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Statement of Purpose



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Aims, objectives & achieving outcomes
3. Status & constitution
4. Management structure
5. Recruitment & approval process Foster Carers
6. Support for Foster Carers
7. Training provided for Foster Carers
8. Review of Foster Carers
9. Social work service
10. Therapy service
11. Support service
12. Education advice service
13. Development & growth
14. Staffing
15. Representation & complaints procedure

1. Introduction:

Amicus Foster Care is a locally based fostering agency which geographically covers Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, Swindon, Wiltshire, North Somerset, Bath & North East Somerset and Somerset, offering high quality care for looked after children in a family setting.

Amicus works in partnership with Local Authorities/Health and Social Care Trusts who commission our services on an individual spot purchase basis or through block contracts. Amicus Foster Care prides itself on providing opportunities for looked after children to reach their full potential and to live fulfilling lives in their community.

Amicus believes in the importance of being inclusive, and will do its utmost to ensure its materials are available through alternative methods of communication. Amicus Statement of Purpose is available on the Amicus website: www.amicusfostercare.com

Statement of purpose:

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose of Amicus Foster Care. It aims to meet the requirements arising from:

- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Services Regulations (England 2011)
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England)
- Care planning, placement and case review and Regulations 2013

The Amicus Foster Care Statement of purpose provides a range of information which is intended for a wide audience including:

- Local Authorities who place, or are considering placing children and young people with Amicus foster carers
- Colleagues from other children's agencies
- Foster carers and prospective foster carers
- Children and young people, who are placed with Amicus carers
- Amicus staff
- General public

2. Aims, objectives & achieving outcomes

Amicus practice is based on the social pedagogic approach that focuses on building relationships, it moves foster carers and agencies from a risk averse culture to a risk management approach. It places relationships at the heart of maintaining stability, improving educational outcomes and wellbeing.

Amicus aims to provide:

- A commitment to a child-centred approach
- Care which engenders high hopes and expectations in the child or young person
- High quality care in a family setting for children and young people who are placed with AFC foster carers
- Due consideration given to matching children with foster carers who can best meet their needs in terms of social and cultural, racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds, gender, sexuality and disability
- Foster carers with a wide range of experience and from diverse back- grounds, enabling choice for children and young people
- A strong support network available to all our foster carers, children and young people, by professionals known to them, 24/7, 365 days a year
- Comprehensive learning and development programmes and TSD

In order to provide these outcomes, Amicus will:

- Provide tailor-made support to carers and their families
- Continue to recruit, retain and train excellent employees and carers
- Maintain high level, excellent quality services for children and young people



