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# STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

2019



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# Introduction

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose of Fostering First.

Fostering First is a non-statutory independent Children and Family Services provider, which is part of the Key Assets Group.



The Key Assets Group (KAG) is a social enterprise, who provides children and family social services in Europe (Finland, Sweden, Ireland), North America (USA & Canada) and Australasia (Australia, New Zealand & Japan). The Key Assets Group (KAG) Board provides governance, oversight and accountability for all companies across the Group.

Fostering First provides services to Tusla the Child and Family Agency and receives referrals for foster care placements from seventeen Tusla Areas.

Our purpose is to provide positive and lasting outcomes for children, young people, families and communities.

Key to what we do is our culture and core values of:

- Recognising everyone counts and is accountable
- Providing high quality and safe services
- Achieving excellence through continuous improvement
- Cultivating knowledge, innovation and learning.

The Fostering First Statement of Purpose provides a range of information, which is intended, for a wide audience including:

- Fostering First staff
- Foster carers and prospective foster carers
- Children, young people, their families and other clients who receive services from Fostering First.
- Tusla (The Child & Family Agency)
- Health Service Executive (HSE)
- Colleagues from other Social Care Agencies and Independent Fostering Agencies
- The general public

The Fostering First Statement of Purpose is intended to meet the requirements arising from:

- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020
- Child Care (Amendment) Act, 2007
- Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995
- Children First Act 2015
- Children First – National Guidance for the Protection & Welfare of Children 2017
- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017
- Child Care Act 1991
- Child and Family Agency Act 2013
- Children Act 2001
- Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012
- Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Person) Act 2012
- Criminal Justice Act 2006, Section 176: Reckless Endangerment of Children Protected Disclosures Act 2014
- Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 and GDPR
- Domestic Violence Act 1996
- Education (Welfare) Act 2000
- Education Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2014
- Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997
- National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016
- Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998
- The Child Care Act 1991
- The Children Act 2001,
- The National Standards in Foster Care 2003
- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU)2016/679

+This list is not exhaustive

# 1 Aims and Objectives of Fostering First

## 'Quality Care in a Family Setting'

Fostering First is an organisation offering high quality, compliant family placement services, at a local level, to children and young people who are in the care of Tusla. Fostering First provides opportunities for these children and young people to achieve their full potential and to live fulfilling lives in the community.

