

The Foster Care Co-operative



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (WALES) 2020 / 2021

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What is a Statement of Purpose?

Our Statement of Purpose for Wales is prepared in accordance with Part 2 of The Regulated Fostering Services (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2019 and the Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services 2019. In its preparation, we have also noted the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, The Regulated Services (Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2017 and The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.

Our Statement of Purpose is a key document for our service and it:

- describes the services provided;
- gives information about where and how these services will be provided; and
- gives information about the arrangements to support the delivery of the services.

In addition to our Statement of Purpose, we also provide a written guide to our service (and both of these documents are reviewed on an annual basis or more frequently if any changes occur that we need to reflect in these documents).

Our Statement of Purpose and written guide are a source of information for children / young people and their families, foster carers (and people thinking of becoming foster carers), our staff and professionals from other agencies.

The Foster Care Co-operative (Wales) also has policies and procedures that have been developed to provide clear guidance for our staff, carers, applicants and Panel members. Our policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated; our carers can access copies of the most current versions on the carers' section of our website and copies are made available to our staff and Panel members via our internal systems (and to others on request / as appropriate).

The Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) regularly inspects our Fostering Agency to ensure that we achieve the aims and objectives which are set out in our Statement of Purpose.

The Foster Care Co-operative (Wales) is committed to improving services and to ensuring the well-being of children which is why we place high importance on our monitoring and quality assurance processes and review our aims and objectives and Agency documents on an on-going basis (updating them as required).

Equality and Diversity

Diversity and inclusion really matters. We are wholly committed to understanding and recognising diversity and inclusion through all we achieve. Educating ourselves and others about diversity and inclusion, being brave enough to challenge each other, making positive changes within FCC, and inspiring other Fostering agencies to do the same.

Our agency aspires to change the lives of children across the country and at its very core, our purpose to represent everyone. We believe in equality of opportunity and chances for all our children, carers and staff. This is why as a Co-operative we embrace as many voices, views and abilities as possible, as well as giving opportunities to people from all backgrounds.

Our ultimate aim is to be able to say 'we have built an understanding of diversity and inclusion and are able to hear and celebrate diverse voices in everything we do'.

Overview of Services Provided

Our Agency recruits, assesses, trains and supports Foster Carers in a variety of locations throughout Wales. Our office is based in Malvern temporarily (please see Section 8 for further details) but we have Supervising Social Workers located in South Wales, Mid Wales and North Wales to ensure that our carers based in those regions (and the children in their care) have access to appropriate levels of supervision and support. We are in the process of seeking new premises based in Wales.

All vacancies within this Agency are detailed and included on the Children's Commissioning Support Resources (CCSR) system.

Further to consultation with the proposed carer(s), referrals are responded to with a detailed 'Expression of Interest' (also known as a Matching Assessment) and a copy of the relevant carer's profile.

The Foster Care Co-operative holds regular "Skills to Foster" courses and all foster carer applicants are required to attend this training prior to approval that is, prior to us being willing to present their application / assessment to our Fostering Panel.

The Foster Care Co-operative offers a range of placements, on a short term, long term and respite basis. We also have carers who offer 'Parents and Children Together' (PACT) placements and Local Authorities are also encouraged to discuss any need arising from requirements for Short Break, Shared Care and Transitional Care. We care for children from 0-18 years old..

Local Authorities are required to provide all relevant documentation within the tendering process. We request that all 'Looked After Child' documentation be

completed before a child or young person is placed as well as the FCC Foster Placement Agreement.

- **Short Term Placements** - are available with foster carers who are skilled and suited to this type of placement. These placements can vary in duration from a single night to a number of months. In all cases, monthly reports are provided for placing agencies along with other appropriate recording.

A proportion of short term placements commence as emergency referrals from Local Authorities and, by the nature of this type of referral, no clear plan or 'end-date' are known at the point of placement. An FCC Foster Placement Agreement is completed prior to or at point of placement which confirms the Care Plan for every child placed.

- **Long Term Placements** - are offered by a number of carers. A permanent home into adulthood is provided when this is an identified requirement of the Child Care Plan. Permanent family placements are offered to children who have had short-term placements with the agency. In all cases, monthly reports are provided for placing agencies on the progress of children in placement. An FCC Foster Placement agreement is completed prior to or at point of placement which confirms the Care Plan for every child placed.

- **Sibling Groups** - The Agency does assess and approve foster carers who have the emotional strength and physical space to take a sibling group. We recognise the additional support that care of a sibling group requires so that each individual child achieves their maximum potential.

- **Shared Care** – the FCC offers Local Authorities the opportunity to place children with carers on a shared care basis that is, where care is being offered both by our foster carers and by the child's permanent family members. This enables children to remain predominantly in the care of their birth family whilst simultaneously accessing any appropriate support services that will maximise and promote good outcomes and ultimately prevent entry to the Looked After system.

- **Short Breaks** – the FCC offers a package of preventative, intensive, short term foster care support to enable families in crisis to avoid a child or young person being taken into care. The FCC will also work with birth families in order to achieve long term change.

- **Transitional Care** – the FCC are able to work in partnership with residential care providers to facilitate positive and stable transitions to family placements.

- **'Parent and Child Together' Placements (PACT)** - our Agency offers appropriately skilled carers who can offer placements for parents with their children. The parent does not have to be below the age of 18 and both parents can be included if this is deemed appropriate to meet the needs of the child and family. Carers are selected who have the necessary skills to undertake this particularly complex type of work. All

carers offering this type of placement are required to undergo specialist training prior to being considered for any PACT placement.

