



VINEYARD FOSTERING

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose has been developed to meet the requirements arising from the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, the Fostering Regulations 2011, The Care Standards Act 2000 and The Children Act 1989 and The Children and Young Persons Act 2008. These require that providers compile a statement detailing services provided, who manages and provides the services and the governing principles.

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims, objectives and a description of services offered and provided by Vineyard Fostering.

Vineyard Fostering Statement of Purpose is available to:

- Ofsted
- Our prospective and approved foster carers
- Vineyard Fostering staff team
- Local Authorities, Health and Social Care Trusts
- Fostering Panel members
- Other Social Care Agencies and their Staff
- Multi-agency professionals collaborating, or working in partnership with Vineyard Fostering
- Parents and families of any child or young persons placed with Vineyard Fostering
- Members of the public

Vineyard Fostering hopes the information provided in this document is clear and can be understood by children, young people, foster carers and staff. It will highlight our mission statement and commitment to providing quality service care delivery for children and young persons entrusted in our care by placing Local Authorities.

This Statement of Purpose will be subject to regular review by Vineyard Fostering Management to ensure compliance with regulatory guidelines and standards of care for Fostering Service Providers. All subsequent changes or amendments will be reported to Ofsted.

1.2 About Vineyard Fostering

Vineyard Fostering is an Independent Fostering Agency that provides foster placements for children aged 0 – 18 years old. We identify and recruit foster families that will offer a safe, secure, and caring home environment for children and young persons placed in our care by Local Authorities.

Vineyard Fostering is a Limited Company registered in England at Companies House (Registration No 12806243) with offices at Hart House, Kimpton Road, Luton, LU2 0LB.

Vineyard Fostering is fully aware of Government initiatives in the support and protection of children and young people and is committed to working with placing Local Authorities in order to assist them in meeting the prescribed objectives.

1.3 Company Management

The management team consists of Henrietta Abraham who is the Responsible Individual for Vineyard Fostering and Giovanni Varricchio, the Fostering Manager and acting Registered Manager.

Henrietta Abraham is the Director and Responsible Individual for Vineyard Fostering. She has been involved in the social care sector for over 25 years and began as a Registered Childminder in 1994 within the London Borough of Camden where she lived for several years before relocating out of London and returning to paid employment in the legal and technology sectors. She later ran a consultancy providing data protection training to organisations including early years and schools through the London Borough of Luton Early Years team after which she took on the role of Teaching Fellow (visiting) in the Law Faculty at the University of Bedfordshire.

Giovanni Varricchio is the Registered Manager for Vineyard Fostering. Giovanni qualified as a Social Worker in 2007 and since then has experience of working in a variety of social care settings, extensively working within the fostering sector. Giovanni has experience of managing and leading social care teams which have provided support to children and families. Giovanni has worked within the fostering sector as a Supervising Social Worker, Senior Supervising Social Worker and Team Manager.

Giovanni's passion lies in ensuring that children and young people are supported to achieve positive outcomes and have opportunities to reach their potential and thrive. Giovanni is passionate about supporting foster carers to ensure they help children achieve, stay safe and grow into successful adults.

The Registered Manager will be responsible for the day to day running of the service. The Company has set policies and procedures in place to enable it to meet current regulations, the requirements of Local Authorities' accreditation criteria, and Ofsted inspection. At all times the Manager will ensure that the needs of each child are paramount and foster carers are trained and supported to achieve the best outcomes for the children in their care.

The management team will seek to leverage their relationship with industry stakeholders to develop partnerships and collaborative working so as to promote synergy in caring for and supporting the children and young people placed with our fostering families.

The management team will hold regular meetings to discuss current and future operations of the business. The Manager will be responsible for producing reports in compliance with Regulation 35 and National Minimum Standards 25 to analyse Vineyard's current work and its development. These reports will ensure quality assurance and monitor continued development of the service in achieving best outcomes for the children and young people, and support for foster carers and staff. These will be shared quarterly with Ofsted for discussion, review and monitoring purposes.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

At Vineyard Fostering, our mission is to provide a warm, safe and loving family environment for children from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs, where they can be supported to thrive and encouraged to achieve the best possible outcomes for them.

We will ensure that children and young persons placed with our foster carers receive excellent, child-centered care and support where their individual needs will be wholly met, their choices promoted, educational development and attainment prioritised, emotional development and resilience supported, so they can fully achieve and optimize their potential.

We will achieve this through a comprehensive and thorough recruitment process of staff and foster carers who share our vision, passion, and commitment to provide safe, secure, and loving homes for children and young persons. Warmth, compassion, empathy, kindness, a good attitude, a non-judgmental approach, and open-minded outlook are qualities we will look for when identifying and selecting staff and potential foster carers. We believe these values and qualities are essential requirements for any individual or persons wishing to provide care and ongoing support for children and young persons.

Our Objectives are to:

- Ensure decisions made and support given are in the best interest of the child and enables the child to thrive and maximize their potential.

