

Statement of purpose 2018 - 2019

Together Trust fostering service



Contents

Introduction to Together Trust's fostering service	3
Status and constitution	4
Management structure	5
Quality assurance	6
Service provision	7
Statistics	8 - 9
Recruitment and assessment	10 - 11
Foster carer agreements	12
What do foster carers say about the assessment process?	12
Range of placements	13 - 14
What do local authority social workers say about the placements?	15
Matching process	16
Equality and diversity	16 - 17
Individual monitoring outcomes tracker, educational information	18
Management and support	18 - 19
Training and development	20 - 21
What do foster carers say about the training?	22
Finance	22
Policies and procedures	23 - 25
What do foster carers say about the service?	25
Children's guides	26 - 27

Introduction to Together Trust's fostering service

Together Trust's fostering service is part of a registered charity that has been providing services to children and young people for almost 150 years.

The service was set up in Cheadle, Cheshire, in 1997 to provide secure long-term placements for children and young people within foster families. Today the service provides a variety of placement options.

We work closely with a number of Together Trust's other services to achieve permanency via foster care for children and young people who are not able to return to their birth families.

Our foster placements provide an informal and relaxed atmosphere, where the safety and security of children and young people are an integral part of daily life.

We aim to:

- Provide the highest quality of care for looked-after children. This includes a safe, stable, caring and nurturing home 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 support children and young people to help them 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.

Together Trust's fostering service continues to grow and develop throughout the North West and increasingly, beyond.



Jill Sheldrake,
Service Director





Status and constitution

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

Day-to-day operational responsibility lies with the chief executive and the service director. However, the fostering panel is constituted in accordance 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).

The charity has achieved PQASSO Level 2. PQASSO is a quality kite mark to show that Together Trust has been externally accredited against PQASSO standards.

The organisation was reaccredited with the Investors in People standard in May 2015.

Together Trust's 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 of service, and to 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 will provide equality of opportunity at all levels and challenge discrimination.

Management structure

The service director is the registered person and agency decision maker for Together Trust's 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 Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered.

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

Team meetings

The fostering team have 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.

Together Trust fostering service comprises:

- Head of service for children and families
- Team manager
- Senior social workers
- Social workers
- Senior support workers
- Administration team manager
- 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 foster care provided. They regularly monitor and review the following:

- The 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 provision

Together Trust complies 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 and 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.

Issues around safeguarding are dealt with immediately, in line with agreed procedures. School attendance and academic achievement is promoted for all children and young people.

Daily written records on each child or young person will be provided.

Corporal punishment will not be used in any circumstance. Guidance is provided on the use of permissible sanctions and a written record kept of any implementation. Together Trust's fostering service and its 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 Together Trust's clinical psychologist or therapist where this has been deemed appropriate.

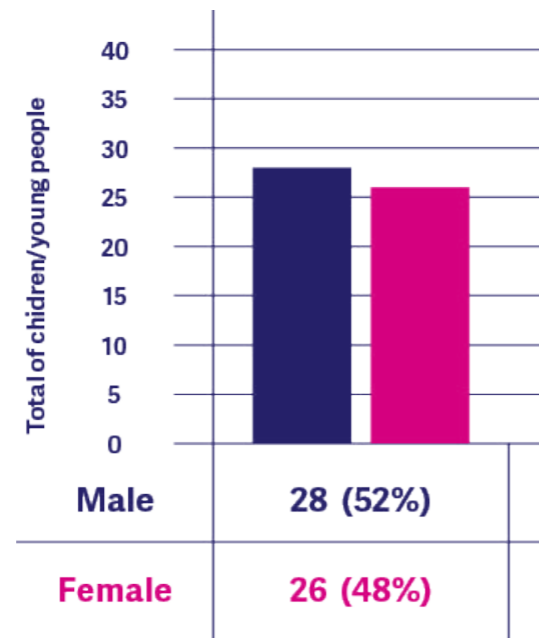
All foster carers have access to 24-hour telephone support from a qualified social worker within Together Trust's fostering service.



