

# **Quality Care in a Family Setting**

**A Practical Guide for Foster Carers**



**Leon Fulcher, PhD & Thom Garfat, PhD**



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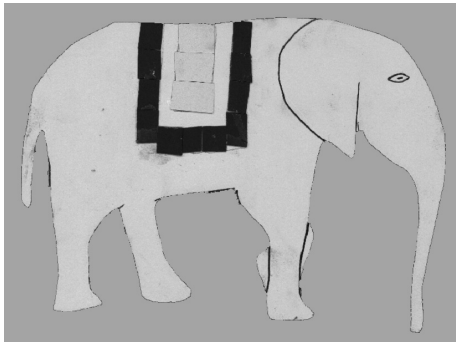


## Elephant

I never could  
Quite work out why  
An elephant  
Could never fly.

With massive ears  
To flap and twitch  
You'd think they'd fly  
Without a hitch.

*Gary*



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The CYC-Net Press

The poems are from *Rattle Your Cool*: A collection of poetry and art by children and young people who are being looked after. Published by, and used with the permission of, *Foster Care Associates*, [www.thefca.co.uk](http://www.thefca.co.uk)

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A Practical Guide for Foster Carers

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[info@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org](mailto:info@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org)

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# Foreword

I am delighted to provide a foreword for Leon and Thom's book.

I first met Leon Fulcher early in my career [26 years ago!] My first and lasting impression was his ability to make complex concepts simple to understand. As a social work lecturer, he would illustrate his point with everyday examples making clear connections with and for the listener. This book, co-written with his long-standing friend and colleague Thom Garfat – a new friend of FCA and distinguished international child and youth care consultant – draws on their collective global experience whilst uniquely addressing — in a practical way — the policy agendas for foster care within the UK as well as elsewhere in the world.

I don't know who coined the phrase 'ordinary people doing extraordinary things' but for me it sums up who foster carers are and what they do. However, reliance on intuitive or opportunistic care and supervision of children and young people is no longer enough. The fostering task and the carer's role require a level of 'conscious competence' that makes use of but moves beyond the ordinary. This volume will assist foster carers' movement towards conscious competence. It is a practical text that will help carers reflect on their own behaviours and promote the positive use of self.

Social workers and therapists might be wondering where this fits with their professional frameworks. Much of the focus in the field of adoption and foster care in the UK is centred around the importance of attachment and often leads to disagreements about permanency. The focus on attachment has primarily emphasised specific attachment relationships and rarely extends to a focus on attachments within the wider sphere of 'belonging' of which attachment is a central component. In FCA this sense of belonging is nurtured for children, carers and staff from Day 1. Attachment and belonging are not mutually exclusive but in my view interdependent. For the child in placement, it may feel like a betrayal to attach to their foster carers but their need to belong can

be met through the broad life of the organisation, through involvement in activities, relationships with support staff, etc.

Recognising the particular significance and value of the relationship foster carers have with children and young people, for me completes the circle of continuous healing relationships which all our children, no matter what age, deserve.

This volume will aid reflective practice and become a tool for discussion between social workers and carers. Hopefully it will influence the development of conscious competence in fostering.

Estella Abraham, Executive Director

[www.thefca.co.uk](http://www.thefca.co.uk)

Foster Care Associates, July 2008

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### **I live in foster care**

I live in foster care  
Laura combs my shiny hair  
My cheeks go red  
When she tucks me in bed  
I like going in a bubble bath  
Because they make me laugh  
I have Brownie friends  
Gemma likes to be with me  
Some of my friends two or three  
Now my poem needs to end  
I hope they will be my friends

*Emma 8*



# 1

## A Daily Life Approach to Foster Care

Foster Carers are ideally situated to be among the most influential of healers and helpers. Think about that statement. It represents the basic orientation to this little book. Foster Carers are significant and important people in the lives of children and youth. Foster Carers are healers.

A Foster Carer's position in the daily life of a young person allows him or her to intervene proactively, responsively and often immediately to help a young person discover and learn new ways of being in the world. This immediacy of intervention creates in-the-moment learning opportunities for the young person as the young person is living their life. It is not a form of healing and helping based on reflective conversations in an isolated office, although those are often important conversations. Nor is it a form of intervention based on structured and regulated contact as might be found operating in a residential group living environment where staff working shifts create an environment quite different from Foster Caring. We recognize that residential group living environments are also powerful forms of helping for young people at different stages of their development. And it is not uncommon for young people to move from residential group living environments to intensive foster care environments. So both groups need to know more about what the other group actually

does. Thus, while intended for Foster Carers, this book may well serve to inform others about this important work.

Foster Care is based on helping young people live their life differently, as they are living it (Garfat, 2002). It is a focused, timely, practical and, above all immediately responsive form of helping which uses “applied learning and daily uses of knowledge to inform more responsive daily encounters with children or young people ” (Fulcher 2004, p. 34).

