



Supported Fostering Services  
Statement of Purpose  
South London & Surrey





*'We work in partnership with Foster Carers and Local Authorities to enable children and young people to grow, develop and achieve their full potential within a stable, caring family environment.'*

*Andrew Stirk*

**Andrew Stirk**  
**Founder & Chief Executive**

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The Supported Fostering Services Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

## Aims & Objectives

The Supported Fostering Services Charitable Trust provides high quality foster placements supported by a care package based on the needs of each individual child

We offer exceptional levels of support and guidance to our trained, experienced and dedicated carers who are clustered around each of our offices in Kent, Essex, London and Cardiff.

Carers receive a premium, accessible service from our fully qualified social work teams with the personal touch we know they value so much.

Our proven record of working in partnership guarantees local authorities a flexible service tailored to their child care priorities.

Our charitable status is founded upon the following purpose:

***‘To help children and young people in need being looked after by local authorities, by the provision of support and assistance to foster carers and the children and young people themselves.’***

***‘To support quality foster placements for children and young people looked after by local authorities.’***

We believe that high levels of quality, support and services are vital to sustain placements, and to operate and promote a non-discriminatory environment.

***‘To enable children to grow, develop and achieve their full potential within a stable, caring family environment.’***

We believe that children and young people in our care are individuals with their own specific and distinct capabilities and needs. All have difficult and sometimes abusive life experiences, that requires a holistic approach covering their social, physical, emotional and educational development.

**Submission to Charity Commission approved July 2001**



## Principles of Care

These eight core principles are fully integrated as the foundation of what we do and why we do it:

### **CHILD-CENTRED DECISION-MAKING**

The needs and wishes of the child are at the heart of all our work.

### **EQUALITIES**

Working practice does not disadvantage or discriminate on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion or age.

### **NEEDS-BASED SERVICE PROVISION**

The child's needs are paramount as the basis for key practice and resource decisions, such as our matching with appropriate carers and the child's individual service package. No child should be denied a service on the grounds of cost.

### **ATTACHMENT THEORY**

Understanding a child's background, issues in placement and in establishing a care plan provides the foundation of our working philosophy.

### **PARTNERSHIP**

Close communication with local authorities, other professionals and the birth family is essential to be able to implement and monitor the care plan effectively. Decisions about children's lives should be grounded in evidence-based knowledge.

### **CONSISTENCY**

Children's right to safety, stability and consistent positive attitudes to help them make sense of their world. Continuity from communication with the professional network and the birth family is also vital.

### **MULTI-DISCIPLINARY**

Provide packages of care tailored individually to the child's needs from a team including our qualified social work staff, play therapist and on a consultancy basis psychologist, counsellor, family therapist and education specialist. To develop excellent working relationships with local schools and health service professionals.

### **QUALITY**

Monitor and maintain the highest quality threshold in accordance with the National Standards, effective supervision, adherence to best practice, pro-active innovation and simply saying 'no' to referrals when we are unable to meet the child's needs.



A group of children are playing tug-of-war in a grassy park. A girl in a red shirt is in the foreground, smiling and pulling on a blue and white rope. Other children are visible behind her, also pulling on the rope. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

## Status & Constitution

Supported Fostering Services (SFS) started in 1994 when the first foster carer were approved. By 2001 The Supported Fostering Charitable Trust was established and registered with the Charity Commission. This progressive move best reflects the ethos, motivation and drive of the agency's work. It also establishes clear lines of accountability throughout the organisation. All staff and carers are members of the charity with the right to elect trustees.

The Board of Trustees consists of co-opted members who offer their skills and experience from a wide range of backgrounds. In addition, there are two Carer Trustees elected by foster carers. This level of partnership at board level represents important benefits to the agency by combining external expertise with the practical day-to-day working experience of carers.

All members are invited to the Annual General Meeting where the Trustees' Annual Report is considered. The meeting provides a forum for discussion and for members to raise questions directly to the Board.