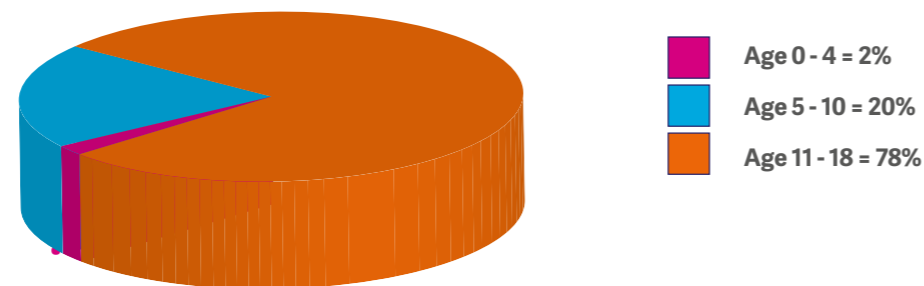


Statistics

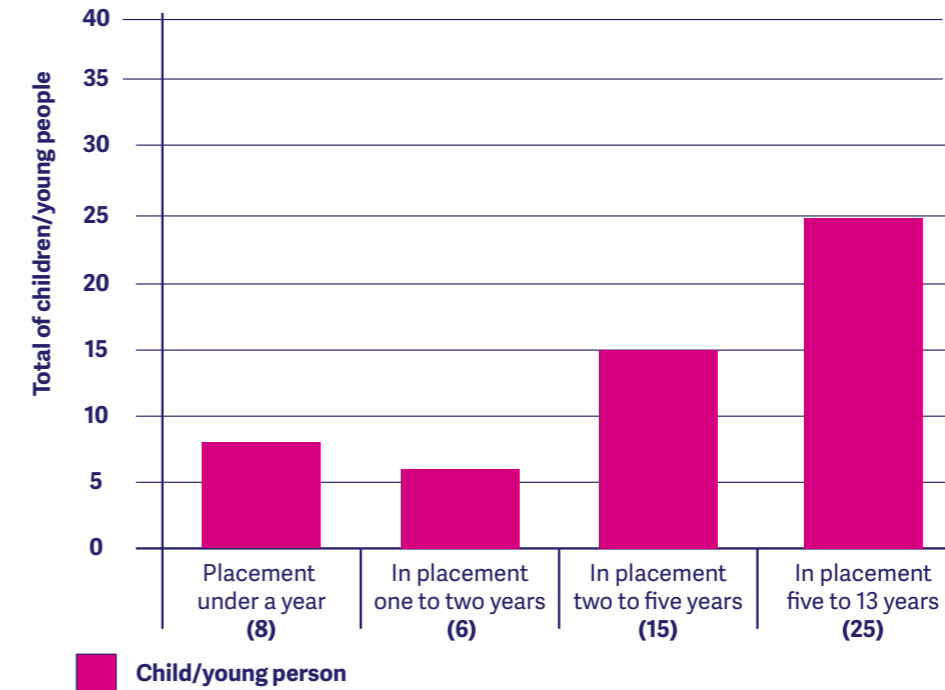
As of the end of March 2018, Together Trust foster carers looked after a total of 54 children and young people, whose gender and ages are shown below:



The below chart shows the age tier groups for a total of 54 children and young people:



85% of children and young people currently in placement with Together Trust foster carers have been placed with their carers for over a year, with 74% of those being in placement for over two years, and a further 46% being in placement over five years. This demonstrates excellent outcomes and stability for children and young people.



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

- "Wash my clothes, good healthy food. Very nice toys, always kind to us. We have a nice house."
 - "Hugs, kisses and I love them so much every single day."
 - "They support me and help me to the best of their abilities."
 - "They treat me with respect."
 - "I just appreciate everything they do for me and the effort they put into helping me happy."
 - "If I stay here it will be brilliant, I love it here."
- One care leaver aged 23-years said:**
- "Everything that they did for me was brilliant. I got so much support. I was helped to leave care and still get great support three years on."

Recruitment and assessment

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. A dedicated referrals and admissions coordinator responds to all telephone and website enquiries.
3. The referrals and admissions coordinator engages with the person enquiring to ensure that enquiries only progress to the next stage where families have time, space and motivation to foster.
4. The referrals and admissions coordinator arranges the initial home visit to be undertaken jointly 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, Together Trust's fostering service assigns 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.

