



Regional Fostering Services
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2022

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1. Introduction

The Care Standards Act 2000 and The National Minimum Standards provide a guide by which standards of care and the provision of services within fostering are to be measured. Regional Fostering Services Limited focuses on outcomes for children placed with foster carers by applying these standards in every aspect of its business. This statement of purpose gives an outline as to how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It conveys how the welfare of children will be met, demonstrates the systems that have been set in place to support foster carers, and outlines steps taken to demonstrate the fitness of the premises and Regional Fostering's financial management.

2. Description of Regional Fostering Services Limited

Regional Fostering Services Limited is based in Uxbridge, Middlesex, and was set up to provide fostering services to children who are in need within the meaning of the Children Act 1989. It has an article of Memorandum, which clearly sets out the company's aims and objectives and its intention to provide services, advice, training and support to foster carers.

Regional Fostering Services Limited depends on foster families (single people or partners) to share their homes within a loving and safe environment for children and young people who are vulnerable and in need. In recent years consistent research evidence has pointed to poor outcomes for children and young people who are looked after by local authorities. The government's drive to improve standards in foster care is reflected in The Care Standards Act 2000, the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2011. Minimum Standards are not best practice, but they do offer the potential to agencies like our own to provide an acceptable standard and quality of care and services to vulnerable children as well as to the foster carers who support them. All of our policies and procedures are linked to the Minimum Standards showing how Regional Fostering intends to implement this legislation across all agency activities.

Regional Fostering Services was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2018 and were rated Outstanding. *“The Agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standard of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people”.*

3. Philosophy of Regional Fostering Services

We chose the name Regional Fostering for our agency because it symbolizes the work we do, in that we recruit and provide services to Local Authorities across various regions in the UK. Britain is a multi-racial and multi-cultural society and Regional Fostering Services represents this diversity and richness within the staff employed by us. We also believe that Regional Fostering is a sign of promise and that by working together, adults can make a promise to children and young people to respect and honour their inalienable rights as humans and individuals as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which is adopted by Britain. This equally applies to Foster Carers, staff and professionals with whom we work to achieve best practice in foster care. This is our vision for all of our operating regions.

Our mission is to deliver a high quality bespoke service, where focus is on the rights and participation of the children in our care in order to sustain long term placements. Many of the children placed with Regional Fostering Services are under permanency arrangements which are sustained over time. Children therefore have a more positive sense of self and have a positive outlook for the future. We aim to offer secure, safe and loving homes to children where they are advocated for and supported throughout their journey.

The ‘Regional’ name is our view of the diversity and richness of the communities we serve. Our symbol is a sign of promise to the children and young people; that we will listen, respect and deliver a service to meet their individual needs and rights as humans. Regional Fostering has a clear focus on diversity ensuring that the needs of children in placement are met.

Children and young people make outstanding progress as a result of the care and support provided by Regional Fostering Services. Carers are offered high-quality, individualised support and receive excellent training and support to meet the requirements of children and young people with complex needs.

Regional Fostering Services advocates strongly for children and young people within the professional network to ensure that the needs of young people remain at the heart of care planning.

4. Status of Regional Fostering Services Limited

Regional Fostering Services Limited is a private company limited by shares. It is registered to operate in England and Wales and to carry out its business by providing the following:

- Recruiting staff to work on premises provided by the company or to work from their own homes.
- Recruiting foster carers who are able to meet the welfare needs of children and young people in need and looked after by the local authority.
- Providing long/short term, respite and specialist foster placements for children and young people looked after by the local authority.
- Providing or arrange for others to provide education, therapeutic services, counselling, direct work, and sports and leisure activities.
- Providing assessment supervision facilities and report writing services to local authorities and voluntary agencies.
- Providing premises and arrange for others to provide transport and facilities to local authorities.
- The company has a remit to carry out its business in a way that will benefit children who are in need and any other business that will in the director's judgement be an advantage to the company.

5. The Management Structure of Regional Fostering Limited

Faraz Agha, the Company Director holds a professional Social Work qualification and is the Responsible Individual. He has worked for 14 years for a variety of statutory, private and voluntary organisations. Faraz previously held a Registered Service Manager and Agency Decision Maker post at another Private Fostering Agency for four years. He has also completed NVQ Level 4 in Management as required by the registration and inspection body. Faraz speaks Punjabi, Urdu and English.

The Registered Service Manager is Ashlea Wilkins, she has a BSC (Hons) in Social Work, Diploma in Child Protection, a PQ level 1 in Social Work, and an NVQ level 5 in management award. She has 14 years experience of working in Social Care, initially supporting leaving care young people, then frontline child protection where she practiced at a senior level. She later managed a team of Social Workers within another private sector fostering agency. She has experience in managing this service for the past 8 years, and has managed social workers and foster carers of a high and complex variety. Ashlea also manages the Agency's fostering panel as the Panel Advisor and is the Agency's Data Protection Officer.