- **When I'm Ready Placements** – When I'm Ready is a governmental initiative to support young people, on reaching the age of 18, to stay with their former foster carers. Whilst not a fostering placement, FCC has a scheme which allows for the former carer to be supported whilst the arrangement is in place. This scheme benefits both the young person and the carer.

Status and Constitution

- The Foster Care Co-operative (FCC) is an independent fostering agency operating throughout Wales and England. Its co-operative status makes the Agency unique amongst fostering providers.
- The Foster Care Co-operative is registered as a Co-operative under common ownership and this registration is listed with Co-operatives UK, the National Clearing House and Representative Body for Co-operatives in the United Kingdom. In addition, the Foster Care Co-operative is registered as a private limited company in the UK.
- PAYE staff will be accepted as members of the Co-operative and Foster Carers as associate members.
- Consultation is achieved with carers through the support group mechanism, carer forum and an innovative and informative FCC website. In order that all views are communicated to the Board of the Co-operative a formal written consultation process is initiated by the Chief Executive Officer well in advance of the Annual General Meeting. Issues raised are recorded and responded to with details being appended to the AGM minutes.
- It is not possible for Foster Carers to sit on the Board of the Co-operative because Foster Carers are expressly forbidden from controlling and/or managing the agency for which they foster in the United Kingdom.
- The detailed rules governing the Foster Care Co-operative are contained within the Memorandum of Association and the Articles of Association, copies of which are available on request and placed on the FCC website.
- The Co-operative is collectively owned and cannot be subject to a takeover or asset stripped by a minority interest, nor can the agency be sold. In the event of the business being wound up, or subject to dissolution, any of the assets of the Co-operative remaining would be disposed of, after its liabilities are satisfied, and not distributed among the Members, but transferred instead to some other common ownership enterprise(s). This may include other UK Co-operatives or to some other non-profit organisation(s) promoting and supporting co-operative and common ownership enterprise, as may be decided by the Board at the time of, or prior to, the dissolution. In the event that for

whatever reason any residual assets cannot be so transferred, they shall be given for charitable purposes.

- The Foster Care Co-operative has been registered with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).
- The Foster Care Co-operative is registered as a Fostering Service under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (RISCA).

The Aims and Objectives, Principles and Standards of the Foster Care Cooperative

The Foster Care Co-operative is a not-for-profit independent fostering agency based in England and Wales. We are committed to providing quality foster care and ensuring the well-being of Looked After Children who are placed with FCC foster carers.

We aim to provide: -

- a good quality, highly regarded service that inspires confidence in children/young people, carers, staff, managers and partner agencies.
- stability and permanence in the lives of the children and young people who are placed with Foster Carers in order to maximise their life chances.

Through such stability the Foster Carers can play their part in developing the child's identity, ensuring their educational needs are met, promoting their health and well-being and realising their full potential.

One of our objectives is to grow the number of foster carers available for children in Local Authority care through the recruitment of individuals and couples new to the fostering task.

The Agency provides a range of placements with Foster Carers for children and young people who are Looked After and the way in which we plan to achieve our overall aims, objectives, principles and standards are to:-

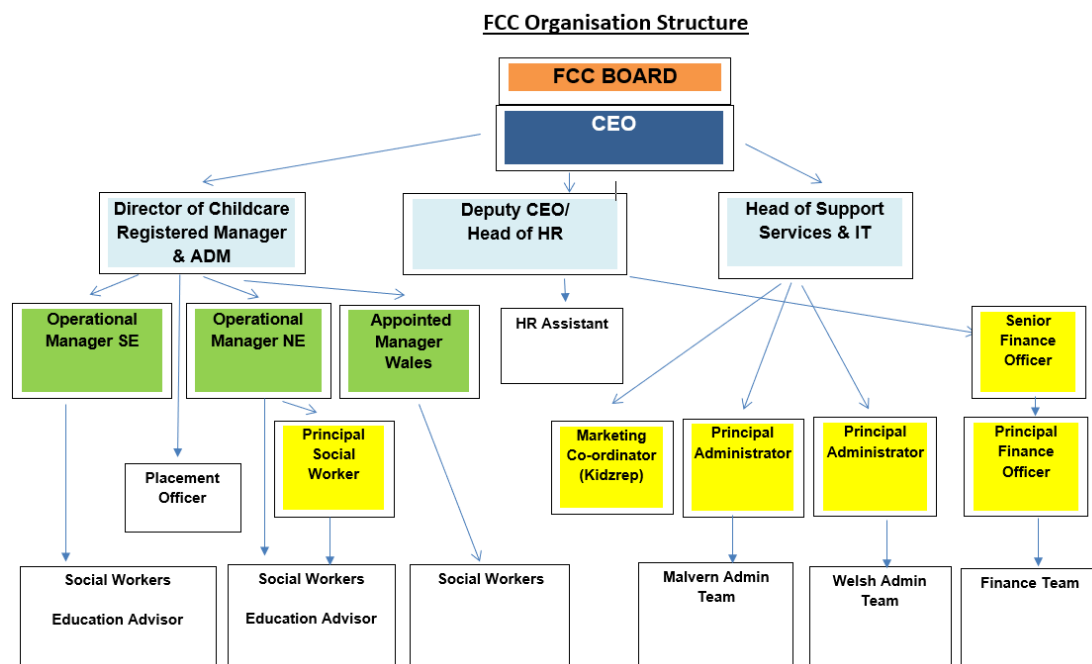
- continually develop a reputation for delivering a quality service with integrity;
- provide an excellent child care service to Local Authorities with a range of good quality family-based care for children who are unable to stay with their own families;
- provide looked after children with a safe, stable, nurturing family experience which will promote their health, educational achievement and wellbeing and which will assist them in coming to terms with their life experiences and reaching their full potential;

