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Welcome

Thank you so much for taking the time to find out more about fostering.

Deciding to become a foster carer is a huge decision and it will take you a lot of time to think about whether you want to take the next step, but we’re here to answer your questions and we’re here to help you at every step.

The process to become an approved foster carer can take some time. It’s not an easy or simple process, but that’s because we have to put the needs of the children first and be absolutely sure you’re the right person to look after the wide range of children in our care. We’re looking for foster carers who can provide children with the stable, safe, and caring family environment that they so desperately need.

Becoming a foster carer is truly a vocation for the right person. It’s not the easiest job in the world, and definitely a world away from the 9-5, but for the right people, becoming a foster carer is the most rewarding thing they’ve ever done. With competitive rates of pay, high quality training and support, and an opportunity to make a lasting difference in the lives of many children, becoming a foster carer could be the perfect next step for you.

We really look forward to hearing from you.

Janet Denny
Birmingham Adoption & Fostering Service

“I feel like caring for children was what I was meant to do with my life.”
Fostering is truly a good thing to do. It means offering a home and caring for a child or young person who needs looking after on a temporary or long-term basis. You receive financial and practical support from us. It is a career, a challenge and extremely rewarding for those who decide it’s right for them.
What is fostering?

Fostering means looking after a child in your own home and as part of your family, but the child remains the legal responsibility of someone else – usually their birth parents, but possibly also the Local Authority.

There are different kinds of fostering, which require different levels of time and commitment. You can choose which is best suited to you.

Broadly speaking there are two types of fostering:

**Temporary:** Children join you at short notice and stay for a period of time, after which they return to their family; or move on to adoption or long-term fostering. Temporary carers will look after many different children in their careers.

You can find detailed information about temporary fostering on page 30.

**Long-term:** Children are carefully matched with you and stay until they move out and live independently, usually around the age of 18. However, some fostering relationships continue into adulthood as children become a permanent part of your family.

You can find detailed information about long-term fostering on page 32.

In Birmingham there are also more specialised options open to you, including Out of Hours (Emergency) fostering.

You can find detailed information about Out of Hours fostering on page 35.

Potential foster carers should expect to engage with children and families from different ethnicities, abilities and religious beliefs; and must relate to and care for children with totally different needs and personalities. Building trust is important, but you must also maintain firm boundaries – without resorting to physical punishment.

In your role as a carer, you will need to liaise with various other professionals, and must be honest in all your dealings. Besides caring for the child, you need to keep accurate written records of their progress; attend meetings, medical appointments and court proceedings where necessary; escort them to and from school, and develop your childcare skills through ongoing training.

“Being a foster carer can be really hard work at times, but I love children and this job is all about supporting children and giving them the care they need. It’s a challenge, but it’s so rewarding.”
What’s the difference between adoption and fostering?

Foster carers are paid fees to look after children on behalf of the Local Authority for a certain period of time, while adopters legally become parents to a child.

When you adopt, the child becomes a legal member of your family as if he or she had been born to you. Once an Adoption Order is made it cannot be revoked, and the child’s birth parents have no legal rights or parental responsibility from that point onwards. Most families then prefer to get on with their lives without much further involvement with us – although our support is available if needed. Adopters do not get paid, although a ‘settling in’ allowance may be claimed at the beginning of the placement, or in certain cases a means-tested regular payment may also be available.

Foster carers are not the child’s legal parents, but care for them on behalf of the Local Authority. They must consult regularly with social workers, other professionals or sometimes birth parents about major decisions affecting the child, and are paid fees and allowances for the services they provide.

Fostering is not so much about completing your family, as offering a supportive family environment for children in need and gaining a sense of personal satisfaction whilst earning an income.

Common reasons for fostering:
“T’d like to help children in need… I feel it could be time for a career change, and I could care for children in my home… We have experience of direct work with children, and have time to give to fostering… I’ve seen other carers do amazing things with children… I feel I want to give something back to society and think I could help.”

Common reasons for adopting:
“We’ve not been successful with IVF and want a family through adoption… We’ve had one child but have been unable to conceive again… We are a gay couple and want to give a child a family for life.”

Fostering and adoption stem from very different personal situations. Although similar in many ways they require different skills and attitudes. If you are considering fostering but know deep down that your desire is really to adopt, we advise you to apply for adoption from the outset.

“Fostering is not so much about completing your family, it’s about supporting children in need.”
What kinds of children need fostering?