Hannah Farrell, the Operations Manager, has a BA (Hons) degree in Theology and Religious Studies and a BA (Hons) degree in Social Work. She has over 15 years experience in social care. She has worked in front line child protection teams across various different local authorities, care planning to a high and complex level. She mostly managed complex court cases. She conducted a dual role of front line child protection social work and recruitment of foster carers through the form F process for over 9 years. Hannah has 7 years experience managing the operations of a fostering service and her focus areas are supporting the Social Work Team Managers, recruitment of foster carers, training, duty and therapeutic interventions. Hannah has a level 5 NVQ management Award.

Regional Fostering Services has two area team managers one in the South region and one in the North region. Each have a team of Social Workers who they support on a day to day basis ensuring the foster carers and the children and young people receive the best possible care and service. Both team

managers are qualified social workers with extensive experience in the fostering sector as well as in safeguarding. They have over 25 years experience between them.

Regional Fostering Services employs a Support Team Manager who is responsible for managing Regional Fostering's internal social work assistants. The support team ensure that direct work is carried out with children, young people and foster carers where the need is identified by the Social Work Teams, as well as ensuring young people are prepared for independence, they are supported with their health, education and emotional wellbeing, and that they feel included within their placements and within the service.

All managers within Regional Fostering Services are expert practitioners who promote a learning culture throughout the service and understand the individual needs of each child in placement. The Registered Manager also has excellent oversight of the quality of care provided to children and young people. Managers lead by example and model good practice which provides excellent support and direction to staff and foster carers. This ensures that high standards are consistently maintained.

The company's Finance Manager is responsible for ensuring that foster payments are made and has an overall responsibility for all financial matters.

Foster Carers are supported by qualified Supervising Social Workers and all foster carers have an allocated worker assigned to them as soon as they are approved with Regional Fostering.

A duty team system is in operation to support carers during office hours and out of normal office hours. This operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Staff members are supported in their work by an administrative compliance team. In addition, Regional Fostering engages the services of a Medical Advisor as well as qualified therapists.

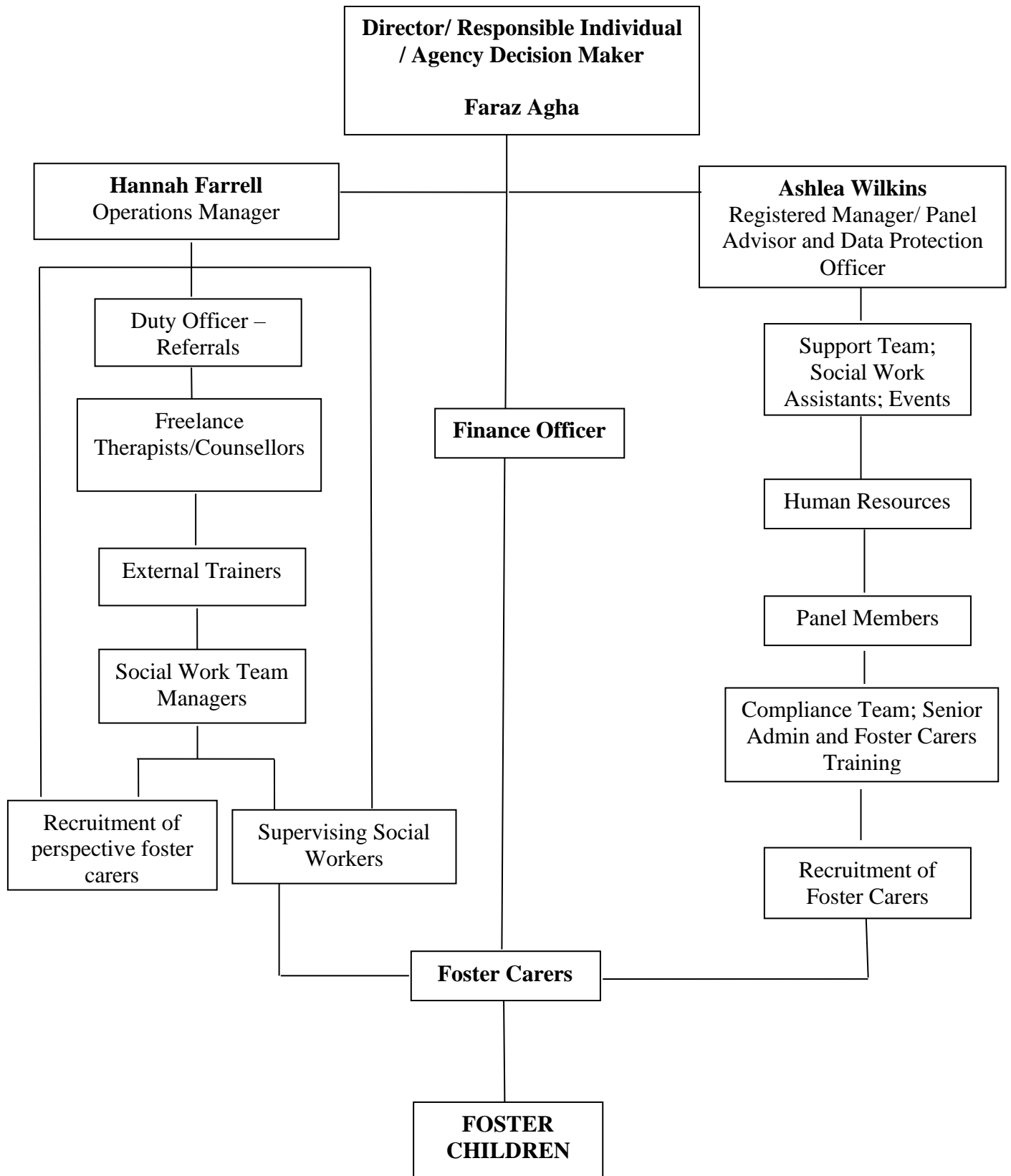
Regional Fostering Services offer therapeutic support to high needs placements as well as social work staff, social work assistants and foster carers. This is to prevent placement breakdowns and ensure that staff and

foster carers receive the support and training they require to meet the challenging needs of vulnerable children. Regional Fostering Services have an in house therapist who is allocated to the most vulnerable children to ensure they receive the best possible support.

Regional Fostering Services fostering panel is an integral part of the company's structure with a remit to recommend approval of foster carer(s) to the Managing Director/ Decision Maker. Regional Fostering have a diverse group of independent individuals who are committed to the panel and bring with them a wealth of knowledge. They are all very open and willing to attend training opportunities presented to them which is imperative to the role.

Regional Fostering Services company structure is shown in the following diagram outlining the responsibilities of each individual:

COMPANY STRUCTURE



6. Staff Qualifications

Regional Fostering's Director, Faraz Agha holds a BA (Hons) in Social Work and a Diploma and an NVQ Level 4 award in Management. Faraz has over 18 years' experience in the social care sector, 12 of which, is experience in managing and directing private fostering agencies.

The Registered Service Manager Ashlea Wilkins, holds a BSC (Hons) Social Work Degree, a Diploma in child protection, and PQ level 1 in Social Work. She has 14 years experience of working in Social Work, both in frontline Child Protection and previous management experience in private sector fostering agencies. Ashlea Wilkins also holds an NVQ level 5 management award in Social Care.

The Operations Manager Hannah Farrell holds a BA (Hons) Social Work degree and a BA (Hons) Theology and Religious Studies degree. Hannah has over 5 years of front line child protection experience and 8 years experience in the recruitment of foster carers. She also has 7 years experience in managing the operations of an Independent Fostering Service and holds an NVQ level 5 management award in Social Care.

At Regional Fostering, all of our Social Workers and Team Managers practice with a degree in Social Work or above. All Social Work practitioners have the experience of either working within the fostering sector privately or for the Local Government, or frontline social work experience. Regional Fostering Social Workers have a range of experience from newly qualified to many years of experience in the field. All Social Work Managers have over 10 years experience in social work practice.

Regional Fostering Service promote the development of newly qualified social workers and as such offer the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). The ASYE practitioners are given the opportunity to take part in reflection groups with the Practice Manager allowing time to discuss research, theory and applied practice.

Staff have access to excellent training and development opportunities within the organisation and the Agency celebrates success and promotes a learning culture to ensure that interventions are well informed.

Regional Fostering also take on Social Work students completing either their 2nd or 3rd year placement, or Masters students. Regional Fostering also have a Support Team who assist foster carers with high needs placements by offering time limited specific interventions around health or education, or transport services. The Support Team also supports Social Workers where needed and ensure young people are supported to transition onto independence.

7. Aims, Objectives and Principles

The overarching aim of Regional Fostering Services is to provide foster homes for children who are looked after by local authorities and who are deemed to be in need of substitute care. Services are offered to children on the basic principle that their needs and welfare are paramount and that their needs are best met within a caring and nurturing environment. The agency promotes healthy outcomes for children and we work to meet these 5 outcomes for all children in our care and ensure that the utmost support is provided to children where they are not achieving their fullest potential.

Regional Fostering's aims are achieved in a number of ways. Firstly through the continuous recruitment and assessment of foster carers who are considered to be suitable and capable of offering substitute care to children in need. Secondly, Regional Fostering work in partnership with local authorities, voluntary agencies and other persons in their professional capacity concerned with the welfare of children and young people to ensure that every aspect of the child's needs are appropriately recognised and met. Thirdly, approved foster carers are supported in their tasks, duties and responsibilities towards the children/young people who are placed with them by putting adequate support mechanisms in place. Fourthly Regional Fostering's objectives are achieved through its excellent training programme, which encourages foster carers to become knowledgeable of the needs of children. This enables foster carers to consistently develop skills and values that are directly related to the

rights of children and young people from a range of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Regional Fostering Services have an enhanced training programme which amplifies the skills of foster carers regardless of the level of expertise they already have. Regional Fostering also recognise that experienced foster carers require more advanced training and this is provided. As a result of this, advanced carers are willing and trained, to offer specialist placements such as therapeutic, high needs parent and child, children with disabilities and children with extreme mental health difficulties for example.

