



Aspris Fostering Services

Statement of Purpose

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1. OVERALL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aspris Fostering Services (AFS) is an independent fostering agency and is part of Aspris Children's Services. Aspris Children's Services is one of the UK's leading independent providers of specialist education and residential care services. We aim to provide safe, stable, therapeutic placements so that children can reach their full potential and face their adult lives with confidence and a sense of their own worth. At Aspris we believe we inspire and motivate, and our five behaviours (Aspirational, Positive, Fun and Friendly, Courageous and Innovative) help us achieve and are core to everything our Foster Carers, staff and the children and young people we support do.

Aspris Fostering Services:

To achieve the company's overall objective Aspris Fostering Services (AFS) aims to provide high quality family placements to looked after children and young people between the ages of 0 and 18 years plus which reflects our commitment to:

- An approach to caring for children and young people which puts their interests first and seeks to promote their social, emotional, and educational development.
- Respect for the racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds of children and young people and seek in every possible way to ensure that the needs of young people in these areas are met.
- Ensure that placements are made with due consideration being given to the gender and sexuality of young people as well as ensuring that any disability that they may have can be met in the proposed placement.
- The recruitment of foster carers from as many different backgrounds as possible, so that diverse needs of children and young people can be met. We also aim to recruit carers within 20 miles of urban population centres within the West Midlands.
- Working in partnership with local authorities, parents, other agencies, and professionals with a legitimate interest in the young person's welfare. We aim to be flexible and responsive to the needs of our children and the placing authorities using our services.
- As an agency we believe distance from the foster home to school is important and we want all our children to go to school as locally as possible. Our target is a maximum of 4 miles whenever possible.

Every Child Matters

At Aspris Fostering Services a high priority is put on achieving positive outcomes for children and young people.

Be Healthy

We aim to provide services that ensure children are delivered a standard of care that supports a healthy lifestyle. Young people will be encouraged to take responsibility for their own health and well-being, supported and guided by our foster carers and staff. In achieving a positive outcome for young people, our policy and direct practice will uphold the principles of ensuring young people are:

- Physically healthy
- Mentally and emotionally healthy
- Sexually healthy
- Safe and with the confidence to keep themselves safe.
- Through education and information, lead healthy lifestyles and are aware of risks from smoking, drugs, substance, and alcohol misuse, underage sexual activity, and infections. We operate an active and successful reward programme to encourage young people to give up smoking. Training courses are delivered to groups of young people at their request.
- Understand the need for personal hygiene.
- The health needs of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are addressed.

Staying Safe

Aspris Fostering Services is committed to practices which keep young people safe and protect them from harm.

- Safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence, child sexual exploitation and county lines
- Safe from bullying and discrimination, crime, and anti-social behaviour
- Have experience of secure and stable placements within a warm family environment
- Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities live in a safe environment and are protected from abuse and exploitation.
- Keep children safe online and educate them to protect themselves as they get older.

Enjoy and Achieve

Our aim is to make everyone aware of the things young people need to help them to be happy, successful, healthy, and safe, actively encouraging learning and development.

- Attend and enjoy school.
- Experience support and encouragement to achieve and exceed national educational standards.
- Achieve good personal social development.
- Experience and enjoy recreational opportunities.
- Children and young people with learning difficulties/disabilities are helped to enjoy and achieve.

Make a Positive Contribution

We ensure the involvement of young people, their families, and carers. Our aim is to assist young people to successfully deal with significant changes and challenges, develop enterprising behaviour, develop positive relationships, and display positive behaviour.

With carers as role models young people learn to behave towards each other, and within the local community, in a non-discriminatory way. Young people are encouraged to understand the range of cultures and beliefs that exist within the home, local and wider communities.

Carers adopt active and positive rewards which promote and encourage children and young people to achieve in all walks of life.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to make a positive contribution.

Achieve Economic Well-Being

Young people are fully supported and encouraged to look to and plan for their future positively to maximize their economic wellbeing and to prepare them for working life. Children and young people with learning difficulties/disabilities are helped to achieve economic wellbeing.

Through pathway planning young people are supported in undertaking a variety of life skills training courses and to look at choices in employment, further education, training, or other career prospects.

To maximise the potential for success of every placement, AFS will provide:

- Supervising social workers who have a caseload of 10 to 12 families.
- 24-hour support to every placement operating an on-call out of hours service
 - Each foster carer with a supervising social worker and each child with a support worker according to individual need
- Access for carers, their birth children, and young people to our therapeutic services
 - Up to 21 days paid respite care dependent on the individual needs of the child
- A comprehensive training programme for foster carers to ensure they are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of placed young people. This training is delivered face to face, by virtual classroom and online learning. All employees have a Continuous Professional Development Programme, and access to specialist learning to ensure they have the skills and capability needed to provide excellent outcomes.