Children of all different ages and backgrounds need fostering. They all have challenges and need real support.

The number of children in need of foster care in Birmingham is increasing all the time. Representing a vast cross-section of backgrounds and ethnic origins and aged up to 17, they will often have emotional and behavioural difficulties and, as a result, may find it hard to build trusting relationships with you and your family.

Many will be undergoing hospital treatment or therapy and some may have medical problems like asthma, allergies, diabetes, or a specific disability such as autism, Down’s syndrome, cerebral palsy or dyspraxia. Some are also in some form of special education, and some have been excluded from school.

For any number of reasons, fostering is a challenging task – and our recruitment policy caters to the areas of greatest need. Currently, we urgently require people who can foster:

- Sibling groups of two or more – of all ages, for temporary and long-term care.

- Young babies up to 2 years old – often with health conditions and other special needs such as cerebral palsy, foetal alcohol syndrome, drug dependency and delayed development in all areas (temporary fostering only).

- Unaccompanied children from abroad – mostly over 12 years old and of diverse ethnic origins, they may have been through traumatic experiences and have often lost touch with their families.

- Emergency placements – Out of Hours at night, bank holidays and weekends. This is a specialised area usually demanding previous experience of fostering or child related work.

- Children with particular difficulties – such as attachment disorders; emotional problems; behavioural or mental health issues; special educational needs or physical disabilities (long or short-term).

“As a foster carer I look after all different kinds of children from different backgrounds and ethnic origins.”
Why are these children not with their families?

There could be any number of reasons why we need to step in and take over the care of a child. Sometimes temporary foster care is needed if the family is experiencing problems, such as ill health or stress, and we anticipate the child returning home once these are resolved.

However, we increasingly need to intervene because of abuse, neglect or a total breakdown of family relationships – in which case the best thing for the child may be adoption or a long-term foster home.

Sometimes, if parents have a history of violence, drugs, alcohol abuse or sexual offences, young babies may be taken away at birth. In other cases, children may be 12 or older before we are notified of their situation by the school, the police or other concerned parties.

Of course, these cases are rarely clear-cut and we make a concerted effort to keep families together wherever possible – for example, if a parent has a physical or learning disability. In some cases, foster care may be best for the child’s welfare and safety.

In our experience, most parents love their children even if they are unable to care for them, and their children usually want to stay with their parents if at all possible. There are many sides to all stories, and it is an emotionally difficult time for anyone involved. It is vital to keep children in touch with their birth relatives, particularly while matters are still under investigation.

“Many children have their own complex backgrounds, need a lot of support and need to keep in touch with their families.”
Who can become a foster carer?

Foster carers are ordinary people who do something truly worthwhile.

Foster carers come from a wide range of backgrounds. You can be single, married or with a long-term partner. You can be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual. You may or may not have children of your own, and you don’t have to be a homeowner.

Pre-school children (under 5) need to be looked after full-time, so the main carer cannot be in work outside of the home – although spouses or partners may. Temporary carers for school-age children may work limited flexible hours up to 16 hours a week. Long-term carers can work provided the child’s particular needs allow it, although we would only expect this to be part-time.

Eligibility requirements

Age
Ideally you need to be aged 23 years or over when you apply. You must be sufficiently emotionally mature and financially stable to provide the support children will need. You need to be sufficiently fit and healthy to meet the child’s needs for activity and exercise, and in the case of long-term fostering (with children usually aged 6 and above), to see the child into adulthood.

Accommodation
Your home may be rented or privately owned, but if you rent you will need to seek your landlord’s written permission. You will need to have a spare bedroom for a foster child and this should be available (i.e. no one sleeping in it) before you apply. This room should have sufficient space for a bed (or cot) and a storage unit for the child’s belongings. A baby up to a maximum of 18 months old may share an adult carer’s bedroom but there must be adequate space around the cot. Your home (and garden if you have one) needs to meet Health & Safety regulations and the National Minimum Fostering Standards in terms of hygiene, play and homework space.

Child care experience
It is important to have relevant childcare experience that gives you an understanding of children’s needs.

