

Parallel Parents Fostering

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

2023 - 2024

SC067795



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This document can be produced in alternative formats or languages if necessary.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parallel Parents: Independent Fostering Agency – 'Outstanding' since 2010.

This Statement of Purpose has been developed in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance including:

- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, and The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2020 (as appropriate)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Children Act: Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services July 2013

The Statement of Purpose, in accordance with Fostering Regulation 3, gives an overview of the aims, objectives and principles of Parallel Parents, and the services, facilities and support that we provide to our fostering families and the children and young people they look after. It also:

- Demonstrates how outcomes for children and young people will be achieved
- Explains how foster carers are recruited, assessed, trained and supervised
- Provides statistics and useful contact details
- Explains how Parallel Parents is managed and staffed.

The information within has been designed to be accessible to anyone who has involvement in Parallel Parents, and a copy will be provided (or will be made available upon request) to:

- The Chief Inspector
- Any person working for Parallel Parents
- Children and Young People who are looked after by Parallel Parents (subject to age and understanding)
- Parents of any such children and young people or adults with parental responsibility
- Foster Carers approved by Parallel Parents and prospective Foster Carers
- Local Authorities

The Statement of Purpose is also available on our website - www.parallelparents.com.

Other relevant legislation:

- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children Act 1989
- UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017

The Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated regularly by the Management Team.

This Statement of Purpose was approved by Dr Sean Fitzpatrick (Director) in April 2023.

2. STATUS AND CONSTITUTION

Parallel Parents was first established in 1994 and is, by Section 4(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act 2000, an 'independent fostering agency' i.e. an undertaking which discharges functions of local authorities in connection with the placing of children with foster parents. Parallel Parents was first registered by the National Care Standards Commission on 11th September 2003.

We are committed to providing consistently high standards of care to children and young people, and our experienced team of Social Workers supports a range of different, needs-led placements that are able to meet the diverse, individual and often complex needs of these children.

Parallel Parents is a company limited by shares and is registered under the Companies Act 1985 (Company Registration No. 4311751). In accordance with the Companies Act 1985 and 1989, Parallel Parents has produced a Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association (copies of which are available to the government commissions which regulate independent fostering agencies in England).

Parallel Parents is currently registered with, and inspected by, the Office for Standards in Education (URN: SC067795).

As of 2021, Parallel Parents has a small number of registered children's residential provisions (including education), each with its own Statement of Purpose. This Statement of Purpose relates to Parallel Parents Fostering. For details of Parallel Parents Residential, enquire at referrals@caretoday.co.uk.

Parallel Parents also has a further Branch office - Parallel Parents West - based in St Helens, Merseyside. URN: 2700992. This Branch is separately registered with Ofsted and has its own Statement of Purpose.

Parallel Parents is also:

- Partner company to Care Today Children's Services Ltd. and (The Partnership of) Care Today (Residential Child Care organisations) and Training 2 Care Ltd. (City & Guilds accredited training centre)
- A preferred provider for a growing number of Local Authorities and consortia
- An Investor in People Platinum Award organisation
- An organisational member of The Fostering Network, CoramBAAF, FosterTalk, NWG Network and National Youth Agency
- An ISO 9001:2015 organisation
- A 'Positive About Disabled People' symbol holder

Senior Management Team objectives include:

- Steering strategic vision and development
- Developing the organisation in line with national requirements and best practice
- Maintaining a child-focussed annual business plan
- Assimilating new guidance and research into practice
- Upholding our values and principles
- Ensuring legal compliance, responsibility in financial and environmental matters and quality assurance
- Monitoring outcomes, client satisfaction and efficiency in meeting targets

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES - PRINCIPLES OF CARE

“Positive, flexible fostering”

Parallel Parents' first priority is always the child or young person in our care. We believe that children have the right to a safe, stable and nurturing home, and our overarching aim is to recruit skilled and resilient foster carers, who are able to offer children a positive substitute family experience, where it is not possible for them to live with their own family members.

Our objective is to meet and exceed the requirements of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011 (and amendments), in order to provide children with the best possible experience of being looked after, the opportunity and support to achieve positive outcomes and feel safe, and the confidence and motivation to aspire to do their best. We continually strive to improve our service provision, with an emphasis on matching, quality, support and safeguarding.

Key Principles for Practice

We aim to:

- Provide as wide a variety of placements as possible to meet the diverse physical, emotional and cultural needs of the individual child.
- See the child/young person as an individual and ensure, as far as possible, the placement fits the particular needs of the child/young person.
- Respect and recognise the importance of the ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, gender, sexuality and any disability of children and young people, their families and foster carers.
- Work in partnership with families (where appropriate) and social workers to implement the child/young person's care plan.
- Work in support of the 'Corporate Parenting Strategy.'
- Return children home, if possible and appropriate. If not, to provide the stability of a long-term placement, either with Parallel Parents or another Agency/Local Authority.
- Respect the child/young person and teach him/her to respect others.
- Ensure that the child is made to feel part of the foster family and has as normal as possible an experience of growing up.
- Ensure that children and young people feel able to participate in their care planning and that their views are heard.
- Promote the health, educational attainment, social/leisure needs and welfare of the child/young person by working within the care plan towards achievable goals.

- Carefully monitor the progress children make and ensure that every decision made is focussed on the child.
- Safeguard children as far as possible and develop innovative strategies by which to do this.
- Ensure effective and appropriate care is provided by skilled, professional foster carers.
- Retain foster carers and staff through a strategy that ensures they are appropriately supported, rewarded and professionally developed.
- Ensure our foster carers receive ongoing training and they are provided with effective support, including an out of hours service.
- Provide a respite menu to our foster carers that encourages the carers to use their own support network, wherever possible, to ensure the young person's placement has the least possible disruption.
- Meet the requirements of the Foster Carers' Charter, and ensure that our foster carers are supported to meet these aims also.
- Be judged on measurable improvements to young people's lives.
- Provide a high quality, cost-effective and well respected expert service.
- Nurture an open, communicative culture and supportive working environment for staff and foster carers.
- Continuously review our practice and make improvements wherever possible.

4. QUALITY STANDARDS

Monitoring

- The quality and performance of Parallel Parents is monitored in a number of ways, including through internal audits and external verification and inspection by Ofsted
- The Registered Managers and other Senior Managers continually monitor the performance of staff, the progress children and young people are making, outcomes achieved and the effectiveness of matching and Placement Plans. Action is taken as appropriate, and feedback is provided through regular meetings (NMS 25.7).
- Our organisational quality management systems have been assessed and approved by CQS (Certified Quality Systems) Ltd. to the following quality management systems standards and guidelines; BS EN ISO 9001:2015. Our quality management systems are audited by CQS on an annual basis.
- We conduct regular consultations with children, foster carers, staff and placing Social Workers, and require written reports to be made to the Registered Managers under Schedule 6 to the Fostering Services Regulations. Reports under Regulation 35 are also produced as appropriate.
- Foster Carers are required to produce written recordings for children and young people in their care.
- School attendance and achievement for children and young people is monitored monthly by our Education Coordinators.
- Local Authority monitoring requirements are fully complied with.

Child Protection

- The overarching aim of our Child Protection Policies and Procedures is to keep children protected and safe. All staff are aware of the Procedure, know how to act upon it, and what their responsibilities are under it. All issues around child protection are dealt with promptly, and in accordance with the locally agreed procedures.
- The Child Protection Procedures are sent to all Local Authorities in which Parallel Parents operates in order to ensure compliance and compatibility and support a multi-agency approach to protecting children.
- All staff and foster carers are vetted rigorously, in line with and above and beyond the requirements of guidance and legislation, to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.
- Prospective foster carers complete NSPCC Child Protection training prior to presentation at Panel, and complete Educare Child Protection Training or Training 2 Care updates, as appropriate, thereafter.

Legal Compliance

- Parallel Parents meets all of the requirements of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards. Our compliance with the above legislation and guidance is monitored by Ofsted, who usually inspect the service once in every three year cycle.

Support and Supervision

- All foster carers receive regular support and supervision, which includes 24 hour telephone support and the annual review. They are provided with regular training and given opportunities for professional development through our City & Guilds accredited training centre (with direct claims status).
- Additional support can be provided to foster carers through our Fostering Resource Centres (Local Children's Homes), our AALA licensed Positive Intervention Team, and our other qualified counsellors and therapists.