2. THE STATUS AND CONSTITUTION

Aspris Fostering Services is a division of Aspris Children's Services. The registered office is at The Forge, Church Street West, Woking, Surrey, England, GU21 6HT. Sally Gregory, Managing Director, is the Responsible Individual for Aspris Fostering Services.

Aspris Fostering Services runs a Fostering Panel which is constituted according to the guidelines set out in the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards: 2011 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and 2013. This Panel considers competency-based Form F assessments on those people wishing to be approved as foster carers for AFS. The Panel also considers most foster carer Annual Reviews.

AFS is registered and inspected by Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. Tel: 0300 123 1231. The agency was judged to be Good in the last inspection in August 2023.

3. MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Responsible Individual and Managing Director – SALLY GREGORY

Sally joined Aspris Fostering Services (formally Priory Fostering Services) in 2023, having previously been the Head of Independent Monitoring and Compliance for Aspris residential care services.

Sally brings a wealth of experience from her 27 years working in social care, the last 22 of which have been working with children looked after in a variety of roles. These have included, support worker, registered manager, operations manager and safeguarding and quality assurance manager.

Head of Fostering Service – MICHELLE BOURNE

Michelle Bourne has over 13 years' experience within the field of social work practice, this has been in various roles and has given Michelle lots of experience working with children and young people.

Michelle is also a qualified Practice Educator where she has supported social work students through their learning journey. Michelle was previously the Fostering Team Manager for Aspris Fostering Services and is now in post as the Head of Service within the fostering agency.

As Head of Service, Michelle is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the service and works closely with the Fostering Team Manager to ensure all foster carers receive the support required to look after the children and young people in their care.

One of Michelle's objectives within her role is to work with the Aspris Fostering team to support positive outcomes for children and young people. Whilst another area that remains at the forefront of Michelle's role is to ensure foster carers are heard and listened to; as we all know the role of a foster carer is demanding, challenging and no day is ever the same – however, Michelle does always point out that the role as a foster carer is also very rewarding.

4 SERVICES

4.1 General

AFS provides family placements for looked after children and young people aged between 0 and 18 years. We can also provide parent and child placements, placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, children with complex health needs (including life limiting diagnoses), respite, short term, and long-term placements.

We are committed to Parent and Child placements. The carers who provide this service will have a clear understanding of the risks, their role, and responsibilities, and will be well supported by the agency. They receive specialist training in this field of work.

The agency also promotes arrangements for young people over the age of 18 who are staying put with their carers. The expectations for these carers are clearly defined and the arrangements are supported by the agency. The agency also supports previous foster children who have moved to independent and semi-independent living.

We preference the use of back-up support care from the friends and family of carers, who are known to the young people on placement. We acknowledge delegated authority improves the lives of children in our care and seek to promote family life that every child could be expected to experience. Where carers friends and family are limited, or not available, we will promote respite placements with approved foster carers and within their terms of approval.

All placements of children and young people are made in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations, 2011 Regulations 27(5)(b) and Schedule 5, FSR 2011 and amendments in FSR 2013.

Careful matching ensures that the needs of the child can be met by the skills, knowledge, and experience of the chosen carers. Any gaps are identified, and additional support and training opportunities are provided. This helps to maintain our very low placement breakdown rate.

Referrals are overseen by the Head of Fostering, placing authorities, supervising social workers and our foster carers are all involved in this process. Foster carers always have the final say in which young people are placed in their homes.

The supervising social worker is also responsible for discussing the referral with the local authority of any young person who is already in placement at that foster home. All placements are made within the framework of current legislation.

During the referral process every effort is made to ensure that all the relevant information is obtained and passed on to the foster carer who is also empowered to speak with the referrer, the social worker involved in the case and the current carers if appropriate.

AFS strongly believes that working in partnership with our placing authorities and other professional bodies is paramount. On a practical level this includes liaison with health and education professionals and our psychotherapeutic practitioner. All research indicates an integrated approach results in better outcomes for children and young people in our care.

4.2 Support

The Fostering Team consists of:

SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKERS

All supervising social workers have a manageable case load of no more than 12 fostering households, depending on individual circumstances and location. They are all professionally qualified and registered. Their role is to both formally supervise on a regular basis and to provide support visits as required by need. This is to ensure that we adhere to the child's Care Plan, promote good practice, and achieve positive outcomes. An Aspris social worker will always attend statutory reviews and other significant meetings, this will also include formal written reports, feedback from the young person and their support worker.

