



Links Group

Links Pet Fostering Group - Terms of Reference & Service Standards

The Links Group raises awareness of the link between the abuse of people and animals through support, training and inter-agency working. Further information can be found at www.thelinksgroup.org.uk

Purpose

The overall purpose of the **Links Pet Fostering Group** is to develop and promote service standards and best practice in the operation of pet fostering services for survivors of domestic abuse; to provide a trusted networking space for members where knowledge and experience can be shared; and to evidence and highlight the need and impact these services have on pet owners fleeing domestic abuse.

Aims

- Promote collaborative working between member organisations and relevant organisations within the animal welfare and domestic abuse sector
- Contribute to proposed changes in legislation, supporting government consultations and providing evidence where possible.
- Publication of combined service impacts such as statistics and fully anonymised case studies.
- Provide best practice advice and support to organisations setting up pet fostering services for people fleeing domestic abuse.
- Work with microchipping databases and contribute to consultations to transform the current microchipping processes to better protect victim-survivors of domestic abuse.
- Suggest and share relevant training and CPD opportunities for members.
- Support relevant research opportunities in relation to enhancing understanding around pets and domestic abuse

Current (Founding) Member Organisations (as of 1st January 2021)

Cats Protection Paws Protect; Dogs Trust Freedom Project (Secretariat); Paws for Kids/Endeavour Project; Refuge4Pets.

Membership Terms of Reference

- Member organisations will be fully subscribed Members of the main Links Group <https://thelinksgroup.org.uk/join-us>. Therefore, a representative of suitable seniority (that is, with the ability to make decisions) will attend **main** Links Group meetings that are generally held twice a year; face to face or virtually.
- Member organisations agree to work to the main purpose and primary aims of the Pet Fostering group and in accordance with the Terms of Reference.
- Member organisations agree to work by the minimum **Service Standards** (set out below).
- Member organisations will provide pet fostering service statistics via a supplied monitoring template and these statistics will be collated twice a year in line with the above bi-annual update.
- Member organisations agree to support the Links Group with the provision of fully anonymised case studies, with agreed standard service user consent in place, to assist with media requests.
- Member organisations commit to working to the minimum service standards set, and alongside other members to promote the purpose of the group and the main Links Group – this may involve attending events or involvement in development work, as set out in agreed activities by the group.

- The group has a rolling Chair which is carried out by one of the founding members of the group. The Chair will rotate at least every two years.
- Meetings will be serviced by the Secretariat, Dogs Trust Freedom Project.
- The Links Group Pet Fostering Group members will aim to meet twice a year, alternating meeting locations between London and Midlands (where required). The last hour of these meetings will be open to pet fostering groups that are not members and to other invited guests as required. Where necessary (e.g., during Covid-19), and as agreed with existing members, these meetings may take place via a video conferencing service.
- Member organisations will send the service manager/leader to all pet fostering group meetings. When not available, a frontline staff member may attend the group on the service manager's behalf to represent their service.
- A bi-annual update will be produced by the group, following meetings in March and October, to update the main Links Group meetings (usually held in April & November). A nominated member will report to the main group meetings on behalf of this group.

Minimum Service Standards (as part of the Terms of Reference)

These standards and the accompanying compliance guidance were agreed by the founding pet fostering group members, and approved by the Links Group Executive members, to ensure members operate under a minimum set of agreed standards to ensure best practice within this specialised area. These standards will be reviewed annually by the group. The next review will take place in July 2023.

1. Member organisations agree to operate a free pet fostering service open to people fleeing domestic abuse across the locations advertised. Please see service definition of Domestic Abuse (DA) below*
2. Joining members must have been running a service to this level for at least 12 months. Groups that are unable or that do not wish to apply for membership, but seek support and advice, can be invited to group meetings, and attend as guests. These groups can also apply to become members of the main Links Group.
3. Member organisations will be registered charities, CICs or voluntary bodies and be able to provide appropriate documentation to support this.
4. Member organisations will only advertise and operate a pet fostering service across a geographical area where they have the resources in place to safely and consistently work to these service standards.
5. Member organisations will not open a new service where there is already a member organisation offering a service and is meeting demand. Where other species are not covered by existing pet fostering service, partnership working of these services to work collaboratively will be expected.
6. Where a pet fostering service offers services for other client groups, they must have at least one dedicated female worker to manage domestic abuse referrals, placements and all contact and support for clients.
7. Where volunteers are recruited to support the admin and operational side of the service, they will not foster pets, and will have undergone a full application process and basic DBS check.
8. Member organisations will have at least one employed female member of staff who is responsible for leading and overseeing the fostering project.
9. Member organisations will only have female members of staff working directly with survivors of domestic abuse.

10. Member organisations will ensure victim-survivor data is only available to frontline workers and necessary service managers, ensuring that they are meeting General Data Protection Regulations Guidelines (GDPR) at all times.
11. Member organisations will ensure their staff members undergo a Basic DBS check or a higher-level check where appropriate.
12. Where possible, member organisations will be a Full, Associate or Organisational Member of Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Aid (national membership body and charities for women and children working to end domestic abuse) so that their pet fostering services are advertised in the WAFE Refuge directory (Gold Book) and via their Routes to Support service. If membership is not granted, members will need to provide confirmation of this to the group.
13. To deliver a pet fostering service which meets the needs of victim-survivors, pet fostering member organisations agree to fully commit to and reflect the values and vision of Women's Aid across all areas of their work, and service delivery, including their contact and participation with other pet-fostering group members during meetings.
14. Member organisations will ensure their services details are registered with the National Domestic Abuse Helpline (run by Refuge), Routes to Support, Men's Advice Line and other relevant local helplines.
15. Member organisations will signpost to appropriate specialist domestic abuse organisations and other support services as required.
16. Member organisations will offer pet fostering services to all victim-survivors of domestic abuse providing they meet the referral criteria. Member services will seek guidance and support from Respect and the Men's Advice Line around supporting male survivors.
17. Member organisations will actively promote their pet fostering services to all DA and related services in their defined geographical service area. They will provide a service for those fleeing from that area and to those resettling in their service area.
18. Member organisations should contact all other member organisations directly and the Links pet fostering Secretariat (Dogs Trust Freedom Project) should their service cease to operate (even as a temporary measure) at any time.
19. Member organisations will ensure that staff working on their pet fostering service and where appropriate volunteers, are trained around DA awareness, risk assessment/safety planning, safeguarding and if applicable, lone working protocols.
20. Member organisations will ensure that staff, and where appropriate volunteers, have the adequate animal handling experience and knowledge required to support pet referrals and placements, and that this is supported by relevant training.
21. Member organisations will operate a clear and safe referral policy as part of this service so that clients, referral agencies and other member organisations are clear on their service criteria. This should include types of pets helped, groups/pets not helped, any policies/procedures and how a referral can be made to the service.
22. Member organisations will ensure that the confidentiality and safety of clients, volunteers and staff members is embedded in all their service procedures and operating practices. This includes absolute anonymity between foster carers and clients, with no contact or data sharing between these groups.
23. Member organisations agree to full client and pet anonymity (this includes clients and pets currently on the service, as well as those that have been reunited) when carrying out any media or promotional work, including online or via social media channels. Full anonymity includes ensuring that clients or their pets are not able to be identified in any way via pictures, filming, or audio recordings. No other potentially identifiable information, such as the client's home region, the pet's name or breed should be shared. When using volunteer case studies to promote the service, a risk assessment must be carried out, and relevant identified procedures put in place to ensure volunteers' safety and confidentiality.

24. Member organisations should ensure they have clear contact details for their service on all promotional materials and be contactable during office hours (Mon - Fri 9am to 5pm).
25. Member organisations will respond to referral enquiries within 24hrs during weekdays, and the next working day after the weekend or a Bank Holiday. Volunteer/general enquiries will be replied to within 3-5 working days.
26. Member organisations will provide the above contact/referral information on a website, either on their own website or via a link to the main Links Group website, so that contact and referral criteria information can always be accessed.
27. Member organisations will foster pets in suitable family homes and may only use boarding facilities as a short-term temporary measure to this system but not in place of fostering. Where relevant, members will ensure clients (owners) are informed when pets are to be boarded, but not provided with the details of the boarding facility.
28. Member organisations will hold a microchipping policy to ensure a safe microchip registration process which suitably protects the victim-survivor and their data.
29. Member organisations will hold a confidentiality policy, safeguarding policy and lone worker policy.
30. Member organisations will ensure they have a client (pet owner) agreement which clearly states the client and pet fostering service obligations, to include details of informed consent on the care of the pet, such as permission for veterinary procedures including euthanasia and emergency anaesthesia.
31. Member organisations will ensure that they, their staff, and their registered volunteer foster carers abide by all relevant animal welfare legislation to protect fostered pets, and that they have the financial and operational means to do so. This includes, but is not limited to, having the financial resources to meet the full cost of any veterinary needs (preventative and emergency care) for pets whilst they are under their care.
32. Member organisations will ensure that they fully manage and support all volunteer foster placements. This will include the in-person monitoring of pets/placements on a regular basis (minimum of once every 2 months) through staff or volunteers carrying out home visits. *During situations such as Covid-19 and as result of national restrictions and guidance, these regular home visits may be replaced by virtual / socially distanced contact.*
33. Member organisations will actively update clients, and where applicable (and with consent from the owner) referral agencies, on the welfare of fostered pets.
34. Member organisations will actively recruit volunteer foster carers in their service area and manage/support a pool of volunteer foster carers to reflect service need.
35. Member organisations will have a volunteer agreement which clearly states the volunteer and service obligations, including clear guidelines on the confidential nature of the volunteering role.
36. Member organisations will not actively run referral 'waiting lists' and will have clear sign posting information (to local breed rescue/vets/etc.) when they are not able to assist referrals in their area.
37. Members will only refer people to other pet fostering services when they are either fleeing from that area or resettling in that area.
38. Member organisations will hold a rehoming policy and will offer rehoming via a suitable foster carer or through an animal welfare charity when pets are not able to be returned to their families.
39. Member organisations always agree to protect the reputation of fellow members by ensuring that all information shared within group meetings, emails and any other form of communication or exchange remains confidential, unless expressly stated otherwise.
40. Members agree to undertaking a regular review of literature, website and social media to ensure that the most up-to-date language is utilised in relation to domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse Definitions:

[Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Definition of Domestic Abuse](#)

[Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#)

[Women's Aid](#)

[Scottish Women's Aid](#)

[Welsh Women's Aid](#)

- **Member Agreement**

Organisation Name:

Status (charity, voluntary body, CIC etc.):

Pet Fostering Group Representative(s)/ Job Title:

The Organisation and above-named contacts have read and agree to the attached terms of reference, service standards and compliance process:

Links Group Representative Signature:

Date:

Pet Fostering Founding Representative Signature (1):

Date:

Pet Fostering Founding Representative Signature (2):

Date:
