

The Foster Care Co-operative



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (WALES) 2020 / 2021

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STATEMENT OF AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- The Foster Care Co-operative (FCC) is a not-for-distributed profit independent fostering agency based in England and Wales. Since its inauguration in 1999, the agency has committed itself to providing quality foster care to Children Looked After who are placed with FCC foster carers.
- FCC works in a way that includes staff and carers in the planning and performance of the agency and all profits are put back into the agency for the promotion of first-rate care for children and young people.
- FCC maintains the standard of care provided by its foster carers through high quality support from supervising social workers; clear lines of responsibility and accountability; positive management; and regular and robust monitoring.
- FCC will provide a service to every child or young person placed with its carers where they will feel safe and protected; where their positive self view is promoted; and their wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care.
- FCC is a co-operative designed to continually develop a reputation for delivering a quality service with integrity.
- FCC is committed to improving the life chances of all children and young people placed with its foster carers using the individual care plan as a benchmark but always striving to achieve more.
- FCC is committed to consulting with children and young people about how they are cared for and what they expect from FCC whilst they remain with us.
- FCC does not discriminate on grounds of gender, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, health, disability, race, colour or age.
- FCC has, as one of its objectives, to grow the number of foster carers available for children in Local Authority care requiring placement, through the recruitment of individuals and couples new to the fostering task. Qualified and skilled staff recruit, assess, train and support foster carers, building strong professional relationships that promote stability in placements.
- 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.

Equality and Diversity

Diversity and inclusion really matter. 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 this is why as an ethical agency, 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.

FCC receives referrals of children and young people requiring a foster placement from Local Authorities throughout England. Referrals are dealt with by our Placement duty Team, identifying potential matches and then liaising with our staff, carers and the Local Authority to progress the referral. This agency has a robust Matching procedure which ensures that every child referred is matched to the carer who can best meet their needs.

Every fostering household has provided a family profile, which includes photos and information about themselves and a message to the child or young person requiring a placement.

FCC offers a range of placement types, as follows:

Short term

FCC provides short-term placements. For example, children and young people may require a short-term placement to aid a return home or to assist them in moving to an adoptive or a permanent placement. A child may be placed in an emergency, pending decisions being made about their future. Foster carers will be working with the placing Authority on objectives within the child's Care Plan and ensuring that the child or young person reaches their individual potential, however long the placement lasts.

Long Term

The FCC offers permanent family placements for children and young people for whom the decision that they require a permanent placement has been made. The aim is to provide a home into adulthood.

We are an agency that will promote Special Guardianship and adoption for children placed with our foster carers, where this is in the child's best interests and with agreement of all parties.

Where appropriate, this agency supports, in principle, carers who wish to continue to offer a place for a young person after their 18th birthday. We believe that offering a young person a Staying Put arrangement, where FCC remains involved and supporting the former foster carer, is the most positive way of providing this.

Staying Put

Staying Put 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 Staying Put arrangement is in place. This scheme benefits both the young person and the carer.

Sibling Groups

The agency does assess and approve foster carers who have the emotional strength and physical space to care for a sibling group. We recognise the additional support that looking after a sibling group requires so that each individual child achieves their maximum potential.

Parent and Child Placements

This Agency provides a Parent and Child placement service. Foster carers are required to have training in this type of provision as well as evidencing their ability to take on this complex task. We have carers who can work with the placing Authority on a parenting assessment and provide evidence for the court report.

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.

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.

SPECIALIST STAFF PROVISION

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.

Education Specialist This role is held by a qualified teacher who has had many years experience working in the public sector. They are notified when children and young people join the agency and monitors their educational progress throughout the period of FCC care. The Education Specialist liaises with carers, placing authorities and individual social workers, promoting educational achievement and assisting where difficulties are present. There is no additional cost for this service. The FCC Education Specialist offers support and guidance to Welsh carers.

Placement Co-ordinator. We employ a Placement Co-ordinator who is ensures our Matching Procedure is very robust as we see this is essential for placement stability. The Placement Co-ordinator is the initial point of contact for all referrals and placing issues and on occasions is assisted by others. FCC offers a responsive and prompt service to all authorities requiring placements.

Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator. The co-ordinator manages the agency's marketing and recruitment initiatives, managing the FCC marketing strategy. Assistance is given to FCC social workers running recruitment events and managing the application process. The role includes managing the agency website and the marketing of the agency through media and online resources.

Enquiries Administrator. The administrator manages and processes all enquiries from individuals/households interested in fostering for FCC. The post

works closely with Supervising Social Workers to ensure information about the agency is supplied to potential applicants and the processing of applications received.

Within the social work staff group, we have individuals with a range of expertise and skills. All our social work staff are qualified and experienced.

Supervising Social Workers and the Education Specialist work closely with carers, young people and partner agencies to support transitions into adulthood as part of their care planning.

The children and young people have access to the FCC 'Kidzrep' through a dedicated webpage and helpline facility. This role is held through our Marketing Officer. On placement, every child and young person receives a Children's Guide which gives information about aspects of fostering, how to complain and provides key phone numbers. The Kidzrep supports children and young people in the following ways;

- 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 (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.