Supervising social workers are responsible for reviewing their carers on an annual basis. This will include a written report, feedback from the placing authorities, children, the carers, and their birth children. The agency is creative in obtaining the views from as many children as possible and in various formats. Both carer and social worker attend the independent Panel.

SUPPORT WORKER

Young people in placement will have a support worker allocated to them if appropriate and according to need. This role involves working with the young people to support them in placement and to develop their leaving care skills. This can include budgeting, welfare rights, shopping, cooking lessons, using public transport etc prior to leaving care. A support worker may undertake specific tasks e.g., supervised contact with parents, extended family, and friends. This can take place either in the family home, at an external venue or in our family contact suite located in our fostering headquarters. Some of our experienced foster carers are also available to provide support when appropriate.

A Support worker can also assist in the development of the young person's social and leisure skills by introducing them to and, at times, taking them to a wide range of activities where they can experience the enjoyment of positive recreation and leisure. Significant progress is recognised by certificates of achievement and gift vouchers.

A Support worker can have a crucial role in enabling the young people to have their voice heard and to assist them in communicating their views, wishes and feelings to the people involved in their care.

The frequency of support will be decided at the initial placement-planning meeting and reviewed thereafter with the carers during regular support and supervision visits. A Support worker may be utilised more frequently if young people are out of education or going through a period of crisis.

A Support worker may also have a role to play in supporting young people who have left our care and are living either independently or in supported accommodation. The agency has a good record of providing ongoing support post care.

EDUCATION ADVICE, SUPPORT AND SCHOOL PROVISION

Aspris Fostering Services believes that full time education is a right for all young people, and we have a history of successfully achieving this.

Our foster carers, social workers and support staff all contribute to successful educational outcomes for the young people in our care. This process also includes the placing authority social worker, other relevant professional bodies, and the birth family where appropriate. We will also attend and provide a written report for all PEP meetings, educational planning meetings etc.

We expect and require our foster carers to remain pro-active and committed to identify the best educational provision, to promote and encourage regular attendance and to support and provide guidance for homework, school projects and normal school trips and to attend parent's evenings etc.

PYSCHO-THERAPEUTIC SERVICE

Aspris Fostering Services employs a dedicated and experienced psychotherapist and counsellor. As standard we provide regular therapeutic input for our carers, their families, and young people. The key role of our therapeutic service is to support the carers and their families by suggesting practical advice in coping with presenting behaviours and providing an explanation as to why these behaviours occur. The placing authority social worker and the AFS social worker can attend these meetings if appropriate. The service has been extended to include home visits and telephone support, which in some cases is out of hours.

TRAINING

Aspris Fostering Services provides a comprehensive training programme for both foster carers and staff. Training is a central and intrinsic part of fostering and the agency provides a well thought out and appropriate training plan. AFS has a clear expectation that carers will participate in the training as fully as possible, and all training is offered within an equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory framework. Training is regularly evaluated, and individual training needs are identified during carers' annual reviews.

We can provide individual specific training to meet the needs of the placed child, for example one carer and her supervising social worker attended a workshop on adolescents who self-harm. All our carers work to complete their TSDS training portfolios. Training is now offered both in a face-to-face format and via e learning to reach those carers who find it difficult to attend training during the day.

5. STANDARDS OF CARE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

5.1 Foster Carers

All foster carers are approved using the latest BAAF competency-based Form F assessment format, conducted by experienced Form F assessors. All carers are presented to an independent Panel for approval. The Panel itself is subject to a comprehensive quality assurance procedure and regular feedback is sought from attendees.

We ensure our foster carers adhere to our policies and procedures. They are issued with our Foster Carers Handbook, which clearly sets out the standards of care we expect. The Handbook reflects the values and principles enshrined in the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards, with which we comply. Our aim is to always exceed the Standards.

Training begins during the Form F assessment. Attendance on the 'Skills to Foster' course is compulsory and any additional training needs are identified and provided by AFS. This course is delivered by the agency's supervising social workers to give prospective carers a good insight into what the agency expects of carers and in

turn how it can support them. Ongoing regular and unannounced visits by supervising social workers ensure carers adhere to and exceed the standards we and the placing authorities expect of them.

We also value our carers and acknowledge the significant impact they can have on the young person's development and potential outcomes. To this end we encourage and facilitate open debate at our regular carers support group meetings and actively seek their feedback and involvement in all aspects of our service. We provide numerous social opportunities throughout the year. We provide (by need) up to 21 days paid respite for carers and a £500 holiday allowance for each child placed with us.

The Head of Fostering oversees all formal supervisions, incident reports and foster carers' quarterly reports to the placing authorities. All Annual Reviews and Form F Assessments are monitored and there is also a robust Fostering Panel QA procedure in place.

