


Be brave,  
be brilliant,  
be a foster carer.

**TOGETHER  
TRUST**

Registered charity number 209782



# Understanding the Together Trust's fostering service

Statement of Purpose 2023



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# Introduction to the Together Trust's fostering service

We're a charity that cares for and champions the rights, needs and ambitions of looked-after children, people with disabilities, autism and mental health differences. We work across North West England.

Fostering is one of the highly personalised services we provide for children and young people.

We set up our fostering service over 20 years ago. Originally, we provided secure, long-term placements, but now offer a variety of different placements.

We have worked hard with our foster carers to build a strong, connected and mutually supportive fostering family.

Placements promote an informal and relaxed atmosphere, where the safety and security of children and young people are an integral part of daily life.

Our goal, for those children and young people who are unable to return to their families, is to secure permanent foster homes for them.

Our fostering service aims to:

- Provide the highest quality of care for looked-after children; including safe, stable, caring and nurturing homes enabling children and young people to make attachments
- Help children and young people gain a sense of belonging
- Achieve all aspects of the placement plan and help children and young people understand and/or resolve the issues that created the initial need for care
- Help children and young people to reach their full potential - physically, emotionally, socially and educationally by enabling them to develop resilience, confidence and courage to make the most of opportunities and life chances.

We are proud that our fostering service continues to develop and make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people facing some of the toughest challenges.



**Jill Sheldrake**  
Service Director

# Status and constitution

As the fostering service is part of our charity, it is governed by a board of Trustees who are responsible for all the social care, special education and community services operated by the Together Trust.

Day-to-day operational responsibility lies with the Chief Executive and the Service Director. However, the fostering panel is made up in line with statutory regulations and operates through an independent chairperson.

**The charity is registered with the Charity Commission (No. 209782) and under the Companies Act 1985 (No. 301722).**

Our fostering service works in partnership with other agencies, parents, carers, local authorities and health trusts in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for looked-after children.

In addition, we aim to continually develop and improve our services to ensure we never compromise on our own high standards. We regularly and actively seek external evaluation.

We are committed to providing holistic services which embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity. Our goal is to ensure that these commitments, reinforced by our values, are embedded in our day-to-day working practices with all children, young people, their families, foster families, colleagues, customers and any other stakeholders. We provide equality of opportunity at all levels and challenge discrimination.

# Management structure

The Service Director is the registered person and Agency Decision Maker for our fostering service. Day-to-day leadership and direction are provided by the Head of Service for children and families and the Fostering Team Manager, who is also the registered manager.

The fostering team includes qualified social workers with a broad range of post-qualifying experience within local authorities, especially child protection work, the health service, private and voluntary sectors.

All social workers are required to hold a recognised social work qualification and be registered with Social Care England.

All staff receive regular formal and informal supervision and appraisal and have access to regular training. This ensures they are aware of new developments, key changes in legislation and regulation, process and best practice.

## Team meetings

The fostering team has meetings on a monthly basis, chaired by the Fostering Team Manager. These are a vehicle for cascading information about the agency, legislation and government developments, sharing good practice and developing peer support.

The clinical psychology and therapy team attend team meetings and provide additional support and guidance to supervising social workers, families, children and young people.

The Together Trust fostering service comprises:

- **Head of Service for children and families**
- **Team Manager**
- **Senior social workers**
- **Social workers**
- **Senior support workers**
- **Administrative lead**
- **Administrative staff**

# Quality assurance

The registered manager meets regularly with the fostering service management team in order to continually seek ways to improve the quality of our foster care.

They regularly monitor and review the following:

- **Strategic direction, aims and goals of the service and how they will be achieved**
- **Safeguarding**
- **Annual business plan**
- **Financial management and performance**
- **Personnel, marketing and recruitment**
- **Policies and procedures**
- **Legal compliance**
- **Culture, values, vision and mission**
- **Outcomes for children and young people**
- **Panel report**
- **Regulatory information - Ofsted dataset and regulation 35 reports**
- **Feedback reports (i.e. from children and young people, carers, local authority commissioners)**





# Service



**We comply fully with the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011;**

**Fostering Regulations (miscellaneous amendments) July 2013; The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations;**

**Volume 2 Care Planning Placement and Case Review 2010 (updated in 2013, 2014 and 2015); Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 and other appropriate statute law.**

Every effort is made to match children and young people with families that reflect their religious, cultural and diversity needs.

