

# FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN TRUST

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2021

### Mission Statement and Values

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

*Families for Children is a Voluntary Adoption Agency, approved and regulated by OFSTED.*

*We believe that the best place for children to grow up is within their family of origin. Where this is not possible, we endeavour to find adoptive families for children who need them. We place a high value on offering these children and families ongoing support.*

*We recognise the diverse society in which we live and, in the services we offer, seek to meet the complex needs of children, valuing and respecting their culture, identity and personal history.*

*As a Christian organisation concerned with the welfare of children, parents and families, our attitudes and practices are shaped by Christian values and we therefore aim to uphold the importance of love, marriage, family life and the dignity of each individual.*

If you have difficulty in understanding this document or would like to see the contents in a different format, please contact the Head of Business or Chief Executive.

### **The Aims and Objectives of the Agency**

1. Families For Children was established in 1993 as a Joint Venture between Exeter Diocesan Board for Christian Care and Plymouth Diocesan Catholic Children's Society.
2. In January 2003 the Agency became a separate registered charity.
3. Families For Children will provide a full range of adoption services for all those affected by adoption through the Agency, who live in the counties of Devon, Dorset, Somerset and

Cornwall, including the Isles of Scilly, as encompassed by the Anglican Diocese of Exeter and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Plymouth.

4. Families For Children works within the principles laid down by the Children Act 1989 and the Adoption & Children Act 2002 and considers:-
  - The welfare of the child is of paramount importance.
  - The principle of parental responsibility should be upheld.
  - Services to all our families and their children must take into account religion, ethnicity, culture, language and any special needs, such as physical and learning disabilities.
5. The priorities of the Families For Children Adoption Agency are:
  - To ensure the child's needs are paramount at all times
  - To provide high quality and safe permanent placements through adoption
  - To recruit, prepare and assess prospective adoptive applicants applying to the Agency who are likely to meet the placement needs of the children waiting for families both locally and nationally.
6. Applications will be prioritised from applicants who appear to have the potential to meet the parenting needs of:
  - Children who are likely to display significant emotional or behavioural difficulties
  - Children who are significantly developmentally delayed and who may require educational support
  - Children whose background history includes physical, emotional or sexual abuse
  - Children who have identified health or medical problems and who are likely to need a significant level of ongoing health/medical care
  - Children who have an identified physical or learning disability
  - Children whose background histories include having a parent diagnosed as having significant mental health difficulties
  - Children from minority ethnic groups
  - Single children aged 4 years or over
  - Sibling groups of two or more children
7. The agency actively works to achieve Fostering to Adopt placements with our partner authorities.
8. **All** applicants will be expected to be able to accept the placement of children with complex backgrounds and children for whom there is not complete background and/or health information.

9. Where Families for Children is unable to accept a Registration of Interest from prospective adopters because we do not have the capacity to undertake the work, we would refer the prospective adopters to another Adoption Agency locally who could proceed with their assessment or would refer them to First4Adoption who would seek to link them with another agency.
10. The Agency is committed to providing adoption support services to all approved adopters who achieve the placement of a child(ren). This will be in conjunction with the placing Local Authority or the Local Authority in which the child is placed.
11. Families For Children is committed to providing adoption support services for all those whose lives have been affected by adoption, recognising the lifelong implications of adoption for adopters, adopted children, birth relatives and adult adoptees. It is recognised that the level of services provided may be limited by the financial constraints within the Agency.
12. Families For Children aims to support people previously adopted through Families For Children to gain access to any birth record information they are entitled to. This will include signposting to the correct agency for their information, support to understand implications of accessing birth record information, and advice on the best way to work towards contacting members of their birth family. We are not able to offer an intermediary service directly.
13. Families For Children does not provide an Intercountry Adoption Service but this is provided by all the Local Authorities across the South West and information about these are available.
14. Families For Children is committed to maintaining effective systems for recording, managing and keeping safe information about children placed for adoption, adopters and information received from people affected by adoption.
15. **The Name and Address of the Registered provider, the Adoption Agency Decision Maker, the Responsible Individual and the Registered Manager.**

Families For Children Trust  
Higher Mill  
Buckfast  
Buckfastleigh  
Devon TQ11 0EE

**The Adoption Agency Decision Maker:** Dave Simpkins, Families For Children Adoption Agency, Higher Mill, Buckfast, Buckfastleigh, Devon TQ11 0EE.

**The Responsible Individual:** The day-to-day management of the work of the Adoption Agency is undertaken by the Chief Executive of Families For Children, Ruth Marriott, in consultation with the Head of Operations and Team Managers. The Head of Operations deputises for the Chief Executive through absence or for other reasons.