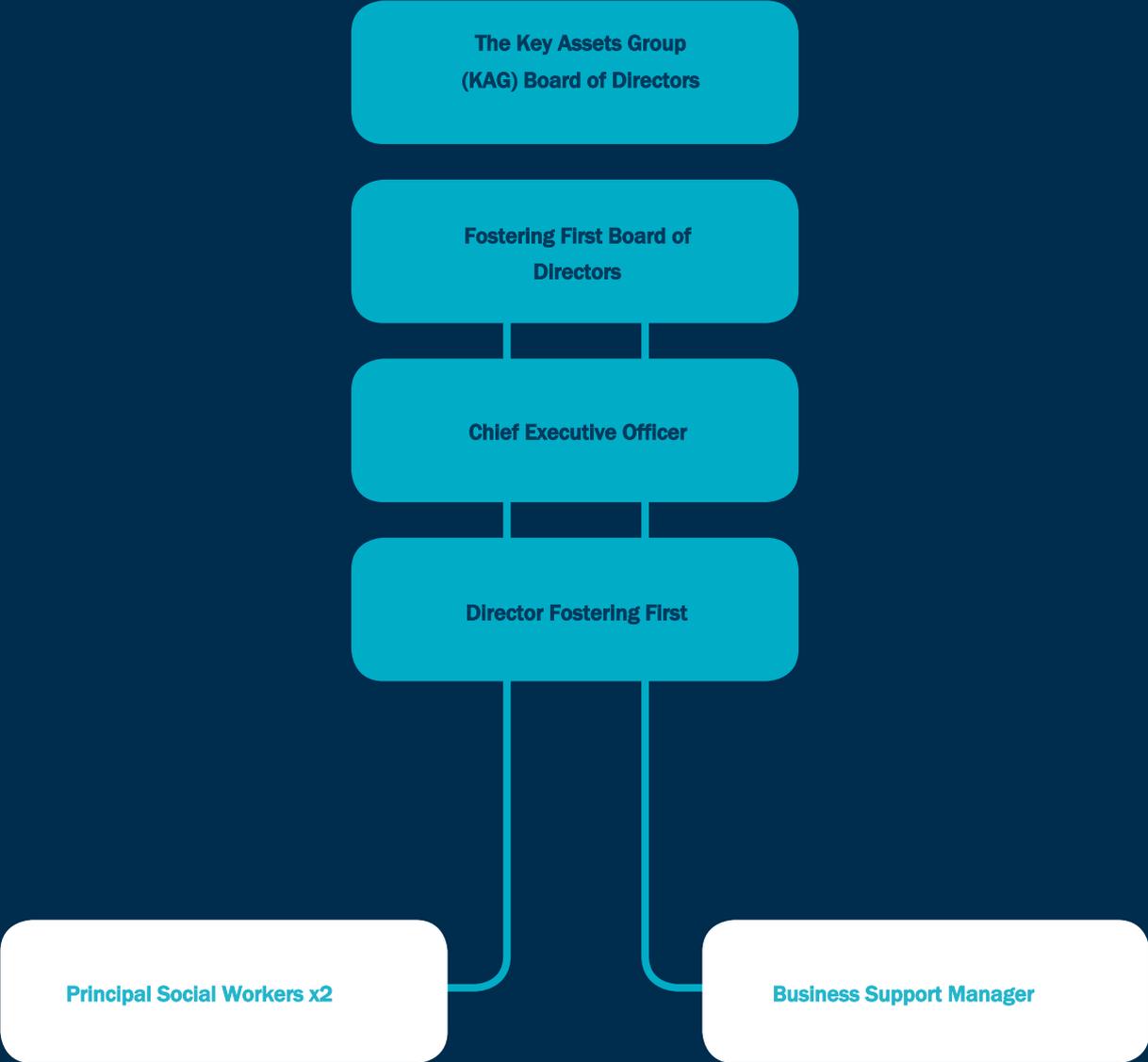
Fostering First focuses on providing flexible and tailored services to children and young people including those who are sometimes described as "difficult to place". This is not a description that Fostering First particularly welcomes or seeks to define but it is useful in emphasising that the agency often receives referrals for placement of children and young people who have complex and complicated histories and who make considerable demands on foster carers and whose placements may require more intensive support.

## Fostering First provides:

- High quality care in a family setting for children and young people who are placed with Fostering First foster carers.
- A commitment to a child/young person centred approach
- Stability in the lives of children and young people to enable them to fulfil their potential.
- Respect for and promotion of the racial, cultural, community of origin, religious and linguistic backgrounds of children and young people.
- Consideration for the gender, sexuality, disability of children and young people when making placement decisions.
- A commitment to the recruitment of foster carers from diverse backgrounds so that Fostering First can offer appropriate placements for children and young people.
- 24 hour support for foster carers and children/young people.
- An inclusive partnership based approach which embraces children and young people, their families, foster carers, Tusla and other agency colleagues.
- A commitment to the ongoing learning and development of foster care households.
- A community based service.



# 3. Fostering First's Management & Reporting Structure



The Fostering First Director is part of the European and US Directors Group. This group comprises the Directors of all of the Key Assets Group (KAG) European companies and meets three times annually to monitor service performance and implement service development. Additionally the group are responsible for the implementation of the group's strategic plan.





## 4.2 Training provided for Foster Carers

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It is recognised that fostering can be demanding and complex. Fostering First is committed to providing high quality training that is accessible and relevant to all our foster carers. Training is viewed as an important element of Fostering First's support to foster carers. Each foster carer has a Personal Professional Development Plan (PPDP) which includes a learning and development portfolio and evidence relating to learning and development, e.g.. Induction, training certificates, qualifications, reflective learning logs, records of learning and development.

### Training is provided to:

- Help foster carers become better at fulfilling the requirement of their role.
- Improve knowledge, develop and refine skills.
- Establish an explicit, positive framework of values, which promotes equality of opportunity.
- Encourage foster carers to reflect and look at the effects of discrimination in all parts of the community, recognising that they care for children in the context of a wider society, and that for many children discrimination is a fact of everyday life.
- Ensure that all foster carers are competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm.
- Encourage foster carers to take responsibility for their own professional development through the maintenance of their PPDP.

### Training at all levels incorporates certain key elements:

#### Statutory

- Children First e- learning module and the role of mandated persons under the Children First Act 2015.