- Promote safety and security for the child by developing a robust risk assessment that is regularly reviewed.
- Develop strong partnerships with Local Authorities and other relevant stakeholders in implementing child centered support.
- Ensure the health and emotional needs of the child are met.
- Promote and maintain positive relationships that benefit the child and enables them to develop their identity, self-respect and care for their own well-being.
- Value and promote the diversity and culture of the child.
- Promote culture that is conducive to learning and education.
- Provide high quality training and comprehensive support for foster carers thereby ensuring quality and cost-effective service is delivered to meet the needs of the child or young person.
- Empower the young people to express their views wherever possible and make choices and decisions about their future.
- Build an experienced, committed and well-trained qualified managers, practitioners and support staff team and ensure high standards are maintained by the team.
- Ensure compliance with National Fostering Regulations and Standards.
- Use of the best of technology to achieve our objectives.

2. Legislation

Vineyard Fostering is set up to operate under the guidance of the following Legislation, Standards of Care and Regulatory Frameworks:

- Children Act 1989 – the primary legislation governing Looked After Children and Fostering Services
- Care Standards Act 2000 – this sets the regulatory and inspectoral regime and establishes National Minimum Standards
- Children (Leaving Care Act) 2000 – the primary legislation governing Services for Care Leavers – has now been incorporated into the Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004 (Amended the Children Act 1989)
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 – regulates all Fostering Services, replacing the Fostering Services Regulations 2002

- Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption and Fostering) Regulations 2009
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 – these specify requirements for Care Plans, Placement Plans, Placement Decisions, Monitoring and Review of Looked After Children
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010
- Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006
- Human Right Act 1998 – treating everyone with equality, fairness, dignity, and respect
- Disability & Equality Act 2010 – prohibits discrimination against people
- Race Relations Act 1976 and Amendment 2000
- The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006
- The Gender Recognition Act 2004
- The Data Protection Act 2018

The Registered Manager is responsible for the management and compliance relating to the legal framework above. Regular monitoring which contributes to assessing the effectiveness of Vineyard Fostering is carried out by the Registered Manager, Responsible Individual/Quality Assurance Manager and the Director(s) who also have responsibility for managing quality and risk in the following areas: -

- All matters listed in Schedule 6 Regulation 35(1)
- Notification of events listed in Schedule 7
- Other significant events related to Vineyard's monitoring.

3. Values, Ethics and Commitment

3.1 Our Ethos – Promoting the Voice of the Child

At Vineyard Fostering we are committed to providing the quality of care and support services that meets and supports the individual care needs of every child and young person, whilst promoting their choice because every child is unique with individual care needs.

We firmly believe that every child and young person has the right to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution

- Achieve economic well-being

Our staff and foster carers are trained to promote child-centered approaches when supporting the individual care needs of children and young persons in our care which enables them to optimize opportunities and achieve best outcomes in every area of their lives.

3.2 Our Values

Vineyard Fostering is a fostering provider with a passionate commitment to the welfare of children and in ensuring the standard and quality of our service provision promotes safe and secure family environments for children entrusted in our care. Our core purpose is to enable best outcomes for children and young people in our care. We will achieve this by:

- Creating a **progressive environment** where staff are empowered through continuous learning and development.
- Promoting a culture which embraces empathy and **values all**.
- Fostering a team spirit where we seek to **achieve together** and **celebrate success**.
- Demonstrating **we care** by going above and beyond to provide excellent training and outstanding support to our foster carers to empower them and promote highest standards in the quality of care that enables the children in their care to thrive and achieve.

We value equality and diversity and promote this in day-to-day practices. We believe children should grow up in circumstances consistent with safe and effective care.

3.3 Our Commitment to Quality Service Provision

Vineyard Fostering is committed to the following standards and quality of fostering service provision for children and young persons:

- The safeguarding of every child/young person entrusted in our care.
- Ensure the voice of every child and young person is heard and their expressed wishes, feelings and choices are promoted.
- Promote person-centered approaches to caring for the child/young person whereby their identity is valued and promoted.
- Promote positive behavior and healthy emotional development for every individual child and young person.