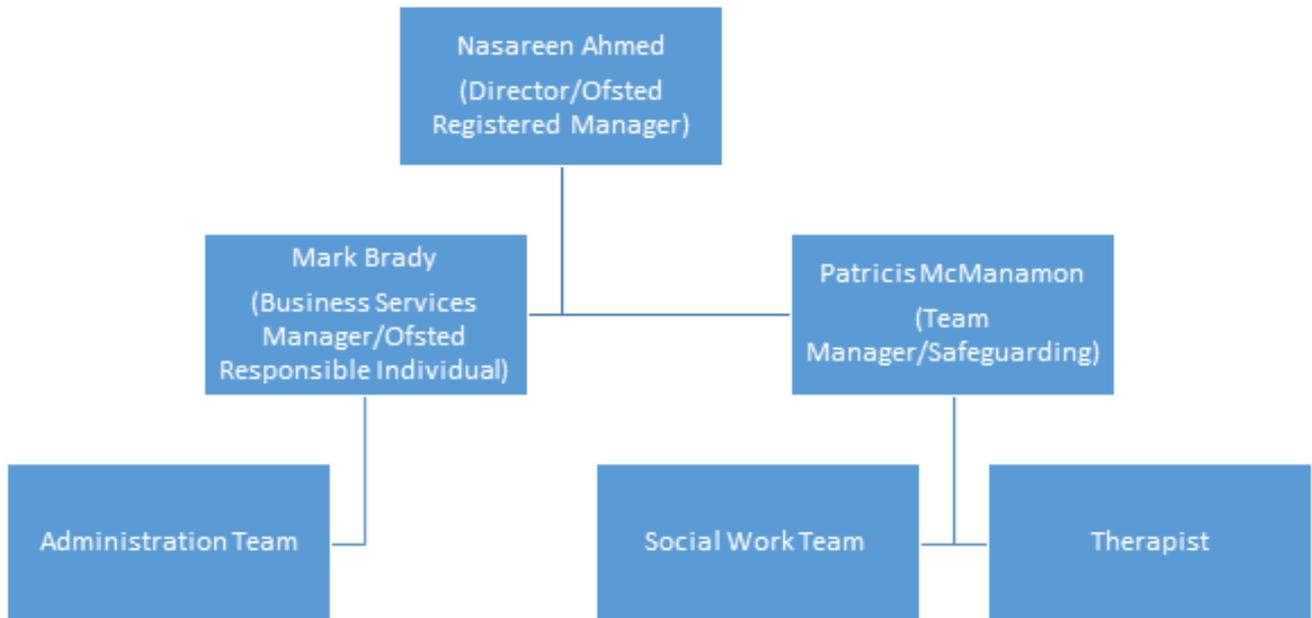
3. Status & Constitution

Amicus Foster Care is an independent fostering agency and a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985 (Company number 6724648)

In accordance with the Companies Act 1985 and 1989, AFC has produced a Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association and copies of these have been made available to the government commissions, which regulate independent fostering agencies and children's social care throughout the UK.

Amicus Foster Care has a Board of Directors. The Board meets regularly and is responsible for the strategic direction and all corporate and financial responsibility for the company.

4. Organistaional structure



Nasareen Ahmed (Director) (CQSW + CMS) is the Registered Manager, responsible for day to day operational service.

Mark Brady (Business Services Manager) is the registered Responsible Individual, and oversees the functioning of Amicus.

The Team Manager and the Social Workers are qualified & registered with the Health & Care Professions Council.

The Psychotherapist is qualified in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy(DBT), Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) & registered with the Health & Care Professions Council and British Association of Therapists.

The Administration team are appropriately qualified and expereined.

5. Recruitment, assessment and approval process

Amicus assessment approach enables Amicus to find out about the applicants family and to make a decision about whether or not they should become approved Foster Carers with Amicus. It is an extremely important process to ensure that all children and young people placed in foster care are safe, secure and can reach their full potential.

In line with Regulations, Amicus follow a two stage process

Stage 1

Interest and initial enquiry

An initial interest is made by email or phone and will be followed up by a member of the team within 3 working days, we will answer any questions applicants may have and to discuss whether fostering is right for them. An initial enquiry form will be completed which will allow the team to make an informed decision as to whether the applicant is suitable for fostering and whether to pursue the enquiry, if it has been decided to progress we will arrange a home visit. We hope to ensure the initial visit will take place within 15 working days of your Expression of Interest being received.

Initial Home Visit

A social worker from the fostering team will visit the applicant at home to discuss fostering in more detail and answer any additional questions they may have. They will complete a brief assessment on the applicant and partner (if applicable) in relation to the consideration into fostering. The visit will also provide a chance for the applicant(s) to provide motivation, understanding and ability to meet the needs of Looked After Children. Applicants are given the chance to discuss the fostering role and have the opportunity to highlight any experiences they may have had that may strengthen their application to foster. The social worker will make a recommendation to the fostering team manager and a decision will be made whether to progress to the assessment stage or if there is additional work/learning that needs to take place prior to this.

The Skills-to-Foster Preparation Training

Following a successful home visit the applicant(s) will be required to attend a two day course called 'Skills to Foster', which is fun and informative. Depending on when the training course starts, the applicant may be invited to attend the course before the assessment begins or after or during the assessment. The facilitation of this course is managed by Amicus managers and social workers with additional support and input from approved foster carers and young people that have experienced the care system. The trainers will produce feedback which will be considered as part of your application.

Stage 1 – Assessment (8 – 10 weeks)

Once the initial home visit has been complete and a decision has been made to progress the application to foster, an application pack which includes; Application form, Application guidance, DBS Check, Mentor information will be sent to the applicant(s). During the assessment stage a number of checks will be undertaken which includes: local authority, probation, finance, employment and education; we will also complete personal references. Applicants will be expected to undertake a health assessment with their doctor. A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check will be carried out on all applicants and any members of the fostering household who are over 18. Once all of the above checks and references have been returned, all information will be reported to the Agency Decision Maker, who will make the final decision in terms of not continuing with an application or agreement to assign a qualified Social Worker to undertake a full fostering assessment (Stage 2). Applicant(s) will be informed of either decision within 10 working days of the final safeguarding checks being received.

Stage 2

Assessment (up to 4months)

If the Agency Decision Maker is in agreement to progress to a full fostering assessment, stage 2 will commence. The assessing Social Worker will produce an assessment report that we refer to as a Form F. At the end of the assessment, the Form F report is presented to the Fostering Panel. Applicants are required to attend the Fostering Panel to meet with the Panel members. They will consider the assessment and will then make a recommendation about approval as a Foster Carer(s); the final decision is made by the Agency's Decision Maker.

Whilst each assessment is an individual process and the length of time an assessment takes varies to some extent, we endeavour to ensure that the Stage 2 process is completed within four months. Throughout stage 2, qualified and experienced members of Amicus will be available to advise and support. It is our expectation that applicants take a full positive part in the assessment.

Carers that are currently fostering for an agency and wish to transfer to Amicus stage 1 and stage 2 can happen concurrently.

At Amicus on average we complete Stage 1 and Stage 2 within a 20 week period.

6. Support for Foster Carers

Amicus Foster Care believes that foster carers need to provide a 'secure base' for children in their care. To enable them to do this, the agency will provide a similar 'secure base' for foster carers and their families and will do this by:

- Round the clock access to a local and known member of staff
- Supervision, support and regular telephone contact from an qualified and experienced AFC Social Worker.
- Twenty one night's paid respite, pro-rata, per year.
- Regular support group meetings.
- Providing access to a pool of Support Workers to work with children and young people where funded and agreed appropriate and useful by the local authority.
- Organised events for foster carers as well as activities for carer's own children and looked after children, throughout the year.
- AFC foster carers will have support and individual access to experienced, qualified therapists as we believe it is essential to support foster carers and their children with managing the impact of fostering.
- Providing educational advice to support foster carers in working with schools and promoting children and young people's educational needs.
- A relevant and comprehensive training programme for foster carers, including access to CWDC, Parent and Child and post-appr oval training.
- A level of financial support, that values and respects foster carers' skills, learning and commitment to Amicus.

Amicus Foster Care aims to provide their foster carers with the solid foundation, structure and support to carry out the very difficult and complex task of fostering. We actively seek and welcome feedback from our foster carers to help us continue to develop our understanding of what 'you' need to enable you to succeed.

7. Training provided for Foster Carers

The training Amicus Foster Care offers, directly relates to the Training, support and development (TSD's) Standards for foster carers. Because of the complexity of fostering, AFC recognises the need for consistent and accessible learning for foster carers and their families.

We provide training and learning opportunities to enable foster carers to:

- Increase and refine their existing skills and knowledge
- A safe place in which to share experiences and to learn from each other, building a network of relationships with their fellow AFC carers and staff
- Develop and use skills to recognise and combat discrimination which many looked after children experience as part of their everyday lives
- Help foster carers to understand behaviour as communication
- Assist foster carers to increase their professional confidence and thereby to contribute to ongoing planning and thinking regarding the care of the child placed with them

The TSD aims to improve children's and young people's lives, by ensuring that the people working with them have the best possible training, qualifications, advice and support. The purpose of the standards is to make sure that all foster carers receive relevant induction, training and support, plus continuing professional development; to impart the knowledge and skills foster carers will need to provide high quality care and to provide the carers with opportunities for career development.

THE 7 STANDARDS ARE:

1. Understanding the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people
2. Understanding your role as a foster carer
3. Understanding health and safety, and healthy care
4. Know how to communicate effectively
5. Understand the development of children and young people
6. Safeguard children and young people - keep them safe from harm
7. Develop yourself

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Each foster carer will, under the supervision of their supervising social worker, complete a workbook within the first 12 months of fostering. The book evidences the foster carers learning and development. Pre-approval, post- approval and other general training can be used to evidence the standards.

On the successful completion of the workbook, the carer will receive a certificate in recognition of their achievement.

In addition, during AFC foster carers careers, they will also have the opportunity to learn about:

- Child safeguarding
- Working with children who have been abused
- Health care of fostered children and young people
- Children who display sexually worrying or harmful behaviour
- Caring for children who have attachment difficulties
- Identity and self esteem, developing the emotional, social and creative skills of children and young people
- Behaviour as communication
- Promoting positive behaviour
- Missing from care
- Promoting independence
- Education of fostered children and young people
- Managing and promoting contact
- Safe caring
- Health and Safety
- First Aid
- Recording & IT
- Valuing diversity and promoting identity

As well as the on-going training and learning development opportunities provided, AFC is also committed to supporting foster carers to receiving formal recognition of their experience, knowledge and skills through TSD Workbook. In line with the Fostering Regulations 2011, Standard 16, Amicus clear about the aims it wishes to achieve for the children and young people placed with the agency through its foster carers. Children and young people are at the heart of all we do at Amicus. In response to feedback received from them and the carers, we are developing a training and workshop programme which seeks to meet areas of highlighted needs and interest. This is alongside the development of a forum which enables Amicus children and young people to have a voice, providing them with the opportunity to input their ideas and wishes into the planning of Amicus.

Amicus also recognises and values the vital part that the sons and daughters of foster carers play within the household, as a result Amicus have committed to providing an ongoing forum which enables sons and daughters to talk openly about their experiences. Together we are highlighting areas in which we can offer ongoing support and advice.

A further development has been born out of the huge support that friends relatives and neighbours of foster carers frequently offer, we compiled an open letter which foster carers can pass on to the relevant people in their network, followed up with a letter to invite them to a meeting to enable us to thank them and assist in their understanding of fostering.

PARENT AND CHILD POST-APPROVAL TRAINING

Amicus Foster Care provides a comprehensive training course for experienced foster carers. The course will allow foster carers to develop assessment skills in supporting Parent and Child placements.

8. Review of Foster Carers

Amicus Foster Care has clear guidance and procedures for completion of foster carer's review, which reflects the statute law, regulations, national minimal standards and good practice guidance.

Apart from the Annual Review, there are other situations where a review may be called which include:

- where concerns have arisen regarding the foster carer's practice,
- where there has been a serious incident,
- where there is a request for change of registration details.

The process considers foster carers training, learning, development and evidence of competencies which have been demonstrated over the previous year.

The Reviewing Officer makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker, the Director of AFC, regarding re-registration.

9. Foster Placements

Amicus Foster Care offers a wide range of placements for children and young people of all ages. All looked after children are carefully matched with the foster carers most suited to meet their needs. We place great importance on matching children with carers that best meet their assessed needs, and ensuring that the appropriate support from a range of professionals is in place. Placements are negotiated through the Local Authority, either through an individual spot purchase contract or as part of contractual arrangements.

Placements are made and subsequent monitoring and support provided in compliance the Fostering Service Regulations (England 2011). Information regarding the child or young person is received and discussed. When matched foster carers are identified either a pre-placement meeting is arranged (depending on the urgency of the placement) or a Placement Meeting is held during which the child's Social Worker and the child meet the foster carers. The detail of the placement is recording on a Foster Placement Plan, completed before and during the placement meeting. This includes essential and valuable information regarding the needs and routines of the child or young person and details of the Care Plan.

We try to ensure that a pre-placement meeting occurs for each placement, but we also recognise that in some emergency circumstances that is not possible but, is arranged as soon as possible following the commencement of the placement.

Amicus placement range

Amicus ethos and practice is based upon a child centred approach which stems from working together, 'The Team Around the Child'. To achieve this, we have recruited and approved a diverse group of foster carers that offer quality care in a family setting.

We ensure that we have access to:

- Specialist Social Workers who have experience in fostering - placements, adoption, parent and child assessments and life story work
- Family and Systemic therapists who have skills and knowledge in facilitating relationships, child development, attachment issues and the impact of trauma on children and young people
- Education specialist who can advise on protocol and developing fruitful relationships with schools and Education Authorities
- A pool of Support Workers, if funded and agreed by the local authority, who can work directly with the child in placement and support foster carers

Amicus can therefore provide responsive and reflective placements for:

Emergency Placements: A placement that is made within 24-48 hours of it being requested and, where there has been no prior plan. Duration of these placements is for up to 28 days, whereupon the placement will convert to one of the categories listed below.

Remand Placements: Care provided for children or young people on remand, or committed for trial or sentence under CYPA or CDA, or retained in Local Authority accommodation under PACE or ,subject to a supervision order with residence requirement.

Short Term Placements: A placement that is made for assessment, bridging or remand which is planned, but not intended to provide a long term placement for the child or young person.

Long Term Placements: A placement that is planned prior to placement commencement (or subsequently) to continue to be available to the child or young person for at least two years or the remainder of his/her legal childhood.

Solo Placements: A placement where, because of a child's or young person's considerable and complex needs, the foster carer is required to offer consistent supervision and support. This type of placement precludes the placement of another foster child. This placement can be of an emergency, short term or long term duration.

Parent and Child Placements: AFC have specifically trained foster carers who offer specialised parent and child assessment placements. These foster carers can undertake a comprehensive assessment of the parent's abilities to care for their child suitable to be submitted to the court.

Placements for Children with Disabilities: AFC have experienced and specifically trained foster carers who offer placements to disabled children and young people. These placements will have access to a multitude of professionals from within this field of expertise.

10. Social work service

All looked after children placed with AFC foster carers will have their own Social Worker from the relevant Local Authority who will maintain contact with the child or young person throughout the placement, undertaking statutory visits and overseeing care planning decisions, taking the child/young person's views and considerations into account.

Additional to the child care Social Worker, AFC foster carers have their own Social Worker, who is allocated to support and supervise them and is their first point of contact.

AFC'S SOCIAL WORKER'S ROLE IS TO:

- **Develop a good working relationship with foster carers and be in regular and frequent contact**
- **Undertake monthly formal supervision of the foster carer(s)**
- **Be available to think through successes, challenges and day to day issues with the foster carer and provide or access help**
- **Help foster carers keep records of the placement and maintain their own recordings**
- **Develop a relationship with the foster carer(s) own children, and ensure they are supported**
- **Maintain contact with looked after children and young people in placement, ensuring their views are sought on the placement, and the services provided by AFC**
- **Undertake unannounced visits to the foster carer's home**
- **Participate in out of hours support to foster carers**
- **Explore and discuss foster carer's training and development needs**
- **Co-ordinate and contribute to the foster carers' annual review process**
- **Liaise with the child's Social Worker and other professionals, and provide relevant information to the care planning process, alongside the foster carer**

11. Therapy service

Allied to the work of AFC Social Workers, is the input of the therapy service. Amicus Foster Care has a Family and Systemic Psychotherapist, qualified in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) & registered with the Health & Care Professions Council and British Association of Therapists, who contributes to the day-to-day reflective thinking about children or young people placed with our foster carers. There are formal get-togethers and an immediate response when foster carers are experiencing difficulty understanding what is happening in the placement.

Experience tells us that having a space to puzzle out together what the child or young person is communicating to us through behaviour is immensely helpful. Foster Carers tell us that having a therapeutic input helps them to make sense of what they and their family are feeling and experiencing whilst caring for the child or young person placed with them.

Amicus Foster Care can provide particular assessments on request and by discussion with the placing Local Authority. We can also provide individual therapy for a child or young person in placement if an assessment finds that this is appropriate either through in-house staff or by working with one of our associate therapists. The commissioning for individual therapy will be negotiated with the Local Authority and regular review built into the process.

12. Support service

Amicus Foster Care has a pool of support workers that help support and sustain placements by identifying and meeting the needs of individual children and young people, and their foster carers.

By working together with 'team around the child', the support workers provide a range of focussed practical help, to sustain and promote children's and young people's placement stability.

This could take the form of structured activities because a child or young person is not attending school, support to foster carers for unseen emergencies, or supervision of contact between the child or young person and their birth family, if requested by Local Authority. All the above rely on the local authority requesting and funding these services.

Support workers also plan activities, support groups and forums for foster children and young people and for foster carers' own children.

14. Development & growth

Our plan is to regulate our growth to ensure that our ethos of established personal relationships, which we believe is the best context for foster carers and therefore children and young people who are placed with them, is able to continue. Within that principle, we aim to recruit foster carers with a wide range of skills, experience and professional interests to serve children and young people in the local communities.

15. Staffing

Director, Team Manager, Services Manager, Therapist, Social Workers and a pool of Support Workers. Additional staff to be recruited according to the needs of business growth.

16. Representation & complaints procedure

Amicus Foster Care representations and complaints procedure places an emphasis on resolving complaints at Stage 1 - informal problem solving. Stage 2 complaints are those where resolution at Stage 1 has not been possible, or where a complainant has chosen to invoke stage 2 of the procedure. Stage 2 complaints are dealt with by appointed independent investigators who do not have management responsibility of the relevant service.

AFC's representation and complaints procedure has scope for a complainant, if dissatisfied by the response received at Stage 2, to request that their complaint be referred to a Complaints Review Panel. This panel will comprise AFC's Director, Team Manager and, an independent person with relevant background experience.

All AFC foster carers, staff and children's/young peoples placing Local Authorities are provided with information about AFC's representations and complaints procedure. All looked after children placed with AFC foster carers are informed of the representations and complaints procedure on commencement of placement.

Records of investigations and outcomes of complaints are collated and held by the AFC Director to learn from and to improve the service in the future.

The outcomes of these complaints are reported annually, or more frequently as may be requested, by any party with a legitimate interest