

# AFFINITY FOSTERING SERVICES LTD



## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE JANUARY 2023

“Enhancing and Empowering Young People’s Lives”



# INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Purpose has been developed in accordance with appropriate statute law including:

- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Service Regulations (England 2011)
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England and Wales) 2011

The Statement of Purpose, produced in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations includes:

- A statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, and; a statement as to the services and facilities provided by the fostering service.

A copy of the Statement of Purpose is provided to, and/or made available upon request, to:

- Ofsted
- Purchasers of the service
- Any person working for the purposes of the fostering service.
- Any child (subject to their age and understanding) placed with Affinity Fostering and the parent or guardian of any such child.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated on regular basis, at least annually by the Senior Management Team, and modified if necessary. The annual review cycle is January each year.

# MISSION STATEMENT

## **Mission Statement:**

“To provide a quality driven service that focuses on safeguarding, positive outcomes for children, their foster families and staff”.

## **Value Statement:**

” Enhancing and Empowering Young People’s lives”

## **Equality & Diversity Pledge:**

Affinity Fostering recognises that in society a number of people are not treated as equal, face prejudice and discrimination and do not always have fair and accessible access to services.

Affinity are committed to:

1. Ensuring people’s differences are celebrated, understood, and respected.
2. Promoting equality and inclusion as a core value across the service, with our children and young people, foster carers, staff and wider communities in which we serve.
3. Actively challenge discriminatory behaviour, assumptions and stereotypes of others.

4. Developing a culture of learning which endeavors to understand the uniqueness of others in respect to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, religious beliefs, political beliefs and neuro diversity.

**Participation Statement:**

*“Participation is when people are given the opportunity to express their views effectively and for those views to be listened to and taken account of. It is about being involved in and influencing decision making on matters that affect them”.*

Affinity have three Children and Participation Leaders managed by A Children’s Participation and Support Supervisor, who assist and encourage young people to contribute to and influence the operation and development of Affinity Fostering.

## **Introduction to Affinity Fostering Services Ltd**

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose for Affinity Fostering Services, an independent Fostering Provider whose office is based in Essex, operating in Essex, Kent, Surrey, London and the East Midlands, and fulfils the underpinning legislation as set out in NMS 2011 Standard 16 including Children’s Guides.

Affinity Fostering Services Limited will provide foster placements for Local Authorities throughout the UK.

This Statement of Purpose has been developed in accordance with Fostering Service Regulations and appropriate legislation and guidance relevant to:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Service National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Fostering Service Regulations England 2011
- The Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

The Statement of Purpose provides:

- A statement of the Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service
- A statement as to the services and facilities provided by the Fostering Services.

## **Company Ownership**

The Directors/Shareholders remain under the control of Affinity EFS Group Ltd. Andy Robins is the sole Director of Affinity Fostering Services Ltd. At Affinity EFS Group level, Andy Robins is CEO, Eleanor Newman is Operations Director and Ole Bettum is Chairman of the Group.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The primary aim of Affinity Fostering Services is to provide the highest quality of care to children and young people and to maximise their potential and achieve best outcomes for those who have been through the care system.

## **Safeguarding:**

Safeguarding is a key priority for Affinity. Foster Carers are provided with clear guidance and information to promote safer caring practice which is reinforced through mandatory training and local support groups.

We have a robust system in place to monitor schedule 6 and 7 incidents, restraints and physical interventions through team managers and senior management. All incidents are routinely reported to the individual children/young people's Local Authorities. Where necessary, joint risk assessment/management plans are agreed in partnership with Social Workers to manage and support placement stability.

Training is provided face to face and through e-learning opportunities. PACE and de-escalation strategies are actively promoted within supervision to support foster carers in their care of children with escalating behavioural concerns. More bespoke training is also sourced on an individual basis where a need has been identified such as Restraint training. Other support and learning platforms include presentations by Supervising Social Workers at local Foster Carer support groups where there is a thematic focus on subjects such as physical intervention and de-escalation strategies.

Robust tracking and monitor procedures are in place related to accidents, critical incidents, physical intervention and restraints. The Fostering Team Manager provides monthly reports to the responsible individual regarding all such concerns including the outcomes and progress of the situation.

Affinity Fostering is dedicated to the following: -

### **Children and Young People:**

- Continuous development of its services in order that children and young people can develop and grow within the five outcome areas of Every Child Matters
- To provide a secure base approach to enable children and young people to develop healthy attachments.
- High quality Foster Care resources that are matched to the needs of the individual child and provide safe, nurturing environments and experiences.
- That a child or young person's physical, emotional and mental health care needs are met, and positive healthy lifestyles are encouraged. Enable all children and young people to benefit from educational opportunities.
- To actively encourage children and young people to inform us of their thoughts and views and ensure we actively listen, encouraged and facilitated by our Participation & Support Leaders
- To promote contact in line with the Care/Placement Plan, birth family and significant others during a placement and to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate.
- Monitoring that the Care Plan for every child placed is followed within the timescales set at each Statutory Review.

### **Foster Carers:**

- We will continue to recruit Foster Carers from all backgrounds in order to meet the racial, cultural and religious needs of children and young people referred.
- A commitment to the ongoing learning and training of Foster Carers, including the TSD Standards; funding specific learning areas that Foster Carers have a particular interest in, in order to develop the individual and benefit the organisation.
- We will ensure the retention of Foster Carers by allowing Carers to be rewarded appropriately and recognise that they are valued and respected.

- To involve Foster Carers in the review and update of relevant organisational Policies and Procedures.
- To actively encourage Foster Carers to inform us of their thoughts and views and ensure we actively listen and action appropriately.

### **Affinity Fostering Staff:**

- To provide consistent support, availability, and supervision to our Foster Carers.
- To provide the highest quality of support to children and young people.
- A Team of Managers, Social Workers, Participation & Support Leaders and Administrators who are appropriately qualified and experienced, registered with their professional regulatory bodies, and supported in continuous professional development.
- Research in areas of practice pertaining to our service to ensure continuous development.
- A focus on continuous improvement, quality assurance, and high-quality service provision.

### **Affinity Management Personnel and Directors:**

- Strategic vision and direction
- Child centred values and principles
- Quality assurance
- Annual review of Business Plan in line with children and service user's needs
- Developing the service in line with best practice
- Financial management to ensure best value to Local Authorities and Affinity Fostering
- Assimilation of new legislation and regulations into practice

## **Status and Constitution**

Affinity Fostering is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985 (Company Number 858158).

Affinity Fostering is registered as an Independent Fostering Provider under provision of Care Standards Act 2000 and regulated by OFSTED who consider Affinity Fostering as being an Outstanding provider.

OFSTED Registration number SC469688.

## **Equality and Diversity**

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 2

Affinity Fostering recognises the diverse society and communities in which we all live and work. We embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity. We aim to recruit people from all backgrounds to reflect the demographics of the regions we cover.

We are aware however, that discrimination, prejudice, unfairness, and oppression exist in every aspect of daily living, including:

- Ethnic minority groups
- Women
- People with disabilities
- Age
- Gender identity

We actively pursue an equal opportunities policy within the organisation not just for our employees but also for the children placed with our Foster Carers. Culture, age, gender, ethnic origin, religion, language, sexuality, and disability are all sensitively addressed during the matching procedure. Equal opportunities form an important part of our Foster Carer's training programme.