Your own children
An age-gap of at least a year is advised between a foster child and any child in the family. Ideally your youngest child should be at least one year old before you apply. If you become pregnant during assessment, we will close your application, with a view to you re-applying when your new child is of a suitable age.
Adult relationships
If you are married, cohabiting or in a civil partnership, you must have been living together for at least one year, and you need to apply as a couple. Even if your long-term partner does not live with you, he/she will still need to be fully involved in the assessment, as they will play an integral part in the child’s life. If you have recently separated from your partner, we ask you to wait at least a year before applying. If you cared for children in a past relationship, we will also want to interview your ex-partner and adult children in most cases.

A good support network of family or close friends is essential for all applicants, and single applicants will need to demonstrate how they will meet the demands of fostering.

Financial stability
Applicants need to be able to demonstrate financial security. If you are the sole earner and give up paid employment in order to foster, you’ll need to show us that you can manage on a Fostering Allowance or at those times when a Fostering Allowance may not be payable, that you can manage on State Benefits.

Smoking
We require that all members of the fostering household and their visitors do not smoke around children or in places where children spend time. This means no one should smoke inside the home or in the cars. Because of their particular health needs, young babies 0 – 18 months and children with particular health conditions are very unlikely to be placed in smoking households.

Language
Foster carers will need to be able to speak, read and write English to a competent level, and be able to communicate in this language both with children and other professionals. Bilingual applicants are very welcome.

Working hours
Pre-school children (0 – 5) need full-time care, so the main carer cannot work outside the home. If the child is of school age, carers may work up to 16 hours per week, but this must be compatible with the child’s needs. All working carers must demonstrate how they would manage school holidays, illness, or times when a child cannot attend school. Ideally carers should be able to identify someone in their support networks who can provide regular support. Fostering will impact significantly on your day if you are the main carer, and you will need to give careful and sensitive consideration to how you will manage any paid work you do.

Pets
All pets should be kept in clean conditions, be regularly immunised, and treated for worms and fleas. They must be under control at all times. We will arrange for vet assessments to be done on most dogs and all exotic pets.
Transport
If you intend to use your car to transport children, it is essential that it is roadworthy and properly maintained. It must meet all UK legal requirements and have adequate room for each child to have a seatbelt and safety seats where necessary. All drivers need to be fully insured and have a valid UK/EU licence.

Statutory checks
All household members aged 16 years and over will be asked to apply for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. If you have lived outside the UK for a continuous period of 3 months as an adult, you will also need to apply for a Certificate of Good Conduct from that country, for which the cost has to be met by the applicant.

Disclosure and Barring Service Checks (DBS)
www.gov.uk/dbs

All past offences and cautions as well as motoring offences (including speeding offences) must be declared and no offences are ‘spent’ when considering your suitability to foster. If you have been convicted or cautioned for any offence, we may not consider you suitable until a period of time has passed according to the severity of the offence. Some offences will automatically bar you from working with children.

If any of your relatives or friends regularly visit your house and are likely to have unsupervised contact with any foster child, they will also be required to undertake a DBS check.

We will also carry out checks with our Children’s and Adults’ Services, to see if you have had any contact with them, and the nature of that contact.

If you live in another local authority area or have worked for another fostering agency in the past, we will need to contact them too.

These are the basic eligibility requirements for us to start considering your application as a foster carer. If we decide to proceed with your application then it is our expectation that you will undertake a full assessment.

Your actual suitability to become a foster carer can only be determined during the approval process, when we get to know you better. It is important to remember that not everyone makes it through to the final stage.

“I choose to care for younger children so dedicate myself to fostering full-time, but I do know people who are foster carers of older children and can therefore also work part-time.”
What qualities would make me suitable?

Foster carers should be good with children and have a mature attitude.

Apart from the basic requirements, such as having a spare bedroom, there are many character traits that make people suitable and great foster carers. It’s not an exact science, but generally successful applicants will have a mature outlook and a certain emotional and physical stability in their lives. You should be comfortable around children, with experience in caring for the relevant age group.

Foster children need a lot of time and attention, and if there’s a lot of change going on in your life, you should wait for things to settle down before applying. Similarly, if you have a hectic lifestyle and expect to slot a child into your schedule, fostering is not right for you. We are looking for people who can meet the child’s needs, not expect the child to meet theirs.

You’ll need to be able to demonstrate financial security and responsibility.

Support from family and friends is also essential, and we need you to consider how fostering will affect those close to you as well as yourself. All family members should agree on the intention to foster, and your home should be kept clean, safe and secure at all times.

Other desirable qualities include honesty and trustworthiness, the ability to work effectively in a team, an open-minded respect for ethnic and cultural diversity, and a positive, patient and non-judgmental attitude to disability.

Children need firm and consistent boundaries in order to feel secure, and you will also need to listen and persevere, and not give up in the face of difficulties.

To support the child adequately with daily tasks such as homework, reading, giving medication or making phone calls, the main carer will need a reasonable grasp of both written and spoken English. We also expect and encourage you to undertake relevant training throughout your fostering career, including induction training. This will enable you to meet the Children’s Workforce Development Council Training (CWDC), Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. You will then attain a Certificate of Successful Completion that is compulsory within a year of approval.

Our preparation training will also help you understand complex issues such as child abuse, neglect, separation and loss, so don’t be discouraged if you don’t have much knowledge of these now. Don’t worry either if you have been through negative experiences in your own life. We will assess your current situation, and what you have made of those experiences.

“I had to learn a lot about a different ethnic background for the little girl I was looking after, but it’s been really interesting and she’s been fantastic.”
Are there any people who cannot foster?

Foster carers should be good with children and have a mature attitude.

By law, we cannot accept applications from anyone:

- Convicted of certain violent or sexual offences
- Convicted of offences against children
- Whose household members have been convicted of such offences

No offences of any kind are ‘spent’ when discussing the protection of children. All convictions and cautions, however minor, including motoring offences, must be declared.

For some types of offences – such as Grievous Bodily Harm or Actual Bodily Harm – there is a sliding scale of time that must have elapsed since they were committed. We would need to discuss the particular circumstances with you before deciding whether to pursue your application.

If you or your close family members have had a child removed from your care, or ever been the subject of child abuse allegations, you are also very unlikely to be considered as a foster carer. This applies to all members of your household over 16 years of age – including children, parents, brothers, sisters and lodgers.
What about my health?

You have to be in good health to look after children.

Fostering is a hugely demanding job. You need to be active and energetic enough to meet the challenge, and be able to cope with stress. As part of the process, you will have a medical examination by your own GP when you reach the last stage of assessment – but if you have suffered a serious illness or are currently taking medication for a chronic condition, including mental health problems, we may advise an earlier examination. It may be better to wait until any acute conditions have cleared up before applying.

We prefer applicants not to smoke, but if you or anyone in your household smokes, we require that you do not smoke around children or in places where children spend time. This means that no one can smoke inside the home or in your vehicle. Because of their particular health needs, young babies 0 – 18 months and children with particular health conditions are very unlikely to be placed in smoking households.

If your own children have particular health problems, the resulting first-hand experience may enhance your abilities as a foster carer – but we need to ensure that your child or children’s care is not compromised as a result of you fostering someone who also has their own needs.

If you have concerns about any aspects of your health, please discuss them as soon as possible with a social worker, and fill in the appropriate box on the application form.

“The children keep me very fit!”
What support is available for foster carers?

There is a lot of support for foster carers.

All carers receive a Fostering Handbook, and are allocated a supervising social worker when they are first approved. A ‘setting-up’ grant is also provided to help purchase any additional furniture and equipment before your first child is placed. Please note this grant is for carers embarking on fostering for the first time, and is not available for those transferring from other agencies.

Your supervising social worker will discuss your needs as a carer, and help facilitate any further training you may require. This includes compulsory post-approval training and helping you to compile a portfolio that demonstrates how you are meeting the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers, which must be completed within 12 months.

The Support Teams also operate an ‘on-call telephone support’ service, with a social worker available to cover nights, weekends and bank holidays and respond to emergency situations. The Out of Hours Emergency Duty Team can also be contacted when the office is closed.

Passport to Leisure

This provides free entry to certain leisure venues, such as swimming pools.

“Fostering is all about team work. It means working in a team with other professionals including social workers, teachers, doctors, and working with other carers, to give the best support and opportunities for the child.”

Fees and grants

Birmingham pays foster carers very competitive fees as well as providing a comprehensive support package.

Fees are in tiers, based on your experience, skills and the complexity of the needs of the children in your care, but you can progress to a higher level as you gain experience, attend training courses and develop your skills.

Current fees are under review and details are available upon enquiry. Please give us a call on 0121 303 7575.

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Current fees are under review and details are available upon enquiry. Please give us a call on 0121 303 7575.
Can I adopt a child that I foster?

We are launching a new project in Birmingham to introduce Fostering for Adoption.