They then produce 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 resilient coping strategies appropriate to the fostering task.
7. The 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, Together Trust's fostering service undertakes 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)
 - Medical reports
 - References from all previous employment involving children and vulnerable adults

- Personal references (at least three), who are visited by a social worker
 - 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.
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.

The fostering panel comprises a variety of professionals and independent members, including foster carers, educational specialists and people with experience of the looked-after children system.
 10. 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, Together Trust's fostering service advises applicants, both verbally and in writing, and assigns a supervising social worker to support the foster carer in the fostering task. We then advise the foster carers' 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. Together Trust continues to make every effort to recruit and approve carers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and this remains a priority for the service.

Together Trust welcomes applications to become a foster carer from anyone over the age of 21-years. 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 are required to 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
- To follow procedures laid down within the agency's handbook and policy and procedures which details the child protection procedures, foster carer roles and responsibilities and behaviour management support
- To inform Together Trust's fostering service of any relevant significant changes to their household or details
- That Together Trust will provide relevant training for foster carers
- That Together Trust will provide supervision
- To participate fully in annual reviews unless there are changes to approval or other specific circumstances.

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."*
- *"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 enthusiasm and guidance offered throughout the assessment process was exceptional."*
- *"The social workers were very professional in their approach and in the execution of the recruitment process."*
- *"The social workers made us feel very at ease when they came into our home."*

Range of placements

Together Trust's fostering service has a range of foster carers approved to provide care to children and young people aged nought to 18-years. This includes placements that cater 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, Together Trust's fostering service is 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 so that they remain happy and know they play an important role in achieving positive outcomes.

Children and young people who are placed with Together Trust's 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 for the children to share a room, and a bedroom sharing risk assessment will be completed. 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 Together Trust's fostering service offers a 24-hour emergency response service to support such requests from placing authorities.

Specialist placements/remand/PACE

For children and young people who have very complex needs and/or challenging behaviour. These placements are supported by experienced foster carers with an increased level of support from the social work and support worker team.





Range of placements (continued)

Parent and child placements

This type of placement is for young people who have become parents at a young age and who need support and guidance in caring for their own child. Parenting assessments may need to be undertaken and foster carers will play an integral role in these.

Sibling placements

Sibling placements are for brothers and sisters who are placed together in foster care. Together Trust's fostering service advocates keeping siblings together within a family environment, unless it is deemed inappropriate by the placing authority. Together Trust specialises in sibling placements and provides 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 siblings together. In these instances children and young people may be placed with other carers. Contact between the siblings will therefore be a priority and will be agreed by the placing authority.

Short breaks/respite - disabled children and young people

Together Trust's 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

Together Trust's fostering service has 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?

- "They (Z & Z) have undergone a significant change in their circumstances and I have observed the foster carer always to be child-centred in the way that they have managed the move, and I am happy with the placement and the children's development and the carer they are provided with."
- "As this is a new placement it is difficult to give a thorough account of suitability, however, with what has been presented to me so far I foresee this as being a good match and the young person has settled in well."
- "The foster carers provide an excellent placement for both children and have good insight into their needs. They promote contact well and have supported them in all aspects of their development."
- "Wayne and Gill will keep me regularly informed of any ongoing progress and any significant events, if they are unable to reach me by phone, they will email me information or contact EDT or duty if I am not available."
- "Very good, the carers are 100% committed to the children and treat them as their own. They have done a remarkable job."
- "They are a good team, both offering a combination of skills alongside each other in their role as foster carers. Their close supportive relationship and attitude to family life enables the young people in their care to experience security and stability."
- "Protective of the children, advocate in their best interests, challenge professionals in the best interests of the children and always offer me a drink."





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 Together Trust's 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.

Together Trust's fostering service has 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.

Together Trust recognises 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 and diversity

Together Trust is committed to eliminating discrimination and treating all individuals fairly and equally in all aspects of its work. We endeavour to promote equal opportunities with all organisations and individuals with whom we work.

Together Trust promotes 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 within our policies and procedures.