## **Management and Structure**

### **In accordance with NMS Standard 25**

Affinity Fostering commits to safer recruitment and selection of staff with appropriate training provided to staff who are involved in the recruitment of staff, Foster Carers and independents such as Panel Members. All staff members that may have access to children are thoroughly vetted as required under The Protection of Children Act, 1999 and Care Standards Act 2000 and NMS 2011.

### **Standard 19**

Detailed job descriptions, Person Specifications, Contracts and Conditions of Service are provided for all staff members by the Head of Business Services who holds the Specialist Paralegal in Employment Law Degree. All Social Workers are registered with the Social Work England (formerly HCPC) and memberships renewed as required. Regular Supervision and Annual Staff Appraisals are conducted and include identifying training needs and interests. The appropriate organisational structure and systems are in place to ensure that Affinity Fostering meets the needs of the service users.

## **Management and Support**

### **In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 21**

It is recognised that placing 'looked after children' often makes large and varied demands on the Foster Carers. Through Affinity Fostering's continuous professional development programme, our Foster Carers are trained to meet the demands of children who have been exposed to high levels of neglect, deprivation, or abuse. Foster Carers for Affinity Fostering are selected for their tenacity, as the demands of fostering are rigorous, and it is expected that Foster Carers will work through difficult issues and concerns with the support of Affinity Fostering personnel.

It is the Supervising Social Worker's responsibility to manage and support the Foster Carer in the fostering task. Affinity's Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers understand that the child's needs are paramount.

Supervising Social Workers visit the Foster Carers they support regularly both when children are in placement as well as when the Foster Carers are awaiting their next placement, this is in addition to ongoing telephone support.

Affinity Fostering subscribes all of our Foster Carers to FosterTalk which provides a range of independent supports including legal services, insurance and independent advice and support in the event of a complaint or allegation being made against them. Additionally, Affinity has secured the services of a relevantly trained Independent Social Worker who will also provide support to Foster Carers should an allegation be made.

A named qualified Social Worker is identified as the Supervising Worker and will complete newly approved Foster Carer's induction programme together with an allocated Administrator and Referrals Officer.

Support begins prior to approval as during the assessment process, applicants are provided with a named Administrator as a point of contact who will assist with paperwork and training allocated. During the assessment process pre-assessment matching and pre-panel meetings are held with the relevant staff team, and specifically identified training provided, which is additional to the statutory Skills to Foster training, to ensure that the applicants are as prepared as possible for the reality of the assessment process and the role of a Foster Carer. This support and preparation are followed up post approval with a robust induction programme.

When placements are being considered, support is provided to the Foster Carers by the Referrals Team, their allocated Supervising Social Worker and, if required a duty Social Worker, to consider all the information provided by the Local Authority to ensure that the most appropriate matches are considered and appropriate wishes and feelings of both birth and looked after children are taken into consideration before offering a placement.

**On-going support** is bespoke, ensuring the right level is achieved, according to the needs of the child and the Carers which may include but not exhaustive of, additional support from the Children's Participation and Support Leaders, respite provision, clinical supervision or bespoke training for the Foster Carers.

**Emergency Support** (on call service), staffed by experienced Supervising Social Workers, is accessible to Foster Carers outside of office hours, 7 days per week, 52 weeks per year. A qualified Manager is also on back up duty to advise and support.

**Support Groups** are held on a regular basis and in venues convenient to Foster Carers and virtually if required. These are groups where information can be shared and any issues can be raised with the agency and most importantly Foster Carers can socialise together, learn from and support each other. Support Groups are also supplemented by a specific training workshop to cover identified areas of case studies or practice reviews particularly around core training subjects.

**Supervisory Visits** - Regular supervision and support meetings are held between Supervising Social Worker and Foster Carers. Supervision meetings are an opportunity to discuss the needs of the child in placement and that the Foster Carer can progress the child's care plan. Any concerns or challenges are also identified and discussed with action plans identified and there is an opportunity for the Supervising Social Worker to meet with children in placement, without their Foster Carers present therefore providing them with an opportunity to share their wishes and feelings about their placement. These meetings are aimed to explore the child's feelings looking at, a hat is going well and any areas of worry for them with a formal record made which is signed off by both parties and overseen by the Practice / Registered Manager.

Supervising Social Workers have primary responsibility for safeguarding the children placed with Foster Carers by developing their skills including identifying training needs of the Foster Carers which is a key part of both the Foster Carer and Supervising Social Worker's roles. Additionally, these meetings provide an opportunity for the Foster Carer's own wellbeing to be discussed. All Supervisions are fully recorded and signed off by the Foster Carer and the Supervising Social Worker.

**Unannounced visits** will take place at all Affinity Foster Carers' homes including any holiday homes/caravans. These inspections will also include an audit of the Foster Carer's practical steps to ensure that they are fully compliant with the GDPR Regulations 2018 and cyber security. They will receive at least two unannounced visits each year exceeding the Regulations. Children and young people must be seen and spoken to during an unannounced visit for it to be considered a successful visit.

Affinity's Senior Management Team hold regular 'Keeping in Touch' Days (KIT) in local areas, or virtually dependent upon need and attendance. The KIT days provide the opportunity for Foster Carers to meet with the Management Team to share their views, concerns and developmental ideas for the Agency. Management also use these meetings to obtain feedback from Foster Carers about the level of support they receive and / or require.

A Foster Carer Forum of elected members has been set up with a purpose of providing a forum for open discussion between Foster Carers and Affinity Senior Management in relation to the service delivery and support offered to Foster Carers and the young people placed with them.

The Foster Carer Members are there to voice not only their own views, opinions and suggestions but also those of the wider Foster Carer Group. It is also the objective of the Forum to be a solution focused group and contribute to the development in a consultative capacity in relation to policies and procedures.

## **Affinity Fostering Staff Team**

**In accordance with NMS 2011 Standards 17/19**

Team Meetings are held monthly attended by all staff and Management. Social Work Practice Meetings are also held monthly where current and topical research information is disseminated along with discussion as to situations with Foster Carer's and our young people. The Team also attends regular Team Days, training events, social events and the Foster Carers' Conference which provides quality external training for all and a social evening and overnight for Foster Carers and staff alike.

The Director is responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation. The Director has experience in managing a Fostering Agency and holds monthly Management meetings with the Senior Management Team to ensure the Business Plan is disseminated appropriately. The Director is also Affinity's Responsible Individual.

All Social Workers are required to hold a recognised Social Work Qualification and be registered with the Social Work England.

The Head of Business Services is suitably qualified in Human Resources and Administration Management and has much experience of working within Independent Fostering Agencies.

New staff will be provided with a three and six month review during their probationary period to ensure that they are being fully supported and inducted into their role to the standards required by the Agency. All staff will receive regular supervision and annual appraisals and have access to regular training, ensuring they are aware of new developments, key changes in legislation, processes and best practice.

Affinity believes in constantly developing staff in their capabilities and professional standards. From 2018 Affinity implemented a staff wide Skills Audit, which culminates in an annual training programme developed to further the learning of all Social Work staff, with Admin staff developing more individually and supported through support sessions.

In addition to permanent staff there is a pool of individuals who will work for Affinity Fostering on an independent, self-employed basis across a variety of roles including Panel Members, Specialist Consultants, Independent Trainers, Form F Assessors and Support Workers.

Panel Members will be overseen by the Panel Chairperson, Form F Assessments will be supervised by the Registered /Fostering Team/Practice Manager, Support Workers by the Principal Social Worker and Participation & Support Supervisor.

All Independent staff are required to hold appropriate qualifications and can evidence previous experience related to the work they are undertaking. Affinity Fostering carries out a range of pre-employment checks on all staff including references and telephone follow up calls, enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks where appropriate to ensure the welfare of children and young people are safeguarded and fulfils our Safer Recruitment Policy.



# STATUS, EMPLOYEES & STRUCTURE

## Staffing

### Director/Responsible Individual:

- BA degree in business administration
- Executive master's degree in business (MBA) Surrey University
- Health & Safety Manager's Certification
- Advanced Safeguarding
- Responsible Individual

#### Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Head of Business Services
- Finance Manager
- Children's Participation & Support Supervisor (L&D Needs)

### Registered Manager/Designated Safeguarding Officer:

- Masters in Professional Education and Training
- Diploma In Social Work
- Diploma in Social Studies
- Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (Humanistic)
- Advanced Certificate in Counselling
- Practice Teaching Award
- Advanced Safeguarding for the Designated Safeguarding Officer
- Mental Health First Aid
- Undertaking CLM Level 5 in Leadership & Management
- Undertaking Part Time Education Doctorate

#### Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Practice Manager
- Principal Social Worker

### Head of Business Services/HR Manager:

- Specialist Paralegal in Employment Law
- NVQ5 – Operations Management Introduction to Company Law, 2008
- Introduction to Contract Law, 2009
- NVQ4 Higher Diploma in Business Administration
- Safer Recruitment Practice
- Advanced Safeguarding
- Mental Health First Aid – Level 2
- Counselling - Level 2

#### Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Business Services Support
- Carer Recruitment Officer
- Administration Team

### Finance Manager:

- AAT Intermediate /NVQ 3 Accountancy
- Pensions
- Sage
- Extensive fostering experience
- Advanced Safeguarding

**Practice Manager/Designated Safeguarding Officer:**

- BA Hons Social Work Degree
- Diploma – Person Centred Counselling
- Higher Diploma – Child Psychology
- NVQ Level 3 – Health & Social Care (Children & Young People)
- Advanced Safeguarding

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Senior Supervising Social Workers
- Independent Social Workers

**Principal Social Worker/Panel Advisor:**

- Graduate Diploma Specialist Social Work
- Consolidation Module Child Care Professional PQ1
- B.A. Social Work
- B.A. Languages (Romanian and English)
- Advanced Safeguarding
- Undertaking ILM level 3 in leadership and management

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Social Workers
- Children's Participation & Support Leaders (Practice supervision)
- Independent Social Workers

**Senior Supervising Social Workers x 5:**

- BA (Hons) Social Work Degree
- Higher Diploma Child Psychology
- Higher Education Diploma in Social Work
- Diploma – Person Centred Counselling
- Certificate in Social Care
- Practice Educator Award
- NVQ Level 4 in Management
- Certificate in Therapeutic Social Work
- NNEB
- Advanced Safeguarding
- One Senior Social Worker is undertaking a six week Therapeutic Parenting training course

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Student Social Workers when placed

**Supervising Social Workers x 2:**

- BA (Hons) Social Work Degree
- PG Diploma Social Work
- BTECH Level 3 Childcare, Learning & Development
- AYSE
- BSc Theoretical Astrophysics
- Advanced certificate in Counselling
- Diploma in counselling
- Advanced Safeguarding
- Diploma in Supervision

### **Participation & Support Supervisor:**

- Advanced Safeguarding
- TSD Standards
- Attachment Styles
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Preparing For Independence and Adulthood
- Life Story Work “Becoming a Therapeutic Care Giver”
- Seen and Heard – Signs of Abuse
- Mental Health: Overcoming Anxiety, Challenges and Building Confidence;
- Contact & Birth Families
- Participation – What Good Fostering Looks Like from a Care Leaver’s Perspective
- Radicalisation and PREVENT
- Education for Looked After Young People
- Diploma in Supervision
- Currently undertaking MA in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy and Counselling

#### Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Children’s Participation & Support Leaders x 2

### **Participation & Support Leaders x 3:**

- Advanced Safeguarding
- TSD Standards
- Attachment Styles
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Preparing for Independence and Adulthood
- Life Story Work “Becoming a Therapeutic Care Giver”
- Seen and Heard – Signs of Abuse
- Mental Health: Overcoming Anxiety, Challenges and Building Confidence;
- Contact & Birth Families
- Participation – What Good Fostering Looks Like from a Care Leaver’s Perspective
- Radicalisation and PREVENT

### **Business Services Support:**

- Advanced Safeguarding
- Safer recruitment Procedures
- Fostering Regulations
- Undertaking CIPD Level 5 HR training

### **Administration Team (Senior x 2, Administrator x 1):**

- Advanced Safeguarding
- Fostering Regulations
- Undertaking ILM Level 2 in Business and Administration

## **Statistics and Outcomes**

### **In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 25**

Affinity Fostering complete Regulation 35 Reports quarterly and are submitted to OFSTED and Local Authorities as part of their Contract monitoring process within agreed timescales.

In conjunction with the Regulation 35 the NMS 25 Report is also completed quarterly by the Registered Manager, in addition to regular statistical reports which are sent to Local Authorities, as part of their Contract Reviewing/Monitoring processes.

## **Records and Confidentiality**

### **In accordance with NMS Standard 26**

Affinity Fostering is registered with the ICO –Number A1015865

Affinity Fostering implemented a programme to ensure that it meets the requirements as directed by the new GDPR Legislation effected on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Affinity invested in the bespoke CHARMS Fostering Database in order to ensure all records/data is maintained in a secure and accessible manner. Appropriate training is provided to all new users and are reminded of their obligations under GDPR and Affinity's Confidentiality Policy.

We are governed by the same legislation as Local Authorities regarding access to files. Looked After Children, subject to their Social Worker's approval, can have access to their files on request. All records and third-party information is kept in the strictest confidence. Staff and Foster Carers receive training on GDPR Legislation and the Data Protection Act.

## **Foster Carer Recruitment, Training, Support and Reviews**

### **In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 13**

#### **Recruitment Criteria:**

Applications to become Foster Carers are welcome regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, race, disability, religion, or culture.

There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of an offence against a child, or any serious offence against an adult.

Anyone over the age of 21 may apply. There is no upper limit for Foster Carers. All applicants must be healthy and active to enable them to care appropriately for a child and this must be confirmed by their GP on a Coram BAAF AH1 medical form and then every three years on the Coram BAAF AH2 form.

It is a requirement that all prospective Foster Carers have at least one spare bedroom for a Fostered child.

## **Safer Recruitment**

### **In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 19**

Safer recruitment has been acknowledged as fitting within the wider context of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and the "Every Child Matters (ECM) Agenda".

"Working Together to Safeguard Children" states all agencies and individuals should aim to proactively safeguard and promote the welfare of children that the need for action to protect children from harm is reduced.

