

# **Empowering, enriching and supporting the relationships at the heart of the fostering community**

**Our strategy 2025 - 2030**

## Our vision

Our vision is for a vibrant fostering community across the UK to work together so every child and young person has the chance to flourish.

## Our purpose

We are dedicated to enriching, empowering and developing the vital bonds between those who offer love, warmth, stability and hope to children and young people. We work tirelessly to ensure that the voices of children, young people and foster carers are heard and placed at the centre of government plans.

## Our golden thread

We believe that relationships are the golden thread running through every fostering story.

Working in a relationship-based way builds a connected fostering community where everyone is valued, respected, and treated as equals.

We know that when foster care is embraced by society, every child and young person has the best chance to make and maintain stable, loving relationships and can look towards the future with hope and ambition.





# The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity and membership organisation. We were founded 50 years ago by foster carers, for foster carers, and our access to governments and policy makers in all four nations of the United Kingdom gives us an unrivalled ability to lead the change necessary to make foster care the best it can be.

We believe that relationships are the golden thread running through every fostering story and are dedicated to supporting, enriching, empowering and, where necessary, restoring the vital bonds between those who work together to offer love, warmth, stability and hope to children and young people.

## Our reach

- We support 35,000 fostering households across the UK – representing approximately 56,000 individual foster carers.
- Our membership spans over 400 fostering services, including local authorities, charities and independent fostering providers.
- Our team of around 100 dedicated staff deliver vital services, resources, and benefits to our members every day.
- We work with and engage more than 8,000 fostering service practitioners, helping to shape and improve practice across the country.
- We deliver hundreds of days training annually, helping carers, professionals and services to develop and maintain the highest standards of care.
- Each year, we respond to thousands of advice and support queries, offering practical and emotional support to foster carers and those who support them.
- We currently deliver over 250 Mockingbird hubs, a pioneering model of peer-led support which brings foster families together into extended family communities.
- Our work also extends to children and young people on the edge of care, ensuring that families receive the help they need to remain together with pioneering preventative support.

## Our network

We are proud to be a diverse, inclusive and far-reaching network, including:

- Foster carers, kinship foster carers, and carers providing post-18 care.
- Local authorities, charities and independent fostering services.
- Children and young people with care experience.
- Fostering-friendly employers and committed donors.
- Foster care associations, delivery partners, trustees, volunteers, and funders.

Together, we represent the full spectrum of people who make fostering possible – and we bring their voices and expertise into everything we do.

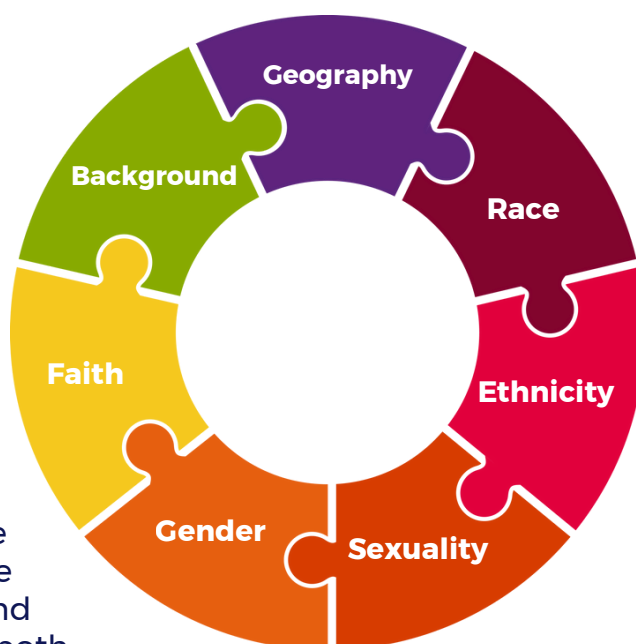
# Our people

## The full diversity of the UK

Our board of trustees brings together a wealth of lived and professional experience in children's social care. Many are foster carers or have care experience themselves.

Our staff team is made up of committed individuals from all four nations of the UK, working together with shared purpose and passion.

Some of our staff are qualified by experience alone, having grown up in or around the care system. Others bring formal qualifications and extensive professional expertise, some have both. All of them are united in their commitment to our cause.



### We are...

- Foster carers, kinship carers, and care-experienced individuals.
- Parents, lone parents, carers, and people of various faiths and none.
- People who identify as LGBTQIA+, from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Experienced in social work, youth work, education, psychology, counselling, residential care, project management, communications, IT, finance, administration, public health and more.

# Our Why

What motivates us is not unique, we share this motivation with every foster carer and fostering service.

Outcomes for children, young people and adults with care experience are not good enough. The majority of care provision in the UK is provided through foster care. Along with every foster carer and every fostering service, we are motivated to improve outcomes for children, young people and the adult they will become.