We deal with issues around safeguarding immediately, in line with agreed procedures. School attendance and academic achievement is promoted for all children and young people.

Foster carers complete weekly electronic diary recordings which can be made available to professionals as appropriate.

We support carers to understand and manage behaviours. Guidance is provided on the use of permissible sanctions and a written record kept of any implementation. Our fostering service and foster carers maintain vigilance around confidentiality at all times.

Assessments are completed by qualified staff with active participation encouraged from prospective foster carers.

All prospective foster carers are expected to complete 'Skills to Foster' training or its equivalent. Foster carers will have ongoing training to meet the training support and development standards (TDS) for foster carers, and are expected to attend regular support/reflective practice groups as part of their development. The service ensures that each foster carer and foster home fulfils all health, safety and risk assessment requirements.



Foster carers work to an agreed care plan, and within the terms of the placement agreement.

Foster carers promote agreed contact with the child or young person's family, unless this is considered detrimental to the child or young person by the placing authority.

Foster carers receive supervisory/support visits from supervising social workers on a regular basis (planned to be at least monthly) and regular telephone contact is maintained. Foster carers also receive an annual review.

Regular consultancy sessions are provided for foster carers, facilitated by our clinical psychologist or therapist, where this has been deemed appropriate.

All foster carers have access to 24-hour telephone support from one of our qualified social workers.

We have formally adopted a model of psychologically informed care as the foundation of all our work with looked-after children. It is based on internationally recognised evidence and the latest psychological research underpinning the 'Good Lives Model'©.

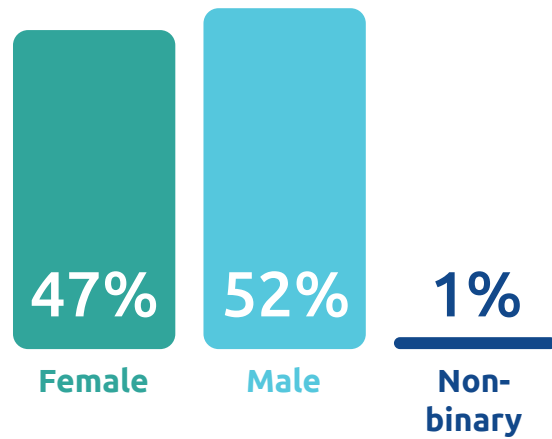
A psychologically informed fostering service has three core elements, all critical and mutually dependent:

- **Theoretical model underpins all work with children and young people by the fostering service.**
- **Specific attachment training for all foster carers and social workers, to ensure all have the same understanding of behaviour, causes, strategies and use language consistently.**
- **The Integrated Therapist commissioned by Together Trust undertakes visits to foster carers within six weeks of a child beginning to live with a Together Trust Foster Carer.**

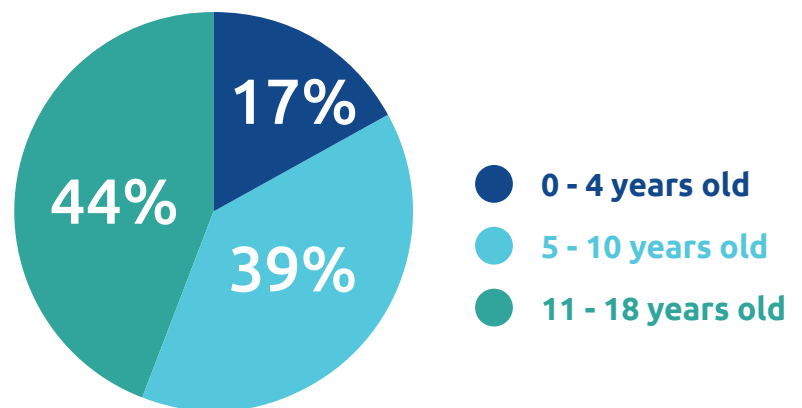
Our priority is to provide all our foster carers, social workers and support workers with core training and expert support to enable a psychologically informed service. This ensures that all who work with children and young people have a psychologically informed approach to provide the best evidence-based practice.

