



'Innovative Solutions - Positive Outcomes'

Statement of Purpose

"Large streams from little fountains flow, Tall oaks from little acorns grow."



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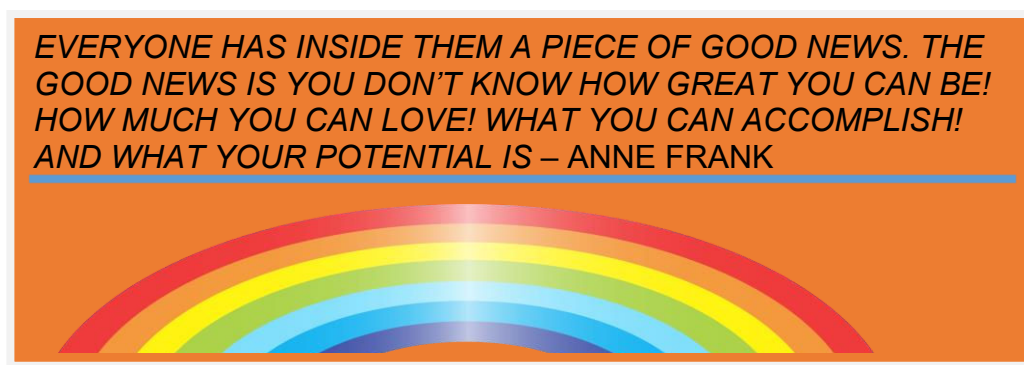
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OUR VISION

Following the successful operation of residential care homes and supported living services in the North East, The Acorns Fostering Service was founded to enhance the services that we offer to Local Authorities for children and young people in their care.

We believe that our foster carers are our greatest asset, forming a crucial part of the professional team around the children and young people in our care. Our foster families are without exception, committed, optimistic, enthusiastic, very hard-working, accepting and non-judgemental. We all work together to ensure that our children and young people have access to all of the opportunities available to their peer group and that they experience safety, security, fun, laughter and inclusion in all areas of their lives.

Our **VISION** is to change the lives of young people by providing stability and



consistency, working together to re-establish their trust in adults so that they can explore their world from a secure base, in the knowledge that they are unique, amazing and loveable.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The Acorns fostering service promotes a therapeutic parenting model to meet the needs of the children and young people in our care, directed by our consultant clinical psychologist. We continually search for innovative ways to improve outcomes for our children and young people and provide excellent training opportunities and support services for our foster families to empower them in their daily practice.

Our MISSION is to provide outstanding professional therapeutic fostering services informed by quality, innovation, value and positive responses to change.

OUR ACTION STATEMENT

We place the child at the centre of everything we do and recruit foster families who have the emotional and physical capacity to meet the needs of our children and young people without compromising their own familial relationships. We acknowledge the inevitability of change and recognise individual strengths and limitations and promote a company-wide culture of innovation, embracing change as an opportunity to improve what we do.

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." *Charles Darwin*



STATUS AND CONSTITUTION

Acorn Care (NE) Limited (Fostering at the Acorns) is an independent fostering provider, a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985.

The Acorn Care Board of Directors meet regularly to review the company wide performance and key performance indicators.

The responsibilities of the Board are:-

1. Development of the group's vision and mission and the prioritisation of action.
2. The formal approval and prioritisation of the statement of purpose.
3. The continual review and development of the company structure.
4. The review, development and approval of company-wide policy.
5. The approval of the company business plan at least annually.
6. The allocation of budgets.
7. The review of performance and compliance with current legislation.

Acorn Care is committed to promoting foster family participation in the company's direction, acknowledging that every stakeholder forms an important part of our team. We hold regular gatherings and encourage free and open dialogue about the satisfaction of our foster families with the service that we provide. When possible, we invite all of our stakeholders, including panel members, to our training events and seek to create an ethos of inclusion for all concerned. The children and young people in our foster families are consulted to the level that they can cope with and our supervising social workers aim to see the young people on their own, in placement, at least 4 times a year where appropriate.

THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WE WORK WITH AND FAMILIES THAT CARE FOR THEM



The Acorns Fostering Service works with children and young people aged 0 – 17 and young adults aged 18 plus who may wish to remain with their foster families under a “staying put” arrangement. Where appropriate, we strive to keep siblings together and some of our families have the capacity to take sibling groups.

Any child who has been removed from their family will have suffered grief, loss and bereavement regardless of the circumstances in which they were removed. Dependent upon their assessed needs, our consultant clinical psychologist will draw up a therapeutic personal development plan for their foster family to work with. Placement stability is key and our hope is that when a child moves into an Acorns family, it will be their final move within the care system.

Additional support is provided to foster families such as regular respite, increased supervision, assistance with contact and specialised training. We recruit foster carers from the local area and areas where the Local Authorities that we work with prefer to place their children and we seek to reflect the demographic of our children and young people in our foster families. We have a robust matching process and we work hard with our Local Authorities to meet the changing needs of our children and young people throughout the term of their time with our families.

All of our families are taught about attachment theory and are encouraged and supported to provide the “secure base” model described by Kim Golding.

We have a mix of new and experienced carers who meet regularly and share their experiences, knowledge and enthusiasm which promotes good communication and networking amongst our families.

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Parent and Child Assessments



Some of our families provide homes for parent and child assessments after completing relevant parent and child training. Our foster carers who undertake this work assess the parent's ability to bond with their child and monitor their ability to meet the child's emotional and physical needs, whilst modelling good parenting techniques, supporting them to become the parents that they wish to be.

Whilst undertaking work of this nature, the supervision of the foster families is increased to weekly or more often if appropriate.

FAMILY AND FRIEND FOSTER CARE (kinship fostering)



Where possible, we offer our foster families 21 nights respite every year. Not everyone utilises this allowance but we are informed by our foster families that at times and in certain circumstances, families and couples may need to re-group and have some time away from the children that they care for. We acknowledge that for those children who have been confirmed as being placed permanently in a family, or for very young children, their foster families going on holiday without them is not always good practice, is exclusive and can have a detrimental effect on their relationship with their foster family. However, our foster families, through consultation, have told us that they wish to have the option of having respite from the foster children not least in case of an emergency such as a death in the family and that 21 days is considered fair across the industry.

We believe that in these circumstances, it is in the best interests of the children and young people to spend their respite with friends or relatives of the foster family as it normalises their experience of family life. With the consent and agreement of the children's or young person's social worker, we assess the suitability of the family friend or relative and undertake a health and safety check on their home. We require them to sign a confidentiality agreement, give them a copy of our child protection and safeguarding policy and supervise them throughout the period of respite, undertaking at least one supervisory visit and ensuring that they have all of the relevant contact numbers, including the out of hours number.

We also speak to the child or young person to ensure that they are happy to stay with the nominated friend or relative and make sure that they are seen by our supervising social worker when they visit during the period of respite. In preference, we like the friend or relative to actually stay in the child's foster home to minimise disruption to the child although clearly, this is not always possible.

MATCHING

We endeavour to match children and young people with families that can meet their needs both emotionally and practically. We complete a matching checklist for every referral that we receive in relation to each family with a vacancy before proposing the match to a Local Authority. All of our foster families are approved to take children aged 0 – 18 to allow flexibility but having such a wide range of approval requires a robust matching process to ensure that our families are working with children who are best suited to their abilities.

We pride ourselves on our knowledge of our foster families and how they work best but without exception, they are all warm and nurturing and are able to offer safe and welcoming homes to the children in their care.

ACHIEVING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (recruitment of foster carers and working therapeutically)



The Acorns Fostering Service has selective recruitment criteria for foster families, only assessing those who are willing to work with children and young people of all ages, any ethnicity, every culture and all races. Anyone can foster provided that they are aged 21 or over, are UK resident and they have a spare bedroom. The team at Acorns upholds this ethos and will consider all applicants who meet this criteria, believing that diversity amongst our foster families helps us to meet the requirements of our Local Authorities and the children that they place with us.

