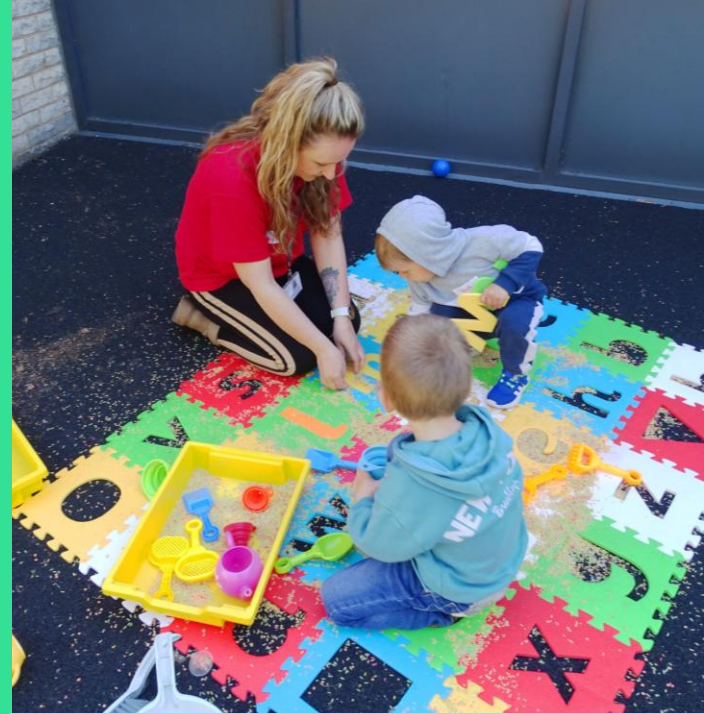
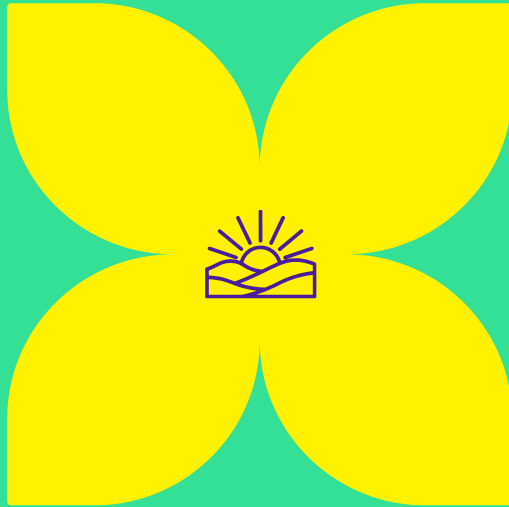




First Step



CEO Recruitment Pack 2026

Supporting children and
families **every step of
the way.**



A Warm Welcome



Simon Powell

Chair of Trustees



Thank you for your interest in First Step and this crucial leadership role.

We are seeking an outstanding Chief Executive Officer to guide our charity into its next chapter, following the planned retirement of our current CEO after 11 years of dedicated service.

You join us at an exciting and transformative time. We are actively driving the organisation forward, focusing on long-term sustainability while ensuring we never lose sight of the families who rely on us. We are looking for a CEO who shares our values, inspires others and can lead with vision, compassion and determination.

The following pages outline our history, our people, our achievements, our deeply held values, and our strategic vision for the future. We very much hope that after reading this pack, you will be inspired to join us and lead our remarkable team.

Simon



Meet Our Trustees



Bruce initially worked in the drawing office involved in digital movement of information. He moved on to work in production and sales, graduating to management. Bruce retired from his role as Managing Director and became a Trustee for First Step in 2005.



David has recently retired from a 40-year career in the financial services industry and was appointed a trustee in April 2026. He has been involved with First Step via family ties for a number of years and is keen to assist the charity through his Trustee role.



Gill worked at First Step for 21 years and was the Service Co-Ordinator until her retirement in 2012. She has continued to support the valuable work at First Step and became a Trustee in 2015.



Ian is a chartered accountant and chartered tax advisor having owned his own practice before merging with a national company. Ian is actively involved in a number of senior voluntary roles. Ian joined First Step as a Trustee in 2023 and is Treasurer for First Step.