- value diversity by recruiting and training carers who respect, promote and reflect the ethnicity, race, culture and religious identity of the children and young people they care for;
- respect the gender and sexuality of children and young people;
- listen to children and young people about their needs, wishes and experiences;
- be wholly committed to children and young people cared for in foster and shared care placements and to be centred entirely on their needs;
- advise children and young people in foster placements of the Complaints Procedure and assist them in making a complaint if they choose;
- enable children and young people to contribute to the annual reviews of their foster carers and make any concerns they may have about their carers known to managers.
- work together with the child's allocated Social Worker to ensure that the child or young person's views about their foster placement are listened to and taken into consideration when decisions are made (especially when there is a Looked after Child Review);
- work together with Education professionals to enable children and young people in foster care to maximise their learning and educational skills and opportunities;
- work together with Health professionals to achieve the best standards of health care and health awareness;
- work together with Leaving Care Teams and Supported Lodgings / 'When I am Ready' Services to ensure that young people are supported as they make the transition from foster care to independent living and gain from training and employment opportunities;
- train foster carers and post-approved carers to a very high standard and enable carers to participate in a wide range of training opportunities;
- support foster carers in providing the highest possible care to children and young people;
- We offer support and assistance 'out of office hours' to the carers during the evening and at the weekend;
- work closely with advocacy services and foster carers to include the views of children and young people in all aspects of their care and the services provided by the Agency;
- keep abreast of research developments and implement suggestions for good practice and a better quality of service based on local and national research findings;
- strive to provide a level and quality of service that exceeds the requirements of the relevant legislation and Statutory Guidance and achieves excellence;
- continue to liaise with our Local Authority partners to learn about their current placements needs and review our recruitment strategies (and update as required);

- employ highly qualified, well-motivated staff who are dedicated to the recruitment, training, assessment and support of foster carers and be solely focused on the needs of children and young people who are cared for in foster placements.

The Structure of the Agency

The current structure of the Foster Care Co-operative is represented below:-



Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/Responsible Individual/2nd ADM

Our Chief Executive Officer is **Sumerjit (Sam) Ram**

Sam is an experienced senior leader with a track record of strategic and operational leadership at CEO and Director levels.

With over 25 years' leadership experience, Sam has established a reputation in the sector for delivering outstanding sustained results through her systems leadership approach to co-production work, collaborations/partnerships, and is known for her transformational leadership style. Sam's career has been driven by her commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people. Sam holds an MA in Leadership & Innovation.

Sam Ram is the nominated Responsible Individual for the Agency in Wales and is registered with CIW in this capacity. She has responsibility for the overall management of the Agency in Wales, ensuring Policies and Procedures are adhered to and are effectively met within the context of a sound financial structure (as well as ensuring compliance with The Regulated Services (Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2017, The Regulated Services (Annual

Returns) (Wales) Regulations 2017, The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018, The Regulated Fostering Services (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2019, and the Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services.

Sam has delegated all aspects of the RI role to the Director of Child Care, other than the Regulation 56 and Schedule 4 responsibilities.

Sam is also the 2nd ADM for the Welsh Panel (the 1st ADM being the Director of Care).

Sam undertakes regular visits to Wales to meet with the Registered Manager/Appointed Manager, wider staff, carers and children placed.

The Agency Head Office

The Head office of the Foster Care Co-operative is based in Malvern, Worcestershire and effectively has oversight for all the company activities; our Business Support, Finance and Human Resources are based there. Our Senior Leadership Team meetings and quarterly quality assurance meetings are also held at this office.

The Chief Executive Officer of FCC is the Responsible Individual. The current post holder is Sam Ram. Sam is an experienced senior leader with a track record of strategic and operational leadership at CEO and Director levels. With over 25 years' leadership experience, Sam has established a reputation in the sector for delivering outstanding sustained results through her systems leadership approach to co-production work, collaborations/partnerships, and is known for her transformational leadership style. Sam's career has been driven by her commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people. Sam holds an MA in Leadership & Innovation.

Our Senior Leadership Team comprises of: -

- Steve Field – Director of Child Care and ADM
- Barbara Bull – DCEO and Head of Human Resources
- Samantha Williams - Head of Business Support Services and IT

The interim address for the Foster Care Cooperative registered office for Wales is:-

The Foster Care Co-operative
Spring Lane North
Malvern
WR14 1GF

Please note these are temporary premises whilst we source a property in the Cardiff area.

Our Board members

Our Board currently comprises the following Directors: -

Laurie Gregory

Honorary President of the Board and Founder

A qualified Social Worker and Manager with 31 years in Local Government Social Services Departments, Laurie has experience ranging from Social Worker to Deputy Director. He also spent four years in international development work across a number of Central and Eastern European countries.

Along with his wife, Laurie has been an approved Foster Carer himself (having previously fostered a child with disabilities for a total of 13 years) and has worked with several independent fostering agencies before founding the Foster Care Co-operative in 1999. Laurie is also involved in a number of charities including Citizens Advice, Crossroads Care and with Housing Associations.

After founding the FCC, Laurie was the Agency's Executive Director for the first ten years it was operating.

Les Kinmond

Chairman of the Board

A retired local businessman, previously Chief Executive of the Prym Newey Group plc, the Independent Chair of Audit for West Mercia Probation Trust and the former Chief Executive of Worcestershire Citizen's Advice, Les is a highly experienced Chief Executive, Chair and Board Member.

In addition to the management of large organisations his particular areas of expertise are strategy and policy, financial management and partnership, working across sectors with funders and key stakeholders.

