

# Fostering North East

Part of St Cuthbert's Care



## Information for Commissioners

# About St Cuthbert's Care

Fostering North East is part of St Cuthbert's Care, a regional charity, which has been established for over 70 years and originally concentrated on the care and adoption of orphaned and abandoned children.

Today our services stretch from Alnwick down to Middlesbrough and we work with children in need, vulnerable families, children and adults with learning disabilities and older people.

We offer residential, short stay and day care, as well as social work, community development services and support to vulnerable people living in their own homes.

We currently have 370 members of staff and volunteers working across our services.



# About Fostering North East

St Cuthbert's Care has provided a fostering service since the 1950s. Over the years the service has developed significantly and is now seen as one of the Charity's key services.

We work in partnership with Commissioners throughout the region and provide a varied range of foster placements for children that reflect their differing needs.

The success of our placements has been built upon by matching the child with the right family. Consideration is given to both the carers' and the child's wishes and feelings and an individual support and learning package is created for the carers and their family. This ensures that carers are given the level of support required to match the needs and demands of the child.

Fostering North East is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (Registration number B030000494). As such, the service is inspected by Ofsted, from whom we currently have a rating of 'Good'. Fostering North East is a member of Fostering Network and Coram BAAF — the UK national organisations for foster care.



## Statement of Function and Purpose

### The aims, objectives and principles of Fostering North East

We are an Independent Fostering Service, providing quality services for children and young people who have a range of needs and disabilities. Fostering North East is a project of St Cuthbert's Care, one of the largest social care charities in the North East of England.

Our work is based on the principles underpinning The Children Acts (1989, 2004, 2008) and The Human Rights Act 1998.

The primary role of our foster carers is to enable children to develop to their full potential, through a positive experience of family life. This fundamental role reflects the mission statement of the charity which states that: **St Cuthbert's Care is a charity working for the common good by enabling people to develop to their personal potential.** The outcomes identified in **Every Child Matters** as being important for childhood and later life are at the heart of our work.

Fostering North East provides a range of placements for children and young people who are unable to remain with their own families.

In the belief that all children are best looked after in their immediate or extended families, we also provide short breaks to those families who are struggling with the demands of parenthood, and who need regular respite in order to enable them to continue to care for their children in the long-term. This service is particularly helpful for families where there is a child with physical disabilities, learning difficulties or other complex needs. The service is also available to long-term carers who require short breaks.

# Aims

**1. To provide all children who are placed in Fostering North East's foster homes with a positive experience of family life.**

**Objectives:**

- To work closely with foster carers to provide an environment in which the child is kept healthy
- To provide an environment where the child *is* safe and *feels* safe
- To encourage and support foster children to enjoy and achieve
- To encourage foster children to make a positive contribution to what is happening to them and around them
- To encourage foster children to achieve economic well-being

**2. To work in partnership with parents and birth relatives of children placed with Fostering North East foster carers.**

**Objectives:**

- To provide clear information about the fostering services offered by the agency to birth parents of children placed in Fostering North East's foster homes
- To involve parents/appropriate relatives in introductory visits, placement plans and review meetings where this is in the best interests of the child
- To obtain evaluation/written feedback from parents/birth relatives regarding the service their child is receiving
- With reference to short-break services, to maintain the parental roles as pivotal to the scheme

**3. To support and promote foster carers in the often complex and demanding task of meeting the holistic needs of children in their care.**

**Objectives:**

- To provide ongoing training for all foster carers, based on an assessment of their individual experience and needs.
- To provide all foster carers with a named support worker to work closely with themselves and their families
- To organise a programme of regular training and support groups for foster carers so that they can meet together in formal and informal settings, to gain new knowledge and skills, to share experiences and to learn from each other
- To operate a 24 hour support-line
- To listen to foster carers' views at all stages and to obtain feedback about the service in order to continually strive to make improvements

**4. To provide a programme of regular short breaks to children, often with disabilities or complex needs, in order to prevent family/permanent foster care breakdown.**