Confidentiality and Requests for Information

- Foster carers are provided with full information about the child(ren) placed with them, and receive training in matters of confidentiality and appropriate information sharing.
- Staff are expected to be vigilant and conscientious in their attention to data protection and confidentiality.
- Records about children and young people, foster carers and staff are kept in accordance with the current legislative requirements.
- We consider all requests for information in accordance with the GDPR.

Policies and Procedures

- Parallel Parents has developed a comprehensive Policies and Procedures manual (known as the Foster Carers' Handbook), which is provided to all approved foster carers. The handbook provides information for foster carers on matters such as health, education, record keeping and health and safety.

Information for Children and Young People

- In accordance with the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards, we have produced a range of Children's Guides which are made available to all children and young people before or at the point of placement (subject to age and understanding). The Guide has been adapted for younger children and can be produced in alternative languages or formats.
- Foster Carers are required to explain the contents of the Children's Guide, which includes information on how to complain, to children and young people in an age appropriate way.

- Wherever possible, information about the fostering household is provided to children and young people prior to the placement commencing, and introductions are carried out.

Development of Staff and Managers

- Parallel Parents ensures that regular training is provided for staff, and Managers are able to refresh their training as appropriate, in order to keep abreast of practice developments and changes to guidance and regulations.

5. RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Parallel Parents has Organisational Membership of:

- The Fostering Network
- CoramBAAF
- FosterTalk
- NWG Network (CSE prevention service)
- National Youth Agency

Working with these Organisations helps us to keep abreast of new research, developments in the sector and best practice recommendations.

Additionally, we strive to use innovative research from the following sources to improve our practice and develop our service:

- National and Regional Independent Provider Forums
- The Department for Education / Ofsted
- ICHA
- Rees Centre (University of Oxford)
- The NSPCC
- Research in Practice
- Social Care Institute for Excellence
- A range of children's charities and organisations, e.g. Barnardos, The Who Cares Trust, NLCAS, NYAS etc.



6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Parallel Parents is committed to, and supports the principle of, equal opportunities in employment and practice. The Company opposes all forms of unlawful or unfair direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of:

- Gender or gender reassignment
- Race
- Nationality
- Ethnic or national origins
- Marital/civil partnership status
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Religious beliefs (or non-belief)
- Pregnancy and maternity/paternity

Any discriminatory behaviour will be challenged and dealt with appropriately.

We believe that it is in Parallel Parents' best interests, and all those who work for it, to ensure that the talents and skills of people throughout the community are considered when employment and career opportunities arise. We also value diversity when recruiting foster carers, as the children and young people referred have a diverse range of backgrounds and needs.

Parallel Parents will take every step to ensure that individuals are treated equally and fairly and that decisions on recruitment and selection, training, promotion and career development are taken solely on objective, work-related criteria.

Operational policies and procedures will be regularly reviewed to ensure that this policy statement operates in practice, that all employees and carers are given equal opportunity and facilities and, where appropriate and practical, special training to enable them to progress within the Company. Foster carers will be provided with any training necessary to ensure that they are able to provide the best possible care for, and promote the heritage of, the children and young people they look after.

A more detailed Equal Opportunities Policy is held within the organisation's main policies and procedures and is embedded into day to day working practices with children and young people, foster carers, employees and clients.

In 2020, Parallel Parents was awarded the Investor in People Platinum Award (having held the Gold Award since 2012).

Parallel Parents is also a 'Positive about Disabled People' symbol holder. A support group for disability carers was set up in 2013.

7. MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

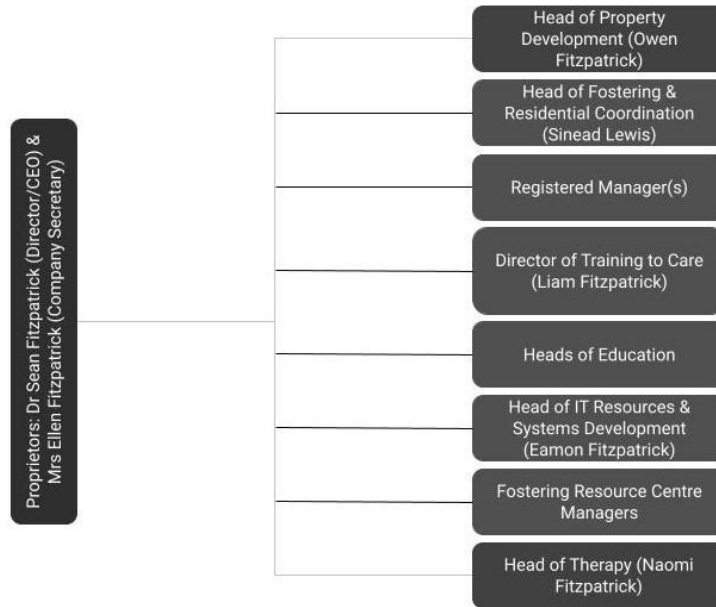
Parallel Parents has one Registered Office, in which all administrative staff are based and where Panel meetings are held (in person or hosted virtually).

There is frequent communication between all levels of the organisation structure and, in particular, between the Registered Managers, Quality Manager, Regional Team Managers and Panel Chair etc. Regular meetings include:

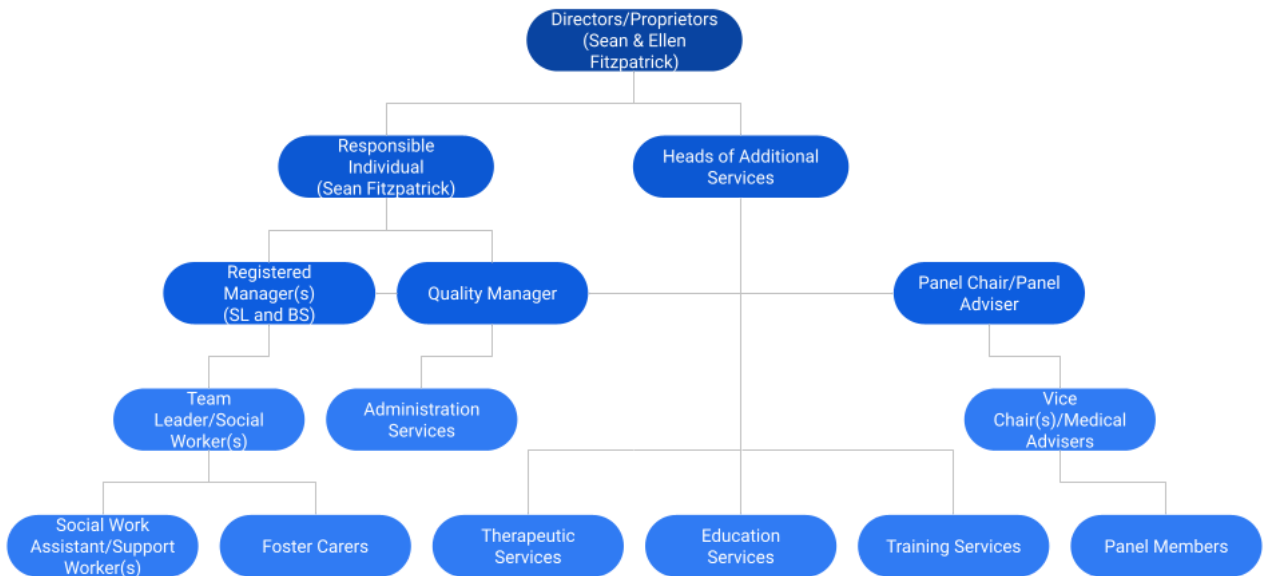
- Regional Team meetings (monthly)
- Smaller area team meetings
- Quality, Development and Business Strategy meetings with senior managers (monthly; meets the requirements of NMS 25.7)
- Board Meetings
- Area Supervision meetings with the Director and Registered Managers (8 times annually)
- Full Team Meeting (quarterly; usually, training is delivered to the full team)
- Business Strategy Group Operational meetings (monthly)
- Recruitment and Assessment Meetings (usually weekly)
- Staff Supervisions and Appraisals
- Carer and Children's Forums with the Registered Managers and Quality Manager
- Support Groups and Training with Social Work staff, Support Workers and Carers (monthly).
- Consultation/Activity Days for Children/Young People
- Panel meetings
- Annual General Meeting / Conference

Sean Fitzpatrick is the Responsible Individual for Parallel Parents.