Prospective foster carers are assessed for their robust family relationships, resilience, optimism and commitment to helping a child on their journey through life. We undertake an initial visit within one week of receiving an enquiry, during which we assess the families understanding of fostering and explore their reasons for wishing to foster. Those applicants wishing only to work with a certain age-group are re-directed to other agencies and where appropriate, towards adoption as we believe that anyone who wishes to foster or adopt is a precious resource and we look to guide them to do so in a way that is best for them, their families and our children and young people.

If a family apply to become foster carers with us and they are not currently fostering, we undertake stage 1 checks in their entirety before progressing to the in-depth assessment and analysis required in stage 2. If the family are currently fostering, we run stage 1 checks and the stage 2 assessment concurrently. During the stage 2 assessment, the prospective carers are invited to attend all of our training and their response to the training forms part of the overall assessment. Once the family have been successfully presented to our fostering panel, they are allocated a supervising social worker who speaks with them at least weekly and visits them at least monthly when they have children in place. We have regular gatherings and training events and an “open door” policy for all of our carers who are always welcome to visit. There is a duty helpline available outside of office hours manned by experienced social workers ensuring that our foster families do not feel isolated or alone. Our foster families are reviewed annually and presented at our fostering panel at regular intervals to continue their registration. All complaints or allegations are dealt with immediately

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however and presentation to panel may occur in response to these dependent upon the circumstances.

The Acorns Fostering team believe that if properly trained and supported, foster families can provide the therapeutic environment within which our children and young people can begin to come to terms with their trauma and loss and grow in self-esteem and confidence, learning to thrive in the knowledge that they are unique and precious. It is the foster family that provides the secure base that every child needs and it is their ability to do this that makes our foster families so special.

All of our families take a therapeutic approach to their work with children and young people, looking for the reasons behind presenting behaviours, addressing the cause of the behaviour rather than the behaviour itself. They provide a therapeutic environment in a nurturing family home and support our children and young people through education, independence training and leaving care.

Every foster family has a dedicated supervising social worker and has access to 24 hour support from a duty worker together with direct access to our clinical psychologist for advice on any questions that they have regarding the children in their care.

The Acorns Fostering Team places the child at the centre of everything that we do and every decision that we make is with their wellbeing in mind. We are passionate about achieving positive outcomes for our children and ensuring that their journey through the care system normalises their experience of life and re-establishes their trust in others, helping them to achieve positive outcomes that otherwise would have been beyond their reach.

TRAINING

“Knowledge has to be improved,
challenged, and increased constantly,
or it vanishes.”

(Peter Drucker)

We offer an excellent training programme, some of which is mandatory and must be completed within 12 months of approval, with the remainder being optional. We like to adapt our training programme to meet new demands and changes in legislation and are committed to providing high quality, relevant subject matter delivered by specialist trainers who are experts in their field. Our clinical psychologist delivers a 10 week course exploring attachment theory based on the secure base model expounded by Kim Golding.

We feel that investment in our foster carers is never wasted and that high quality training ultimately pays for itself in improving outcomes for our children and young people.

COMPLAINTS, CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING



The Acorns Fostering Service's number one priority is to keep the children in our care safe from harm. We have a robust recruitment and retention of staff policy together with a complaints policy, a confidentiality policy, a safeguarding and child protection policy and a child sexual exploitation policy. All of our staff and foster carers are aware of the policies which are strictly adhered to and fully comprehensive and appropriate to any given situation.

Complaints are taken seriously and addressed immediately, especially if they concern an expression of dissatisfaction by a child or young person. Our children and young people are told how to make a complaint in the welcome pack that they receive when they join us and all complaints will be dealt with by either the Registered Manager or the Responsible Individual. If the complaint is about either the Registered Manager or the Responsible Individual, the complaint will be dealt with by a Director at board level. Allegations are handled robustly but sensitively and additional support is given to foster families in the event that an allegation is made against them. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn and to improve the services that we offer and we regularly review and monitor what we do and how we do it to assure the highest quality in every area of our service.