# Statistics

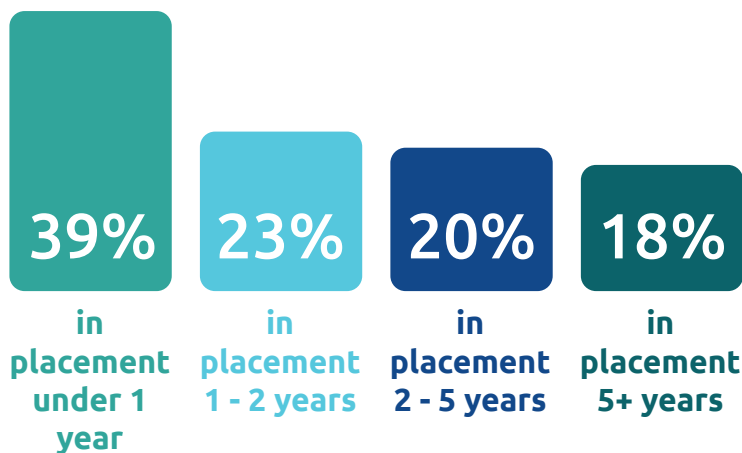
Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 our foster carers looked after a total of 79 children and young people.



The chart shows a breakdown of the 79 children and young people, looked after by our foster carers between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023, by age group and the percentage totals for each age group.



Of the 79 children and young people in placements:



This demonstrates excellent outcomes and stability for children and young people

# What do children and young people say about the service they receive?

Young people, who have been fostered, say the following about their experience:

They support me, make great food and treat me like I'm their biological child.

I like the way they are always friendly.

It is very fun and there is lots to do.

Lots of fun!

They are nice, kind and help out.



# Recruitment and assessment

References from all previous employment involving children

1. The foster carer recruitment action plan draws on the recommendations from the research undertaken by The Fostering Network: “It is important to make sure the service is streamlined: the enquiry to approval process needs to be customer friendly, timely, efficient and effective.”
2. Our dedicated referrals and admissions coordinator responds to all telephone and website enquiries.
3. Our referrals and admissions coordinator ensures that enquiries only progress to the next stage where families have time, space and motivation to foster.
4. Our referrals and admissions coordinator arranges the initial home visit with one of three named social workers.
5. Following the initial home visit, the social worker completes an assessment of the applicants’ strengths and vulnerabilities. The fostering manager reviews the assessment and decides whether to invite the applicants to attend the ‘Skills to Foster’ training.
6. If training is successful, and prospective foster carers wish to proceed with their application, we assign a qualified social worker to undertake a comprehensive assessment. The first stage of the assessment involves all statutory checks, and the second stage looks at all personal/background information with the prospective carer(s) and their family.

Our social worker then produces a report (referred to as a form F), which covers individual profiles of applicants, relationships and partnerships, support network, as well as any children in the household. Additional areas covered are childlessness or limitation of family size, description of family lifestyle, valuing diversity and parenting capacity. In assessing these areas, potential carers need to be able to demonstrate evidence of their experience, skills and suitability to

become foster carers, and resilience coping strategies, appropriate to the fostering task.

7. Our social worker must make a minimum of six visits to the home, but the exact number will be dependent upon a number of factors, such as if the applicant is single or in a relationship. The social worker spends time working with the prospective foster carers on their form F and portfolio. The assessment is a joint process and full participation from applicants and their family is needed.
8. During the assessment, we carry out a range of statutory checks including:
  - **Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check**
  - **Local authority checks**
  - **Employer and/or current fostering organisation references**
  - **School/health visitor reports (on own child, if appropriate)**
  - **Personal references (at least three), who are visited by a social worker**
  - **Medical reports**
  - **Overseas check (where appropriate)**
  - **A health and safety inspection will also be carried out on the prospective foster carers' home**
  - **Ex-partners and children of an appropriate age from previous relationships will also need to be involved**
  - **SSAFA (the Armed Forces Charity) checks if applicable.**
  - **References from all previous employment involving children**
9. Once the form F is completed, the prospective foster carers have ten working days to read their report and provide their written observations. This report is then presented to the fostering panel, which prospective foster carers are encouraged to attend.
10. The fostering panel is made up of a variety of professionals and independent members, including foster carers, educational specialists and people with experience of the looked-after children system.

The panel members, referred to as members of the central list, make their recommendations to approve prospective foster carers or not, but the final decision is made by the Agency Decision Maker.