Organisation Senior Management



Parallel Parents Branch Structure



Fostering Panel

Our original Panel has been established since 1994 and our central list comprises people with experience from a variety of backgrounds, including Social Work, Health, Education, and Foster Care. It also includes people from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and a balance of both genders. It meets the requirements of NMS 14 and Regulations 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28. The Panel has a well-established reputation for independence and our aim is to develop its role in quality assurance in relation to the assessment and carer review processes. All Panel Members are fully checked and Panel Meetings are subject to written procedures over decision-making. Panel has access to medical advice as appropriate.

Although the Regulations require only the first review of a carer to go to Panel, as part of our commitment to quality, independent oversight of our work and promoting safeguarding, we currently normally put all reviews of carers to Panel.

Staff

All of Parallel Parents' staff are appropriately checked/vetted in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2011, and have relevant and appropriate recognised qualifications and experience, including:

- Diploma in Social Work
- BA/MA
- BSc/MSc
- Ph.D
- A1 Assessor Award
- NVQ/Diploma Level 4/5 in Leadership and Management
- Experience of Residential and EBD Childcare / Management

Additionally, many of our staff have specialist qualifications and experience, including Counselling and Psychotherapy Post-Graduate Diploma and work as a Practice Teacher. All Social Work staff are registered with Social Work England (previously HCPC). The agency employs a variety of individuals who have a diverse range of experience in the sector, and in the areas of management and administration, in order to ensure that practice requirements are met and exceeded in all areas of the organisation.

All staff receive appropriate levels of support, training and supervision, and are consulted with and appraised at least annually.

Director & Responsible Individual:

- B.A Hons. Social Science, Liverpool University, 1970
- Qualified Youth Worker
- Ph.D Criminology/Deviancy, Edinburgh University, 1980
- Detached Youth Worker (1972-3) Working with gangs in Dundee.
- Youth Worker (1973-1980) Establishing and managing youth clubs in Stockport.
- Senior Intermediate Treatment Worker (1980-86) Established and managed Juvenile Justice Centre in Stockport
- Project Director – Regional Charity (1986-91) Reorganised the residential provision from traditional homes to bases for work in the community.
- Joint Director of Care Today (1991 – Present)

Registered Manager (SL):

- Dip.S.W.
- Residential Childcare (EBD) – 3 years
- Fostering Services – since 2000; Registered Manager since 2004.
- Registered Managers' Award (MRCC)
- Safeguarding Level 5
- Trained in PAMS assessments

Registered Manager (BS):

- BA Social Work – 2012
- BSc Psychology
- MRCC (Level 4)
- 13 years' experience working with children and families in a residential setting
- 10+ years' management experience
- 8+ years' experience as a Supervising Social Worker
- Safeguarding Level 5
- Trained in PAMS assessments

Quality Manager:

- BA English Language and Literature
- MA (Oxford)
- Post-Graduate Certificate in Counselling
- In post since 2011

8. SERVICES OFFERED

We offer a range of carers to suit the needs of individual children. With the implementation of our career structure for foster carers, several are already studying towards the Diploma in Health & Social Care (Children & Young People), and aiming to achieve status as Level 3 Carers (or above). We can offer placements with carers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and heritages. Our placements extend across the North West, East and West Midlands, and Yorkshire.

Our placements are emergency or planned, short and long-term, for all ages (0 to 18) and sibling groups. However, we recognise that many of our referrals will be for young people who have a history of failed placements, challenging behaviour and complex needs. Many of our foster carers have experience of working with challenging behaviour and receive the highest level of support, supervision, training and guidance.

Types of Placement offered:

- Children with challenging behaviour
- Children (either sex) who have been abused physically, emotionally and/or sexually
- Children who abuse, although any placement will be subject to detailed risk assessment before placement with (or with access to) any other children. This assessment will involve all parties, including the potential foster carers, and would not take place without written agreement from all involved
- Remand Placements
- Mother and baby, including assessment of parenting skills, child protection issues
- Placements for children who are disabled or who have complex health needs
- Respite
- Permanent Placements
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker placements
- Solo placements / complex needs
- Placements for children who are transitioning to or from Residential care ('step down')

Referrals and Matching

Our referral system is designed to obtain full and accurate information to ensure careful matching. At the point of referral, we require:

- Completed, countersigned referral form (essential)
- LAC Documentation including the Care Plan, Placement Plan and Medical Consent/Delegated Authority (ideally, before placement, except, in emergencies, as soon as possible after placement)
- Any other relevant information e.g. psychiatric reports (as with LAC Documents).

Additionally:

- Under NMS 15.1 and 15.2, written foster placement agreements must contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer. This is particularly important with emergency placements. An initial planning meeting should be held within a maximum of 72 hours to consider the continued appropriateness of the placement and to make detailed plans.
- Specialist therapeutic input should be discussed before placement, if required.
- Foster Carers should be fully involved in devising and agreeing Placement Plans. In the case of emergency placements, care planning is given immediate attention. Wherever possible, introductions should be carried out and information about the foster carer(s) should be shared with the child/young person.

All placements are matched by a Supervising Social Worker from the Area Team that best knows the skills, matching considerations and household circumstances of the foster carer, and our experienced referrals team provide detailed and relevant information about the Carer to the Local Authority.

The Supervising Social Worker is heavily involved at the beginning of the placement, providing enhanced support where necessary and ensuring the continued appropriateness of the match.

Additional Services available:

- Psychological Counselling (BACP and UKCP registered Counsellors and Psychotherapists)
- Play Therapy
- Support Workers
- External education support worker
- Access to Positive Steps Intervention Team (outdoor pursuits) – AALA Licensed
- Input from Fostering Resource Centres (Local Children's Homes from within the Organisation)
- Resources from NWG Network gold membership

Direct Work

Where necessary and appropriate, our Social Work team can provide additional, enhanced support or structured activity in order to support placement stability or improve the quality of the placement. This may include outreach work, days out with a Support Worker, supervised contact or specific pieces of structured work such as Life Story work. Support is needs led,

and can be provided daily, with the support of staff from Care Today Ltd/Partnership, or Parallel Parents Residential, if necessary.

Fun days, forums and seasonal parties are organised on a regular basis in each area, providing an opportunity for consultation in an informal setting. This includes regular school holiday activity days for looked-after and birth children.

Achievements are acknowledged through our regular newsletters to carers and young people, and the achievements of children are celebrated through certificates and 'praise postcards.'

Support for Education

In accordance with the ethos of Parallel Parents, each foster placement actively promotes and supports the educational attainment of the children, in line with each child's age, aptitude, needs, interest and potential.

"The Education and Achievement of Children is actively promoted as valuable in itself, and as part of their preparation for adulthood" (DfE – National Minimum Standards 2011).

Parallel Parents recognises the need to ensure that all children and young people have access to an appropriate education provision which meets their statutory entitlement to 25 hours of education per week. Where young people are no longer in education, they are encouraged to participate in further training, voluntary work or employment.

Parallel Parents employs two Education Coordinators, one of whom is the Organisation's Virtual Head, who provide:

- Support in gaining and maintaining school placements.
- Advice and support to Supervising Social Workers and carers about education issues.
- Support with arranging individual tuition or further support.
- Guidance on how to access a range of courses and alternative education provisions.

We support carers through education training and a clear education policy, which includes checking (through supervision visits) that children are:

- Prepared for school on time and with appropriate uniform and resources.
- Encouraged to participate in after-school clubs and extracurricular activities.
- Shown support at all times and helped with their reading and homework etc.
- Given access to appropriate educational resources such as a computer and local library.
- Represented by carers at parents' evenings (as appropriate) and with close liaison between the school and carer.

- Given an appropriate, quiet home environment in which to study.

Active liaison will take place with each educational placement, always ensuring the target – provision of an appropriate full-time educational placement/programme – is pursued.

If a Local Authority educational provision is not available, an appropriate (needs based) package is provided by Care Today/Parallel Parents Education Services, under the direction and guidance of the Education Co-coordinators, who will utilise qualified teachers/instructors to provide/offer an alternative programme.