## Inspection, Registration & Approval

SFS was established in England in 1994. We are regulated and inspected by Ofsted and have been rated 'Outstanding'. Our offices are located in Kent, Essex, Lewisham and North London. In addition our Cardiff office is regulated by the CSSIW.

We are committed to continual improvement and development to meet our objectives. Part of this process is a Quarterly Care Review to monitor and evidence key performance indicators.



## Foster Care

The core of our service is the provision of a range of foster placements with experienced, trained carers skilled in working with children who have had difficult life experiences.

Following a rigorous assessment, we provide pro-active support and consultation and a comprehensive on-going training programme. This combination remains the foundation of successful placements, empowering foster carers as partners in the agency.

We believe that children should have the opportunity to live in a family environment that values their identity and background. We endeavour to offer placements that match the child's culture and origins, and to avoid trans-community disruption.

We take great care in the placement process. We will offer a match only if the needs of the children and the capabilities of the carers are compatible. Just because we have a bed does not mean that we have a placement.



## Placements

The skills and expertise of our carers as part of a package of child-centred services enable SFS to offer a range of placements right across the age range from babies to teenagers.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Decisions about children should be grounded in evidence-based knowledge. Qualified staff provide multi-disciplinary assessments as part of the local authority care plan for court, possible reunification with birth family and planning for permanency, including concurrent planning.

### **SHORT-TERM**

Task-centred placements to offer children security during the development of their care plan.

### **EMERGENCY & RESPITE**

Our 24-hour service allows us to place a child at any time of the day or night.

### **LONG-TERM PLACEMENTS**

We are able to offer permanent care with some carers who welcome this commitment.

### **INDEPENDENCE & AFTERCARE**

We ease the transition for young people into independent living plus outreach support.

### **SIBLING GROUPS**

We ensure that sibling relationships are maintained, whether this is best served by them living together, or in neighbouring foster homes.

### **PARENT & CHILD**

Assessment and development of parenting skills around a structured programme.

### **UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN**

Children who have arrived in the UK with out their parents need the safety of a stable family environment.

## Disability Service

This dedicated group of foster carers and specialist staff provide family placements for children with a disability. The purpose of the service is to offer otherwise disadvantaged children the same opportunity of family life as any other child.

Built on our existing principles of family care, children and carers receive a bespoke package of care tailored to their individual needs.



## Services for Children & Young People

We aim to tailor packages of care for each individual child. At SFS no child is denied a service on the grounds of cost. Services are provided just when the child needs them, a flexible, needs-based response geared at the child's pace and avoiding drift.

At SFS children from different families do not share a bedroom. In other words, carers must have at least one room available for children who are fostered.

### **THERAPEUTIC SERVICES**

Therapeutic services play an integral role in our services to children and young people.

Fast track access to a range of skilled practitioners ensures the right service for each child when they need it.

### **PLAY THERAPY**

Play therapy is a mode of therapy that helps children to explore their feelings, to express themselves and to make sense of their life experiences.

Play is children's natural medium to learn, communicate and to explore their worlds. Recovery from difficult life experiences can be facilitated by a Play Therapist allowing a child freedom of expression in a safe and trusting environment.

Conventional talking therapies may be inappropriate for children and young people who struggle to put their feelings into words. Play Therapy allows children the opportunity to explore and understand these feelings.

Play Therapy can offer such children a space in which the feelings they have can be expressed and contained. It cannot change what has happened but it can promote resilience within each child to enable him or her to discover a more hopeful view of the world.

All therapists hold a Post Graduate Diploma in Play Therapy and are Registered Members of the British Association of Play Therapists. As well as providing therapeutic input to children and young people our therapist also consultation with carers and staff.

### **ART THERAPY**

Art Therapy is a form of Psychotherapy that uses art media, as its primary mode of communication. Children who attend Art Therapy need not have previous skill or experience in art: the Therapist is not primarily concerned with making an aesthetic or diagnostic assessment of the person's image. The overall aim is to enable a person to effect change and growth on a personal level through the use of art materials in a safe and facilitating environment. Art Therapy is based on psychodynamic principles. The art work can hold many levels of meaning and it is the person who explores this, supported by the Therapist.