To achieve the above, Affinity Fostering has undertaken the following:-

- Senior Management and all staff team members are committed to Children and Young people's safety.
- Key Personnel have received Safer Recruitment Training.
- Safer Recruitment Statement on all Application Forms and Job Descriptions.
- Pre-employment/engagement Safer Recruitment Self Declarations must be completed prior to selection for interview.

- Ensure that Affinity Fostering have effective recruitment and human resources procedures, including checking of all new staff and volunteers, to ensure they are safe to work with children and young people.
- Follow procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff, Foster Carers.
- Have procedures about how to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people.
- Will annually review our recruitment procedures, including the renewal of DBS checks, eligibility to work in the UK and Social Work England (formerly HCPC) Registrations.

## Recruitment

### In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 13

- Affinity Fostering has clear written, recruitment and selection procedures for appointing Foster Carers, which also involves young people in care placed with the Agency.
- A welcome speedy response is given to all Initial Enquiries irrespective of whether they are received by telephone or via the Agency' Website.
- Initial contact will be made by the Business Services' Team who will filter appropriate enquiries to the Senior Supervising Social Workers who are the leads for Affinity's Foster Carer Recruitment and who will endeavor to make personal contact with the enquirer by telephone within 48 hours to arrange an initial visit. A detailed explanation of Fostering is given to the applicants and, if requested by the enquirer, an Initial Visit will be arranged as soon as possible and no longer than 7 days unless requested by the enquirer.
- A report following the initial visit will be submitted to Senior Management for the agreement to proceed at which point an information pack will be provided to the enquirer for completion. Alternatively, if the decision is not to proceed a letter will be sent to the enquirer, informing them of the reasons.

Applications that have been accepted will be notified in writing that their application has progressed to Stage 1 – initial checks and enquiries and are informed of when their application will move to Stage 2 – Assessment. Within Stage 1 Affinity undertake an initial Health & Safety of the home to ensure it is fit to foster together with a pre-assessment matching meeting which identifies any potential issues regarding matching young people alongside the applicants, the family constitution, pets, employment or due to the applicants' own preferences for approval ranges. Additionally, Affinity will provide a full explanation of its Matching Policy and criteria. This workshop will be led by an identified Senior Supervising Social Worker and the Affinity Business Support Team who respond to all Local Authority Referrals and liaise with Foster Carers regarding potential placements and who have extensive knowledge regarding Affinity's matching process.

- If the decision is to proceed the applicant(s) will be invited to a 2-day Basic Skills to Fostering Training which will be presented locally, or virtually if required by Senior Social Workers, an experienced Foster Carer and a Looked After Child where possible. The format of the training is derived from a programme produced by Fostering Network and is tailor made to fit the ethos of Affinity Fostering covering the principles of 'From a Secure Base' Dr Gillian Schofield.

Additional specifically identified training to provide further information and guidance to applicants is provided during the assessment process which can then provide additional evidence towards the TSD Standards that have to be completed within the first 12 months of fostering.

- A pre-panel meeting will also be held with applicants to provide them with information and guidance on what to expect when they are presented to the Independent Foster Panel.

On-going process:-

References and checks are undertaken from the age of 18 years.

- Disclosure and Barring checks
- Local Authority checks (upon application and every three years thereafter)
- Current or previous fostering organisation references/Protocol Meeting
- School/Health visitor reports (on own child if appropriate)
- Medical reports
- Birth children interviews
- Current and previous employment references
- References from all previous employment or voluntary work involving children and vulnerable adults
- Personal references (at least 2) who will also be visited by a Social Worker.
- Overseas checks where applicable
- Two health and safety inspections will be carried out including on any holiday homes /caravans, upon initial application and when nearing the completion of the assessment.
- Dog Questionnaire / Pet Questionnaire (For other types of animals)
- Financial – Landlord/Mortgage where applicable
- Ex-partners & children of an appropriate age from previous relationships will also need to be interviewed.
- GDPR Safety / Security Audit undertaken
- Verbal telephone reference to ensure authentication of written reference.

Throughout this process support is given to the applicants by the Administration Team who are experienced and qualified to ensure that this is a smooth and thorough assessment.

## Assessment

A qualified Social Worker will carry out a Form F assessment, using the competency format, as published by British Association for Adoption and Fostering (Coram BAAF) 2017. An additional Assessment report is completed for those Foster Carers who seek approval to be approved for Parent and Child placements. The Social Worker will visit the applicant's home generally on 6 - 8 occasions, to meet and collect information about all members of the household and their support networks. Any children within the household will also be interviewed separately. Adult birth children living independently will also be interviewed where appropriate.

The assessment can take up to 6 months but must be concluded within 8 months of date of acceptance of application and every effort is made to ensure that there is no unavoidable delay. All information obtained about prospective Foster Carers is held on file. Upon request this can be viewed under the Freedom of Information Act. References from external agencies (DBS, Local Authorities, Medical and professional references) are sought. The referees are made aware that the reference could be shared with the Applicant if they so request, under the Freedom of Information Act.

The assessment is supervised and signed off by either the Practice Manager or the Principal Social Worker and the completed assessment is shared with the prospective Foster Carers for their agreement, comment and signature.

The document is sent to the Panel Members at least 10 working days in advance of the Panel Meeting to enable full and proper consideration.

## **Annual Reviews**

The procedure for reviews is detailed and reflects the Statute law, Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011.

Foster Carer Reviews are held annually unless the Panel have advised for it to be held sooner, or there is a complaint or allegation that necessitates an earlier review. First Reviews will be presented to the Independent Foster Panel with further presentation of Fourth, Seventh Annual Reviews and three yearly thereafter for quality assurance reasons.

The review procedure is based on the core competencies as set out in the Coram BAAF Form F Assessment.

The Review is conducted by an Independent Reviewing Manager with the Foster Carers' Supervising Social Worker in attendance. The First Annual Household Review Report format is completed on the Five Outcomes with subsequent Review Reports based the Secure Base methodology and measured against the TSD standards for foster carers.

## **Guidance on the Purpose and Conduct of Reviews**

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (Regulation 29), the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) require that the suitability of Foster Carers is reviewed within one year of approval and at intervals of not more than one year thereafter.

The primary purpose of any Foster Carer Review is for a fostering service provider to satisfy itself that the Foster Carer(s) continue(s) to be suitable to carry out the responsibilities of fostering children/young people and to determine if the Foster Carer household remains an environment in which the welfare of any child/young person placed will be safeguarded and promoted and meets the expectations of Affinity Fostering.

Annual Reviews are also an invaluable opportunity for Affinity Foster Carers to give feedback on the level and quality of support received from the agency, including an appraisal of how their training and development needs have been addressed. Future training and development needs should also be identified as well as future support needs. Completion of a Foster Carer's Review is also the main vehicle within Affinity for routine updating of statutory checks/enquiries in relation to Foster Carers and for ensuring that the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there and is a safe environment. Affinity's Children's Participation & Support Team will seek one to one feedback from young people placed, which is age appropriate, as well as providing them with an opportunity to share their true wishes and feelings about their placement. The Administration Team will also seek feedback from both placing Local Authority Social Workers, Independent Review Officers, looked after young people's school and if appropriate from birth parents. Affinity's Supervising Social Workers will also seek feedback at the young person's Review, if appropriate. Foster Carer's own birth children are also invited to share their comments, if applicable.

Enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks will be carried out upon initial application. All Foster Carers will be subscribed to the DBS Update Service and annual checks of the register undertaken to ensure that no additional information has been included since their initial Enhanced DBS check was undertaken. All Enhanced DBS checks are undertaken on adult members of the household, Support network and will be renewed every 3 years (NMS, Standard 19).

In completing assessments of prospective Foster Carers, Affinity Fostering undertakes enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks in relation to other household members who are aged 18 years plus.

Medical Updates will be undertaken every three years with a Medical Questionnaire Update completed as part of the Annual Household Review process on alternate years.

Issues emerging from the updating or completion of statutory checks/enquiries will be fully explored with the individual.

A Coram BAAF Form F will have been completed for all Foster Carers. Coram BAAF Form AH1 is completed by the applicant's GP to ensure the applicant is fit to Foster. This document is also confirmed by Affinity Fostering's Medical Adviser who will add any necessary comments and their recommendation as to whether they believe the Applicant is fit to foster based on the information provided. Any issues arising from medical reports will be discussed with the Foster Carer.

Affinity Fostering is committed to Foster Carers having the maximum opportunity to participate in and contribute to Annual Reviews and will support and assist Foster Carers to achieve this objective. The Foster Carers' own Supervising Social Worker will be in attendance at the Review meeting in order to contribute to the discussion as well as support the Foster Carers. As well as making their own written and oral contributions Foster Carers will receive a copy of the completed Reviewing Officer's Report for comment regarding the accuracy and fairness.

Affinity Fostering ensure that all Foster Carers complete a new Foster Care Agreement (Care Standards Regulations 28(5)(6) and Fostering Service Regulations 2011 Schedule 5) following their each Fostering Review once the Agency Decision Maker has ratified their decision to remind them of their duties and responsibilities as well as any changes to their terms of approval. At Affinity Fostering, Foster Carer Reviews are completed:

- Not less than yearly as specified by the Regulations and Standards and where there has been a serious or significant incident or event in the life of a Foster Family which raises questions about suitability to foster and/or their capacity to provide appropriate care for fostered children/young people.
- Following a serious complaint and/or allegation of abuse in relation to a Foster Family.
- Following a standards of care investigation.

Detailed financial information and guidance is supplied to Foster Carers within their Foster Carer Handbook and Finance for Foster Carer's Policy and are also provided with a detailed annual statement. In accordance with economies of scale and the good working relationship we have with Local Authorities the fees paid to Foster Carers shall vary with sibling groups. This will usually mean a reduction per child per sibling groups of 2 or over.

If Foster Carers choose to take their young people on holiday and not take their respite entitlement this will be calculated and paid to them at the end of the calendar year.

Local Authorities may contact Affinity Fostering for details pertaining to charges (in addition charging information will be sent prior to agreement of any placement). Any additional support identified can facilitate as required additional rates.

Affinity Fostering hold contracts with the following Authorities:

- Essex County Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Commissioning Alliance (West London Alliance)
- London Care Services
- D2N2
- South London Commissioning Programme



Fee structures are agreed within those contracts.

Affinity Fostering also provide spot purchase services and are confident that we offer best value competitive fees whilst providing an outstanding service.

## **Panel**

### **In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 14**

All initial Foster Carer Assessments and First Annual Household Reviews will be presented to an Independent professional multi-disciplinary Foster Panel with the option to present Fourth, Seventh Annual Reviews and three yearly thereafter for quality assurance purposes. It is our expectation that the Foster Carers will attend Panel on their First Annual Household Review, and subsequent Reviews that are presented to Panel being supported by their Supervising Social Worker.

Whilst the Panel's main function is to evaluate Foster Carer applications, Fostering Household Reviews including changes to Approval Terms, it also acts as a steering group for the organisation maintaining and improving quality standards and practice as well as to offer advice and guidance on other matters as well as make recommendations as to the continued suitability as approved Foster Carers.

All prospective Foster Carers attend the Panel with their Assessing Social Worker.

The Foster Panel will make their recommendation about the suitability of the applicants and the range of their approval status.

A Panel Advisor will be available to advise Panel on any legislative and Care Standard issues. The Panel Advisor has undertaken appropriate training and continues to work with the Agency Decision Maker and Panel Chair on achieving the effectiveness of this role.

## **Agency Decision Maker**

Legislation requires that no member of a fostering Panel should take part in any decision made by a fostering service provider and effectively creates a distinction between a fostering Panel's recommendations and the separate decision-making responsibilities of the Agency Decision Maker. The Decision Maker will not participate in Panel meetings.

The Decision Maker will receive copies of all papers (agendas, minutes and reports) circulated to Panel members for Panel meetings. In making the decision, the Decision Maker will take account of Panel's recommendation and will see the Panel's final minutes. In complex cases the Decision Maker may need to clarify points with the Panel Advisor or the Chair. However, the Chair is not allowed to take part in the decision-making process and will need to be mindful of this.

Affinity Fostering Services Decision Maker, Chris Dingley is independent of the organisation, holding a BA (Hons) Social Work & Social Policy as well as a Diploma in Social Work, specialising in Fostering, Children & Families, Safeguarding and representing children in public law proceedings. Chris Dingley has also held the position of Fostering Panel Chair since 2012 for a number of Agencies and acts as an independent ADM to two other Independent Fostering Agencies.

The ADM will consider the recommendation and Panel Minutes within two working days receiving the Panel's Recommendation and final set of approved Panel Minutes. The prospective Foster Carer will be informed orally within two working days and written confirmation will be sent within five working days of the ADM's decision.

## **Training**

### **In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 20**

Affinity Fostering recognises that the needs of Looked After Children and Young People will change over time. To this end we actively support the continuous professional development of our staff and Carers through training. Training is a crucial element of Affinity Fostering's support to Foster Carers and staff team.

New Foster Carers undertake an Induction Workshop, including TSD information, normally within two weeks of their approval which is facilitated by appropriate Supervising Social Workers and Administrators. Foster Carer's Continuous Professional Development Plan (PDP) is considered within every Annual Review.

Newly approved Foster Carers will be allocated a 'Foster Carer Buddy' who will be an experienced Foster Carer able to offer peer to peer advice and guidance at the beginning of the new Foster Carers' fostering journey.

A full programme of training is provided annually comprising of E-Learning / Virtual and Face to Face training courses which are held in easily accessible local venues. The Foster Carer Agreement which the Foster Carers sign agrees to attending regular training which is a requirement and expectation of being a Foster Carer for Affinity Fostering. Foster Carers who have not attended training and have not submitted acceptable reasons will be taken back to Foster Panel to seek advice and guidance on way forward.

The core elements of the training programme are:-

- Safeguarding in addition CSE/CCE/Gangs/FGM/Radicalisation and PREVENT
- Safe Caring
- Effective Recording
- Providing a Secure Base
- Valuing diversity and promoting equality.
- Pediatric First Aid

Specific courses are arranged with external trainers for Foster Carers who have Looked After Children with an identified need.

Affinity provides additional quality training from external trainers at the two-day Foster Carer conference, which is held at a four-star hotel, where three training sessions are held over the two days and lunch, dinner and accommodation is provided. Foster carers are at liberty to use the hotel's leisure facilities, all funded by Affinity.