#### Core Curriculum (Mandatory)

- Working with children who have been abused.
- Safe caring.
- Managing difficult behaviour.
- Managing and promoting contact.
- Valuing diversity and promoting equality.
- Good Record Keeping.

#### Additional

- Preparing young people for moving on and adult independence.
- Attachment Theory and Practice (3 Day Training).
- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families (TCIF) (3 Day Training).
- First Aid.
- Health and Safety.
- Health care of fostered children/young people.
- Education of fostered children/young people.
- Empowering children/young people.
- Identity and self esteem.



# 5. Services Fostering First Provides

## 5.1 Fostering Placements

Fostering First offers a wide range of placements for children and young people of all ages with foster carers. Fostering First placements are underpinned by our unique Key Care Team Model which stems from practice wisdom in the area of foster care. It provides a description of the essential aspects found to be effective in achieving positive and lasting outcomes for children, young people and families from the work of the Key Assets Group (KAG) across the world. The Key Care Team Model complements the Key Assets Group (KAG) strength-based therapeutic approach centering on the needs of the child, young person and family. The carer or family member are the central agent of change in the child or young person's life, with the focus on collaboration of the professionals, and others involved so there is an integrated approach in the best interest of the child.

### What is Key Care?

- A dynamic, integrated, systemic approach to working together to make a positive and lasting difference for children and families.
- Key Care is dynamic and evolving. It meets the individual needs of children and young people and their carers or family members whilst enabling the Key Assets Group (KAG) to achieve the goals of the organisation.
- Key care is a therapeutic, relationship-based approach, with staff and carers/families collaborating as an integrated team, drawing on theory relating to trauma, attachment and systemic ways of working.
- Key Care Teams are led by Social Workers, providing regular supervision, support and practical assistance to carers, liaising and consulting with a team of professionals supporting the carer and child in placement.

*\* Diagram Appendix 1*

All placements are 'matched' to ensure a good fit between the needs of children and young people and the skills and experience of foster carers to meet those needs. Many

Fostering First foster carers have extensive experience and/or training in specialised areas of care, for example, caring for those who have been sexually abused or dealing with challenging behaviour.

Needs and placement solutions are carefully and continuously monitored and supported by Tusla – either through an individual service level agreement, or ideally as part of a wider service level agreement commissioned by Tusla. In line with the Regulations, each placement will be subject to a Foster Placement Contract.

Fostering First has specifically designated 'Placement Officers' who are the first point of contact for enquiries about placement choices.

### Standard Placements

All standard Fostering First placements incorporate the following supports:

- A standard fostering allowance in line with DCYA guidelines

- An allocated Link Social Worker who provides a responsive flexible support service
- Out of hours emergency support which includes a call centre, a duty social worker and senior manager on call
- An Education Officer who provides support to children and foster carers to ensure that children have every opportunity to reach their full educational potential
- A team of Social Care Worker's to provide direct support to young people
- Therapeutic support is provided by our team of experienced therapists
- Carer groups which meet monthly to promote peer support, information sharing and development opportunities
- A comprehensive training programme updated annually based on carer development needs
- Family activity days to provide informal opportunities for fun and building social networks
- Up to 10 nights of supportive respite

### Enhanced Placements

Fostering First recognise that some children and young people in foster care require additional inputs to support their placement and to assist them through a difficult period. Fostering First can offer an enhanced placement to meet those needs in a flexible and responsive manner.

For further information on our enhanced placements please click here.

### Specialist Placements

Specialist fostering gives children with complex needs a placement within a family setting. Specialist fostering was developed to provide family placements for children who are in residential care or who may be at a high risk of entering residential care. Fostering First is striving to provide long-term sustainable specialised foster care placements for children and young people with a history of multiple placement breakdowns and behavioural issues.

The model of work involves a 'wraparound' of support services including social work, childcare support, education and therapy which would sustain highly demanding placements.

For further information on our enhanced placements please click here.

### Supported Lodging Placements

Fostering First's Supported Lodgings carers provide accommodation, support and a family setting to young people over 15 years who cannot live at home, but are not ready to live independently. These young people will have gone through a range of experiences and will require your support in making positive choices in their lives.

For further information on our Supported Lodging placements please click here.

## 5.2 Placement Regulation

All Placements of children and young people with Fostering First foster carers are made and monitored in accordance with the National Standards in Foster Care 2003 and the Child Care Regulations 1995.

### **This means that:**

- All Foster Carers are properly approved, reviewed and have signed a 'Foster Carer Contract'.
- All children's placements are made using individual 'Foster Placement Contracts' which are prepared either before or at the point of placement and which include essential information sharing and care plans.
- Wherever possible, pre-placement planning is undertaken, including introductions between foster carer and children). For emergency placements, immediate care and placement planning priority and matching is continued throughout the early days of the placement.
- A Service Arrangement should be in place prior to the making of a placement between Fostering First and Tusla, where this is not in place each placement has a specific Funding Agreement.

## 5.3 Social Work Service

All children and young people placed with Fostering First foster carers should have their own Social Worker from the relevant Tusla area who will maintain contact with them throughout placement, make care planning decisions and conduct statutory visits

In addition to the child's Social Worker, an Fostering First Link Social Worker is allocated to support and supervise every Fostering First foster carer with the placements they provide.

### **Fostering First Link Social Workers will:**

- Maintain frequent contact with the foster carer and children in placement through placement visits and telephone calls
- Make unannounced visits to the foster home
- Provide advice, guidance and support to the foster carer on their care of children in placement
- Participate in out-of-hours support to foster carers
- Co-ordinate other support services as appropriate, for example, child care work, respite care provision
- Liaise with other professional service providers who may be involved and contribute to formal meetings about care plans
- Identify and help respond to foster carer's training needs
- Keep careful records of the progress of placements
- Maintaining good communications with the child's social worker

Fostering First employs experienced and CORU registered Social Workers who can offer a wide range of expertise. For example, some of our staff are trained and experienced in undertaking Life Story Work with individual children/young people and can offer this service where so requested. Fostering First social workers also offer training on Attachment, TCIF and Trauma.

## 5.4 Children's Support Services and Young People's Participation

Fostering First's Support Service is integral to providing a range of effective needs-led services for children/young people and foster carers.

The development of the Support Service is based on the agency's belief that, if appropriate, packages of support are available to foster carers, when children and young people who would otherwise be unable to live within a family environment are able to do so. The Social Care Worker is part of a team that works directly with young people where it is agreed with Tusla that additional support is required to assist in meeting the young person's need to realise their full potential.

### The range of services offered may include:

- Day support to maintain a placement. This could be an educational programme or structured activities because a child/young person is not attending school; support provided within a classroom setting or support to meet an unforeseen emergency in a foster home, for example.
- Transport for a child/young person to attend school, contact visits, Fostering First activities or holidays, or where appropriate, transport for foster carers.
- Supervision of contact between a child/young person and his/her birth family.
- Social activities for foster children/young people.
- Fostering First social activities for the sons and daughters of foster carers.
- Out of hours duty support in response to crises or other emergencies.

The Fostering First Young People's Participation Strategy encourages the involvement of young people in the organization through the Young People's Forum "Chatter Matters"

The Support Service is designed to be flexible and responsive and the above examples are not exhaustive.

Support Service teams are managed by a Children's Officer who is supervised by an Fostering First Senior Manager. Additionally the Children's Officer works closely with Link Social Workers to ensure that the voice of the child/young person and their participation is central to the delivery of services within Fostering First.

- Fostering First staff working within this part of the service includes Social Care Worker's and sessional workers, All staff are fully vetted and supervised by Fostering First managers.

### Children's Participation

The right to participation is a fundamental right of children and young people. This right is outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. FFI believes that children and young people should be facilitated to express their wishes, feelings and views about the care they receive and should be enabled to participate in decisions affecting their lives. All children placed with FFI will be provided with the opportunity to have their views and opinions heard regarding all aspects of their care.

There are various means of facilitating children's participation in FFI including:

- A children's forum Chatter Matters has been established to promote children's rights and to give children and young people a voice and influence on the fostering service that they receive from FFI. The FFI Children's Officer is responsible for co-ordinating the forum and it is made up of a group of young people in their mid to late teens. The purpose of the forum is to give children/young people in foster care with FFI the opportunity to:
  - Speak out about issues that affect them
  - Be listened to, valued and understood
  - Be involved in planning and developing services
  - Provide user feedback about the quality of service FFI provides
  - Realise their rights.
- A peer led Chatter Matters forum has been established for younger children. This group is run by a group of older teenagers and is an opportunity for younger children to talk about issues that affect them and to give feedback on services.
- A Youth Interview Panel has also been established to give children and young people the opportunity to have a say in who gets to work with children and young people in FFI.
- An Independence Retreat for young people aged 16 and upwards is held on a yearly basis to support young people as they prepare for the transition to Independence.

The Children's Officer arranges, facilitates and co-ordinates children and young people's participation in FFI by organising activities and events for children and young people to get involved in throughout the year. Mechanisms for children's participation are developed based on feedback from children and young people. This may include organising workshops based on need identified by children and young people. The Children's Officer also organises summer family activity days on a yearly basis.

## 5.5 Education Service

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Fostering First believes that it is every child/young person's right to receive an appropriate education that will help them to achieve their full potential. Research has shown that the majority of children/young people in care, want to attend a mainstream school and gain nationally recognised qualifications that they can use as currency in the job market or as a passport to further education. It has long been recognised that a good indicator of earning potential is educational attainment at the age of 16.

### Education Officer

Fostering First has a Senior Education Officer who is a qualified and experienced teacher. Their responsibility is to find appropriate education provision for every child/young person of school age placed via the agency. Our education team have extensive experience of working in the field of education; many are teachers who have worked with children who present challenging behaviour or have special educational needs.

### School Placements

Wherever possible a mainstream school place is sought unless this is not the best way to meet the needs of the child/young person. The Education Officer liaises with Tusla Social Workers, Education Welfare Officers, Schools, Educational Psychologists, foster carers and the children/young people themselves to ensure appropriate education is found and any inter-authority funding issues resolved.

Once an education placement has been identified, an Education Officer will monitor the child's/young person's progress and report to reviews and planning meetings. The Education Officer also gives advice to foster carers on how best to support the education of the young people they have

placed with them. We recognise the crucial role played by our foster carers in encouraging children/young people and valuing their achievements.

At times, education placements need support and the Education Officer can often help to arrange this – perhaps by liaison between the various agencies – occasionally by giving direct support, either personally or by recruiting suitably qualified tutors to work with the young person.

### Out of School Support

Not all school placements run smoothly and sometimes children/young people have to wait for appropriate provision to be allocated to them. If a child/young person is out of school for any length of time, the Education Officer will usually be able to arrange some alternative education.

Fostering First can demonstrate that, on average, over 94% of children and young people placed in Fostering First foster homes who are of school age consistently attend appropriate education establishments.

## 5.6 Therapy Service

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Fostering First has a commitment to a child centred service through the promotion of a broader understanding of the emotional needs of children/young people and the implications for their carers.

### Qualified and Experienced Therapists

Fostering First employs qualified, accredited and experienced therapists and psychologists who work locally in multidisciplinary teams.

The Governance of Fostering First's Therapy Service have taken account of the ethical guidelines of professional organisations which oversee training and accreditation of therapists.

### Multi-Disciplinary Teams

All young people placed with us will receive consideration of the ways their placement will be able to address their therapeutic needs. This process is facilitated by having a Therapist as part of a multi-disciplinary team supporting placements for example through, consultation with the carer(s), liaison with external mental health providers etc.

### Support to Placements

Therapists can work with others in the Fostering First team supporting the young person in placement to consider and agree who, in each situation is the person best placed to carry out particular pieces of work.

The focus of our attention is to make placements more successful and to help young people have positive relationships and experiences. Information gained will also help us develop a system of identifying and measuring the beneficial aspects from our approach in order to continue to inform practice.

### Individual Therapy for the Young Person in Placement

If therapy for the young person is indicated this will be supported with suggestions about which approach (e.g. art therapy, play therapy, psychotherapy) is recommended and the implications of this. Fostering First can source a suitably qualified therapist and work in conjunction with Tusla to facilitate such an intervention. Throughout a young person's placement a Therapist is available for consultation by the carer and those supporting the placement.

## 6. Number of Foster Carers

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The Key Assets Group (KAG) has over 959 foster carers. (June 2018)

Fostering First currently has 105 foster families (17th May 2019).

The number of placement requests always outstrips the number of foster carers with suitable vacancies and so foster carer recruitment is a continuous and high priority activity.

## 7. Number of Fostered children/young people placed

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There are over 1,059 children and young people in placements across the Key Assets Group (KAG) and Family Support is provided to a further 716 families.

There are 123 Children and Young People placed with Fostering First Foster Carers (17th May 2019)

- > 75.6% (93) have been in placement with Fostering First for 12 months or over.
- > 27% (33) are children who are of ethnic backgrounds other than White Irish.
- > 32.5% (40) are female, 67.5% (83) are male.
- > Average age of children in placement is 11 (10.64 to be exact)

## 8. Staffing

The Key Assets Group has over 1200 full time and part time permanent staff (June 2018).

