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Introduction

This Statement of Purpose has been developed in accordance with appropriate legislation and guidance including:

- The Children Act 1989;
- The Care Standards Act 2000;
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011;
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011

The Statement of Purpose, produced in accordance with Fostering Services Regulation 3, includes:

- Statement of the Aims and Objectives of Unity Foster Care
- Statement as to the services and facilities provided by the fostering service.

A copy of this Statement of Purpose is available on our website and copies will be made available, upon request, to:

- Any person working for Unity Foster Care; including independent workers
- Any foster carer or prospective foster carer
- Any child or young person placed with Unity Foster Care
- The parent/person with parental responsibility for a child or young person placed with Unity Foster Care

This Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed by Unity Foster Cares' Management Team, whenever there is a change in the service, or at least annually.

Unity Foster Care is an Independent Fostering Agency with the registered office based in Leeds. We pride ourselves on being a responsive agency with clear management structures in place.

The Agency believes that most children's needs are best met within their own families, however, we also recognise that this is not possible for all children. Unity Foster Care provides high quality alternative care within a family setting for children and young people, either on an emergency, short or long-term basis.

Unity Foster Care was first registered in 2016; our last Ofsted inspection took place in November 2021 where we were rated 'Good' in all areas.

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Unity Foster Care operates in the Yorkshire region and is currently on the White Rose Contract, providing its services to the local areas including Leeds, Bradford, Doncaster, Sheffield, Kirklees, Calderdale, across to North Lincs and North East Lincs. We also operate in the North East and are on the Tyne Tees Consortia contract, covering Hartlepool, Redcar-Cleveland, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Darlington, North and South Tyneside, Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, and Sunderland local authorities.

Unity Foster Care is committed to providing a high-quality fostering service. The Statement of Purpose describes how Unity Foster Care ensures best outcomes for children in foster care. It includes details of staffing of the service, management arrangements, monitoring and evaluation of services and the details of Ofsted.

Aims

The main aim of Unity Foster Care is to hold the child at the center of everything we do; to ensure each child or young person in our care has a voice and is listened to.

We aim to:

- Provide safe, stable and nurturing placements for children and young people placed in our care.
- Provide a range of high-quality services which promote and achieve best outcomes for children who need a fostering placement.
- Exceed National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and comply with all relevant legislative and regulatory frameworks.
- To ensure that the needs of the diverse community of children, families and carers are taken into consideration.
- Maximise the contribution of stakeholders (which includes foster carers, children and young people), to ensure their feedback and ideas improve the quality of the service.

Objectives

Our objective is to provide high quality care for children and young people, which meet their needs and promote their development. We work closely with local authorities, health and education professionals to ensure best outcomes for children and young people. Alongside this, we achieve our objective by recruiting, assessing and supervising foster carers and offering a robust package of training and support. In addition, we ensure we meet best outcomes for children by constantly monitoring and evaluating our services. We use quality assurance mechanisms to ensure a high quality of care.

We believe that effectively matched, supported and managed periods of care provide children with the opportunity to;

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Well Being

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Values

The welfare of children and young people is paramount and at the heart of all our work. For us, the safety, well-being, and protection of looked after children are our priorities.

We believe that;

- The values of Unity Foster Care are in line with those embedded in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services
- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of our care.
- Children should have access to a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a positive environment that can meet their needs.
- We will listen to and promote the wishes and feelings of children and young people.
- Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and considered.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs should be fully recognised and taken into account
- The significance of contact for looked after children, and of maintaining relationships with birth family and others, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Foster carers should be treated as professionals and recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child.
- Foster carers should receive high quality support services and opportunities to promote their own development in order to provide the best care for children.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved is essential to deliver the best outcomes for children.
- Diversity and equality should be valued in all aspects of service delivery.

