

The Fostering Network Strategic Plan: 2016-2020

Our vision	A society where the importance of fostering is understood, recognised and supported
Our mission	To support those who foster; improve opportunities for fostered children and young people and provide expert guidance to all fostering services
Our values	<p>We are trusted – expert and independent</p> <p>We are together – a network, working in partnership, for community, for members</p> <p>We are vital –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">For raising awareness of fosteringFor creating changeFor up-to-the-minute information, advice and support for foster carers, fostering services and fostered children and young people – the whole fostering community

Our identity

In 1974 a group of 18 foster families came together to share ideas, provide mutual support and be a force for change to ensure all fostered children and young people had the best possible start in life. The group that was formed as a result of this historic meeting went on to become The Fostering Network, now the UK's leading fostering charity and a community of 60,000 foster carers and 400 services across the UK.

After 42 years at the forefront of fostering, The Fostering Network remains passionate about foster care and the difference it makes to children and young people, and is the essential network for foster care. We bring together everyone who is involved in fostering, inspiring, motivating and supporting them to make foster care better. Together, we're a powerful catalyst for change, influencing and shaping fostering policy and practice at every level. All that has happened over the past four decades has helped build the charity's current vision: that all children in foster care enjoy the very best life chances and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This is the motivation that drives our trustees, staff, volunteers and other supporters in all that we do.

We work to ensure that all fostered children have a positive experience of family life, supporting them to have high aspirations, to overcome the challenges of their early lives and to achieve their very best. We help foster carers to improve children's lives, championing the vital role that they play and working to ensure they are properly recognised, valued and supported.

Our strategic plan to 2020 looks at ways we will innovate and develop across our activities to grow our influence and impact. It adds to existing ongoing activity which underpins all that we do as an organisation to promote foster care and influence positive change across the UK.

Our operating environment

Our strategic plan reflects the changing environment in which we operate. The following factors summarise the key challenges that we and our members face and inform our ambitions and work plans:

- Increasing numbers of young people and complexity of need within the care system
- Ongoing stigma associated with children in care and their outcomes
- Lack of awareness of the impact of good foster care on outcomes for children and young people and a perceived 'hierarchy of care'
- Public sector austerity and budget cuts, and the impact of these on our commercial performance
- Increasing competition in our key delivery areas, including from the commercial sector
- Ongoing digital revolution and the organisation's ability to evolve in response to this

Our approach

We are a single organisation working across the four countries of the UK responding to local need. We want to be an organisation that is geographically diverse and representative of the communities it supports. This requires a much stronger local presence across the UK and a membership that reflects the many and varied needs of all children and young people unable to live with their birth families.

We are an organisation that is striving for excellence in everything we do, using research and our practice wisdom alongside cutting edge pilot programmes to drive forward change for children and young people. We want an organisation that uses technology to make us more efficient and effective in all that we do, including engaging effectively with our community. We want an organisation that is financially sound and makes the best use of all of our resources. We want an organisation that develops talent and enables our workforce to meet with confidence the real challenges that we and our beneficiaries face. We want an organisation that models exceptional 'customer' service so that all those who come into contact with us feel they are supported, respected and listened to.

We are striving to be an organisation that is truly child centred and has a real focus on improving outcomes for children and young people in care, helping them reach their potential, and supporting foster carers and others to achieve this.

We have identified four key drivers in delivery of our strategic plan:

<p>Outstanding Leadership</p> <p>We will use Kouzes and Posner’s Leadership Model as a guiding set of principles which demonstrate exemplary behaviours and attitudes for the way we work.</p>	<p>Exceptional Customer Service</p> <p>We will use the Customer Service Excellence Model and its five criteria as a tool to maintain engagement and good relationships with our colleagues, members and stakeholders, to be recognised as a successful and trustworthy organisation with an outstanding reputation for customer service.</p>
<p>High Performing and Engaged Workforce</p> <p>We will use the eight factors of workplace engagement set out in the Best Companies Criteria to become an employer of choice.</p>	<p>Financial Security</p> <p>We cannot achieve any of this unless we are a financially secure organisation with good financial stewardship. We are operating in an increasingly competitive market and in a period of austerity for public services. We want to model an approach that gives the best possible support to children, young people, foster carers and fostering services, underpinned by a strong business model and long-term plan for maximising the organisation’s resources.</p>

Our ambition by 2020:

- **all children will have the opportunity to play a proactive role in the decisions made about their lives**, with systems and decision making processes designed to reflect their views and needs
- we will see **positive role models and case studies used in the national media** that challenge stereotypes and better reflect the positive outcomes for young people with experience of foster care
- **all children will have opportunity to stay with their foster carers post-18**, where both they and their foster carers want this
- the **educational attainment gap for young people in care will have decreased** by 2% when measured at 16 against the general population
- **the care system will offer a range of permanence options where there is no hierarchy** and instead services and support are chosen based on the needs of young people, not legal status
- all fostered children will receive **appropriate support and intervention to build upon their emotional wellbeing** and reduce their mental health needs
- the **importance of relationships, for young people and foster carers, will be recognised as central to first class foster care**, and local process and practice will be designed to reflect this
- there will be **sufficient foster carers with a range of skills and expertise so that a child can be placed with a carer who can meet their needs** when a placement is required
- we will see **improved recognition of foster carers as professionals**, with:
 - 75% of foster carers feeling they are valued as professionals and valued as part of the wider team around a child
 - 100% of foster carers receiving at least stated minimum fostering allowances, including allowances for providing post-18 care
 - 100% of foster carers feeling well trained and supported by their fostering service to provide the best possible care for the children in their care
 - 100% of foster carers feeling empowered to make appropriate decisions and advocate on behalf of the children in their care, as they would for a child of their own

To help us achieve this, from 2016 The Fostering Network will focus on working to ensure that the organisation is...

Child-centred

We will not only have children at the heart of all that we do, but will actively and meaningfully engage young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of the organisation's work. We want to role model exceptional youth engagement as a way of promoting the value of young people shaping the support they and their foster families receive.

Influential

We will continue to lead and shape the fostering agenda across the UK in partnership with our fostering community to increase awareness, recognition and support. We want to drive continual improvement in fostering to ensure foster carers are recognised, valued and involved in developments across the sector.

Connected

We will make new connections and develop relationships with key policy and decision makers in all areas that impact on the lives of children and foster families. We want to continue to grow our network to help raise awareness, support and accountability for fostering across society.

Growing

We will continue to strengthen our position as the leading fostering charity in the UK by growing and diversifying our community of foster care. We will grow our membership to ensure we reach the maximum number of foster carers, fostering services and other agencies involved in supporting young people in care.

Responsive

We will have increased our capacity and expertise to ensure we deliver tailored and responsive products and services to meet the changing needs of children, foster families and fostering services.

These themes will guide all our operational activities and underpin the organisation's work plans across the UK.

Our strategic objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: Child-centred

Provide opportunities for children and young people that benefit them, make their voices heard and enable them to reach their potential.

Strategic Objective 2: Influential

Promote foster care to ensure society understands, values and recognises how foster carers transform children's lives.

Strategic Objective 3: Connected

Influence policy and the legislative framework so it supports and promotes excellence in foster care

Strategic Objective 4: Growing and Responsive

Support fostering families and the services that work with them to provide the best possible care for children and young people