



# A guide to Fostering with Children Always First



## Who we are

Children Always First is a small, family-owned fostering agency who really do put children and young people first. Our therapeutic parenting approach, which really helps children to grow and flourish, ensures that we make a real and lasting difference to children who have experienced trauma and abuse.

We do exactly what our name suggests.

- ✓ We are as child-centred as it gets... provide a genuine therapeutic parenting approach... and deliver the best possible carer support.
- ✓ The needs of Children Always come First. Our owners, management, consultant and staff are all entirely committed to keeping children at the very forefront of our thinking. We are here to meet their needs and deliver the best possible outcomes through our care.

## Our Story

Children Always First was established in December 2012 by Julie Elliott and Jan Blazak in order to make a real and lasting difference to damaged young lives. Jan had worked with young people all of his life, including management of a residential home and the last seven years spent within the independent fostering sector.

Julie was a Senior Manager in Children's Services for many years with responsibility for specialist support services, fostering services, adoption services and residential homes for a Local Authority.

Both Julie and Jan care passionately about vulnerable children and young people, and in particular those children who are 'looked after'. They really want to make a difference so they decided to take a huge leap and set up a fostering agency with a real difference - Children Always First.

What brings us all together at Children Always First is our shared values and beliefs. We share a child-centred ethos and 'therapeutic parenting' approach. We work tirelessly to ensure that each child achieves their full potential, whatever hurdles life has thrown in their way.



## Why do children and young people need to live in foster care?

Children and young people need foster care for many reasons:

- Parents can be unavailable to provide consistent care for their children due to mental health issues and substance misuse.
- Parents can be ill or die and there are no other family members to take care of their children.
- Parents can neglect and fail to protect their children within their own families and children can be deemed to be unsafe living at home.
- Other parents may have children with a disability and need support or are unable to care for their children.

What these children and young people need is security, patience and understanding, to help them grow up to be healthy adults, living their lives to the full and being able to meet and cope with the challenges that face all of us at different stages in our lives.

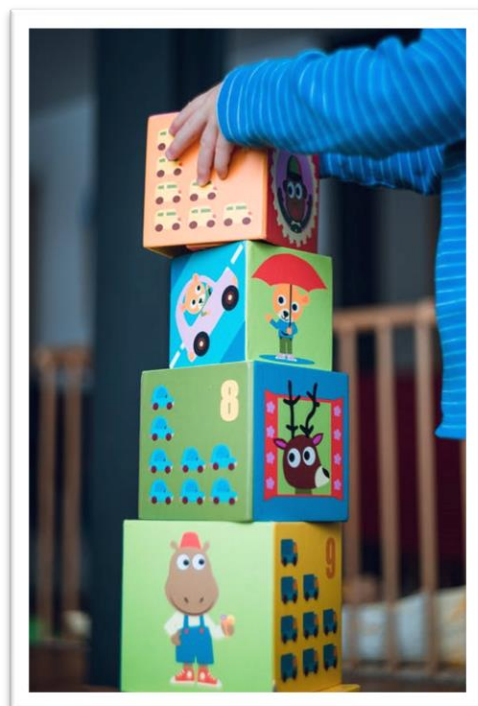
## Our Mission

Our mission and commitment is that every child and young person in our care:

- ✓ is safe and protected
- ✓ thrives and blossoms physically and emotionally
- ✓ achieves and has happy memories
- ✓ moves on in a positive and sustainable way

...and ultimately

- ✓ achieve their full potential



## Who can foster?

Children Always First is committed to celebrating equality and diversity both within the organisation and in the wider context. Children Always First wishes to create a diverse team of carers and staff from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures.

We believe that culture and diversity paint the fabric of life and as such we are committed to celebrating a variety of festivals and events, in addition to providing an anti-discriminatory working environment.

Individuals will be valued by what they do for children and young people and/or contribute to the organisation regardless of their:

- ✓ Race and ethnicity
- ✓ Religion and belief (or non-belief)
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Sexual orientation
- ✓ Disability
- ✓ Gender and gender reassignment
- ✓ Marriage or civil partnership
- ✓ Pregnancy or maternity

**Children Always First believes that diversity and equality should be at the core of our entire practice. We are committed to making this happen.**

Foster carers come from all parts of the community, so do the children and young people we look after in foster care. We need people of all ages, from all walks of life so that we can find the best match for every child.

You can be considered for fostering if you are:

- ✓ single - male or female
- ✓ any ethnic background
- ✓ of mixed parentage or in a mixed parentage relationship
- ✓ families with or without children, married or living with a partner
- ✓ a person with a disability
- ✓ couples of the same or different gender

What matters most is that you have the...

- ✓ time and space
- ✓ commitment and patience
- ✓ care and skills

...to work with children and young people

## What skills do I need?

Foster carers have particular skills and abilities which help them provide and maintain a good standard of care to the children they look after.

