

Statement of Purpose 2022 - 2023

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Introduction

Welcome to Following Whispers Family Consultancy Ltd. This Statement of Purpose will provide a framework for the way we operate as an Independent fostering service.

At [Following Whispers](#) we believe that every child has the right to be safe, supported and listened to. We believe children and young people should reach their full potential, develop their own identity and experience living in a family environment. As an Independent Fostering Provider, we understand that it is important to have skilled, knowledgeable Foster Carers at the heart of our service who can support our children and young people.

This Statement of Purpose has been produced to provide information to all interested parties, including:

- Any person working for the fostering service
- Any Foster Carer or prospective Foster Carer of the fostering service
- Any child placed with a Foster Carer by the fostering service
- Any parent or guardian of any child placed with the fostering service
- Any purchasers of the service

A copy of the Statement of Purpose is provided, and/or made available upon request, to:

- Ofsted/Chief Inspector
- Any person working for or with the fostering service
- Any purchasers of the service

The Statement of Purpose, produced in accordance with Fostering Services Regulations includes:

- A statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service
- A statement of the services and facilities provided by the fostering service

This Statement of Purpose and the service we provide has been developed in accordance with and reflects appropriate legislation and guidance:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Services Regulations (England 2011) (Amendments 2013);
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England 2011)
- The Care Planning and Fostering (England) Regulations 2010 (Amendments 2013) (Miscellaneous Amendments 2015)
- Working together to Safeguard Children 2015 and other national frameworks
- National Standards for Foster Care and Family Placement Services

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated at least annually by the Senior Management Team.

Mission Statement-Aims and Objectives

At Following Whispers, we believe that every child has the right to be safe, protected, supported and listened to. We believe children and young people should reach their full potential, develop their own identity and experience living in a positive family environment. We strive to enable children and young people to have choices, promoting empowerment, self-esteem and confidence which improves outcomes.

The aims and objectives of the agency are:

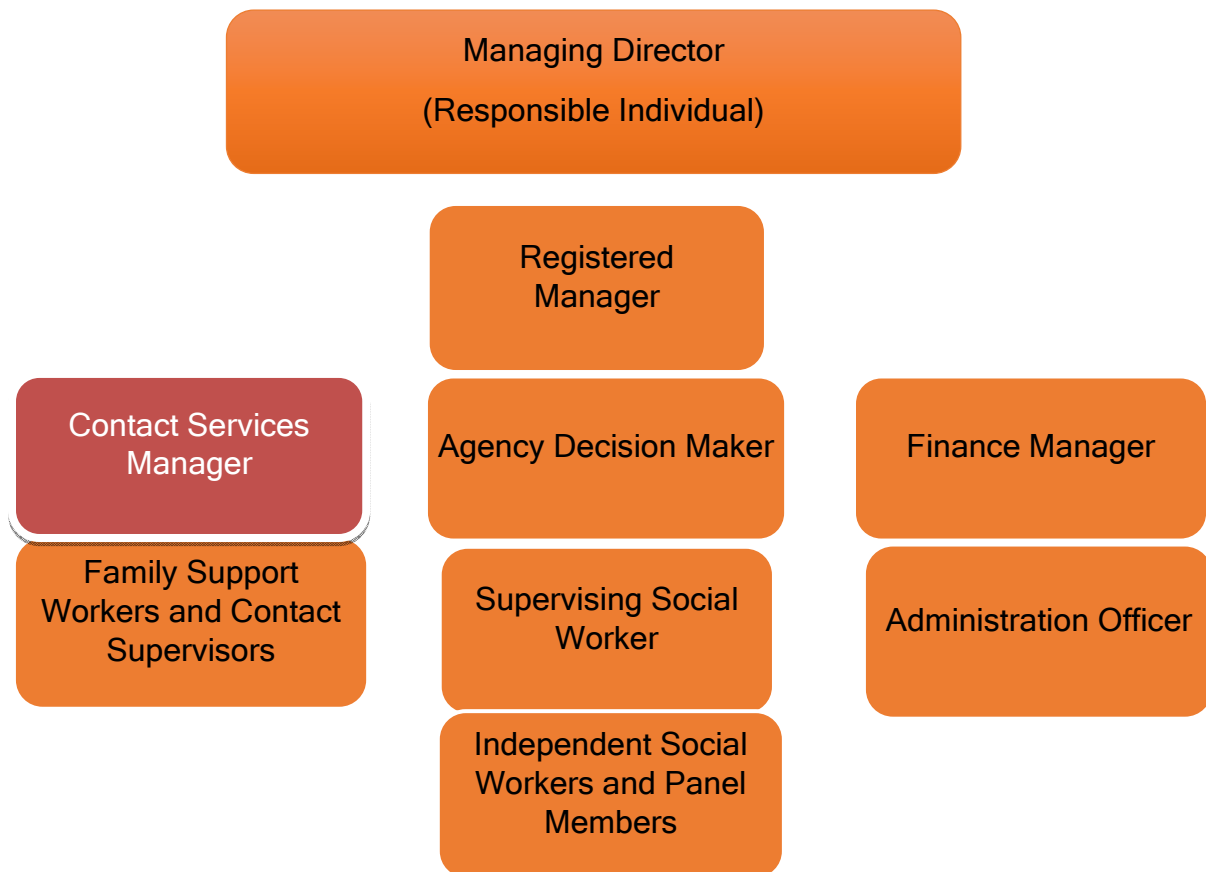
- To provide a high-quality service for looked after children and young people of all ages whose needs have been assessed by the responsible Local Authority as being best met in a foster care setting
- To ensure children and young people are placed with carers who have been recruited, assessed, approved and reviewed in accordance with statutory regulation and national standards and guidance
- To support, supervise and provide on-going training to carers so that they can provide a quality service that addresses the physical, emotional, educational and health needs of the children and young people in their care
- To continually develop and improve our service and not to compromise standards. To this aim we seek internal and external evaluation and feedback on our service