**Objectives:**

- To work in close collaboration with the local authorities teams who have assessed the children and families as in need of this service and obtain all the relevant information from them about the child and their needs
- To work closely with the child and their parents and ensure that the parents remain central to the scheme, for example by including them at all stages, consulting and obtaining feedback from them
- To ensure that foster carers offering this service receive relevant and timely training and specialist information as required to meet the often complex needs of the children

**5. To work in close partnership with local authority personnel who place children with Fostering North East's foster carers.**

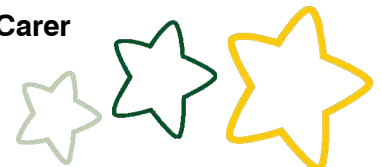
**Objectives:**

- To provide local authorities with accurate information about the schemes and costs for those schemes, offered by Fostering North East
- To attend introductory and planning meetings with and/or on behalf of the foster carers
- To attend statutory reviews, case conferences and other meetings as appropriate with and/or on behalf of the foster carers
- To work together with the child's social worker to ensure the child's needs are kept central at all times.

“I honestly do not think the agency can be improved. All the staff are efficient, polite and are always ready to help.

I recommend the agency at every opportunity.”

**Current Foster Carer**



# Our range of fostering services

★ Long-term or permanent placements

★ Temporary or short-term fostering

★ Short break fostering

★ Parent & child fostering

“(Fostering North East) are always there for you, they don’t fob you off if you have a problem and you can always speak to your support worker. You can unload your worries to a professional.”

Current Foster Carer



**Long term placements** are provided for children or young people who need to receive care and support through to independence.

Unlike most short term placements which are generally emergency situations, placements for permanent care are carefully planned and introductions are scheduled over a period of time depending on the child’s and the carers’ needs.

**Permanent placements** are generally available for children over the age of eight years as it is hoped that younger children’s futures will be secured by adoption.

There may be situations where long term placements are required for younger children who have specific medical needs or physical disabilities and Fostering North East has been successful in the provision of a number of these placements in recent years.

Generally, contact is also an important feature of long term care and is actively promoted and supported by carers, where appropriate.

We place a high degree of importance on permanent carers meeting the educational needs of young people placed so that each child is encouraged to attain their full potential.

Permanent carers are expected to support the young people in their care with independence skills and to ensure they are fully consulted about decisions and plans for their future.

Young people placed in permanent foster homes tend to have more complex needs, therefore a high level of support is available to the carers.

**Temporary placements**, ranging from several weeks or months to a year or more, can be arranged, often at short notice, if appropriate carers are available.

It is accepted that children placed under these circumstances will be very anxious, distressed, even traumatised. Carers will receive a high level of support from Fostering North East in the initial stages of placement.

Close liaison with the local authority social worker is also necessary at this stage to elicit all the available information about the child, their needs and background for the carers.

Family contact is a main feature of short term care and Fostering North East carers are expected to actively encourage and support this, where appropriate. Decisions will need to be made at the placement agreement meeting regarding venue, frequency and supervision of contact.

Carers are expected to actively support the children and young people with their educational needs and Fostering North East has access to an education advisor for support in complex situations.

It is anticipated that the majority of children will be enrolled in a school near to their placement but in circumstances where it is in the child’s best interests to remain at their current school, maybe until the end of a term, it is expected that the local authority would fund any transport costs.

**Short break fostering** is generally a planned, organised service where a child or siblings stay with carers on a regular basis, maybe one or two weekends a month and sometimes extra in holiday periods.

The fundamental purpose of short break care is to support parents in continuing to care for their child at home for as long as possible by offering a structured package of breaks. This service is particularly beneficial to families where the children have special needs, whether they are physical disabilities, learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural problems.

# Training for foster carers

We wish to give our foster carers as much support and training as possible to ensure they feel confident in carrying out the type of fostering they have chosen.