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Service Structure

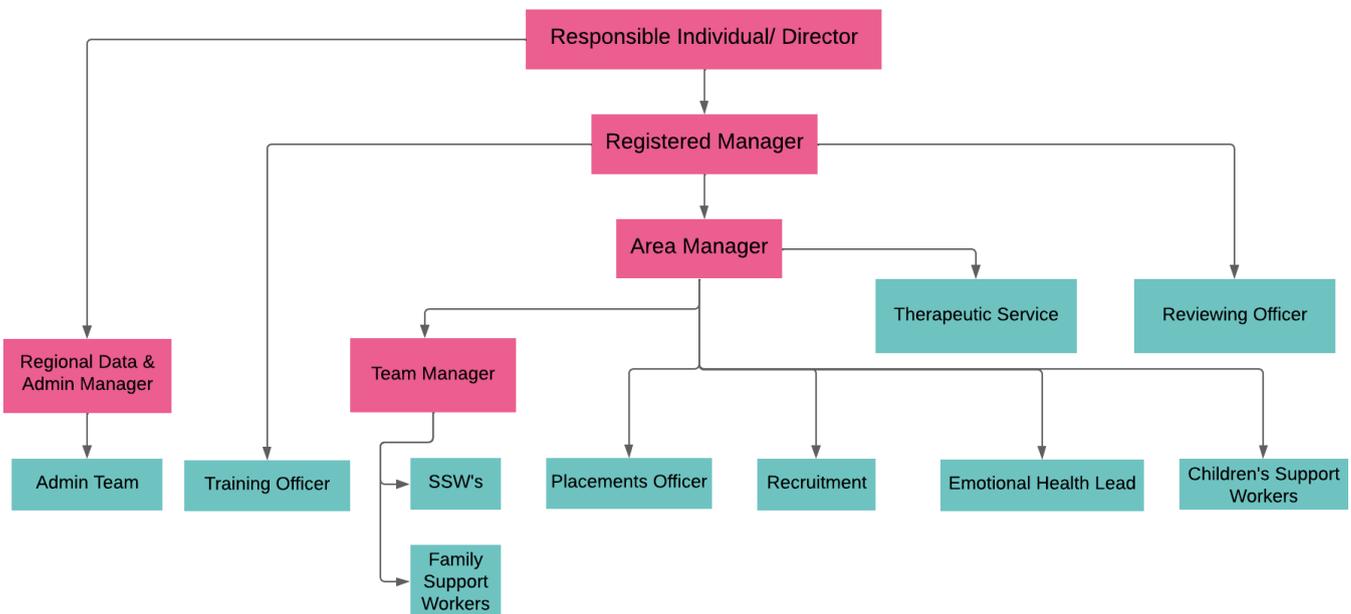
Management of the Service:

Responsible Individual – *Joanne Sharples*.

Registered Manager – *Patsy Wainwright* - the service is managed on a day-to-day basis by the Registered Manager. The Registered Manager is supervised and managed by our Responsible Individual.

Area Manager – *Lee Connell* – the day to day running of the Social Work Service is managed by the Area Manager. The Area Manager is supervised and managed by the Registered Manager

Team Manager – *Tia Gibbs* - the responsibility of this role is to assist the Area Manager in the day- to-day management of the Social Work Service, support and supervision of the Supervising Social Workers who support and supervise foster carers.



The Fostering Panel

In accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations (England) 2011, Unity Foster Care maintains a central list of individuals who form our fostering panel.

The panel meets regularly to consider each application for approval and to recommend whether a person is suitable to act as a foster carer. It also recommends the terms of approval; reviews the suitability to continue as carers and makes recommendations on cases or matters that Unity may refer.

The Independent Panel Chair has a wealth of experience working with children and young people and the central list covers all areas including Education, Health, Children Health and active Foster Carers. The agency currently uses the services of an independent ADM. Panel will also fulfil a quality assurance function.

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Our Services

We pride ourselves on finding the closest possible match when children and young people need to be placed in foster care and identifying any additional training, support or resource required. We work in partnership with Local Authorities and all other agencies to achieve the best possible outcome for all children who need to be looked after.

Unity Foster Care provides the following types of placements:

Short/task centred placements; working towards specific goals. These may include assessment placements, bridging or periods of care which meet other specific care plan objectives. This category also includes:

- Respite placements; carers offer a short stay to children to give their carers or parents a break for a few days or during holiday times. Some carers offer other types of placements alongside respite placements.
- Emergency placements; these are often unplanned and with short notice.

Long term foster care placements; carers offer long term stability and commitment to children and young people until they move to adulthood and independence. This category also includes “Staying Put” placements – to facilitate a gradual transition for young people through to adulthood. We recognise that for many young people in the care of the local authority, leaving foster care around their 18th birthday may not be appropriate.

Parent and child placements; carers offer a placement to a baby and their parent in order for the parent to be able to care for his/her child in a safe and supported environment. Some of these parents may be looked after themselves if under the age of 18.

Unaccompanied minors/Asylum seeking young people – we offer care for children and young people who are deemed to be unaccompanied minors/asylum seekers and where their residency status in the UK is yet to be determined. We can provide additional training for foster carers to address support in immigration, religion, language and cultural needs and integration within the community and local faith groups.

Recruitment, Preparation & Assessment of Foster Carers

Recruitment:

Foster carer recruitment is a key priority for Unity Foster Care.

The aim of our recruitment strategy is to provide a choice of placements to meet the individual needs of a child. A key objective is to provide placement stability through meeting the child’s needs and recruiting carers who have the skills and abilities to help looked after children achieve the best possible outcomes. We aim to have a low turnover of staff and foster cares to ensure further stability of the service.

We specifically look for:

- A spare bedroom
- Plenty of physical and emotional resilience and stamina
- A commitment to attend training events and support groups
- A strong commitment to education and the overall progress of children and young people
- A willingness to support a child’s/young person’s attendance for therapy, hospital appointment etc- including the provision of transport where necessary

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Applicants are welcomed from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

Unity Foster Care uses a number of different tools to recruit foster carers, including internet and social media advertising, attending community events and personal recommendation.

Assessment:

Potential applicants can make contact via telephone, the website or in person at our offices. An initial screening will be conducted, and a decision will be made to either proceed or decline. If the decision has been made to decline, then clear reasons will be given. If the decision has been made to proceed, then an initial home visit will be arranged. During the home visit, detailed discussions take place about the applicants' suitability to foster and the benefits and implications of being a foster carer.

Applicants will be advised if at this stage, they are not deemed suitable to foster. However, if they are, they will be invited to complete an online application or paper version if preferred.

Once this has been completed, an assessing social worker will be allocated to complete their assessment. The assessment is divided into two stages:

Stage 1 Stage 1 of the assessment is about checking facts (references, health status, suitability of accommodation, details of household members, criminal records, previous applications to foster or adopt and details of current/ previous relationships).

Stage 2 Stage 2 of the assessment is a more detailed assessment of a person's suitability to provide foster care for children. During the course of the assessment the assessor and the applicants will discuss the terms of the foster carer's approval; numbers of children and age range depending on the carer's skills and abilities, circumstances and preferences. The assessment report highlights the applicant's strengths, limitations and any areas for additional support to inform future matching and placement considerations.

The assessing social worker completes a written report which is shared with the applicants (excluding 3rd party information). Applicants have the opportunity to check for accuracy and add comments.

The completed assessment report is submitted to the Fostering Panel for recommendation.

As part of the assessment and preparation process, applicants will be asked to attend the Skills to Foster Course. We aim to complete assessments in no longer than six months.

Training, support and reviewing process

Unity Foster Care has an annual training programme and foster carers have an individual learning and development plan linked to the programme. Undertaking learning and development is an ongoing requirement for Unity foster carers and this includes e-learning.

Foster carers are allocated a Supervising Social Worker, who they will have regular contact with. Support is offered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Regular foster carer support groups are arranged. Each foster carer is reviewed annually.

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Matching and Placement

When a referral for a placement is received, full information is taken about the needs of the child or young person. Full consideration is given to all appropriate placements available.

We match children and young people with carers who are trained and skilled to meet their needs or provided with a plan to meet any identified training gaps to meet the child's needs.

Amongst other matching considerations, ethnicity, culture and religion are some of the needs which will be considered when a placement is provided for a child or young person. We will also look at how gaps in need could be addressed.

For parent and child placements, a specific matching form and risk assessment is complete. As part of the matching process Unity Foster Care ensures that the foster carer is given sufficient information about the child/parent and child both written and verbally.

Monitoring of the Fostering Service

The fostering service is monitored through provision of formal supervision for all staff and foster carers, the auditing of case files, supervision records and day-to-day management of the service. All policies and procedures are reviewed annually.

Unity Foster Care recognises that supervision and support for carers is vital. It is important that the carer's work is recognised as providing the major component in meeting the looked after child's needs.

All carers have an allocated Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Workers visit carers regularly to monitor the standards of care provided, assist the carer to play their part in the child's care plan and identify any training needs.

Supervising Social Workers are responsible for ensuring that the care offered to children in foster care meets the required standards.

It is recognised that the Supervising Social Worker is a key support to foster carers and they aim to build supportive relationship with the foster carers to enable them in their role as carers.

The Supervising Social Worker visits and telephones the carer regularly whilst the child is placed. Visits to the foster carers take place on a monthly basis. It is recognised that new carers may need a higher level of contact in the initial stages of fostering and also those carers looking after several children or children with complex care needs. These visits can be increased as assessed need determines. Areas discussed during these visits and decisions reached are recorded and shared with the foster carer.

As part of our monitoring process, there will be at least two unannounced visits annually by the Supervising Social Worker or any other Unity worker, to the foster carer's home.

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Foster Carer Annual Reviews

Foster carers are reviewed annually. This is a formal meeting and considers their status as foster carers and on-going suitability to foster. It considers the terms of their continued approval. It also gives an opportunity to look at the work they have undertaken during the year and is an opportunity to reflect on achievements and learning. Any training needs are considered, and recommendations made for the future.

In preparation for the review meeting feedback is sought from the foster carer, children who are or have been in placement in the preceding year and their parents if appropriate, the placing social worker(s), the views of foster carers own children and Reviewing Officers. The reviewing officer will meet with foster carers' own children to seek their views wherever possible.

Foster Carers' first annual review is taken back to the Fostering Panel as are reviews where there have been standards of care issues, after any allegations or serious concerns.

The Fostering Role and What our Carers can expect

Supervisory home visits - Foster carers receive monthly supervision from their Supervising social worker. Supervision provides a space for carers to reflect on their practice and the needs of the children/young people placed. The training and development of foster carers is also monitored.

Unannounced visits - Foster carers will receive two unannounced home visits a year. This is to complete checks to ensure a high level of care is being provided to the children and young people.

Transport – Day-to-day transport for children looked after is managed by foster carers for instance school runs and contact with birth parents. We will try and support if foster carers are unable to do this at times subject to resources.

Participation and Activity days - Are organised for our fostering families such as trips to the seaside, or zoo, and fun days. We also hold an awards ceremony annually where we celebrate the achievements of children and young people and certificates and vouchers are given. We also recognise the progress and achievements of those placed in our care with the presentation of vouchers and well-done cards.

Foster carer reviews - as discussed above

Record Keeping - Foster carers are expected to record regular logs for the children in their care. These logs are then reviewed by the supervising social worker. Recording is an essential part of the foster carer's role which help monitor the child's journey.

Policies and Procedures - All our foster carers have access to the foster carer's handbook which has the key policies and procedures along with useful guidance. We also have a wide range of policies and procedures which foster carers have access to on our electronic database, Charms.

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Complaints and Allegations

Users of Unity Foster Care are provided with copies of the complaints procedure and advised to invoke it if they are unhappy with services provided. Foster carers are also advised about the circumstances in which they may have recourse to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) if they disagree with a decision being proposed by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

Most complaints are resolved informally and speedily, and records are kept of all complaints, compliments and representations made to Unity Foster Care. There are clear procedures in place for responding to complaints.

Looked after children are also provided with information on how to make a complaint and how to get independent advice and support should the need arise. Some looked after children may want their foster carer to make the complaint on their behalf.

Any issues arising from complaints, standards of care, or allegations against carers to ensure any lessons learnt are discussed and changes in practice made.

Children's Guide

Unity has three Children's Guides for children and young people, specifically designed to engage children of all ages.

The Children's Guides contain information about being in care and what to do if children are unhappy or wish to complain about something.

These guides are available as both a hard and soft copy.

Listening to Children and Young People

Children's views are taken into account in decision making and reviews.

Unity Foster Care provides opportunities for children to give their views about their experience of foster care.

The Agency supports our Children Young People's Council, providing training to those placed in our care; specifically, around subject designed to keep them safe; for example, Internet Safety.

Where children make complaints or allegations, the starting point will be that they are telling the truth, and all similar matters will always be fully investigated.

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Safeguarding

We believe that the greatest means of keeping children safe is to instill a commitment to listen to children and take seriously what they say.

When placed all children are given a copy of the Children's Guide. The Children's Guide includes information about who a child can contact to discuss any concerns or safeguarding issues.

Foster carers are given very clear guidance about safer caring. This is reinforced through mandatory training on safer caring and ensuring all carers have a Safe Caring Plan which is adapted at the start of each placement. We are committed to increasing and updating knowledge of how to safeguard children, through the ongoing development of training which is informed by changing trends and needs.

Safer Recruitment Guidelines are observed in the recruitment of all staff working for the organisation, whilst extensive checks are undertaken on carers, in a context of a robust culture of exploring prospective carers' histories and motivation.

At the point of placing children and young people, supervising social workers are responsible for coordinating the completion of a risk assessment, where applicable. The purpose of the risk assessment is not merely to identify risks, but to identify what steps can be put in place to manage these. Risk assessments are updated should risks change or increase, or when information comes to light which would require a fresh assessment.

Clear procedures are in place in relation to critical incidents, dealing with complaints, allegations and standards of care concerns. The Registered Manager provides regular reports to the management and executive teams regarding all such concerns, including their outcome. Following allegations and standards of care issues, carers are reviewed and the review is presented to panel.

Foster carers, all staff, volunteers and panel members receive mandatory training on safeguarding and The Prevent Duty.

Involvement in the fostering service

Unity Foster Care believes it is important to involve foster carers, professionals, children and young people in the development and improvement of the fostering service by providing opportunities for feedback and consultation.

The agency is also looking to run a regular service survey; and invite feedback via the Junior Council.

The agency management team hold quarterly meetings with the Foster carer representatives from each area to discuss future planning, suggestions and any themes arising from consultation with foster carers.

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OFSTED

Unity Foster Care will be inspected by Ofsted in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011. The contact details for Ofsted are as follows:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Contact Details

Unity Foster Care's offices are located at First Floor, 4340, Park Approach, Thorpe Park, Leeds. LS15 8GB

Unity Foster Care can be contacted by emailing hello@unityfostercare.co.uk or by calling our office on 0333 77 22 333.

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