In-house educational packages and programmes include opportunities to access nationally recognised assessments and qualifications (AQA Unit Awards, ASDAN Youth Awards, AQA Achievement Tests, RSA CLAIT, Key Stage SATs etc). Our in-house provision is intended to offer short-term alternatives, with the objective of reintegration, wherever appropriate, into mainstream school or FE College.

Family Time

Foster Carers are supported to facilitate family time between the child and their birth family (or significant other) where this is called for in their care plan. Where supervision of family time is required, and input from the agency is specifically requested by the Placing Authority, Support Workers and Supervising Social Workers will undertake this task, in recognition of the need for a child to have a familiar face to support them through what can be, for some children, an emotionally challenging time.

Independent Support and Specialist Advice

All approved foster carers are provided with full, paid membership to The Fostering Network, which provides them with a wealth of independent advice and support about practice, legal and financial matters, exclusive offers and benefits, Legal Expenses Insurance and advocacy. Additionally, Parallel Parents has 'Gold' membership of NWG Network, allowing unlimited accounts. Parallel Parents also has organisational membership of The Fostering Network, CoramBAAF, FosterTalk and ICHA.

Health Promotion

Foster Carers are supported to promote the individual health needs of each child/young person, including ensuring they are registered with a local GP, optician and dentist. They are also supported to access other appropriate health services, such as CAMHS. Health Promotions training is mandatory for all foster carers, and helps them to provide children and young people with a healthy lifestyle, including balanced diet and regular exercise.

Therapeutic Services

The organisation is currently (2022 onwards) developing its own Therapeutic Model, which will be embedded in practice at policy level and throughout the organisation's extensive training programme. Currently, Parallel Parents is able to provide therapeutic services to young people where this is required, at an additional cost, although Supervising Social Workers and Managers can consult with the qualified Therapy team as part of their day to day work.

The organisation is working towards being fully Trauma Informed, and training in Trauma Informed Practice has been provided to all staff and foster carers. All Parallel Parents staff members completed 'Post Traumatic Growth: Care After Covid' in March 2022.

Recruitment efforts in Parallel Parents will focus on finding prospective foster carers who have the necessary skills and qualities, along with a willingness to train and develop, to provide Therapeutic Parenting and Therapeutic Foster Placements.

The Organisation, as of 2023, has set up a Therapeutic Training Centre, which is currently seeking CPCAB accreditation for its Level 2 and 3 Counselling courses.

Respite

Foster Carers receive 14 days' paid respite allowance per year (standard), and may either use the respite, or allow it to accrue if they do not require breaks. It is our policy to place children in respite only when it is in their best interests, and this will usually be with either checked family members who are known to the child (in the carer's own home), or other Parallel Parents foster carers with whom they are familiar.

Post 18 Care – 'Staying Put'

Several of our foster carers have, or are currently, supporting post-18 or 'Staying Put' arrangements with young people. We recognise that the move to independence can be daunting for some young people; therefore, our foster carers and staff usually remain on hand, where practical and appropriate, to provide ongoing support during and after the transition.

Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Consultation

The quality and performance of Parallel Parents is monitored in a number of ways, including through internal audits and external verification and inspection by Ofsted. The Quality and Registered Managers and other Senior Managers continually monitor the performance of staff, the progress children and young people are making, outcomes achieved and the effectiveness of matching and Placement Plans. Action is taken as appropriate, and feedback is provided through regular meetings (NMS 25.7).

Our organisational quality management systems have been assessed and approved by CQS (Certified Quality Systems) Ltd. to BS EN ISO 9001:2015 standards. We conduct regular consultations with children, foster carers, staff and placing Social Workers. Reports under Regulation 35 are also produced as appropriate.

Our Quality Management Team includes:

Registered Manager for Quality (Beverley Salt):

- BA Social Work
- BSc Psychology
- MRCC (Level 4)
- 13 years' experience working with children and families in a residential setting
- 10+ years' management experience
- 10+ years' experience as a Supervising Social Worker
- Safeguarding Level 5
- Trained in PAMS assessments

Quality Manager:

- BA English Language and Literature
- MA (Oxford)
- Post-Graduate Certificate in Counselling
- Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading - Proofreading Level 1
- Working towards Level 2 Introduction to Counselling (CPCAB)
- In post since 2011

Autistic Spectrum Condition Support Hub

Parallel Parents employs a specialist in Autistic Spectrum Condition who is based in the Merseyside Area and will also serve the Parallel Parents West Branch. The Autism Hub Manager is a qualified social worker (BA Hons. Social Work) and has an MA in Autism (Children). The Hub provides:-

- Bespoke support packages
- Individual support plans
- Tailored training for individuals and groups covering ASD, ADHD, PDA, sensory processing difficulties, communication and Alexithymia, Autism and Safeguarding, and mental health
- One to one support
- Autism/ADHD support groups
- Fact sheets and resources

Training Services

Sister organisation, Training to Care, is able to cater for the vast majority of individual training and CPD requirements, and will also serve the Parallel Parents West Branch.

Training to Care is City and Guilds approved, and has Direct Claims Status, meaning that qualifications can be awarded prior to external verification. The Training Centre provides relevant qualifications from Level 2 to Level 5, and supports staff members and foster carers to access Degree level and post-graduate courses as required, including Social Work qualifications.

All of the organisation's mandatory training requirements are met by Training to Care, either directly or through partnership with The Social Care Hub. The Training Centre ensures (with support from Management) that all individuals have a relevant and up to date CPD plan, and organises an Annual Training Agenda with courses informed by topics of national interest and observed trends.

All Supervising Social Workers/Managers, including those proposed to work for the Parallel Parents West Branch, have completed the Train the Trainer course, and are therefore able to offer training opportunities tailored to individual learning needs.

9. FOSTER CARERS: RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT, TRAINING, SUPPORT AND REVIEW

Recruitment, Assessment and Approval

Parallel Parents aims to recruit a wide range of foster carers, particularly members of working class and multi-ethnic communities. It is felt important to search for individuals who may have shared many of the negative experiences of children in care and achieved a positive adult life. We feel that such people are positive role models for children. Word of mouth is often the most effective way of attracting such valuable people; many of our fostering households are related to each other, and provide 'ready-made' support networks for each other.

Our recruitment practices are fair, efficient, ethical and reflective of current Local Authority needs. We are mindful of the national deficit of foster carers, and ensure that all of the foster carers we recruit have sufficient induction and training to ensure their retention.

Anyone may apply to become a foster carer, regardless of their gender, marital status, employment status, sexuality, disability or culture, providing they have a spare bedroom and are over 21 years of age. There is no upper age limit to fostering, but carers are required to attend a medical with their GP every three years, and are subject to annual reviews of approval. Any applicant who has been convicted of an offence against a child or a serious offence against an adult will be excluded.

The Approval Process

Initial Enquiry

- Enquiries are prioritised according to current geographical and business need.
- We aim to recruit a range of carers with diverse skills and backgrounds.
- Initial enquiries are usually screened by phone from our Head Office to ensure that enquirers are meeting our basic prerequisites (such as having enough bedrooms) and that they have a basic understanding of the application process and the fostering task.
- As part of this process, we investigate personal and work circumstances and try to obtain information about pets and regular visitors as well as current employment etc.

Initial Visit

- Positive initial calls are passed on to experienced initial visitors who undertake a further screening phone call to verify initial information, and then, if appropriate, conduct an initial visit in order to further explore the applicant's motivation and reasons for wanting to foster, their home life and their willingness to train and commit to the full application process.
- To provide objective and balanced feedback, initial visitors normally visit in pairs and assess the family set-up, including physical environment (health & safety issues etc.) and the suitability of the enquirer (i.e. Skills, qualities, empathy).
- From time to time, our existing experienced fosters carers will accompany the initial visitors to help with this process and answer any questions.

Assessment – Stage 1

- If Initial Visitors recommend continuing the application process, enquirers will complete an application pack, which includes DBS application forms for each member of the household (over 16), AH medical, checks consent form and application form, which enables us to obtain the information required under Schedule 3 to the Fostering Regulations. The Application Pack will then be reviewed by the Registered Managers, Assessments and Reviews Manager and Recruitment/Development Managers (as appropriate).
- Additional checks and references may be sought at the discretion of the agency; safeguarding children and young people is our first priority.
- The checks are processed by designated qualified and experienced staff at our Head Office, with direction, where necessary, from our Agency Decision Maker.
- The Assessment is carried out in accordance with Statutory Guidance on the assessment and approval of foster parents (i.e. Stage 1 and 2 have distinct decision making processes, although we carry out both stages in conjunction).