**The Registered Manager:** The Head of Operations, Karen Dale, is the nominated manager who provides specialist knowledge and skills in adoption to ensure timely and effective provision of services to Service Users. The Head of Operations works closely with the Chief Executive, Team Managers and Head of Business to ensure provision of a consistent, coherent and flexible service.

## 16. Registration

Families For Children Trust is registered with OFSTED (SC049026). No conditions are in force in relation to this registration.

The Agency is a Registered Charity – **Registration Number 1093131** and the work is overseen by a Board of Trustees. It is the responsibility of the Chief Executive to ensure that Trustees are provided with information about the working and finances of the Agency at their regular meetings.

## 17. Qualifications and experience of the Registered Manager

**Name:** Karen Dale

**Date Appointed:** 16.03.2020

**Qualifications:** BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies and Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (1985)

Certificate in Management (1998)

MA (Hons) Advanced Professional Practice and Advanced Award in Social Work (2000)

Postgraduate Certificate in Education (2007)

**Relevant Experience:** The registered manager has been employed in statutory and voluntary childcare services for 35 years and has been employed as a Senior Manager/Assistant Director in a number of Local Authorities. The Registered Manager has significant experience of managing statutory services including adoption, child protection and children in care.

## 18. The number, relevant qualifications and experience of the staff working for the purposes of the Agency

The qualified social work staff at Families For Children Adoption Agency provides the adoption service.

## 19. Staff Team

### Higher Mill (Head Office)

<b>Chief Executive</b>	Ruth Marriott <i>Bsc (Hons) 2:1 Social Policy and Administration (1997)</i> <i>Diploma in Community Work</i> <i>Masters in Business Administration (MBA) (2008)</i> <i>Diploma in Business Studies (2006 )</i> <i>Certificate in Business (2005)</i> <i>ILM Level 4 Introductory Diploma in Management (2005)</i>
<b>Head of Operations</b>	Karen Dale <i>BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies and Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (1985)</i> <i>MA (Hons) Advanced Professional Practice and Advanced Award in Social Work (2000)</i>
<b>Head of Business</b>	Nigel Backhouse <i>MA in Personnel and Development</i> <i>NVQ Operational Management Level 5</i> <i>BSc(Hons) Computer Studies</i>
<b>Agency Decision Maker</b>	David Simpkins
<b>Panel Adviser</b>	Karen Horsnell
<b>Finance Officer</b>	Patricia Pidek
<b>Business Support Assistant</b>	Lewis Langton
<b>West Team Manager</b>	Claudine Gilson <i>MA Social Studies and Social Work Diploma (2005)</i>
<b>West Senior Practitioner</b>	Vacant
<b>West Adoption Social Workers</b>	Amy Clark
	Lucy Clarke

	Lenny Knight
	Heather Maddox
<b>Life Story Book FSW</b>	Katy Cooney
<b>East Team Manager</b>	Nicky Dawe <i>Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) (1989)</i> <i>Master of Science in Social Work Studies(1989)</i>
<b>East Senior Practitioner</b>	Lucy Blows
<b>East Adoption Social Workers</b>	Katharine Lane
	Stella Gillies
	Penny Palmer
	Soraya Pethick
<b>Placement Co-ordinator</b>	Andrea Brown
<b>Family Support Manager</b>	Lisa Pitcher
<b>Family Support Senior Practitioner</b>	Vacant
<b>Family Support Workers</b>	Gill Coram
	Tessa Frampton
	Pippa Vallance
	Helen Waring
<b>Birth Family Matters</b>	Ally Osnowska
<b>Administrators</b>	Lesley Andreasson
	Ali Harris
	Corinna Phillips
	Katherine Butt
<b>Contracted Fundraiser</b>	Antonia Poole
<b>Contracted Marketing Officer</b>	Katey McDonald
<b>Outdoor Centre Manager</b>	Jon White

20. All Social Work staff employed by Families For Children Trust hold a professional Social Work qualification i.e. **CQSW, CSS or DipSw.** or the equivalent as approved.

20. Families For Children Trust is committed to supporting appropriately experienced staff to achieve further post qualifying awards as well as gaining additional training in other therapeutic practice such as DDP and Theraplay.

### **The Organisational Structure of the Agency**

21. Please see diagram attached.

**Systems in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to ensure that the services provided by the Agency are effective and the quality of those services is of an appropriate standard.**

22. The work of the Agency is overseen by a Board of Trustees with a variety of selected and appropriate skills including adopters themselves. The Trustees meet quarterly to review the work of the Agency. Board meetings are pre-ceeded by three sub-committees (Finance and Human Resources, Fundraising, and Professional Issues), held two weeks before the full Board.