Objectives:

- To ensure the provision of high-quality care to children and young people in a safe, healthy and nurturing family environment
- To meet the child's individual needs and promote their best interests, in accordance with their care plan
- To have 24-hour support for carers, children and young people
- To protect children and young people from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation
- To value diversity and promote equality, by recognising the importance of a child's ethnic origin, religion and cultural background; and to consider a child's gender, sexuality and any disability they may have
- To recognise and develop the child's sense of identity and self-worth
- To promote the child's health and wellbeing, including their physical and emotional welfare
- To promote educational achievement and attainment
- To promote and support agreed contact with the child's family and friends, in accordance with the care plan
- To prepare the child for adult life through the development of relevant life skills
- To seek the views and opinions of children and promote participation
- To recruit individuals and families from different aspects of the community, in turn offering local authorities a range of placements, reflecting a variety of children's needs
- To achieve consistently high standards when recruiting and assessing carers
- To have an independent Fostering Panel to consider assessments, make recommendations to the agency regarding the award, review or termination of approvals

- To ensure consistency and continuity in the supervision, support and guidance to foster carers
- To provide accessible training that enables carers to develop their skills and knowledge to better meet the needs of children in their care
- To offer placements that carefully match the specific needs of the child to the carer's skills and experience
- To regularly review the stability of placements in order to ensure care provided to children remains positive and consistent in order to minimise the potential for placement breakdown
- To be a responsible employer in recruiting and employing an adequate number of appropriately experienced and qualified staff, who meet the needs of carers and children placed with them
- To ensure the agency is organisationally appropriate and properly structured
- To have procedures in place to control and supervise agency activity
- To have arrangements in place to control and supervise the agency's finances, based on sound financial principles and recognise good practice
- To maintain the skill and knowledge base of independent staff, managers and panel members by providing effective training and staff development programmes
- To monitor and review agency policies, procedures and practice on a regular basis
- To implement administrative procedures and practices so that management and staff can practice their duties in an efficient and effective manner
- To maintain secure, separate and accurate records on children, carers and staff and ensure access to such records, in line with relevant legislation

Company Structure-Status and Constitution



Name and address of Registered Manager: Margaret SIOBHAN Hamilton

Name and Address of Responsible Individual: Paula Henderson, Investaco House, Unit14, Invicta Way, Manston Business Park, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5FDAll the activities of Following Whispers are inspected and regulated by Ofsted, Registered Number: SC062080

Ofsted – Can be contacted at the follow address: Ofsted, Piccadily Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD Telephone: 0300 123 1231 Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Management-Staff Team

As a small team, the staff at Following Whispers work closely together to ensure open communication and smooth running of the service. The staff team meets formally on a weekly basis to discuss and share matters arising. The staff team comprises of:

Managing Director (Paula Henderson): Paula is a qualified Social Worker, registered with the HCPC and has over 20 years' experience of fostering. Paula provides direct support for Foster Carers and young people. Paula is also the agency Responsible Individual and founder of Following Whispers.