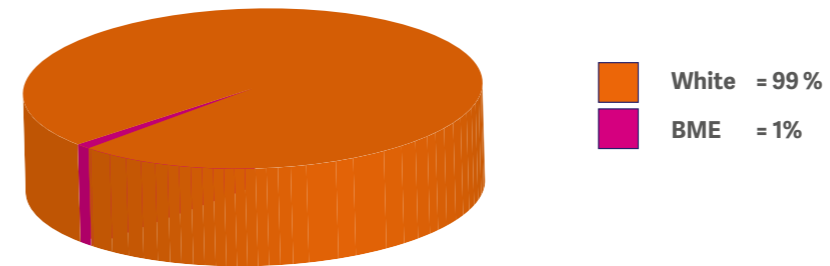
Our fostering service has a cultural support worker who works closely with foster carers where children are placed with a family from a different cultural, ethnic or religious background to their own. Information and advice is provided to all carers, children and young people, which promotes their health, religion, cultural and ethnic heritage.

As part of its ongoing commitment to recruiting families that represent diverse communities, Together Trust has made links with community groups and leaders within African and Asian communities. Together Trust is also a member of New Family Social, which supports LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) foster carers and adopters, as well as the Fairer Fostering Partnership.

Targeted advertising has also taken place in designated demographic areas to attract families who can meet the specific needs of children and young people requiring foster care.

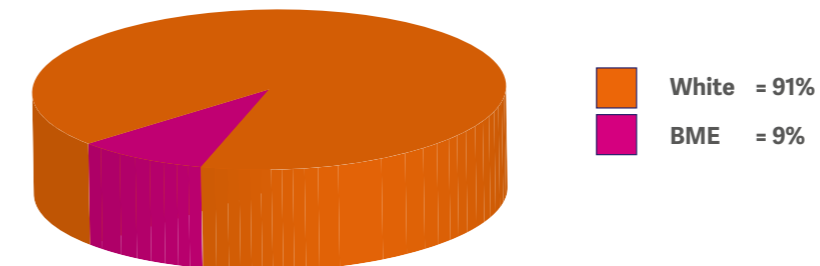
Foster carer ethnicity - March 2018

As of the end of March 2018, Together Trust had 71 individual foster carers. The chart below demonstrates their percentage ethnicity:



Children and young people ethnicity - March 2018

As of the end of March 2018, Together Trust had 71 individual foster carers. The chart below demonstrates their percentage ethnicity:





Individual monitoring outcomes tracker

At the start of every placement, Together Trust's fostering service uses a child specific individual outcomes tracker to monitor desired outcomes for the children and young people in our care. The purpose of this information is to demonstrate 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 2017 to March 2018, 100% of all children and young people in Together Trust foster placements who were of school or college age were receiving an educational provision. Of those taking their GCSE exams, a high proportion were expected to achieve good results, and some particularly high grades.

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

Together Trust's 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 to make 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. Together Trust's 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 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 ascertain their wishes and feelings.

Management and support (continued)

Emergency support

At weekends, during bank holidays and at night, foster carers are supported by an on-call service, staffed by a qualified social worker from the fostering service.

Together Trust also provide a 24-hour family placement service available to local authorities/social services department 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.

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/reflective practice groups

Regular support/reflective practice groups are held in venues convenient for foster carers. These groups are where information can be shared, any issues can be raised with Together Trust and most importantly, foster carers can socialise, learn from and support each other.

Foster carer mentoring

Together Trust operates a mentoring scheme, with the aim of developing skills and understanding of the fostering role and 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/reflective practice groups.

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

The purpose of the foster carer mentor is to provide an increased level of informal support to foster carers, with the aim of developing the skills and understanding of foster carers. This support will enable placements to be maintained and positive outcomes will be achieved in relation to children and young people.





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.

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 the first review, foster carers are required to attend on-going 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 log in for The Fostering Network's online training. All foster carers are required to undertake this and to undertake refresher training bi-annually.

This training consists of six modules, including:

- Attachment
- Behaviour
- Contact
- Education
- Health
- Safer caring.

All foster carers are provided with a personal development portfolio and this will form part of their supervision and annual review process.