Les also has 7 years' of experience of working in the charity sector and undertakes a number of voluntary activities within his local community.

Jerry Tudge

Company Director

Jerry is a qualified Building Surveyor and ex-foster carer (with 14 years of experience of fostering) with work experience in the private, NHS and Local Government sectors.

Jerry also sits on both the Welsh and English Fostering Panels.

Although now retired, Jerry was previously the Principal Building Surveyor for Worcestershire County Council.

Brian O'Connell**Company Director**

Brian is a consulting solicitor for a large solicitor's firm based in Worcestershire. He has also sat as a Deputy District Judge for over 20 years.

He was also a founder member of the Worcester Duty Solicitor Scheme.

Elizabeth (Betty) Hutton**Company Director**

Betty has over twenty-two years of experience of working in the Third Sector as a Personal Assistant to a Chief Executive. In this role she worked closely with members of the Board of Trustees and Management Team on highly confidential matters, and covered all aspects of charity governance and adoption.

Since retiring, she has continued to volunteer with Faith in Families and for six years, also volunteered for SOVA (Supporting Others Through Voluntary Action) Currently she is assisting as volunteer with local Food Bank, is a volunteer patient with local hospital and is a long-standing participant in UK Biobank.

Betty also has past fostering experience as a single foster carer, having fostered thirteen teenagers (and has assisted local authorities with Information Days for prospective foster carers).

Our Welsh Regional Office

FCC Wales is currently seeking new physical premises in the Cardiff area following the sale of our previous office. This process has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and it remains part of the long-term strategic plan of the agency to source a permanent Welsh Regional Office.

Our Malvern office is the temporary operational regional headquarters for Wales and provides support to existing Foster Carers, recruits potential carers and completes assessments and supervises all child care placements in Wales.

The office has facilities for carer training, support groups and large meetings.

All those employed are expected to have considerable experience and evidence work of a high calibre in their particular field as well as possessing qualifications relevant to the post held. Social Workers are expected to demonstrate a good working knowledge of the processes involved in all aspects of the provision of foster care.

Director of Child Care

Steve Field is the Director of Child Care for England and Wales; he has overall delegated responsibility for the management of the service in Wales and acts as the Agency Decision Maker for the Welsh Fostering Panel.

Qualifications:-

Steve qualified in 2006 with a BA (Hons) in Social Work from Gloucestershire University and achieved his post qualifying award in social work in 2009.

Experience:-

Steve has 13 years of experience within a variety of different Local Authority settings including Looked After Children, Care Leavers and Safeguarding.

His most recent role prior to joining the FCC was within a senior leadership team as a Group Manager, overseeing four safeguarding teams and a Looked After Team.

Operational Manager / Appointed Manager – Wales

Andrew Purnell is the Appointed Manager for the FCC Wales. Andrew has direct operational responsibility for the supervision of the social work team and manages all day-to-day agency activity.

Qualifications:-

Andrew qualified as a social worker in 1986 and gained an MBA in 2000.

Experience:-

Andrew worked in Local Authority services for many years, firstly as a social worker in children services and later working with people with HIV. Andrew has managed Local Authority teams including child protection, duty and long term services. In 2008, Andrew moved into the independent fostering sector and has been a Registered Manager for two independent fostering agencies before joining FCC in 2019.

Supervising Social Workers – Wales

We have 2 part-time and 3 full-time Supervising Social Workers who are responsible for the recruitment and the assessment of prospective carers, supporting and developing carers once approved and supporting the placements of Looked After children so that opportunities for positive outcomes are maximised.

The SSW monitors the educational attainment of children and works alongside Local Authority Social Workers and carers (and in liaison with other

professionals) to offer advice, assistance and support in relation to children facing issues in this area.

All Social Workers in the Team hold a relevant qualification and extensive experience of working in the area of Children's Services; they are all registered with Social Care Wales (SCW).

Support Services (Wales)

Children's Representative - The Agency have a Children's Representative for Wales (please see Section 17 for further information about this role).

Administrative Team

Our Head of Support Services and IT (based at our Head Office in Malvern) line manages our Principal Fostering Administrator (who in turn lines manages an admin officer who provides business support to the Agency in Wales). Along with their work directly related to the cases of foster carers and children placed, the Administrative team also assist by playing a role in the co-ordination of work related to placement referrals, the training we deliver and our Fostering Panel.

Processes for Monitoring Quality

Our Responsible Individual maintains oversight of the management, quality and safety of the service via the monitoring processes we have in place, via frequent visits to the service and through regular meetings with the Senior Leadership Team and Operational Managers.

There are a number of ways in which the Agency monitors the quality of the services being delivered:-

- The regular supervisory activities of the workers and managers;
- The RI will visit the service as a minimum of every 3 months as set out within the regulations (however will be more frequent than this). This will include consulting with staff, children and carers in respect of the agency and as part of quality assurance.
- Views or comments expressed by carers and other professionals and / or through the statutory Reviews of children in placement;
- The work of the Fostering Panel;
- Monitoring of placement disruptions, compliments and complaints;
- Monitoring in respect of the frequency of staff supervision, file audits and via their annual Appraisals;
- Reports of Inspections by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW);
- Issues raised by carers via their Supervising Social Workers / the Managers or at Support Groups;