Financial Manager (Mike Henderson): Mike is responsible for all financial matters related to the organisation.

Registered Manager (M. Siobhan Hamilton):The Registered Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the agency, she is a qualified Social Worker. The role is to manage the team, develop policies and procedures, consistently audit the fostering service and implement regulations, ensuring safeguarding and working towards best practice. Regulation 35 of the Fostering Regulations (2011) requires the registered manager of a fostering agency to have systems in place to monitor the quality of care provided and to improve the quality of care.

Supervising Social Worker:The Social Worker is responsible for visiting Foster Carers regularly whilst providing support and supervision, attending meetings, spending time with children and young people and making recommendations for the annual Foster Carer review.

Contact Services Manager:The role of the manager is to co-ordinate the running of the agency contact centre service, provide direct supervision to Contact Centre Staff, provide on-site coaching and mentoring to Contact Centre Staff, lead staff in writing, implementing and reviewing support plans which reflect the interests and wishes of children placed within the agency.

Family Support Workers:Provide specific support to Foster Carers and children, for instance putting in an independence training package. Family Support Workers are on hand to provide additional and meaningful support to Foster Carers from day care to one to one sessions with young people as and when required.

Administrative Officer:To support Following Whispers staff by ensuring good communication, facilities and administration services.

Contact Supervisors:Facilitate and supervise contact sessions between children and their birth families and other people within their family network.

Equality and Diversity

Following Whispers is committed to providing services which embrace diversity and promote equality opportunities. As an employer we are committed to valuing equality and diversity within our workforce and to treating all employees and applicants equally, and we embed these values in our working practices.

We provide equal opportunity and do not tolerate direct or indirect discrimination. The service is responsive to children and young people's racial, cultural and linguistic background and belief systems, recognising their age, understanding, ability, and any additional needs they may have arising from physical or intellectual impairment.

Safeguarding

Working Together to Safeguard Children: www.workingtogetheronline.co.uk "Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: for services to be effective each professional and organisation should play their full part and have a child-centred approach: for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children".

Following Whispers prides itself on being child focused, we strive to reflect, learn and develop our practice in a way that safeguarding is as the centre, using Serious Case Reviews as a tool for learning.

Staff are encouraged to "think the unthinkable" to be respectful yet challenging of carers, the local authority and the organisation itself.

We listen to, and encourage children in participation events, as a way of engaging and developing relationships with those children within the service.

On placement all children are given a copy of the children's guide which provides them with information about who they can talk to, or how to make a complaint.

Foster carers are given clear guidance around safe care and alongside their own family safe care plan, a safe care plan specific to the child placed is created.

Risk assessments are completed at the point of placement, and updated at least six monthly or following any significant incidence, to reflect changes. The purpose of the risk assessment is not just to highlight risk, but to identify what children, carers and staff can do to address, manage and decrease the presenting risks.

The Registered Manager ensures all schedule 7 events and notifications are reported and managed in line with relevant legislation and company policy.

Staff and carers receive mandatory training on safeguarding. Team meetings are used to reflect on any current and relevant situations of safeguarding and/or risk and discuss matters accordingly.

Fostering Panel

The Agency has a Central list. The Fostering Panel is made up of members largely independent of the Agency. They come from different backgrounds such as Education, Health and Social Care. Members also include Foster Carers, an employee of the Agency and those who have had previous experience of being Looked After. The Fostering Panel has access to medical and legal advice.

The Fostering Panel provides an independent overview and makes recommendations to the Agency on matters that are presented to them. It is child-focussed and aims to ensure that any new foster carers that the Agency recruit will keep children and young people safe.

The Fostering Panel has important functions:

- To recommend to the Agency whether applicants are suitable to be approved as foster carers
- To recommend any changes to a foster carer's approval
- To discuss any serious concerns about a foster carer's practice
- To recommend termination of a foster carer's approval

The Fostering Panel members will consider the application to see if it meets the Agency's fostering requirements. The Panel will then make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). Applicants will be informed in writing of this decision. If they have been unsuccessful, they will be advised that they may (within 28 days) request that the agency review this decision or seek a review of this determination by the Independent Reviewing Mechanism.