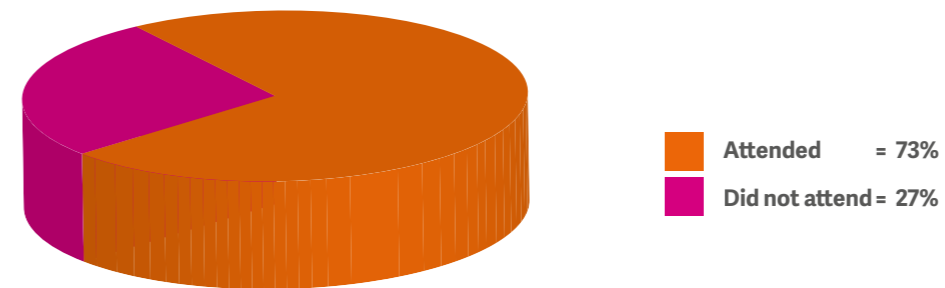
A clear framework of training and development is put in place and used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their needs.

Post-approval training is held at various locations 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.

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.

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.



Training evaluation March 2018

Number of sessions to which carers were invited	Number of sessions carers attended	Number of non-attendance sessions	Percentage of sessions attended
403	295	108	73.2%



What do foster carers say about the training?

- *“All courses were very well presented, interesting and relevant.”*
- *“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.”*
- *“Happy with all training being offered by Together Trust in the past and we just build on that either through work or local CAMHS.”*

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.

The Together Trust also pays 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.

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

Policies and procedures

Together Trust's fostering service has a comprehensive manual of policies and procedures. These are reviewed annually and any updates are sent to all approved foster carers.

Alongside the policy and procedures, Together Trust's fostering service has 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.

The handbook is reviewed throughout the year and any updates are issued as appropriate to foster carers and staff.

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. Following this, foster carer reviews will be chaired by an independent reviewing officer who will make recommendations to both the carers and the service.

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.

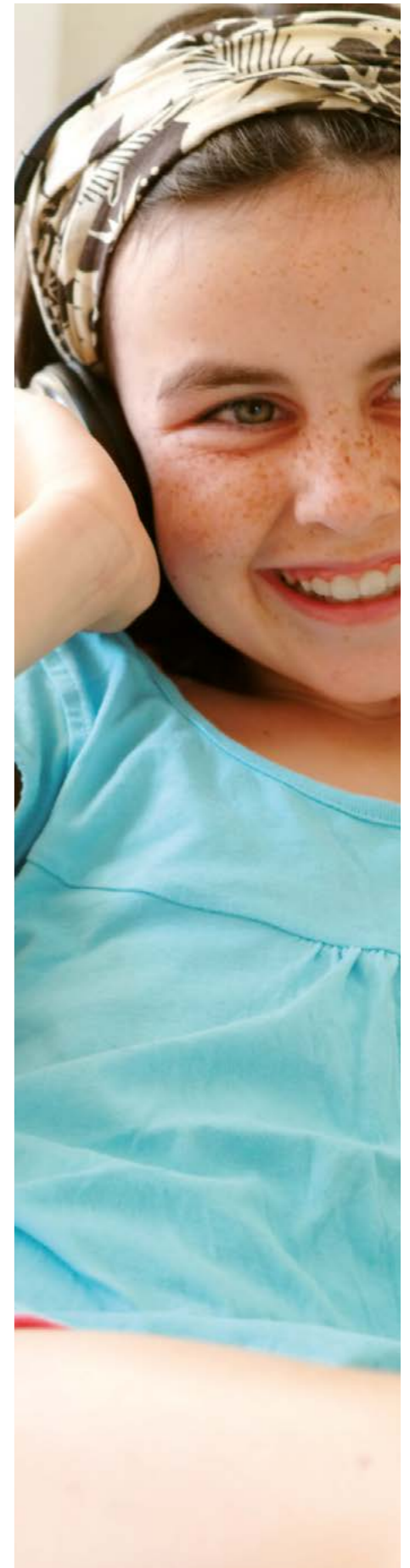
All reviews with changes of approval are presented to the fostering panel for consideration, and any changes to their household and the impact on children and young people placed are considered as part of any recommendations made.