Affinity have engaged with multiple E-Learning training providers whose course library covers a wide range of relevant fostering core subjects, as well as other more courses that meet Foster Carer's individual needs which meet OFSTED requirements.

Foster Carers receive regular mail outs from the Government and professional bodies, i.e NSPCC, RoSPA, Kidscape informing them of any legislative changes or amendments and useful guidance on relative matters. The usage is recorded on the Foster Carer's Professional Development Record and how the learning is transferred into practice is considered.

## **Enhanced Training**

In addition, Affinity Fostering identifies Foster Carer's particular skills and interests and will source local education resources to provide Foster Carers the opportunity to gain recognition of new skills.

Experienced Foster Carers are trained to contribute to the Skills to Foster Courses for prospective Foster Carers, alongside a qualified experienced Social Worker, as deemed best practice by Fostering Network. Affinity will identify a suitably matched approved Foster Carer to act as a buddy to newly approved Foster Carers. A group of Affinity Foster Carers have compiled a short video sharing their personal views on what it is like to be a Foster Carer and in particular, a Foster Carer for Affinity. This is shared with new applicants during the Skills to Foster training.

## **Parent and Child Assessment Training**

Affinity Fostering provide a bespoke training package for Foster Carers who choose to develop their skills in Parent and Child Assessment. OFSTED approved E-Learning Parent & Child training will be completed by newly approved Foster Carers wishing to offer Parent & Child placements.

Affinity has an identified Lead staff member Social Worker for Parent and Child Fostering and provide regular Parent & Child Forums for Foster Carers and support groups for their Parent & Child placements.

## **Placements**

### **In accordance with NMS Standard 15**

Affinity Fostering offer a range of placements to Local Authorities for children and 0-18 years.

Placements available:-

- Long term
- Short term
- Bridging (minimum of one month)
- Respite
- Parent and child assessments
- Solo placements (with no other children in the household)
- Permanency
- Disability

In-depth information will be requested from the Local Authority to assess the needs of the child, prior to placement. Matching is of primary importance and the needs of the Looked After Child will be assessed carefully to assist this process.

A Matching Pro forma will be completed to ensure the best possible match for young people and will involve the Referrals Team, Foster Carer, Supervising Social Worker and Practice / Registered Manager. The views of other children both birth and Looked After will be sought if appropriate prior to placement as will the views of their placing local authorities.

All placements must be negotiated through the child or young person's Local Authority either through an individual placement contract or as part of a wider contract of service provision commissioned by the Local Authority.

Placements are made and monitored in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations and by using an individual Foster Placement Agreement which is prepared either before or at the point of placement. Individual Care Plans will be contributed to and promoted by Affinity Fostering.

Where a child is already in placement, the existing Child's Social Worker's views will be sought for additional placements that may be placed alongside the young person placed by their Local Authority.

## Placement Services

All children and young people placed with Affinity Foster Carers should have their own Social Worker from the relevant Local Authority or Social Care trust who will maintain contact with them throughout the placement, conduct statutory visits and make Care Planning Decisions with and for the child.

In addition to the child's Social Worker, a Supervising Social Worker is allocated to support and supervise each Affinity Foster Carer with the placements they provide. In addition, Affinity provides support from their independent Children's Participation and Support Team.

Affinity Fostering Supervising Social Workers will:

- Maintain frequent contact with the Foster Carer and children in placement through placement visits and telephone calls;
- Undertake monthly supervision of Foster Carers which is recorded and signed by the Supervising Social Worker and Foster Carer(s);
- Support and provide necessary reports for Children's Reviews, PEPs. Social Workers will attend all meetings where possible.
- Undertake a minimum of one of the two unannounced visits to the foster home per year, being supported by the Children's Participation and Support Team if necessary for the second visit;
- Provide advice guidance and support to the Foster Carer on the Safe Care of the children in placement.
- Participate in out-of-hours support to Foster Carers on a rota basis which is fully supported by a Senior Fostering Manager.
- Co-ordinate other support services as appropriate e.g. support work, respite care provision;
- Liaise with other professional service providers, who may be involved and contribute to formal meetings about Care Plans.
- Identify and respond to Foster Carer's training needs.
- Maintain up to date records on the progress of placements.

## Education

**In accordance with NMS Standard 8.**

Education is an important part of children's lives. Affinity Fostering is committed to maintaining children within the community and to this end whenever possible we ensure that the children are entered into mainstream and local special needs schools.

Affinity has a nominated Education Lead who actively communicates between Foster Carers, Local Authorities, Schools and Virtual Heads to ensure that all young people have an appropriate educational placement, or their education needs met in alternative methods. The Lead is notified of all new placements and will become involved as a liaison point at the commencement of placements should it be required.

Where appropriate Affinity Fostering will liaise with Virtual Schools in order to secure appropriate school resources for our looked after young people which will be initiated by the Education Lead.

Affinity also ensures that all achievements are closely tracked and recorded. Affinity Foster Carers will support and encourage all children to enjoy and achieve.

## Respite

Affinity Fostering provides 2 weeks paid respite to Foster Carers with placements. This entitlement will be calculated by Affinity Fostering Finance Manager at the end of each year.

Foster Carers are encouraged to use all or part of their respite entitlement to provide a family holiday for them and their looked after child/ren. If this is not possible it is hoped that they can identify possible respite Carers within their own family network, or utilise an identified Back Up Carer to enable the child to have continuity of care by people known to them. Affinity Fostering consider Foster Carer's support networks within the Form F Assessment.

Where ongoing support is necessary from the regular Carer's network, a Back Up Carer support assessment is completed.

Affinity Fostering also provide an Activity Holiday for young people, this takes place during the summer holidays which also provides respite to their Carers. This is in addition to regular activity days out which are normally organised.

## Children and Young People's Rights

Affinity Fostering believes that all Children and Young People placed with our Foster Carers have a right to:

- Protection from bullying, ridicule and emotional abuse in all areas of their lives.
- Protection from all forms of violence, including physical abuse and corporal punishment, in all areas of their lives.
- Protection from all forms of sexual exploitation, including prostitution and sexual abuse, in all areas of their lives
- A caring and warm environment that acknowledges their right to privacy and confidentiality within reasonable limits.
- An environment that positively acknowledges their ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality and any disability.
- The opportunity to develop their own sense of identity and family history, including encouragement in valuing their own language, food, clothing and social presentation.
- Consultation about their wishes and feelings regarding their placement and care plan, including information about their rights and access to the agency's and independent complaints procedures.
- An environment that actively encourages appropriate Social Behaviour by providing appropriate role models to encourage good citizenship.
- An environment that is educationally stimulating, encourages reading books and using a computer together with support when making all educational and career choices.
- An environment that actively meets their health and safety needs including the right of consent to, or refuse, medical examinations (dependent on age and understanding) and access and encouragement to a healthy diet and physical exercise.
- Accurate and appropriate information, advice and counselling regarding, drugs, alcohol, smoking, relationships and sex education.
- An Independent Visitor if they do not have regular contact with their family.

## Looked After Children

Affinity Fostering will work in Partnership with Local Authorities across London and the South East/Midlands including Lincolnshire/Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire/Hull/Stoke as well as providers further afield such as East Sussex and Torbay to provide fostering placements for children and young people.

