

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a gravel path that curves through a lush, green park or forest. The path is bordered by tall, leafy trees on both sides, creating a sense of depth and tranquility. The sky is overcast and grey.

High Support Fostering Services Statement of Purpose and Function

Giving young people opportunities others take for granted.

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Introduction.

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose and Function of Oak Lodge High Support Fostering Services.

The Statement of Purpose and Function will outline the aims and objectives of the services, 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 High Support Fostering Services' Statement of Purpose and Function has been written in consultation with Independent Social Work/Care consultants 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 the Directors of Oak Lodge Fostering Services and updated as necessary, in line with Legislation, Regulation, Standards and Practice developments.

Aims and Objectives.

Oak Lodge High Support Fostering Services aims to provide high quality care for children and young people, 0 to 18 years of age 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 High Support Fostering Services 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 to 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 is a National service and accepts referrals from all Health Service Executive Areas

Management and Staffing

Oak Lodge High Support Fostering Services is part of Oak Lodge Residential Services, a non statutory agency, private limited company. Company registration number – 9581900L, Companies Act 1963 – 2001.

Company Directors

Oak Lodge High Support Fostering Services was established in 2007 by three 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 up to four young people (aged 12-18 years) at our residential unit in Carrick on Suir, County Tipperary and are now developing a High Support Fostering Services 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 High Support Fostering Services Helping Team of foster carers, social workers, social care workers, educational, medical and psychotherapist professionals work together to provide high quality care to children and young people.

Core components of the support provided by Oak Lodge are;

- therapeutic support and intervention from our consultant psychotherapist
- two-weekly support and supervision from a qualified link worker
- weekly carer support group meetings that are facilitated by therapist/psychologist and link worker
- respite care
- access to education and activity programmes
- access to an on-going programme of development and training related to the fostering task
- 24 hour support and guidance

Link Worker

The Link Worker supports the foster carers in their role and works along side 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

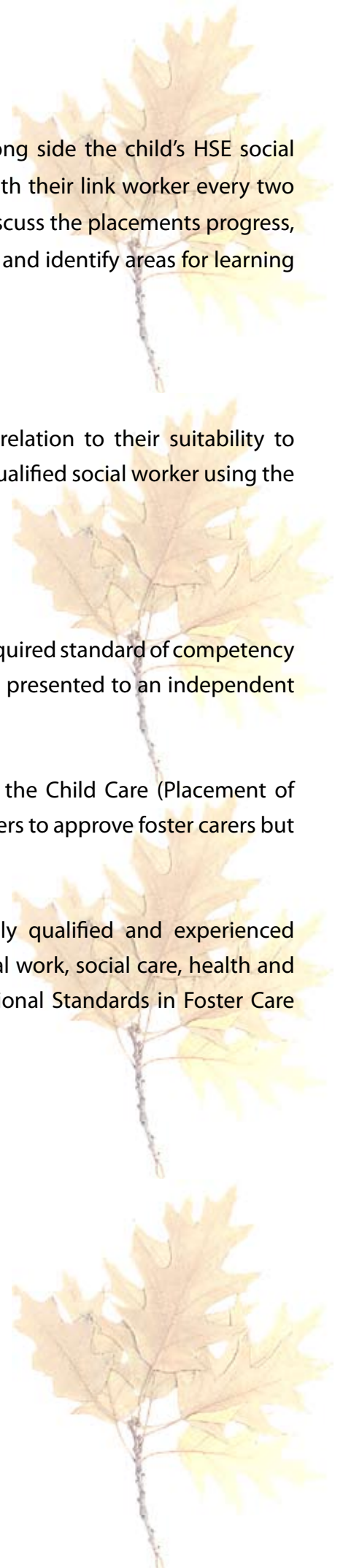
All applications from prospective foster carers will be considered in relation to their suitability to undertake the fostering task. They will be assessed by an independent qualified social worker using the BASW Form F1 competency framework.

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/approval.

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 but 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 High Support Fostering Services 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 High Support 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 to ensure the best possible outcome for the child within the foster placement. Foster carers are supported in their care of the children by other members of the helping team who provide on-going support, training and development.

Oak Lodge Foster Carers, as a central part of 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 thus provide them with the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

We work in collaboration with Slievenamon Education and Adventure Centre which provides an educational and outdoor adventure programme to children and young people who experience difficulties in mainstream educational settings and programmes of activity are available to support children in Oak Lodge high support foster placements.

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 High Support Fostering Services 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 Fostering Services 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 High Support Fostering Services 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 where an agreed focussed assesment is 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 is completed 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 High Support Fostering Services 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 along side 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 persons 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

Slievenamon Education and Adventure Centre provides an educational and outdoor adventure programme to children and young people who experience difficulties in mainstream educational settings and have been assessed as unable to function adequately at home or in the community. The Education and Activity Centre has a team of qualified and experienced staff who work with young people to address their educational and personal development needs. Programmes of activity are available to support children in Oak Lodge high support 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. 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 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 High Support Fostering Services 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.

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/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.

Oak Lodge High Support 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 High Support 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 carers 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 High Support 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 High Support 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 High Support Fostering Services may make complaints/allegations against their present or past carers, or other individuals in their life. In such cases, Oak Lodge in conjunction with the placing 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 complaints/allegations will be treated sensitively with due regard for the young persons 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 will 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 Oak Lodge Directors for analysis and monitoring.



OAK LODGE FOSTERING SERVICES

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