- In accordance with the new Quality Assurance Improvement Framework we've recently developed, the Agency produces Quality Assurance reports targeting key areas (that are then discussed / reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and the Operational Managers on a quarterly basis);
- The Agency produces a bi-annual Quality of Care report as well as quarterly monitoring reports.
- Every carer will have an allocated Supervising Social Worker with sufficient capacity to provide an appropriate level of support (this will be monitored by the Managers during allocation meetings and via regular formal supervision with staff);
- Foster Carers, staff and panel members will be provided with appropriate training to fulfil their tasks (staff & managers will monitor this via supervision sessions with carers and staff, via carer Reviews and staff appraisals and through statistics relating to attendance on training courses).
- The Agency will follow the Health and Safety policies of the FCC to ensure the Health and Safety of all involved (staff & managers will monitor this via supervision sessions with carers and staff and through statistics relating to current H & S checks, appropriate documents, etc. being in place)
- The Agency undertake careful 'Matching' when a placement request is received (monitored by the managers) so that children are matched to carers (within their approval category) and whose assessed skills and abilities are considered suited to enable the child's needs to be met as detailed below:-
 - Emotional and Behavioural Development
 - Health
 - Family and Social Relationships
 - Social Presentation
 - Self-Care Skills
 - Education and Educational Achievement
 - Identity

When offering a placement (further to undertaking the 'Matching' process) the Agency will complete an 'Expression of interest' (EOI) form. The purpose of the EOI form is to provide information to the child's allocated Social Worker to explain how the proposed carer(s) would plan to meet the identified needs of the child (as detailed on their Care Plan). A copy of the proposed carer's current Foster Carer profile will also be given to the child's allocated Social Worker when a placement is being offered.

The Managers will monitor this area of working, utilising statistics in relation to placement requests, placement disruptions and via feedback from carers, children's Social Workers and other professionals.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The FCC does not discriminate against any individual wishing to be considered as a foster carer because of gender, ethnic origin, religion, culture, language, disability or sexuality.

We focus on welcoming applications from persons with life experience who are completely new to fostering.

Recruitment takes place in all Welsh regions where we currently have foster carers. A variety of methods are used to recruit potential carers and this eclectic approach has proved to be successful. We feel it is important to us to emphasise the 'not for profit' status of the Co-operative and our ethical approach to the delivery of a fostering service.

Recruitment activity includes advertising campaigns and attendance at weekend events, fetes and festivals. Advertisements are targeted geographically and can include adverts on local radio and in a variety of differing newspapers, magazines, etc. however, more recently we have tended to focus more on advertising on social media sites.

In addition to applications made via our website or at events, we've found that the FCC attracts a significant number of enquiries via 'Word of mouth' which (usually when friends, relatives are able to highlight success and reward in their work as Foster Carers).

Further information about our upcoming recruitment events can be found on our website.

Assessment of potential Foster Carers

Further to having expressed an interest in joining the FCC, all applicants who initially appear to meet the criteria for a foster carer will receive an initial visit from one of our qualified Social Workers. At this initial stage the Social Worker will outline our Agency's expectations and will further assess the applicant's suitability to become a foster carer. The Assessing Social Worker will then make a recommendation as to whether they believe the applicant(s) should proceed to Stage 1 of our assessment process (which would involve the Agency seeking references and undertaking the necessary checks).

The assessment process therefore starts with the initial home visit and if at the end of Stage 1, the Assessing Social Worker and their line Manager agree that the applicant(s) should proceed to Stage 2 of the process, this will then be followed by an in depth full fostering assessment (currently we utilise the BAAF Form F Assessment).

We recognise that our assessment process is very comprehensive but feel that where adults are expressing an interest in caring for vulnerable children and young people:-

- it is necessary to ensure that both the applicants and the Agency are satisfied that there is proper understanding of the task that is to be undertaken;
- we need to be very clear that our focus and responsibility is ultimately towards the children and young people (and that nobody has a **right** to become a foster carer).

We have a policy in place in respect of the Recruitment and Retention of carers and this is reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Approval of Foster Carers

Applicants will be given an opportunity to see the room in which the panel meeting is held and to meet the Panel Chair prior to presentation at the Fostering Panel.

Prior to the Panel, applicants are provided with a copy of our Panel Guide along with their invitation letter (to provide further information about the Panel's responsibilities and functions).

When an assessment of an application to foster is presented to the Fostering Panel the applicants are invited to attend. The Panel (see below) consider the application and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker in respect of whether or not the potential carers should be registered with the Agency and if so, the terms of their approval.

The Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel maintains a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster care delivered by The Foster Care Co-operative.

A Fostering Panel has been established in Wales and became operational in November 2011. The Panel is composed in accordance with the Regulations and is chaired by an Independent Chair.

The Panel is made up of Foster Care Co-operative staff and independent members with a range of experience in the social care fields. The Panel meets regularly (in accordance with the needs of the Agency) and every Panel member is required to sign a confidentiality statement.

Further to the new Fostering Regulations coming in to force in Wales, we are now looking to further increase the number of Panel members we have as part of the establishment of our 'Central List'.

The independence of the Panel is intended to ensure that the commercial necessities of running the agency do not compromise the ability to meet regulatory standards.

Procedures for Review of Foster Carers

The Procedures for reviewing Foster Carers includes an Annual Review undertaken in accordance with the Regulations and regular support / supervision visits. However, the Agency are able to undertake a review of a carers approval at any time if this is felt to be required.

All carers will receive at least one unannounced visit a year. Looked After Children are seen regularly on home visits and their views about the quality of their care explored as appropriate. A consultation form is used to obtain Looked After Children's views as part of the Annual Review process for carers. Children and young people are also made aware that they are able to comment on any aspect of their care at any time; they are provided with information about differing people that they might find helpful to speak to about their views in our Written Guide.

The other process by which the quality of care provided by our Foster Carers is monitored is through the work of the child's allocated Social Worker, who is also required to visit the child regularly. Feedback on the quality of care provided is also obtained via the child's Statutory Reviews.