Young people with care experience are **three and a half times less likely** to progress to higher education than their non care experienced peers



Young people with care experience are over **three times more likely** to not be in education, employment, or training



Around

**1/4**

of homeless people are care experienced



**1/4**

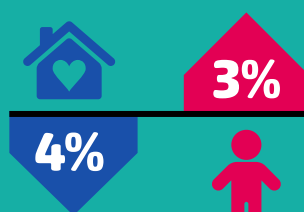
of the prison population are care experienced



People with care experience are more likely to have a mental health issue and have lower levels of wellbeing



Since 2021, the number of fostering households has decreased by 2,417 while the number of children in care has increased by 2,855



Over **1/3** of foster carers report being excluded from important meetings about the children they foster



**46%** of foster carers have considered resigning

Only half (52%) of foster carers rate support from their fostering service as excellent or good, while 21% rate it as poor or very poor.



# Our values

The Fostering Network was created by foster carers to be a force for change, fairness and equity across the fostering community. As a registered charity we are a nonprofit making organisation, we are entirely focused on making foster care the best it can be; we have no other motive. We are transparent and focussed.

## **We are GENUINE.**

We believe that 60,000 foster carers and 400 fostering service providers are more than just members of The Fostering Network; along with all of us, they are The Fostering Network. Our purpose is to create and enhance the connections that are so vital to a unified and collaborative fostering community.

## **We are CONNECTED.**

Over the last 50 years we have built a reputation for being a respected and credible source of information, advice and guidance. We have become well known for our high-quality campaigns, products and services and our independent, research-informed publications. Knowledgeable and reliable, we are a trusted source of both support and illumination.

## **We are EXPERT.**

We believe that all successful relationships are built upon personal connections, communication and empathy. We are a warm and approachable organisation, offering an open door and safe space to the full fostering community. In every action and interaction we strive to be positive, responsive and responsible.

## **We are CARING.**

The needs of the fostering community are forever changing and our organisation must continue to evolve in order to provide the necessary leadership. We are proactive and agile, offering innovation and creativity at pace. We celebrate the diversity of our community, providing a consistent national service framework that has the flexibility to be delivered with local relevance.

## **We are ADAPTABLE.**

For over 50 years we have been pivotal in improving foster care. We must continue to be bold and ambitious, a vocal and passionate voice that amplifies the calls of our members and fights for change. We must use our influence and experience to challenge the status quo and be the powerful champion that the fostering community needs.

## **We are BRAVE.**

# Our strategic goals

**We are driven to achieve our goals in the next five years:**



# Strategic goal one

## Be the catalyst for child-centred change in foster care



The fostering community is made up of different stakeholder groups, each with their own specific objectives and challenges but united by a common goal; to create stability and offer hope and love to children and young people.

This goal relies on strong, functioning and positive relationships between everyone in the fostering community. While many connections are fair, balanced and supportive, there are also instances where this is not the case.

The Fostering Network is dedicated to supporting, enriching, empowering and, where necessary, restoring these vital bonds to create harmony and unity across the fostering community.

### To achieve this goal we will:

- Ensure all of our work is child-centred.
- Work collaboratively across the sector to develop practice models which are rooted in relationship-based approaches and inform how we communicate and engage with members.
- Produce a language guide based on reframing language principles to ensure we recognise the needs of everyone we engage with.
- Align all of our external communication with this guide and train every staff member to ensure our collective language is part of the solution.
- Build collaborative relationships with individuals and organisations aligned to our goals and inspire wider society to understand, support and value the key role foster care plays in children's social care.
- Promote and grow evidenced-based programmes as a mechanism to build, develop and improve relationships across the sector.
- Increase the number of TFN staff trained in restorative and solution-focused practice.
- Develop new products and services to respond to the evolving needs of the fostering sector with a focus on supporting, enriching, empowering and restoring relationships.
- Expand our reach across society to ensure solid foundations for relationships and improved understanding of care experience and foster care. From building connections with student social workers, via a new programme of university outreach, to working more closely with virtual headteachers and looked after children's nurses.



# Strategic goal two

## Secure sustainable income through meaningful relationships



Membership is at the heart of The Fostering Network. Through the provision of membership, we create and maintain a UK-wide network of foster carers, fostering services and organisations with shared goals.

We know the difference that membership with our organisation can make, and we want to make this a reality for as many people as possible. We will seek opportunities to grow our network of members and continually strive to improve our membership offer to ensure we are adding value in what we provide.

We will maintain our not-for-profit status and seek to sustain our organisation through income generation and fundraising to meet our charitable purposes. This will be achieved through the development and delivery of high-quality, wide-ranging service delivery and the diversification of our income streams.