Training (Pre-Approval)

- We have a robust pre-approval training programme, which also allows for further screening of applicants. All prospective foster carers are required to attend the Introductory Training developed by the Fostering Network. This is usually carried out in group sessions to ensure that attendees benefit from group discussions and to encourage networking.

“The Skills to Foster” (Third Edition, 2014):

- What do Foster carers do?
- Identity and life chances
- Working with others
- Understanding and caring for children
- Safer Caring
- Transitions

The development standards provide a structured approach to the training and assessment of foster carers. This focuses on the skills, experience and development – or competencies – which are needed to foster effectively. The approach comprises 37 key competencies or abilities grouped under seven broad headings.

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (formerly CWDC) are designed to support foster carers from pre-approval through their first year of fostering, and are started during the assessment process:

- Standard 1 – Understand the principles and values essential for fostering children & young people
 - Standard 2 – Understand your role as a foster carer
 - Standard 3 – Understand health and safety, and healthy care
 - Standard 4 – Know how to communicate effectively
 - Standard 5 – Understand the development of children and young people
 - Standard 6 – Keep children safe from harm
 - Standard 7 – Develop yourself
-
- Prospective foster carers complete the NSPCC's Child Protection training prior to approval, in order to ensure that they have a sure knowledge of safeguarding issues prior to children being placed.
 - Additionally, prospective carers are provided with training in First Aid and Behaviour Management prior to presentation at Panel.
 - All members of an applicant's household undertake safe caring training (as age appropriate), or 'My Family Fosters'.
 - The agency's expectations of foster carers are laid out in the Foster Care Agreement, which is given to applicants at the start of the assessment process as a training tool that reinforces the ethos of Parallel Parents.

Assessment – Stage 2

- Parallel Parents uses the CoramBAAF FORM F (2014/2018). A qualified, assessing social worker will gather evidence from a wide range of sources to complete the written report. The evidence is then presented to our independent Panel.
- Safeguarding, equality and legal aspects of looking after children are discussed in laymen's terms to ensure that applicants have a thorough understanding of the requirements for becoming a foster carer.
- Assessments explore extensively the previous experience of applicants and address how these experiences can be used to the best advantage when caring for children who often have complex needs.

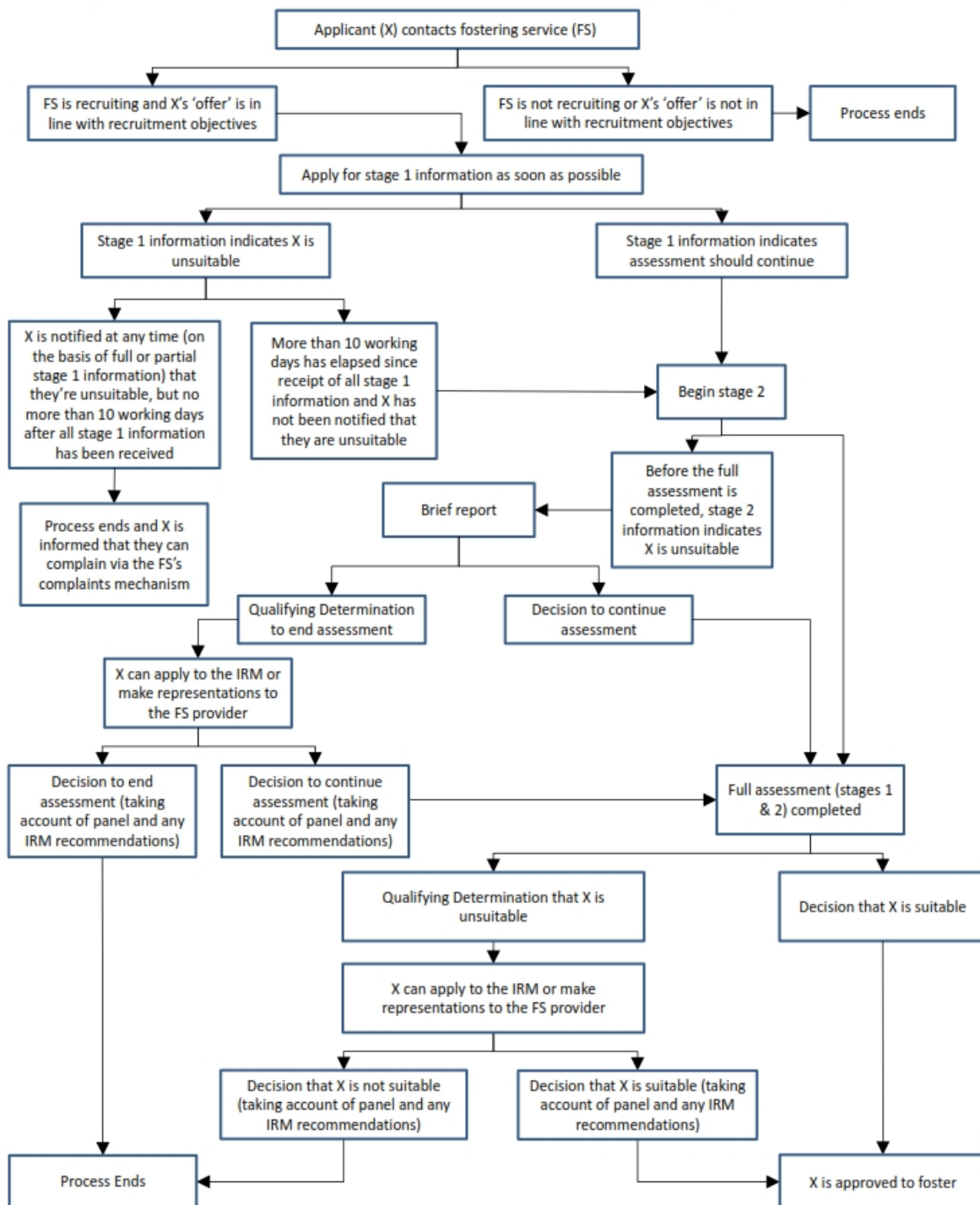
Panel

- Form Fs are presented to our experienced independent panel and applicants are invited to attend in order to ask and answer any questions prior to approval.
- The Panel quality checks assessments and cross-checks information provided in order to confirm the suitability of the applicants, and it will recommend appropriate terms of approval with regards to the skills and qualities of the applicants as well as the emotional, physical and practical needs of client groups.
- The Agency Decision Maker studies the panel minutes, taking into account the panel's recommendations and will proceed to make a decision on suitability based on these.

Once carers are approved by Parallel Parents, they will be allocated a named support worker who is appropriately qualified and will be responsible for the carer's support needs. The carer's first year is probationary. In addition to 24 hour support, s/he will be offered weekly telephone contact and support visits in line with the current Foster Care Agreement. The key issue is the needs of the child/children placed. It is recognised that Probationary Carers require additional support and advice.

The flowchart below, taken from the Department for Education's website, outlines the accepted process for the assessment of foster carers.

Stages 1 and 2: Foster carer assessment & approval process



NB - This diagram illustrates how stages 1 & 2 of the assessment process fit together. It is not intended to cover all actions a FS must undertake as part of the process - FSs must refer to the regulations and statutory guidance for this information. It should be noted that at any point in the process applicants (1) can withdraw, in which case the process ends; and (2) can complain to the FS (and must be informed of their right to do so if they are turned down in stage 1).

Department for Education, 2013

Training and Development

Post-approval, carers undertake an individual training programme based on identified need during the assessment process and on the terms of their approval. However, Level 1 carers must undertake the following mandatory training within the first year of approval:

Level 1 (Probationary) Carers (all)

Mandatory training:

First Aid (completed prior to approval and renewable every three years)	Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care Induction
Health Promotions (renewable every three years)	Behaviour Management (pre-approval; annual updates)
NSPCC Child Protection (pre-approval); Educare Child Protection / Training 2 Care Safeguarding (Annually)	Safe Handling of Medication and Health and Safety (renewable every three years, if appropriate)
Leaving Care/Preparing for Independence Training (based on approval/age of placements)	Disability Training (for carers fostering children with disabilities)
Safer Caring (pre-approval); annual updates	Various Online Training (provided through The Social Care Training Hub)

Other training available through structured sessions, online, or through support groups including:

- National Minimum Standards/Agency Policies and Procedures
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Equality and Diversity
- Fire Safety
- Recording and Reporting

Above and beyond this, probationary carers may also opt to attend further training run in their area for Level one/two carers detailed below or further training may be offered through support groups.

We also offer Online Training through The Social Care Hub in a variety of topics.

Training available for all Carers:

Revised annually to offer different sessions based on needs of the young people in placement and as part of the carers' training plan, the following sessions are running in 2023-24 (in addition to mandatory training, online training offered through The Social Care Training Hub, and external training included in the agency's NWG Network membership):

Health Promotions: Sexual Health	Internet Safety and the Blue Light Effect
Gang Crime	Autism (ASD) and ADHD
Contextual Safeguarding	Trauma Informed Practice
Therapeutic Parenting Techniques	Introduction to PACE
Experimental and Harmful Sexual Behaviours	Sensory Development - Sensory Diet
Self-Harm	Attachment Disorders

Training is usually held in twelve key locations, in order to make it as accessible as possible to foster carers. In exceptional circumstances, some evening or weekend training may be arranged. There is an expectation that carers will attend training on a regular basis in order to enhance their skills and knowledge and further their own professional development. Failure to attend training may lead to a review of the carer's suitability to foster.

Full range of available courses:

Loss and Bereavement	Nutrition and Behaviour around Food
Allegations and Complaints	Reflective Practice
Social Pedagogy	Developing Through Play and Creativity
Solution Focused Approach Skills	CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy)
Children and Young People's Development	Cyber Bullying, E Safety, Internet Safety and Social Networking
The Meaning Behind Behaviour	Conflict Resolution
TDS / Diploma Workshops	Notification training
Anger Management	Building Identity
My Family Fosters Refresher	Health and Safety

Building Resilience (Risk Resilience and Strategies)	Parenting a child who has been sexually abused sessions 1-6
Learning Difficulties / EBD in Education / SATS and Education Statements	The Skills Development Course - for foster parents and parents of children who have been sexually abused
ADHD / ADD	Drug Use and Misuse
15 to Independence pack	Autism Awareness
Education Training	Communication
Tax Training	Safeguarding
Social Media and Internet Safety	Sexualised Behaviour
Sexual Exploitation and CSE	Therapeutic Approaches
Autistic Spectrum Disorder training	Absconding Behaviour
Equality and Diversity Training	Children and Young People who Self Harm
Transitions and Endings	Protective Behaviours
Attachment Training	Risk Taking Behaviours
Safe Caring Refresher (also for babysitters and regular visitors)	Social Pedagogy
Life Story Work	Child Development
Carers' Role in Education (Learning Difficulties, EBD, Exclusions, EHC Process)	PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy)
Self Harm: How can we help a young person?	Therapeutic Parenting
Caring for Teenagers ('Brain Rewire')	Roles and Responsibilities / Contact (Refresher)
Stress Awareness and Management	Staying Put
Drugs Awareness (including Legal Highs / Psychoactive Substances)	Recording Outcomes Monitoring Sheets, Reporting Significant Events and Confidentiality (Refresher)
Neuro-Linguistic Training	Mental health Awareness / Supporting Mental Health
Emotional Language	Paediatric First Aid

ADHD and Autism	Foetal Alcohol Syndrome
Alcohol and Substance Abuse / Legal Highs	Managing Disclosures
Disability and Mental Health Awareness	HIV / AIDS Awareness
Anti-oppressive Practice Training	Missing, Risk Taking and Offending
Confidentiality	Managing Difficult Behaviour
Resilience and transitions	Paediatric Specialist Training
Global Developmental Delay, Epilepsy and other Specialist Conditions	Adoption, Special Guardianship and Permanence
Domestic Abuse	Offending Behaviour
Forced Marriage training	Stress Management
Safeguarding Children with Disabilities	Fire Safety
Asylum Seekers - Legal Perspectives	Contact training
Long-Term, Permanence, SGO and Staying Put	Counselling Skills
Managing Allegations	De-escalation Techniques
Raising Self Esteem	Attachment and Survival Strategies

Enhanced training available for Level 2 – 5 carers:

- Level 3 Diploma for Children’s Workforce: Social Care Pathway – this may be undertaken at any time following the successful completion of the Probationary period.
- Specialist Disability/Learning Difficulties or CAMHS Training
- Introduction to Counselling (Levels 2-4)
- Behaviour Modification Techniques
- Conflict Resolution (3 day course)

Career Structure

Note: subject to consultation and change at the discretion of the Agency, if Regulations or Contracts require review.

Parallel Parents is committed to offering high quality care, in a family setting, to children/young people who have a variety of needs. We acknowledge that our foster carers

are an integral part of our team. We value their skills and acknowledge the quality of care that carers have provided for children/young people.

In line with the high level of skills and commitment that many of our carers have shown, we have introduced a professional career structure. Hopefully, this will allow carers opportunities for advancement and will encourage them to take on extra responsibilities within the organisation.

Note 1: Carers at the highest level of the career structure, who achieve exceptional outcomes for children and display the ability to proactively support other foster carers/work with children's families, can apply to the Agency to be considered for progression to join the staff of the Agency, initially as a Support Worker, with a view to formal social work training (subject to the ability to successfully complete such training). *This is at the discretion of Parallel Parents and subject to the current staffing needs of the Agency and its development plan.*

Note 2: Career Level and Additional Placement Allowances: At the discretion of the Agency, a Carer may receive extra allowances, in addition to their standard career level allowance, where a child's behaviour or needs are particularly complex and/or challenging. Examples (not exclusive) are a verbally or physically aggressive teenager, a young person at risk of child sexual exploitation or a child with disabilities requiring high levels of personal care. This agreement will normally be in writing, detailing the reasons for the additional allowances and any extra responsibilities. However, this is child specific and, when the child is discharged, the Carer will return to their current Career Level Allowance. Additional allowances may also be paid, entirely at the Agency's discretion, and only by prior written agreement, for specific tasks or pieces of work undertaken by the foster carer (e.g. leafleting/recruitment, training).

Note 3: Respite Allowances: Respite allowances are paid in line with individual carers' standard career level allowances (i.e. respite payments will range from £55.08 per night to £69.64 per night, dependent on current career level).

Requesting Career Progression

Progression to another level will be discussed (if appropriate) with the FCDW/Support Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer as part of the carer's Annual Review process and may be deferred to a later date. Parallel Parents' social workers and local authority social workers will be approached for feedback on the foster carer's level of competency. The carer will prepare a letter, or portfolio, highlighting their skills and may be interviewed by the Panel. The independent Panel will make the final recommendation as to the progression of carers. They may propose a time scale to look at the carers again, if they feel that further skills need to be demonstrated. Requests for progression should be completed in the relevant section of the Pre-Review Carers' Comments Form prior to, or during, the review. Carers not seeking progression should use this form to demonstrate how they continue to

meet the requirements of their current level, as you can be downgraded, as well as upgraded.

Basic Requirements for Progression to/Staying on Any Career Level

In order to successfully progress to any level of the career structure, foster carers must have:

- **Completed all mandatory training and kept this training up to date in line with agency expectations (both carers must have completed mandatory courses; updates should take place within every three year review cycle)**
- Promoted/achieved positive outcomes and planned transitions for children and young people cared for
- Shown commitment to, and worked in accordance with, the Agency's aims and objectives (outlined in the Statement of Purpose) and the requirements of the Foster Carer Agreement ('Carers' Responsibilities'), and followed all Agency policies and procedures
- Completed any outstanding actions/development points from the previous annual review and supervision.

If the above requirements are not satisfied, the carer may not progress at this time.

Important: Carers are approved as individuals or partners. If partners, **both** must meet the requirements successfully and be reviewed annually to maintain a minimum level 1 status.