The Structure of the Agency

Status and Constitution

FCC 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, FCC is registered as a limited company in the UK.

It has been agreed that PAYE staff will be accepted as full members of the Co-operative and foster carers as associate members. It is not possible for foster carers to sit on the Board as contained in the detailed rules governing the Foster Care Co-operative within the Memorandum of Association and the Articles of Association, copies of which are held at Head Office.

In essence, 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 FCC being wound up, or being subject to dissolution, any of the assets of the company remaining to be disposed of, after its liabilities are satisfied, cannot be distributed among the Members and will be done so in line within the Memorandum of Association and the Articles of Association. This will 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.

CEO/Responsible Individual

The Chief Executive Officer of FCC and this post is based in Malvern. 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.

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.

Our Senior Leadership Team comprises of: -

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

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:-

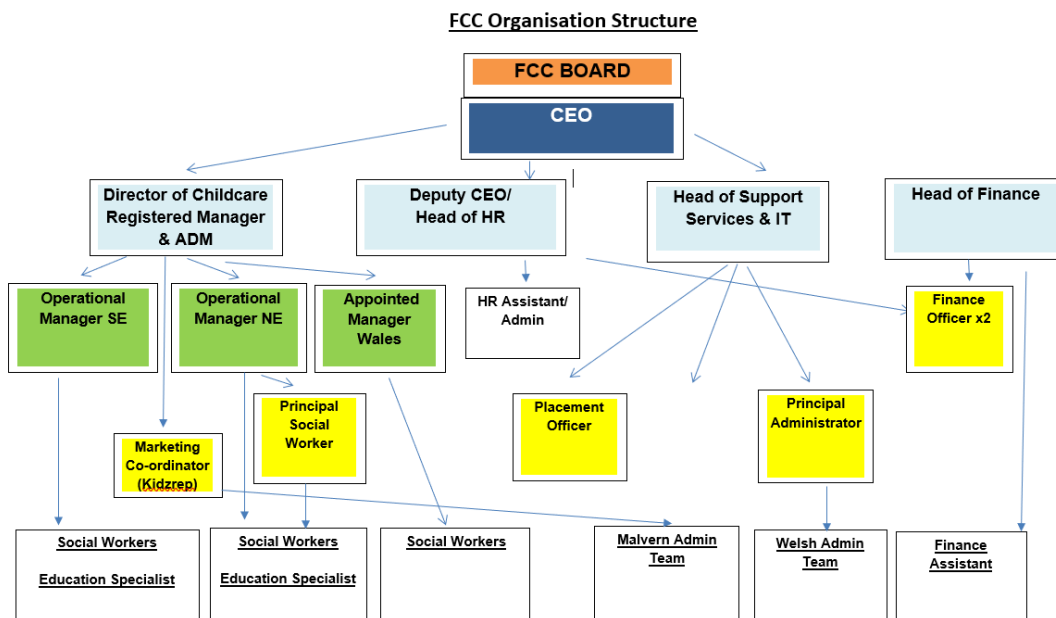
Steve qualified in 2006 with a BA (Hons) in Social Work from Gloucestershire University and achieved his post qualifying award in social work in 2009.

Experience:-

Steve has 15 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.

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



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 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: -

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 and Company Secretary

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. FCC is committed to using community venues to conduct support groups, panel and training. This allows us to contribute towards and support like-minded local businesses in the areas of South and North Wales.

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.

Operational Manager / Appointed Manager – Wales

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

Qualifications:-

Jo qualified as a social worker in 2005 and gained an NVQ Level 4 in management in 2010.

Experience:-

Jo has been a qualified social worker for over 15 years with the last 10 years working in Fostering. Jo has held management posts in Local Authorities including Disabled Children and Specialist Services Team and two Residential Short Break Units. Within fostering, Jo has been Registered Manager with two independent fostering agencies before joining FCC in 2021.

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.

FCC Supervising Social Workers are home based. This allows them support carers in the local communities they are based.

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).

Consultation for foster carers

The regional carer support groups provide a consultation forum for foster carers. The introduction of a new and wide-ranging web-based information structure is at the heart of increasing consultation and visibility for all full and associate members throughout the UK. At present Support Groups operate South and North Wales.

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 available to all members of the Co-operative. This includes a Carer Forum that meets with the Director of Child Care at stages through the year to help impact the strategic plans of the agency and provide feedback regarding the agency.

Consultation for children and young people

FCC provides a range of opportunities for children and young people to comment about the quality of care they receive from individuals and from the agency as a whole.

These come in the form of questionnaires and feedback forms; social events; and consultation activities/website.

We are committed to listening to what fostered children and young people say. We are also committed to listening to what birth children and young people who foster say. We will act on suggestions and comments and respond quickly and promptly to complaints and concerns.

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 Appointed Manager.

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
- 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 information around the panel process and be supported by their Supervising Social Worker before, during and after their attendance at 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.

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.

THE FCC SERVICE TO FOSTER CARERS

FCC makes a major investment in training staff and foster carers and delivers training events both centrally and locally throughout England. We seek to secure deliverers of training who are experts in their fields.

