



Foster
for Knowsley

Could you give a child a brighter future? 

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Hello

Thank you for taking the first step in finding out more about fostering. Becoming a Foster Carer means you can turn the lives of children and young people around by giving them a loving home and a brighter future.

We understand that you must have lots of questions and we hope this booklet will answer some of them for you. We know that it won't answer every single question you have, so please do get in touch if you still have questions after you have read this. Remember there are no 'daft' or 'silly' questions when it comes to fostering and we would be delighted to answer your

questions. Should you feel ready to have a chat about the next step, our friendly team will be more than happy to help.

Becoming a Foster Carer with Knowsley Council means you'll have the complete support, training and skills you'll need to make a difference to a child's life. Unlike many Independent Fostering Agencies we don't make a profit. Every decision we make is made with the child's best interest's at heart. We are passionate about what we do and believe that every child deserves to live in a loving, safe and stable home.



“I always tell people that fostering is an extraordinary role for ordinary people ”

Paul, Foster Carer



What is fostering and why are Foster Carers so important?

Fostering is an arrangement in which adults care for a child or children whose birth parents are unable to care for them. Children come into care for a variety of reasons and may have suffered abuse or neglect. Being placed in foster care offers children a chance to regain stability and security in their lives in a family home. Fostering is challenging and demanding, but every one of our Foster Carers tell us it is incredibly rewarding.

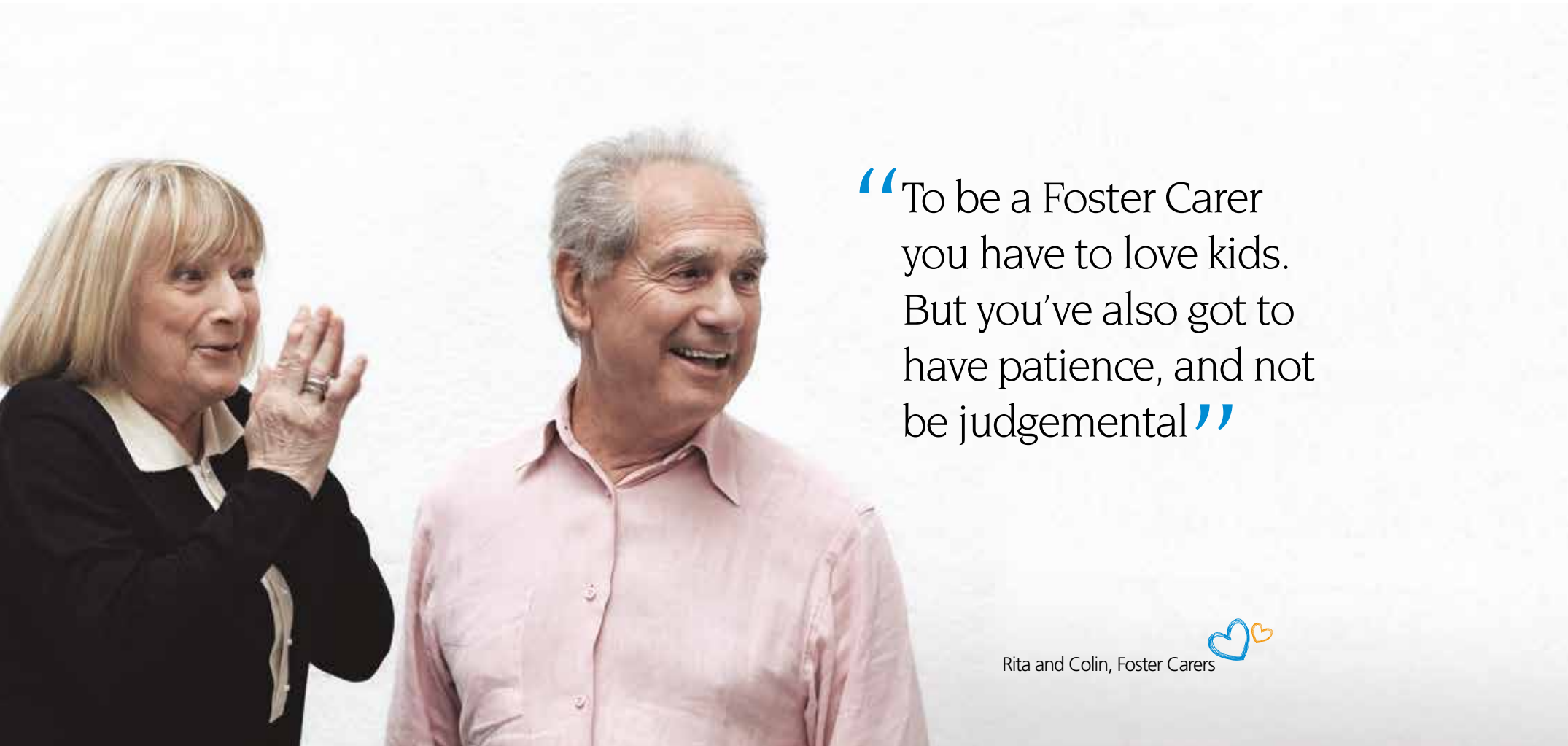
Foster Carers provide a safe, caring and loving home for children (from birth to 18-years old) who are not able to live with their own family. Foster Carers support children and young people, enabling them to enjoy their childhood and teenage years whilst encouraging and supporting them to grow into successful, independent, and mature adults.

When a child is taken into care, the local authority becomes responsible for their welfare. The ages, needs and cultural backgrounds of children in foster care in Knowsley are varied, but they all need positive adult role models to guide and support them.

How does fostering differ from adoption?

Fostering is very different from adoption. When a child is adopted, all legal responsibility for a child's welfare is transferred to their adoptive family and they are no longer part of their birth families.

Fostering means the child can keep their ties with their birth family, and their family would usually be encouraged to have regular contact with the child.



“To be a Foster Carer
you have to love kids.
But you’ve also got to
have patience, and not
be judgemental”

Rita and Colin, Foster Carers



What do Foster Carers do?

Foster Carers really do make a difference to the lives of the children and young people who come into their care. Foster Carers look after the children in their care on a day-to-day basis. They can look after one child, or more, depending on how much room they have in their home.

Foster Carers work with a range of other professionals in the ‘team around the child’ to provide security and stability at a crucial time in the child’s life. To most children this will be their first experience of a positive family life. From attending school and health appointments to taking part in after school

activities, Foster Carers provide children with a happy home environment where their physical, emotional and psychological needs are recognised and supported. They ensure that children enjoy good relationships and interact positively with others; they are prepared for and supported into adulthood so they can reach their potential and develop confidence in their skills.

Foster Carers also play a pivotal role in raising children’s self-esteem and confidence.

Who can foster?

There is no 'typical Foster Carer' we welcome applications from people who are single, living together, married, divorced or separated, heterosexual or LGBTQI, own their own homes or who rent. We need Foster Carers from a wide range of backgrounds, races and religion. Our Foster Carers come from different backgrounds, but they all have one thing in common, they want to make a difference to a child's life.

The law states that you must be a minimum age of 21 but there's no upper age limit on applicants and as long as you are fit, energetic and healthy; you can apply to be a Foster Carer.

You must have a spare bedroom, we expect all looked after children to have their own bedroom and this must be available at the time of your application. Any extension or conversion plans must be completed before you apply.

You must tell us about any convictions you may have. We cannot accept applications from people who have been convicted of certain criminal offences, such as violence or crimes against children. Some minor offences may not affect your application, but you must inform us of any convictions during the assessment process.

What skills and qualities do you need to be a Foster Carer?

Although there aren't any particular qualifications needed to apply for fostering, you do need to have the basic skills, ability and commitment to care for children or young people as well as enthusiasm. You do need to be patient and have a positive attitude. You will also need to have good communication skills and be able to work with children and professionals.

“As long as you've got some love, some patience and time, and you're compassionate, that's all children need. They need to know they're wanted”



Brenda, Foster Carer



What are the different types of foster care?

Foster Carers play an important role working with children and young people to help make sure they get the care and support they need. General foster care falls into two categories - Short Term and Long Term. There are many different types of foster care that Foster Carers offer, all of which come with different challenges and rewards. At this early stage in the application process you may be unsure about what type of foster care you wish to offer. But as you come to the end of the assessment process and learn more about fostering, you will have a much better idea about what type of fostering best suits you and your family.

Short Term Care

Short-Term placements can be for children of all ages who sometimes return to their own families within a few weeks or months. It can involve providing a place for a child or young person to stay for a few nights in an emergency, or can be for up to two years. Short-Term Foster Carers provide a home for a child whilst social workers work with and support their family to make positive changes for the child's future.

During Short-Term foster care placements it is important that everyone involved works closely to support the child until they can either return to their family safely, or if this is not possible, move to an alternative long term home.

Short-Term foster care placements provide children and young people in an unsettled situation the security they need. Sometimes, our Short-Term Foster Carers develop bonds with a child and may then decide, if appropriate, to become their Long-Term Foster Carer.

Long Term or Permanent Care

Long-Term placements are secure and permanent placements, providing a home and family environment to a child until they reach adulthood. Though a child may not be able to return to their own family they may still need to maintain links with them, so adoption is not suitable.

Short Breaks

This covers a variety of part time care ranging from several hours a week to a couple of weekends a month. Foster Carers look after children for different reasons, such as when a parent or Foster Carer is admitted to hospital, or a family needs a break. This could also include offering a break to the family of a child with additional needs on a pre-planned regular basis.

Parent and Child Placements

This is a specialist type of care and involves a young parent and child; usually a mother and her new baby, living with a Foster Carer when they need extra support and care.

Our parent and child carers offer parental advice and guidance to the young parent to enable them to learn and develop their parenting skills. This is a time limited placement to enable an assessment to be completed usually within court proceedings.

What age of child can I foster?

A foster child could be a newborn baby, an older child or young person, up to age 18. Your Assessing Social Worker will help you make decisions about the age of the children you care for, ensuring a good match between you, your family and your foster child. If you have particular preferences your Social Worker will be happy to discuss this with you. Usually, as you go through the application process and complete training, your confidence in caring for a wide range of ages will increase.





A Foster Carers' journey

On average it takes less than 8 months from making an application to becoming a Foster Carer with Knowsley Council.

We continuously strive to shorten the time it takes to approve Foster Carers in accordance with Government statutory guidance. However, our main priority is of course ensuring the process is thorough and is done at a speed that is right for you and your family.

- 1 The First Step** Everyone's journey will start at a different place, reading this information pack may be your first step or you may have already spoken to us, attended an information drop in event, chatted to a Foster Carer or sent us an enquiry through our website. We are just really happy that you have made that first step of enquiring with us.
- 2 Get in Touch** After reading this booklet you'll probably have more questions about your individual circumstances which may not have been covered. Give our friendly team a call and they will be more than happy to answer your questions and help you with any concerns you may have to help you make a decision. The member of the team will also take some information from you and if you wish we can arrange an initial home visit with one of our Social Workers.
- 3 Initial Home Visit** After you've had an initial chat over the phone and feel ready to proceed, a member of our team will come to see you for an initial home visit. We will discuss your expectations, life experiences and begin to gather information.
- 4 Skills to Foster** All Foster Carers need to complete our 'Skills to Foster' pre approval training course, this usually takes place over a weekend. This is designed to teach you the skills you need to be ready for fostering and introduce you to other potential Foster Carers. You will hear from existing Foster Carers and from young people who have been looked after. They will both share their experiences with you. It's informative and offers real insight into fostering.
- 5 Assessment** We will start your Assessment by assigning you an Assessing Social Worker who will visit you at home. The Assessment is called a 'Form F' and usually takes between 3 - 4 months. Your Social Worker will prepare a report on you and your family to include your background experience and skills in caring for children. You can read more about the Form F Assessment overleaf.
- 6 Panel** Once the Assessment is complete, your Form F report and background checks are given to a group of fostering, educational and care professionals, known as a Fostering Panel. Your Social Worker will be at your side to offer support throughout. The Panel will then consider your Assessment and make their recommendation.



About the Form F Assessment

The Form F Assessment takes place once you have decided to go ahead with a formal application to foster. You will have an Assessing Social Worker who will work with you and write the Assessment based on everything you have shared with them.

The Assessment has two stages; the first stage gathers information and various background checks are conducted. Some of these checks include:

- Enhanced DBS Police check (previously CRB check) and a full medical check for all household members aged over 18 years
- Local Authority checks
- Education Department check (if you have school aged children)

- References from current and previous employers
- References from at least two friends and one family member - they will also be visited by your Social Worker
- If appropriate we will also contact a significant ex-partner (somebody you were married to or have children with)
- A financial assessment

Before conducting the checks we will need to see documentation such as:

- Birth certificate, passport, evidence of national insurance number
- Marriage/civil partnership/divorce certificates
- Bank statement/ wage slip/ evidence of benefit entitlement

The second stage of the Assessment looks at your life history from birth to the present day, including:

- Your family, friendships, current relationship and significant previous relationships
- Your lifestyle, health, accommodation and neighbourhood
- Education and employment history, financial situation and your child care experience

Throughout your Assessment your Social Worker will meet with you at least eight times and will also provide work for you to complete independently.

If you have a partner, you will meet with your Social Worker together and separately. If you have children they will also meet with your Social Worker.

We will ask you to complete a Foster Carer Profile containing basic information and photographs about you, your family and your home. This will be given to the child before he/she is placed with your family or as soon as appropriate.

All your information is then gathered together, creating the Form F Assessment. This is then analysed to help us make a decision about your ability to become a Foster Carer. When completed, your Form F Assessment is presented to Knowsley's Fostering Panel and senior management for a decision regarding approval.

How We Will Support You

Remember we're with you every step of the way.

Being a Foster Carer is one of the most fulfilling things you can do. You provide much-needed love and support to children and young people during difficult situations, and in doing so, you need the right support from us to help you. We believe that support is about giving our Foster Carers the knowledge and 24 hour support to provide skilful and confident care, so that they can continue to enjoy looking after children, and can get through some difficult times.

We never expect Foster Carers to deal with things alone, which is why we always emphasise that we're with you every step of the way.

Social Worker Support

Once you are approved as a Foster Carer, you'll be assigned a Supervising Social Worker who will be your first port of call for guidance, advice and reassurance. Being in touch on a regular basis, both by phone, email, and home visits to supervise and discuss any concerns any family members might have, and to make sure extra support is always available if necessary.

Supervising Social Workers will play a vital role in matching you with a child and supporting you throughout the placement. In Knowsley, our Fostering Team work alongside the children and young people's Social Workers and so will ensure you receive the highest level of support and guidance to help you in your role.

24/7 Support

Your Supervising Social Worker will always be your first point of contact during the week. You can also access the support from a Social Worker 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – we're only ever a phone call away.

Buddy and Mentoring

We have a buddy and mentor scheme that provides new Foster Carers with individual support from some of our experienced Foster Carers. The scheme is often the start of long-lasting friendships.

Fostering Support Group

The Foster Carers Support Group is held monthly and is an excellent opportunity for Foster Carers to meet up, discuss issues and learn from each other's experiences. The Knowsley Support Group offers Foster Carers the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences and extend their support network.

Foster Carers Committee

The Foster Carers Committee play a key role in organising regular group activities for our Foster Carers and the children in their care, from trips to pantomimes to holidays in Flamingo Land.

Generous Payments

Payment is usually the last thing on your mind if you are interested in becoming a Foster Carer, but we recognise the vital work you will be doing with generous reward payments. Payments will depend on the age of the child, number of children you care for and can be discussed in further detail during your initial home visit.

Training

Once you have been approved as a Foster Carer, your Social Worker will work closely with you to identify any skills and training you may need. We will ensure that you continue your learning and development and will create a comprehensive training programme for you to continue your fostering career.

A comprehensive list of training and accredited courses is available for all Knowsley Foster Carers. This includes access to over 200 courses and also e-learning that you can complete from home.

If you have children, we recognise the vital role your children will play in the role of fostering and we offer activity sessions throughout the year to show our appreciation and give an opportunity to meet other 'kids who foster'.

“Stop thinking and make a phone call, it's the best thing I've ever done in my life. To watch a child grow and become more confident”






What our children say

“I had never been on holiday before I came to live with my foster carers. I am so grateful that I’ve been able to have such great experiences with them”

Sean, aged 12 

“I never felt like I belonged until I came to stay with my foster carers. I have this big family now who really care about me. I love going for walks with them and having a laugh. It’s home now”

Daniel, aged 14 

“My Foster Carer does my hair really nice. I like going to school and my friends tell me it's nice too. She makes me boss meals too”

Layla, aged 8 


“My Foster Carers are really nice. I love getting baths and bedtime stories here, my favourite is the teddy bear book”

James, aged 4 

“My Foster Carers know when I am upset and always listen to me. They never judge and always know how to make me feel better when I'm feeling down. I'd never been listened to before I came to live with them, they understand and are always there for me”

Bella, aged 15 





If you feel ready to take the next step get in touch with our friendly Fostering Team today. There is no pressure, and we will support you every step of the way.

Foster
for Knowsley

0151 443 3958

www.fostering.knowsley.gov.uk

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