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. Together Trust's 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 on at least one of these visits each year.

The purpose of these visits is to ensure the accommodation and care provided to a foster child or young person is in keeping with the high quality expectations of Together Trust.





Policies and procedures (continued)

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 daily diary for each child or young person in placement in which to record information. Their supervising social worker will read and sign the diaries at each supervisory/support meeting and record this on the supervision report.

Complaints and outcomes

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

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

Together Trust views complaints received 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 of making a complaint and the procedure involved in doing so. The children and complaints booklet also includes Together Trust's pledge to children and young people.

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

Foster carer forum

At least once a year the fostering service hosts a foster carer forum. This gives foster carers the opportunity to meet with the chief executive of Together Trust, the service director/agency decision maker, the head of service and the team manager. The forum provides an opportunity to consult with foster carers on service developments and give updates on national and local information and initiatives.

Foster carer charter

Together Trust's 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 what foster care is, and about 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?

- *"Excellent support always available 24 hours and always have the right advice."*
- *"Together Trust gives amazing support for a very difficult and complex occupation which requires essential training and support."*
- *"As I have had so many meetings/school problems this last year, Together Trust has really supported me through it."*
- *"The Trust continues to grow and evolve. Some of the more recent forums, consultations and meetings have instilled a renewed sense of 'belonging' again to the organisation."*
- *"It is family, everyone helps we are recognised by name & not number."*



Children's guides

Together Trust believes that children and young people have a right to information and support throughout the fostering process. The service undertakes regular consultation in regard to the care that children and young people receive, in order for the service to continually develop.

As part of this, young people and Together Trust have completed a pledge together.

YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

"We want to be more involved with recruitment of foster carers."

"We want to interview staff."

We promise

- That this is something we want you to be involved in and we value your input and contribution. We encourage young people to be included in recruitment decisions.

YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

"Speak with us more."

"Be more open with us."

"Listen to our views more."

We promise

- To listen to all children and young people. We will give you the time and opportunity to have your say and express your thoughts, wishes and opinions. What you have to say is important to us.
- To share information with you and consult with you. This can be done through the young people's forum or you can talk to a supervising social worker, a support worker or an independent visitor.

Our pledge to children and young people

YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

"We want training sessions to help us."

We promise

- To provide you with training sessions that are catered to meet your needs and will fit around your other commitments, i.e. school, college, etc. We will look at training sessions to be put on in the evenings or at weekends.

YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

"We would like an open door policy to managers, staff etc."

We promise

- We want you to come and speak to us. Our door is always open and we encourage you to talk to us. This could be about an issue or a concern or just for a general chat.

YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

"We would like more meetings."

We promise

- The forum members are in charge of the meetings regarding times, frequency, days etc, as it's their forum. We will support them in arranging the meetings and speak to all the relevant people to help this happen
- We have different groups apart from the forum, these include girls and boys groups.

YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

"We want more mentors (care leavers) to help us, especially with helping us prepare to leave care."

We promise

- To help you be prepared when it's time for you to leave care
- We will do this in various ways, including: independence work regarding budgeting, shopping, washing, cooking etc; inviting you to join the care leavers forum; encouraging care leavers to act as mentors so that they can help you and support you.



For further information about the Together Trust fostering service, please contact us:

Foster carer enquiries t: 0800 05 222 50
Referrals and placements t: 0161 283 4800
General enquiries e: fostercarer@togethertrust.org.uk
Fostering t: 0161 283 4800

Together Trust Centre t: 0161 283 4800
Schools Hill, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 1JE
Preston sub-office t: 01772 705 455
Unit 4, East Way Business Village, Oliver's Place, Fulwood, Preston PR2 9WT

The Together Trust fostering service is part of the Together Trust, a charity that has been operating for over 140 years. We believe that everyone deserves an equal chance in life and everyone has the ability and right to experience joy, safety, happiness and hope.

By providing specialist education, care and community services to children, young people and adults the Together Trust aims to do everything in its power to make that happen.

Registered charity number 209782

together trust
fostering service

 /SupportTogetherTrust

 @TogetherTrust

www.togethertrust.org.uk

