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Approved by Tusla Crisis Management Team – COVID-19

**Procedures and Processes for the National Emergency Foster Carers
(NEFC) Panel**

Background

An emergency panel of foster carers has been established as a response to the impact of Covid-19 on the capacity within Tusla services to provide foster care placements for children who require care and are on a care order, or subject to a voluntary consent for admission to care.

Care order in this paper refers to:

- Children in a full care order
- Emergency care order
- Interim care order, and
- Section 12

The panel is established as a temporary measure for the duration of the Covid-19 crisis.

It is anticipated that placements will be for the period of COVID-19 and for a short period after unless a transition home can take place or alternative placement can be identified.

Purpose of the National Emergency Foster Care Panel

The purpose of the panel is to provide on-call foster carers who can accept placements from Tusla social work teams during office hours when all local resources have been exhausted.

The National Out-of-Hours Service (NOHS) may also access the panel in the event they have no carers available.

Foster carers on the panel will be placed on a rota system when required and while on the rota will be on call 24/7, with the primary emphasis on making day time placements.

Emergency Foster Carer Recruitment during Covid-19 Crisis Management

Who can apply to be an Emergency Foster Carer?

The primary focus of recruitment for the emergency panel is with four identified groups:

- Current foster carers nominated by the Principal Social Worker (PSW)
- Chernobyl Children Ireland Host families (in Ireland)
- New foster carers nominated by the PSW
- Staff within Tusla

Each of these groups will need to participate in an initial assessment process and be approved by the National Emergency Foster Care (NEFC) committee. As part of the assessment process they will have to demonstrate that they can:

- Provide care and support for a child or teenager during the crisis period of Covid-19 measures
- Be available to care for a child or teenager at short notice
- Have suitable accommodation for the child or teenager
- Provide adult supervision for the child or teenager - this can be done by more than one adult living in the household
- Can help a child or teenager to abide by the HSE guidelines on social distancing

NOTE: This is not a commitment to become a full time foster carer, but to provide a temporary caring safe home for a child during the critical Covid-19 emergency.

How will carers be recruited?

- Each area via the PSW will identify existing carers who would be in a position to become Emergency Foster Carers and advise the NEFC panel.
- A communication will be sent to all Chernobyl families via Chernobyl Families International to ascertain their interest in emergency fostering.
- Expressions of interest will be sought through Tusla Newscast.

How can people express their interest in becoming an emergency foster carer?

Contact details will be provided with all correspondence to potential emergency foster carers. The national e-mail address will be provided and foster carers can express their interest in becoming an emergency foster carer. They will be asked to specifically reference emergency foster care as their interest. The national e-mail address is: tusla.fostering@tusla.ie.

The national fostering recruitment line will then make contact with the local area in which the potential foster carer resides. This information will be taken from their postal details and once the relevant local area is notified they will then take over the process of assessment.

All potential emergency foster carers will be asked to complete an application form and this can be done either remotely or by post.

What will the interim assessment process involve?

A completed application form will be screened by a qualified social worker and fostering link worker.

As part of the interim assessment for emergency foster carers, the following steps will be taken:

- Online Garda e-Vetting form completed and processed. These applications should be noted to the vetting unit as Emergency Foster Carers, Priority 2.
- Applicants will need to nominate two referees, and the referees cannot be relatives.
- The application should include a brief outline of work history including caring roles and experience, either in the home, voluntary settings or in a professional capacity.
- Applicants must provide confirmation that an adult will be present in the home at all times to care for any child/teenager placed.
- Provide a video or Microsoft Teams video call of their home showing interior and exterior, and proposed sleeping space for the child/teenager. This can be done by Microsoft Teams or a video sent by WhatsApp. Tusla will maintain a record of the video viewing on Microsoft Teams and the video will be deleted from the phone. These records will be maintained in line with Data Protection requirements.
- The prospective carers will also be interviewed, via phone/Microsoft Teams by the assessing social worker and/or fostering link worker. The interview/s must include both applicants if there are two adults in the household and all other members of the household.
- Demonstrate that they are aware of and comply with HSE/COVID-19 guidelines.
- On the basis of the application and initial assessment process, the assessing social worker will make a recommendation which is supported by the team leader and PSW to the National Emergency Foster Care Committee.
- The prospective carers will be informed if their application is successful following communication from the National Foster Care Committee.

(Please refer to the initial assessment framework for COVID 19 for additional information on the assessment process)

NOTE

Successful applicants must undertake the two online Children First foundation courses and certification prior to the first placement. As per interim assessment framework, certification must be provided to the assessing social worker who will explain their legal obligations in relation to Children First.

The National Emergency Foster Care Committee (NEFC)

A National Emergency Foster Care Committee (NEFC) will be established to support the creation of an emergency foster care panel and to ensure that a responsive approval pathway is available to carers who are interested in becoming emergency foster carers during this public health crisis.

- A National Emergency Foster Care Committee will be established to prioritise applications for emergency foster carers during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Local foster care committee needs to be informed of any change in current foster carers' status.
- If relative foster carers are being nominated for national emergency panel, they will require a top-up assessment to ensure they are approved to become emergency general foster carers.
- If approved adoptive carers are nominated for the national emergency panel, they will require a top up assessment to ensure they are approved to become emergency general foster carers.
- Local foster care committees will be notified by the NEFFC of foster carers coming onto National Emergency Foster Care Panel.

What happens next?

If the potential foster carer has a positive recommendation, the NEFC panel will be informed and they will become available to be part of the rota for the panel.

The National Emergency Foster Care Panel

Objectives of the NEFC panel

- To provide emergency foster care placements during office hours for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It is anticipated that placements will be for the period of COVID-19 and for a short period after, unless a transition home can take place or alternative placement can be identified.

- To supplement the current National Out-of-Hours Service emergency carer panel, if needed.

Scope of the panel

- The NEFC Panel will seek to provide foster placements for children in the care of Tusla when all local placement options are exhausted.
- The panel manager will consider all requests for emergency placement between 9am and 6pm Monday to Friday (all additional requests outside of these hours will be directed to out of hours).
- The NEFC panel manager is appointed to oversee the availability of placements and identify the best match.
- The NEFC panel manager will seek to identify a placement from the panel closest to the child's geographic location.

Who will be on the panel?

- All foster carers on the NEFC panel will be approved foster carers, either relative or general, who have been identified as emergency foster carers.
- The four categories of foster carers that will be part of the NEFC panel include:
 - Current foster carers
 - Chernobyl Children Ireland host families who have been approved
 - New foster carers nominated by the PSW
 - Staff within Tusla
- Additional categories of potential carers may be added to the panel over time, if required.

How will the panel operate?

- A panel administrator will establish and maintain a roster for its duration.
- A rota system will be established comprising of a number of families per week.
- The quota of on-call carers per region will be determined following confirmation of panel numbers and will be in proportion to anticipated demand.
- Foster carers on the NEFC panel rota will be available 24/7.
- Foster carers on the NEFC panel rota will receive a retainer allowance - financial details as per Appendix 2.
- The placing area must notify the panel administrator when a child has been discharged from the emergency foster placement.
- A mechanism is in place to ensure that the National Out-of-Hours Service can access details of on-call carers (shared drive).

- Where the National Out-of-Hours Service makes an emergency placement from the panel they will notify the panel administrator by start of business the following morning.
- Responsibility for submitting payment details lies with the placing area in which the child resides - see Guidance Appendix 2.

How will emergency foster carers be supported?

- Newly recruited emergency foster carers will be prioritised for allocation of an assigned link social worker.
- Emergency foster carers will be assigned a link fostering worker from the local area, who will support the carers via remote means, e.g. phone calls, video calls and email.
- The emergency foster carers will be provided with as much information that is available about the child and the contact details for the allocated social worker.
- Emergency carers will be provided with the 24 hour Out of Hours Emergency Foster Care phone line number for evening and weekend calls.
- Emergency carers will be provided with contact details and information about the Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA). Online supports and online training provided by IFCA will also be outlined.
- Emergency carers will be provided with a short document outlining the ‘significant events’ protocol. In the case of a significant event, the carer will know who to contact, when and in what format (phone, webchat or email).
- Tusla will provide emergency carers with contact details for IFCA support phone line
- Where possible, an experienced Tusla foster carer will provide mentoring and buddy advice remotely to the emergency carer.
- Emergency foster carers will also be issued with the same guidance as current foster carers on how to facilitate family contact for children placed. This may be remotely, or by visiting the parents where it is safe to do so.
- Family contact arrangements will be made on a case-by-case basis, and these will be clearly outlined to the carer in advance of the placement where possible.
- The Child Protection or Children in Care team requesting the placement will oversee the care plan for the duration of the placement.
- Care planning will take place in line with regulations and adherence with national standards where possible.

Supports for Children placed in emergency foster care households

- Children will have an allocated social worker for the duration of their placement.
- Children’s social worker will maintain weekly contact via phone, WhatsApp or other allowable digital means.
- Children will be provided with number of out of hours emergency contact for non-office hours.
- Children placed will know the arrangements for ongoing contact with their family during the period they are in emergency foster care.

Circumstances for the removal of an emergency foster carer from the panel.

There are a number of reasons a new emergency foster carer may be removed from the panel. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list:

- They decide that they no longer wish to provide emergency foster care
- They have no capacity to take additional placements
- A serious concern or allegation has been made and a child removed from placement
- They are no longer available due to personal circumstances
- They advise that they are symptomatic or confirmed COVID-19, or that a member of their household has a confirmed case or is symptomatic

In all of the above scenarios the fostering link worker must inform the panel manager and clear records should be maintained on the local foster carers file.

Case records

The assessment and subsequent appointment of Emergency Foster Carers during the Covid-19 involves a number of processing activities that would not be used in standard assessment processes. This includes the collection and processing of the personal data of the potential foster carers and their families and the sharing of personal data of Tusla service users with approved Emergency Foster Carers.

All of this activity is subject to the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

In order to reduce the risks that the process of the interim assessment presents to the organisation, the following steps must be taken:

- All records created relating to Emergency Foster Carers, Covid-19 must be kept safe, secure and separate from all other Tusla records and access restricted on a least privilege and need-to-know basis.
- Each record must use the same document naming convention and have the same form and content, for example:
Name of Record:
Unique Reference Number,
Name of carer, Emergency Foster Carer, Covid 19,
DD/MM/YYYY
- The interim assessment of potential Emergency Foster Carers should include all questions asked and responses thereto and records of all correspondence between Tusla and potential Emergency Foster Carer. This should include all photographs, applications, letters, references, garda clearance, emails, etc.
- Any video recordings submitted by the potential applicant are to be sent to a Tusla device and emailed immediately to a Tusla email. Once receipt is confirmed, the original recording must be deleted from the device.
- The assessment report and recommendations should also be maintained in the same manner.

- Microsoft Teams will be used to share and store the information relating to the interim assessment of all emergency foster carers assessed during the period of COVID 19.
- Access to these records will be limited on a least privilege and need-to-know basis.
- The NEFC panel will hold only essential information on foster carers and families that comprises of key information on location and pen picture to support matching (Appendix 1).
- All information will be maintained in line with Data Protection requirements.
- Access to the panel/rota details will be password-protected.
- Emergency fostering allowances will adhere to financial regulations.

Process: How to make a referral

- Local area teams must have exhausted their own placement options before seeking placement from the emergency panel. A placement request to the NEFC panel must be approved by the local PSW.
- A request for a placement can be made directly or by phone, email or other means of communication to the panel administrator. This request should include key details relating to:
 - The child's circumstances
 - Family details
 - Special needs
 - Level of trauma
 - Known behaviours
 - Likely timeline of placement
 - Views on likely family contact arrangement for the purpose of matching with the foster carers on call
- The social worker must demonstrate that efforts to place the child with suitable relatives or family friends have been unsuccessful.
- Following approval to apply for a placement, a placement form should be submitted to the NEFC panel administrator.

Matching and making placements

- Matches will be made between the known needs of the child/children and the profile of the family, keeping in mind geographic location.
- In the event that the only available placement option is outside of Tusla's local area, the requesting social work department will determine whether or not to accept this placement.
- The panel manager will link both with the on-call emergency foster carer and the placing social worker prior to the placement being made so that the profile of the family/child can be shared and a plan can be agreed for the transition of the child into placement.
- The PSW for the emergency foster carer will be notified when a placement has been made and when a placement has ended (via email).
- When an out-of-hours placement has been made, the panel manager will be notified.

- The panel manager will then contact the local area to discuss placement requirements and likely length of placement the next working morning.
- All placements made (OHS/Day) must be reviewed weekly with the panel manager to review capacity of the panel on an ongoing basis.
- The day panel will operate from 9am to 6pm each day.
- In the event there is no availability on the panel the local area must refer back to their own line manager.

Placement Breakdown

- Where placement difficulties arise, the social worker for the child and the link worker for the emergency foster carer must seek to resolve the concern.
- In the event that the placement breaks down, the social worker for the child can revert back to the panel to seek an alternative emergency placement if required.
- In the event of a placement breakdown, a review of the continued availability/suitability of the emergency foster carer on the panel will take place between the panel manager and the link worker where placement breakdown occurs.

Appendix 1

National Emergency Foster Care Panel

Emergency Foster Carer Profile Form

Name of Carer(s):	
Unique ID reference:	
Address:	
Eircode:	
Directions:	
Family Composition:	
Current placement, if any:	
Approval status:	
Matching considerations: Age range, gender, ethnicity, special skills with children	
Family pet composition:	
Health and Safety checklist including compliance with HSE COVID-19 Guidelines:	
Spare Bedroom:	
Notes of any serious concerns and outcomes:	
Dates of last medical and outcome:	
Emergency item checklist: Pyjamas, toiletries, games, toys, cots	

Appendix 2

RETAINERS FOR EMERGENCY FOSTER CARER: COVID 19

Introduction

As the situation with regard to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to evolve in Ireland, we have prepared a proposal in relation to the provision of emergency foster care for the period of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment of uncertainty for staff, children, foster carers and families. This new process is intended to support staff and their managers to meet the demand for foster care placements in their areas in challenging circumstances.

It is anticipated that there will be an increased need for foster carers to care for children in care for a variety of reasons including:

- New admissions to care
- Existing carers becoming ill
- Disruption or breakdown of existing placements

The current provision of foster care is at maximum capacity. Whilst there has recently been a national recruitment campaign, which has identified potential foster carers and their assessments have commenced, they have not as yet been approved. Therefore, there exists no increased capacity within current service provision.

New provision

In response to this pressure on the system, a National Emergency Fostering Panel has been established to provide a list of emergency foster carers who have agreed to provide this service. This list of carers will operate on a needs basis and a select number of foster carers will be placed on a rota system to meet the demand. Once a child is placed, the carer will be removed from the rota and replaced by another carer.

The National Emergency Fostering Panel will operate a rota system and a retainer allowance will be administered to each carer on the rota system. This retainer allowance will be administered centrally and coded to a new general code 67843 and separately from the fostering allowance.

For the purpose of this document the term emergency foster carer refers to foster carers who are providing emergency placements through the National Emergency Fostering Panel.

Finance process

The number of successful applicants to become emergency foster carers that will be selected to be placed on the rota will be based on anticipated demand for their area.

For foster carers on the rota for the National Emergency Fostering Panel a retainer allowance of €300 per week has been made available while the carer is on the rota. This is in

line with arrangements for current out of hours emergency foster carers under contract through a commissioned service.

If a child is placed with the carer while they are on the rota, the retainer continues to apply for the duration of placement, however they will be removed from the rota.

In addition, when a placement is made, they will **also** receive overnight rate of €46.42 for those children under 12 years of age/€50.29 for those children over 12 years of age for each night child remains in their care. This equates to the fostering allowance over a period of seven days.

It is important to note that **not** every foster carer who agrees to provide an emergency foster care service during this period will automatically be processed the retainer allowance, only those on the rota.

Retainer allowances will be processed and administered centrally, the fostering allowance in respect of the child will be administered by the placing area.

No retainer allowances will be paid unless the carers are listed as on the rota for the National Emergency Fostering Panel.

The fostering allowance made in respect of the child must be made on the payment initiation form CA0001 as per the current payments process and processed by the placing area. You can find the form here - http://hsenet.hse.ie/childfamilyagency/Payment_Initiation_Form.html

Sign off:

It is recognised that under the current circumstances staff may not have access to scanners/printers in order to forward signed off vendor set up forms/signed payment initiation forms/signed validation sheets linked to cash uploads.

Therefore, HBS have agreed that in response to COVID 19 they will accept these forms without signature but all documentation should be accompanied by email from PSW or Area Manager authorising action needed for processing payments.

Appendix 3 (See Attachment)

Guidelines for COVID-19 Testing of Children and Young People in the Care of Tusla

https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CMD_AD-10-2020_Guidelines_for_Testing_Final_CIC_COVID19.pdf

Appendix 4

COVID- 19: Updated Advisory Notice relating to Family Contact (access) for Children in Care

https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CMT-AD-003-2020_-_Updated_Access_Guidance_COVID_19_-_2020-03-18.pdf

Appendix 5

Covid-19 Response: Interim measures with regard to the restricted use of WhatsApp

https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/CMT-AD-23-2020_-_Covid_19_Interim_measures_with_regard_to_use_of_WhatsApp.pdf