Successful applicants will be informed in writing and allocated a supervising social worker. Once approved, foster carers will receive an induction that outlines expectations, policies & procedures and remuneration.

Applicants are not required to meet with the Agency Decision Maker

Service Provision-Contact-Therapy

Mainstream Fostering

Long Term Placements: Long term fostering means that a child or young person lives with a committed foster carer until they reach adulthood. Being brought up by one carer, often over several years, gives young people in foster care more consistency, and a greater sense of belonging within a family. It also helps them to settle within a local community and develop positive relationships.

Short Term Placements: Short term foster placements are for children and young people who need to be looked after temporarily. It's the most common type of fostering placement, and it gives foster carers the opportunity to really make a difference during a time of change in a young person's life.

Respite Placements: We provide respite for our in-house placements which are for specified periods of time. This can be an overnight stay, a weekend or a couple of weeks.

Emergency Placements: Are provided at short notice and are supported by a 24-hour response service. These placements can become short or longer-term placements.

Sibling Placements: We can facilitate sibling group placements, ensuring siblings can be kept together.

Bridging Placements: Are a short term, flexible placement, focussing on ensuring the most sensitive transition for the child into and from a placement.

Permanency: Permanency aims to provide security for a child through to adulthood, as all children and young people benefit from living in a predictable and stable environment with as much certainty as possible. A permanent foster placement provides a child with a fundamental commitment from the carers to the child for the rest of their childhood.

Staying Put Arrangements: From the age of eighteen young people are no longer legally 'in care' or 'looked after' and therefore fostering arrangements and legislation relating to children placed with foster carers no longer applies. In circumstances where a young person remains with their former foster carer/s after their eighteenth birthday, the arrangement should therefore be deemed an 'age eighteen and older arrangement' or "Staying Put" arrangement. Once the child reaches the age of eighteen and legal adulthood, the local authority is no longer making a placement, but facilitating a "Staying Put" arrangement for the young person

Specialist Fostering

Specialised Disability Placements: Children with learning difficulties as well as physical disabilities need that little bit more care and attention at home. The home should meet the physical needs of the placement and extra support is available from care workers depending on the level of need.

Parent and Child: Parent and child placements are a specialist type of fostering where a young parent, usually a mother and baby, comes to stay with you at a time when they need extra support. The aim of the placement is to provide support and guidance to the parent so that they may eventually provide independent care for their child.

Integrated Therapeutic Placements: Therapeutic fostering is a specialist type of foster care that is tailored to support children and young people who have dealt with trauma, abuse or any other kind of severe disruption prior to being placed into foster care. These children may have trouble forming meaningful and trusting relationships with other people or have other behavioural or emotional issues. The agency provides specific training for carers and packages of care that include supporting children's education, behavioural and safety needs. Additional support is provided by our Family Support Workers, Therapist and Trainer.

Contact Service

We are a NACCC Approved Contact Centre (National Association of Child Contact Centres). We facilitate and supervise contact sessions with the birth family if requested by the Local Authority, as part of the Care Plan for the young person. We will provide the support for family work to help develop and build bridges between the child/young person and their parents/siblings.

We provide Contact Supervisors and venues for family contact sessions for children placed within our own Fostering Agency as well as outside agencies such as Local Authorities, CAFCASS and local Solicitors seeking this service.

In Margate we have two contact rooms available at our main office which provide a comfortable, controlled venue equipped with sofas, toys, games, craft activities, DVDs and toilet and kitchen facilities. These provide space for contact to be closely supervised.

We are also able to provide experienced and DBS checked Contact Supervisors for contact sessions happening in the community such as shopping centres, parks, bowling alleys or other venues in the area local to the foster child and their family. Requests for this service can be negotiated through the office.

Therapy Service

Our Therapy Service includes access to Child Psychotherapists, Family Therapists and Play Therapists. A referral will be made if therapy is required. Therapists will liaise with the placing authority, carer and SSW in order to ascertain the purpose of the therapy and to develop a plan, including reviewing this. Reports are provided when required. Children usually see their therapist weekly. This can be more frequent if necessary.

Supporting Carers and Children

Following Whispers has various measures in place to support Foster Carers as they carry out the fostering task:

Supervision: Formal Supervision Home Visits are conducted by Supervising Social Workers at least every 4 weeks to each foster family or more frequently if required.

Support: Regular weekly phone calls from the office to check the progress of the placement and provide any advice or support required.