The relationship between the Therapist and the person in therapy is of central importance, but Art Therapy differs from other psychological therapies in that it is a three way process between the person, the Therapist and the image or artefact.

## **THERAPEUTIC LIFE STORY WORK**

Life Story Work provides children and young people with a comprehensive process of discovery, exploration and understanding of their history. It is essential that a child or young person is able to understand their lives and the various twists and turns that have led them to be living within a care environment.

We do not feel it is adequate to provide a Life Story Book that a child or young person has not had the opportunity to explore or to challenge. The approach to this work is therefore led by the child and young person who is encouraged to work through a chronological life map, which incorporates their life events and relationships. It is through this process that a child or young person is able to seek clarification of life events and to contribute their own memories and challenge their thoughts, hopes, nightmares and cover stories.

We do not simply tell children and young people about their lives but help them process the information they hold within themselves, as well as the information we have gained through access to Social Services files and interviews with members of the child's or young person's birth family or previous carers.

## **OTHER THERAPEUTIC SERVICES**

Following an assessment of need we are able, in conjunction with the placing local authority, to commission services from a range of fully accredited specialists to provide a therapeutic approach that the child requires.

This includes psychology, psychiatry, educational psychology and family and psychodynamic therapy.

## **PREPARATION FOR INDEPENDENCE**

A plan for independence is drawn up in partnership with the young person and the carer, alongside the Pathway Planning process. This identifies the particular strengths and the needs of each young person and the resources that are available to achieve the young person's aims and objectives.

SFS support includes guidance and assistance around the basic tasks of daily living and the resources and emotional support to empower the young person. This includes the provision of a grant to assist the move to independence.

## **CONTACT**

Where contact is in the interests of the child, it is important that it takes place in a warm, safe setting where the child and parent, birth family and other significant people can make the most of their time together. All our offices have welcoming, comfortable rooms with toys and play equipment. Supervision and reports can be provided. Where appropriate contact can take place in the carer's home, if this is safe for all household members and the best place for the child. Transport for children to and from the sessions is available.

We expect that the social worker, the birth family and SFS sign up to a contact agreement that sets out all the arrangements and expectations. Parents can expect to be welcomed in a non-judgemental environment.

## **EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT**

SFS believe that looked after children deserve the best possible opportunities in education to learn and develop.

The SFS Virtual Head is an experienced and highly skilled Education Consultant supporting Supervising Social Workers at PEP, LAC and education meetings. The aim is to ensure that the young people receive their full educational entitlement, suitable provision and support via the Pupil Premium. As well as challenging schools where needed, support is offered to schools by the agency, meeting an unmet need that may otherwise compromise the young person's education by enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological profile of the young person. Individual tuition, one off assessments and observations in school are also available. This helps to avoid possible triggers and support the young person to form and maintain appropriate relationships.

SFS recognises that children and young people from disrupted backgrounds often find formal educational settings difficult to manage.

While most children remain in their current schools we work partnership with the placing local authority to identify appropriate schools and secure a place when most appropriate. If a young person is out of school for a period of time, the Education Consultant is able to provide education in the placement. We work hard to ensure that young people are not excluded for their behavioural needs, that they remain in school and where needed we help to secure Education Health and Care Plans so that young people who need special schools or specialist support can access it.

## **ROOMS AND FACILITIES**

The facilities at each of our sites are available for a variety of purposes such as contact (including supervision), tuition, meetings and reviews. We make our facilities available to local authorities whether or not children are currently placed.





## Services for Carers

Foster carers deserve the best possible support. Foster care can be ultimately rewarding and exhilarating, but it can be a rocky, uncomfortable road at times. We know what our carers want because we ask them: high quality accessible support with the personal touch. SFS is structured to achieve these aims, so carers do not undertake the journey alone.