All children/young people placed with Affinity Foster Carers receive a welcome letter and are informed of the Complaints Procedure on commencement of placement. These can be translated into languages to accommodate the cultural or learning needs of the Looked After Child.

Additionally, Young People are provided with an age-appropriate Young Person's Handbook which provides information about resources and information specific to a young person that is looked after, and services and social opportunities that are available to them locally.

This contains further information about what to do if they are not feeling happy and includes information about bullying and information on information on how to make a complaint with regards to the quality of care they are receiving.

'Have your say' forms are available within the process of completing our Foster Carers' Fostering Reviews and will be monitored by the Senior Management Team to ensure we are providing the best service possible. Along with the standard issues covered in the Placement Agreement- Affinity Fostering's Social Worker will ensure that Children are aware of their rights whilst placed with our Foster Carers with all the information that they will need with regard to pocket money, clothing allowance, savings travel and lunch money Birthday and Festival allowances.

Affinity Fostering's Supervising Social Worker will ensure that they meet and get to know young people that are placed with their Foster Carers to ensure that their views are heard and recorded. These recordings will be carefully monitored as used to improve quality in Affinity Fostering providing the best service possible.

Affinity Fostering ensure that regular updates of Children and Young People's progress and outcomes are recorded on the CHARMS database which allows for monitoring, review and sharing with the appropriate placing Local Authority.

Affinity Fostering monitor children's outcomes and progress by using the 'Wellbeing Worms' which were derived by consultation with our VOICES Children's forum to ensure that these are in a child friendly format and will be a meaningful record of their time in care. These supplement the Wellbeing Outcomes reports that are generated by the Supervising Social Workers for children's reviews.

## Safeguarding Children

### In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 4.

Affinity Fostering has a clear policy that is in line with Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011, Standard 4, Safeguarding children and as outlined in the Children Act (1989). Any child protection/safeguarding issue or allegation against Foster Carers or any employee will be reported immediately to both the Placing Authority and area Local Authority. In all cases the needs of the children are a priority and our staff would work in line with the host Safeguarding Team and OFSTED where necessary.

The Registered Manager and Practice Manager are the Designated Safeguarding Officers and will liaise with both the LADO and OFSTED where there are concerns around safeguarding.

Designated Officers Safeguarding Training' will be updated at least bi-annually.

## Participation

Affinity Fostering have one Children's Participation & Support Supervisor and three Participation & Support Leaders, and one Children's Support Worker whose main aims and responsibilities are not only to provide support to Foster Carers but also to engage and encourage all young people placed to have their views heard and to assist Affinity Fostering in reviewing and developing their policies and procedures to ensure that best outcomes for Affinity's young people are achieved.

Parent & Child Placements will have their own support groups, these are facilitated by the Participation/Support Leaders and relevant topics are discussed and assimilated which will benefit to the birth parents in placement in relation to the care of their child(ren).

This group has been extremely positive and allows the parent to feel less isolated and more included in the foster placement and ultimately in the care of their child. Minutes are retained and shared with group. Parents are also provided with a Memory Box when they arrive in placement so that they can collect baby mementos for safekeeping as part of the baby's own life story.

### VOICES

Affinity's Voices Group is a young person's council group comprised of young people currently in the care of Affinity Fostering Services. This group, facilitated by Affinity's Participation and Support Leaders, meet regularly to discuss, assist and advise Affinity on pertinent issues and ongoing working practices, enhancing the service Affinity provides to their young people, and empowering them in their lives with Affinity and beyond. An example of this is our Voice's campaign around Child In Care reviews in school, which received support from Nadhim Zahawi MP and both NAIRO and NIROMP. This culminated in an online and dissemination campaign with NIROMP, and Voices members attending and delivering to NAIRO's annual conference and NIRMOP's nationally represented meetings. Crucially, this has brought about national awareness to IRO influencers to change their ongoing practice.

The Voices group provide suggestions and feedback to experiences and proposed organised events. This included Affinity's annual holiday for our young people, which took place in August 2022 as well as specific training topics for the young people placed within Affinity.

Affinity have a value-adding project called the Independent Living Project. This one-on-one project with young people over the age of 15, over a 12 week period, covers core areas such as nutrition, budgeting and health, and includes individual tasks the young people complete with the support of Affinity's Participation and Support Leaders, to enhance their skills and empower them with knowledge and confidence in preparation for leaving care and going on to independent living.

## Complaints Procedures

Affinity Fostering's Complaints Manager is Lesley Day Smith – Practice Manager

Affinity Fostering's Complaints Procedure has been developed to always respond speedily & equitably with any Complaint made by Children/ Young People, Parents, Foster Carers or Social Workers.

Affinity Fostering has a comprehensive complaints procedure and have access to an Independent Complaints Officer if the need arises.

The Complaints procedure is included:

- Within the age appropriate Welcome Packs for children and young people;
- Induction Pack for Foster Carers and in addition within the Foster Carer Handbook
- Employee induction pack upon commencement of employment;

and

- Employee Handbook

# Complaints and Allegations Against Staff and Foster Carers

## Background

To ensure that Foster Carers are managed in an appropriate and proper manner, The Placement (of Children) Regulations and Vol. 3 of the Children Act Guidance requires that a complaint procedure to respond to complaints from Foster Carers in a manner that can be demonstrated to be open and fair is in place.

Affinity Fostering aims to deal with complaints quickly and effectively. Complaints can be made by, or on behalf of children and young people, by Foster Carers and by Affinity Fostering staff and also other Professional bodies and individuals. Complaints may range from minor concerns which require informal discussion, through to serious concerns requiring formal consideration in relations to standards of care and/or child protection matters. The outcome of complaints can range from discussion and advice, through to clear directions of essential actions to deregistration and possible prosecution.

Certain complaints indicate that a company, rather than an individual response is critical. The purpose of the Complaints Policy and Procedure is to clarify the process that must be followed when a complaint is made. The following documents should also be referred to:

- Allegations against Foster Carers and Staff Policy
- Child Protection Policy and Procedure
- Staff Disciplinary and Grievance Policies and Procedures
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- Customer Care Policy
- Children's Guide

## Complaints and Representations

Affinity Fostering have established written procedure for considering complaints. All complaints will be responded to and investigated by Affinity Fostering's Complaints Manager. A written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it and the outcome of the investigation. In addition to this the Regulation 35 Report which is submitted to Ofsted will contain a statement and summary of any complaints made during the preceding reporting period and the action taken in response.

There is a register to track all Ofsted Notifications to ensure that all are concluded as appropriate, should a complaint require an Ofsted notification to be made.

## Complaints by Foster Carers

The Foster Carer's Handbook which provided during the induction process gives clear guidelines on making complaints. Foster Carer's training covers making complaints. Specific training is also delivered on safe caring, managing complaints and allegations. Affinity Fostering offers 24 hour support service so complaints and allegations can be reported and dealt with 24/7, 365 days per year.

Affinity Fostering recommends that any complaint made by a Foster Carer could first be discussed with their Supervising Social Worker. This may resolve the complaint, if not a meeting will be arranged between the Foster Carer and the appropriate Manager to resolve any concerns. If an informal resolution cannot be reached the complaint will then be passed onto the Complaints manager – Lesley Day Smith to undertake a formal investigation. Any complaints will be escalated to the Registered Manager if considered necessary.