Fostering First has:

1x Group Chief Executive Officer (Key Assets Group)

1x Head of Finance & Commerce (Key Assets Group)

1x Director

2x Principal Social Workers

1x Business Support Manager

2x Team Managers

1x Quality and Training Manager

9.6 x Link Social Workers. 1x Children's Officer

2x Social Care Workers

1x Assessment Coordinator

2x Senior Social Work Practitioner 2x Therapist (1 WTE)

1x Senior Education Officer

2x Fostering Advisors

1x Placement and Marketing Manager

1x Senior Business Support Officer - Finance

2x Business Support Officers (Placements/ Carer Approvals and Reviews)

1x Receptionist.

The Group employs senior managers (Directors) who have operational management responsibility for service delivery within defined geographical areas. They are supervised and supported by the Group Chief Executive Officer.

Additional support is provided by a Central Support Team including, Finance, Commercial Activity,, IT, Database Management, Human Resources, Corporate Communications and Marketing.

All Senior Managers within the Group are professionally qualified in a range of areas including social work, teaching, behavioural science, nursing and youth work with considerable post qualifying experience across the public, private and voluntary social care sectors. Many already hold or are in the process of obtaining management qualifications.

Some social work staff, in particular Team Managers and

Senior Social Work staff undertake specialist responsibilities in relation to foster carer recruitment, reviews of foster carers, foster carer training and coordination of work with foster care approval committees.

All FFI Link Social Workers are registered with CORU under the requirements of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2004.

Social Care Workers are professionally qualified and have experience of working with children in care.

All Education staff are qualified teachers with previous teaching experience, often with children and young

people who have special educational needs or present considerable challenges.

The Therapy Service requires that therapists hold appropriate qualifications, full membership of a training body that includes registration with a nationally recognised organisation and have relevant experience. Therapists have professional indemnity insurance in place.

FFI's Children's Officer/ Child Care Workers have obtained the Degrees, Certificates or Diplomas in Child Care or a relevant qualification.

In addition to permanent staff, FFI has a pool of contracted workers who undertake work for the agency. The majority of these workers are employed within the Children's Support Service.

A considerable number of people work for FFI on an independent, contracted basis across a variety of roles, for example, social workers completing assessments of prospective foster carers, education support workers involved in direct work with a child/young person temporarily not attending school or providing additional input within a classroom setting. FFI also employ the services of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).

For all contracted staff, verification of any necessary formal qualifications in relation to the work undertaken is assured and FFI carries out a range of checks and enquiries, comparable to those for permanent staff, to ensure that the welfare of children and young people is safeguarded.

All staff including contractors who undertake work for FFI – have job descriptions, contracts of employment and/or contractual project briefs..

# 9.Complaints and Outcomes

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The Representations and Complaints Procedure places an emphasis on resolving complaints at a local level, i.e. Stage 1 . Records of investigations and outcome of complaints resolved informally are held by the Complaints Manager and collated in summary form for analysis by the Quality Assurance and Service Improvement Team and the Board of Directors.

Stage 2 complaints are those where resolution at Stage 1 has not been possible or where a complainant has elected to invoke Stage 2 of the procedure direct. Complaints of this nature are dealt with by the Fostering First Complaints Manager and Independent Investigators are appointed to carry out formal investigations. Complaints are maintained on a central database and are reviewed quarterly by the senior management team.

The Representations and Complaints Procedure has scope for a complainant, if dissatisfied by the response received at Stage 2, to request that the matter be referred to a Complaints Review Panel comprising the Chief Executive or another Group Senior Manager or a person with relevant background experience who is independent of the organization e.g. a representative from the Irish Foster Carers Association.

Fostering First is committed to implementing an effective process for responding to and addressing complaints about the services we provide. We encourage our staff and foster carers to be receptive and sensitive to complaints made about our services, and ensure that the voices of children are listened to. We are committed to proactively resolving any issues of disagreement or shortfall in our services, and regard complaints as a potential learning experience contributing to service improvement.

All stakeholders are informed of their right to complain and the processes to be followed. Accurate records are maintained of all complaints and outcomes, and complaints, representations and feedback are included in the monthly report for the the Key Assets Group (KAG) Board

# Appendix 1



The Key Assets Care Team Model Diagram