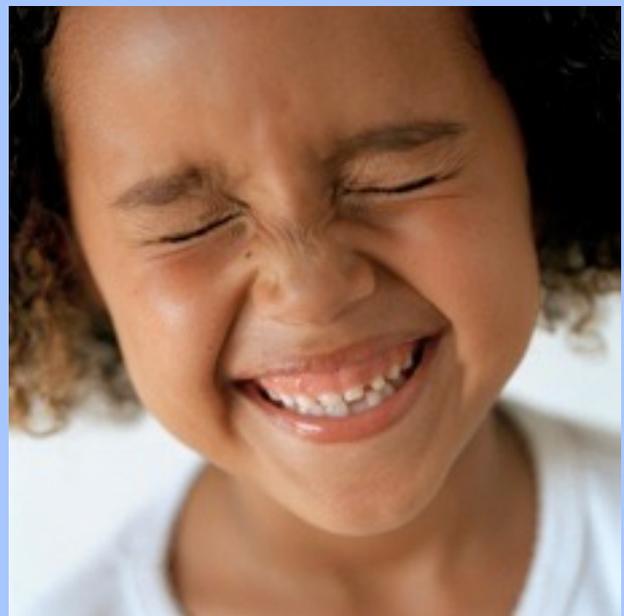
### **SUPPORT & ADVICE**

Every family works alongside their own allocated supervising social worker based in their local office. Because of their protected workload – each worker supports no more than 10 to 12 families – social workers have the space to devote to a high quality service. Consultation from our therapeutic team is also available if, for instance, carers are addressing behaviour that is especially tricky.

Our carers are clustered within a radius of around 45 minutes traveling time of their local office. As a result the agency and our resources are easily accessible. They get to know the staff and other carers from their office. Informal support networks develop with other carers living locally. Each local office develops a sense of identity, the personal touch backed by the strength of a larger organisation.

Monthly consultations for carers facilitated by a clinical psychotherapist are held, this enables carers access to specialist advice, support and strategies to help children and young people deal with their complex emotions.

Supervising Social Workers are part of these sessions, so they can ensure that strategies, advice can be carried forward into practice.



### **24 HOUR SUPPORT**

Our on-call service ensures that a member of the SFS social work staff is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to provide advice, support and guidance and to deal with emergency referrals from local authorities. A senior manager is additionally available as back up.

This service is highly valued by our carers but is sparingly used, a measure of our success in empowering our carers to effectively handle the issues that arise with the children in their care

## **THE SFS TRAINING PROGRAMME**

SFS is committed to provide an extensive rolling training programme for all our carers. Sessions take place in each of the offices, and increasingly staff attend alongside carers, two further examples of the sense of SFS identity and working together.

It is a condition of approval that SFS carers are committed to their continuing development and that they attend training. Our Annual Foster Carer Reviews identify development plans in conjunction with the carer, which are then confirmed by the Panel. We understand the time commitment involved, especially as carers lead such busy lives anyway! Most courses are within school hours in their local office, enabling carers to be available for children at the beginning and end of the day, and a crèche is provided. Some courses are run in the evenings, weekends or online. We use a variety of trainers from outside the agency, which ensures a broad, up to date approach.

All trainers encourage a non-judgemental, open environment where sharing and listening is welcomed, and life learning and experience is valued. Feedback at the end of every session is essential, and comments are taken seriously when planning our programme in the future.

## **ALLOWANCES & EXPENSES**

There is a clear structure for allowances and expenses with a system for carers to claim expenses. All payments are made promptly with any queries resolved within 24 hours. Advances are available to carers at the start of a placement if required.

## **RESPIRE**

SFS offer carers up to 21 nights paid respite when in the best interest of the child as reflected in their Care Plan.

## **SOCIAL EVENTS**

Various social events are organised throughout the year, in conjunction with the carers. These include the popular summer barbecue and Christmas party, outings and evening events.

## **FOSTER TALK MEMBERSHIP**

All SFS carers are members of Foster Talk, paid for by the agency. This provides a variety of benefits including independent advice and a 24 hour legal helpline



## Services for Local Authorities

At SFS we provide more than just fostering. Our enhanced packages of care ensure that the goal of better outcomes for looked after children is a pragmatic, achievable objective.

