



Oak Lodge
Fostering Services

Policies and Procedures

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Oak Lodge Fostering Services

Clarification of Terms

For the purpose of this document '*a foster carer*' is a person(s) who have completed the Oak Lodge Fostering Services assessment process and been approved by the HSE Local Area fostering committee.

Where Oak Lodge '*staff*' are mentioned this refers to any worker who is in the employment of Oak Lodge Fostering Services.

Where either '*children*' or '*young people*' are mentioned in the text, both are intended, although these terms are defined differently in various pieces of legislation. The definition of a child under both the Child Care Act 1991 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a person under 18 years of age and it is this definition which is used throughout this document.

The term '*Oak Lodge Fostering Services*' is used throughout this document and refers to Oak Lodge Fostering Services a registered company - no. 457992.

The term 'High Support' refers to the high level of support provided to foster carers and children/young people in their care. All foster carers assessed by Oak Lodge will be presented to the HSE local area committee and 'general' approval sought.

The term 'host' refers to the geographical HSE area in which the foster carer resides.

The term 'placing' refers to the geographical HSE area from which the child originates and where the supervising social work service with responsibility for the child/young person is located.

'*Policy*' is a statement of intent relating to the operation of each area of Oak Lodge Fostering Services and '*procedure*' is the method by which the policy will be carried out.

Value Statement

It is the intention of Oak Lodge Fostering Services Ltd to provide high quality foster care placements to all children and young people in the care of our service.

We believe that all children have the right to a childhood that is free from abuse and harm and adults charged with the care of children have a duty to provide appropriate care and protection that enables children to reach their fullest potential.

Oak Lodge Fostering Services staff and foster carers adopt best practice principles that underpin our approaches to working with children and young people placed in our care. We acknowledge the fundamental rights of children to be protected from harm, treated with respect and dignity, listened to and have their own views taken into consideration.

We consistently apply safe practices in recruitment, support and training of staff and foster carers and recognise that valuing children means valuing workers.

We seek to work collaboratively with all those involved in the life of children in our care and adopt child centred approaches to our practice and decision making.

Oak Lodge Fostering Services

Legal Context

The services provided by Oak Lodge Fostering Services are governed by legislation, regulation and policy standards relating to the care and protection of children. A brief overview is provided here:

- **The Constitution** is the most fundamental document relating to young people's rights in Ireland. All legislation is derived from, or considered in the context of, the constitution. Article 42.5 makes provision for cases *"where the parents for physical or moral reasons fail in their duty toward their children, the State is guardian of common good and by appropriate means shall endeavour to supply the place of the parents but always with due regard to the natural and imprescriptable rights of the child"* (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937).
- **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** was ratified in Ireland in September 1992. It is composed of a series of articles, which cover a comprehensive range of issues pertinent to children such as their civil, social, economic and cultural rights. The Convention commits states to legislate in all areas concerning children so that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration. It also calls for the empowerment of children and the right of children to express opinions and have their views taken into account in decisions relating to their lives. The convention pays specific attention to children living in care, including the right to protection for a child deprived of his/her family environment with regular re-assessments of his/her situation, strict controls on the conditions of their detention including separation from adults and legal representation at all times.
- **The Child Care Act 1991** places responsibility on health boards (now Health Service Executive) to promote the welfare and protection of children. There are three governing principles of the Child Care Act 1991. The first states that the welfare of the child should be the first and paramount consideration. The second states that a child's wishes should be taken into account. The third principle states that it is generally in the best interests of the child to be brought up in his/her own family. The Act also makes provision for access arrangements, care plans, case reviews, emergency and full care orders and for the establishment of the inspection service.
- **The Department of Health Child Care Regulations (Placement of Children in Foster Care) 1995** are the statutory guidelines to be followed by professionals working with children entering and living in residential care. These regulations outline the principles relating to the promotion of the welfare of the child in placement. The importance of effective care planning is

also emphasised in these documents. As mandated in the Child Care Act 1991, the regulations regulate the review of care plans.

- **The Freedom of Information Act 1997** allows members of the public access to any information held relating to their person, in State files. This has implications for the young people in our care as the Act allows them access to (age appropriate) information on their files.
- **Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998** relates to immunity from civil liability, to any person who reports child abuse reasonably and in good faith. It protect employees who report abuse from discrimination and it allows for the protection of persons against malicious reports by the creation of a new offence of false reporting of child abuse i.e. making a report knowing it be untrue.
- **Children First: Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children** (Dept of Health and Children, 1999). This document contains national guidelines designed to assist those engaging regularly with young people. The guidelines relate to reporting child protection concerns and assessment techniques for best practice.
- **The National Children's Strategy** (Dept of Health and Children, 2000) is a ten-year plan to improve the quality of children's lives. The Strategy sets out three national goals. The first goal states that children will have a voice in issues affecting their lives. The second states that children's lives will be better understood. The third states that children will receive better quality supports and services.
- **The National Standards for Foster Care** were introduced in 2003. The Standards outline expectations of performance for foster care services, including management and staffing, purpose and function, monitoring, children's rights, planning for children and young people, care of young people, safeguarding and child protection, education and health.
- **The Children Act 2001** proposes a number of diversionary interventions to be implemented with regard to young people in conflict with the law. The Act also makes a number of provisions for particularly troubled or vulnerable young people who have not committed a crime and are in need of special care and attention. The Act allows for such young people to be detained on Special Care Orders in Special Care Units.

Statutory Obligations

A number of statutory obligations arise from the legislative and policy measures outlined above. These obligations serve to ensure that the best possible care is provided to young people living in foster care. This care is based on current knowledge of what constitutes best practice. With this in mind, it is the responsibility of each foster carer and staff member to familiarise themselves with the documents outlined above. Foster carers and staff must reflect the key principles of these measures in their own daily practice.

Oak Lodge Fostering Services

Purpose and Function.

Introduction.

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose and Function of **Oak Lodge Fostering Service**.

The statement of Purpose and Function will outline the aims and objectives of the service, the range of services provided, management and staffing structure; the recruitment, training, approval and supporting of foster carers and the representation and complaints process.

Oak Lodge Fostering Services' Statement of Purpose and Function has been written in consultation with Independent Social Work/Care consultants and Health Information and Quality Authority to ensure that the service meets the requirements of;

- The Children Act 2001
- The Child Care Act 1991
- Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995
- National Standards in Foster Care 2003
- Directions and Guidelines issued by the Department of Health and Children

The Statement of Purpose and Function will be reviewed annually by Oak Lodge Fostering Services Directors and updated as necessary, in line with Legislation, Regulation, Standards and Practice developments.

Aims and Objectives.

Oak Lodge Fostering Service aims to provide high quality care for young people who cannot live within their family home and require alternative placement.

The fostering services provided by Oak Lodge will focus on meeting the individual needs of children within a nurturing family environment. Foster carers will be recruited, trained and supported to ensure they offer effective care to children and young people placed with them and will be central members of the 'helping team'.

Oak Lodge Fostering Service will provide;

- Quality care to children and young people placed with Oak Lodge Fostering Services Foster Carers
- A high quality standard of care that is responsive to the individual needs of children and young people
- Stable and nurturing family environments that support children and young people to reach their fullest potential
- Child centred practice, planning and decision making approaches
- Placements that promote the racial, cultural and religious backgrounds of children and young people
- Competent foster carers who are sensitive the needs and pre-placement experiences of children
- Therapeutic and psychological support for children and foster carers
- 24 hour support for foster carers and the children in their care
- A commitment to the on-going learning, training and development of foster carers
- A partnership approach with Children, Birth Families, Carers, Health Services Executive, Social Work, Education and Therapist colleagues working together in the best interest of the child

Oak Lodge Fostering Services accepts referrals from all Health Service Executive Areas

Management and Staffing

Oak Lodge High Support Fostering Service, a non statutory agency, is a private limited company. Company registration number – 457992, Companies Act 1963 – 2001.

Company Directors

Oak Lodge Fostering Services was established in 2007 by four experienced practitioners with qualifications in social care, social work and psychotherapy. We provide services to children and young people who for various reasons cannot live at home with their birth families and require alternative placements. We provide care for young people (aged 12-18 years) at our five residential centres and are now developing a high support Fostering Service for those children whose needs can be met within a family environment.

Helping Team

Oak Lodge Fostering Services recognises the importance of working as a team and values each person's role in the life of a child in their care. We therefore seek to work in partnership with children, birth families, foster carers, HSE colleagues, therapists, psychologists, educational colleagues and all significant others to achieve the best outcome for the child.

Oak Lodge foster carers will be supported in their care of all children placed with them by a team of experienced and qualified staff. They will have access to support and guidance twenty four hours a day from a team of social care staff at Oak Lodge residential unit. Access to therapeutic support and intervention from our consultant psychotherapist, two weekly support and supervision from a qualified link worker, weekly support group meetings facilitated by therapists/psychologists and link worker and access to an on-going programme of training related to the fostering task.

Link Worker

The Link Worker supports the foster carers in their role and works alongside the child's HSE social worker to support the placement. Oak Lodge foster carers will meet with their link worker every two weeks for supervision. The Link Worker and Foster Carers will meet to discuss the placements progress, examine any difficulties arising and look at solutions, reflect on practice and identify areas for learning and development.

Assessing Social Worker

All applications from prospective foster carers will be considered in relation to their suitability to undertake the fostering task. They will be assessed by an independent qualified social worker using the BASW Form F1 competency framework.

Fostering Committee

If in the opinion of the assessing social worker, the applicants meet the required standard of competency to become foster carers with Oak Lodge Fostering Services; they will be presented to an independent Committee for consideration/recommendation.

Oak Lodge Fostering Services Committee 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.

Oak Lodge Independent Fostering Committee will consist of suitably qualified and experienced members, with knowledge and expertise in the areas of fostering, social

work, social care, health and education. Membership will comply with the requirements of the National Standards in Foster Care 2003.

Services Provided

Oak Lodge Fostering Service provides a wide range of foster care placements in order to meet the diverse needs of children and young people who require alternative care placements.

Our placements are available to children and young people who cannot for a variety of reasons live within their own birth families; this includes children who present challenging behaviour, sexualised behaviour, children with chaotic and disrupted care histories, those who have experienced abuse and trauma and had previous placement breakdown.

The abilities and experience of the foster carers will be matched with the individual needs of children in order to ensure the best possible outcome for the child within the foster placement. Foster carers are supported in their care of the children by the helping team who provide on-going support, training and development opportunities.

Oak Lodge Foster Carers in conjunction with the helping team will offer a safe and supportive family environment in which children and young people can work to overcome the difficulties they may be experiencing in their lives and provide them with the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

All children placed with Oak Lodge Fostering Services foster carers will be done so via referral from the Health Service Executive and in accordance with the Service Level Agreement.

Oak Lodge Fostering Service provides placements that are;

- Long Term
- Short Term
- Emergency
- Assessment
- Bridging
- Solo
- Parent and Child

Long Term Placements

Oak Lodge Fostering Services will offer long term foster care placements to children and young people who require a permanent alternative home for the duration of their childhood. Oak Lodge recognises that short term placements are often the

initial plan for a child or young person whilst reunification options are explored and long term placements can develop as the child's care plan is reviewed. Oak Lodge is committed to recruiting foster carers who have the flexibility required to meet the changing needs of young people and the requirements of their care plan.

Short Term Placements

Oak Lodge Fostering Services Foster Carers will care for children on a short term/time limited basis when this is within the agreed care plan for the child or young person. Foster Carers, as part of our multi disciplinary helping team can be contracted to carry out specific task centred pieces of work with children where the purpose of the placement is known to be focussed and time limited in duration.

Emergency

Oak Lodge Fostering Service will provide twenty-four hour availability and support for its foster carers and the children placed with them. They will accept emergency referrals and make a placement with appropriate carers as available.

Assessment Placements

Assessment placements will be short term placements that have an agreed focussed piece of assessment work to be undertaken by the Oak Lodge foster carers. The carers as part of the helping team will work with HSE colleagues, therapists, psychologists and education professionals to assess the child and young person's strengths and needs in relation to a specific area of their development. This assessment can contribute to the long term planning for children; help determine the best placement options and the support services needed. A written assessment report will be provided by Oak Lodge Fostering Services.

Bridging Placements

Bridging placements are sometimes required as part of a longer term care plan for a child or young person. The child and/or young person may be working with Social Workers and Birth Family towards reunification or towards independent living (dependant on the age of the young person) and require an 'interim' placement while this care plan develops to fruition. Oak Lodge Foster Carers will work with children, young people and those involved in their care to support and prepare the child for the future in accordance with the agreed care plan.

Solo Placements

Oak Lodge Fostering Services understands that some children who come into the care of their Fostering Service will have specific complex needs that require a solo placement. This type of placement is required when the needs of the child or young person places high demands on the foster carer because constant adult supervision is required in order to keep everyone safe from harm. The increased level of supervision and individual attention required precludes the placement of any other children with the foster carers.

Parent and Child Placement

Parent and child placements will be available to young mothers (including pregnant young women) and fathers who require support with the parenting task. Foster Carers providing these placements will work alongside young parents to assist with the development of parenting skills, helping them learn the skills needed to provide a high standard of care to their child. There may also be an assessment element to this type of placement and Oak Lodge Foster Carers will work with the young parent and all involved in their care to provide an assessment of the young person's parenting ability. A written assessment report will be provided by Oak Lodge Fostering Services as required.

Therapeutic Support Services

Therapeutic and psychological intervention and support services will be available to all Oak Lodge foster carers and the children placed with them. Foster carers will have twenty four hour support, advice and guidance in relation to children and young people in their care. They will also attend weekly carer support group meetings which will be facilitated by a qualified link worker and psychotherapist/psychologist. All foster carers will meet two weekly with their Link Worker, for support, discussion and supervision.

Therapeutic and psychological services are available for all children placed with Oak Lodge Foster Carers from our consultant psychotherapist and can be commissioned by the placing HSE area as agreed in the child's individual care plan and service level agreement.

Education and Activity Programmes

Children and young people who experience difficulties in mainstream educational settings will be supported to maintain their school placement or access home tuition services. Oak Lodge fostering services can provide a range of educational programmes including Fetac awards as well as a wide range of leisure/social activities. Specialised programmes are available to support children in Oak Lodge foster placements and can be commissioned by the placing HSE area.

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.

Foster Carers

Application and Assessment

On application to Oak Lodge Fostering Services prospective carers are visited in their home by a 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 F1 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.

Recommendation for Approval

If, in the opinion of the assessing social worker, the applicants meet the required standard of competency to become foster carers with Oak Lodge Fostering Services; they will be presented to an independent Committee for consideration.

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.

Oak Lodge Fostering Services is committed to the recruitment and retention of competent professional foster carers who have the abilities to meet the needs of children in their care.

Review

The approval/ appointment of all Oak Lodge Foster Carers will be subject to annual review. The review process will give carers and link worker the opportunity to formally evaluate the carer's progress and continuing capacity to provide high quality care to children and young people. The recommendation of the reviewing officer following the review meeting will be shared with all parties and submitted to the Oak Lodge and Local Health Area Office Fostering Committee.

A review may also be called at any point by Oak Lodge Fostering Services following a serious incident or complaint.

Training

Training is a key component of the preparation and support available to Oak Lodge Foster Carers and the children they care for. All carers must undertake pre-approval training as part of the assessment process and make a commitment to undertake a further programme of training related to the fostering task. Post approval training will include; child protection, safe caring, managing challenging behaviour, valuing diversity, attachment, first aid and recording. Training programmes will be designed and delivered by experienced practitioners and organised by Oak Lodge in such a way that facilitates maximum attendance by its carers.

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, a Company Director and Link worker will meet with the foster carers to notify them of the decision and confirm the termination with reasons in writing.

Allowance

Oak Lodge Foster Carers will receive an allowance which recognises their skills and values their commitment to the fostering task.

Support

Foster carers will have twenty four hour support, advice and guidance in relation to children and young people in their care. They will also attend weekly carer support group meetings which will be facilitated by a qualified link worker and psychotherapist/psychologist. All foster carers will meet two weekly with their Link Worker for support, discussion and supervision. On-going training and development is a key component of the support available to Oak Lodge carers and gives all foster carers the opportunity to expand their knowledge base, improve their skills and ensures continued competence.

Representation and Complaints

Oak Lodge Fostering Services representations and complaints procedure defines a complaint as "any expression of dissatisfaction about the quality, lack of, or refusal of a service that the person complaining is entitled to use".

All children and young people in our care and those acting on their behalf will be expressly informed of their right to complain. Oak Lodge has a pro-active approach to problem solving and recognises that effective complaint systems contribute towards keeping children and young people safe.

Complaints are concerned with three aspects of the care task;

- Child Protection
- Service provision
- Staff conduct

Children and young people in the care of Oak Lodge Fostering Services may make allegations against their present or past carers, or other individuals in their life. In such cases, Oak Lodge in conjunction with the placing and host HSE social work team will follow child protection investigation procedures as set out in Children First, The National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children. All child protection allegations will be treated sensitively with due regard for the young person's safety and wellbeing.

Complaints relating to service provision and staff conduct are expressions of dissatisfaction that a child or young person, birth family, foster carer, HSE colleague and/or others may make regarding Oak Lodge staff or service delivery and do not fall under child protection concerns. It is the responsibility of Oak Lodge

management to oversee the investigation of such complaints in line with the three stage Representation and Complaints Procedure.

Oak Lodge management work to resolve all complaints at a local/informal level (stage 1) by meeting with the person making the complaint, listening to their complaint and taking appropriate action to address their concerns. All complaints are recorded in writing. If the complainant is not satisfied that their concerns have been addressed they may wish to invoke stage 2 of the process. Stage 2 complaints are referred to Oak Lodge Directors for investigation; the initial complaint as well as the action taken by management to address the complaint will be reviewed. If complainants are dissatisfied with the response received at stage 2, an independent investigator will be appointed to carry out a formal investigation – stage 3.

All children/young people, foster carers, staff and placing HSE areas are provided with information about Oak Lodge Fostering Services Representation and Complaints procedure. Records of complaint investigations and outcome will be held by the Head of Fostering Services for analysis and monitoring.

Oak Lodge Fostering Services

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