Fostering for Adoption allows those who want to adopt children to foster them while they are waiting for the court to decide if adoption is the right plan for the child. We are launching a new project in Birmingham Adoption Service to introduce Fostering for Adoption.

The advantage for the child is that it will provide continuity of care, as they could be placed with carers who may become their adopters. If the court later decides that the child should be adopted, and the ‘match’ between these carers as adopters and the child is approved, the placement becomes an adoption placement.

Fostering for Adoption carers will be approved as adopters and foster carers. They will foster the child temporarily whilst the courts decide if the child can be placed for adoption or should return to their parents.

There are lots of things to think about when considering Fostering for Adoption relating to the advantages, uncertainties and demands of the fostering phase. The impact of the uncertainty of the outcome needs careful consideration.

For a discussion regarding Fostering for Adoption in Birmingham please contact us on 0121 303 1010 or via our online enquiry form. You can also find out more information in the Coram Guide available to download on our website at:

www.adoptandfoster.co.uk/fostering-for-adoption

“Fostering for Adoption means temporary placement for a child with the potential for it to become permanent.”
What is the process to become a foster carer?

Enquiry, information and visit
- Make an enquiry online or on 0121 303 7575, and receive an initial call-back from a social worker
- Information Pack downloaded, emailed or posted out
- If basic eligibility is met, you are invited to an Information Meeting (compulsory)
- A social worker visits your home to carry out a Fostering Initial Interview

Preparation Group Training, Home Study and Assessment
- If initial checks are satisfactory, you are invited to attend Preparation Group training
- Attend series of 9 Preparation training sessions
- Complete Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) checks
- Medical examination and references
- Home Assessment involving approximately 10 visits
- Social worker produces comprehensive assessment report, supported by your portfolio of evidence about your competency as a carer

Fostering panel, support and placements
- Birmingham Fostering Panel consider your assessment report and make a recommendation about approval
- Senior Manager ratifies this decision
- Appeals process followed if necessary
- You are allocated a Support Team and placements process and support begins

Please note: Our process is currently under review. Please check with the Adoption and Fostering Team for the latest information.
I’m interested – What do I do next?

Approval by panel takes about 6 months, but the whole process will take a little bit longer.

The process shows each step you’ll need to take and should take no longer than 6 months between your Formal Application and approval by the Panel. However, the length of time between your first contact with us and your Formal Application can vary according to your own availability for meetings, interviews etc.

1

Initial Contact

To express an interest in fostering, please fill out our online enquiry form on www.adoptandfoster.co.uk or call Birmingham City Council on 0121 303 7575 and leave your details. We’ll pass your details on to our Recruitment Team. An experienced social worker will then give you a call at a time that suits you to discuss the fostering criteria, your eligibility, and to answer any questions you may have.

2

Information Meeting

You will then be invited to attend a compulsory Fostering Information Meeting where you can meet an existing foster carer and other prospective foster carers and talk about the fostering process with like-minded people, as well as getting your questions answered by our Recruitment Team. Before attending the meeting you should read this information pack fully. The details and dates of the meetings are on our website, and you will need to contact the Recruitment Team to book onto a meeting. Please advise us before the meeting if you have any access requirements or if you will need an interpreter or signer. Please do not bring children along, as the meeting can last up to 2 hours.
Fostering Initial Interview

Once you have attended the Information Meeting, unless you have made an express wish at the end of the meeting not to be contacted, you are allocated a social worker who arranges a visit to your home at a mutually convenient time to carry out a Fostering Initial Interview.

We will visit you at home to discuss what you can offer. This visit lasts about 2-3 hours and is a good opportunity for you to put questions to us on a one-to-one basis. It also allows us to gauge whether you can provide a nurturing environment for children with enough physical and emotional space to satisfy the National Fostering Standards, and meet the needs of the children needing care. We’ll also check on things like home hygiene, safety, and arrangements for pets – especially dogs.

A decision will be made following this visit whether you proceed to the next stage.

Preparation Groups and DBS Checks

If everything is satisfactory, you’ll be notified in writing that your details have been passed on to the Training and Assessment Team, who will invite you to attend Preparation Group Training in due course. Here you can meet other prospective foster carers, and explore the issues connected with fostering and what it could mean for your family – in greater detail.

Applicants’ children are also given the opportunity to attend their own preparation sessions. Separate sessions are organised for children aged between 7-11 years and 12-16 years. The groups run for one or two days during holiday times or at weekends. Held every 6-8 weeks, Preparation Training usually takes the form of nine separate sessions spread across weekdays or evenings and Saturdays. The sessions include training on Listening to Children, Team Work, Development of Children, Safeguarding, Abuse, Understanding Behaviour, Fostering and Your Family and Moving On. You are likely to wait longer if you can only attend the evening/Saturday groups as these are held less frequently. We expect applicants to make themselves available by taking time off work if necessary.
You will also need to apply for an Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). You can find full details about this on the DBS website: www.gov.uk/dbs

As part of the DBS disclosure we need to verify the identity of all applicants face-to-face. You will need to provide us with at least three forms of identification. At least one form of photo ID is essential, as is a recent proof of address and your NI number. Please consult the list of acceptable identification you are given at the information meeting. If in doubt, please provide as many items as possible.

Everyone living in the home over the age of 16 will be required to complete a DBS disclosure.

You may have already applied for or obtained an Enhanced Disclosure elsewhere but unless this check has been carried out by our own Directorate (People’s Directorate) in the last six months, we cannot accept it. Effectively, most people will have to apply for a new DBS check.

If you have lived outside the UK for a continuous period of more than three months as an adult, you will need to obtain a Certificate of Good Conduct from that country, normally at your own expense.

If you are aware of any criminal convictions or cautions in your family, please let us know at the outset to avoid delay or embarrassment. Please note that you have to declare all offences, including motor offences, even those normally considered as ‘spent’. If you do not disclose an offence this is likely to affect your application detrimentally. Please make sure all family members are aware of this.

Your Disclosure document will be sent to you directly and is valid for three years. You will need to renew it every three years while you are fostering.
After Preparation Group training, you will complete a formal application form and be allocated an assessing social worker. We aim to do this as quickly as possible after training. The Team Manager will let you know if you have to wait. Once allocated, the assessing social worker will visit you at home to carry out your assessment. This involves about ten visits.

You will also need a medical examination by your own GP (if not already done), and at least three references from people who know you well – one relative and two non-relatives. Your assessing social worker will then draw up a detailed report covering all aspects of your family life. You will have an opportunity to read this and comment on its content. By this point, you will also have compiled a portfolio of evidence about your competency as a carer.

If you have been married or lived with a partner previously (and cared for children together) we will need to make contact with your ex-partner and/or adult children to obtain a reference. Talk to us about this if you have concerns.

If during the assessment we do not feel that fostering is right for you, or what you have to offer does not match the children waiting for fostering, we will advise you prior to the Panel.

The assessment process is expected to take 16 weeks from allocation of a social worker to the presentation of the report to the department’s fostering panel.

This process involves an average of between eight and ten visits to applicants plus visits to referees and significant others. The social worker will produce a written comprehensive assessment report (BAAF Form F report) regarding your suitability as foster carers and this will be supported by the production of your portfolio of competency-based evidence.
6

Fostering Panel

All the reports and evidence will then be put to the Birmingham Fostering Panel, which has an independent chair. The panel will recommend whether or not you should be approved. You will be invited to (and are encouraged to attend) this meeting.

The panel’s recommendation must then be ratified by a Senior Manager in the People’s Directorate before formal approval can be granted. If you are not approved, you will be given 28 days to make another representation to the panel if you wish.

7

Support Team

Once approved, you will be allocated your own supervising social worker from one of the support teams. They’ll get to know you, make sure you have all the practical things you need, help you through your first placements, offer you further training, and (for long-term) discuss any children who could be a possible match for you. Your supervising social worker will visit regularly, review your performance every year, and assist you when they can at case conferences and various meetings. They will also work with you on your future development and will help you to complete a portfolio as part of the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers. You will also have access to the BFCA network and to your local Foster Carers group, called a cell group.
Relationship guidance

You have to consider the relationships in your life, past and present, to see how these might affect your role as a foster carer.

Both single people and couples applying to foster may find some of the information below helpful.

The guidelines below have been put in place in order to protect children waiting for placements. Children have often already experienced great upset and are vulnerable as a result. Therefore, it is necessary for them to have as much stability as possible.

Previous relationships

If you are single and have previously been in a permanent relationship, on any basis, that has subsequently broken down, you will be asked to take time to work through any issues before applying to foster. In this circumstance you will be asked to wait for one year before coming back to us to apply.