SFS provides services of the highest quality:

- a range of placements with experienced, trained carers;
- a full range of social work and therapeutic services;
- a package of care tailored to the needs of each individual child;
- our inclusive fee ensures not only that each child receives the services they need; there are also no 'hidden extras';
- 24-hour availability;
- contact facilities.

We have a proven track record of working in partnership with local authorities. We actively encourage regular dialogue; as an agency we are large enough to provide the full range of services, but light on our feet so that we can respond to local needs. We come through on Best Value: as a charity we are able to deliver the highest standards at a realistic rate.

SFS can help local authorities as they progress towards essential child-focussed goals:

- the child remains at the centre of decision-making;
- high quality packages of care, including foster placements, embodying best value;
- increased placement choice;
- local placements ensure family ties can be maintained and local mainstream services accessed;
- placements more likely to reflect children's origin and culture;
- enhanced placement stability;
- service delivery is monitored and evaluated.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss what SFS can do for you.



A photograph of three children (two boys and one girl) laughing and playing in a large outdoor sprinkler. The water is spraying from the right side of the frame, creating a misty atmosphere. The children are in the foreground, and the background is filled with lush green trees and foliage. The scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a summer day.

## The Recruitment & Assessment Process

People from all walks of life make excellent foster carers. Whatever their background or experience, they need one crucial quality, the ability to understand and meet the needs of looked after children and young people. Our whole assessment process is therefore geared to finding people with these special qualities to give our children the best possible care.

We ensure a high quality threshold by:

- ensuring all aspects of the assessment process are covered by qualified SFS social workers;
- keeping all assessments in-house, ensuring a consistent approach;
- selecting only the best applicants;
- ensuring prospective carers and staff have the time and space to complete their work together;
- using the nationally recognised BAAF assessment format.

## **SEVEN STAGES OF ASSESSMENT**

### **1. THE ENQUIRY**

An information pack will be emailed or posted within 24 hours of a potential carer contacting SFS. The pack contains information about fostering in general in and about SFS in particular.

Included are forms that ask brief details of the family, their child care experience, if any, and their interest in fostering.

### **2. THE INITIAL VISIT**

Our social workers will visit the family in their own home to explore the nature of fostering in more depth and to ensure the family meet our basic requirements. From the outset applicants are actively involved in the assessment process; they must decide if fostering is right for them. We are open about our expectations and share the competencies they must achieve.

### **3. THE SELF ASSESSMENT FORM**

Applicants complete a detailed form providing information about

their family, background, childcare experience and motivation to foster, which enables us to identify their attributes and potential. The material is based on the four main fostering competencies:

- Caring for Children;
- Providing a Safe and Caring Environment;
- Working as Part of a Team;
- Carer's Own Development.

### **4. SKILLS TO FOSTER**

Prospective carers attend an initial 3 day training course based on the Fostering Network and BAAF material, which covers all aspects of the fostering task and includes input from existing SFS carers. This is an intensive period of preparation, assessment and reflection.

### **5. THE ASSESSMENT**

A qualified SFS social worker will gather information to complete the BAAF Form F assessment report. She/he is expected to have about 20 hours of direct contact with the family over a period of 3 to 4 months and to seek evidence from other appropriate sources.

Applicants nominate a number of people able to comment on their ability to foster, at least two of whom will be interviewed by the assessing social worker as referees. Also, applicants consent to SFS obtaining checks on all household members over the age of 18 from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), local authorities where they have lived in the past 10 years, local Child Protection Teams, the carer's current employer and any other relevant agencies.

Carers must complete a medical examination at their G.P., which is passed to the SFS Medical Advisor.

Prospective carers have access to all information, including a copy of the Form F, except personal references and the references from external agencies.

## **6. THE PANEL**

The SFS Panel is made up of people with experience and expertise in the childcare field. Most are independent of the agency. Members include representatives from the health, education and social work professions as well as a foster carer from outside SFS and someone who has first hand care experience. Social work staff and managers are also present. They will consider the application and recommend whether or not the applicants are approved as foster carers. Prospective carers attend the meeting and can contribute to the discussion.