Regional Fostering's aim is to prevent children from being accommodated within residential settings and to keep them within a family unit as much as is safely possible. This is discussed in more detail within section 10.

Regional Fostering Services offer targeted one to one support to looked after children who have been identified as requiring an additional level of support in order to stabilise their placements. Social Work Assistants undertake targeted pieces of work for a 6-8 week period. It is to support children who's placements may be at risk of breaking down, children with complex needs, children at risk of exploitation and exclusion, children needing support with transitioning to independence and children who have requested this service. The team also deliver group workshops which are combined with an activity, to identified young people. Topics include; understanding the care system, health and healthy eating, emotional wellbeing, sexual health, bullying, contact and identity.

By offering this service, Regional Fostering aim to achieve a higher level of consultation with looked after children and their feedback assists us in shaping the service we offer to our children. We aim to achieve better outcomes for children in our placements by enabling them to receive direct one to one support in areas which we have highlighted as frequent worries for looked after children. By using the group work we aim to enhance a young person's confidence and resilience and understanding of the challenges they may be facing. It is aimed to educate the young people in our care and offer stability to children's placements which will result in better outcomes for them.

We chose to combine these consultation groups with an activity for the children such as trampolining, bowling and cinema in order for the children to feel relaxed and so that they enjoy the experience. We consistently review children's starting points and measure their outcomes with front line staff and in a senior management setting. This offers a structured holistic approach where children's outcomes are discussed and further support plans implemented where necessary.

Regional Fostering also offer a Semi Independence programme to all young people preparing for independence. The programme is led by our Social Work Assistants, providing our young people with the necessary skills to utilise when they move onto independence. The programme is also used by young people to evidence to their Social Workers what they are able to do for themselves which aids decision making on the type of accommodation the young person is offered after foster care.

Regional Fostering Services has access to external freelance therapists and counsellors who undertakes targeted interventions with children and young people. They also support foster carers with therapeutic strategies and offer them an outlet where they need additional support. Regional Fostering offers this service to ensure that the children and young people in our care are afforded appropriate access to the services they require in order to achieve better outcomes.

8. Equal Opportunities Policy: Diversity and Difference

Regional Fostering has an Equal Opportunities Policy that applies to staff, foster carers and allied professionals. Our Equal Opportunities Policy is based on the Race Relations Amendment Act, Equality Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Disability Discrimination Act and the Geneva Convention on the Rights of the Child. These pieces of legislation help us to make a clear statement of our intentions not to discriminate on grounds of race, colour, gender, religion, language, disability, sexuality, age or on any other grounds. Regional Fostering Services are innovative in our approach to ensuring staff's skills and interests are valued and promoted.

RFS consistently recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds with varied lived experiences in order to meet the matching requirements of our looked after children. This is to ensure that our service reflects the community in which we operate in terms of ethnicity, religion and sexuality and that our children's identity and diversity needs can be met whilst in our care. RFS also recruit a diverse staff team from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds which also promotes a diverse workforce. This enables us to reflect well as a staff team and to regularly keep ourselves updated and influenced by a range of professionals from different backgrounds.

9. Standards of Care

The principles and standards of care are in keeping with the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations (2011) and the National Minimum Standards. Foster carers must demonstrate their capabilities of providing safe care for children and young people who are placed in their care whether on a short or long term basis. The principles followed by Regional Fostering Services Limited are underpinned by the Department of Health Looked After Guidance on caring for children placed away from home, and the requirement for an independent agency to ensure that:

- The welfare of the child is safeguarded and promoted
- Due consideration is given to the child's wishes and feelings in light of age and understanding
- The child's religious, racial origin cultural and linguistic needs are promoted.

In order to ensure high quality of services, foster carers are required to promote the seven dimensions of the child's/young person's needs and promote their welfare in areas such as their education, health, emotional and behavioural development, identity, social presentation, family and social relationships and self care skills. Any child or young person who is placed with a foster parent and alleges any form of abuse within the definition of the DoH (1999) Safeguarding principles, are investigated and may lead to a number of outcomes which could include:

- Moving the child/young person to an alternative placement
- Offering the foster parent(s) further training and support
- Setting tasks for the foster parent(s) to complete
- Termination

10. Services and Facilities provided by Regional Fostering Services

In line with the aims and objectives of Regional Fostering, a range of services are provided to foster carers, children/young people, and professional agencies. These are outlined below. Information about Regional Fostering's services is clearly outlined in the following documents.

- Information for carers
- Children's Guide to Services and Complaints
- Foster Carer's Handbook
- Staff Handbook
- Regional Fostering Services Policies and Procedures

Regional Fostering Services provide placements for all children/young people from birth to 18 years of age from all backgrounds and ethnicities. We also offer staying put arrangements for children who are post 18 years. We provide emergency, short-term, long-term, bridging, parent and child, respite and pre-adoption placements. We provide specialist placements for children with disabilities, therapeutic placements, parent and child, and a limited number of two parent and child placements. The foster carer(s) providing this specialist service will have particular knowledge or expertise in this area and receive an enhanced support package tailored to the identified needs of the placement.