You will need to be able to:

- ✓ Build a child's sense of self-worth and identity
- ✓ Stick with a child through the bad times and the good
- ✓ Promote a child's health and education
- ✓ Encourage a child to develop and maintain friendships
- ✓ Understand the many different needs of children
- ✓ Respect and accept a young person's identity, sexuality, religion, culture, race,
- ✓ language and any special needs
- ✓ Show flexibility in handling a range of challenging and difficult behaviour
- ✓ Encourage and support contact with a child's parents and family, as appropriate
- ✓ Develop your own therapeutic parenting skills through preparation and on-going training

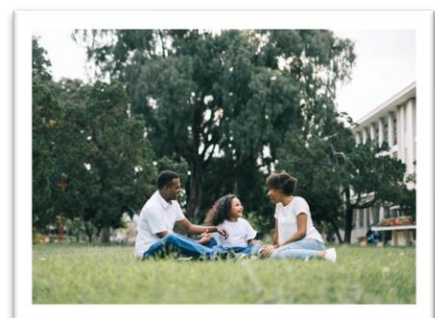
Training and support will enhance your skills as well as providing you with an opportunity to develop others.

## Types of fostering

Children Always First will work with Local Authorities to provide the right type of placements required for children. Children's safety and welfare is paramount in all placements and foster carers will be trained in safer care practice. Children Always First works in partnership with other agencies concerned to get the best for children.

### Short-term fostering

Children Always First foster carers provide short term, task centred, placements for children and young people of any age. We help children to understand what's happening and offer the appropriate support. Children Always First contributes to the assessment, plans and review process for the child whilst the Local Authority engages with the family to return the child home or move to a longer term placement or independence.



### Long-term fostering

Where the plan for the child or young person is long-term foster care, Children Always First foster carers help by offering a child or young person the chance to grow up in a safe and supportive environment, where they will receive care, nurturing and the opportunity to keep in touch with their family through the management and support of positive contact experiences.

### Fostering groups of brothers and sisters (sibling foster care)

Children Always First will help siblings stay together. We understand that in many cases children need the security and comfort of each other. Our Social Workers and specialists will contribute to our understanding and support of the sibling dynamic in order to support carers in their tasks.

### Parent and Child fostering

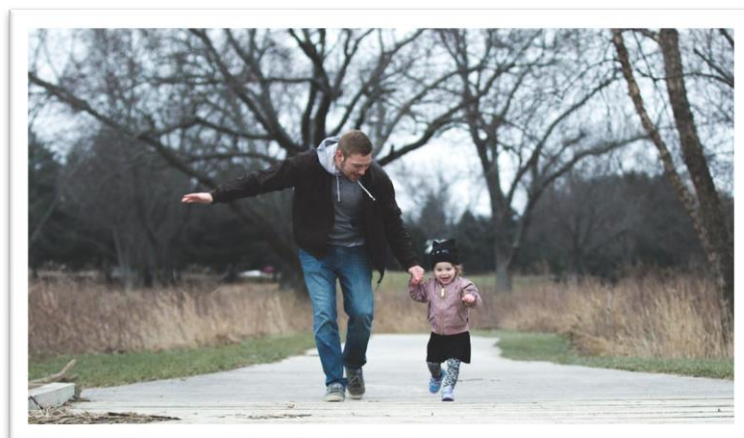
Children Always First provides placements, when commissioned, to help the parent/parents who need support and security to enable either assessment of their parenting or specialist support to parent.

### Respite/ Short Breaks

Children Always First provides respite care for looked after children and young people who are already fostered by other foster carers for a short time-limited period. This respite or 'short break', always in co-operation with the Local Authority, will be arranged in-house when our carers need to have a holiday or a break without the children. Occasionally, we will suggest a short break within the existing placement when we need to de-escalate and repair challenging or difficult situations. Some children will have a respite weekend built into their care package so the carer can recharge their batteries if the placement is particularly demanding.

### Under 5s (Pre-Adoption fostering)

Many children aged under 5 may have a plan for adoption if they are not returning home. We prepare and support our foster carers to understand the crucial role they play in helping the child/children to prepare for a 'forever family'.



## How do I become a foster carer?

Children Always First will recruit, assess and support a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people.

### Referral and Initial Visit

When prospective carers express an initial interest in fostering with Children Always First, we talk to them about the agency, the way in which we work, and what is involved in terms of assessment and the requirements of the role. Carers are asked to fill in an application form about themselves and other members of their household. This form gives the agency permission to carry out a variety of background checks.

### Checks

In order to safeguard the children we care for, we need to carry out various checks. These include checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service and Local Authority checks. Personal and Employment references are also necessary. It is not possible for people to become foster carers if they have committed any offences against children, or some other serious offences. Carers will be asked for proof of their identity and we will ask them to have a health check to show they do not have any major health problems.

### Pre-panel training

Carers receive an invitation to attend the mandatory pre-approval training, where they learn more about what is involved in fostering. This is a chance to meet other people who are going through the process, and talk to experienced foster carers. The course takes place over 2 days and is based on the 'Skills to Foster'. It explores the impact of pre-care experiences on children in care, safeguarding and safer care, the effects of poor and abusive parenting, and explores positive ways of caring for children and young people in order to improve their outcomes.

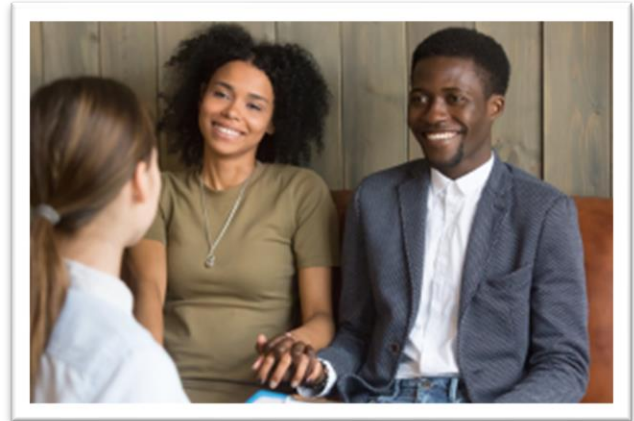
### The Form F Assessment

Prospective carers are allocated an Assessing Social Worker who carries out their personal assessment.

The assessment covers a range of subjects relating to the needs of children who require fostering. We will ask prospective carers for permission to contact ex-partners and adult children. All the information gathered by the social worker is put into a report outlining the applicants' skills, future training needs and areas where perhaps they need more help. Carers will see the Social Worker's report before panel and can make their own comments in writing.

### Fostering Panel

In accordance with the Fostering Service regulations 2011 (Reg. 45, NMS Standard 14) the Children Always First fostering panel plays a key quality assurance role and provides objectivity and challenge to the agency in the interests of children. The panel has a 'core' membership drawn from a central list. Panel members hold the relevant qualifications and experience and Children Always First will ensure panel is quorate.



The assessing Social Worker presents the report to the fostering panel. Applicants are invited to the panel and there is an expectation that they attend. The panel makes a recommendation to the Children Always First Agency Decision-Maker (ADM) as to whether or not to approve as foster carers. The ADM will then review the papers and the recommendations, advised by the panel, and give their final decision regarding approval.

### Post Approval

Once prospective carers are approved, the Registered Manager carries out an Induction and they are given further information about training opportunities and allocated a Fostering Social Worker.

### Matching process

We have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the matching process. Children Always First will liaise closely with the Local Authorities following a referral to ensure all placements are closely matched with our carers. There will be preparation for the placement before the child arrives (unless an emergency placement makes it impossible). The foster carer will receive up-to-date information about the child included in the child's care plan. This will maximise the potential for a successful placement for the child and the carer.





## Opportunities for learning and development

Children Always First is committed to supporting and enabling foster carers to grow and achieve through a robust and comprehensive learning and development programme.

Children Always First provides the support and development to foster carers that enhances the holistic and 'wrap around' approach the child or young person may need. We believe 'therapeutic parenting' and a 'therapeutic environment' is the essential ingredient in providing a safe, positive and stable care experience to children.

Children Always First ensures that training is bespoke, well-prepared and delivered by a variety of experienced trainers. Our training is delivered at weekends as well as during office hours so it can be accessible to all. Children Always First:

- ✓ Continuously improves the programme using feedback and evaluations from foster carers
- ✓ Provides quality learning and development opportunities using excellent trainers and specialists in the field
- ✓ Involves foster carers, children and young people in our delivery
- ✓ Ensures that our programme is fully reflective of our approach to equality and diversity
- ✓ Helps our carers to put into practice their learning and provide opportunities to reflect and grow

### The learning and development opportunities include:

- ✓ Pre-panel training as part of the assessment process
- ✓ Training Support and Development Standards workshops for new foster carers
- ✓ Children Always First Induction for all carers
- ✓ Mandatory training for all primary/secondary carers
- ✓ Additional training workshops
- ✓ 18 week Attachment Group for primary carers
- ✓ DDP level 1
- ✓ An Annual Seminar
- ✓ Foster Carer Forums to meet the Directors



### Chances to catch up with other foster carers:

- ✓ Carer Support Groups in carers own homes
- ✓ Regular Coffee Mornings at the office

## DDP Golden Thread

Children who come in to care often experience high levels of relational trauma and need to be supported through therapeutic parenting. Parenting using the principles of Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy helps the parent understand the meaning of their child's behaviour and stay calm and emotionally regulated as they talk with their child, even at very difficult times.

To support the DDP practice our training helps foster carers gain an understanding of attachment, trauma and PACE, through the step by step process below. Ensuring the DDP Golden Thread is woven into our therapeutic parenting.

### Foundations for Attachment

3 Day introduction to DDP

This training takes place on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

### Nurturing Attachment

18-Week Specialist Therapeutic Parenting course

\*for all primary carers\*

### DDP Support Groups

Practice Workshops - PACE/ DDP/ Attachment Based/ Themed Monthly – 2 hours

\*for carers who have completed Nurturing Attachments\*

## What support can I expect?

Children Always First prides itself on its approach and commitment to supporting carers.

### Fostering Social Worker

All of our staff are vetted and robustly recruited, not only for their skills and experience with looked after children, but because we believe that they care about children and young people. Our focus is on ensuring staff stability. Our entire staffing structure is child-focused and committed to utilising a 'therapeutic parenting' approach in order to achieve the best outcomes for the children we look after. There is a dynamic approach to learning and development in the agency which included induction, post-qualifying training and in-service training for staff. Our Fostering Social Workers ensure they provide regular, quality and effective supervision and support to carers. They attend key meetings/reviews for the child where required.

### Youth Support Workers

They work with children aged 5 years and over. Providing access to learning and development opportunities as mentioned above. They have an allocation of 20 children to ensure they are available and accessible to support the Fostering Social Worker and carer tasks. They run a funky children's activity programme, youth groups and hold regular consultations with the children and young people.



### 'Therapeutic Parenting' training and support

Our staff and carers are trained and continuously developed to meet the needs of traumatised and vulnerable children. The agency holds Jigsaw Meetings to enable the network to gain an in-depth understanding of the child's needs. In more complex situations, carers and staff can have direct access to our therapist and Clinical Consultant who will give one-on-one support. Where a child has complex issues we will endeavour to provide direct therapeutic support from a therapist or commission an assessment to determine their needs and support, in liaison with the Local Authority.

### Education and Learning

Our foster homes promote learning and achievement in every aspect, from attending parents' evenings to visiting prospective universities. Our team provides expert educational advice and support, attends all Personal Educational Plan meetings and advocates for the child in all educational settings and with the Local Authority.



### Health and well-being

CAF ensures that carers and staff prioritise the health and well-being of our children so that children can live in a healthy environment. Carers play a key role in day-to-day health support for the child.

### Carer Support Groups

We expect our carers to attend carer support groups and social events as part of their Fostering Agreement with the agency. Foster carers meet together in small support groups that provide an opportunity to talk about fostering issues with other carers.

Formal and informal feedback from support groups helps to inform further training needs which can be addressed through the support group, one-to-one sessions, or in more structured training settings. We use carer support groups as a consultative group to help shape and develop our services.



### Independence Support Group and Adoption Support

CAF offers help and support carers at every stage of their placement. The Youth Support Team support children and young people to prepare for independent living by offering creative and fun activities that focus on developing life skills. The team also hold support groups for their carers. Similarly CAF has developed specialist adoption support groups for foster carers who have children who are going to be adopted.

### Children and Young Peoples' Social Activities

CAF have a comprehensive social activities calendar. Carers and children can expect two big social events per year, plus many fun and exciting activities throughout the year. Sowing the seeds of positive shared memories creates the platform on which lasting relationships are built. We promote fun and interesting leisure activities with the carer families and Children Always First organised events.



### Involving our children and young people

Children Always First prides itself on consulting with children and young people and making sure they take a full and important role in shaping our services. We organise and support a consultative groups integrated into positive activities and talk to children about other agency issues which may affect them.

Twice a year we send each child and young person an age-appropriate survey which will aid our quality assurance and makes certain that each individual voice is heard.

### Financial Support



Children Always First pays competitive fees and allowances to all of our foster carers. We make sure carers receive all their training and carer support group expenses. Because we pay good professional fees we expect our foster carers to attend all meetings and training in addition to looking after the child or young person in their care.

### 24/7 support

Carers have out-of-hours access to a member of the Children Always First team weekdays and weekends. Sometimes this may be a chat about a particular issue, or could mean a call out visit from the team member.

### Newsletter

Carers and staff receive a regular newsletter with information and latest news and information about Children Always First and fostering.

### Technology and the internet

We provide support and training to enable and positively encourage our carers to use our database for enhanced communication and administration tasks. Carers are encouraged to access national organisations help lines and websites for advice, information and support. We prepare and support our carers on issues of e-safety.



Contact us... we would love to hear from you

We are based in Bromsgrove with easy access from the M5 and M42 motorways.

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