Upon approval as a foster carer, we advise applicants, both verbally and in writing, and assign a Supervising Social Worker to support the foster carer. We then advise the foster carer's residing authority that they have been approved.

Applications to become a foster carer are welcomed regardless of the individual's gender, marital status, sexuality, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion and culture or employment status. The timescale between the initial home visit and approval is approximately four to six months unless there are specific or exceptional circumstances. We make every effort to recruit and approve carers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and this remains a priority for the service. We welcome applications to become a foster carer from anyone over the age of 21-years-old. A welcoming response is given to all enquiries.

Any applicant who has been convicted of an offence against a child, or a serious offence against an adult, will immediately be excluded. There is no upper age limit for foster carers, although applicants must be healthy and active to enable them to care appropriately for a child or young person.

It is a minimum requirement that all prospective foster carers must have at least one spare bedroom that can be used by a fostered child or young person.

## Foster carer agreements

Following approval, foster carers must sign a foster carer agreement which covers a range of contractual information including to:

- **Care appropriately for children and young people in placement, as identified in the foster placement agreement**
- **Follow procedures laid down in the agency's handbook and policy and procedures which detail the child protection arrangements, foster carer roles and responsibilities and behaviour management support**
- **Inform us of any relevant, significant changes to their household or details**
- **Participate fully in annual reviews, unless there are changes to approval or other specific circumstances**
- **Agree to undertake supervision and relevant training provided by us for foster carers.**

# What do foster carers say about the assessment process?

We had a fantastic assessing social worker, the whole process flowed well and there were no hidden surprises.

My assessing social worker was very easy to talk to, and I felt comfortable with them. I thought they were very thorough in their work and did their job well.

The enthusiasm and guidance offered throughout the assessment process was exceptional.

We found the whole process to be efficient and all staff to be friendly and helpful. Special thanks to our social worker who was honest, supportive and reliable and helped us at every stage of the process, both practically and emotionally.

The social workers made us feel very at ease when they came into our home.

The social workers were very professional in their approach and in the execution of the recruitment process



# Range of placements

We have a range of foster carers approved to provide care to children and young people aged 0 to 18-years. This includes placements for children and young people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, with physical and learning disabilities, challenging behaviours and parent and child placements.

Although successful at recruiting foster carers, we are also fully aware of the need not to become complacent.

The service is constantly reviewing policies, procedures and service developments in order to offer a supportive and competitive package of support to foster carers, children and young people. We want them to remain happy and know they play an important role in achieving positive outcomes.

Children and young people, who are placed with our fostering service, will not under any circumstances be expected to share a room with another child in placement, or a child of the foster family. The only exceptions to this are siblings, or if the fostering family are going on holiday. In both circumstances, the placing authority will need to agree and consent to the children sharing a room. A bedroom sharing risk assessment will be completed and the views of the children or young people, who will be sharing the room, will also be sought.

## Short-term placements

Short-term placements could last for days, weeks or months, whilst plans are made for the child or young person's future by the placing authority's children's services department.

## Long-term placements

Long-term placements may be suitable for children or young people for whom adoption is not an option. In this situation, the foster carer cares for a child or young person as a member of their family up to, and into, adult independence.

## Emergency/unplanned placements

These placements happen in instances where a child or young person needs somewhere to stay at short notice. This could be for a few nights or longer, depending on the circumstances. Placements are provided at short notice and our fostering service offers a 24-hour emergency response service to support such requests from placing authorities.



## **Family group placements (children)**

Family group placements are for brothers and sisters who are placed together in foster care. We advocate keeping family groups together within a family environment, unless it is deemed inappropriate by the placing authority. We specialise in caring for family groups and provide additional support to foster carers to assist them in the task. On occasions, especially with larger sibling groups, it may not always be possible to place the children together. In these instances, children and young people may be placed with other carers. Contact between the children will, therefore, be a priority and agreed by the placing authority.

## **Short breaks/respite - disabled children and young people**

Our fostering service has a range of foster carers who have experience and skills in caring for children and young people who are disabled and/or require specialist medical care.

Respite placements are provided to give parents a break or offer additional support if they do have their own support network. In addition, respite is also offered to our own foster carers and is available in order to support placement demands and needs.

Short break care is designed to support children within their own families or foster families with whom the child is living. This can be anything from an overnight stay to a couple of weeks.

## **Placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children**

We have a range of experienced foster carers who can support and care for unaccompanied children and young people from outside the UK. These individuals are willing to advocate, actively seek support services and work within the child or young person's care plan.



# What do local authority social workers say about the placements?

Together Trust's fostering service has a range of experienced foster carers who can support and care for unaccompanied children and young people. I mainly work with J (female carer) who works very hard to ensure I am fully updated with all relevant communication in relation to the child in placement. J attends all meetings requested and makes time for home visits with flexibility. J is fully aware of the care plan and strives to meet the actions required.

T and J have a clear understanding of their role, this is a long term placement and because of their knowledge and skills I have needed limited intervention. T in particular has been clear about the young person's needs and how they may be met.

W and G have demonstrated on numerous occasions their ability to go above and beyond what we usually expect of our foster carers; maintaining the placement for the child and ensuring children thrive.

The children are made to feel part of a family and the community by being active members in several clubs and through trips out. The children usually have a different social event or club to attend every evening and at weekends. All the children's needs are met and they have the ability to challenge professionals if they believe these needs are not being addressed.

E is the main contact of the two carers. E has communicated and informed me of information when needed. E has attended all meetings that have been arranged and has welcomed me for visits.

Both R and J contribute continually to the care plan for the young person they care for, this is through visits, telephone calls and attending meetings. They are both very professional and informative.

Both carers work well with myself and all professionals involved in L's care and are fully involved in the plans.

The carers are accommodating and flexible with visits and meetings. Where possible, they attend meetings together and this ensures the information is shared effectively between the carers and myself.

C and D are proactive and advocate for the children in meetings to ensure that the children are being well supported at school. C and D have a good understanding of the roles of the different professionals involved and access support from their supervising social worker appropriately. They are self-sufficient and resourceful and understand when there is a need to involve me in decision making and when they can make decisions independently.

# Matching process

All placements are considered closely to ensure that children and young people are matched with foster carers whose skills and experience can meet their needs. This is done using a comprehensive matching form which identifies strengths, as well as additional support and/or training that may be required.

Many of our foster carers have experience of caring for, or specialise in meeting the needs of, children and young people who have been neglected, abused, have challenging behaviours or specific medical requirements etc.

We have a referrals and admissions coordinator, who is the first point of contact for enquiries about placement choices. They are supported by a duty social worker and liaise closely with supervising social workers in the fostering team, foster carers and referring/ placing authorities. This helps to ensure the best possible match for each child, young person and the foster carers.

We recognise that all children and young people have diverse needs, and that foster carers with a range of skills should be available to ensure the best matches are made.

# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Our charity is committed to eliminating discrimination and treating all individuals fairly and equally in all aspects of our work. We endeavour to promote equal opportunities with all organisations and individuals with whom we work. The Together Trust has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion practitioner.

We promote a working environment in which there is no unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation. All staff, foster carers and volunteers uphold the values and ethos defined in our policies and procedures.

Our fostering service has a Cultural Advisor who works closely with foster carers where children are placed with a family from a different cultural, ethnic or religious background to their own. Information

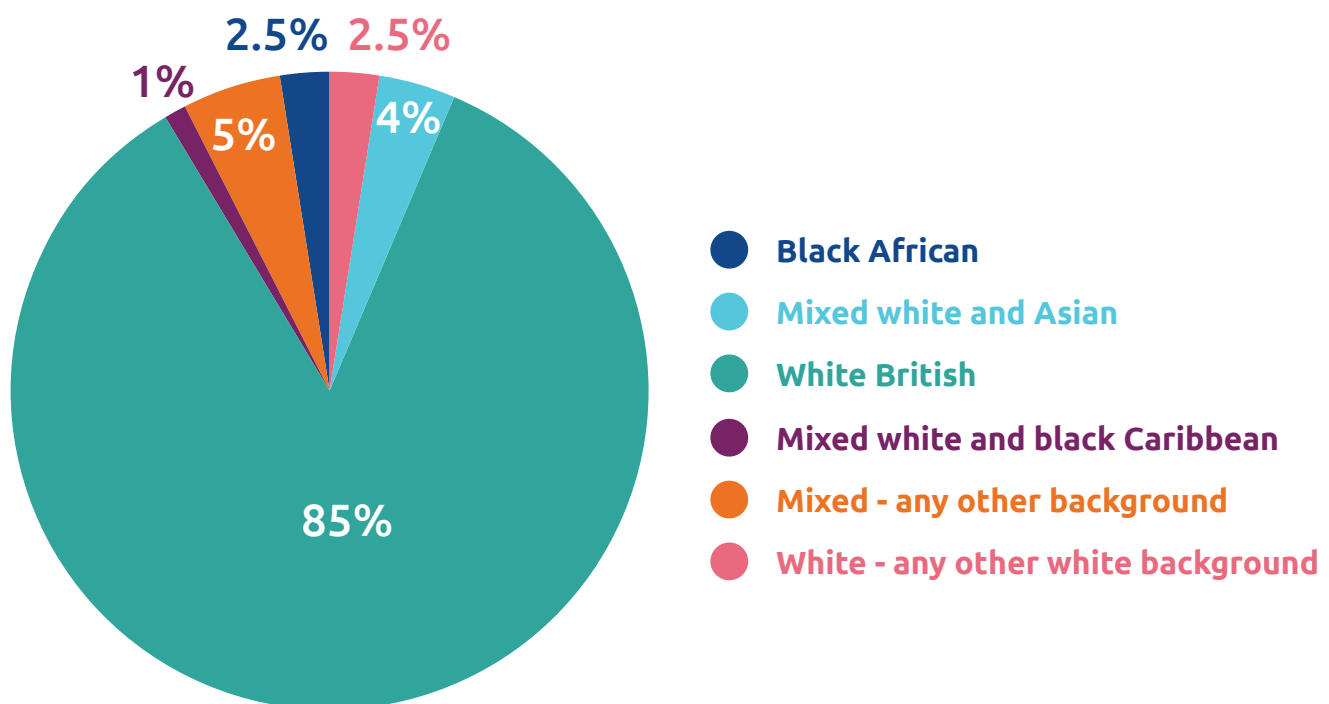
and advice is provided to all carers, children and young people, which promotes their health, religion, cultural and ethnic heritage.

As part of its ongoing commitment to recruiting families that represent diverse communities, we have a Cultural Advisor who has links with community groups and leaders within African and Asian communities. We are also a member of New Family Social, which supports LGBTQ+ foster carers and adopters, as well as the Fairer Fostering Partnership.

## Children and young people ethnicity

We had a total of 79 children and young people in placement between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

The pie chart and its key show the breakdown of their ethnicity in percentages.



# Individual monitoring outcomes tracker

At the start of every placement, our fostering service uses a child-specific, individual outcomes tracker to monitor desired outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

This information demonstrates that the service is providing children and young people, placed in our care, with added value to their lives, and positive outcomes in accordance with their care plan.

These reports are shared with the placing local authority at the child or young person's review. They also provide real information regarding the child or young person's ongoing development.

## Education information

In the year from April 2022 to March 2023, 100% of all children and young people in our foster placements, who were of school or college age, were receiving an educational provision.

Young people are supported to study vocational subjects alongside mainstream education where this would meet their needs.

Our fostering service is committed to supporting young people to achieve their potential, and actively works with placing social workers to meet all the targets in their personal education plans. This provides a solid foundation for the successful transition to further education and work opportunities.

## Management and support

It is the supervising social worker's responsibility to manage and support foster carers in the fostering task. Our supervising social workers understand they have a responsibility for ensuring that the child or young person's needs are paramount, even though they do not have case management responsibility for the child or young person.





The supervising social worker will visit the carer regularly through the use of social communication platforms or in person to the household both whilst a child or young person is in placement, and when the foster carer has vacancies. It is a further expectation that the supervising social worker will speak with the children and young people in placement at regular intervals to understand their wishes and feelings.

## Emergency support

At weekends, during bank holidays and at night, foster carers are supported by our out of hours service, staffed by a qualified social worker from the fostering service.

We also provide a 24-hour family placement service available to local authorities' social services departments for the emergency placement of children and young people.

## Supervisory/support visits

Regular supervision/support meetings will be held between supervising social workers and foster carers. Supervision meetings should be an opportunity for positive development as well as any issues of concern. These are completed using both social communication platforms and in person.

The supervising social workers also have a primary responsibility for assisting in the career development of foster carers, establishing training needs with them and making arrangements to meet these.