- Provide nurturing support for children and young persons who run away or who are missing from care by responding positively to their expressed wishes and anxieties, ensuring their safe return and minimizing risks.
- Support each child and young person to access and enjoy social and leisure activities.
- Support and promote every child and young person to access education and optimize learning opportunities.
- Support contact with family members and friends.
- Provide safe and secure family environments where every child and young person can feel safe and supported.
- Work closely with Local Authorities to ensure quality information is collated regarding children and young person's needs when matching with foster carers. This includes information related to individual identity, language, race, culture, faith, educational assessment/attainment, emotional and physical health and wellbeing.
- Value and embrace the diversity of the child or young person and promote equality of opportunity. Our goal will be to ensure that this is embedded and reinforced in our day to day working practices with all children and young people, foster families, colleagues, and all other stake holders. We will ensure equal opportunities for all and have a zero-tolerance attitude to discrimination.
- Ensure every child or young person and foster carers are prepared for their placement by providing essential information.
- Promote the independence of every child and young person, particularly during transition to adulthood.
- Provide essential information to ensure every child and young person are made aware of the support and learning opportunities available to them and support them to access these opportunities.
- Provide a robust, thorough recruitment and assessment process for suitable foster carers with the right qualities needed to support the care needs of children and young people entrusted in our care.
- To run an effective Panel which deliberates well and makes sound recommendations and efficient decision-making processes.
- To match every child and young person with foster carers who are able to meet their assessed needs.
- To conduct regular reviews of Statement of Purpose and Children/Young Persons' Guide.
- To be guided by business principles and values of integrity and accountability with a commitment to running a service that is effective and efficient in meeting the assessed needs of children and young people entrusted to our care.
- To make sure all staff are suitable to work with children, and that they are qualified and supported in their continual professional development.
- To support, supervise and train staff in therapeutic practice.

- To provide supervision, training, and support to foster carers and promote the highest standards in the quality of care given to every child or young person entrusted to their care.
- To handle safeguarding concerns and allegations in line with procedures and processes.
- To consistently pay foster carers appropriately and on time.
- To take account of budgetary issues and business continuity.
- Vineyard Fostering will keep good budget and monthly audit monitoring reports in line with the company's business principles and values of maintaining financial transparency, accountability, and overall financial and business integrity.

4. Our Therapeutic Management Model of Care

4.1 The Team Around the Child

Children referred to Vineyard Fostering have experienced the trauma of being removed from their birth family. They often have a painful history and damaged relationships in early life that have continued to impact upon further relationships, their sense of self and their emotional development. These early life events and damaged relationships can often lead children to display difficult and challenging behaviour, which offer a huge challenge to those charged with the care and development of the children.

Vineyard Fostering will utilize its core principles and the Secure Base Model to promote attachment and resilience in foster carers and children and provide a therapeutic management structure with a team of professionals around the child. We believe that open, transparent, and positive working relationships with information dissemination and cooperation in service delivery are all essential elements in ensuring every child and young person in our care is fully supported, therefore we will promote collaborative and partnership working with other professionals and stakeholders who form the team around the child/young person.

We recognise that the most important environment where a child can develop trust, manage emotions, build self-esteem, feel effective and gain a sense of belonging is within the foster family setting, therefore, Vineyard Fostering's staff team and professionals around the child, including Local Authority Social Workers, Education and Health Services, will work in partnership with the foster family offering support, supervision, therapeutic assessment and training, plus an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences of living and working with the child in their care.

Our strong belief is that if our foster carers and staff are to provide effective support to the children and young people, they have to, themselves, feel valued, understood, supported and cared for. Through a wide range of up-to-date training courses and resource materials, Vineyard Fostering ensures staff and foster carers are well trained, adequately equipped with skills that

will enable them to promote an excellent standard of care delivery to the children and young people entrusted to our care.

5. Providing Safe Care for Children and Young People

5.1 Our Foster Placements

Vineyard Fostering believes in providing safe, secure, warm and nurturing therapeutic care for children and young people, aged 0 – 18 years of any gender, in foster placements that represent a home environment where every child and young person can feel a sense of belonging, where their choice is promoted, and their sense of identity is supported and enhanced.

Vineyard Fostering provides foster placements for children and young people from diverse backgrounds, no referral is ever the same. We are committed to ensuring every child and young person has their individual care needs met and choice promoted.

- *Placements – Providing Stable, Safe and Nurturing Home Environments*

Vineyard Fostering takes diligent care and attention when matching children and young persons with long term foster carers in order to give placements optimal opportunity of success and to minimise placement breakdowns and unplanned ends which would effectively mean multiple moves for children and young people leading to instability in their lives. We ensure that children and young people are matched to foster carers where both parties will have the best likelihood of making the foster placement a success.

At Vineyard Fostering, we are keen to see every child or young person access the right opportunities and achieve the best outcomes. This is achieved by placing children and young people in safe and caring home environments where they will be nurtured and encouraged to achieve their potential. Vineyard Fostering endeavors for children and young people placed in our care to have a sense of belonging where they feel at home and a part of a stable family in their foster placement. Equally important is promoting the diversity and cultural identity of the child and young person and enhancing their self-worth.

- *Types of Placements*

Vineyard Fostering provides a wide range of placements for children and young people of all ages with foster carers, these include:

- Long-term and short-term placements
- Parent & child placements
- Sibling groups

- Placements for children with disability
- Respite placements
- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children placements
- Emergency placements

All placements made with foster carers are undertaken and monitored in accordance with the Fostering Regulations.

5.2 Children We Look After

We care and look after children and young people who may have experienced the following:

- A difficult childhood where the child or young person may have experienced trauma.
 - Family breakdown where the child or young person may or may not have been exposed to domestic violence.
 - Children who have suffered sexual abuse.
 - Children who have suffered physical harm or neglect.
 - Domestic violence at the hand of a parent/s or other family member.
 - Children at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation.
 - Children who have been trafficked or victims of modern-day slavery.
 - Children with learning difficulties or disability.
- *Sibling Groups*

Vineyard Fostering will always prioritise matching sibling groups in the same foster home so that siblings are not separated. This is to promote sibling groups continuing to be together in a family unit, as far as is practicable. Sibling groups are only separated if it is in the best interests of the children or young people due to safety or safeguarding concerns.

- *Life Story Work*

Vineyard Fostering understands, supports, and promotes Life Story Work for every individual child and young person entrusted in our care. Life Story Work is important for helping children and young people separated from their birth families to remember and make sense of their early lives as children and young people who have been through the care system often experience changes in social workers, carers, and home before being placed with an adopted family.

6. Referral and Placement Process

6.1 Referral and Matching

The agency will only accept referrals for placements from local authorities.

Where a referral is made, the referring local authority will be requested to provide information about the child.

In the case of an emergency placement where it is not possible for the referring local authority to provide the information at the time of the referral, they will be asked to provide as much information as is available and, if the placement goes ahead, full information is requested within five working days of the placement. It is particularly important for the agency and in particular the carer, to have all relevant information about the child and their family so as not to hinder the carer in providing a safe environment for the child and others in the household.

The referral is considered immediately by the fostering manager who will liaise with the referring local authority as necessary. As part of this exchange, information about proposed foster carers will be provided to the referring local authority in order to consider whether the carers can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs, taking into account the impact of the proposed placement on existing members of the household.

The various placement options are discussed with the referring local authority and a professionals' planning meeting is convened at this stage if required, for example, if a child has complex needs.

The matching process will consider the child's needs in all key areas for example, background information, education, health, contact, cultural identity and religion, any risks. Also of consideration are other factors including the carer's availability, experience, other children in the placement.

6.2 Placement Planning Meeting

Once a decision has been made to make a placement, a pre-placement planning meeting should take place between the foster carers, the supervising social worker and the placing local authority. If appropriate the child with suitable family/significant others should attend.

This meeting must consider and agree the detailed placement arrangements according to the Care Plan for the child.

The main purpose of the planning meeting is to share full information about the child with the foster carers and agree the contents of the Placement Plan.

Once the placement has been identified, the supervising social worker should ensure that the child has a copy of the Children's Guide within which there are details regarding the Complaints Procedure. A copy of the Complaints Procedure should be provided to the parents/carers.

Wherever possible, arrangements should be made for the child, parents or carers and the social worker to visit the foster home prior to the placement. If this is not possible, arrangements may be made for the carers to visit the child and parents or carers; or, as a minimum, for information about the foster carers to be sent to the child.

If none of these arrangements can be made, for example where the child is being placed in an emergency or at short notice, extra care must be taken in case the child is frightened or confused, and the information described above should be provided to the child as soon as possible after the placement including the foster carers family book/profile.

6.3 Respite Care

Respite care is offered to ensure children, young people and the foster carers who provide care and support may have a much-needed break or holiday from the day to day challenges of placement and to ensure they find space and opportunity to rest, reinvigorate, reflect and relax – this is important to minimise ‘burn out’.

Respite care is available upon request to all foster carers, children, and young people, especially placements where a child or young person with complex care needs may be placed e.g. a child or young person with disabilities or challenging behaviour.

6.4 Preparation for Independence and Aftercare

Vineyard Fostering provides pathways for transition to Independence post-18 years and staying put arrangements to ensure young adults and care leavers are entitled to continuity of care, ongoing support, and a stable home environment as care leavers. They are also provided a personal advisor.

7. Our Service Provision

7.1 Recruitment, Approval, Training and Review of Foster Carers

Vineyard Fostering is committed to a robust recruitment policy of staff and foster carers, to ensuring children and young persons entrusted into our care by Placing Local Authorities are safely looked after.

Vineyard Fostering has a fundamental role and responsibility for providing essential training and ongoing professional development support to staff and foster carers to ensure they are well informed and equipped with knowledge and skills needed for the quality of care required to support children and young persons in our foster placements.

Vineyard Fostering works with a variety of independent providers offering a range of services based on the individual needs of the children, young people and foster families that we support.

These include Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Teaching, Occupational Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Psychotherapy, Drama Therapy, Behaviour Management specialists, independent social workers, and trainers.

To meet the child focused and agency outcomes Vineyard Fostering will seek to:

- Recruit, assess, approve, and train a range of carers in sufficient numbers to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in care.
- Have an ongoing recruitment process using all available opportunities to attract new foster carers, who can meet the needs of children and young people entrusted in our care of all ages.
- Match children and young people with foster carers who can meet their needs, including those related to their gender, race, culture, religion, language, disability, and where any gaps in matching occur, highlight the need to address these by provision of additional support.
- Maintain a pool of trained, skilled, competent, and well supported foster carers whose skills, abilities and competencies are reviewed on an annual basis.
- Provide a high level of support and supervision to all foster carers regardless of the type of fostering they are approved for, so that carers can deliver the quality of care required to meet the needs of children and young people in their care.
- Deliver training courses to approved carers who must complete the Training, Support & Development Standards (TSDS) workbook within 12 months of approval, and where appropriate Vineyard Fostering will provide the specialist training required to meet the needs of children and young people placed in the care of named foster carers.
- Provide respite foster care services for children and young people with a disability, and to support Vineyard Fostering's own foster carers, needing a break from time to time.
- Ensure that children and young people cared for by Vineyard Fostering will have full and proper access to health, education, social, and vocational services, and facilities, so that they are not disadvantaged by being in care.

- Ensure through regulatory powers and duties, and through consultation and the complaints processes, that children and young people in care will be protected from harm and poor standards of care.

7.2 Foster Carers

Vineyard Fostering will, after applying its vetting and selection procedures, engage foster carers to carry out the work of caring for children and young people placed into our care. It will provide 24-hour support and full training to enable them to carry out their work and to develop their skills for the future.

Foster Carers will undertake a wide variety of specialist therapeutic work with children and young people, as well as providing a safe and nurturing environment. Vineyard Fostering's carers and their families will be given a high level of support, with 24-hour access to professional help and advice, which will enable carers, children, and young people alike, to feel confident and protected. In addition, they will be given on-going training tailored to their individual needs, which will be identified at regular reviews. Vineyard Fostering will actively encourage all carers to undertake formal training, complete their Training Support & Development Standards (TSDS) Workbook, and will provide opportunities and support for them to fulfil these expectations.

An atmosphere of trust and confidence will be nurtured within the company, so that carers feel valued and always supported. They will be made aware that they will receive the guidance, information and support they need at all times.

Carers will also be provided with and expected to comply with the agency's comprehensive policies and procedures, for example, the safeguarding and risk assessment policies, to guide them in their practice.

The homes of foster carers will be risk assessed and foster carers expected to work within Vineyard Fostering's health and safety and safer caring policies.

- *Foster Carer Recruitment*

Vineyard Fostering will check all applicants who are being assessed through the Disclosure and Barring Service and the relevant Local Authority.

All foster carers will be recruited in line with National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Regulations. This includes interviews with the prospective carers, household members, and the carers' immediate family, and any ex-partners the applicants may have had. Checks with the DBS, Health, Education and Local Authority will be taken up and personal references applied for.

Vineyard Fostering is committed to providing excellence in foster care and will look to recruit potential foster carers who will be able to meet the high standards of therapeutic care and professionalism required of them as foster carers.

Vineyard Fostering recognises the importance of recruiting prospective foster carers, who may not have previous experience as foster carers, but who have relevant experience, skills, a positive attitude, and the motivation to become professional therapeutic carers.

Vineyard Fostering will not actively recruit approved carers from existing independent fostering providers or Local Authorities. Any individual making enquiries, who is currently approved as a foster carer for another agency, will have to undergo the same rigorous assessment process, as would any other applicant, and would first be required to discuss the matter with their existing agency, and the Local Authority of any child/young person placed.

Vineyard Fostering adheres to protocols devised by the Fostering Network, the Joint Forum of Independent Fostering Providers, and agreed with the Association of Directors of Children's Services. The protocol contains guidance in relation to the movement of foster carers between providers, (be they Local Authorities or Independent Fostering Providers), which recognises that the well-being of children and young people already in placement is prioritized.

Vineyard Fostering will advertise for its carers through various social media channels, journals, community events, and through the company's website. However, it is anticipated that most enquiries will be from 'word-of-mouth' recommendation.

Vineyard Fostering will not directly employ its foster carers. They will be engaged and registered by Vineyard Fostering on a self-employed basis. The strategy for the recruitment of Foster Carers will be based on the identified needs of children and young people in care. It will be directed at specific target groups to evidence that there are carers to meet diverse needs.

Potential carers, through the recruitment process, will be advised that in general there is an aim that young people in foster care could remain with their foster carers into adulthood (up to 21 years or older) through the Staying Put arrangements or adult disability schemes. They will be made aware of the ongoing opportunities which will be offered through Vineyard Fostering as it develops, to support young people until they feel ready to move on.

- *Foster Carer Assessment and Approval*

Vineyard Fostering will assess prospective carers using Form F. This document will explore and reflect in detail the applicant's life history and childhood. This will also reflect the Secure Base Model and how carers demonstrate availability, resilience, ability to include a child or young

person in their family and build their self-esteem. Detailed information on the approval procedures is available on request.

7.3 Fostering Panel

Vineyard Fostering has established a Fostering Panel, which will recommend approval and review foster carers on behalf of the agency.

DBS Checks will be undertaken on all foster carers, carers' children over 18, agency staff and volunteers and Fostering Panel members.

Vineyard's independent Fostering Panel will be held every four to six weeks, as required, and will be conducted in line with government regulations and good practice guidelines. The panel has an Independent Chair and vice-chair, and its members are drawn from a central list of skilled and experienced individuals. A Panel Advisor is also available, who can provide advice, guidance, information to Social Workers and to panel members at each panel meeting. The panel will make recommendations on the following issues:

- The approval of foster carers
- Changes of approval
- First reviews of approval
- Standards of Care Reviews resulting from allegations and complaints against carers
- Practice issues
- Terminations of approval

The Agency Decision Maker will consider the recommendations from the panel and will make the final decision.

Prospective foster carers will be invited to attend the panel when their approval is being considered. Applicants will be informed of the recommendation immediately by the Panel Chair. All decisions taken by the Agency Decision Maker will be communicated orally to applicants within two working days of receipt and then confirmed to them in writing within five working days.

All applicants and assessing social workers, who attend, will be asked to complete a feedback form, so that ways of improving the process can be considered, ensuring that everyone involved can make the best contribution to this important area of decision-making.

The Panel Chair will meet with the Agency Decision Maker on a 6 monthly basis to discuss the quality of information provided in reports to assist with quality assurance.

Additional evaluation and monitoring will take place through:

- Learning from end of placement meetings.
- Quality assurance forms sent to foster carers and Local Authority social workers.
- Feedback from prospective, and already approved, carers and social workers.
- Reflection on training.
- Regular appraisal of panel members.

8. Support and Supervision

8.1 Supervision, Support and Training of Staff and Foster Carers

Vineyard Fostering Agency is committed to ensuring staff and carers receive regular and effective supervision. Supervision supports the development of a positive culture in the Agency and provides a focus for continuous improvement and consistent practice which help to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

The Agency will ensure:

- Each member of staff and each carer has an induction.
- All staff and foster carers receive regular supervision and informal support as required.

Supervision is a formal process in which the workload and performance of each individual is evaluated and reviewed so that support can be provided as required and training and development needs identified.

All staff and carers will receive regular formal supervision, normally by their Line Manager or Supervising Social Worker to enable them to:

- Be clear about their role, responsibilities and accountabilities.
- Understand and achieve their individual aims and objectives and those of the Agency.
- Be supported in maximising their potential.
- Be clear about communication methods which allow for constructive two-way feedback.

Formal supervision does not replace the informal supervision that takes place on a more regular basis as required.

Supervision is a private but not a confidential process. This means that the records are the property of the Agency, not the individual. Where there is an explicit issue that needs to remain confidential this must be agreed between supervisor and supervisee.

Supervision is not a forum for dealing with disciplinary matters, although concerns about work, personal competence or conduct will be raised in supervision. Where it is anticipated that a more formal process is needed, the matter should be dealt with outside supervision and via the appropriate procedures.

Any areas of disagreement between the supervisor and supervisee will be recorded on the supervision records. Areas of disagreement that cannot be resolved may be referred to the Fostering Manager.

It is recognised that, in addition to individual supervision sessions, there are other ways in which staff and foster carers discuss and seek advice. This could be through peer mentoring or in a group setting. These are valuable and helpful ways in which staff and foster carers can broaden their knowledge and expertise, however they must never be a substitute for formal individual supervision sessions.

The child's allocated social worker should be contacted for specific advice or support in relation to the child and their care and placement plans.

Frequency of supervision meetings will be agreed between the foster carer and the Supervising Social Worker and should take place as appears necessary in the interests of the children placed with them and in accordance with the agency's policies and procedures.

Informal supervision will take place as required.

Foster carers will also be provided with information about what support will be available from the Agency outside office hours, including the relevant contact details.

There will be an unannounced visit at least once a year. The main purpose of the unannounced visit will be to look at the home environment that a child is living in.

8.2 Supervising Social Worker

In addition to the child's or young person's Social Worker, a Supervising Social Worker is allocated to support and supervise every foster carer with the placements they provide.

All children and young people in placement with Vineyard Fostering are visited regularly as part of the role of the Supervising Social Worker. In undertaking this, due consideration is given to the role and involvement of the local authority social worker, so that there is clarity between the roles and responsibilities of each agency and social worker. The Supervising Social Worker will ensure

that the best interests of the child and/or young person are being safeguarded, promoted, and identify further services that are appropriate to promote the physical, mental, and emotional welfare of the child or young person.

The Supervising Social Worker will:

- Maintain regular contact with the foster carer and children in placement through monthly placement visits and daily/weekly telephone calls.
- Make a minimum of at least one unannounced visit to the foster home every year.
- Provide advice, guidance, and support to the foster carer on their care of children in placement.
- Participate in the out of office hour's management and support to carers and local authorities.
- Investigate and co-ordinate other support services as appropriate.
- Liaise with other professionals and contribute to reviews and formal meetings in respect of care planning.
- Provide formal supervision and identify and respond to foster carers training and development needs.
- Keep accurate records and provide regular updates, always keeping local authority social workers informed of the progress of young people in placement.

Vineyard Fostering employs Supervising Social Workers who are suitably qualified and experienced. Every effort will be made to match children with families that reflect their religious, cultural and diversity needs. Issues around child protection will be dealt with immediately, in line with agreed procedures.

9. Quality Assurance and Confidentiality

Vineyard Fostering promotes a culture of continuous improvement giving careful consideration to feedback about the services we provide received from any individuals with whom we have contact.

9.1 Evaluating, Monitoring, Auditing

As a Social Care provider, we welcome inspections from Local Authorities and Ofsted as a means of monitoring the service we provide and encouraging us to strive for the best outcomes for the children placed with our foster carers.

As part of our Quality Assurance Framework, safeguarding is given the highest priority and the improvement in its quality is top of the agenda of Vineyard Fostering management team. Monthly senior management meetings ensure progress of review of the quality of care, audits and progress in working towards service improvements and achieving good and outstanding inspection outcomes.

9.2 Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Vineyard Fostering adheres to all guidelines and protocols of The Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The agency recognises its duties to safeguard the confidentiality of all personal information it collects in relation to carers and their families, children in placements and employees and other professionals.

Any information that identifies individuals personally and is not already in the public domain is to be treated as confidential information and the Data Protection legislation will therefore apply meaning it should be obtained with consent, processed lawfully, stored securely, protected against unlawful and unauthorised processing, access, loss, destruction, or damage and only shared with others if the data subject consents to the sharing or the sharing is necessary in the public interest (including to safeguard a child from abuse or neglect or protect an adult at risk).

When handling personal information staff and foster carers ensure that:

- They promote, support and protect the privacy, dignity and rights of children and young people and their families.
- Personal information is only shared with individuals authorised to have access to it.
- Records are clear and accurate, stored securely and retained only for as long as necessary.
- They comply with best practice.
- They conform with the law.

The Manager ensures that maintaining the confidentiality of any personal information and the importance of accurate record keeping is discussed with all new employees, foster carers and any volunteers as part of their induction.

To protect personal information, e-mail messages containing personal identifiable information about service users are sent using a secure or encrypted connection or service.

- *Information Sharing*

It is generally only appropriate to share personal information with others where informed consent has been given to its disclosure by the person to whom it relates.

However, there may be situations which arise when working with children and families where the sharing of confidential information without consent is appropriate.

Sharing information amongst other professionals working with children and their families is essential to providing the best possible care and to keeping children safe. In many cases it is only when information from a range of sources is put together that it becomes clear that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm. Where there are concerns that a child may have suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, staff members and carers within the agency will share confidential information lawfully for this purpose.

The key factors in deciding whether or not to share confidential information are necessity and proportionality, i.e. whether the proposed sharing is likely to make an effective contribution to preventing the risk and whether the public interest in sharing information overrides the interest in maintaining confidentiality.

Circumstances in which sharing confidential information without consent will normally be justified in the public interest are:

- When there is evidence or reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant Harm; or
- To prevent significant harm arising to children or serious harm to adults, including through the prevention, detection and prosecution of serious crime, i.e. any crime which causes or is likely to cause significant harm to a child or serious harm to an adult.

Where there is a clear risk of significant harm to a child, the public interest test will almost certainly be satisfied.

Whenever personal information is shared with another agency, it should always be recorded.

- *Breach of Confidentiality*

Confidence is breached where the sharing of confidential information is not authorised by the person who provided it or the Data Subject or where there was no justification for sharing the information.

To minimise 'accidental' breaches of confidentiality, confidential information must only be shared with others within the agency for genuine purposes and on a need-to-know basis. Confidential

information should not be shared with members of foster carers' families who live outside the household.

No person working within the agency shall knowingly misuse any information or allow other to do so.

Breaches of confidentiality will be regarded seriously and may result in action being taken for example a review of approval for foster carers, disciplinary action for staff.

9.3 Compliments

A register of Compliments will be maintained and monitored to highlight and reward exceptional practice and inform practice development for foster carers, staff, and the agency.

10. Safeguarding

10.1 Protecting Children and Young Persons

Safeguarding children and young people is a priority for all at Vineyard Fostering. The safety and welfare of every individual child and young person entrusted in our care is of paramount importance, therefore, a robust Safeguarding policy is in place to ensure safeguarding protocols are adhered to with vigilance, urgency and effectiveness.

Vineyard Fostering provides mandatory safeguarding training to all staff and all foster carers to enable them to have the awareness and knowledge required in ensuring that all entrusted with the care and welfare of children and young persons are consistently vigilant in making sure they are protected from abuse and harm whilst they are entrusted in our care and our foster placements. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and depends on effective joint working between staff, carers and relevant agencies and practitioners.