There are two stages within the Procedure to be followed should any issues or concerns raised by the Foster Carer not be alleviated through discussion with their Supervising Social Worker.

Part of this discussion may cover whether it would be more appropriate for the complaint to be directed to the local authority with responsibility for the child's placement under the local authority's complaints procedure. Consideration will also be given to the allocation of independent support to the Foster Carers during the investigation which will be funded by Affinity Fostering if appropriate. All Foster Carers have membership to FosterTalk who also provide independent advice and guidance to Foster Carers.

### **Informal Resolution – First Stage:**

Following receipt of a written complaint the matter will be investigated by the Complaints Officer. The Foster Carer's letter will be acknowledged within seven days. The investigation into the complaint will be completed within 28 days. The person carrying out the investigation will meet with the Foster Carer who can have a representative present at this meeting.

A letter of resolution or outcome will be issued in response to informal complaints by the Foster Carers by the Practice Manager, including details of how the matter was investigated, by whom and with the relevant facts to support the outcome.

This stage of informal resolution will be completed **within 6-weeks** from the official complaint.

### **Formal Resolution - Second Stage: (if cannot be resolved informally in the first instance)**

Affinity Fostering is committed to resolving conflicts and concerns at an early stage – **Stage One** - wherever possible, but in the interests of transparency and a commitment to individual interests/rights, individuals are able to complain at **Stage Two** in the first instance if they so wish. Affinity Fostering will ensure that complainants are kept informed regarding the progress of their complaint. In the event that any complainant is not satisfied at any stage, they may and should avail themselves of the right to make a complaint to the Regulatory Authority.

## **Representation in Respect of Terminations**

Termination of approval is usually considered in line with either the Foster Carer's Annual Review or a serious standards of care investigation following a substantiated complaint. If the Independent Fostering Panel recommends de-registration of the Foster Carer and Affinity Fostering's Agency Decision Maker supports and ratifies this recommendation, this is confirmed in writing by the Agency Decision Maker with the reasons allowing a 28 day period for the Foster Carer to make representations. Foster Carers will be made aware of their right to lodge an appeal with the Independent Review Mechanism.

## **Complaints Made by Children, Parents or Local Authority Social Workers**

It is important that children and young people who are being looked after by Affinity Fostering are satisfied with the service they receive.

Apart from what may be considered good practice, the Children Act 1989 provides in legislation for children to have this right.

Upon the commencement of their placement, children and young people are provided with an Affinity Children's Guide which sets out the process of how to complain.

In order that Affinity Fostering can investigate the complaint fully, the complaint has to be about services provided by Affinity Fostering Services to children and their families. It can be made by either:

- Children and young people looked after by Affinity Fostering.
- Or it can be made on behalf of the child or young person by:-
- A parent;
- Any person who is not a parent of his/hers but who has parental responsibility

An independent organisation called Voice are very experienced in working with young people and any difficulties they are currently experiencing:

### **Coram Voice (Formerly VOICE For the Child in Care)**

Gregory House  
Coram Community Campus  
49 Mecklenburgh Square  
London  
WC1N 2QA  
Phone: [020 7833 5792](tel:02078335792)  
Email: [info@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:info@coramvoice.org.uk)  
<https://www.coramvoice.org.uk>

### **OFSTED**

Children and young people and Foster Carers have a Statutory Right to an Independent Complaints Procedure through OFSTED.

Complaints Manager  
NBU  
Piccadilly  
Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

**Tel: 0300 123 4666**

## **Complaints Raised by Affinity Fostering Employees**

Affinity Fostering has a robust supervision and appraisal system, supported by an Open Door Policy to resolve potential grievances without the need to evoke the formal grievance procedure.

Employees should be encouraged to raise these issues informally in a confidential meeting prior to implementing the grievance policy. This may solve the problem quickly and protect good working relations. All information will remain confidential unless a criminal offence has occurred or there is a risk of personal danger.

It is essential that grievances from employees are treated fairly and consistently.

The grievance procedure is a legal requirement and both parties, Affinity Fostering and the employee, are required to follow the procedures.

A grievance is defined as a complaint by an employee about an action which their employer has taken or is contemplating taking in relation to them, and this can include actions of other employees. It does not apply to dismissals and normally does not apply to complaints about other disciplinary action, as an employee must use the appeals procedure in these circumstances.

It is important that employees feel comfortable to communicate openly within the company. Therefore, if any individual has a grievance Affinity Fostering will make every effort to address this to find an equitable solution via the grievance policy.

## **Quality Assurance**

**In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 25.**

Affinity Fostering ensures maintenance of a rigorous QA monitoring system of all Policies and Procedures. Additionally, individual files and recordings are considered monthly to ensure current information is available to all staff.

Quality Assurance is a standard item on the Monthly Management Meetings and Independent Panel Meetings.

Panel Members assess and evaluate all Form F Assessments and Fostering Household Review Reports as well as the performance of the Panel meeting itself and members residing on that Panel.

In addition, Panel Chair will also confirm that Assessments presented to the Independent Panel will evidence that applicants and / or Foster Carers have met or continue to meet the Fostering Competencies as required under the Fostering Standards and will provide a summary of all Panel's recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. Additionally, the Panel Advisor will also submit a feedback form to the Agency to ensure that any actions or recommendations are acted upon appropriately.

Affinity invites feedback, suggestions and ideas for improvement/development from Foster Carers, young people in placement and other relevant third parties.

Foster Carer/Management Keeping in Touch Days are conducted in venues, or virtually if necessary, whereby open invitation is given to local Carers to join for lunch to share ideas and thoughts as to what could be improved within the service or to confirm what is good and working for them.

Affinity's Administration Team use appropriate QA Checklists when auditing all tasks undertaken and data collation required for but not exhaustive of:

- Form F Assessments
- Foster Carers' Supervisions / Annual Household Reviews
- Unannounced Visits
- DBS/Medical/Household Document Renewals
- New placements including receipt of all essential documentation
- Appropriate Risk Assessments

Foster Carers' Recordings Data will be maintained by Affinity Fostering's Registered Manager in all the areas listed in Schedule 8 of Care Standards Act 2000.

## **Foster Carer Forum**

Affinity place significant importance on its VOICES group where we consult with our young people about the development of our policies and practice but primarily to ensure our children are listened to in relation to the service, we provide them.

It is equally important to seek the views of our Foster Carers and to ensure that you also feel heard and have a voice in the development of the agency and its business. This is integral to our agency's ethos of putting children and Foster Carers at the core of what we do and as such a new Foster Carer Forum of elected members was set up in October 2022.

Role/Purpose of the Forum:

Forum members will become advocates of other Foster Carers in relation to those issues that affect the collective wider Foster Carer Group and play a significant role in working with the Senior Management Team in the development of policies and other matters.

The Forum will be a core group of Foster Carers who offer representation to other Foster Carers across the agency. This group will focus on providing Foster Carers with the opportunity to meet with the Senior Management Team and to feel able to raise any concerns, or alternatively, ideas that may help the agency continue to develop its practices and service delivery.

Meetings:

Meetings will be held quarterly with formal agendas and minutes distributed to all members.