To achieve this goal we will:

- Ensure every member of The Fostering Network knows and understands that we are here for them and knows how to access our services.
- Evolve to create new membership categories to expand our network and build new relationships with stakeholders in the fostering community.
- Embed a continuous review framework for our membership offer to optimise the value we offer to our members.
- Capitalise on developments in technology to offer greater connection and an improved member experience.
- Expand our Fostering Friendly Employer programme and build new relationships with corporate partners.
- Expand our consultancy work to support members to address the challenges they are encountering.
- Explore new fundraising streams and opportunities to diversify our funding portfolio and increase our organisational resilience.

# Strategic goal three

## Increase the impact of our work



The Fostering Network is seeking continued change to improve foster care. It's why we were created, it's at the core of who we are and what we do.

We are certain that impactful change is part of the solution to improving outcomes for children and young people. We want this change to result in long-term sustainable improvements and to achieve this, we will need to continually adapt too.

To further increase the impact of our work, we will focus on outcomes through a process of monitoring, evaluation and reporting. We will continue to listen, build our evidence base, and respond with purpose.

We will continue to collaborate and grow effective partnerships to achieve change on a large scale. The scale of the problems faced has grown since we were created and therefore collaboration is key to shaping the future for children and young people.

To achieve this, we will:

- Create, test and embed organisational impact measurements and tools to support this development.
- Produce an annual impact assessment of the organisation.
- Develop our participation strategy, introducing new ways to consult and engage with children, young people, foster carers, fostering services and wider stakeholders.
- Initiate and respond to new opportunities for collaboration and partnership working.
- Review our key audience and identify opportunities to achieve greater impact through new relationships while continuing to build on existing relationships.

# Strategic goal four

## Drive forward quality improvement in fostering practice



Every day we interact with foster carers and fostering services. Through our advice lines, programmes, practice consultants and independent support workers, we listen to the challenges and complexities of fostering with empathy and understanding.

We try at all times to offer support and guidance in the knowledge that everyone involved is primarily doing their very best. The challenges and complex situations faced unfold against a backdrop of pressures facing all aspects of health and social care in the UK.

We want to do more to improve the quality of fostering across the UK and ultimately improve outcomes for children and young people living in foster care.

To achieve this goal, we will:

- Refine and refocus our practice services underpinned by these four key principles:
  - Trauma informed
  - Child centred
  - Solution-focused
  - Relationship-based
- Design and develop a quality improvement framework for fostering to create much sought after consistency.
- Align our work with the quality improvement framework.
- Review our products, services and guidance to adhere to practice quality improvements and our key drivers.
- Establish mechanisms for internal connectivity between all our front-facing service delivery teams, to ensure holistic, consistent service delivery for all.
- Introduce flexible, person-centred online learning and development services.
- Continually review the breadth and depth of our service delivery to ensure it is responsive to sector demands.

# Strategic goal five

## Influence transformational policy change



Key developments in child and family policy have taken place over the course of the last 50 years since the inception of The Fostering Network. Devolution is one of the key changes, shifting the landscape of the UK and the focus of our organisation.

Some of these shifts have resulted in legislative changes; some translate to guidance and good practice alone. There are still many areas to improve and one of the consistent objectives of The Fostering Network is to influence changes in policy to bring about transformational change.

As a UK-wide organisation, we understand and respect the distinctiveness of foster carers and fostering services in each country. Working across all four nations also offers a unique perspective and opportunity. We are able to take a holistic view across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and to influence and shape transformational policy change.

To achieve this goal we will:

- Develop and embed methods to ensure our policy actions continue to be informed by the views of our members.
- Seek to influence governments and act as a 'critical friend,' offering evidence informed advice, based on our engagement with our broad membership base, to inform policy direction and to challenge where required.
- Increase opportunity for direct interaction between our members and decision-makers across the UK.
- Redefine our research and policy work to reflect our ambition for greatest impact.



# Strategic goal six

## Be the best organisation we can be



This goal reflects our desire to create and maintain organisational wellbeing. Caring for each other and creating the best environment for our staff enables us to be there for others who need us.

We are committed to ensuring equity, diversity and inclusion in our workforce and will take active steps to maintain this commitment in our approach to recruitment and retention.

We are committed to understanding our organisational impact on the planet and taking steps to reduce this impact.

We are committed to providing employment opportunities for people with care experience and will take steps to improve our practice in this area.

To achieve this goal we will:

- Develop a strategy for organisational wellbeing.
- Continue to grow our numbers of staff who are care experienced and/or have lived experience of foster care.
- Refine and embed equal opportunity recruitment & selection practices.
- Further develop our EDI strategy and continue to drive forward improvements under the work of the Equal Focus Group.
- Develop and embed a process for organisational wide continuous professional development.
- Introduce realistic and achievable goals to reduce our impact on the planet and inform our policies.
- Identify and act on opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our organisation.

# Our core services

Everything we do connects to our purpose. This is how we make a difference. This is how we have a positive effect on the vital bonds between those who work together to offer love, security, stability, success and hope to children and young people.