Lynn joined First Step in 2003 as a Play-leader and felt very privileged to work with many families. After 11 years Lynn moved on to become a Local Authority Special Educational Coordinator until her retirement in 2025. Lynn has been a Trustee at First Step since 2023.



Martin trained as an accountant and later moved to working in the world of IT - providing systems for accountants and later the Finance Industry. He became a Trustee for First Step in 2019 and sits on the Finance Committee.



Roisin has been a practicing solicitor in Havering for over 30 years until her recent retirement. She has been a Trustee for nearly 20 years, 14 years as chair. Roisin is married and living locally and remains committed to the work of the charity.



Simon has been involved with First Step for nearly 20 years and is now the Chair of Trustees. Professionally, Simon is the Head of Channel at Thomas International. He brings extensive leadership, governance and stakeholder management experience to the Board



Steve qualified as a mechanical engineer and has spent 40+ years in the construction and property fields, most recently as a business owner. He has extensive Board experience with a strong background in governance, stakeholder management and financial control.

About Us

First Step is a family support charity working with families of babies and young children with special needs and/or disabilities

First Step was established in October 1988 in response to a plea from some parents of young children with special needs and/or disabilities.

They felt along with others in a similar situation, would benefit from a group where they would be able to talk, share experiences, and provide support for each other in a non-judgmental environment.

Since then the Charity has evolved to provide a wide range of sessions and services.

These have been designed to strengthen the wellbeing of the family and improve outcomes for children.

First Step works with around 100 families each year offering tailored support, information and encouragement.

The first contact often occurs at a time of uncertainty, feeling all is not well with their child.



“

Without First Step I would still be a struggling parent with a frustrated child.

GEMMA, FIRST STEP PARENT

”



Current Visions and Objectives

Our vision is for an inclusive community working together to ensure that families of children with special needs and/or disabilities can access resources so that their children have the best start in life and can achieve meaningful outcomes.



Provide a caring, inclusive and professional environment for families of children with special needs and/or disabilities that supports and responds to their individual needs.



Help give babies and pre-school children with special needs and/or disabilities the best start in life through professional play, learning and therapeutic learning experiences to help them achieve meaningful outcomes.



Help support and empower families of children with special needs and/or disabilities to access the resources they need to improve quality of life for the whole family.



Act as a voice for families of children with special needs and/or disabilities.



Our Values

First Step Values shape our culture, guide our decisions and influence the way we work with everyone.

We are *Welcoming*, creating a safe, supportive environment for families, *Respecting* each family's unique journey.

By *Including* everyone, we foster strong connections and a true sense of belonging.

Through tailored support, we *Empower* families, *Enriching* lives and helping children and families thrive.

Welcoming



First Step is passionate about providing a safe and welcoming sanctuary where families feel accepted, supported, and lose their sense of isolation.

We foster a warm, friendly environment built on trust, where staff and volunteers listen with sensitivity, value every family's experiences, and are committed to confidentiality, consistency and compassionate support.

Respecting



First Step recognises and values the unique qualities, experiences and strengths of every adult and child.

We respond to individual needs with empathy and understanding, maintaining a non-judgemental approach that respects personal preferences, differences, valuing the families' knowledge of their child.

Including



First Step celebrates the diversity of families' lifestyles and experiences, as we actively seek new ideas and approaches that improve outcomes for families and children.

We strive to create opportunities and provide resources for those who may otherwise feel excluded or marginalised. We value working in partnership with families, team members, and external agencies, while advocating to ensure every family feels heard, included, and supported.

Empowering



First Step is dedicated to empowering families to navigate the lifelong journey of raising a child with special needs and/or disabilities. Building on individual strengths, we provide support, training, and accessible information tailored to each family's unique needs.

We celebrate every achievement, no matter how small, recognising what is meaningful, realistic, and important for the whole family.

Enriching



First Step is committed to enriching the lives of families and children by providing a professional, high-quality service delivered by a skilled, well-trained and dedicated team. We combine engaging play experiences, care that respects dignity, and an individual, empathetic approach to supporting families.

Through effective relationships, supportive teamwork, and the use of warmth and positive humour, we create an environment where families feel valued, encouraged and supported.



Executive Summary

First Step has grown from its establishment in 1988 to become a key support charity for families of children with special needs and/or disabilities.

Following several organisational challenges - including leadership transitions, funding reductions and the impact of Covid-19 pandemic - the Charity has restructured where necessary and emerged stronger, with renewed focus, clear priorities and a commitment to sustainable growth.

From 2026 onwards, the strategic priority is to build and deliver sustainable, long-term services, maintaining high quality, care and support, that strengthen the charity's reputation and impact, whilst ensuring financial stability.

First Step is well positioned to build on its strong foundation, and ensure that high quality support for families is available for decades to come.



Organisational Development

1988–2014: Foundation and Growth

- Charity founded and steadily expanded service provision.
- Multiple Ofsted outstanding gradings
- Raising £1.2M to refurbish current building
- High levels of satisfaction

2015–2020: Regrowth & Consolidation

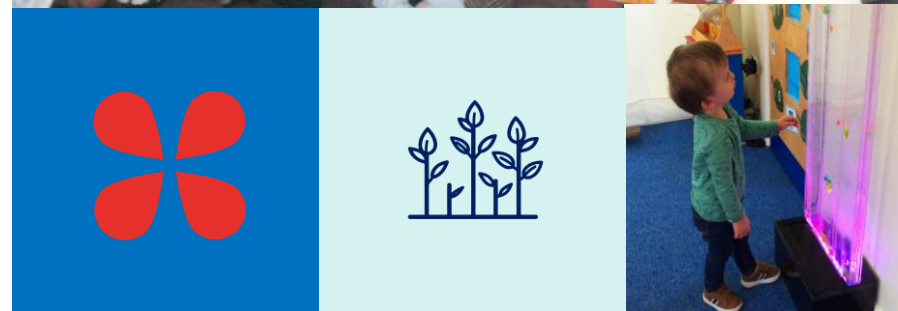
- Appointment of CEO Mark Halls.
- Focus on building staff cohesion, organisational culture, and external reputation.
- From 2017, local authority funding was reduced by 40-50%, necessitating a higher focus towards fundraising and income diversification.

2020–2025: Stabilise & Restructure

- COVID-19 lockdowns heavily impacted service delivery.
- Second phase of organisational restructure implemented.
- Emphasis on post-pandemic recovery, operational efficiency, and rebuilding reserves.

2026 Onward: Strategic Transformation

- Roadmap focusing on building sustainable services, strengthening financial resilience, further growing supporter engagement and fundraising and ensuring long-term community impact.



Family Support

Our family centred approach combines specialist Family Support Groups, with tailored one-to-one support, which meet the diverse needs of families and their children, whilst delivering meaningful and measurable outcomes.

Building Trust & Relationships

So that families know and feel someone understands and cares about them, their child and their situation.

Understanding the Children's Needs

To develop a family-centred plan to enable the parents to start to regain control of their situation and support families in coming to terms with the needs of their child.

Develop Communication

To identify, develop and share appropriate communication methods, strategies and motivators, so families are empowered to nurture and develop their child

Reliance & Empowerment

To build the resilience of parents to manage their situation, their wider family and the lack of understanding of the community and empower parents to manage the professionals they interact with more effectively.

Lifelong Friendship & Support

By integrating parents into a wider peer support group, establishing lifelong friendships.

Advice

Providing one-to-one advice to address the specific needs of individual families and to assist in the preparation for application for Disability Living Allowance (DLA), which can be a daunting task.



Our Impact

Our work is targeted to achieve quantifiable impact for the families we have the privilege of supporting. We support the parents, to identify triggers and motivators, and from there gently encourage and guide them to put strategies in place that will empower the parents and enrich the quality of life for the whole family.

Through effectively gaining the attention of the child, effective two-way communication can be established, which in turn enables a significant improvement in cooperation.

From decades of experience, we have learnt how to offer gentle support in an encouraging way. This creates the impact detailed for the whole family.

The Parents

- Feel more in control of life
- Know they are being a good parent
- Know they are meeting the needs of their child
- Less anxiety & worry
- Hope restored
- Isolation reduced
- Proud of child's achievements
- Feel worthy
- Have realistic expectations (comfortable)

The Child

- Able to convey wants and needs
- Anxiety reduced
- Reduced frustration and meltdowns
- More mellow/calm
- Ability to regulate their own emotions
- Feels understood

The Family

- Able to convey wants and needs
- Anxiety reduced
- Reduced frustration and meltdowns
- More mellow/calm
- Ability to regulate their own emotions
- Feels understood



Our Services

First Step is recognised as a highly professional, specialised family support organisation dedicated to supporting families with babies and young children who have special needs and/or disabilities. First Step combines expertise, experience, and compassionate care to deliver outstanding support tailored to the individual needs of each family.

Previously recognised with six consecutive 'Outstanding' OFSTED inspections, First Step has built a strong reputation for delivering exceptional support and early intervention services.

Today, the organisation remains a trusted and valued part of the local community, continuing to make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and families across the borough. For over 38 years, families have turned to First Step at a moment of uncertainty and concern, normally pre-diagnosis, fearing all is not well with their child.

Sometimes, they are struggling to be listened to by medical professionals, feeling overwhelmed with the implications of supporting a child with special needs and can often feel isolated. Families can self-refer or be referred by professionals, partner agencies, Health Visitors, and by friends or through our publicity and website.

A family focus group highlighted the importance of emotional support, practical advice and sense of connection as there is little other assistance available.



BB

There's no support anywhere else like it.

ANDREA,
FIRST STEP PARENT

DD



Our Volunteers

Volunteers have been at the heart of First Step since it was established. Whilst the Charity has grown and developed over the years, volunteers continue to play a vital role in supporting the dedicated staff team to support families across the community.

When in 2017 the Local Authority withdrew the funding, they had provided over many years as part of their own austerity savings, our volunteers stepped into the breach to enable us to continue to deliver services, with less paid staff.

We currently benefit from 19 amazing volunteers who give sacrificially of their time, to work at First Step, seamlessly alongside the employed team on a committed and regular basis. They work in the playroom, on reception, at fundraising events and in maintaining the building and grounds.

Additionally, we have a group of helpers who assist at specific events throughout the year. We simply couldn't do what we do without our volunteers and helpers.



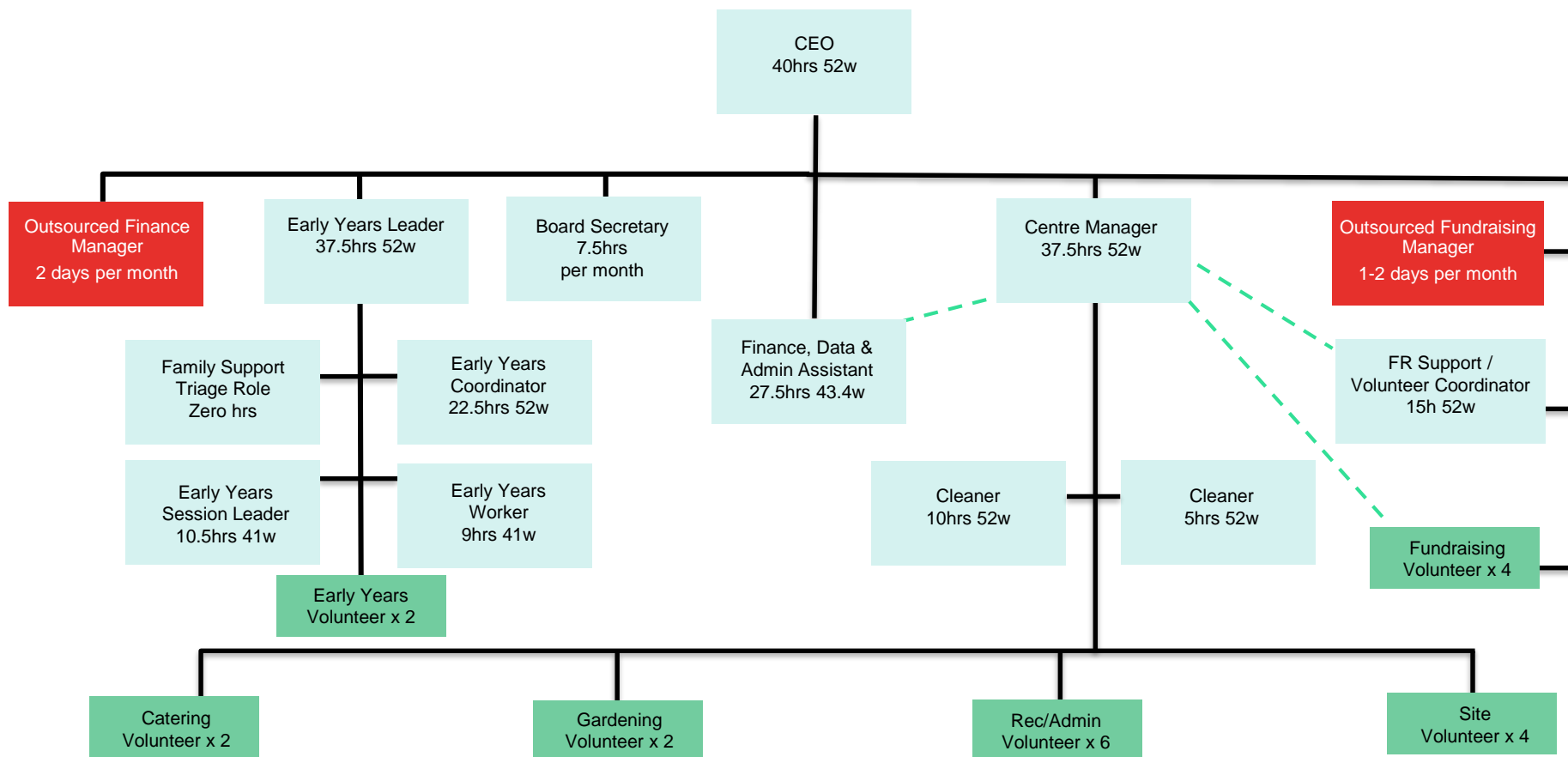
Meet Our Management Team

Our dedicated management team brings together a wealth of expertise across early years education, specialist care, operational management and charity governance.

Working closely in partnership with our Board of Trustees, they ensure that First Step remains a safe, welcoming and outstanding environment where every child and family can thrive.



Our Structure



Our Fundraising Annual Events

Fundraising plays a vital role in enabling First Step to fund its work, which is only possible through the generosity of our supporters, which includes community and business organisations.

Our Annual Fundraising calendar includes a wide range of well-established and highly valued events including:

- **The London Marathon:** Overcoming the ultimate endurance test to raise vital funds.
- **Our Annual Golf Day:** A staple community event combining golf, networking, and a charity auction, while strengthening relationships with supporters and businesses.
- **Annual Christmas Bazaar:** Bringing local families together with volunteers, supporters and sponsors for festive stalls, games, and the magic of Christmas for our past and current children.



The commitment and generosity of our supporters play a vital role in enabling First Step to deliver transformative early intervention for children and families.



Our Fundraising

Local Events



QUIZ NIGHT



TASTY TREATS



BINGO NIGHT



Bringing the community together.

First Step plays an active, vibrant role in the local community through a wonderful variety of social and fundraising events. These gatherings are essential; not only do they raise vital funds to keep our services running, but they also bring families, volunteers and supporters together in an atmosphere of warmth, laughter and mutual encouragement.

Our regular schedule features everything from our popular 'Tasty Treats' coffee mornings, where community members can connect over refreshments, to high-energy Bingo and Quiz Nights that spark some friendly competition. We also host engaging, one-off evening events, such as our recent evening talk with former West Ham footballer, Pat Holland, ensuring there is always a diverse range of activities for everyone to enjoy. Every moment spent at our events helps support a child's journey.

Our Fundraising

Looking Forward

We are driving forward with an ambitious fundraising plan to secure sustainable, long-term financial support for our strategic priorities.

Our key objectives this financial year are to:

- **Recruit a Fundraiser:** To build on the work of our Fundraising Consultants and grow our Individual Giving and Business/Corporate Fundraising income
- **Expand Business Partnerships:** Foster committed engagement, corporate charity-of-the-year schemes, staff volunteering days, and business sponsorship packages.
- **Nurture Supporter Stewardship:** Provide exemplary care and communication to our existing donors, ensuring they see the direct impact of their generosity.
- **Legacy Programme:** Launching a Legacy Programme to enable supporters to offer stability, hope, and kindness for years ahead.
- **Website Redesign:** Refreshing our website and brand identity to strengthen visibility, engagement, and fundraising opportunities.
- **External Evaluation:** Developing stronger evidence from family feedback, to shape services delivery and support funding applications.



Welcome to First Step

Empowering children with special needs through play and supporting learning activities for their life-time.

We're here to support you.

You are not alone on this journey.

For over 30 years, families have contacted First Step at moments of crisis and uncertainty.

When you feel overwhelmed by the implications of supporting a child with additional needs, we provide the expert care and community support that is often unavailable elsewhere.

How We Help

Inclusive Play for Your Child
Our specialist centres provide a safe, controlled, and fun environment where children can play and develop their skills in a supportive setting.

A Community for You
The private spaces in our centres provide a safe and secure environment where you can meet other families and share your experiences.

Expert Guidance & Advocacy
From helping you manage individual needs to working with Children's Learning Support, our specialist staff provide the expert advice and support you need to move forward.

BINGO NIGHT

JEREMY WEST, WEST & COE

The continued development of our corporate and business partnerships is central to the long-term success of First Step. It is encouraging to see new sponsors joining us and existing partners deepening their commitment through meaningful corporate social responsibility initiatives.

CEO Role

This is a hands-on, outward-facing role, leading from the front, championing First Step's profile within the community and igniting the interest of existing and potential supporters and donors.

- Inspire, energise and direct the First Step team of staff and volunteers, to consistently deliver outstanding support for families of children with special needs and or disabilities.
- Foster a positive and proactive culture that embodies excellence and compassion at every level.
- Shape and communicate a strong strategy and vision, ensuring that every aspect of our work align seamlessly with First Step's objects and values.
- Actively seek out and embrace new possibilities to expand and enhance services, driving innovation to ensure the organisation continues to make a meaningful difference to the community.

Please find the full job description on our website:

www.firststep.org.uk/recruitment/jobs/

Main Responsibilities:

Leadership & Strategic Management

- Development of First Step with particular regard to the needs of families of children with special needs and/or disabilities
- Organisational planning and financial controls across all operational areas with creativity and flair
- Ensure the organisational Vision, Objectives and Strategic Plan remain ambitious and relevant
- Partnership working with trustees, staff teams and stakeholders

Management

- Families & Children Services
- Finance
- Fundraising
- Safeguarding
- Facilities
- Governance
- External Communications
- People Management

How To Apply

If you are inspired to lead our remarkable team and guide First Step into its next transformative chapter, we would love to hear from you.

Your application should include:

- A fully completed Application Form including a Personal statement of up to 3 sides of A4, detailing how your experience, skills and values demonstrate your suitability for the CEO Role

(A supplementary CV. can also be provided for additional information but not in place of a fully completed Application Form)

How To Apply:

The full job description and application form is on our website:

www.firststep.org.uk/recruitment/jobs/

Please submit your formal application via email to recruitment@firststep.org.uk

Key Dates:

Closing Date for Applications:

Sunday 5th July 2026 at 23:30

First Round Interview:

Mon 13th July 2026 &

Thu 16th July 2026

Second Interviews:

Week commencing 27th July 2026

If you have any questions, or for a confidential discussion about the role, please contact our CEO Mark Halls via recruitment@firststep.org.uk



Thank you

Thank you for considering a future with First Step. Your interest in leading our organisation is deeply appreciated by the Board of Trustees, our staff, volunteers and the hundreds of families and young children who rely on our care and support.



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www.firststep.org.uk