Following Whispers registers all its Foster Carers as members of The Fostering Network. The Fostering Network offers advice and support for Foster Carers and has up to date research and information around the Fostering Agenda.

Following Whispers can provide and arrange day care and up to 23 nights respite per year is available for all our foster families.

Regular training sessions throughout the year are planned to build on and advance the skills and knowledge of the Foster Carers. Foster Carers are also asked to complete their Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) Workbooks within their first year of fostering to help them demonstrate their competencies as Foster Carers. Monthly Foster Carer Support Groups take place in 2 locations.

24 Hour Support: We provide on call 24-hour support, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, this includes over the telephone advice and support from the office as well as our out of hours (OOH) service. On top of this service we also operate a back-up support service where members of the Management team remain on-call should they be required to assist the OOH Workers.

Annual Reviews: A review of foster carers' approval must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. Fostering regulations make it clear that the first review report has to go back to panel. After that, there is no legal requirement for a review to go back to panel, although the fostering service can choose to do so.

The review will consider whether a foster carer's approval should continue and if there should be any changes to their terms of approval.

Policies and Procedures: Foster Carers have access to all agency Policies and Procedures. These are also available on CHARMS. Our Policies are updated regularly to ensure the information remains relevant and a copy of the updated version is given to the Carers and updated on the system. Foster Carers and staff have access to the agency Policies and Procedures.

Record Keeping:Foster Carers are expected to maintain records of any information or events relating to the child in placement. Carers have access to the CHARMS system where these records can be recorded. These will be checked and signed off by their allocated Supervising Social Worker.

Birth Children Support:At Following Whispers, we believe that supporting birth children is essential to supporting fostering families. Birth children have access to 24-hour support by telephone and through our open-door policy where they can talk to staff. Each birth child is given a set of our Children's Guidelines. Following Whispers also offers activities specifically for birth children which provides an additional source of support.

Activities:A programme of activities and days out are run throughout the year aimed at providing a choice of activities that cater for the needs of all of the Foster Carers and Young People within our agency.

Support Groups:We hold monthly Foster Carer Support Group Meetings in 2 different locations so that all Foster Carers living in different areas can access these. Fostering staff will facilitate these meetings and where possible the Managing Director will attend so that Foster Carers have an opportunity to discuss matters face to face with them.

Financial:A monthly fee is paid to all our Foster Carers which comprises of two elements: a carer reward element, and maintenance for the child. All Carers are self-employed and as such will need to pay their own Tax and National Insurance. Foster Carers are also advised to have their own Accountants.

Supporting Children

Children placed with Following Whispers are seen regularly. This can happen in the home or at the offices. During visits we can provide time for the child/young person to talk to a Supervising Social Worker or Family Support Worker privately about their experiences within their foster home. Children and young people are provided with a Children's Guide to the service which is produced in various formats in line with the different age groups and different communication needs of each child.

Events/Activities:A programme of activities and days out are run throughout the year, aimed at providing a choice of activities that cater for the needs of all of the Foster Carers and Young People within our agency. Additional specific activities can be considered in-line with Care Plans.

Support Groups:The young people involved in the agency both as looked after children and birth children within foster families have their activities which allow them an informal setting to support them in the fostering experience.

Training:Where appropriate we provide training sessions to the young people on topics relevant to them. This is delivered in a format that they can understand and be involved in.

Advocacy:Every child or young person in foster care has the right to advocacy from someone independent to help them express their views or make a complaint. Having access to a Children's Rights officer or Advocate is the right of anyone in care and neither a foster carer nor young person should feel that they will get into trouble if they ask for an advocate to help them express their views.

We can liaise with the young person's Social Worker and advocacy agencies if appropriate.

Participation

This means that children have a right to say what they think and have their thoughts respected and considered when decisions are being made about their life.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12 states: any child or young person has a right to express their views and have them given due weight in decisions affecting them in accordance with their age and maturity.

This Participation Pledge means that Following Whispers promises to:

- Make sure that everyone who works at Following Whispers understands that they must be proactive in engaging children in participation.
- Listen to, respect and taken children's views seriously.
- Not discriminate against children in any way and to treat them as individuals.
- Continue to strive to build meaningful participation into our values, structures and procedures. We would like children to tell us if they feel we can improve on what we do.
- Make sure that our Participation Policy is available to all young people and their Social Workers, Following Whispers families and staff.
- Let children know about things happening at Following Whispers that affect them, how they can be involved in making decisions and what changes will be made based on what they have said.
- Be honest with children about what can and cannot happen and make sure that they understand why.
- Promote and champion children rights to have their say and make sure their views are taken seriously.

