DBS checks and references. The assessor will also agree a schedule of visits to complete the assessment.

The Applicants will be invited to undertake Skills to Foster training which forms part of the assessment. Applicants will need to have a medical with their GP prior to approval.

The assessment is very comprehensive and produces a report that covers past and present relationships and partnerships, support networks, individual profiles, interviews with children and adult members of the household, lifestyle, parenting capacity and experience and valuing diversity, as well as a Health & Safety check of the home. This report will be presented to the Children First fostering panel. The applicants will also be required to complete, a safe care policy, fire evacuation plan, carer profile and a family portfolio which includes photographs.

The assessor will invite the applicants to attend the panel and will advise the applicants in advance, how the panel presentation meeting will be organised and what part they will play in it, the assessor will also attend the panel. The panel members experience derives from a variety of backgrounds, including education, health, social care, fostering and includes members who have experienced the care system.

Following the panel presentation, the applicants will be notified immediately of the panels recommendation in respect of their application. However the final decision as to the applicants' approval will be made by the Agency Decision Maker.

If, at any time during the assessment, the assessor feels the applicant falls short of the standards required, this will be discussed with the Registered or Team Manager immediately.

Any areas of shortfall must be investigated and where training or support will not bring the applicant up to acceptable standards, the assessment must cease. The assessor will inform applicants of this decision and the reasons within 48 hours and present a brief report for consideration by the Fostering Panel.

Post Approval

The applicants will receive written confirmation of their approval, a foster carer agreement. Where panel have asked for further work or clarification, the assessor will agree a timescale for this work to be undertaken.

Where approval is given and all checks are complete, the household details will be entered on to the CHARMS system which acts as a central register, and the carer allocated to an SSW.

The CHARMS system will then be able to provide a matching service between the foster carer and a child/ young person referred to Children First.

Newly approved carers have an induction with their allocated SSW within seven days of their approval.



Annual Reviews

Each Fostering Household will have an annual review, unless there are significant changes to their circumstances in which case we will conduct an extraordinary review at that time. These circumstances include:

- After the final strategy meeting of a s.47 investigation involving a carer(s)
- Where allegations have been made regarding a carer(s) child care practice and no s.47 investigation is pursued
- Where there has been a breakdown in the approved carer's relationship resulting in one carer moving out of the household. In this instance both carer's will be subject to review except where one/or both carer's has given notice of an intention to resign
- Where there have been significant changes to the carer's lifestyle
- Where there has been the death of a carer
- Where a carer has been diagnosed with a serious illness
- When a carer has stopped or started living with a partner
- Where a carer is not working in partnership with the agency including a lack of willingness to attend training

The annual household review will address the carer's training and development needs for the next year and suggest, if required, alterations to their approval status. The ECM (Every Child Matters) outcomes are covered to provide a picture of how the carer works with the children and young people in their care. Reports will be requested from the child's social worker, school, SSW, carer, the child/young person in placement, the birth family (if appropriate) and any other interested parties. An independent social worker or Team Manager will chair the review either in the office or within the carer's home.

Following approval the carer's first review report and every third year the annual review will be presented back to the Fostering Panel for their recommendation and comments and subsequently the decision maker for approval. Carer's will be invited to attend all panel reviews.



Matching

All Children and Young People are closely matched to ensure that their needs are met by our skilled and experienced Foster Carer's. At Children First we recognise that all children and young people are different and thus all placements are unique.

Our dedicated Referral Co-ordinator is on hand to assist Local Authorities in finding the right match for children or young people, they work closely with the Supervising Social Workers, Foster Carers and Local Authorities to ensure the best possible matches are made.

The matching process will consider the child's needs especially regarding the following key areas:

- Safeguarding
- Schooling/Education
- Expectations around contact, particularly in relation to the foster carer's part in facilitating and/or supervising such contact
- The child's identity/race/culture/religion
- The child's history
- The child's behaviour
- The child's health
- The focus of the placement

The matching process will also consider the carer's availability and:

- Their experience / knowledge / skills
- Their address and the distance from the foster home to the child's school / local authority
- Any other children in the placement
- The foster carer's own children and other family members

Children First will not propose a placement if the assessed needs of the child cannot reasonably be provided by the proposed foster carer's.

We match using a sophisticated database against many criteria and in consultation with our experienced social work staff, so that the placement offered is matched as closely as possible to the child or young person.



Finance

Children First Foster Carers receive a weekly fostering allowance, paid directly into the Foster Carers bank account fortnightly.

The allowance paid to foster carers includes a maintenance payment with additional payments for clothing, pocket money and birthdays and Seasonal Allowances.

Savings for children in care are deducted at source and saved in individual accounts administered by the NFA Group.

Foster Carers are self-employed and must seek their own advice on liability for Income Tax and National Insurance.

Local Authorities should contact Children First Fostering Agency for information pertaining to our charges for the different types of placements and support services offered.



Training and Development

Foster Carers

Children First is committed to ensuring that foster carers are highly skilled and equipped to give children and young people placed with this agency a positive experience of fostering. The Statutory framework for fostering informs the comprehensive training programme delivered to our foster carers to ensure their continual provision of high quality care.

The training provided is delivered by a dedicated training team to ensure carers are able to access training conveniently. The training equips the foster carers to work with complex children and young people to ensure their quality of life is improved. The foster carers are trained to develop an understanding and knowledge of the multi-racial and disadvantaged groups in our communities.

Children First fostering training is updated and reviewed annually to ensure the courses delivered are compliant with the latest guidance and legislation. The NFA Group Carer Academy, a 12 week reflective training course to enhance the skills of experienced carers.

It is expected that all our approved foster carers attend training regularly and that they further their development in a variety of ways. The carers are offered e-learning courses and are encouraged to read widely and at times may attend relevant externally provided courses or attend training through their work.

Our foster carers are supported to complete the Training, Support & Development Standards (TSDS) within one year of approval training to formalise their learning in a measured and consistent way. The carers will develop an understanding of attachment, safeguarding, promoting healthy living and managing challenging behaviour, including de-escalation techniques. Once the TSDS workbook is completed each carer will complete a personal development plan with their SSW on their role and practice as a foster carer and this will form part of the carer's annual review.

Support Groups

Children First provide regular support groups, in five locations (Basildon, Brixton, Manningtree, Hitchin & Bedford) to ensure ease of access, so that our foster

carers can meet other carers in an informal setting to discuss topical issues and receive peer support. These meetings enable the carers to share experiences of fostering and to discuss any issues that may be concerning them. Often a speaker will be invited.

Foster Carer Participation

Children First encourage experienced foster carers to participate in the delivery of training courses and at recruitment events. This furthers the development of the presenting foster carer and enables newer foster carers or applicants to gain first hand insight into the fostering task.

We encourage carers to contribute to the development of the training programme and ask their views on various subjects periodically. We send out carer questionnaires to ascertain the carer's views on a wide range of subjects including our service to them. Feedback is gathered from carer's regarding their annual household review.

The Senior Directors and Managers meet with carers for an annual consultation event to ascertain their wishes and feelings and to update carers on significant achievements or changes within the wider company.

As part of the QA audit process carer's views will be sought with one to one interviews being held and questionnaires being completed.

Our more experienced foster carers are invited to act as mentors to less experienced or new carers under our buddy-ing scheme. This involves matching the experienced carers to their 'buddies' so that support and mentorship can be offered.

Employees

Children First encourage all employees to develop professionally by accessing e-learning and training courses where appropriate.

Employees will continue their training and development under the guidance of their regulatory body. Each year all permanent employees will have an appraisal, part of this is an audit of training and development needs.



Quality Assurance

All foster carers have an allocated qualified Supervising Social Worker.

It is the SSW's responsibility to manage and support the foster carer in the fostering task, backed up by their Team and Registered Managers. Both the Children First SSWs and foster carers are trained to ensure the children and young people's welfare is paramount. They will work in partnership to ensure that the children and young people's needs are met and that they are provided with a safe, nurturing placement where they are able to meet their potential and have good outcomes.

The SSW will visit the foster carers monthly to undertake supervision. These times are an opportunity to discuss the day to day care needs of the children and young people and how the foster carer is working to meet those needs and progress the care plan. Discussions about training needs will also be held at these meetings.

Carers are expected to maintain daily logs and provide monthly reports. All staff and carers have completed Data Protection training.

The Registered Manager completes a monthly report and schedule to report for Senior Management as well as being responsible for the Regulation 35 report.

The SSW will undertake a minimum of two unannounced visits to foster carer's homes per year. Children First also carry out health and safety inspections of each fostering household to ensure the standard of accommodation on offer is of the highest quality. The SSW will attend all meetings and reviews with the carer, prepare reports for annual reviews and keep a thorough and accurate record of all fostering activities.

A Safe Care Policy and Risk Assessment will be updated at least once a year, always following a new placement or serious incident.

The teams are contactable at their local office during office hours, and for out of hours support the foster carer can ring the duty number. The duty system is operated centrally and manned by the SSW's on a rota basis backed up by a Team and the Registered Managers.

All Foster carer's have access to a SSW 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year.



Support and Consultation with Children & Young People

“Children always come first”

Children First has been working for twenty years to provide safe, secure and caring homes for children and young people. We recognize the uniqueness and individual needs of every child we place and do our best to find the right family.

Where ever possible we will try to plan placements and have introductions, each carer has a welcome book and every child or young person placed will be given a copy of the Children First Children’s Guide and Welcome Pack.

We expect supervising social worker to see each child on a regular basis, to ascertain their views about their care.

The views, wishes and feelings of children and young people are vital to the development of services. Consultation takes various forms either through, questionnaires, on line surveys, consultation events, activities and feedback forms for carer’s annual reviews and LAC reviews. All children and young people receive a copy of their own magazine “Kidslines” or “Teenlines” filled with articles from children and young people and other interesting news.

We celebrate children and young people’s achievements and make sure their voices are heard in the recruitment of staff and approval of carer’s at panel.

We provide a range of events and activities for children and young people to be involved with: from cookery and photographic competitions, days outs, making arts and crafts and a Christmas Pantomime.

Children First ensure that children and young people have financial security in the form of a personal savings account, where a regular weekly amounts are saved centrally, which is then able to move with them to another placement or into independence.

Independence skills for young people is a priority, to ensure young people are prepared and have the skills to care for themselves. Every carer is expected to work with the young person using an independence programme once they reach 14 years.

Children First will advocate for Staying Put arrangements to allow a young person time to mature and develop or complete their education.

Children First also celebrate the achievements of children and young people with annual awards.



Contact Details

Children First Fostering Agency
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Cricketers Way,
Basildon
Essex
SS13 1SS

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**Children First Fostering Agency
Statement of Purpose March 2019**

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