Foster Carers are required to attend appropriate training and Support Groups. We provide guidance on our training expectations for carers, along with putting individual 'Training & Development' plans in place for each carer, which assists in making them aware of the training they need to complete and assists the Agency in monitoring their attendance at Support Groups, training, etc and their overall contribution to their own development.

Foster Carer Agreement

A written foster carer agreement is put in place for each of our Foster Carers at the time of their approval. This agreement lays out the FCC's expectation of Foster Carers, what they can expect from the Agency and more generally provides an overview of the key terms and conditions of the partnership between the Agency and the Foster Carer.

These agreements are updated whenever there is a change to the Foster Carer's terms of approval.

Support for Foster Carers

The Agency believes that for Foster Carers to provide a service for children that is high in quality they need to be provided with good quality and regular support to enable them to do this. The FCC acknowledges that fostering is not always an easy task and also recognises the impact that it can have on the Carer's own family.

Support Services provided:-

- Each fostering household is allocated a Supervising Social Worker, who visits the carers' home on a regular and frequent basis (with additional visits provided when a need for a higher level of support is identified);
- The Agency also maintains a number of regional support groups for Foster Carers;
- We have an 'out of hours' Duty Service with rota in place to ensure that there is an identified Supervising Social Worker 'on call' at all times. In this way we ensure that all of our fostering households are able to make contact / access support outside office hours. We maintain copies of the Duty rotas.
- Foster Carers are required to attend all child care reviews and conferences and whenever possible are supported in their attendance by their Supervising Social Worker.
- The Agency can make provision for paid respite care of up to 14 days per annum (subject to this being agreeable to all concerned). Whilst respite care does provide Foster Carers with a break from the direct caring task, it must be recognised that this is not always appropriate for the child/children and some Foster Carers do not wish for this provision to be made available to them or the children placed with them.

The respite we provide is designed to be used for rest, recuperation and to maintain placement stability. Respite presupposes the availability of a suitable respite placement which can minimise the disruption for the child/children concerned. All arrangements must be subject to the prior approval of the Agency and the placing Local Authority.

- Where appropriate, the Agency can make available additional personalised and confidential support to Foster Carers.

This provision is not always required but the facility can be utilised where Foster Carers, usually together with their Supervising Social Worker, agree the need for this intervention. This would be formalised as part of the child's Care and Support Plan with the Local Authority.

- Once approved, every Foster Carer is given password access to the web-based Carer Manual which includes policies, guidance, forms and procedures of the Agency. The current Statement of Purpose of the FCC is also available on our website.

Services and Support for children

Memory boxes and Written Guide to the service - at the point of placement, all children and young people receive a 'Memory Box' along with some suggestions about how to keep items related to 'memories' and a copy of our Written Guide to the service (in a format appropriate to their age and language requirements). The Written Guide contains information such as useful phone numbers and information about how to raise a concern or make a complaint (and help is offered to children who may have difficulty in accessing the services they wish to utilize). We also provide information about how to access the children's section of the FCCs website at this time.

The FCCs Children's website – similar to our carers and the 'carer section' of our website, the children in placement have a 'logon' that allows them to access a specific section of our website designed to provide them with useful information, along with games and competitions, etc. The information provided includes contact details for the Children's Commissioner for Wales, our Inspectorate and information about how to contact our Children's Representative, how to make a complaint, etc.

Children's Representative - The Agency have a Children's Representative for Wales (Kidzrep) and the remit of their role includes:-

- providing cover for the Kidzrep phone (for both England and Wales) i.e. management of any calls / web messages received;
- Undertaking a support role in respect of all children and young people placed in Wales (which would involve arranging events, often with a linked consultation element).
- Assisting in the review and management of the content of the children's section of the FCCs website.

Activities and Events: Examples of activities and events that we have regularly run in the past are poetry or story writing competitions for children, art workshops for children (and subsequent art exhibitions), summer events for carers and children (such as going to see an outdoor children's play and then a barbeque), seasonal meals for carers, winter events for carers and children such as ice skating, etc.

Training

The Foster Care Co-operative makes a major investment in training for example, all new fostering applicants must undertake induction training in the form of a residential weekend based on the Fostering Network's 'Skills to Foster' model.

The FCC provides a mandatory programme of training for newly approved carers and in addition to mandatory courses related to Safeguarding, Safe Caring, Reporting and Recording, Education, First Aid, Behaviour Management, Child Exploitation, and E-Safety, the courses offered (some of which are delivered by UKCP registered psychotherapists) are designed to explore strategies based on an attachment led trauma informed model and its aim is to teach carers:-

- how to provide 'secure-base' experiences which promote trust and resilience;
- how they can structure care-giving to promote an underlying organisation of attachment, through therapeutic parenting.

In this way FCC look to develop an understanding about how to apply attachment theory to changing problematic and self-defeating behaviours in order to support recovery from the impact of childhood trauma.

The FCC also has mandatory training expectations for more experienced carers in regard to their ongoing training and development. Once the mandatory induction training programme is completed, the FCC offer advanced courses (again some based on an attachment led trauma informed model delivered by UKCP registered psychotherapists). Examples of some of the additional courses run in the past are 'Understanding mental health issues', 'Self-harm', 'Understanding learning difficulties', 'Radicalisation' and 'LGBT'.

In addition to our face to face training, FCC offers an online training programme which covers all of the mandatory training modules, as well as specific subjects relating to the fostering task. This online provision is available to all staff and carers.

