

Action for Children Family Breaks Devon and Fostering South West Peninsula - SC064273

Statement of Purpose

AIMS

Our two linked services - Action for Children Family Breaks Devon and Fostering South West Peninsula – have a single aim: to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable children and young people in our region. We aim to do this through the provision of high quality foster placements for children and the provision of training and support services to enable foster carers to maintain excellent care for each individual child.

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.

OBJECTIVES

1. Action for Children Fostering South West Peninsula and Family Breaks seeks to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people in society by the provision of safe, secure and successful foster placements including the provision of short breaks for children with additional needs.
2. The interests of the children involved are paramount and their safety is the first duty of the fostering process. Foster carers are carefully and thoroughly assessed by means of a BAAF Form F and supervised and reviewed by the Team Members. The Service is now utilising the 2 stage assessment process.
3. Once a child is matched with a foster family, services are designed to promote the success of the placement by providing supervision, support, psychological consultancy and training to the carers to meet the particular needs of the foster child, in order to maintain the placement successfully.
4. The Action for Children Fostering service is provided by skilled, professional workers who have chosen to specialise in providing short breaks for children with additional needs, fostering short term, long term and Parent and Child family placements. 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.
5. Finding the right families for children is often a complex task involving a number of different organisations. Action for Children 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.

PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS OF CARE

In our work with children and families we always aim to:

- Put children and young people first.

- Believe that where possible, children are best cared for in their own families. Where this is not possible, we aim to create a positive experience of family life through foster care.
- When providing short breaks we aim to work in partnership with parents and families and to support them. We seek to work alongside other professionals to enable the parents to continue with their care of their child.
- Listen to the views of children, young people and their families, of foster carers and of our 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, by meeting their needs, helping them achieve their potential and enabling them to develop a positive identity and high self esteem.
- 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 to ensure that when children are placed with a foster carer, their special needs, their identity, and their contact and ties with their birth family members are preserved, if this is in the best interest of the child.
- Take into account and plan for ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender and disability needs of children in the process of matching them with their carers.
- Be sensitive to the needs of children and seek their inclusion whenever appropriate.
- Work closely together with foster carers, families and other agencies to ensure that children and young people are protected from harm.
- Do our best to ensure that children are able to develop in a healthy environment to achieve their potential, take up the opportunities available and participate in the community as responsible citizens.
- Ensure that all young people prior to leaving foster care including those who access short breaks are prepared for independence and prepared for making that transition.
- Work with all applicants and carers in an open and honest way and give reasons for recommendations and decisions taken which involve them.
- Provide each carer with a supervising worker for support, information, supervision and annual review.
- Recognise that fostering is a difficult and demanding task and that we have a responsibility to prepare and equip carers for the tasks involved and to provide ongoing training, support, supervision and appraisal.
- Maintain an efficient and prompt payment system.
- Review what is being provided on a regular basis and consider ways of improving services and will strive for continuous improvement.
- Develop information systems to monitor our performance and to measure outcomes. It is important to us that our services are effective and represent Best Value.
- Remain committed to working co-operatively with other agencies to ensure comprehensive and co-ordinated services for children and their families.

- Do our best to ensure that looked after children and those concerned with their welfare are encouraged to make comments and give feedback on the service provided and should have access to the Complaints Procedure. Action for Children Fostering South West Peninsula & Family Breaks takes complaints seriously and acts on them without delay.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

We provide a varied fostering service covering long and short term fostering, respite and short breaks for children with disabilities.

We provide foster placements for the South West Peninsula local authorities. For the short breaks service we work under a contract from Devon County Council to provide short breaks for the children and young people referred by them. We provide 1,500 overnights per annum on a block contract with Devon County Council

The Practitioner Team has an office base in Exeter.

Our team offers:

- A comprehensive and responsive system for providing information to enquirers seeking information about fostering.
- Assessments of applicants are undertaken by Team Social Workers and Independent Social Workers
- Matching of children, young people and parent/child placement required by LA's to our fostering resources both longer term and short breaks.
- Regular Supervision of Foster Carers.
- 24 Hour out of hours duty cover alongside other teams for longer term fostering.
- 24 hour out of hour's duty cover for short breaks.
- Respite Care.
- Regular Support Group for Carers and social events for carers and children
- Direct work with children/young people when required.
- Identification of additional resources to meet the needs of children/young people in placement.
- Advocacy on behalf of children/young people in placement to access relevant services.
- Work with relevant services to meet the needs of children/young people in placement.
- Clinical Psychologist service providing consultation, support and training for carers.
- Medical Advisor consultation and support for project workers and carers as needed
- Recruitment, preparation and assessment of short breaks foster carers.
- Services of a Paediatric Nurse
- Training for short breaks carers in medical protocol and administration of medicines
- Identification of resources to meet the needs of children and young people in placement.
- Assess and match children with carers to ensure children and young people's needs are met.
- Review placements with families and carers annually.
- A Fostering Panel

STATUS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE AGENCY

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, successful foster placements, which meet and exceed the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and 2013.

REGISTERED PROVIDER

Name	M/F	Position Held	Full/ Part-time	No. Hrs Per Week	Qualifications	Date Commenced Working for Action for Children
Laurie Long	F	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

MANAGERS DETAILS

Name	M/F	Position Held	Full/ Part-time	No. Hrs Per Week	Qualifications	Date Commenced Working for Action for Children
Mark Kingston	M	Fostering Services Manager	Full Time	35 Hours	Dip S/W Post Grad Cert In Soc Ser Man	17.07.1997
Phyllida Brown	F	Registered & Team Manager Fostering South West Peninsula and Family Breaks Devon	Full Time	37 Hours	MA in Applied Social Studies, DipSW, (studying for Level 5 CACHE Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England) Children and Young People's Management Pathway	01.09.2005

See Appendix 1 for staff information

The Agency's Foster Carers

Action for Children Family Breaks and Fostering South West Peninsula have 39 approved Foster Carers, 14 of whom provide Short Breaks Care for children with disabilities.

