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Islamic Fostering Service Update

السلام عليكم
 Arabic: Peace Be With You

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Six Months On: An Update

Since our launch on 30th April 2004 we have received a fantastic response. Various good-will messages were received, and many local authorities have since used our service. Best of all, our service has been considered of the best quality by those using us. We are personally extremely pleased by the testimonials we have received—please see the section below.

However, we appreciate that much more needs to be done to promote the interests of

Muslim children in care. We plan to hold training courses, conferences and to launch a handbook for social workers in addressing these needs.

To do this, we need your support. If we are to remain feasible for the long term we need more local authorities to come forward and work with us. We have a flexible approach and pride ourselves in being supportive and friendly. Please therefore do not hesi-



tate to contact us even for informal discussions.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter, feedback is welcome!

**Our Referrals Line is
020 7923 0330**



Goodwill Messages and Testimonials

The Facts:

20 months were spent on development before launching our service

Consultations were held with BAAF, Islamic community leaders and leading senior consultant social workers to develop the service

Unique policies and procedures govern the work of the agency with respect for diversity at the core

We are an organisation committed to quality in child centred provision, and strive to work to best practice guidelines

Thank you to all those that have written to us since our launch in April.

Below are goodwill messages and testimonials we have received from Local Authorities that have used our services over the last six months:

"I am pleased to hear of the launch of your service. This is an excellent initiative, and an issue of great importance to the Muslim community. I wish you every success."

Lord Adam Patel

"I was delighted to read your press release regarding the launch of the Islamic Fostering

Service. You are right to identify this need and I am sure a specialist agency is the right approach."

**Phillip Sutton,
Fostering Network**

"[Your carers] ... proved to be excellent foster carers and had great genuine interest ... [they were] very proactive in ensuring all the boys needs were met"

London Borough of Newham

"[We] ... would be more than happy to use your agency again and were very satisfied with the service provided"

Surrey County Council

"... we are satisfied with the service you have recently provided ... we have been impressed with your professionalism and flexibility. At the point of referral and following identification of placement, your agency endeavoured to meet our requirements. We would have no hesitation in using your services again"

London Borough of Camden

"We have found the staff to be efficient, informative and supportive to the children placed with their carers ... We would have no hesitation about using them in the future"

London Borough of Barnet

The Islamic Fostering Service was launched in April 2004 and offers foster care placements for children aged between 0-18 for short-term, long-term, respite, emergency, pre-adoption and

bridging placements. We will also soon offer mother and baby placements.

Our offices are located in Stoke Newington in the London Borough of

Hackney. They are a ten minute train journey from Liverpool Street Station, and good road, bus and public transport links connect us to the rest of London.

Occupying a large modernised Victorian property with excellent IT and telephony infrastructure, we are fully equipped to offer our major service to Local Authorities.

As an agency we believe our greatest asset is our diverse pool of carers from many ethnic backgrounds. We

therefore ensure that they are well supported with 24 hour access to multi-lingual advice, and regular support and supervision visits. We also have a training programme for all carers that equips them for the fostering task, and through a system of feedback strengthen their skills continuously by offering on-going training. All carers undergo a rigorous checks and assessment procedure before being approved, as is expected by regulations and best practice guidelines.

We also adopt a detailed staff development strategy to keep them well trained and prepared for quality service provision.

Since August 2002 we have been an active voice for promoting fostering issues in the Muslim and mainstream media. Articles on our work have been included in *Vectone Urdu TV, Ramdan Radio, The London Muslim newspaper, Community Care, Care and Health, Children Now* and other media.

We are constantly working with a network of faith and BME voluntary and community organisations to promote fostering issues using close links the Directors have built

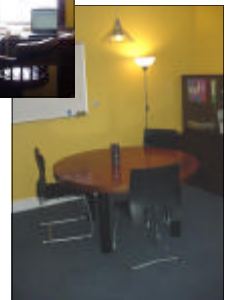
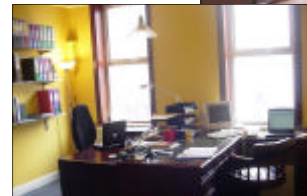
"We are constantly working with a network of faith and BME voluntary and community organisations to promote fostering"

About Us and Our Services

throughout the UK over many years.

