

## The Fostering Network Strategic Plan: 2020-2023

### **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**

We are trusted – expert and independent

We are together – a network, working in partnership, for community, for members

We are vital – For raising awareness of fostering

For creating change

For 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 55,000 foster carers and 370 services across the UK.



The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity and membership organisation. We are the essential network for fostering, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children. We support foster carers to transform children's lives and we work with fostering services and the wider sector to develop and share best practice. We work to ensure all fostered children and young people experience stable family life and we are passionate about the difference foster care makes. We champion fostering and seek to create vital change so that foster care is the very best it can be.

The Fostering Network has led the way in fostering for 45 years, and remains as ambitious for the future as ever. Our strategic plan to 2023 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 and members, both organisations and individuals, so that we can represent their views and opinions.

We want to be an organisation that is focused on improving practice and 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 know that to improve outcomes for children we must influence key decision makers to create necessary change.

In our previous strategic plan (2016-2020), we identified four key drivers to assist with its delivery. Looking back over this period, we are pleased with the progress we have made with each of these drivers, and have identified new targets for the period 2020-2023:

### **Outstanding leadership**

The Kouzes and Posner Leadership Model has been introduced and the conceptual principles behind this have been adopted. We will continue to provide training and support to all managers in this area.



### **Exceptional customer service**

We have restructured to enable all staff to work in a way which focuses on exceptional service and is responsive to members' needs.



## High performing and engaged workforce

Our staff engagement programme, Striving for Excellence, has seen us become a Best Company and in The Sunday Times Top 100 list for two years.



## Financial security

The charity is now on a sound financial footing; we have built reserves and instilled a culture of business planning and appropriate budget setting. We have diversified income streams and built sustainable projects and programmes.





While we continue to view these drivers as important for the long-term stability of the organisation, this plan will also focus on four new areas to drive our work forward. We know that foster care is the right option for the vast majority of children in care, and we know that it can transform their lives. But we also know that it can be and should be improved. We want to see stability for fostered children, who are supported to make and maintain relationships, to achieve their educational potential, and to have good mental health and wellbeing. And we want to see foster carers valued as a key member of the team around the child, with the practical, financial and emotional support they need to provide the best possible care for children.



Our ambition is a world in which:

- all children and young people who need a foster family are found the right family first time
- all fostered children have the best possible experience of family life built around strong relationships, with stability, security and support for as long as they need
- fostered children have the very best educational opportunities and support, giving them the chance to enjoy learning and achieve their full potential
- fostered children have access to mental health assessment and access to mental health help and support where needed
- foster carers are viewed as professional childcare experts, and a key member of the team around the child
- the system listens to children, puts them at the centre of any decisions made about them, and respects and nurtures their relationships
- the system that supports children in care is driven by evidence and research into improving outcomes
- society has the same aspirations and expectations for children and young people in care as it does for all children and young people
- there is a positive view of the impact of being in care and the narrative of care, and foster care is seen as an equal option for children who can't live with their birth families.

# **Our strategy**

## **Strategic objective 1**

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

## **Strategic objective 2**

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

## **Strategic objective 3**

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

## **Strategic objective 4**

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

## **New drivers to support meeting the strategic aims**

### **Member engagement**

- Through roadshows
- Working groups to support our policy and practice
- State of the Nation – fostering services and young people in addition to foster carers.

### **Evidence informed practice**

- Greater use of existing research
- Commissioning new research
- Dissemination of research and evidence informed practice to foster carers and services
- Young people's participation.

### **Practice focus**

- Further develop practice specialisms such as education and mental health
- Develop new programmes and projects
- Roll out existing programmes and projects where evidence shows impact
- Increase the link between policy, campaigns and practice.

### **Influencing the external environment**

- Work with others to create change
- Challenge and influence key decision makers to meet our strategic aims.