



Participation and Advocacy Policy

AFA is a family based, child centered fostering provider. We aim to include and involve children and young people in the development of the agency by encouraging participation in the recruitment of staff, requesting feedback on the services provided and consultation on new initiatives.

AFA recognises that children and young people should play an integral part in the development of the services provided to them. For example:

- The Central List for the AFA Fostering Panel has an independent member with recent experience of being looked after, two members who were fostered as children, and one Panel member who grew up in a family that fostered.
- The Consultation group has drawn up a list of questions to be asked by the Fostering Panel. They cover the qualities young people felt were important when considering applicants for approval as foster carers. The group have also provided questions for interviewing Placement Managers, and a range of other agency posts.
- The Skills to Foster preparation course includes a young person with care experience as a facilitator. We have recently begun to involve one of our Looked after Children as a visitor to the course.
- The Skills to Foster preparation course also involves the sons and daughters of Foster Carers. They talk to the children of prospective carers about what it is like to foster.
- Young people who foster, as part of their parent's role as carers, are invited to attend AFA training courses as appropriate to their age and understanding.
- There is an active Children's Consultation Group (CCG), which aims to record the experience and views of looked after children and young people, as well as those living in fostering families. The group considers how to make information more accessible and involve children and young people of all ages in developing the service. They also help those who work with looked after children to have a better understanding of their experiences.
- There is also a Fostering Friends group for children who live in families who foster. The group supports children and young people, and encourages them to share their thoughts and views so that AFA have a better understanding of their needs. This will help us provide the support they need, alongside their parents.
- The Children's Consultation and Fostering Friends groups help plan social events, in which staff participate, for all children connected to AFA fostering.
- Our staff value the participation of children and young people in developing our services, and we enjoy the opportunity to share informal and fun activities.

The children's guides give details of how to contact AFA staff and the Directors, as well as other independent sources of advice, such as Anne Longfield, who is the Children's Commissioner. AFA has also funded publication of a book entitled "Pilchard's New Family" by Leon MacLean and Paul Harris, which is given to all our newly approved carers. This helps them to provide information and support to the children in their care.



The Children's Consultation Group have helped to design leaflets about bullying and taking risks. They have been written for two different age groups and include details of where children can get support and help if they need it. The CCG have also designed an introductory leaflet about the group and created a 'Welcome Box', which is given to all children when they move into a placement.

The Fostering Friends group has also been involved in creating resources, which can be used in the assessment and support of foster families. This includes leaflets, information packs, a game and a book, which shares the experience of a child living in a fostering family.

The AFA website has a Children's & Young People's page and your comments and ideas are welcome. The website also has links to other sites.

Children, for whom AFA are responsible, can contact one of the Directors, who will happily listen and respond to your queries or suggestions.

AFA Placement Managers have contact with the sons and daughters of foster carers when they visit the home, and we aim to support them through the changes that take place in a fostering family. Placement Managers will be accessible to the children who foster, so that they can offer the support they need. The Placement Manager can meet with children and young people with their carer, or on their own if requested.

Advocacy for children and young people

What can an Advocate do?

'An advocate can help a child or young person make a complaint or any other representation about their care, for example, issues around contact with birth families or placement moves. They can accompany them to reviews or other meetings and ensure that their voice is heard. Having access to a Children's Rights officer or Advocate is the right of anyone in care.'

From Fosterline's website.

All children looked after by AFA, as well as the children in fostering families, are invited to send in their views when the carer's AFCR (annual review) is due, or at any other time they wish. This is also an area of work that the Children's Consultation and Fostering Friend's groups have contributed to, by designing feedback forms for children of different ages.

AFA takes their responsibility of gathering the views of children and young people and advocating for them, very seriously. The voice of the child needs to be at the forefront of all those who work with them, and AFA understands that when working with large organisations such as the Local Authority, a child's views can get lost. This can happen for many reasons but, more recently, it appears to be linked to changes of social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO). AFA have listened to the children in our care and have made a decision that all children will be offered an independent advocate.

- All children will be given a leaflet on advocacy in their 'Welcome Box'.
- The right to have an advocate will be raised at the Placement Planning meeting.
- AFA will ensure that an advocate is offered to all young people during the first 3 months of placement, at the time of the first LAC review, as well as during visits to them.
- The right to, and offer of, advocacy needs to remain on the agenda for all subsequent LAC reviews.
- Carers will be given relevant information to share with young people in their care.
- Carers are supported and encouraged to advocate for children in their care.
- Carers will be supportive of the children and young people in their care and help them to share their wishes and feelings openly with those in the team around the child.
- Foster carers will promote the relationship between the child or young person and their social worker.

This policy was reviewed and updated with the help of the Children's Consultation and Fostering Friends groups. Many thanks to Aiden, Amelia, Bethanie, Corbyn, Eche, Harry, Reuben, Shannon and Thomas for their thoughts and contributions.

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Children's' Rights & Advocacy Services

Coram Voice	0808 800 5792
The Children's Legal Centre	08088 020 008
The Children's Commissioner	0800 528 0731 for children in care 08088 020 008 Children's Rights Alliance England
National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)	0808 808 1001