Recruitment, Assessment and Approval

Following Whispers understands that caring for children can be a demanding task and is committed to ensuring that we have carers who can meet the needs of our children through providing good quality care. All prospective carers are rigorously assessed and vetted by the agency to ensure that we approve suitable carers for our children and young people.

Skills to Foster Training Course: This course can be started anytime during Stage one or Two.

As part of the assessment process applicants will need to attend 'Skills to Foster' which is a course of 6 sessions designed to give prospective Foster Carers an opportunity to gain an insight into fostering, highlight the work and tasks involved and explore the needs of children in care. The Skills to Foster course forms part of the assessment process for prospective Foster Carers; completion of the course is therefore compulsory. In the case of couples, it is expected that both complete the course.

Stage One:

Initial Enquiry:When contact is made by a potential applicant a first response questionnaire is completed asking a few key questions which will help us decide if the potential applicant is suitable.

Initial Visit:If the above is satisfactorily completed, the Managing Director will undertake an Initial Visit to the potential carer at their home.

Application:If the decision is made to proceed, an Application pack will be sent to the applicant. Once that application has been received the process will continue.

Checks:An Enhanced DBS check will be undertaken on the applicant and any other members of the household. Local Authority checks, school checks and financial checks will be completed.

A minimum of three personal references must be obtained from adults for each applicant and they must have known the applicant for at least two years.

All applicants must agree to a written report being obtained from their GP on their health and any other relevant health issues.

Once all this information is received and completed, the agency will decide whether to move on to Stage two.

Stage Two:

Assessment Interviews:A Form F Assessor will be allocated and will arrange a number of visits in order to complete the Form F assessment. This will involve seeing members of the household together and individually. Once the report is completed it will be shared with the applicants for agreement before being processed and sent to the Agency Panel.

Panel Recommendation: A panel of people (Independent Fostering Panel) must consider the application and the assessment report and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker as to the suitability of the applicants to be approved.

After Approval:Where an application is approved, each foster family will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker. The allocated Supervising Social Worker will provide support to the Foster Carer up to, during and after all placements.

Depending on circumstances Stage One and Stage Two of the process can be completed concurrently.

Should the applicants be unsuccessful, they will be advised that they may (within 28 days) request that the agency review this decision or seek a review of this determination by the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM).

Training and Development

At Following Whispers, we believe in providing children and young people with the highest standards of care. Our carers are given training to enhance their learning and development and equip them with the skills and knowledge to manage a range of diverse needs. We have internal and external trainers and we regularly use Foster Carer feedback from training sessions to develop and improve our training provision.

Training Support & Development Standards (TSD): within the first 12 months of being approved as a Foster Carer, all carers are required to complete workbooks to meet the TSD standards. This is started during the Skills to Foster Course

enabling us to give a high level of support to new carers. Following Whispers also provide a range of continuous development learning resources to support and enable Foster Carers' TSD Award achievement

Mandatory training: this is ongoing training courses that are mandatory for our Foster Carers to attend.

Online Training: is available for second carers and is offered in addition to the mandatory training undertaking at the training centre.

Records will be kept of the training provided and attended by carers.

The Supervision, Appraisal and Annual Review processes will be used to identify training needs and areas of development. Training provision will be regularly reviewed and evaluated to ensure that it is of the highest possible standard and appropriate to the needs of the organisation.

Complaints and Outcomes

Following Whispers have a comprehensive complaints procedure, which is made widely available in different formats suitable for children, young people, carers, parents and professionals.

If we were to receive a complaint, we will deal with your complaint quickly. If you ring us, we will acknowledge your complaint within 24 hours to take the details. We aim to provide a full reply within 10 working days. If this is not possible, we will keep you up to date with our progress.

For a copy of our Complaints Procedure or to make a complaint, please contact the Registered Manager or Managing Director on 01843 263461.

Contact Details

If you require any further information to that enclosed in our Statement of Purpose, please get in touch with us and one of our team will be more than happy to assist in your request.

You can contact us either by phone on: 01843 263461

Email: admin@foster-care.org

Or write to: Following Whispers, Investaco House, Invicta Way, Manston Business Park, Ramsgate CT125FD.