## **7. THE DECISION**

The Panel's recommendation is passed to the Agency Decision Maker, with whom rests the final approval decision. Prospective carers will be informed verbally immediately and the decision confirmed in writing within 48 hours.

## Annual Foster Carer Reviews

The performance and abilities of our carers is reviewed every year, in line with the National Standards. The Supervising Social Worker meets with the family and compiles a report that covers the carer competencies, with particular reference to these key areas:

- an understanding of the needs of children and the ability to meet them;
- an awareness of and sensitivity towards culture, origin and background;
- ability to work with the care plan;
- ability to work with the birth family;
- agency support and feedback;
- the carer's development over the past twelve months, including relevant issues for their birth children.

Every review contains a mutually agreed Development Plan to address issues for the coming year. The views of placing social workers, placed children and the carers birth children are also sought.

The SFS Panel then considers all the information, reviews approval criteria and adds any other recommendations.



## Organisational Structure

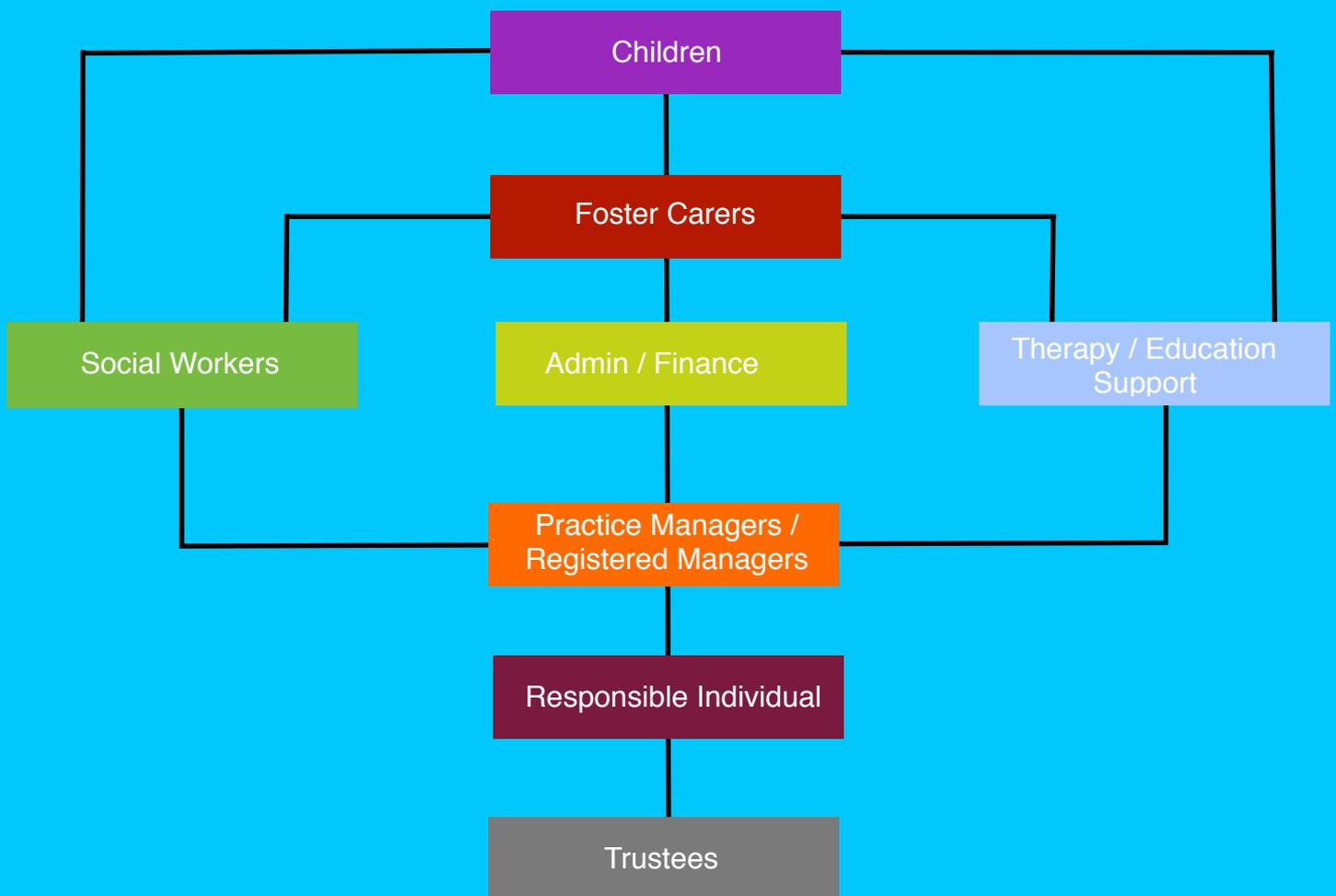


The management structure is geared to achieving our organisational aims with the professional staff supporting carers to enable them to give children the best possible service.

## MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Our accountability and support structure enables the SFS vision and objectives to become reality. SFS management culture creates a framework of accountability and procedure within which colleagues are empowered to be innovative, creative,

professional and adopt a 'can do' problem-solving approach. Our flat management hierarchy facilitates informed and prompt decision taking from an accessible management team.



## THE MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Trustees have responsibility for the broad strategy and oversee management effectiveness in achieving the aims and objectives of the agency. In addition they bring to the agency qualities that offer a broad range of experience.

The Responsible Individual as Chief Executive has responsibility for supervising the business and financial aspects of the agency.

As the Registered Manager the Practice Managers have responsibility for the day-to-day delivery of services to children and carers and manage the local SFS team at each of our sites.

The Operations Manager works alongside Practice Managers to oversee the effective operation of the organisation within the regulatory framework and is also Agency Panel Advisor.

## STAFF

Supervising Social Workers have responsibility for the day-to-day support and supervision of placements within a protected caseload of no more than 10 to 12 families. This gives workers the time and resources to focus on providing a high quality service.