## Support groups

Regular support groups are held in venues convenient for foster carers or via social communication platforms. These groups are where information can be shared, any issues can be raised with us and, most importantly, foster carers can socialise, learn from and support each other.

# Foster carer buddying

We operate a buddying scheme to develop skills and understanding of the fostering role. It is targeted at the following, if considered appropriate:

- **Newly approved foster carers**
- **Foster carers with limited support networks**
- **Foster carers who need increased confidence to attend training and support.**

Buddying provides impartial support to foster carers and allows the buddy to have an opportunity to further develop their own professional practice, skills and knowledge.


## Training and development

As part of the training and assessment framework, which incorporates the training and development standards (TDS), all prospective foster carers are required to attend 'Skills to Foster' training prior to their approval. Sessions take place over two to three full days, dependent upon numbers, and are held on a regular basis throughout the year. These may take place on a social communication platform.

Newly approved foster carers will be expected to complete the training and development standards (formally known as CWDC). Both carers must complete this within 12 months of approval.

The basic subjects covered in these sessions are:





- **Promoting sense of identity**
- **Managing difficult behaviour**
- **Working in partnership with birth parents and other professionals**
- **Legislative framework**
- **Child development**
- **Attachment and loss**
- **Safe caring**
- **Why children come into care**
- **Awareness of child abuse and child protection issues**
- **Diversity – challenging discrimination**
- **Leaving care/transitions.**




Following their first review, foster carers are required to attend ongoing training and support/reflective practice groups. This equips foster carers with the skills and knowledge to enable them to provide quality care to children and young people in placement.

On approval, foster carers are provided with a login for online training. All foster carers are required to undertake refresher training on mandatory courses bi-annually.

This includes:

- **Equality and diversity**
  - **Health and safety**
  - **Administration of medication**
  - **Risk management and safer caring**
  - **Safeguarding children – ( not repeated after first year)**
  - **First Aid – three yearly renewal**
  - **PBS – yearly renewal**
  - **Minimising allegations**
  - **Complex Safeguarding**
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A clear framework of training and development is put in place and used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their needs.



Foster carers and staff are offered Attachment Training linked to our therapeutic approach and a 9-week PACE training course which is facilitated by the Together Trust Integrated Therapist and another member of the psychology team.

Post-approval training is held at various locations or via social communication platforms during term time and within school hours to suit most carers. Where carers are unable to attend due to other commitments, some evening or weekend training may be arranged to meet these needs. One-to-one specific training can also be arranged in some circumstances, where appropriate. There is an expectation that all carers will attend training on a regular basis. Failure to attend without good reason may lead to approval status eventually being withdrawn.

Post approval training includes:

- **Safeguarding Advanced**
- **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**
- **Attachment/PACE**
- **Fire Safety**

- **Health and Nutrition**
- **Medication (advanced)**
- **Radicalisation and Extremism**
- **Reporting and Recording (advanced)**

Further development and refresher courses to develop skills and knowledge, reflecting current practice, are offered after completion of the training programme. Training relating to placements requiring specific skills, identified at the matching stage or following placement, will also be provided.

Within the first 24 months, foster carers are required to attend a number of mandatory courses which they are expected to work towards with their supervising social workers. All foster carers are provided with personal training and development files which they are expected to maintain in order to plan how to develop their skills and knowledge as approved foster carers. These form part of their supervision and annual review process. If a foster carer refuses to attend ongoing training they may be temporarily put on hold until they undertake training as recommended by the service. If foster carers continually miss training the service could recommend termination of approval, as the skills of the carer will not reflect current practice. This can change regularly in accordance with statute law and regulation.





## What do foster carers say about the training?

All courses were very well presented, interesting and relevant.

Happy with all training being offered by the Together Trust in the past and we just build on that either through work or local CAMHS.

Extremely useful, always good to refresh and update.

Understanding and Reparenting: excellent course - makes you see more why young people behave like they do sometimes and how we talk to them makes a difference to them.

# Finance

Foster carers are supported by an entitlement of 14 days respite per child, per year. This can be extended depending upon the needs of the child or young person or, in exceptional circumstances, which must be agreed by the registered manager and placing authority.

Excess mileage costs, to transport children and young people to specific health appointments or educational provision outside of the local authority boundary will be paid, as well as mileage to and from training courses.

We also pay membership fees for carers to belong to The Fostering Network.