Foster carers providing specialist placements have a speciality in one particular area such as parent and child placements, children with disabilities, or children requiring a therapeutic placement. Specialist foster carers have the enhanced skills and abilities to sustain such complex placements and this is supported by a structured training and support package offered by Regional Fostering. The skills that specialist foster carers have will either be evidenced

within the form F assessment, or Regional Fostering Services will offer the training for carers that show a particular strength or interest in these specialist areas.

Foster carers providing high need parent and child placements, or two parent and child placements, are required to complete 12 weekly assessment reports which will aid the Local Authorities parenting assessment. They are also in some cases required to attend additional specialist training, learning the health needs of the child in their care for example. Significant health needs in children requires constant vigilance and awareness by the foster carers with additional training and frequent visits and appointments in hospital. Parent and child placements are time limited and require a lot of intensive support from the foster carers and the agency, and continue to be in high demand due to the specialist nature of this form of care.

Regional's therapeutic placements offer direct therapy to children and young people and intensive support to foster carers. We offer ongoing therapy for the child, and the foster carer also has access to the therapist for guidance and support in order to sustain the placement and meet the child's needs. The child in placement will have regular reports provided by the therapist which are shared with the Local Authority. Supervising Social Workers also have access to the Agency's onsite therapist to again seek guidance, support and learn therapeutic techniques.

Regional Fostering Services also provide a small number of specialist health placements by having recruited carers with nursing qualifications. They are able to provide services to children with medical needs including HIV/AIDS, eating disorders and specific disabilities. While Regional Fostering recognise their skills in providing care for children in need, they are not employed in a professional nursing capacity and therefore do not carry any professional responsibilities.

In order to prepare young people for independent living we provide foster carers with an allowance that must be saved on the behalf of foster children/young people. We have a policy on savings for children/young people looked after by Regional Services foster carer/s. The savings scheme

is administered by Regional Fostering. This money will be made available to children/young people when they cease to be looked after by our foster carer(s). We work according to the young person's Pathway Plan ensuring that the foster carers are supported to equip the young people with the necessary independent living skills they will need when they move on from foster care. We also have an independence programme which is issued to young people preparing for independence and they are supported to complete the programme with the help of the Social Work Assistants. The workbook encourages independent living skills and can clearly identify to the Local Authority the areas in which the child both excels and requires support in. Key topics such as budgeting, banking, social skills, employment, communication, home management, and ICT are covered.

Regional Fostering Services provide a 24-hour emergency service. We have a range of carers able to accept emergency placements for individual children or sibling groups. The out-of-hour's service ensures that foster families can contact a named person in an emergency. Regional Fostering Services out of hours service is currently run by our senior staff and management team, ensuring that foster carers are able to seek appropriate guidance and advice at their time of crisis from an experienced member of staff.

Services to Children

Regional Fostering offers a range of services to children who are fostered with foster carer(s) principally to ensure that children's/young people's health, educational, psychological and emotional needs are met. The principle form of service provision is the recruitment of foster carers for children who are unable for whatever reason to live with their birth families or relatives. In recognition of the psychological and emotional needs of children who have suffered in a variety of ways and as a result of abuse and neglect, we provide therapists and counsellors to work directly with children and young people requiring this type of service.

In recognition of children/young people's needs for promoting identity and self-esteem, Regional Fostering offer them culturally matched placements. In cases where this is not possible, Regional Fostering will advise the local

authority that this ideal cannot be achieved, but will also offer them full information on other areas in which available foster carers would be able to meet the child's holistic needs.

Children and young people are offered opportunities to express their views at the foster carer's annual review and this is an enlightening process and one that contributes to our quality assurance systems. They are also given a copy of the Children's Guide when they come into placement which outlines the agencies policies around equal opportunities and how to make representations. This is also contained both in this Statement of Purpose and the Foster Carer's Handbook. Children looked after are seen and spoken to at least 8 weekly by the Supervising Social Worker where they are given the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings. Our Supervising Social Workers will discuss all aspects of the child's care plan with them, they build individual positive relationships with them, take them out, advocate for them and ensure their risk assessments are formed in discussion and consultation with the young person. They become a vital part of their professional network and someone who can be relied upon.

As highlighted above, Regional Fostering also offer both group and one to one targeted work to young people. Children and young people can use these group settings to reflect on their experiences and tell us what they think of the services we are providing. It is also useful to use these forums for evidence building that will contribute to change and improved services within our organisation. Children can also receive direct one to one support on a weekly basis, where identified as a need, in order to help improve their outcomes and the stability of their placement.

Offering children a different setting for reflection and discussion has resulted in them again, building a positive rapport with their supervising Social Worker and we have seen an improvement in children understanding their care plan and complex placements being sustained.

11. The Education of Looked after Children and Young People

Regional Fostering believe that an education in a mainstream school is generally the best all-round option to offer children/young people and we have ongoing discussions with schools regarding additional therapeutic and pastoral support that can be offered to support children. Our Supervising Social Workers and Social Work Assistants play a vital role in supporting educational development and achievement. Every effort is made to enrol or maintain children in local schools, however, if this is not possible Regional Fostering will liaise with the local authority to ensure that alternative arrangements for the child's/young person's education are made via the education department.