SFS only employ fully qualified childcare practitioners with previous experience in the public sector, dedicated to providing a child-centred service. Their core duties are offering support, advice and guidance to carers and undertaking Form F assessments. In addition they are expected to use and develop a range of skills such as communicating with their local authority counterparts, direct work with carers and children and offering training workshops to carers.



Our Administrative Team provides an invaluable range of secretarial and financial support.

Play therapy and the principles upon which it is based play an integral role in our services for children. Our qualified and BAPT accredited therapists not only offer therapy for children but are also available for consultation to carers and staff.

Additional sessional staff are employed to facilitate delivery of flexible multi-disciplinary packages of care. They all have qualifications appropriate to the tasks they perform and are subject to the same checks and enquiries as full-time members of staff.

### **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

We seek to provide emotionally intelligent leadership and support and an environment in which children can learn from exemplary role models.

### **A LEARNING ORGANISATION**

The principles of a learning organisation are intrinsic to our practice.

We are committed to the advance of the SFS Staff Training Programme based on personal training and development needs identified in supervision and appraisal. Training is organised for individuals, for groups of staff with topics of common interest such as diversity and assessment skills and jointly with carers.

### **NUMBERS, QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF**

Responsible Individual 1  
Practice Manager 1  
Senior Practitioner 1  
Qualified Supervising Social Workers 4  
Administration 1

Other sessional staff variable depending on need. All Supervising Social Workers, Practice Managers have CQSW or DipSw qualifications. The Managers have a NVQ level 4 in Management. The Responsible Individual has an appropriate business degree and sits as a Magistrate on the Greater London Family Panel. Other members of staff have qualifications where applicable to their job titles.

All Social Workers and the Practice Managers are DipSw qualified or hold a Social Work Degree

### **COMPLAINTS AND THEIR OUTCOMES**

SFS has a clear and accessible complaints procedure There is a Complaints file holding a summary of all complaints. The Responsible Individual maintains this file and conducts a quarterly audit to monitor the quality of the complaints procedure and to gain any learning for the agency.





# Contact Us

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