Our foster carers are required to attend mandatory courses in Safeguarding, Safer Caring, Disrupted Attachment, Diversity, CSE, Management of Challenging Behaviour, Allegations, e-safety and Paediatric First Aid. We also provide training for experienced carers who require an advanced level in fostering practice.

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.

We are working with a therapeutic social worker who offers specialist advice and training to our carers.

FCC is committed to the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care and a full programme of training has been established to ensure carers complete the Workbooks within the set timescale. Work starts on this during the assessment and pre-approval phase.

The agency is committed to setting and adhering to recognised established standards of good practice. Consequently, all foster carers are supported with their subscriptions to the Fostering Network.

Foster carers are encouraged to ensure that they are abreast of, and operate to, the Code of Practice for Foster Carers and the National Minimum Standards.

Particular emphasis is placed on providing good quality and regular support to foster carers. When an individual applies to become a foster carer, they are allocated to a qualified FCC social worker who undertakes the assessment and presents the applicant to the Fostering Panel. This same social worker (wherever possible) continues to supervise the foster carer throughout their fostering career. We feel that the relationship built up between the carer and social worker during the assessment phase promotes a positive working relationship when children and young people are placed. **This promotes placement stability.**

The agency also maintains a number of support groups for foster carers on a four to six weekly frequency. These are formal meetings with an agenda and are minuted. Very often the groups are used as training opportunities and carers will benefit from access to local training providers who are specialists in their fields.

Each set of foster carers has access to our Out of Hours support service which means a social worker is on hand to support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Foster Carers expect to be invited, and to attend, all Child Looked After reviews and conferences. They are supported by their supervising social worker or a member of FCC staff.

The agency makes provision for paid respite care of up to 14 nights per annum subject to this being agreeable to all concerned. All respite (or Back Up) carers are assessed and all arrangements must be subject to the prior approval of the Agency and the Placing Local Authority.

Every Foster carer, once approved, is given password access to the web-based Carer Information Section which includes the policies, guidance, forms and procedures of the Agency. The current Statement of Purpose of the Foster Care Co-operative is available on our website and is reviewed on an annual basis.

THE FCC SERVICE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

FCC is committed to placing children and young people in fostering placements that will ensure their needs are met and they are safe.

We view placement stability as a key element of the fostering service we provide. We strive to ensure placement stability through the support and training we provide to our foster carers.

Every child or young person placed with FCC foster carers has been a part of a robust matching process where we would hope that the child has had some input into the decision to join an FCC foster family.

Every child or young person will, on placement, be given tools to capture the events and experiences whilst living with an FCC foster carer.

FCC produces two age-appropriate Information Guides for children and young people placed with FCC. These guides explain the service offered by the Agency and what to do should a child or young person have a complaint or a concern about their care. The telephone number of Ofsted, Childline and Become (formerly The Who Cares Trust) are included. The guide also includes a section for inserting the names of the Independent Reviewing Officer responsible for the child and the child's Social Worker. These guides are web-based and every child also has a hard copy. The guides are available to children and young people through suitable alternative methods should this be required.

Upon placement, every child and young person is given a Welcome Box from the agency in which they will find a photo album, a Children's Guide and a Memory Stick, as well as some personal items. This encourages the child and carer to start keeping photos, important documents and certificates of achievement that can be taken with the child whenever they move on. We believe in promoting and enhancing the life stories of children in foster care.

Any child or young person placed within FCC, and any child whose family is fostering for FCC, has access to the 'Kidzrep', our marketing officer who can be contacted regarding anything that is of concern to them. The 'Kidzrep' can be contacted through the website or by phone and the contact details can be found in the Children's Guides.

All children have access to the FCC Children's Website (Kidz Zone), where information, competitions and events are assessable.

We consult with fostered children and young people on a regular basis and ask them to help us with ways of improving our service. The Kidzrep will use a variety of means in which to engage children and young people in matters that concern them within the agency. FCC hold a children's forum through the year where children have the opportunity to meet and feedback to members of the SLT.

We also support the children of fostering families by encouraging consultation and participation through activities and discussion. They too have access to our 'Kidzrep'.

REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS

Complaints made against the Agency are investigated in accordance with the FCC Complaints Procedure which is available on the FCC website and in hard copy if requested.

Initially, complaints are investigated within the Agency through arrangements outlined in the Complaints Policy. The internal process is in three possible stages. Where the complainant remains dissatisfied after the internal process, then an Independent Person can be appointed to investigate.

The numbers of complaints are held centrally within the Agency, and the process of investigating each complaint is recorded. All complaints and compliments are automatically reviewed through the quarterly Quality Assurance report that is completed in line with Fostering Regulations. The Senior Management Team may feel a complaint should lead to a change in procedure and the Board of Directors of FCC may also examine the complaints that have been made and require the agency to take action.

A serious complaint about any approved foster carer, and any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers, will be reported to the Inspecting body, CIW, as required under Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations (2019).

FCC has a Whistleblowing policy.

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.

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.

Moving into 2021, FCC hope that as restrictions ease, we will be able to implement a mixed model of support, utilising technology and the best practice outcomes learnt across the Fostering Sector.

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>