Our website (www.fostercarelink.com) is updated regularly, and has a range of PDF downloads available.

Foster Care Link is a robust organisation, and we hope that the Islamic Fostering Service will eventually develop to become a national resource especially for multicultural metropolitan areas. However, we believe in expan-



sion without compromise on quality, and will therefore closely monitor all areas of our work to ensure we are meeting our own high internal standards where the voice of the child is always paramount.

Islam in the most misunderstood religion in the West. A religion that teaches peace, tolerance, equality and respect for all is often misrepresented as a faith of violence, misogyny, and oppression.

With regard to the issue of foster care the religion is clear; it is a duty for Muslims to care for those within the community that require this. A complex set of rules govern "Kafala" - the Shariah defined

system of foster care which



literally means "to feed" but is best translated as "foster care". Over 1400 years ago the Prophet Mohammed set the ground rules for the preservation of fostered and adopted children's' identity. They should maintain their family heritage and their family name. He himself fostered young children, and as a child orphan was fostered himself. Throughout his teachings he propounds the rights of looked after children, the need to put in trust their wealth, the duty for the community to parent them and promote their wellbeing. He also warned against those that wished to take advantage of their vulner-

Islam and Foster Care

ability due to their lack of guardianship. For example, he stated that "The home wherein the orphan [child] is ill treated is the worst home on Earth".

Whilst adhering to legislation and working to best practice, Foster Care Link and the Islamic Fostering Service also work to these ethics. It seeks to develop a yet untapped resource; the many caring Muslim families that would potentially foster children first and foremost as an act of compassion for fellow human beings and in adherence to the guidance and recommendation of their Prophet.

Latest News Summary

Discounts for Sibling and Long Term Placements

It has been agreed that for sibling and long-term placements commencing after 18th October 2004, we will be offering a 10% discount on our weekly rate. This would make our agency one of the Best Value amongst Pan-London contracted agencies. Discounts for long-term placements commence as soon as the status of the placement is formally confirmed.

Pan-London Contractor Status

Foster Care Link and the Islamic Foster-

ing Service are currently undergoing the process with Harrow Council to obtain Pan-London Contractor status. Our contract has been submitted, and we are now awaiting inspection. Thank you to Brent for nominating us!

Vectone Urdu TV Appearance

Following on from our last newsletter, on 19th August 2004 staff from the Islamic Fostering Service appeared on a 1-hour discussion programme on Vectone Urdu TV, broadcast throughout Europe. Callers from as far a field as Hamburg called in to discuss fostering issues.

Ramdan Radio Show

On 4th November 2004 the Islamic Fostering Service has been invited to discuss fostering issues in the Muslim community on Ramdan Radio, broadcast on the web and throughout East London.

Next Panel Meeting

Our next panel meeting is due in early December when we hope to approve six new families from Ealing, Enfield, Hackney, Newham and Slough. Carers are from a range of ethnic backgrounds including Ugandan, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian. All are Muslim.

On 20th May 2004 the Directors of the Islamic Fostering Service wrote to Margaret Hodge MP, Minister for Children, on the issue of same-faith placements.

The central aim of our letter was to request that the system of monitoring placements centrally be extended in DFES statistics to include the faith of children placed. We argued that this would empower providers for all minority faith groups with invaluable



information, stating that "it is only when communities are aware of actual numbers of children looked after from their own backgrounds that an attempt to comprehensively address needs can be made appropriately". This monitoring would also tie in to current regulations that stress the importance of religious matching.

A response was received from the Minister of Children on 1st July 2004, which sited all the existing legal duties for

authorities to pursue same-faith placements for foster placements. However, on the proposal to monitor the faith of looked after children this would be an unreasonable "additional burden".

The letter marked the beginning of our campaign named 'A Place in Faith'. With pressure from the Muslim community, we are working on this ongoing campaign on educating the sector on why faith is the most important consideration for Muslim looked after children, often truly traversing boundaries of race, ethnicity and culture.

'A Place in Faith' Campaign

Everyone knows that in Ramadhan Muslims fast.

However, the significance of the month is much more deep rooted, not only in the spiritual sense but also for the social aspects of the Islamic holy month.

The month of Ramadhan is a time for spiritual reflection, prayer, doing good deeds and spending time with family and friends. The fasting is intended to help teach Muslims self-discipline, self-restraint and generosity. It also reminds them of the suffering of the poor. It is

common to have one meal, the *Suhoor*, just before sunrise and another, the *Iftar*, directly after sunset. This meal will commonly consist of dates followed by other foods. Because Ramadhan is a time to spend with friends and family, the fast will often be broken by different Muslim families coming together to share in an evening meal. In the late evening special *Tarawih*

prayers are held at the Mosque. Ramadhan ends with the festival of *Eid ul-Fitr*, a time of joy, especially for children with large family get-togethers and gifts.



Ramadhan for Muslims is a month different to all others, when the normal routine changes and is a time for self-reflection on life. It is sorely missed when it ends!

Frequently Asked Questions

(and some you were too polite to ask)

Q. Are you an existing Muslim agency re-branded or re-launched?

A. No. We are completely independent of any other agency or provider. We launched earlier this year after twenty months of independent consultation and development using leading consultants in the field. To the best of our knowledge, we were the first Islamic agency to be registered with the CSCI. Both Directors of the agency have substantial experience in the Muslim voluntary and community sector of more than fourteen years. It was their vision that drove the establishment of the Islamic Fostering Service.

Q. Why is it important to place Muslim children with Muslim families?



A. Islam encompasses many spheres of day-to-day life. Although

Muslims vary on their level of practise, all adhere to basic rules. This often includes dietary requirements for Halal meat and ingredients (which effects everyday supermarket products such as bread), Islamic daily *Salaah* prayers, fasting and prayer in the month of *Ramadhan*, after-school Islamic ethics and classical Arabic lessons, preparation for adulthood in understanding dealing with finance and distributing Zakaat (giving 2.5% of wealth to charity, a fundamental pillar of Islam). These are just some basic areas covered by Islam. To our carers this comes as second nature, and they impart this knowledge and practice to children on an ongoing basis. It is often understandably difficult for a non-Muslims to deal with these issues

other than in a superficial way.

Q. How will you meet the needs for Muslim children differently from existing providers?

A. All of our carers are Muslim. The home environment for children will therefore strongly reflect existing religious practice. Our carers also come from a range of ethnic backgrounds providing appropriate cultural care, though Muslims from diverse backgrounds often share similar cultural practises. Two of our Social Workers are also *Aalims*, qualified Islamic scholars. They therefore have a level of respect from parents of looked after children, carers and within the Muslim community in general. This is unique in the sector. Our policies and procedures are also geared towards addressing the very specific needs of the Muslim community.

Q. How do you ensure that the children are not uncomfortably forced into fully practising Islamic rules when they are not used to this?

A. An important part of our training for carers is to understand how to precisely meet the needs of children. This includes never forcing Islamic practice on children, but instead catering for their needs and level of understanding. We educate them on suitably tailoring Islamic education and environment. Our carers vary in their level of practise. Sometimes they need to improve their own practise to 'keep up' with what the child is used to, and sometimes they need to remain flexible and understanding when a child understands only the very basics. We follow the Quranic advice that 'there is no compulsion in religion'. Fundamentally, we ensure that a child feels comfortable within the environment of the carers home as much as possible, and this is closely monitored by our social workers.

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islamicfostering.com

This newsletter is
available in PDF format
on our website

Q. How do we know that the best interests of the child in all areas are promoted?

A. Our carers must undergo stringent checks and assessments prior to approval. They are fully trained on an ongoing basis on promoting the interests of children placed. We also select high calibre carers whenever possible. Amongst our carers are a barrister, race relations expert, former Mayor, IT Analyst, accountant and teacher to name a few. Many of our carers are UK born, and are passionate about providing a home to a Muslim child as an act of brother/sisterhood with fellow Muslims. The agency as a whole follows comprehensive policies and procedures governing all areas using best practise as the base. We manage many successful placements, and have had positive outcomes as can be confirmed through written references provided on request (also see front cover).