Probationary Periods

After extensive initial training and approval, the first year will be a 'probationary' period for all new Parallel Parents' Carers (whatever their initial career level). Carers with no previous experience of fostering must gain some experience of fostering and/or demonstrate their skills/competency before they can be considered for progression (the probationary period can, therefore, be extended beyond a year). **Important:** Carers with previous experience of fostering and/or transferable skills from qualifications or employment may begin their career with Parallel Parents at the level most appropriate to them (at the Agency's discretion), but will still be subject to the probationary period, regardless of their qualifications/experience on entry.

The Career Structure (Basic Allowances)

Level	Essential tasks/skills	Desirable tasks/skills
1	Carers need to demonstrate an ability to:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in line with the Foster Carer Agreement • Meet the responsibilities listed in 'Carers' Responsibilities' 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in an appropriate training programme (to include home study and/or day courses) Contribute to reports for reviews/meetings Complete the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care <p>Some experience of fostering is necessary for progression (at the Panel's discretion).</p>	
£385.56 Per Week		
2	<p>The first annual review will assess the probationary period (normally, completed under Level One, except for experienced Carers joining from other Agencies). Successful completion will lead to progression onto Level Two and the opportunity for gaining knowledge and experience with a view to further career development. Carers will normally operate for at least one year on this level and must undertake any individual training programme(s) detailed in the Annual Review.</p>	<p>Carers must fulfil the requirements in the left column, but in addition meet at least one of the following criteria:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successfully managing a 'complex' placement or placements (may include placements with a high level of travel or appointments etc.) Assisting in the recruitment of new carers or showing commitment to developing the service Being involved in the training of other carers (where an appropriate qualification or experience allows this) Gaining experience by completing shifts in Care Today Homes
£411.05 Per Week		
3	<p>Carers now have at least two years' fostering experience and must show that they:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate a high level of skill in working with complex cases e.g. abused children, children with disabilities, remand cases, sibling groups or children with complex behavioural issues (includes placements with a high level of travel, appointments etc.). Work actively, and on an outreach basis, with parents/families and liaise effectively with other agencies and professionals. Carry out specific and specialised pieces of work with children/young people (e.g. life story, behaviour modification and preparation for independence). Enrol on Diploma Level 3 in Health & Social Care (Children & Young People), in addition to any individual training programme(s) detailed in the Annual Review. <i>**Enrolment is a requirement of progression to Level Three. Must have completed Diploma within 3 years of enrolment.</i> 	<p>Carers must fulfil the requirements in the left column, but in addition, meet at least one of the following:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assisting in the recruitment of new carers or showing commitment to developing the service Being involved in the training of other carers (where an appropriate qualification or experience allows this) Increasing experience by completing shifts in Care Today Homes Supporting other carers, practically or emotionally Running support groups for carers, or helping to run activity days for children and young people.

	<p><i>Failure to complete within this time-scale may result in demotion to Level Two at the discretion of the Panel.</i></p> <p>* Diploma may be undertaken at any time following the successful completion of the Probationary period.</p>	
£436.54 Per Week		
4	<p><i>Highly experienced and skilled carers with a wide variety of fostering experience and a proven record of contributing towards outstanding outcomes for children and young people.</i> Must meet all of the requirements of Levels One to Three (including undertaking any individual training programme(s) detailed in the Annual Review), as well as taking on specialist roles with Parallel Parents. The competencies described below are a requirement of progression and must be demonstrated on a continuing basis in order to secure progression to, and maintenance of, Level Four status:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing specialist placements (e.g. complex and/or challenging behaviour, perpetrators, PMLD, complex medical needs, 'step down' or therapeutic placements etc.) ● Providing respite and emergency placements (as appropriate) ● Writing reports for reviews/meetings and undertaking specific pieces of work (e.g. Life Story work, independence training, facilitating/supervising contact) ● Must have completed Diploma Level 3 in Health & Social Care (Children & Young People) or equivalent qualification (at Agency's discretion) <p>Note: Level Four will be awarded only when a specialist placement has been provided within the last 12 months.</p>	<p>Carers must fulfil the requirements in the left column, but in addition meet at least two of the following criteria on an ongoing basis (or an equivalent task/commitment):-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assisting in the recruitment of new carers or showing commitment to developing the service ● Being involved in the training of other carers (where an appropriate qualification or experience allows this), including running training courses ● Making contributions, as appropriate, to our Fostering Resource Centres ● Supporting other carers, practically or emotionally ● Running support groups for carers in their area, or helping to run activity days for children and young people.
£462.03 Per Week		
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Must consistently meet all of the requirements for Levels 1 to 4. ● Additionally, the Level 5 Carer is a Practice Leader and so, normally, will be a Carer who has made an outstanding contribution to fostering with Parallel Parents over a period of 10 or more years, and routinely demonstrates all of the Career Structure skills and commitments, especially to training and practice improvement/learning. ● Factually evidenced exceptional performance must be maintained to remain on this career level. ● Requests for progression to this level must be 'seconded' by a Senior Manager and the Carer must have a specialist placement. ● Carers who have applied/been accepted by the Agency for social work training may be considered for this level, as part of their progression in the Agency. 	
£487.52 Per Week		

Specialist / Hub Carer (Operating outside of Standard Career Structure)

- Selection by Senior Management from existing Level 5 carers, or carers from Levels 1 to 4 who have demonstrated exceptional outcomes or skills.
- A Specialist / Hub Carer works together with the local Support Team, to support/take responsibility for a group of carers within a geographical area (up to 45 minutes' travel time radius), and linking with both the Area, and Central, PP management to achieve outstanding outcomes for children.
- They have an important role in linking with the Central Quality Team/Registered Managers to monitor/develop best practice on the fostering front line.
- The Hub Carer is normally considered part of the Agency Support and Management Team and may or may not be formally employed by Parallel Parents (at the discretion of Senior Management).
- A Carer may request to be considered for a position as a Hub Carer outside of the Annual Review Process, and approval as a Hub Carer is separate from Standard Career Progression (Levels 1 to 5).
- Carers who have applied/been accepted by the Agency for social work training will normally be considered Hub Carers, and existing Hub Carers may be considered for further training and qualifications.

Allowances to be agreed on an individual basis

Please Note:

- It is essential that Placing Authorities validate our Career Structure. This requires us to demonstrate that foster carers who are promoted have adequate experience as well as appropriate skills. A normal time-scale for progression to Level 4 would be a minimum of three to four years. In exceptional circumstances, other fostering experience and significant positive outcomes for children or working with their families may be taken into consideration by the Panel.
- The Training, Support and Development Standards Fostering Induction must be completed within 12 months of approval (NMS 20.2), unless carers can evidence that they have already completed this with another service. Carers who decline to enrol on the Diploma Level 3 in Health & Social Care (Children & Young People) cannot progress beyond Level 2.
- Whilst we would encourage progression through the levels, carers must recognise their limitations and work at their own pace (i.e. carers with any work commitments will find it very difficult to maintain Level 4 and would remain on Level 1, 2 or 3).
- If carers disagree with the panel recommendation, they have a right to appeal to the Agency Decision Maker.
- Requirements for any level must be consistently met, especially mandatory training, which must be kept up to date. Annual Reviews can lead to demotion as well as promotion.
- **Important: A Carer approved for Level 4 or 5 will receive the enhanced allowance only when a specialist placement is being provided. Non-specialist placements will continue to be paid Level 3 allowances as a maximum.**

Seasonal Supplementary Allowance

Parallel Parents is committed to finding ways in which to financially reward the hard work of foster carers; through consultation, carers told us that they would welcome 'booster' allowances in times of financial strain. Therefore, we currently reward carers **on standard career structure allowances** (**not** Carers with enhanced allowances or respite carers, except in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Agency) with £300 of supplementary allowances per placement each year, which are paid on top of regular allowances, regardless of career level:-

- **£150 per occupied placement paid early July** (in time for Summer Holidays)
- **£150 per occupied placement paid early December** (in time for Christmas, or can be saved for another occasion/festival)
- **Important – Siblings:** all LA Contracts insist on significant sibling discounts. As we normally still pay the Carer on our career structure i.e. the Agency, not the Carer, takes the discount 'hit', unfortunately, this makes it financially impossible to pay the full 'booster' for all of a sibling group. We pay £150 in July/December for the oldest, £100 for the second, and £50 for any other siblings.