Children and young people who are excluded from education must be given support. If carers are in employment we will ask them to take time off work or to make alternative arrangements with nominated carers known to Regional Fostering who can supervise the child/young person during the day. Our aim is to work in partnership with the local authority to ensure that children/young people are reintegrated into school as quickly as possible and that they are not socially excluded. This involves providing them with the right level of support and help and home tuition where necessary.

Regional Fostering will offer relief support to foster families by asking a worker to take children out for the day. This gives them a break, particularly during the holidays. We recognise that families are doing a good job, but that they may need time and space to devote to the needs of their own children. We encourage foster families to support each other through formal and informal networking, and by using the support groups offered.

Regional Fostering Services also provide private tuition resources to children who require additional support which is not covered by their Pupil Premium.

The Registered Manager closely monitors outcomes for children and young people and how they are achieving their expected targets in education. If young people have additional needs, Regional Fostering Services ensures

that they access funding from the pupil premium for extra support and that there is a clear plan in place to help them to make progress.

12. Recruitment Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers

Currently Regional Fostering Services recruit foster carers from a range of cultures, and religions with differing levels of experience in order to have a diverse group to meet the needs of all Looked after Children. Regional Fostering operates a duty system that responds to all enquiries from individuals and couples wanting to apply to become foster carers. This begins a process whereby the following actions are taken:

- Basic information is requested and given about our fostering services. Information is given to help the individual or couple decide if they wish to take their application a step further.
- If it is decided that they would like to undertake an assessment, the next step is to make an initial home visit to explain the agency's procedures and guidelines.
- This is followed by the completion of an application form including consent. A request is made for information about the applicant, their family and any other person involved.
- All applicants are invited to attend a preparation course called 'Skills to Foster'. This course is delivered by Regional Fostering Services staff and managers. Applicants are given the dates for this course well in advance.
- Those who attend the course and decide that they wish to proceed to the next step are required to provide more detailed information about themselves and their family. This is to gain their permission to make a number of statutory checks and request references as to their suitability to become foster carers. Regional Fostering will make enquiries from a number of agencies and these include:
 - The Police – DBS
 - Department of Health
 - Probation Service

- References from any person living in the household. This includes any person age 16 and over who stays in the household on a regular basis and who sleeps there overnight.
- Birth child references who may no longer be living in the home
- Home Local Authority checks
- Education references for birth children of school age
- Ex-partner references
- Minimum of three personal references
- Employment References
- Name and address of their G.P.
- Copies of recent utility bills
- A copy of Marriage/Divorce Certificate
- A copy of an up-dated mortgage statement.
- Proof of home ownership
- Proof of financial stability

13. Assessment Procedures

Assessments are carried out by qualified social workers. Our social work assessments follow the competency based assessment method. This means that applicants are asked to demonstrate their competence to become approved foster carers. We advise applicants that they must provide evidence of their ability to foster vulnerable children and young people. We also gain additional evidence from our observations when applicants attend the 'Skills to Foster' course.

- Throughout the assessment process information is gathered using the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) assessment form.
- The assessment which consists of a series of interviews, takes place in the applicants home over a period of 6-8 visits.
- The assessment focuses on the individual or individuals applying to become foster carers and their family. We make a detailed assessment of their past experiences and help them to think about their reasons for applying to become foster carers.

- Applicants do not have to be professionals. However, they need to have a willingness to care for children/young people between the ages of 0-18 who cannot live with their family and are in need of alternative care. They must be able to provide a room in their home to accommodate children or young people.
- Throughout the assessment process applicants are advised and helped to gather information and evidence providing examples of their relevant experiences and skills. This enables applicants to produce a portfolio of evidence. The assessment is then presented to the Fostering Panel.
- All information gathered, except for references, are shared with the applicant/s. Applicants are also given an opportunity to read the social worker's assessment before it is presented to the Fostering Panel and add their comments.

14. The Fostering Panel

The Regional Fostering Panel has a key role to play in the agency's decision-making process. They are governed by the Regulations that are set out under the Care Standards Act (2000) and the Fostering Regulations. The panel is independent of Regional Fostering Services and has a remit to make recommendations about the approval of foster carers to the Managing Director/ Agency Decision Maker. A foster parent and care leaver are also included in the panel membership, along with a teacher and a looked after children's nurse practitioner.

The Fostering Panel are responsible for considering foster carers annual reviews and recommending their continued suitability for the tasks they have been recruited to perform. Where there are complaints relating to foster families, the Fostering Panel must recommend to the Managing Director/ Decision Maker what action needs to be taken by the agency.

Reviewing Foster Carers

The first review is conducted one year after registration and presented to Regional Fostering's Panel along with a report evidencing a foster parent's competencies over the past year. Panel are then able to make recommendations about the foster carers fitness to remain registered. Foster carers reviews will then be presented to Panel every 3 years thereafter under 'good practice'.

All other reviews are conducted by Regional Fostering's staff and do not normally return to panel unless a complaint, allegation or standard of care concern has been raised against a foster carer, or there has been a significant change in household.

Regional Fostering Services follows reviewing procedures for each approved foster parent and these are conducted on a yearly basis. The review concentrates on how the carer(s) is managing the fostering task and how they continue to meet the National Minimum Standards. It also reviews any difficulties the carers have experienced and how they have achieved positive outcomes for the children/young people placed with them. The review identifies further training and development needs, and other services that will appropriately meet the child's needs.

This is a detailed procedure using documentation that has been adapted from BAAF by Regional Fostering Services, to capture every aspect and activity of the fostering task. Of crucial importance to this process, is gaining information from children and young people about how they experience living with the foster carers. Feedback and information is also gathered from the child's local authority allocated social workers. All information is recorded using specially designed forms and a copy is sent to the foster carer for their records. This ensures that they have read a written copy of any agreements that are made in the review, to which they will comply.

Advisory Group to the Fostering Panel

The panel members also act as an advisory group to Regional Fostering Services. All panel members have recognized qualifications and bring a wealth of knowledge and a variety of background experience to the panel.

Regional Fostering Services seek their advice when appropriate and necessary. We follow the Regulations in terms of ensuring that Panel is always quorate and comprises of a range of different professionals. Panel members also have a quality assurance role which they bring to the service, ensuring that the quality of reports being presented to panel is consistent and meets the Agency's objectives.

15. Training Services

A wide spectrum of training is offered on a regular basis to approved foster carers to enable them to develop skills and knowledge and the ability to perform the task they are asked to complete. All training is evaluated and in addition, we ask foster carers to provide feedback on the range of services that are offered. Regional Fostering Services use a range of external training providers to ensure that training is current and that our foster carers development is encouraged and promoted.

Regional Fostering follows a core and mandatory training programme for all approved foster carers. This programme outlines the training courses, which are to be completed in order for the carers to have a sound understanding on the responsibilities on them as foster carers and enhancing their ability to safeguard and protect children and young people.

An overview of the training programme is set out below:

- Completion of the Training Development Standards portfolio within the first 12 months of approval
- First Aid
- Safeguarding
- Managing Allegations
- Risk Management and Safer Caring
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Prevent
- Equality and Diversity
- Strategies for De-Escalation
- Understanding Attachment
- Fire safety

- Food Hygiene
- Health and safety
- Reporting and recording
- Safe handling of medication.
- Internet Safety

RFS also have a therapeutic training programme for all foster carers and staff which is delivered and evaluated by a trained therapist. Foster carers complete 4 modules to complete the course over a 12 month period. The learning objectives for the course are as follows:

- Understand what childhood trauma is and how it impacts children/ young people
- Learn the key parts of the emotional brain, fight, flight freeze and our survival responses
- Learn how long-term trauma can impact the developing emotional brain and responses
- Understand triggers and their impact in children's lives when dealing with trauma
- Learn how some parenting strategies might trigger children's survival responses
- Learn how you can help make a difference: An introduction to therapeutic response skills
- Learn strategies for reducing stress and fight, flight and freeze responses at home
- Learn what attachment is and how attachment disorder can develop
- Understand and explore the different types of attachment disorder
- Identify typical behaviours of a child/ young person suffering from attachment disorder
- To be able to identify why children/ young people revert to some typical behaviours such as stealing and link it to attachment disorder
- Explore why and how scenarios/ circumstances could trigger a child to revert to attachment style behaviour
- Learn how to support children and young people from a trauma informed approach and develop a therapeutic response, designed to reduce their attachment style behaviour

- Remind yourselves of the emotional brain and survival mechanisms
Fight, Flight, Freeze
- Recap on what we know so far
- Explore the difference between therapy and a therapeutic approach and the impact of this for the children
- Discover our 8 therapeutic pledges
- Learn how to meet each pledge and adapt your responses and approaches with children to ensure you are using a therapeutic approach
- Learn how to use therapeutic responses and practice using this approach in different scenarios
- Explore and learn about why we need to change our approaches to behaviour management
- Identify why children misbehave and explore real life scenarios
- Recap the emotional brain and learn how this links to behaviour
- Explore the difference between connection vs disconnection when working with vulnerable children
- Recap therapeutic responses
- Extend the therapeutic response approach to managing behaviour and focus on how to support children who are struggling to regulate and displaying difficult behaviours
- Explore the importance of boundaries and consistency

Foster carers offering specialist placements would be highly skilled and experienced in managing children with high vulnerabilities. Their training would be more specialised and tailored to a specific need for example parent and child, children with autism, children with visual or hearing impairment, children with sexualised behaviour and so on. It may include extended therapeutic training or counselling.

National Vocational Qualifications

Regional Fostering Services believe that it is important to invest in foster carers to gain qualifications such as Training Support and Development standards, which is an assessed course that demonstrates competence.

Regional Fostering also supports highly experienced carers to undertake further qualifications to enhance their skill set such as a diploma in psycho-therapeutic counselling which one of our foster carers completed as well as NVQ awards.

16. Supporting Foster Carers

Regional Fostering values the contribution that foster carers are making to the development and well-being of children and young people who are placed in their care. Therefore we offer a range of support to enable foster carers to manage with the challenging aspects of fostering. The foster parent's support group meet regularly to give mutual support to each other. Other types of support are offered such as:

- A continuous duty and out-of-hours service to foster carers. The out-of-hours service operates seven days a week, and twenty-four hours a day. Foster carers will know that they can always contact a member of staff should they need to do so.
- An equipment service: Where foster carers are looking after babies, young children or children with disabilities, we offer equipment which foster carers find helpful.
- Membership to independent support through Foster Talk. All foster carers who are approved with Regional Fostering Services will automatically become members.
- Therapeutic support to foster carers by a trained counsellor to offer them guidance and therapeutic strategies to support the children in their care.
- Highly skilled qualified team of staff offering support to foster carers which is informed by research and best practice, which enables foster carers to help young people with complex needs to make progress.
- Offering foster carers a welcoming, family environment where they feel listened to and supported.
- Careful matching of children and young people to foster families.
- Excellent and highly skilled management team who provide a high level of support. Management team are easily accessible by foster carers and young people.

- Therapeutic training programme offered by a trained therapist focusing on how trauma manifests itself in behaviour of vulnerable abused children.
- Support Team comprising of a team of Social Work Assistants working primarily with complex young people who are at an increased risk of placement breakdown, targeted young people who require an additional level of support and young people preparing for independence.

17. The Role of the Supervising Social Worker

Supervising Social Workers support, guide and train foster carers through regular visits and interventions. All foster carers are introduced to their Supervising Social Worker that carries responsibility for liaising with the foster carer and other agencies on their behalf. Social workers also conduct the foster carer's review on an annual basis. In addition our Supervising Social Workers dedicate time to the children in care at least 8 weekly and this may consist of taking the child out of the placement to further support them. Supervising Social Workers have supported young people with contact, interviews at college, solicitors appointments, child protection interviews with the Police, and have also attended family weddings and funerals to support their children and young people in care.

18. Complaints Procedures

Regional Fostering Services have complaints procedures and the guidelines are clearly outlined in the foster carer's handbook and within the companies policies and procedures. The complaints leaflet describes the procedures that are followed when managing a complaint and indicates the types of actions that will be carried out if a complaint is made.

In addition we have a 'Whistle blowing' Policy, which is designed to give staff and foster carer's freedom to expose any area of bad practice to a delegated individual within the agency.

19. Student Supervision

Regional Fostering has a commitment to student learning and offers student social work placements within its organisation. Regional Fostering Services have to date supported the learning of four social work students.

20. Foster Carers' Handbook

The foster carers' handbook offers a guide to our policies, procedures and all aspects of our service. All foster carers are expected to read the guide and refer to it as and when it is required. The Supervising Social Worker assists foster carers to go through each section of the handbook, and complete a form confirming they are aware of the contents. This process helps us to ensure that foster carers have read the handbook and indicates that they have understood the messages that it gives. Foster carers utilise the handbook and are encouraged to refer to it if they have any queries.

21. Children and Young Person's Guide and Parent and Children's Guide

In accordance with the National Minimum Standards, we have published several Children's Guide's and also a Parent and Child guide. We have produced guides that are specifically aimed at children under 11 and over 11 years, as well as young people aged 16 and above, preparing to leave care. Our specifically designed guides for our parent and child placements outlines the different types of parent and child foster placements that are offered to the Local Council's and it also explains to the parent, which professional involved with their child's care planning, is responsible for which tasks. It outlines the different types of legal orders that may apply to their child, supervision levels within the placement, restrictions on visitors, and practical advice around health, education, relationships, SIDS, post-natal depression and much more.

Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers go through the guides with children/young people and ensure that they understand their rights. The Children's Guide contains a list of important contact numbers that children and

young people can use if they would like to speak to an independent person and also includes a wealth of other age appropriate guidance and information.

22. Regional Fostering Services and Good Practices

Regional Fostering are committed to forming partnerships with local authorities and working together for improved outcomes for looked after children. We believe that the practice of working together is important in providing a network of services to children and families. Regional Fostering will continue to be committed to modelling good practice, which will be developed through reflective practice and a high quality training programme for both foster carers and staff.

Regional Fostering Services is judged by Ofsted as Outstanding due to being effectively run to a high standard, consistently meeting the standards of Good. Regional Fostering Services strives for best practice ensuring strong advocacy for children and young people. Children and young people, including those with complex needs, make outstanding progress from their starting points which is a key strength of our service.

23. Conclusion

Regional Fostering Services strive to achieve stable, secure, permanent placements for vulnerable children and placements which will improve a child's healthy outcomes.

If you would like further information please do not hesitate to contact us in writing or via telephone using the information on the front of this booklet. We welcome your interest and comments.

Faraz Agha

Regional Fostering Services Ltd