5.2 Social Work and Administrative Staff

All staff are fully aware of our policies and procedures which are clearly set down in our Policies and Procedures and Charms Manuals. On appointment, staff have a comprehensive induction programme and have access to regular training and formal supervision.

AFS is part of Aspris Children's Services, one of the UK's largest providers of specialist care and educational services. As well as the normal range of benefits you would expect from a national company, all staff have access to an independent employee assistance helpline, the company emotional wellbeing phone app, childcare vouchers and maternity, adoption, and parental leave allowance.

AFS understands that it is important to have a sound, efficient administrative system, run by committed and well-trained administrative staff. Not only is this essential to run an effective business, but it also has a fundamental impact on the wellbeing of our carers and young people. AFS and its staff also receive support from the Aspris Children's Services Central Services. This includes Human Resources, IT, accounts and finance, quality assurance, health, and safety.

5.3 Policies and Procedures

AFS has the following policies and procedures:

- *Policies and Procedures Manual* – This contains all our policies and procedures, which enable staff to perform their role. It is broken down into sections dealing with matters such as: Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers, Management of Young Peoples' Placements, Care of Young People in Placement, Child Protection, Young People and Their Rights, Personnel and Training.
- Child Protection (Safeguarding Policy) – All children and young people placed with our foster carers have their well-being enhanced and are protected from harm. Our child protection procedures are compatible with Local Safeguarding Children's Board procedures and made available to Placing Local Authorities. Fostering staff and carers receive regular, high quality, external Child Protection Training and two members of staff have completed the Designated Safeguarding Officer training Level 4. All placements have a risk assessment and behaviour management plan and the family have a safe caring policy which is updated as required for every new placement and in line with any changes in circumstances. Protocols are in place to manage any Allegation(s) against Foster Carer or staff member.

- Foster Carer Handbook – Our Foster Carer’s Handbook is a practical guide to being a foster carer. It contains many policies and procedures and is updated and reviewed on a regular basis.
- Equal Opportunity Policy – It is the policy of AFS to support and promote Equal Opportunities. Any person connected with the day to day running of AFS does have equal access to all available services and is treated with respect regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or nationality. We also have an Equal Opportunities Policy applicable to prospective carers.

- Complaints Procedure – AFS has a clear and robust complaints policy and associated procedure. Wherever possible we aim to resolve complaints in an informal manner by discussion with all concerned parties. We recognise that sometimes there are issues that cannot be resolved informally, and a more structured system is in place. In these circumstances the agency can appoint an independent practitioner to investigate the complaint and we may also employ an independent arbitration officer. Following the investigation, recommendations would be made to the Head of the Fostering Service. The complainant is involved at every stage of the process. As an agency we look upon complaints in a positive manner and understand that it may an opportunity to improve and refine our working practices.
- Panel Policies and Procedures – AFS has a comprehensive set of Panel policies and procedures which include a quality assurance feedback loop. The implementation ensures that the Panel is organised efficiently and effectively to allow it to make decisions of good quality which are in line with the over-riding objective of promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children in foster care.
- Staying Put – AFS continues to support young people beyond 18. They are given our out-of-hours number and still receive support visits from our support workers if needed. They are still eligible to attend any organised activities. Many of our foster carers continue to provide ongoing support to such young people and where appropriate they stay with our carers in a supported lodgings arrangement.

5.4 Aspris Fostering Services will support foster carers by:

- Ensuring that each Foster Carer is allocated a fully qualified Supervising Social Worker. Foster carers will receive at least one visit per month from their Supervising Social Worker and more according to need. Formal supervision takes place quarterly.
- If appropriate foster carers/children will also receive regular visits from a Support Worker, such visits will be based upon the child's Care Plan.
- Providing 24-hour support to carers 365 days per year.
- Providing a comprehensive training programme.
- Formulating a safer caring policy for each household and individual behaviour management plans.
- Supporting birth and foster children.
- AFS staff will attend all reviews, PEPs, planning meetings etc.
- Providing up to 21 days paid respite care per child per year.
- Providing a £500 holiday allowance per child per annum.
- Providing access for our carers and their birth children to our psycho-therapeutic services.
- Organising regular Foster Carers Meetings and facilitating informal carer meetings. We seek and respond to all feedback from carers and their birth children.
- Providing a peer mentor for new carers.
- Providing a comprehensive holiday activity and social programme for carers and their children.
- Paying for the carers' membership of Foster Talk.

5.5 Aspris Fostering Services expects placing authorities to:

- Allocate a social worker to monitor the welfare of the child during placement.
- Provide good quality information that will make AFS aware of all issues and concerns relating to the child prior to placement.
- Inform us of changes in circumstances that will affect the child in placement.
- Fully comply with current childcare law and national minimum standards.