Foster Care is immediate. It focuses on the moment as it is occurring. It provides opportunities for a young person to learn and practise, new thoughts, feelings and actions in the most important of arenas, daily life.

Imagine, for example, a young person who has difficulty in respectful communication and for whom the helping team has decided that respectful communication will be a part of her intervention plan. While she might take classes in ‘communication’ or visit a therapist to understand why she is acting in such a manner, the Foster Carer has the opportunity, in ‘real time’ to:

- Identify immediately when the undesirable communication is occurring, in the moment that it is occurring, so that both the young person and the Foster Carer know exactly what is being discussed.
- Help the young person reflect on her communication style ‘in the immediate’ – e.g., processing the feelings, thoughts and memories which are occurring as the young person is in the middle of the communication.
- Help the young person learn and practise new ways of communicating as that communication is occurring – e.g., at meals, bedtime, playing, doing chores – in short ‘in daily life as it is being lived’.

Few other forms of helping have such immediate relevance for the young person.

The words 'everyday events' suggest the routine, the non-technical and the unimportant tasks. Yet it was here, in the everyday events, that the child's development and function became impaired and problematic, and the . . . worker's skill lies exactly here, in getting the youngster's days to start going right again.

— Brian Gannon, 2000

We have written this little volume specifically to help Foster Carers focus more directly on the daily life space where living and developmental learning are nurtured with looked after children or young people through the planned use of daily life events. It is our belief that the more Foster Carers are able to focus effectively on 'learning in the moment' the more powerful their interventions and environments will be. Ordinary people doing extraordinary things with looked after children and young people underpins any attempt to provide quality care in a family setting. We salute those who make a difference in children and young people's lives.

This volume is organized around England's *Every Child Matters* agenda (2005) for Foster Carers and Scotland's *Getting It Right For Every Child (or Young Person) in Foster and Kinship Care* agenda (2007), thereby highlighting a comparative social policy dimension to this volume and a focus on enhanced developmental outcomes for looked after children and young people. We have brought together a Commonwealth perspective on 'developmental assets' (Search Institute, 1997, 2007) which are now used in many different parts of the world and a Child and Youth Care Approach (Garfat, 1998) because *when combined, they offer powerful and helpful learning for Foster Carers*, providing opportunities for better outcomes for young people in foster care. The literature on the Circle of Courage and other writings circulated by *Reclaiming Youth International* has also been influential (see, for example, Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002) as has other resiliency and strength focused material.

## The Developmental Assets

The 40 Developmental Assets were identified by the Search Institute of Minneapolis, following research on millions of children and young people, as "concrete, common sense, positive experiences and qualities essential to raising successful young

people". Over time, these assets have been revised and adapted for use with younger and older children as well as adolescents. As Leon Fulcher (2005) wrote elsewhere:

The basic idea behind this *Strengths-Based Approach* is that certain external and internal influences – or what the Search Institute calls assets – have been shown empirically to dramatically shape young people's chances in life. Young people with more assets have greater chances for success. 20 external assets have been identified around four themes: *Support; Empowerment; Boundaries & Expectations; and Constructive Use of Time*. These *External Assets* involve family members, other adults, community involvement and safety, family, school, neighbourhood and peer group boundaries, and purposeful use of time at school, home and in the community.

At the same time there are 20 internal assets or internalised characteristics that help shape daily living. These are also grouped around four distinctive themes: *Commitment to Learning; Positive Values; Social Competencies; and Positive Identity*. Highlighted in these *Internal Assets* are issues associated with achievement and engagement in learning activities, whether at school or at home. They also involve values such as caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility and restraint. Competencies associated with planning and decision-making, interpersonal and cultural skills, resistance skills and peaceful conflict resolution are also highlighted. Finally, themes such as personal power, self-esteem, having a sense of purpose and hope for the future are also reaffirmed as important.

— Leon Fulcher, 2005

In this book, we have made no attempt to focus specifically on each of the 40 developmental assets. Further information about the Search Institute assets can be found via their website ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)). Here we have used this resiliency and strengths-based approach to inform daily life interventions in foster caring for looked after children and young people. Both approaches are used here to provide Foster Carers with materials from child and adolescent development to promote a practical, strengths-based approach to Foster Care. Throughout this volume an emphasis is placed on the development of a strong sense of self within every looked after child or young person. Self, we believe, is central to the helping process.

## A Child and Youth Care Approach

We have been involved in working with youth and their families, and those who work with them, for a number of years. Throughout our time in the field there has evolved an approach to helping that is now recognised as a contemporary 'Child and Youth Care Approach', which focuses on the following characteristics and principles (Garfat 2004):

- *The use of daily life events* involves using the everyday, seemingly simple moments which occur as we live with children and young people to help them find different ways of being and living in the world. The moment, as it is occurring, provides the most powerful and relevant opportunity for intervention for change.
- *Being with people where they live their lives*, means that we are involved, and intervene, in all areas of the young person's life, as it is appropriate: home, school, community, anywhere that young people interact with their world and the people in it.
- *Responsive practice* means that the intervener attends to the relevant developmental characteristics of the individual child or young person and, rather than reacting to their behaviour, responds to the young person's needs in a manner which is proactively consistent with the developmental needs and stage of the young person.
- *Intentionality*, means that everything that we do with a young person, we do with a purpose. There are no 'random interventions', rather all our interventions are planned and fit with the goals we have established with the young people and/or their families, and which we review regularly.
- *Hanging out and Hanging in*, means that we spend much of our time doing apparently simple, everyday (and extremely important) things with young people which to the outsider may seem like we are, in fact, doing nothing. It also means that we do not give up when the 'times are tough' rather we hang in and work it through, thus demonstrating our commitment and caring for the young person. Equally, when the times are good we do not automatically assume that 'all is well' for we recognise that, when the times are good, set-backs may be just around the corner.

- *Doing 'with', not 'for' or 'to'* refers to how we engage with young people helping them to learn and develop through doing things with them. We do not deny them the possibility of growing through doing everything for them (especially when they are capable of doing it themselves) and we do not stand back and do to them (e.g., order them about). Ultimately we are engaged 'with' young people in the process of their growth and development, standing beside them as a guide through stormy waters.
- *Engagement and Connection* build from the belief that if a young person is not engaged with us, and/or if we cannot connect with him or her in a significant way, our interventions cannot be effective. Relationship is the foundation of all our work. And connection is the foundation of relationship.
- *Being in Relationship* is not the same as 'having a relationship'. We all have relationships all the time but 'being in relationship' means that we are engaged with the young person at a deep and profound level which impacts both young person and helper. We recognise that we live in a relationship with young people that is created by both of us.
- *A needs-based focus* assumes that everything one does, one does for a purpose, and that purpose is to meet a need. When one helps a young person to find a different, more desirable way of meeting a need in question, then the previous way of meeting the need (usually an undesirable behaviour) is no longer necessary and it becomes easier for the young person to let go of that behaviour.
- *Present-oriented* means that in our work we are focussed on the 'here and now', on what is happening in this moment, especially between ourselves and the young person. It is based on the assumption that 'we are who we are, wherever we are' and that if a young person can change their way of being in the immediate moment we can help the young person generalise that behaviour to other situations in their life.
- *Flexibility and Individuality* refer to the fact that every young person is unique and all of our interventions must be tailored to fit the young person as we understand her or him to be. It means, then, that we are flexible in how we interact with each young person, realising that there is no one approach or



intervention which fits for every child. There is no one approach or response which is applicable in all situations.

- *Rhythmicity* refers to the joint experience of being in a synchronised moving connection with children or young people. Rhythms of coming and going, rhythmic rituals of greeting, patterns of play among children, simple repeated gestures of greeting are all examples of the rhythms we might experience with young people. Connecting in rhythm with young people helps to develop connections and joins us together in 'being with' that young person.
- *A focus on context* permeates all our work. We are conscious that everything which occurs does so in a context unique to the individual child, the helper and the specific moment of interaction. While some elements of context may be the same (e.g., agency philosophy, regulations, the physical environment) other elements of context (e.g., personal history of being cared for, previous relationships with adults, developmental stage) vary with the individual interactions between Foster Carer and young person.
- *Meaning Making* refers to the process we all go through in making sense of our experiences. An action occurs, we interpret it according to our own way of making sense of things, and then we act according to that perception. Thus two different young people may respond very differently to a simple gesture because of what it means to them. What is important is not 'what we meant to say' but how what we say (or do) is interpreted by the young person.
- *Reflection* is the process we go through when we think about our work: what we have done, what we are doing, and what we might do in the future. The effective helper is a reflective helper constantly wondering if there are better ways, or how one might do things differently, or whether what we are doing is the most appropriate given the desired outcome.
- *It's all about us* refers to the fact that, ultimately, our success or failure with young people is profoundly influenced by who we are ourselves and that it is only with a deep and active self awareness that we can assure ourselves that our actions are in the interest of the child and not simply meeting our own needs. It also refers to the fact that we are not doing this alone. The plural 'us' refers to everyone involved in helping a young person

grow and develop: Foster Carer, Birth Family, Young Person, Social Worker, Teacher, Therapist, G.P, Managers, Neighbours, Peers, Distant Relatives, etc., etc. All of us have a role to play and the more we are 'us' unified and working together, the more successful we will all be in supporting developmental outcomes for looked after children and young people.

These characteristics of a Child and Youth Care Approach are woven into the various chapters of this book, not as distinct points (although sometimes we might focus specifically on one of the characteristics) but rather as a unifying philosophy which defines how we are when we work to help young people grow developmentally.

## A Team Parenting Approach

As stated at the beginning, we believe Foster Carers are well positioned to be the most influential of helpers and healers in a child's life. A large part of this is explained through Foster Carers' being ideally placed to use opportunity events in a young person's daily life, as these opportunities occur. Another large part of the reason is because Foster Carers are not alone in this work. Foster Carers are a part of a team, working together with other significant people to promote team parenting.

Each of us plays a specific role with the young people we are 'looking after'. Some of us focus on one area, some on another. Some of us deliver direct service and some of us offer indirect support to the direct carer. Some of us create the agency framework for helping and healing and some of us enact it. What is important is not so much 'what we do' but that *we do it together with a common focus on the plan of care and the goals for each individual child or young person*. Thus, as a team, we must agree on the plan, on the approach, and on how to best 'be with' the individual child or young person. This does not mean that we all have to be the same in all our interactions with the young person but it does mean that we must all be 'on the same page' in focus and approach. We need to have a common way of understanding the young person and work according to that understanding. This consistency is what makes any team parenting approach to helping

a powerful support for the young person's growth and development.

Throughout this book you will find references to teachers, social workers, birth families, doctors, nurses, etc. As you encounter them, remember 'it's all about us' and if we are not working together within a common framework of understanding, our interventions will be less effective than they might be. Thus, if you do happen to find yourself unable to connect very well with another member of the team, you will need to work with that individual so you can all come together in this endeavour of helping. Sometimes the most important work we do with young people and/or their families is in either advocating for the young person or working on our own relationships with other professionals.

I think to get the best out of foster care in the year 2000 and beyond ... we need to work with each other in a collaborative way that acknowledges the importance of each other's role. It should recognise the importance of the concept of partnership, be creative and prepared to give new things a go. We cannot work in isolation and we need to respect each other, working to achieve positive outcomes for the children we care for.  
— Jill Wain, 1999

### A Few Words About the Way this Volume is Organised

You will notice that this is a small book. Indeed, in the early days of writing it we were calling it 'The *Little Blue Book* for Foster Carers'. We intentionally set out to write a small book, focused and to the point because we know that Foster Carers are typically very busy people. What you have is a short book, organized into concise chapters that we hope are 'user friendly' and appropriate to those working on the front line as Foster Carers.

Each of the chapters in this book corresponds to one of the *Every Child Matters* or *Getting It Right For Every Child* agenda themes and is organized using the same format. We begin each chapter with a short **introduction**, followed by a **short story** that emphasizes that particular focus of the chapter. Next Foster Carers are offered '**a little theory**' which sets the foundation for the topic before moving to the core of the chapter, **theory into practice**,

finally ending with some **tips for practice**. Throughout each chapter you will find exercises, suggestions and ideas for activities that Foster Carers might work on alone or often with the children or young people whose lives they share.

Our goal has been to write something that is both theoretically sound and realistically practical. Our hope is that in doing so we can help you in your important work: the helping and healing of young people.

**Children are always the only future the human race has;  
teach them well.**

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### **The gooey monster**

Monsters, monsters everywhere  
They can live in the sewers  
And live in your house too  
They leave a gooey trail in  
your shower  
Goo, goo everywhere.

Monsters, monsters everywhere  
They live in the bathtub  
They can live in the sink  
They can slide under the door  
They can live in the sea  
They can really frighten you!

*Charmaine 11*



*"This volume will assist foster carers' movement towards conscious competence ... a practical and suggestive text."*

Getting it right for every child in kinship and foster care starts from the premise that every child matters, regardless of where they live. While training, support and development standards are now used to enhance, monitor and evaluate the quality of care given to looked after children and young people, Foster Carers are frequently expected to perform their pivotal roles without practical guidance and support.

Building from a strengths-based, daily life approach, *Quality Care in a Family Setting* seeks to redress that deficit, offering practical assistance for Foster Carers to do extraordinary things with the children and young people for whom they care.



**Leon Fulcher, PhD** and his wife Jane have been foster carers, and have worked in numerous countries with young people who were successfully placed with Foster Carers. In working across cultures and geographies, Leon has developed the ability to bring clarity to often complex subjects. Leon also specialises in caring for caregivers, team working and promoting learning opportunities.



**Thom Garfat, PhD** is an international consultant and trainer who has worked with children, young people, care givers and those who help them for over 35 years. His primary focus is on 'making it work'; finding practical day to day ways to enhance the process of development and healing. Thom lives with Sylviane in Quebec, Canada.

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The CYC-Net Press  
PO. BOX 23199, Claremont 7735 SOUTH AFRICA  
[info@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org](mailto:info@cycnetpress.cyc-net.org) • <http://cycnetpress.cyc-net.org>