

## **Step Up Step Down: Demonstration programme for Wales**

### **Expression of Interest Pack for Local Authorities**

#### **Introduction**

Welsh Government and the KPMG Foundation have jointly awarded funding to implement and deliver our innovative Step Up Step Down programme at two demonstration sites in Wales. This funding offers an opportunity to dramatically improve outcomes for families with children on the edge of care. Our programme seeks to embed and sustain delivery beyond the grant funded period and demonstrate a scalable model for further roll out within Wales and beyond.

The Fostering Network has a long track record of delivering innovative programmes that bring about large scale and sustainable improvements to the lives of children and foster families. Step Up Step Down has been piloted and delivered in partnership with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland for over five years. We introduced the Mockingbird family model to the UK in 2015, establishing networks of extended family support between groups of foster families and connected households. In Wales, we led a consortium of charitable organisations to deliver Confidence in Care, a programme of training reaching over 1300 foster carers. More recently we have worked collaboratively with regional and local authority teams on Fostering Wellbeing, a multi-disciplinary approach to holistic support and improving outcomes for children and young people.

#### **Step Up Step Down**

Step Up Step Down is a pioneering approach to supporting families on the edge of care, demonstrating a reduction in the numbers of children coming into care, and improved outcomes for children and families. At its heart are specialist, highly trained family support foster carers, who provide time limited, preventative support to up to four families at any one time.

The model is designed to be flexible, offering wraparound, needs-led support to families, with a nurturing and trauma informed approach. The project team can step up rapidly to meet families' emerging needs or crises and step down to lower levels of support once they are supported to find lasting solutions. Its focus on community involvement ensures families are empowered to build a sustainable support network. It also engages families in co-producing the support and activities, so that they best meet their needs.

Although the partnership model is embedded within children's social care services, with the FSFCs supervised by a social worker, the fact it is delivered by an independent charity with a needs-based approach helps overcome barriers many families face to engagement.



## **Staffing and structure**

The programme will be overseen by our Director for Wales, with expert direction from our UK SUSD Manager. We will appoint a full-time Programme Manager for SUSD in Wales, responsible for delivery across both pilot sites. There will be a SUSD team in each of the participating Local Authorities.

### **Family Support Foster Carers**

The family support foster carers (FSFCs) mentor their families and offer short breaks for children, offering stability and giving parents time to address their challenges with support. They provide feedback on their involvement with the families during review meetings.

The FSFCs could be experienced foster carers within the service who want to develop their skills and explore a new opportunity within fostering. Alternatively, they can be recruited specifically to this role in SUSD but must gain approval prior to commencing in the role. It is imperative that the FSFCs have the skills and commitment to working with both parents and children as part of the SUSD programme. A role description for the FSFC is included in this pack.

Specific training for the SUSD role and funding for each of the Family Support Foster Carers will be provided by The Fostering Network as part of the programme.

### **Supervising Social Worker**

The Supervising Social Worker (SSW) will need to be released by the local authority to be engaged full time within the SUSD programme whilst remaining employed by the local authority. They will supervise the FSFCs, undertaking all regulatory requirements and building their skillset as part of the SUSD service. They will attend professional statutory meetings for the families involved with SUSD and support the chairing of the initial planning and review meetings for those families as part of the programme. The SSW will also be recognised as an essential member of the SUSD programme team, supporting with all SUSD events and activities e.g., attending family activity days.

### **SUSD Regional Lead**

Employed by The Fostering Network, the Step Up Step Down (SUSD) programme officer delivers attachment and parenting training to parents, holds therapeutic nurture groups for children, family activity sessions developing networks of peer support, and identifies and secures sources of support within the local community. The officer works with families to find practical solutions to the issues they face. They also support the planning and review meetings with families, alongside the FSFC and Social Worker.



## SUSD Steering Group

The programme steering group will facilitate stakeholder engagement, review progress and share learning. It will comprise of representatives from The Fostering Network, local authority fostering team, family support and safeguarding lead(s), foster carers and - in time - parents who have taken part in SUSD.

The steering group will meet bi-monthly during the implementation phase and then move to a quarterly meeting once the programme is established. We recommend that the Safeguarding Lead chairs this group, although the service itself sits within Fostering. This demonstrates the collaboration and partnership working required to ensure SUSD is successful.

### What impact has SUSD had?

In the Northern Ireland programme, four family support foster carers have supported 73 families (96 adults and 151 children). The majority of children referred to SUSD are referred because there is a risk of care admission; referrals are also accepted to support reunification plans to re-unite families where children have already been placed in care. Of the 151 children involved in the pilot only 11 were moved into care: four of these children went into SUSD supported kinship placements and one to a short-term placement. Three children were supported to move out of residential care back to their birth family.

"This service is the best example of trauma-informed practice I have seen."

Una Lernihan (NI Health and Social Care Board)

"This service truly keeps families together safely and well, especially during the pandemic when so many other services were reducing or closing."

Head of Safeguarding, South Eastern Trust

Independent evaluation found additional positive outcomes including reduced levels of family support required, increased school attendance, higher parental employment and parents gaining new life skills. A further independent cost benefit analysis identified cost savings of £1.5 for every £1 invested. Longer term savings from reduced need for support services are likely to be much greater still.



## Evaluation for Wales

In order to determine the extent to which the programme achieves its aims in Wales, an independent evaluation will be undertaken.

## Timescales for Step Up Step Down

Activity	Date
Expression of interest opens	Monday 7 November
Expression of interest closes	Monday 5 December
Shortlisting and interviews	w/c 12 December
Successful authorities identified	Friday 16 December
Implementation and training	Jan – March 2023
Referrals to SUSD start	April 2023



## Expression of Interest

The Fostering Network are now inviting expressions of interests from the 22 Welsh Local Authorities to identify two partner authorities to pilot this innovative approach as part of our demonstration programme.

## Participation requirements

Commitment from the fostering team, safeguarding and family support teams, as well as foster carers, parents and the children and young people themselves, will be essential if the programme is to be of real value. The local authority will need to consider the commitment of resources to support the following programme elements:

- leadership and governance arrangements;
- communication with local stakeholders;
- recruitment of foster carers as Family Support Foster Carers;
- family, children and young people's participation
- practical support for meetings, training and development events e.g. provision of venues.

Most importantly, the local authority will also be required to provide an experienced social work practitioner (FTE) to undertake the role of Supervising Social Worker with no other case load outside of the pilot.

## Expressions of interest timescales

**The enclosed template will need to be completed and emailed to [wales@fostering.net](mailto:wales@fostering.net) by Monday 5 December if you would like to be considered as a local authority partner for the programme.**

A panel, which will include representatives, from Welsh Government, Foster Wales and The Fostering Network will review all expressions of interest. Shortlisting interviews will be held with nominated representatives from the Local Authority on **15 & 16 December**.

For further information please contact;

### **Sarah Thomas**

Director for Wales

Tel: 029 2044 0940

e-mail: [wales@fostering.net](mailto:wales@fostering.net)