Every child and young person has a generic risk assessment and safer caring plan which are reviewed every 6 months to ensure that they remain current and relevant. These documents can be reviewed at any time in response to life events and once a child reaches the age of 11, a specific child sexual exploitation risk assessment is undertaken which is also reviewed twice a year as a minimum. The Acorns Fostering service follows the procedures and guidance provided by our local safeguarding partnership and follows their protocols for children and young people who are missing from care. Our child protection and safeguarding policy is reviewed at least annually.

All of our policies and procedures are available to all of our stakeholders via our website and can be produced in any format or language to suit the stakeholder's requirements.

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THE TEAM

NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF
THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED PEOPLE CAN
CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED IT IS THE
ONLY THING THAT HAS. (Margaret Meade)

We are a small team, consisting of a Responsible Individual, an Interim Manager, a Senior Practitioner, a Supervising Social Worker and a Senior Administrator. As a team, we are passionate about what we do and are determined to provide an outstanding fostering service for our children and young people.

Julie-Ann Foxton – Responsible Individual – Julie-Ann is one of the founding Directors of Acorn Care and was instrumental in the recruitment and setting up of the fostering agency. Julie-Ann has personal experience of living within a residential placement as a young person, which was a significant factor in her motivation to work with her fellow Directors to establish Acorn Care. Julie-Ann attends meetings between the staff and Directors to discuss operational issues and is also a member of the Fostering Panel.

John Walker – Interim Manager – John had a previous career as a Royal Air Force Policeman, as an oil rig worker and as a Prison Officer. Whilst working as a Prison Officer he saw a need to work with families and children. In his spare time he took on sessional roles in a children's home and as an outreach worker. After working directly with children, he decided on a career change. John qualified as a Social Worker in 2007 from Northumbria University. On qualifying he worked for a local authority in Child Protection for a year before moving into fostering. John gained experience as a Supervising Social Worker before moving into Placements. John is passionate about improving outcomes for children and assessing, supporting and developing foster carers.

Viv Longstaff – Panel Administrator – Viv has been with the fostering agency since its inception in 2013 and handles all the administration work for the service from the recruitment of new carers through to taking minutes at the Panel meeting and post approval. Her previous experience working in a local authority Children's Services department gave her the valuable background knowledge for the role.

Viv is a committed member of the team and enjoys meeting up with our carers at training sessions and other events, which she organises, to help make them feel part of our 'fostering family'.

Joyce Virth – Senior Practitioner – Joyce joined the Acorns Fostering team as Senior Practitioner in June 2023. Her social work career began working for a local authority as a support worker in 1993. She qualified as a social worker in 1999 and completed a Diploma in Higher Education, both qualifications were gained from Sunderland University. Joyce has over 30 years' experience of working in a social care setting including homeless hostels, a housing aid charity and a children's secure unit. Working in local authorities she has gained experience from supporting vulnerable young people in child protection, looked after and leaving care teams and has been a Team Manager of a fostering team. Joyce also has a qualification in Achieving Best Evidence in Child Protection. Her values are to always endeavour to ensure that children and young people's welfare is paramount, and that their needs are at the centre of everything she does. She believes that children and young people should have an enjoyable childhood, with good parenting and education, and a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.

Gerard Hennessey – Supervising Social Worker (part time) – Gerard qualified as a Social Worker in 1996 and worked in Children's Services for Durham County Council until 2005. In this role he worked with children, young people and families under Child in Need, Safeguarding and Looked After procedures completing assessments and reports for Child Protection Conferences, Looked After Reviews and Court Proceedings. He visited children and young people in foster and residential placements and completed direct work with children and young people to obtain their wishes and feelings. In 2005 he became employed by Cafcass (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) as a Family Court Adviser representing children and young people in Family Court Proceedings as a Children's Guardian. He recently worked as a contractor doing Form F Assessments in respect of new applicants wishing to become foster carers and joined Acorn Fostering Services in June 2023.

DISTRIBUTION

This statement of purpose is available on our website and copies are given to every stakeholder when they join us. It forms part of the children's welcome pack and can be made available in any language or format that makes it accessible to all.