All staff and carers have a responsibility to report any concerns of abuse or neglect and to take all allegations seriously and report them to their manager or an independent person - such as the child's social worker, Police, Regulatory Authority or the NSPCC.

10.2 Dealing with Allegations

Foster carers are trained to be aware of the agency procedure should they believe or suspect a child or young person is at risk of harm, or if the child or young person has disclosed or made an allegation. The foster carer should report as soon as possible to a member of the management team in line with Vineyard Fostering safeguarding procedures. Management will report the disclosure or allegations immediately to the child or young person's Social Worker, the LADO, Ofsted, and the Police.

Enquiries and investigations relating to allegations against our foster carers or staff are dealt with under the local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children Procedures in a manner that provides effective protection and support for children and the person making the allegation, while at the same time supporting the person who is the subject of the allegation.

Allegations or suspicions that a member of staff or foster carer has caused harm to a child will be investigated thoroughly, speedily and sensitively under those procedures and will involve open and honest communication with and support for all those affected.

In certain circumstances, where there is insufficient evidence to support a Police prosecution, action can still be taken to protect a child such as the termination of contract of employment for the staff member concerned or reconsideration of the foster carer's approval.

It should also be noted that it may be necessary during an investigation to consider what action, if any, should be taken with regard to other children with whom staff or foster carers have contact, including their own children.

Where incidents may involve abuse from one child to another, both Placing Local Authorities will be immediately informed. Vineyard Fostering will ensure all safety protocols relating to ensuring the child is safe will be adhered to and implemented. Vineyard Fostering will liaise with the relevant professionals to ensure any advice and guidance given are actioned immediately.

10.3 Complaints

Vineyard Fostering promotes a culture where children, families and other professionals are encouraged to express their views and concerns with adults who will actively listen to them and work towards solving the problem. Children, young people, families, and staff are reminded about their right to complain and are given information on how this can be done and what happens in the process.

A complaint can be made by anyone to whom the agency provides a service or anyone with sufficient interest acting on their behalf.

Children should be supported by foster carers and/or agency staff in making their complaints. These should be dealt with in a sympathetic and timely manner. A complaint can be about the delivery or quality of the service, agency practice or procedures, a foster carer, or a change in care plan in which case it is brought to the attention of the child's allocated Social Worker or alternatively, the Independent Reviewing Officer.

It is the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer to make sure that looked after children are aware of the local authority's Complaints Procedure, which must comply with the Children Act

1989 and associated regulations, and to assist the child to access independent support and advice to enable them to use this procedure if they wish to do so.

Foster carers may make complaints with the help if needed of their Supervising Social Worker, an advocate or a supporter about the agency or the placing authority under the relevant local authority's complaints Procedure.

Where possible, complaints would be addressed informally and easily resolved and can be withdrawn by the complainant at any stage.

There are three stages to the complaints process.

Stage One – this is an informal process which consists of a meeting between the complainant and the supervising social worker unless the complaint is about them or a person related to them, in which case the complainant should proceed straight to Stage Two.

The agency will ensure that complainants are kept up to date regarding the progress of their complaint. In the event that any complainant is not satisfied at any stage, they may and should avail themselves of the right to make a complaint to the Regulatory Authority.

A letter of resolution or outcome will be issued in response to informal complaints by the Fostering Manager, including details of how the matter was investigated, by whom and with the relevant facts to support the outcome.

Stage two – this is activated where the complainant is not completely satisfied with the outcome of Stage One, or if at the outset they require that the matter be dealt with by someone other than an employee of the fostering agency. The complainant will be advised that they must put their complaint in writing to the Fostering Manager, who will then contact the complainant within 7 working days to advise that they have instructed an Independent Complaints Investigating Officer in relation to the complaint and will advise them of their name and the expected time frame for the investigation.

A report will be completed following the investigation, detailing how the matter was investigated, by whom and what outcome was reached with relevant evidence to support the report's conclusions.

Stage three - this is the final stage of the complaints process. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage two investigation, they must confirm this in writing, including reasons for their dissatisfaction, to a senior member of staff who will arrange for the case to be reviewed by an independent panel within 30 days.

The panel will consider the documentation available in relation to the complaint and any further written representations that the complainant wishes to make in relation to the investigation. The panel will reach a decision within 24 hours of meeting and the complainant will be advised of the outcome in report form to include any actions in order to resolve the situation within 7 days.

11. Useful Contact Details

Vineyard Fostering
Hart House, Kimpton Road
Luton
LU2 0LB
Tel: 01582 522311
Email: enquiries@vineyardfostering.co.uk

Registered Manager
Email: gvarricchio@vineyardfostering.co.uk

Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT
T: 020 7783 8330

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/about-us/contact/>

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)
Piccadilly Gate Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD
T: 0300 123 1231
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk