

Be a foster carer

We care, they care, can you care



Make a difference to a child's life - today

There were
65,000
children in care in
England last year



**Every day 59,000
children live with
45,000 foster
families across
the UK**

“ As foster carers we are committed to all the children that come to live with us, mostly teenage girls. Remember kids in care have sometimes been neglected; physically, sexually, mentally and emotionally. The children can be angry, resentful and sad. Be prepared for the child to be anything but happy about being in your home.

However if you have a lot of love, patience, and a spare room you can be the first person to organise a celebration for them, help them paint their first picture or carve their first pumpkin!

Help the child to see that families are a great place to grow up and that family relationships can be healthy?

If a child can trust you, they will be able to do the same with others in their lives which may lead to a healthier future. ”

Lorraine - current foster carer





Forward...

Being a foster carer is rewarding and can be lots of fun! It is also a big commitment and a real challenge. It is a chance to make a difference to a young person's life that will help them to aim high and achieve more.

Helen - Telford & Wrekin foster carer

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Why we need foster carers

Children come into care for various reasons...

“We need more foster carers because children can’t always live with their birth family. This could be because their parents are ill, unable to look after them, or the courts agree that a child would be safer living with different adults.”



A safe secure home...

Foster carers living in and around the Telford and Wrekin area provide a safe secure home for local children. This means any child placed with them can still have connections to things that are important, like family, school, friends and activities that will help them to grow up and still be part of the Telford and Wrekin community.

Most achieve more...

Research says living as part of a foster family is better for most children in care and helps them to achieve at school and form lasting relationships.

Keeping children in our community...

As anyone with children knows looking after children is expensive and how disruptive it is when children have to move school or travel far to continue with the activities they enjoy. We want to keep our children local where this is safe to do so, so that they do not have far to travel and don't miss out on local friends and family.



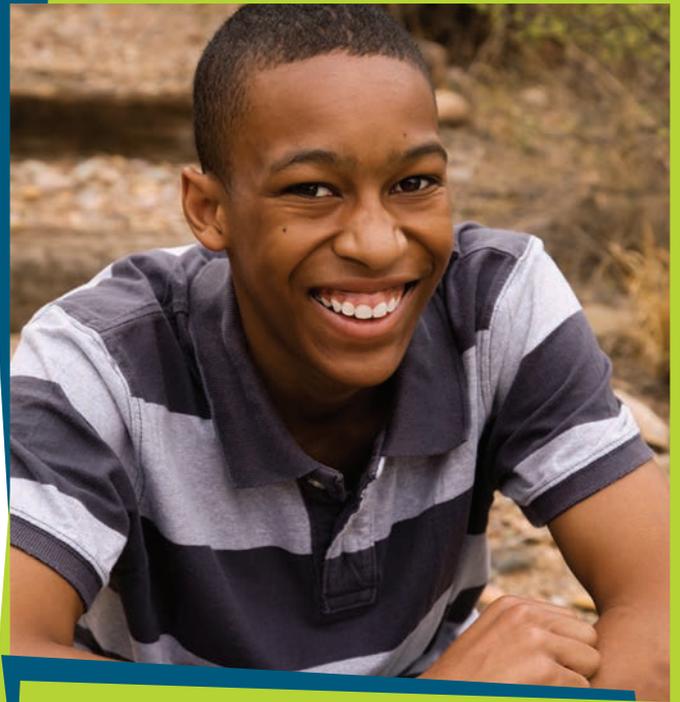
61%
of children leaving care felt their lives were better than they would have been if they hadn't been taken into care.

Our aims

“Some of the aims, objectives and visions for the Telford and Wrekin Fostering Service are captured here - you can see that we put the needs of our foster carers and children first.”

Telford & Wrekin’s overarching vision is for all children in care to have placements that meet their social, emotional, health and educational needs and provide support to enable them to achieve their full potential.

- Children and all their family members have a right to expect that they will be enabled to fulfil their potential, irrespective of their race, gender, cultural or religious background, or any disability
- To give consideration to the racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic background, the gender, sexuality and disability of the fostered child or young person and carefully match their needs with the skills of foster carers
- We place as many of our children as possible in care locally to enable them to maintain links with their families (where appropriate), school and their local community
- To recruit, train, assess and support foster carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of children and young people
- To ensure all foster carers have access to training, guidance and the support of a fully qualified Fostering Social Worker
- We work in partnership with our foster carers to provide good quality placements and appropriate types of placements which provide value for money



“Making fostering a bridge to a better childhood and a better future.”

Types of foster care

There are many different ways to foster some you may not be aware of...

Mainstream

This is caring for children, of all ages from babies to teenagers, who need to be fostered. This can be for any length of time from a couple of weeks or until they reach adulthood – every situation is different. Sometimes we refer to this as short term or long term foster care.

Respite

This usually involves providing a short break for families when there is no one else who can help, this could be for a hospital stay or during relationship difficulties. Emergency foster placements are needed quickly and at anytime, usually in the day but occasionally at night. Children will only stay for a few nights, whilst things are sorted out for them.

Shared care

This provides regular short breaks for disabled children (usually 1 or 2 nights per month). It gives the child the opportunity to form new friendships, enjoy activities and develop independence. It also allows siblings of disabled children to have time with their families and parents and have a break from caring responsibilities.



Contract Care

This also provides short breaks to disabled children, but in a full time capacity. Contract carers should have experience of caring for disabled children, and are paid an enhanced fee plus allowances in return for providing 200 nights care per year for children with more complex needs.

Kinship Care (known as connected persons)

This is about a family member or close family friend stepping in when the local authority needs to find an alternative place for a child to stay.

Wherever possible, we aim to keep brothers and sisters together. This means we need foster carers with enough space in their heart and home to take on family groups as well as individuals.

On other occasions we look for a foster carer who can take just one child who will need that bit of extra support and more of your time and energy to make a real difference.

Foster carers - what we look for...

As every child is different, so are our foster carers.

Have a look at the list below and you will see how diverse foster carers are.

You can be:

- Married
- In a settled relationship
- In a civil partnership
- Single
- With or without your own children
- Over 21, but there is no upper age limit
- From any ethnic background and culture
- Of any religion or faith



But your experiences and personality make the real difference to a child in care.

Some of the most important skills we look for are the...

- ability to listen to what a child is saying
- confidence to handle difficult situations
- patience to try and try again when things get tough
- flexibility to try things differently, and take on new ideas
- ability to work as a team player with us, the child, and others
- commitment and determination to see things through
- understanding of confidentiality and the reasons why it is important
- willingness to be honest with us

and most of all a sense of humour - to see the funny side of life!



What you need to consider

Before you apply to become a foster carer...

Your home...

All children who are fostered over the age of 6 months are expected to have their own room, and not share with your own children.

How many spare bedrooms have you got?

Babies can share a bedroom until they are 6 months old, but will need a room of their own if they remain with you for longer.

Is there room for a baby's cot in your room?

All foster homes need to meet certain health and safety standards. This will be looked at during our first visit.

Is your home insured, clean and free from clutter?

Your family...

Fostering affects everyone in the family, children as well as adults. If you are part of a couple, both of you must want to foster.

What does your partner think about this?

Children whose parents foster share their home, their parents and their belongings with the fostered child.

What do your children think of having a fostered child in their home?

Your children will still have the same demands for your time and affection, even after a fostered child comes to stay.

How will you balance what your child needs as well as the needs of the fostered child?

Financial considerations...

Whilst we like at least one adult to be at home as a full time carer, we accept that this is not always possible, and we are happy to discuss individual cases.

A lot of meetings are arranged in relation to children who are fostered that take time out of your day. They may be ill, and can't go to school.

Is your employer sympathetic and flexible about your working pattern, so you can have time off when needed?

Fostering includes an allowance to cover the costs of looking after a child. There is also a fee for you, which recognises your skills and abilities as a foster carer. These are payable while the child is with you.

Could you afford to give up work and not rely on fostering as an income?



Why do you want to foster?

People have a variety of reasons why they want to foster. This can be because they want to offer a child the opportunity to be part of their family. Some say they see fostering as a way to work from home, or they think fostering will be a good thing for their family to do.

What are your reasons?

Case study

Ted and Julie

Short term foster carers Ted and Julie have welcomed three children into their family. This is what they say...

We have just completed our first year as short term foster carers. We can honestly say that foster caring has been a great experience and has given us a real sense of fulfilment.

It can be tough working with vulnerable children but it certainly comes with its rewards and there are plenty of moments that make it worthwhile.

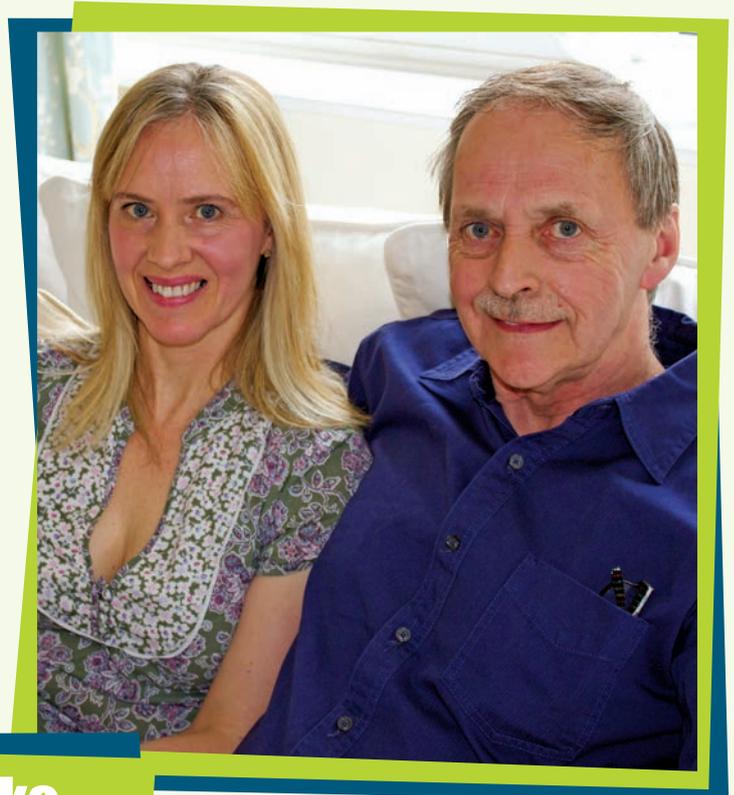
You recognise the need for the whole family to be involved.

You appreciate the priceless experience of sharing the achievements of children in your care, from a baby's first words or from seeing an older child gaining trust, learning new skills, growing in confidence and beginning to fulfil their potential.

It's nice to feel like you are making a difference. It is a uniquely challenging role with each child placed with you having their own individual needs.

We have been supported throughout by the foster carer team and have been given lots of opportunities for ongoing training.

“We can honestly say that foster caring has been a great experience and has given us a real sense of fulfilment.”



“It's nice to feel like you are making a difference.”

Case study

Lyn

As a contract carer Lyn takes in children for a few nights on a regular basis, giving their parents time to deal with their siblings or other issues. This gives the child time out. This is what Lyn said...

My name is Lyn, I am a contract carer for the Council.

This is my dream job, it is hugely rewarding and I get so much out of it.

I cannot recommend this career enough to anyone who wants to help and support children and young people with disabilities, and their families.

I would never say the role is easy. But it is so enjoyable it does not usually feel like hard work at all. I open my home to six local families.

The child/young person comes to stay with me and I get to know them and their families very well before the first stay.

We have a very close relationship and I thoroughly look forward to the children coming. They usually stay two nights a week every month. It is like their home from home.

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“I cannot recommend this career enough to anyone who wants to help and support children and young people with disabilities, and their families.”

I love seeing all the children that I support developing as individuals and their independence and confidence growing all the time.

You do need to work very closely with the child's parents/carers as they know them best. The Council will help with this.

I still keep in touch with the children who I have cared for and who are now adults.

This is a different type of care to foster caring. This is about parents, and the child themselves, having a home away from home and having 'time out' for them to enjoy new things.

It also gives parents/carers the chance to concentrate on other siblings or caring duties and to take a break.

You need to be patient, willing to learn and adapt and love being with children and young people.

You will get full support and training from the fostering team.

It is more than a 'job'.

What we consider... as part of the assessment process

Because children who come into care have been through difficult experiences we have to make sure that all foster carers and their homes are suitable to look after children.

Therefore we need to check lots of things...



Some of the things we check include:

Your home

If it is rented you need to obtain permission from your landlord to foster, we will need to see written evidence of this. Safety checks such as having a garden pond covered, a fire guard and smoke alarm fitted. If the bedroom for the foster child is furnished to the same standard as the rest of the house.

Your health

You will need to have a full medical with your GP. We will also contact other health services to see if you have had support from them.

Your previous relationships

We are required to talk to ex partners and children from those relationships. We will need to see all documents relating to this, including divorce and custody papers.

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks

This will reveal any criminal involvement or convictions on you or family members. Some information held by the police doesn't automatically exclude you from fostering, but needs to be carefully considered and you will be interviewed about this. Those convicted for violence or sexual offences cannot foster.

References

We will ask for six personal references as well as an employer reference.

Any local authority involvement

Whether you or a family member have received support or been investigated by social services, probation or other agencies, either in Telford & Wrekin or any other authority you have lived in.

Education

If you have children of school age we will talk to their school about how you are supporting your child as their parent.

Finances

Anyone who has been made bankrupt cannot foster. In addition, if your debts are considerable we will undertake a financial assessment.

Other things we also consider are where you live, if you drive, how many children live at home with you and any pets you may have.

“Most of all we are looking to see if you are right for fostering and fostering is right for you.”

Training and support...

To help decide if fostering is right for you and you are right for fostering, the next step is to attend a preparation course called 'Skills to Foster', where you will take part in training with other people who are interested in fostering.

Our course takes place over 2 evenings and 3 Saturdays. A social worker and approved foster carer are part of the training and they will be able to answer your questions and support your learning. The course will form part of your assessment, as well as give you more information about the challenges and rewards of fostering.

Every foster carer is required to complete a workbook of standards in foster care within the first 12 months of approval. This starts during Skills to Foster, continues through your assessment and is completed after approval, all with the help of the professionals involved.

All approved foster carers have an allocated social worker that will visit frequently and telephone regularly to support you in getting things right. You will also be offered further training to help give you the skills and knowledge needed.

There is always someone on the end of a phone, even when your allocated social worker isn't in the office. When the office is closed, there is still support available 365 days a year through our Emergency Duty Team.



We provide access to support from other professionals, which includes therapists, support workers and educational specialists.

We have regular support group meetings with other foster carers to share experiences and knowledge, and sometimes speakers are invited for more informal training too.

There is also a support group for your own children which takes place throughout the year during school holidays and children in care have activities provided throughout the year too.

Sometimes you just might need to talk to another foster carer, and there is a Telford and Wrekin Foster Care Association, run by carers for carers who are always available.

A package of financial support is provided. One part is the allowance, to meet the costs of the child, including clothing and pocket money. The other is a fee for you as a foster carer. After 12 months the fee will increase, subject to your attending training and a successful review.

You can find out our current fees by going to www.telford.gov.uk/fostering or contacting the Family Placement Team on **01952 385888**.



The process... to becoming a foster carer

1. Enquiry

Reading this is the first step to becoming a foster carer. The next step is contacting us. We will ask you for some simple details and then arrange a home visit.

2. Home visit

You will be asked lots of questions, and may have some of your own, which is fine. We will ask you to complete a detailed information form, if you haven't already done so.

3. Manager's decision

The information from the home visit will be considered, and a decision made whether we need to know more, or to invite you to our Skills to Foster preparation course.

4. 'Skills to Foster' preparation course

Six initial learning sessions. All sessions must be completed and if you are a couple, both of you must attend together.

5. Assessment

This is an in depth assessment and usually takes place over a 4-6 month period. Sometimes it may take longer.

6. Fostering panel

Your assessment is presented to a fostering panel who consider your application. You will be invited to attend this meeting with the social worker.

What if my circumstances change?

During this process your circumstances may change. You may wish to put things on hold for an agreed time or stop it completely, and we understand this.

It may also be that we need to stop the assessment, in which case we will contact you.

The process normally takes 6-9 months...

If at any stage you are not happy with any decisions taken you have the right of appeal.

In the first instance you should write to the local authority. If you are dissatisfied with the decision, and wish to appeal you can contact the Independent Review Mechanism.

7. Approval

NO
Appeals process in place.

Yes
The next step begins - placement.

Frequently asked questions...

Here are some questions we get asked along with our answers, we hope that they might help you.

Why should I foster for Telford & Wrekin Council?

We look to place children with our own foster carers before going to any agency. Our children will be local to you, so less time is spent travelling for school or appointments. Over time you will develop relationships with the same social workers, so you will already know who you are working with when the child is placed with you. Things are often easier with your social worker and the child's social worker in the one place, working together.



How is fostering different from adoption?

Fostering is different from Adoption because a foster placement is a temporary arrangement that is part of a wider support package provided by the local authority. It is only through adoption that you will become the 'legal parents' of a child.

If I have a medical condition, would this affect my application?

It is important to be in good health to be able to undertake the range of duties being a foster carer requires from you. If you have a medical condition or disability that is not life threatening, is well controlled by medication and does not affect your normal daily life we will consider you.

Someone in my household smokes, can I still apply?

You are not ruled out, but you will not be approved for fostering children under 3 years old. We also expect you to smoke outside of the home.



I think fostering is for me!

If you think fostering is for you then you need to consider when is the best time to take the next step. It might be now or in a couple of months. You decide.

I still have questions...

If you want to ask a question or need more information then get in touch. We will be very happy to chat with you and help you decide whether you can offer your heart and home to a Telford child.

Case study

Kelly

Kelly's parents have fostered three children and this means that Kelly has shared her parents and her home with these children. When asked about this, Kelly said...

I have thoroughly enjoyed being involved in the process of foster caring and it has given me memories that I will always treasure.

I think it has also strengthened us as a family unit as we support each other in trying to create a warm and caring home.

I have felt privileged to witness the strength and resilience shown by the children we have cared for and to be part of their journey.

It is always exciting waiting for the next child to arrive! Sharing your home with a foster child is like having a new member of the family and it encourages me to be patient and kind.

I am definitely going to consider becoming a foster carer in the future. Its hard work but worth it and I would urge anybody who thinks they have the qualities to be a foster carer to do it.

“I have felt privileged to witness the strength and resilience shown by the children we have cared for and to be part of their journey.”



“I have memories that I will always treasure.”

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Take the next step..

www.telford.gov.uk/fostering

email fostering@telford.gov.uk

or call 01952 385888

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