Initial preparation groups are provided by Fostering North East, to give prospective carers an introduction to the different aspects of fostering.

Following approval, carers' training needs are monitored regularly and opportunities are provided to access courses and develop knowledge.

**“We had training sessions which helped enormously.**

**There is quite a long matching up process which means you have plenty of time to get all your questions answered.”**

**Respite Foster Carers**



The service benefits the child by offering new relationships and experiences and broadening their social circle. It benefits the parents by giving them a break and time to spend with other children in the family.

**This service can be of great benefit to children and young people in residential schools who have no family contact.**

The short breaks in specially selected foster homes can offer the children invaluable experience of “normal” family life.

The short break service is also available to long-term carers who require a regular package of respite to enable them to provide the child in their care with a permanent home.

Carers receive specific support relating to the child's needs and they are expected to submit written feedback to Fostering North East after each visit. This is then made available to the child's social worker to enable monitoring of the service to be carried out.

A placement agreement meeting takes place at the beginning of each placement and the child will then be reviewed regularly by their local authority in accordance with Looked After Children regulations.

## Training



### Initial preparation groups

It is important that all sessions are attended - there are usually three - and that both partners attend, where applicable.

Issues covered by the training groups include:

- Child development
- Loss and separation
- Feelings of birth parents
- Child protection
- The different types of abuse and how these can affect children's behaviour
- Managing difficult behaviour
- The impact of fostering on yourself and your family and how to ensure safe caring
- Allegations against carers

The training may include input from experienced carers. Further specific topics are offered for carers interested in providing care for children with disabilities.

### Following approval

Carers' training needs are monitored regularly by their support worker and there are opportunities to access courses and develop knowledge from a variety of sources to ensure knowledge and skills remain up to date. These include:

- Courses offered by local authorities to carers and social workers
- St Cuthbert's Care courses for carers, residential staff and social workers
- Distance learning from a variety of sources, including the NSPCC
- Courses provided by Coram BAAF and the Fostering Network
- Bi-monthly carers' support/training group where the topics are planned a year in advance and based on carers expressed needs
- Training is viewed as an important part of Fostering North East's support to foster carers, therefore it is an expectation that carers will attend a significant proportion of events over the year

# Support to foster carers

At Fostering North East we believe that the main role of carers is to enable children and young people to develop to their full personal potential by providing them with a positive experience of family life.

As this is such an important task, we believe that carers deserve the highest level of support from the beginning of their involvement with the agency, through the matching process, to the foster placement and beyond.

**“The manager and staff team work closely with placing authority commissioners and social workers and this helps ensure that young people live in stable placements and receive the support they need.”**

**Ofsted Report 2015**



- On approval all carers will be allocated a named, qualified and experienced support worker who will support carers and their family members throughout the placements.
- Carers will be contacted by their support workers on a regular basis and will receive a home visit at least once every two months - although frequency of contact may be as often as daily in very complex situations.
- Following approval, carers are informed of their right of access to their personal files and that their supervision notes and any other contacts with the agency form part of these files.
- We understand how important regular telephone contact is for our foster carers and, should their own support worker be unavailable at any time, another member of the team will be available to offer continued support.
- We provide our carers with a 24-hour telephone helpline for advice or assistance out of office hours.
- All carers are members of Fostering Network, covered by insurance policies arranged by Fostering North East. This includes an All Risks and Malicious Damages and Personal and Public Liability policy. These supplement the carers' own household insurance and Legal Expenses policy in the event of a criminal prosecution being brought against carers as a result of their fostering role. The policy also offers 24-hour access to the Fostering Network legal line for advice on any legal matter. Carers are made aware that appropriate car insurance is their own responsibility and that the agency does not offer any cover in this area.
- Because allegations against anyone working in the childcare field is a very real possibility, Fostering North East has arranged with a neighbouring local authority to provide an independent confidential advice and support service to foster carers who are facing an allegation.
- Training is crucial in supporting carers in their role and details of initial and ongoing training is covered earlier in this leaflet. The training and support groups also have an informal element where carers can share ideas and difficulties in a confidential forum.
- Separate support group sessions are organised for the children at the same time and give fostered and birth children the opportunity to mix together freely under supervision.
- Carers are provided with a copy of the Fostering Network magazine on a quarterly basis and are encouraged to become individual members.
- Respite care will be discussed at the beginning of any placement and a decision taken based on individual circumstances. On occasions, it may become necessary to raise the issue during a placement, if the need arises and all attempts will be made to negotiate successfully with the placing local authority.
- Carers' reviews will be held annually, or more frequently if required, and will provide the opportunity for carers and their family to reflect on the previous year's fostering experience. The review also helps to identify any developments or changes which need to be considered for the year ahead.

# Case Studies

*Names have been changed  
to protect identity*

## Rachel, age 11

***"I received loads of Christmas presents, but best of all I was given love."***

These were the comments of 11 year old Rachel who has been with her current long-term carers for over a year. She made this comment following her first Christmas with Alice and Jim, when she was overwhelmed by the love and care shown to her, not only by her carers but also by their family, friends and neighbours.

Rachel had a traumatic early life characterised by domestic violence, alcoholism and abuse. However, since coming to live with her long-term carers her life has been turned around for the better; she is doing very well at school - she would like to be a vet - and is learning that a difference of opinion need not result in black bin liners at the door and another move.

Rachel is learning how to make friends and to join in with a variety of activities including dancing, swimming lessons and Guides. She enjoys helping her carers in their allotment, going on bike rides with them and having trips out to local places of interest.

Rachel anticipated the day she was to be placed with them as ***"the best day of my life apart from my wedding day"*** and was so excited to have a ***"forever family"***.

**"Rachel was overwhelmed by the love and care shown to her"**

## Jason, age 12

Jason took a Dreamflight trip to Florida, which he described as ***"brill"***. He has cerebral palsy and was nominated for this trip by his Consultant for his bravery in dealing with his condition and his positive and cheerful outlook on life.

Life certainly changed for Jason the day he moved in with his current long-term foster carers over 4 years ago. Beth and Mike were apprehensive at first when Jason came to live with them as his history showed a child who could not walk and who was withdrawn and sullen. In his previous placement he had been put to bed at 6pm and could not play out or get involved in any physical activities.

Now Jason is a treasured family member; he attends a weekly youth club and football club with the help of a befriender and enjoys camping on the beach with his foster family. He enjoys going out in the family boat and the carers' attitude is one of encouraging and supporting Jason to do anything and everything he wants.

His current ambition is to stay with his foster family until he is 37 and to play foxy bingo!

**"Jason is a treasured family member ...and he enjoys camping on the beach"**

## Sam and Jonathon, ages 3 and 4

Brothers Sam and Jon were placed with foster carers in an emergency situation following years of neglect, missed medical appointments and lack of stimulation.

At 18 months Sam was unable to walk and his legs had no muscle tone due to being kept strapped in his buggy or cot for hours at a time. Jon was terrified of water and refused point blank to go in the bath; his hands would clench and turn white, and he became rigid with fear, when a wash or a bath were mentioned. On placement the boys looked frightened and withdrawn, with the younger one rocking himself backwards and forwards for comfort.

In a surprisingly short time the boys settled into a clear routine so that they know food will always be available and the carers will play with them and see to their every need.

Gradually Jon has been coaxed into the bath, first of all by carers getting him to wash a dolly and then by playing with water with him; he had his first trip to the swimming baths after he had been there 6 weeks and this was a monumental achievement, he absolutely loved it.

Providing the basic essentials of nurturing, encouragement and a clear routine made such a difference to these children's lives.

**"In a surprisingly short time the boys have settled into a clear routine"**



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For further information on the full range of services provided by St Cuthbert's Care, please contact Sheila Errington, Director of Care Services at the address above or on:

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