Management and Support of Foster Carers

The support and supervision of foster carers is tailored according to their experience level, the circumstances of their current placement and the foster child(ren)'s complexity of needs. We ensure that foster carers have access to any support that may be required in the interests of the children they are caring for. Our view is that the increasingly specialist role of foster care requires appropriate training, support and allowances:

- There is a 24 hour support package, including 24/7 telephone support by the area team (not a duty team).
- Each Foster Carer will have a qualified Foster Care Development Worker who is responsible for coordinating support and supervision. Formal supervision visits are very important and take into account the child's wishes and feelings, as well as progress and any emerging issues. Supervision also considers the carer(s) performance and the development of their competencies, skills/training needs and the continued stability of the living environment. Dependent on need, the standard Formal Supervision Rota is either, normally monthly, or, normally six weekly (with a 3 weekly support visit in between). The overall support package will be tailored to reflect the needs of the foster child(ren) and the experience of the foster carer. Weekly telephone support, as a baseline, is used to monitor placement progress and plan support. For example, increased telephone support (daily, if necessary) or additional support visits, activity support or crisis respite in response to placement issues.
- Each household has a Foster Carer Handbook.

- Local support groups are operated (sometimes by our more experienced carers) and carers are encouraged to network. Seasonal parties and 'fun days' are also organised.
- There are opportunities for foster carers who are experiencing more than usual difficulties in caring for a child to receive a needs led higher level support package. This can include linking to Fostering Resource Centres with experienced residential staff.
- Positive intervention / outreach work can be arranged for more challenging/complex children in order to give carers appropriate breaks.
- Unannounced visits are undertaken several times a year, in addition to an unannounced inspection visit.
- Each Foster carer is reviewed annually to ensure s/he is still meeting the regulatory requirements. This opportunity also allows them to give feedback to the agency about their own experiences.
- Regular consultation is undertaken with carers, in the form of written consultations, forums, newsletters and invitations to give feedback, comments and suggestions on a regular basis (through annual review etc.)
- Carers are able and welcome to email our Head Office directly, or make use of our 'Text "Talk"' service (send text messages directly to Head Office).
- The agency ensures that all carers have appropriate support networks and babysitters in place and that these individuals are checked in line with current legislation.
- Carers have access to information from The Fostering Network, CoramBAAF and other professional bodies, as appropriate.
- Financial support – The carer allowance realistically covers the cost of maintaining a young person. In circumstances where there are likely to be exceptionally high costs of looking after a young person, it may be necessary to negotiate an extra charge to cover foster carers' outgoings e.g. high travelling expenses, additional respite/activity allowance or excessive damage. The Agency may arrange for more complex/challenging placements to be double funded, will ensure that carers are assisted in applying for any mileage scheme for which they may be eligible, and give carers advances on their allowances where this is necessary in the interests of the children they are caring for.
- Emotional support – we have a qualified counsellor who offers sessions on a weekly basis – these can also be arranged for carers.
- Supervising Social Workers engage foster carers in the care planning process and support them in their role within the 'corporate parenting' approach.
- The agency endeavours to provide foster carers with any available information about the child(ren) they are caring for (e.g. Care Plan) and ensures that they understand how to use this information.
- Independent support is offered during any allegation.
- We extend support to the whole fostering household as appropriate.

- We offer a comprehensive training and learning programme including Training, Support and Development Standards, First Aid, Child Protection, Safe Caring and the possibility of obtaining a Diploma in Health & Social Care (Children & Young People).
- Carers are able to make training requests, and where necessary and practical, training can be facilitated in the foster carer's own home.
- Each foster carer is an automatic member of The Fostering Network.
- Each Foster Carer is required to sign a Foster Care Agreement, and holds a copy of our signed Foster Carers' Charter on file. These documents set out the foster carer's responsibilities and Parallel Parents' duty in meeting the needs of the child.
- The above practices lay a foundation for good communication and ensure that approved foster carers have the confidence to request further support and resources where required.

Placing Authorities have increasingly prioritised fostering rather than residential placements for looked after children. While this is a positive strategy, it does mean that many children who previously would have been placed in a Children's Home are now placed with foster carers. These children may have complex needs and challenging behaviour, both of which put increased pressure on foster carers. This can increase the danger of placement breakdown and it is not unusual for children with multiple placement breakdowns (fostering and residential) to be referred to Parallel Parents – even children who are currently in secure accommodation.

Fostering Resource Centres

While we remain committed to our general support strategy detailed above and developing respite strategies in the community, particularly utilising a carer's support network to create 'in placement' respite, we recognise that the needs of this group of challenging children may require a different respite strategy. For this reason, as well as extending our respite scheme and seeking to recruit additional respite carers, we are currently developing the concept of Fostering Resource Centres where residential staff link closely with designated foster carers (usually Level 3/4/5 Carers). These staff may provide additional support to the carers in the foster placement or the child may have an agreed respite package in the Children's Home. When placement difficulties are encountered, the Home may also provide respite to assess the situation and, if possible, revise the placement plan to prevent further issues. It may also be appropriate for the Children's Home to be involved in preparing the child for fostering e.g. working together with the foster carer on a pre-admission strategy to the carer's home. Our partner organisations, The Partnership of Care Today and Care Today Children's Services Ltd., have 38 homes (with further provisions under development), and this creates significant potential for a creative approach to support strategies for fostering.

10. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

Representations and Complaints

Parallel Parents' detailed Complaints Procedure is available upon request, and can be found on our website. Although representations may be made verbally or in writing to the organisation, our preference is that such representations or complaints be made to the Placing Authority, as a means of ensuring independent investigation.

It must be stressed that the supervising social worker (Parallel Parents) is available to the young person for private discussion and access to the placing authority's social worker is unrestricted, as are telephone calls to parents and extended family (where agreed as appropriate in the care plan).

In the event of wishing to make a formal complaint, please contact:

Responsible Individual
Parallel Parents
Suite D
8 Millfield Court
Eccleston
St Helens
WA10 5RG

Tel: 0161 477 5830

Email: admin@caretodayparallelpayers.net

Comments, Suggestions and Compliments

If you have a comment, suggestion or compliment, please address it to the Quality Manager, using the contact details above, or use our **Universal Feedback Form**, which can be found at <http://www.parallelpayers.com/feedbacksurvey>

Testimonials

"[Carer] is the best carer and she's always there whenever I need someone to talk to, or if I'm feeling down, she's always there, she's like a mum and I love her to bits."

Young Person

“I have to say that the level of support I have received has been second to none. The placement I had was a mum and baby and mum proved to be very difficult and was absconding at all times of the day and night, and it didn't matter what time of night I contacted [my support team], they were always very supportive and helpful and nothing was ever/is ever too much trouble for them or any of the other staff I dealt with during that placement. There has never been a time when I have not received support when needed. I feel like a valued member of a special team and very proud of it.”

Foster Carer

“I would not hesitate to place any other children with [carers] in the future. Their personalities and temperaments are exactly what I as a Social Worker and parents want in foster carers – approachable, friendly, trustworthy, and also it really comes across how much they care about [child] and they look after him brilliantly.”

Placing Social Worker

KEY STATISTICS

- Parallel Parents Ltd. has been rated ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted in four consecutive inspections since 2010.
- In 2021, 100% of our approved foster carers stated that they were happy with fostering.
- 99% of children and young people who provided feedback stated that they felt safe, supported and well cared for by Parallel Parents.
- Parallel Parents and the wider organisation supports over 700 people annually to access CPD opportunities.
- When asked to rate their experience of fostering with Parallel Parents on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being high), foster carers gave an average score of 9.4.

11. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you work for a Local Authority and would like to make a referral, please contact:

Referrals

Tel: 0800 023 4441

Fax: 0161 332 8307

Email: referrals@caretodayparallelpayers.net

If you are interested in applying to become a foster carer, please contact:

Recruitment Line

Tel: 0800 023 4450

Email: hello@parallelpayers.com

Web: www.parallelpayers.com

Administration Office

Parallel Parents
2nd Floor
Lansdowne House
85 Buxton Road
Stockport
SK2 6LR

Tel: 0161 477 5830

Web: www.parallelpayers.com

Email: admin@caretoday.co.uk

Our Ofsted Inspection Office

Ofsted
Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk