

**Channels & Choices Therapeutic Fostering**

**Statement of Purpose**

**(This document is to be read in conjunction with the Channels &Choices brochure)**

**This statement was last revised on the**

**9th May 2023**

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**Our aims and objectives**

*“Children are referred to us due to their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, which have resulted in their inability to be able to be cared for within a family environment. Nearly all of the children have experienced early life trauma, and most have some form of an attachment disorder. We have a highly integrated therapeutic community which focuses on working collaboratively ensuring seamless transitions, so that we can achieve the best outcomes for the children we care for.”* – Directors’ statement

Channels & Choices Therapeutic Fostering Limited (company number - 08377728) is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 2006. We are an independent fostering service and we are regulated and inspected by Ofsted. Our most recent Ofsted inspection was undertaken in November 2021 and the service was judged to be ‘Good.’

Our primary aim is to improve the lives of children whose development has been impaired by abuse, trauma and deprivation.

A centre of excellence

We strive to be a centre of excellence in therapeutic fostering services and we encourage each and every child to reach their full potential through providing them with a safe, stable and consistent family environment. We recognise through documented research that a child’s needs are best met by a nurturing family and we are committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family with a well-matched foster placement.

How our journey started

The Channels & Choices group was established in 2005 by three qualified social workers who had become frustrated with local children’s services. Over the years the company’s name became synonymous with excellence in children’s residential care and through natural evolution the company also established a DfE registered school; The Sallygate school (which provides both primary and secondary education). Although we have had therapists working with the company from its inception our in house therapy team has really developed since around 2008 and we are now registered as a therapeutic community with The Royal College of Psychiatry, The Consortium of Therapeutic Communities and the National Centre for Therapeutic residential and foster care. Our fostering service was established in 2013 and evolved as we wanted to offer our own fostering service to those children who had progressed in our residential homes and were ready for a fostering environment.

Developing a secure base

We aim for all young people to achieve personal integration through developing a secure base that will equip them for moving forward with their lives. The development of meaningful relationships is essential for this to happen.

All of our approved foster carers are encouraged, trained and supported to help children reach their full potential through evidencing best practice techniques.

In order to achieve these aims we have set the following core objectives:

1. To provide high quality therapeutic foster care placements where each child will have the opportunity for stability, a security and a warm, safe caring environment within families that best match their identified needs.
2. To recruit carers from all backgrounds in order to meet the ethnical, cultural and religious needs of children and young people referred to Channels & Choices.
3. To develop our services so that we can help young people improve their outcomes in all aspects of their lives.
4. To ensure all foster carers have access to training, guidance and the support of an appropriately qualified and experienced supervising social worker at all times.
5. To offer 24-hour support for foster carers, children and young people.
6. To promote placement stability by utilising the skills and resources of the rest of the therapeutic community such as our in-house therapy team and school.
7. To promote contact with the birth family and significant others and to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate.
8. To work in close partnership with Local Authorities to promote and safeguard the best interests and welfare of the child or young person.

**Our therapeutic framework**

Our therapeutic framework is based upon psychodynamic theory and is heavily influenced by attachment and systemic theory. Our therapeutic community strives to provide a holistic therapeutic environment for each child. They will experience therapeutic interaction and support as part of their daily lives.

Our extensive in-house training, a full assessment of individual child’s needs (completed with supervising social workers, therapists and foster carers), POD support groups (six weekly facilitated by therapists and supervising social workers), provides a robust model of holistic support and individual specific intervention where appropriate. This is also informed by our own individual interaction, therapeutic relationships and our ongoing therapeutic assessments, discussions and processing together as a community.

From the outset we make sure that our children are well matched to our community in order to meet their emotional and developmental needs.

Assessments are completed according to individual need which may include psychological, psychiatric, cognitive functioning, occupational therapy and speech and communication and will inform how we (Channels & Choices and carers) will meet their needs. The day to day arrangements for this can be found in our placement plans and foster carer action plans.

All children placed with Channels & Choices are encouraged to talk about their wants and needs.  Therapeutic support is provided dependent on individual need, this may be through either group (both primary & secondary age boys and girls groups) or individual opportunities. This can be done at each child’s own pace and creatively amongst the adults that care for them.

Therapeutic Services are provided through our in-house therapy department which includes a Psychiatrist, Psychotherapists, Systemic Therapist, Play Therapist, Speech and Language Therapist and Occupational Therapist. Support and guidance is available to all children and carers. All members of our therapy team work in collaboration to promote Channels & Choices’ underpinning therapeutic framework and ethos.

We believe that reflection and sharing is a huge resource which allows foster carers to develop and broaden their understanding and skill base thus our therapy team also works directly with our foster carers in individual sessions and/or via support group sessions. Joint case management supervision for supervising social workers and therapists are undertaken by Deputy Manager or Senior practitioner, to ensure that all decision making has taken social work and therapeutic perspectives into consideration.

The therapy department provide a consultation service for all members of the fostering team to identify the potential referral pathway to the therapy department based on a child’s individual need.

We work in partnership with Professor David Shemmings and have incorporated David’s ARP (Attachment and Relationship-based Practice) project in to our therapeutic framework. The ARP project is a core training course and David directly trains all of our staff and foster carers.

We have teamed up with David to create training DVD for practitioners working with traumatised children called ‘Brain Child’: Getting your brain to do what you want’. The DVD shows a number of short films explaining how the brain works when a child has experienced relational or developmental trauma. There are 5 professionals who cover current issues such as: CSE, on line safety, violent gangs, child trafficking, sexual and physical abuse, and being missing from home. There are also 6 care leavers who tell their stories about their experience of trauma. We have also been involved with research projects with the DfE, Kent University. Please see our website for further details.

**Our current statistics**

At present we have 33 families registered with us and 41 children in placement (May 2023).

**The management structure and staff team**

**Ross Barnett, Director**

Ross began his career in 2001 working for the Local Authority as part of the specialist Looked After Children team. He also worked in the local authority’s mental health and long term child protection teams before setting up Channels and Choices with his colleagues in 2005. He is a qualified social worker registered with the HCPC and he also has a degree in Psychology.

Ross holds the registered manager’s award for children and young people and undertook the role of registered manager within Channels and Choices at the company’s inception in 2005. He also tutors professionals about managing conflict and appropriate physical interventions.

As well as being a company Director Ross is also the Responsible Individual and Agency Decision Maker for the fostering service.

**Steve Davison, Director**

Steve is a Director at Channels and Choices. He is a qualified social worker with a diploma in therapeutic child care. Steve has over 20 years’ experience working with children and their families. He has worked for the Local Authority as part of the Youth Service, Young Offenders team, Education Welfare and 7 years in a LA residential children’s home. Following his qualification as a social worker Steve worked for the Council’s Long- term & Child Protection Team before he helped form Channels and Choices.

**Sarah Whiting, Fostering Manager**

Sarah has over 25 years working with children and families in a variety of settings. After qualifying as a Social Worker in 2010 she worked for the Local Authority in a Children and Families team and subsequently for 5 years in a Child in Care team. She joined Channels & Choices in 2017 as a Senior Practitioner in the Fostering team before moving to the position of Registered Manager in June 2019.

**Channels & Choices Therapeutic Fostering also currently has the following staff team:**

2 Social Work Assistant

4 Supervising Social Workers (incl. 2 part-time)

1 Experienced Practitioner

1 Senior Practitioner

1 Deputy Manager

2 Administrators

**Standards of care**

**Monitoring our performance**

Channels & Choices are committed to meeting and then exceeding the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (as amended) and Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (2011).

The performance of the service is monitored through:

* Completion of monthly regulation 35 monitoring functions and quarterly monitoring reports.
* Ofsted inspections.
* Other quality assurance monitoring checks including internal audits and external consultants.

**Ofsted**

Ofsted regulates and inspects our service. Their contact details are:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

T- 03001231231

E- enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

**Safeguarding**

The Channels & Choices safeguarding procedures lay down a clear format for the reporting of any Child Protection or safeguarding matter in line with national and local procedures.

Channels & Choices Safeguarding Manager Paulette Holliday has been a Lead Associate Trainer with Kent Safeguarding Children’s Board for the last 10 years delivering Child Protection & Safeguarding, CSE, Online Safety and Radicalisation (PREVENT) Training to professionals across Kent. She is also a Home Office approved trainer and she leads on many of the courses provided to our foster carers and staff from all departments of the community. Paulette liaises and consults with the appropriate host Local Authority’s Social Services Department for any safeguarding queries or concerns.

**Complaints**

Channels & Choices are committed to providing the highest level of childcare and services to children and young people, their foster families and the placing authorities. We have a comprehensive complaints procedure which is given out to all young people and carers as part of the children’s guide and handbook. We will immediately investigate any concerns bought to our attention and where appropriate, take action to improve our performance. A copy of the procedure is available upon request.

**Policies and procedures**

Channels & Choices have developed a detailed and comprehensive policy and procedure manual which is hosted by Tri X. Further information regarding policies, practice and procedures can be found in the following handbooks:

* Fostering Policy & Procedures- this online resource outlines the policies and procedures for our foster carers and staff.
* Panel handbook- this handbook provides information about our fostering panel and its practices.

**Recruiting, selecting and approving Channels & Choices foster carers**

Channels & Choices looks specifically for families who have the energy, commitment and cognitive ability to develop a professional career in therapeutic fostering. We encourage applications from diverse background and life experiences.

All interested individuals who contact Channels & Choices will have their enquiries recorded on an enquiry form. If appropriate, we will send out an information pack and direct them to certain parts of our website in order to help the enquirer decide whether they feel they have the necessary skills to undertake the role of therapeutic foster carer.

Once the potential applicant has had an opportunity to find out about fostering and if they are still keen to apply, they will be asked to complete an application form. Usually, the application form will be left with the applicants following the initial visit/meeting but it may be sent to the applicants at their request.

**The initial visit**

Our initial visits/meetings are undertaken by one of our supervising social workers, Deputy manager, Placements and Recruitment Manager or Registered manager – all of whom have relevant knowledge, experience and skills. The aim of the initial visit is to help interested parties gain a clearer understanding of the role of a therapeutic foster carer, as well as for the social worker to undertake an initial assessment of the suitability of the enquirers. During the visit, applicants will be given further information about fostering. The roles and responsibilities of foster carers, the assessment process and support available to foster carers will be discussed.

**Preparation training**

Applicants and those who may wish to know more about becoming a foster carer with Channels & Choices will be invited to attend our 3 day preparatory training course which is based on the Fostering Network’s 'Skills to Foster' course. This course focuses on the practical day to day skills that all foster carers need. As part of this this preparatory training we offer a ‘introduction to therapeutic fostering’ session. Some of the children living with foster carers at Channels & Choices are also involved and will interview the potential foster carers.

**Moving on to assessment**

Based on the feedback from the ‘Skills to Foster’ course facilitators and the results of the initial checks (DBS, medical and Local Authority etc.) the Placement and Recruitment manager and Registered manager will decide whether to proceed with the next stage of the assessment process, which involves allocating an independent social worker to assess the potential carers. The assessment will follow the Stage 1 and Stage 2 process as defined in the Assessment and Approval of Foster Carer Guidelines and Regulations (2013).

**The assessment process**

The assessment of prospective foster carers is undertaken based upon the areas highlighted in the CoramBAAF Form F report. The assessment using Form F is primarily about identifying whether an applicant or applicants are suitable to be approved as foster carers, to determine the kind of fostering for which they are suitable, and to consider any terms of approval. In our context we will specifically consider whether applicants have the qualities to develop as therapeutic foster carers.

Once the applicants have been through our in-depth assessment process, the statutory checks required and the assessment report has been finalised, the recommendations of the assessment will be presented to our fostering panel.

**Approval**

Channels & Choices’ fostering panel makes recommendations about the approval of prospective foster carer(s). The Agency Decision Maker considers the assessment documents and the minutes of the panel meeting including the recommendations, before making a decision about the approval of prospective foster carers. Following this decision the applicants will be notified in writing. Where the decision is made to approve the applicants, the letter will specify any terms of approval. The ADM will make a decision within 7 days of receiving the panel meeting minutes and recommendations. Following approval, foster carers and Channels & Choices sign a written agreement (Foster Care Agreement) that sets out the terms and conditions of the fostering household’s relationship with Channels & Choices therapeutic fostering.

**Assessment and approval process flowchart**

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| --- |
| **Telephone Enquiry** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Information Pack** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Initial Visit/Meeting** |

**3 -6 months**

|  |
| --- |
| **DBS, Local Authority and other Checks Undertaken** |

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| --- |
| **Preparation training such as the Fostering Network “Skills to Foster” Training Course** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Assessment Interviews Personal & Work References** |

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| --- |
| **Completed Form F Presented to Panel** |

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| --- |
| **Approval Decision by Agency Decision Maker** |

|  |
| --- |
| **Approval** |

**Joining the community & how we support our foster carers**

Following their approval, successful applicants will join our professional team of foster families and become part of Channels & Choices therapeutic community. We support our carers 24 hours a day/7 days a week. A member of the fostering team is always at hand to help find the best way forward whether that be within or out of office working hours.

Regular contact with a supervising social worker

The team at Channels & Choices are extremely well trained and very experienced. Each foster family is allocated an experienced supervising social worker to help guide and advise them. They will make regular phone calls to the family and undertake monthly visits, to help foster carers and the child with them get the most out of their fostering journey. They will also attend meetings with the carers and be the link between the family, the Local Authority Social Worker and Channels & Choices therapeutic community. The supervising social workers work very closely with the therapists who support the foster carers.

Support meetings with other foster carers

There are also six weekly foster carer support meetings (PODS), where carers can meet, talk to, support and learn from other foster carers and members of the fostering and therapy team.

Every two months a locality group is held; the purpose of this is to support carers to develop more local support networks and friendships which in turn benefit our children. These groups are not formally structured and are social groups. Each locality group is led by one carer who liaises with the other carers in their group around possible activities they would enjoy and availability (to ensure that most can attend at convenient dates). Four times a year each locality group meets up with the children for a bigger activity such as going to adventure park or a BBQ at someone's home.

Channels & Choices fostering activity days & events

Our foster families and children have given really good feedback about our ‘fostering activity days’. We arrange regular activities and events for all of the family to take part in. Summer fun days, wildlife park outings and pumpkin picking are a few of the recent activities as well as our annual community awards ceremony, spectacular fireworks evening and a visit to the pantomime at the Marlowe theatre in Canterbury. We have a number of foster carers, who alongside some of the team and children design the fun days, and also help give the children in our care an additional way of getting their views and ideas heard.

Our therapy team is always there to help

Within the Channels & Choices community, our therapy team provide a huge amount of support to our foster carers. The team provide individual and group support to children and our foster families, as well as training across the community. Our foster carers tell us that they value the contributions of the therapistsat the foster carer support group meetings or at individual supervisions.

**Foster carer annual home reviews**

At least one unannounced visit will be made to each foster family each year and a formal review of the foster carers’ approval is carried out annually. During this review an Independent Social Worker considers whether a foster carer's approval should continue and if there should be any changes to their terms of approval. The views of foster carers, children, supervising social worker, local authority social workers and any other professionals involved are considered as part of this review process. The recommendations of the annual review will be considered by the fostering panel and/or the agency decision maker, depending on the circumstances. Fostering regulations make it clear that the first review report has to go back to panel. Foster carers are required to attend panel for their first review. After that, there is no legal requirement for a review to go back to panel, although the fostering service can choose to do so. At Channels and Choices the foster carer’s review is taken to panel on alternate years.

**Training for our foster carers**

At Channels & Choices we passionately believe in having highly professional and skilled foster carers. We support our foster carers with ongoing training and support enabling our carers to provide the best care possible to the children and young people placed with them. As such we arrange various training courses throughout the year, and arrange bespoke training according to the needs of our carers and the children placed with them.

We provide a wide and varied range of mandatory and optional courses in addition to bespoke workshops which are designed to help enhance the skills and knowledge of our foster carers. These courses compliment and build upon the TSD standards for foster care.

The DfE originally produced the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care.

All foster families have their own copy of the standards workbook guidance. The TSD standards are:

• Standard 1: understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people

• Standard 2: understand your role as a foster carer

• Standard 3: understand health and safety, and healthy care

• Standard 4: know how to communicate effectively

• Standard 5: understand the development of children and young people

• Standard 6: safeguard children and young people

• Standard 7: develop yourself

Channels & Choices provide opportunities for carers to demonstrate that they meet the standards as listed in the TSDs workbook and this should be completed within 12 months from the carers’ approval.

We believe that reflection and sharing as a group is a huge resource which allows foster carers to develop and broaden their understanding and skill base. Therefore we often train as a community so that our foster carers may attend any course with colleagues from the fostering, therapy, residential or school teams.

We also have some of the country’s experts in therapeutic child care working alongside us at Channels & Choices. Professor David Shemmings provides some of our core training to our foster carers. David’s ARP (Attachment and Relationship based Practice) project has now been incorporated in to our therapeutic framework and compliments the rest of our core and specialist training. Our in house therapy team and social work practitioners also provide innovative workshops and training to our foster carers and their families. Some of the more bespoke courses that we offer include: Attachment and Trauma Informed Training.

Our website gives further details about our training as well as videos of our carers talking about their experiences of fostering for Channels & Choices.

**The ‘stepping stones programme’ and our range of placements**

Most of the children placed with us at Channels & Choices Therapeutic Fostering are children who have been subject to our unique ‘stepping stones’ programme. These placements are shorter term; outcome focused pieces of work within our group living residential homes. Most of these children at the point of referral are displaying a risk taking behaviour which is not manageable within a foster placement and many have had multiple placement breakdowns which have further impacted their presentation and needs.

Their behaviour has been stabilised within our residential services and the community has worked collaboratively with the placing authority to agree a plan for a return to a fostering environment. Our Placements and Recruitment Manager monitors and co-ordinates the planning for children who have been placed in our ‘stepping stones’ programme and works closely with all the professionals involved with the child.

There is a huge amount of planning that goes in to the transition, as we know historically transitions have been very difficult for the child. The child then, at the agreed time, transitions in a planned way to live with identified therapeutic foster carers. The child will keep the continuity of their school, their therapist and communication with key staff from the residential home. Foster carers are involved in the planning process and get to work with the existing team around the child.

We also accept direct referrals from local authorities for children requiring a therapeutic foster placement. This can include the following:

• Long term placements

• Short term placements

• Sibling groups

• Bridging placements

• Solo placements

We carefully consider the abilities and needs of each child, as well as the skills, abilities, developmental and support needs of the proposed foster carers before proposing a match to a placing local authority.

**Our services for children placed with us**

Channels & Choices has now been established for over 20 years and the welfare and outcomes of the children remain at the heart of what we do. As we have detailed throughout this document we have a clear focus on training and developing our foster carers so that they can provide the best care for each child in placement with us. Each child who is placed at Channels & Choices receives an age appropriate children’s guide which details what we do and how we do it, as well as useful contacts and ideas.

Functioning within a family

We aim to prevent the unnecessary cycle of placement breakdown through the ‘stepping stone’ programme. At the point of referral many of the children cannot yet function within a family environment when they are most under stress, which is usually exhibited through some kind of risk taking behaviour. What we have seen from this model is that children who would have otherwise remained in a residential setting until independence (as they would have entered residential care at a later age after numerous breakdowns) are able to return to a family environment. We have also seen that we are able to stabilise and then successfully move the child to a foster family rather than continue the cycle of disrupted foster placements as they are not yet ready.

Healthy Lifestyles

Channels & Choices only approves foster families that display the required skills, commitment and emotional capacity to care for one of the children placed with us. Keeping children healthy and active is a key element and we expect all of our carers to encourage children placed with them to take part in play, activities, hobbies and other interests. We believe that this builds positive relationships between all the members of the family, helps build and maintain appropriate peer relationships for the child as well as helping to develop their self-esteem and identity.

**Education services & The Sallygate School**

We are committed to ensuring that all children placed with us have the opportunity to reach their full educational potential. For some of the children in our fostering service mainstream school will provide the best match and therefore the best outcomes for education. We work in partnership with local mainstream schools and special educational needs departments in order to secure and maintain school placements.

There are also a number of children who are unable to manage a mainstream environment and for these children we can offer a placement in our DfE registered school: The Sallygate School. The school curriculum caters for key stage 2, 3 and 4 pupils (primary and secondary age) and has a high level of staff to child ratios to ensure that each individual child has the opportunity to reach their full potential. The school offers a broad, balanced and differentiated curriculum blended with the new National Curriculum.

The teaching is based around a sound knowledge and understanding of the needs of each student, and is shaped around the ways in which different students learn. This means that we take care to nurture the individual talent, and aim to respond to the learning needs of every student. The curriculum is delivered in small learning groups with qualified teachers, who are supported by one or more learning mentors depending on the needs of the group. The timetable places a daily emphasis on Math, English and Science across all Key Stages. In these subjects students are offered opportunities to work for early accreditation where appropriate. All pupils, including those with an Education, Health and Care plan will have differentiated learning where needed. Where gaps in previous learning are identified, individual support is put in place, to ensure that all students reach their learning potential.

**Contact us**

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering

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**Sarah Whiting, Registered Manager & Ross Barnett, Director and Responsible Individual**

**Channels & Choices Therapeutic Fostering**