The staff and Foster Carers of the FCC attend training together in order to promote partnership and good practice. Training can take place either at our Regional office in Cardiff or at a location more local to a group of carers. Certificates of attendance are always issued upon completion of a course.

The FCC also provides training for the Fostering Panel members on an annual basis.

A range of additional training can be provided to carers, staff and panel members and funded on an 'as and when required' basis.

The agency is committed to setting and adhering to recognised established standards of good practice. Consequently, all Foster Carers are supported by the Agency financing individual membership of Fostering Network.

There is an expectation that further training throughout their careers as carers, will be attended, as identified through the annual review and supervision process. This is enshrined in the Carer Contract.

Social Workers are encouraged to ensure that they are abreast of current legislation and guidance, are operating in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Social Workers and are supported in their continued professional development (which also assists them in maintaining their registration with Social Care Wales). Both staff and Panel members have appraisals undertaken on an annual basis.

Financial support

A range of financial support is provided to foster carers providing placements and summarised as follows:-

- Foster care payments are made on a fortnightly basis in arrears, usually via BACS payment.
- Respite Care, is provided, by agreement, for up to 14 days per year, per child placed. The mileage associated with the respite care provision is met by the Agency.
- Mileage is paid on officially approved journeys beyond the first 20 miles. These journeys are normally focused on the needs of the child, and could include contact arrangements, visits to specialist medical advisers, the courts, etc.
- Those journeys that are of mutual benefit (to both foster carers and the Agency) are reimbursed in total. Examples of this type include attendance at support group meetings, training events, etc.
- The full costs of attendance at support group meetings and training events are covered by the Agency

Consultation and Participation

Co-operatives UK, the main constitutional advisers, continue to provide advice and guidance on our unique co-operative development.

The regional support groups provide a consultation forum and the introduction of a new and wide-ranging web-based information structure will be at the heart of increasing consultation and visibility for all members, throughout the UK.

Dedicated support, information and consultation areas are provided for staff, carers and the foster children themselves.

National and regional events are also staged to support the carers and their families and provide open access to all the managers in an informal and extended manner

Minutes of meetings and forums are published for all members of the co-operative and are available on the FCC website.

Other examples of the ways in which we consult children and carers and encourage their participation is through carer Support Groups, consultation forms issued to all members of the fostering household for carers reviews and by seeking their views during visits, at events, etc.

The agency has a Carer's Forum who meet with the Registered Individual, Director of Child Care and the Appointed Manager at stages through the year and help contribute to the development of the agency.

Listening to Children and Hearing What They Say

- The FCC believes that children have a right to be listened to and be heard. A child's views, however communicated, should always be respected and taken seriously.
- Children should have access to clear and simple procedures which allow them to express their opinion and, if necessary, to complain about the quality of the service they are receiving. This includes the provision of foster care by the FCC.
- If children are unhappy with the outcomes of any representation they wish to make about a service, they will be made aware of and helped where necessary, to activate an established appeal procedure.
- Children placed in the care of the FCC will have their views, wishes and feelings acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the foster care household.
- How adults have taken children's views into account will be discussed with them and, where a significant request, wish or concern is not acted upon, this will be explained to them and the reasons why. FCC foster carers are skilled at communication with children, including listening to the child and responding to them as appropriate.
- Children placed with FCC foster carers are encouraged to share their views on all aspects of their care and support. The particular needs of a child or young person with a disability, special educational needs or complex needs are recognised and taken into account where consultation and decision making are required.
- In addition to asking children about their experiences of fostering, we also seek their views on the types of events that they might like us to run for children and families in the future.

- The FCC regularly seeks the views of the child in placement, their parent(s) wherever possible / appropriate, the child's Social Worker, their Independent Reviewing Officer and other professionals involved regarding the care of the child. This is done through evaluation reports and questionnaires for the carer's annual review; feedback forms at the end of a placement; attendance at all meetings concerning the child, consultation events and via the children's section of our website.
- As mentioned above, our Agency has an identified 'Children's Representative' (Kidzrep) for Wales; they have a mobile number which can be used by any fostered or birth child in the Agency who wishes to raise a concern or make a complaint. Foster carers understand that the child is able to use this mobile number, in private, should they so wish. This role is facilitated by our Marketing officer.
- Children will receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints. These are logged by the Director of Child Care and monitored. The Agency has Complaints procedures and any child or young person wishing to make a complaint will be assisted in understanding these procedures.
- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account when reviewing the performance of FCC foster carers and when considering the development of the service that the agency delivers.
- We want children to know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care. However, as it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases, we also endeavour to help them understand why this is the case (and make sure that they know how to obtain support and make a complaint). Wherever possible, the views of others with an important relationship to the child are gathered and taken into account.
- Along with being committed to seeking and listening to the views of children and young people who are placed with its carers, we are also committed to ensuring that the children living in fostering families have a voice. On the consultation forms we send out to birth children (including adult birth children) for carer reviews, in addition to asking about their experience of fostering, we also ask if they would be interested in attending special events held for the children of foster carers (and if so, the types of events they think that they might enjoy). Where it's not possible for us to act upon the requests of children who foster, they too will be helped to understand why.

Complaints and representations

The FCC recognises that the views of Foster Carers are important and has a number of mechanisms in place for carers to give their views e.g. by contacting the Managers / Directors, via the feedback provided to their Fostering Supervising Social Worker or for their Annual review, at Support Groups, etc.

Foster Carers are encouraged to raise any concerns they have informally. The expectation is that concerns will be addressed in a mutual spirit of goodwill and respect between the Foster Carer and the Agency. On occasions where this does not lead to the matter being resolved satisfactorily children/young people and/or their Foster Carers may then wish to consider making use of the formal complaints procedures.