All foster carers are self-employed and as such must ensure they pay their own tax and national insurance. Detailed information and guidance is supplied to foster carers as part of their induction, and a detailed annual statement is provided. Foster carers are also kept informed of dates for HMRC webinars relating to foster carer taxation.

In accordance with the fostering frameworks we have with local authorities, the fees paid to foster carers will vary with sibling groups.

Our fostering service does not charge for services such as educational or therapeutic support, but any request for additional support, from referring or placing authorities, can be provided at an additional rate.







# Policies and procedures

Our fostering service has comprehensive policies and procedures.

These are reviewed annually and any updates are sent to all approved foster carers.

Alongside the policy and procedures, we have a comprehensive, but easy-to-understand, foster carer handbook. Every approved foster carer has access to the handbook in order to aid them with their fostering task. It contains information on fostering law, the complaints procedure, access to records, child protection, support, health issues, health and safety matters, education information and information about managing behaviour.

## **Foster carer review**

Following approval, foster carers will have a first review within 12 months. All first foster carer reviews will be presented to the fostering panel. All foster carers will then have reviews annually in accordance with the fostering regulations. These reviews will be chaired by an independent reviewing officer, who will make recommendations to both the carers and the service. These may be completed via social communications platforms or in person.

In line with the Fostering Regulations (miscellaneous amendments) July 2013, the Agency Decision Maker is responsible for all decisions about a foster carer's suitability to remain approved and whether or not their terms remain appropriate, including where no changes are proposed. Where there are complaints, or specific concerns, then a foster carer may have an early review which will be presented to the fostering panel. All reviews, with changes of approval, are presented to the fostering panel for consideration and any changes to their household and the impact on looked-after children and young people are considered, as part of any recommendations made.

The foster carer review is an opportunity to look at progress in meeting targets set for the development of skills, and to set new goals and action plans for the following year. Training needs are assessed and commitments to further training agreed.

## **Unannounced visits**

Part of the monitoring of care provided by foster carers is the expectation of unannounced visits by the supervising social worker. These will be carried out in line with fostering regulation and guidance, which is currently one unannounced visit per year. Our fostering service plans to carry out a minimum of two unannounced visits each year and may undertake more if required. A full health and safety checklist will be completed at least once each year.

These visits ensure that the accommodation and care, provided to a foster child or young person, is in keeping with the high-quality expectations of the Together Trust.

## **Record-keeping**

Foster carers are expected to keep a record of events relating to the child or young person in placement. Maintaining records is an important part of the foster carer's role, and accurate, factual and unbiased recording is therefore paramount. It should also be noted that these recordings could, should the need arise, be used as evidence in court proceedings. Foster carers are provided with a weekly electronic diary for each child or young person in placement in which to record information. Their supervising social worker will read and sign the diaries and record this on the supervision report.

## **Complaints and outcomes**

The complaints procedure is made widely available to all our service users. It is reviewed annually to check satisfactory operation and identify any patterns, and the action taken on individual complaints.

Our fostering service's complaints procedure places emphasis on resolving complaints at a local level and an early stage (stage one complaints).

The complaints we receive are viewed as serious matters but also as a way to learn and improve the level of service provided.

All our foster carers, children and young people are provided with a useful booklet explaining the process and procedure involved in making a complaint. The children and complaints booklet also includes our pledge to children and young people.

The Fostering Team Manager oversees all complaints from children, young people and carers, and the service director is made aware of these. Where complaints are contentious, we are committed to using links with other services within the Together Trust's care team, or experienced and independent social workers whose support is considered impartial.

### **Foster carer charter**

Our foster carers have drawn up a foster carer charter, which summarises what carers expect from the fostering service and what the service and the local authority can do for them. The charter is a list of principles to promote a shared understanding of foster care, and the important role foster carers have in making a real difference to the lives of children and young people in care. The charter has been drawn up following consultation with foster carers.







# What do foster carers say about the service?

I love working for the Together Trust.

We enjoy working within the Together Trust and value the support and advice they provide.

Always available for advice and help when required.

Everyone is there to help when needed be it in words or in person.

No issues - the Together Trust offers a very good level of support when needed.

We would like to thank everyone at the Together Trust for their invaluable support during this review period

**Be brave,  
be brilliant,  
be a foster carer.**

**Contact us:**

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