

Section Two

Foster Carers

Oak Lodge Fostering Services

Section 2.

1 Assessment and approval of foster carers

Assessment

"Persons who apply to become foster carers receive written information and a clear explanation of: the process of assessment, the criteria against which they will be assessed, the qualities they will be expected to demonstrate, the professional supports available to foster carers, the company's commitment to equal opportunities the allowance payable, the appeals procedure." (National Standards for Foster Care 2003, 14a.2)

- On application to Oak Lodge Fostering Services prospective carers are visited in their home by an independent qualified social work assessor and given information about the fostering task, Oak Lodge Fostering Services, commitment and expectations and the assessment process. The assessor will also look at the accommodation and the rooms available to foster children. If at the conclusion of this visit the assessor considers the applicants have potential (based on screening criteria) to become foster carers they will be invited to complete Oak Lodge Fostering Service application form.
- On receipt of application, the prospective carers will begin the assessment process. They will work with the independent social work assessor and over approximately a three month period examine their suitability to foster children. Oak Lodge assessors use the BASW Form F competency assessment framework to demonstrate carer's suitability for the fostering task.
- Statutory checks and enquiries are an important part of the assessment process and help establish applicant's suitability for the fostering task. Oak Lodge Fostering Services will carry out all checks and enquiries as required by the National Standards for Foster Care 2003 and the Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995.
- Foster carers must demonstrate through the process of assessment that all they meet (or have the potential to meet) all the criteria to become foster carers with Oak Lodge Fostering Services and furnish the assessor with information required to carry out the assessment in full.
- The views of all members of the household will be sought through the assessment process and all must be in agreement in order for the application to foster with Oak Lodge Fostering Services to go ahead.
- Three referees will be interviewed and the information supplied be consistent with that supplied by the applicants.

- All applicants children (if of age and understanding) will be interviewed and their views regarding the fostering task and applicants suitability taken into consideration in the process.
- The social work assessor will complete the assessment report within four months of receipt of application and this will be shared with the foster care applicants and their comments sought.

(Please refer to appendix 4 – competency criteria matrix)

Approval

- If the process of assessment identifies that the applicants meet the required standard of competency to become foster carers with Oak Lodge Fostering Services; (in line with the competency criteria) they will be presented to an independent Committee for consideration/approval.
- Oak Lodge Fostering Services recognises that in line with the Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995 it does not have statutory powers to approve foster carers and exists for the purpose of quality assurance.
- Only a Foster Care Committee of a Health Service Executive, Local Health Office Area has the authority to approve foster carers – Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995, Part 3, Section 7. Therefore all assessments will be submitted to the Foster Care Committee in the local health office area in which the carer resides for consideration and recommendation for inclusion on its foster care panel.

II Supervision and Support

"Approved foster carers are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker. This person, known as the link worker, ensures that foster carers have access to the information, advice and professional support necessary to enable them to provide high quality care." (National Standards for Foster Care 2003).

- All Oak Lodge foster carers will be supervised and supported by a Link Worker who holds a professional qualification in social work.
- The Link worker will be recruited via the services equal opportunities policy and procedure, and have a clear job description that defines their role.
- The Link worker will visit foster carers in their home fortnightly (at minimum) to provide supervision and support.
- The reports of these visits will be submitted in writing to the Head of Fostering Services and a monthly report will be furnished to the placing HSE social worker.
- The Link worker will support foster carers in writing reports, attending and contributing to meetings relating to the children in their care.
- The Link worker will work alongside the child's supervising social worker to ensure communication is consistent and the child receives the highest standards of care from the Oak Lodge foster carer.
- The Link worker will facilitate a weekly foster carer support group.

On-call support

- Oak Lodge Fostering Service offers a 24-hour support service for foster carers. This is in the form of an 'on-call' person being available by phone, to be consulted on issues which need clarification. The 'on-call' person should be consulted when a situation is more complicated than usual.
- The 'on-call' rota is drawn up by the Head of Fostering Service
- In cases of extreme emergency the 'on-call' person will go to the foster carers home.
- The Head of Fostering Services (as the designated child protection person) will be contacted regarding any issues relating to child protection concerns/allegations both within and outside of office hours.

Incident De-briefing

- Should an incident occur within an Oak Lodge foster placement the Link Worker will ensure that staff and foster carers are offered appropriate support following the incident.
- Incident debriefing is an important tool for growth through the processing of incidents and experiences.
- The Link Worker will conduct a full debriefing session with a member of staff involved in an incident.
- The debriefing will provide a forum for individuals to discuss their feelings and or their concerns in relation to a particular incident or particular practice with relevant team members. When a non-critical incident occurs and it is considered that individuals may benefit from the opportunity to discuss the matter further with those involved.
- If required, the staff and/or foster carer will be facilitated to attend for further support.

Respite care

- Respite care is an important component of the support Oak Lodge Fostering Services offers its foster carers and the children placed with them. Up to five weeks of respite care is available to foster carers each year and more can be provided if required in order to support the continuation of a placement. Respite can also be made available in an emergency and will be provided via other Oak Lodge approved foster carers.

III Training

Training and Development

- As part of Oak Lodge overall commitment to enhancing the care being provided for young people who are placed in the service, every effort will be made to provide training to all staff members and foster carers in a wide variety of areas aimed at keeping up to date with regard to child protection policies and procedures and in current thinking on best practice in service provision for young people.
- Staff members, both full-time and part-time and foster carers will be required to pursue in-service training in a variety of relevant topics and in particular child protection and welfare training.
- Head of Fostering Services will review both foster carer and staff training needs at regular intervals and implement programmes of learning as required.
- An induction programme of training will be available to all Oak Lodge foster carers which will focus on key areas of learning specific to the fostering task i.e. child protection, TCI for foster care, attachment and loss, 'parenting' skills.
- All foster carers will undertake the IFCA 'Foundation for Fostering' pre-approval training course as part of their assessment and must successfully complete this course in order to pursue their application with Oak Lodge Fostering Services.
- There will be an on-going programme of training for all Oak Lodge foster carers and they must make a commitment to pursue learning that ensure continued professional development
- Oak Lodge is working with WIT regarding a professional qualification in foster care and all Oak Lodge foster carers will be supported to access this course of learning.

IV Reviews of Foster Carers

Reviews

- All Oak Lodge Foster carers performance will be subject to annual review, this is to ensure continued competence for the fostering task.
- Annual reviews will include; an evaluation of the carers performance over the previous year in respect of children in their care, identify training completed and further training required, look at the carers current circumstances and the impact on their capacity to offer high quality care, the carers health and support networks.
- The health and safety check of the home will also be updated as well as necessary checks and clearances, for example garda check.
- The Link worker will compile a report for the review and elicit the views of the child, HSE supervising social worker and the foster carer as to their performance over the previous year. This report will be shared and discussed with carers prior to the review.
- The review meeting will be chaired by an independent chair person with relevant qualifications and experience in the area of fostering and will be attended by the foster carer, their family, the link worker and head of fostering service and Oak Lodge director of services.
- A report with recommendation is completed by the review chair and submitted to the Oak Lodge Independent committee for consideration. The report will also be sent to the host area HSE committee for information.
- If the review cannot reach agreement, any party can invoke the appeals procedure and this will be addressed by the representations and complaints policy and procedure.
- Review reports and decisions will be held on the foster carer file and a copy supplied to the carer.
- Reviews can be called at any time by the Head of Fostering Services; following an incident, allegation, complaint and in other circumstances where it is felt the performance and practice of the foster carer is in question.

Termination of Appointment

- If Oak Lodge Fostering Services considers foster carers are no longer suitable for the fostering task they will discuss the reasons with the foster carer, for

termination of their approval/appointment. A written report outlining the reasons for termination of appointment will be submitted to Oak Lodge and Local Health Area committee for consideration.

- In the event of termination of appointment the Head of Fostering Services and Link worker will meet with the foster carers to notify them of the decision and confirm the termination with reasons in writing.

Oak Lodge Fostering Services