Where a child/young person has a complaint about an aspect of life in their foster home, initially this will be discussed with their allocated Local Authority Social Worker. Discussion may then take place with the Foster Carer and the Fostering Supervising Social Worker.

The FCC has a 'Procedure for applicant, carer & child representations, complaints & compliments' and an 'Agency Procedure for complaints and compliments' (for matters unrelated to foster carers and placements specifically).

Carers, children and young people can access the relevant complaints procedure via their domains of our web site. Children and young people are also provided with an age appropriate hard copy of our Children's Guide, where relevant guidance is outlined. There is also a facility for contact with the Agency Children's Representative who can assist a child or young person to make a complaint if required.

A Foster Carer, child or young person may also choose to contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales:-

**Children's Commissioner for Wales
Oystermouth House
Charter Court
Phoenix Way
Llansamlet
Swansea
SA7 9FS**

Tel: 01792 765600 / Fax: 01792 765601

Children & young people's freephone number: 0808 801 1000 (or they can text 80 800 starting their message with COM)

Email: post@childcomwales.org.uk

Web: <http://www.childcomwales.org.uk>

In addition to this, anyone who has concerns that the Service is not meeting statutory requirements is able to contact the Care Inspectorate Wales:-

**Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)
Welsh Government office
Sarn Mynach**

**Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ**

Tel: 0300 7900126

Email: ciw@gov.wales

Web: <https://careinspectorate.wales>

The Agency maintain a central record of complaints made, their nature and outcomes. The Managers will monitor the outcome of complaints and the service will analyse complaints and their outcome to identify any necessary improvements.

An annual report will be made to the Fostering Panel on the number and type of the complaints.

Whistleblowing

All staff within FCC are subject to, and protected by, the FCC's Whistle Blowing Policy.

Welsh Provision of services for people in the Welsh language

We welcome applications and opportunities to work with Welsh speakers. The agency has a commitment to using a Welsh interpreter as and when needed and will ensure that anyone's language requirements are suitably met. Children who are first language Welsh speakers will have their needs considered and suitably matched with carers to enable their identity to be respected.

All of our assessments and support for first language Welsh speakers will be tailored accordingly and we actively seek to recruit people able to communicate in the Welsh language.

We endeavour to make all of our literature available bi-lingually and although unfortunately our website isn't fully bi-lingual as yet, we are in the process of addressing this issue for the future.

Research and Development

In order to encourage a Service that is committed to continuous improvement, the Agency will contribute to the development of research and practice within its specialist area. This will be achieved through participating and commissioning research projects where appropriate, as well as utilising

evidence-based research conducted within other Fostering Services, which have been identified as providing good practice models within this field.

The Development of Policy and Procedures

Policies and procedures in respect of the Agency have been developed to comply with legislation, Regulations and Guidance. They are also informed by research and best practice. Policy areas are continuously reviewed and developed to take into account changing needs of children, young people, carers and the Agency overall.

Records of Foster Carers and Foster Children, Confidentiality and Access to Records

The FCC has clear policies on recording, confidentiality and access to records, which comply with legislation and which enables Foster Carers and the children and young people in placement to have access to information written about them.

Foster Carers, Staff and Panel Members are required to keep all sensitive information they have about the children/young people in placement confidential.

The FCC maintains records in accordance with Regulation 39 and Schedule 2 of the the Regulated Fostering Services (Service Providers and Responsible Individuals) (Wales) Regulations 2019, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); our Agency has a Data Policy which offers further guidance on this issue.

However, in summary, our Agency will maintain the records in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Regulations and Guidance and:-

- records will be kept accurate and up to date;
- records will be held securely (and will make suitable arrangements for the records to continue to be kept securely in the event the service closes);
- records of each approved Foster Carer will be held for no less than 15 years after the termination of approval.
- in respect of children in placement - when the service ceases to be provided the records of the child to whom the records relate will be delivered to the placing authority
- will make the records available to the Welsh Ministers on request,
- will ensure that children who use the service are made aware of their right to access their records, and have such access to their records as is permitted by law.

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, the country went into lockdown as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. As a result of this, the agency updated the organisation's Business Continuity Plan to evidence how we would respond to the changes needed to keep staff safe and continue to support our carers and children.

Supervisions with carers and staff were completed remotely through video conferencing, as was any meetings, unannounced visits and other regulatory responsibilities. SSW kept in contact with carers on a weekly basis (sometimes more often) and our education advisor provided support through telephone, video conferencing and website contact.

Foster Care Co-operative remained dedicated to developing the skills of staff and carers through the use of our online training resource.

The agency continued to hold regular fostering panels for new applicants and reviews of existing carers by using video conferencing tools. We also continued our skills to foster training using the same medium.

This was a significant challenge for everyone across the UK and it was clear that the agency was able to respond to these challenges to ensure that the same level of support and responsibility was maintained throughout lockdown.

For any face to face visits with carers needed, we have a COVID-19 risk assessment to ensure that best and safe practice is maintained at all times. Likewise, we have increased our communication with LAs as part of our joint working to protect and support children.

The agency has organised a 'Post Lockdown Reflective Group'. The group will be represented across all departments of the agency and will look at the working arrangements during lockdown, the positives and challenges of working remotely and areas that we can take forward in the future as part of our working practices.

As lockdown begins to ease, the agency will continue to work under government guidelines ensuring that our staff, carers and children are supported and protected.

Website

We hope that you have found our Statement of Purpose useful however, if you would like to know more about our Agency, we would recommend that you have a look at our website:-

<http://www.fostercarecooperative.co.uk>