Children and Young people placed

The foster placements offered to children and young people within the service are for children whose ages range from 0 – 18 years. The service currently has 1 Staying Put Placement whose current plan is to remain

with her carers for the foreseeable future. The service also offers short-breaks placements to children and young people. Most of the children in placement are White British whilst one is Black British. Most of the children placed are also in compulsory education.

Foster carer recruitment

All young people referred to our services require higher levels of support and supervision and carers who have an appropriate approach, level of skill and understanding. 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 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 are paramount; their safety and well-being is the first duty of the fostering service. Prospective foster carers are carefully and thoroughly assessed by means of the BAAF Form F 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 Preparation course which is delivered in modules 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

We include care experienced young people and experienced foster carers in the foster carer preparation training wherever possible.

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 of foster carers

The service has access to a monthly Fostering Panel which takes place in Exeter and Bristol alternately. Panels are constituted in keeping with the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and 2013, the representation includes; Action for Children social workers and a Paediatric Nurse who provides insight on health; Independent representatives including a Foster Carer, Social Workers from the Local Authority. The agency also uses Medical Advisors who comment on applicants or carer's fitness to foster. However the medical advisors do not sit on the fostering Panel. 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 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.

Support and development of foster carers

Approved foster carers who provide fostering for the Fostering South West Peninsula are supervised and visited at least monthly, and will receive additional support visits where required. The supervising social worker for the carers also maintain regular phone contact, at least once a week to check on the carers and the placement. Carers also have access to a duty worker throughout the day and have access to Out of Hours in case they need support in the evening or at weekends. This support is very useful for the carers when their social worker is unavailable and all carers highly value this service.

Foster Carers providing Short-Breaks Care are visited regularly, most often every 3 months or more frequent if required. This is often decided on the basis of the needs of the children and on the number of placements the carers are able to provide.

All Foster Carers have access to Support Group Meetings which take place approximately every 6 weeks and the location is rotated between the South and North of Devon to maximise participation of foster carers. The sessions last about 4 hours where practice and updates on procedures or guidance are provided. The sessions also split into 2 groups where Family Breaks Carers are 'teamed' up with a worker from this service to discuss any issues experienced through the fostering; whilst the other group discusses issues experienced with the full time foster carers.

All foster carers also have access to the Foster Carers' Handbook which is now available online and Action for Children is currently working on devising the *Foster Care Essential* which is a paper copy of the online handbook which includes core information on policies and procedures. Included in this paper copy of the Handbook will include a Welcome Pack to all newly approved carers along with information on substance misuse, eating problems, and any other issues they might come across through the fostering.

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

- ***"I am happy with the support I am given by Action for Children and by my supervising social worker. Being a planned break carer I am grateful for the information given on child's needs and care, particularly information around their safety."***
- ***"I am very happy with the support and service provided by Action for Children. Action for Children respond very quickly to any problems and they advise me or take appropriate action."***

Matching and Making Placements

The service aims to provide a range of placements so that children can be appropriately matched with foster carers with the appropriate skills, knowledge, family structure, ethnic background and geographical location.

When matching children to foster carers, the project 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 households is also considered when matching the young person with the available foster carers especially when the young person is still at compulsory education. With the provision of Short-Breaks, matching also takes place over a number of meetings including the Parents and identified Foster Carers.

Promoting Positive Behaviour. Attachments and Relationships

Within the service, close work takes place with the foster carers and the placing Local Authority to identify the children's needs and to complete and set up a robust placement plan which will identify how the children's needs will be met whilst in placement. The Fostering South West Peninsula Service has been accessing input and support through trained Clinical Psychologists which service is accessed by the foster carers and respective social worker. These sessions have been extremely helpful in support carers and the service to identify strategies that will work well for the individual child. Some of our children and young people also accessed Therapeutic Life Story Work that has supported these children come to terms with their own identity which has supported them to build and maintain health attachments with their foster carers.

Foster Carers providing Short-Breaks Care often maintain regular contact with the birth family or care giver for that child to ensure consistency of care given.

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. Applicants will also be subject to a medical, 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. The Service tries to involve children and young people within the matching process and seeks their views where possible and this often takes place through meetings with the Local Authority and through introductory meetings prior to the placement commencing.

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.

Complaints

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

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 fostering. Each incident of a child going missing is risk assessed to determine the level of risk and concern appropriate. Every absence is reported to the service, the placing authority, and to the police if warranted. 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 registered with a local GP and dentist. Exercise which is fun and a healthy diet are encouraged. Foster carers are provided with training on Safe Storage of Medication as well as Safe Administration of Medication along with Paediatric First Aid.

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 support the young person.

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. All activities are undertaken safely, taking account of his/her needs and abilities.

Some young people may also wish to become involved in voluntary work activities, such as fundraising, supporting others or environmental work. Action for Children 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. 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's education and have high aspirations for all young people placed.

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

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.

The range of needs Action for Children is able to meet

The Service has successfully recruited and will continue to recruit and develop skilled and experienced foster carers, who are able to offer foster placements to children and young people who have complex backgrounds, display challenging behaviour, and have high level needs, including;

- Post traumatic stress disorders and attachment difficulties
- Self harming
- At risk of sexual exploitation
- Children who have learning, physical and sensory disabilities.

Signed:



Phyllida Brown
Registered Manager



Laurie Long
Responsible Individual

April 2017