23. Families For Children is committed to seeking feedback from Service Users in order to inform future Service provision. The content of information provided by Service Users is evaluated by the Management Team and the Professional Issues Sub-Committee of the Board of Trustees and is used to inform developments in the Agency's practice.

24. At the current time a robust system is in place to seek feedback from adoptive parents at key points in the adoption process.

25. We have systems in place to obtain feedback from users of the Agency's adoption support services including:

- Adoptive parents
- Adopted children
- Adult adoptees (Section 51 counselling)
- Birth relatives

**Feedback from adoptive parents:**

26. Adoptive parents are consulted on their view during the adoption process and are given the opportunity to attend the Agency's Adoption Panel when their application to be approved to adopt is considered.

27. All applicants who are engaged with the Agency are also asked to complete a questionnaire:

- At the end of each stage of the process
- After the Adoption Order(s) has been granted.

28. The Agency approaches prospective applicants who request an information pack but do not then request a follow up visit. This informs the planning for our on-going recruitment of adoptive parents.

29. Where applicants decide not to proceed at any point in the assessment process (pre-Stage 1, during Stage 1 or Stage 2), the reasons for this are sought.

## **Procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters**

### **Recruitment of adopters**

30. Families For Children is mainly a provider of adoptive parents. The Agency is a member of SWAC (South West Adoption Consortium) and the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA). Families For Children works alongside the various Local Authorities and Regional Adoption Agencies in schemes to promote adoption and the recruitment of adopters.
31. Families For Children has experienced a consistently steady level of enquiries/applications in recent years. The Agency undertakes localised recruitment on a regular basis. Families For Children uses National Adoption Week as an opportunity to promote adoption through the media. This will often involve working closely with other agencies.
32. The Agency has always been mindful of the length of time that children with particular needs (physical, emotional, social, educational, cultural) can wait for placements, so in order to prevent 'undue delay' in placing children, the Agency has pursued specific initiatives in order to attract interest from appropriate families.
33. All enquiries from prospective adopters are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval and the subsequent matching and placing process.
34. The Agency's information pack is reviewed on an annual basis.
35. All prospective adopters are required to attend training during the assessment process. The material used is designed to provide prospective adopters with information about the adoption process, to prepare them for the potential issues they will face in parenting adopted children and to provide information about the range and needs of children who need adoptive parents.
36. The purpose of the training is to provide prospective adopters with the information that they need about adoption in general, the Adoption Agency and the profile and needs of children requiring placement. All preparation training for Adopters is now undertaken in Stage 1 which enables all parties to assess the prospective adopters suitability to proceed to the assessment Stage 2.

37. We also ensure that adopters are given specialist information on Fostering to Adopt/Early Permanence so that they can make informed decisions regarding whether placement under these regulations is something they would like to consider.
38. Families For Children coordinates sufficient training sessions each year, depending on need. All prospective applicants are given the opportunity to speak with existing adopters during the preparation and assessment process.
39. The material currently used in the training sessions is reviewed annually.

### **Assessment of Applicants**

40. Prospective adopters wishing to be assessed by Families For Children are expected to undertake Stage 1 of the assessment process before requesting to proceed to the full assessment in Stage 2. Second time adopters commence the assessment process at Stage 2.
41. The Agency will use the Information Session, Initial Visit and Stage 1 to determine whether prospective adopters are likely to have the capacity to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption. If the Agency deems an application as being unlikely to succeed, this is acknowledged to the prospective adopters at an early stage and the reasons for this explained.
42. Families For Children's decision as to whether or not to proceed with an application will be based on the minimum legal requirements and the Agency's criteria.
43. When Families For Children decide not to proceed with an application; applicants will be informed in writing and advised of the options open to them.
44. Families For Children seek to offer an assessment and approval process that is comprehensive, thorough and fair. Consideration will be given to all the areas of the applicants' lives, detailed within the BAAF Form Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR).
45. During Stage 1 of the assessment process the prospective adopters will have a named worker to guide them. If they progress to Stage 2 then a worker will be allocated to undertake the detailed assessment with them. The Agency uses written agreements with all prospective adopters at both stages of the assessment process to confirm and clarify expectations and timescales.
46. Applicants are expected to undertake Preparation Training with the agency, this is 3 days in duration and undertaken in Stage 1 of the process to fit in best with Adopter timeframe. It also enables training facilitators and prospective adopters alike to have taken the time to really look at the issues around adoption to ensure that they are happy for the applicants to move onto Stage 2.

47. Applicants are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets their health and developmental needs – physical, emotional, intellectual and social.
48. Prospective adopters are encouraged through both the training sessions and the social work assessment to identify the competencies and strengths that they have and those that they will need to develop if they are to be able to provide for both a child's short and longer term needs.
49. If prospective adopters are considering Fostering to Adopt, additional materials are covered to help them look at the issues of adopting under these regulations and explore their motivation, skills and preparedness for this.
50. A range of status, health and statutory checks as well as personal references are taken up on all prospective adoptive applicants during Stage 1 of the assessment process, these include Enhanced DBS checks.
51. Prospective adopters are kept informed of progress throughout. Families For Children seeks to balance the need to give prospective adopters time to consider and adjust to new information and ideas and in some cases to demonstrate a capacity to change, whilst avoiding unnecessary delays.
52. Whenever possible the Agency seeks to complete Stage 1 of the process within 2 months and Stage 2, which includes presentation of the applicants to the Agency's Adoption panel for consideration, within a further 4 months. Prospective adopters may take a break of up to 6 months between stages 1 and 2.
53. All prospective adopters receive a copy of their assessment report and are provided with at least 5 working days to consider and comment on the contents.

## **The Adoption Panel**

54. All prospective adoptive applicants seeking approval will have their application presented to the Families For Children Adoption Panel for consideration.
55. The composition of the Adoption Panel is in accordance with the Adoption Agency Regulations.
56. The Adoption Panel is held twice a month and additional Panels may be arranged if needed.
57. The overall functioning of the Adoption Panel is managed by the Head of Operations.

58. Panel members and the Adoption Agency's Decision-Maker are supplied with copies of all the reports to be considered by the Panel on each agenda item, at least 5 days prior to the Panel meeting.
59. Families for Children have an independent Agency Decision Maker.
60. The social worker for the applicants, or if necessary, the supervisor/line manager will be present when an application is considered to answer the Panel's questions and to enable them to reach a decision.
61. Applicants are given the opportunity to attend the Adoption Panel meeting at which their application is considered and ask questions.
62. The Recommendation of the Panel is conveyed to the applicants on the day of Panel. The Adoption Agency Decision-Maker considers the Recommendation having read the relevant report and the Minutes of the Panel Meeting.
63. The Decision-Maker reaches the final decision in relation to any application within 7 working days of the Panel meeting.
64. The Agency Decision-Maker will convey the decision in writing to the applicants' social worker and Panel Administrator.
65. The Head of Operations ensures letters confirming the Agency's Decision are sent to the adoptive applicants.
66. In the event of an application not being recommended for approval, the prospective adopters are informed of their right to make representations or a complaint and details are provided on the role of the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).
67. Approved adopters are reviewed every 6 months, where a placement has not been achieved – with 6 monthly reviews being undertaken by the Assessing/Family Finding Social worker and the prospective adopters, and the 12 month review undertaken by the Team Manager alongside the Social Worker and prospective adopters.
68. Approval relates only to the placement of children from within the UK. All approved adopters are invited to join the South West Adoption Consortium and the Adoption Register for England and Wales (Adoption Match). Information on approved families awaiting placement is regularly circulated to Local Authorities nationally. The Agency has specific arrangements in place to assist Local Authorities/RAA in the South West to achieve local placements for the children waiting for adoption.
69. Approved adopters are encouraged to be proactive in homefinding through subscribing to relevant publications and on-line services such as Linkmaker (FFC subscribe to this service),

SWAC Website and Adoption Match. In addition Families For Children will notify approved adopters of information about children received via frequent fliers from Local Authorities through their social worker. Adopters are invited to Family Finding Events, DVD Evenings, virtual events, and Adoption Activity Days where these are held in the region, and advised of any that are ongoing outside of the region should they wish to travel.

## **Support to Prospective Adopters**

70. Approved adopters will be given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process.
71. All approved and waiting adopters will continue to have a named social worker. The social worker will provide regular support throughout the post approval period and assist in considering the specific needs of children awaiting placement.
72. Where information regarding a child is complex or requires specialist knowledge to evaluate the implications, Families For Children will seek to ensure that the prospective adopters have access to professional guidance to help them clarify and explore the implications of the information, thereby helping them to make an informed decision for themselves as to whether to proceed. Where there are significant medical issues, a meeting with the Agency's Medical Adviser may be arranged.
73. Families For Children will assess any apparent risks there may be to the adoptive family in pursuing an identified match, alert the prospective adopters to any risks and give advice on these.
74. Families For Children will advise and support adoptive parents in preparing children within their household or wider network for the impending placement and adoption. This may, if required, include the involvement of a separate worker from the Agency.
75. Where adopters do not directly reflect the ethnicity or heritage of the child to be placed, Families For Children will provide advice, training and support aimed at enabling the prospective adopters to promote the child's racial and ethnic identity in a way that is likely to lead to a positive self-image, and knowledge about the connection to their origins. Families For Children will seek to help adopters to understand the need for, and to develop strategies, to help the child address racism or other forms of discrimination. Support from appropriate professionals may be obtained.
76. Families For Children will ensure that adoptive parents are informed prior to a placement about support services that are available within the area, should they or the child require specialist support after the Adoption Order has been made and how they might access these services.

77. Families For Children will work with the placing Local Authority to ensure that there is a robust Adoption Support Plan in place prior to a placement being made. This will include the provision of any financial support which may be payable in respect of the child and the process by which the payment of this allowance will be reviewed. Families For Children will ensure that adopters are aware of any welfare benefits to which they or the child might be entitled and how they might claim them.
78. Following the placement of a child, all prospective adopters approved by the Agency, will continue to receive social work support until such time as the Adoption Order is granted.
79. It is the expectation of the Agency that all children placed with Families For Children approved adopters will have a named social worker from the Local Authority who will be responsible for supervising the child's welfare and supporting him/her within the placement.
80. Families For Children will encourage adopters to indicate their agreement in writing to sign up to any plan for direct or indirect contact with birth family members that was proposed at the time of placement and will support the adopters in facilitating these arrangements.
81. Support will be made available to the adoptive parents to help them to establish an open acknowledgement of the child's adoptive situation within the family.
82. Families For Children will provide advice and support to the prospective adopters along with the Placing Authority social worker on progressing the application to adopt to the appropriate Court at the appropriate time.
83. Families For Children recognises that timely and effective support will help to avoid placement breakdowns. However, the complexity of children's needs, the impact of any neglect or maltreatment and the interaction with the adoptive parents' patterns and ways of managing these difficulties, may threaten placement, whatever services have been made available.
84. Should a placement experience difficulties, whatever the level of severity, Families For Children will seek to ensure that:
- Separate support is available to the prospective adopters and the child.
  - The child's welfare remains the paramount consideration.
  - The Review process in respect of the placement acknowledges the difficulties within the placement and identifies/agrees interventions and supports focused on achieving a positive outcome for the child.
  - The possibility of placement disruption is acknowledged and planned for appropriately.

## **Adoption Support Services**

85. Where adoptive parents approved through Families For Children contact the Agency seeking information/advice/support due to difficulties with an adoptive placement, they will be offered advice and information, signposting to appropriate services or an assessment to identify the support required. Families For Children will, wherever possible, seek to provide information and support in order to achieve a positive outcome and prevent the breakdown of the placement, but this will need to be managed within existing staffing and budget constraints. It may be necessary/appropriate to negotiate the provision of adoption support services with the Placing Local Authority or the Local Authority where the adoptive family reside.
86. Where the difficulties in a placement are such that the adoption breaks down, Families For Children will seek to provide reasonable support to the adoptive parents in order to enable them to remain positively involved in the planning for their child.
87. Any adoptive parents contacting Families For Children for support at any stage following the granting of an Adoption Order, will be made aware of what support services are available, both locally and nationally and how they might access these.
88. Families for Children Family Support Service aims to provide the right support at the right time through an Advice and Support Line, access to a range of interventions including volunteer peer mentors, Family Support Workers and specialist intervention Social Workers or referral/support to access an appropriate service. Our workers are trained in a range of therapeutic interventions such as PACE, Theraplay and therapeutic lifestory work. We have access to locality based Clinical Psychologists, and Sensory Occupational Therapist and a number of other affiliated professionals, so where appropriate, we are able to complete assessments to support applications to the Adoption Support Fund or Local Authorities direct. Responsibility for Adoption Support Fund applications lies with the placing Local Authority for 3 years from when the Adoption Order was made or after that period the Local Authority or Regional Adoption Agency for the area where the family reside.

## **The Complaints Procedure**

89. All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency are provided with written information about Complaints Procedures, including contact details for the Representations Officer.
90. All children and young people who are placed for adoption through Families for Children are provided with a copy of the Agency's Children's Guide, which contains details of how to make a complaint.
91. Other service users such as adults requesting birth record counselling are also provided with details of the complaints process on engagement.

92. The Chief Executive and Head of Operations together with the Head of Business will monitor all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Team.

### **Details of the Registration Authority**

**Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, MANCHESTER M1 2WD  
Telephone Number: 0300 123 1231**

**Ruth Marriott, Chief Executive August 2021**