Recently formed relationships

If you are in a new relationship where you have been involved with the person for less than one year you will be asked to take time for this situation to become a more permanent and settled situation before applying to foster.

Any present partners will need to go through the DBS process in the same way as yourself. They will also be party to the screening, assessment and training process along with yourself. Therefore, it is very important that once any relationship is in a settled position you are both in agreement on fostering.

Breakdown of a relationship

Should an existing relationship breakdown for any reason prior to or during the screening process you must inform us of this change. Again, you will then be asked to wait one year for your personal circumstances to settle before you approach us again.

Different types of relationships

Should you have a partner who is not resident with you but this is a long-term relationship, the partner must be screened along with yourself and will also be part of the entire fostering process. There will be an opportunity during the screening interview to discuss the issue of relationships fully and you will also be able to ask any questions you may have.
Future relationships once approved

If you are a single person and approved to foster you will need to give some thought to the issue of any future relationships you may form. Likewise if you currently have a partner but then separate, you need to be aware that you are required to notify us of any changes in your personal circumstances once you are approved.

Any new partners will need to go through the DBS process in the same way that you have. They will also be party to the screening and assessment process along with yourself. If approved and you form a new relationship, your new partner will need to be fully assessed.

Support throughout the process

As the fostering process can be very demanding it is possible to have the support of a family member or friend with you. This may be limited during certain parts of the process, for example, during screening and this should be discussed with you in full by the duty social worker.

In addition there are certain organisations that can provide more information and support to you once you are approved:

**Fostering Network**
020 7620 6400
www.fostering.net/england

**Birmingham Foster Care Association**
0121 464 3037
www.bfca.org.uk

Any questions?

Should you have any specific questions regarding the above you will have ample opportunity throughout the process to raise these. However, you can contact the duty social worker at any time to clarify any queries if you wish.

**Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team**
0121 303 7575
www.adoptandfoster.co.uk

“It’s important to not have any relationship problems present that might affect the welfare of the children you have to look after. They have to come first and be looked after in a stable environment.”
Every child should be protected from harm; however, children with a history of abuse or neglect may fail to recognise hazards or danger.

The Fostering Service needs to make sure that the home environment of every prospective foster carer is safe, secure and suitable for fostering. The social worker completing the fostering assessment will consider a variety of health and safety issues to ensure the well-being of children.

The following is a list of the health and safety issues that we would expect you to begin to address as you progress through the recruitment process. It is appreciated that you may not currently have all these things in place; however, these things would need to be addressed prior to any child being placed with you.

All accommodation will need to be clean and good hygiene standards maintained. It should be tidy and free of clutter in all rooms.

**Fire safety**

If you become approved as a foster carer, your home will need to be fitted with a working smoke alarm, a carbon monoxide detector and a fire blanket. All heating appliances will need to be fixed to the wall and fireguards in place both for fires and for heaters. Electric sockets should not be overloaded and safety covers should be in place in unused sockets.

**First aid box**

Your home will need to have a basic first aid kit for 1-10 people.

**Toys**

You will need to be sure that all toys in your home are safe, clean and in good condition. You will need to consider how you will supervise the use of toys.
Baby and toddler equipment

Any equipment for use with babies and toddlers will need to be clean, in good working order and be fit for purpose. Safety gates will need to be fitted on the stairs, and cots need to be regularly checked to ensure they are stable and secure.

Inside your home

Space will be needed for a child to pursue their homework and engage in quiet activities as well as space for more boisterous play.

All floor coverings and carpets need to be in good condition and secure. Stairways must be adequately lit, free from obstacles and have a handrail in place. Glass furniture and windows need to comply with safety standards. Any glassware or fragile objects need to be out of reach of young children.

Kitchen

Electrical cords on kettles and other electrical goods need to be short and out of reach of children. A cooker guard will need to be fitted and all sharp knives kept out of children’s reach. Any chest freezer will need to have a lock fitted. All hazardous substances must be stored securely.

Bathroom

All lights and heaters need to have switches outside the bathroom or a pull cord of a safe length. Any locks need to be out of the reach of children and any medication kept in a locked cupboard. All cosmetics and shampoos etc need to be kept out of the reach of children. There should be a way of controlling the water temperature, such as thermostatic taps.

Bedrooms

There will need to be sufficient bedroom space including space for a bed, wardrobe, chest of drawers and personal belongings. Beds and cots will need to be safe and robust and wardrobes and other large pieces of furniture sturdy and secure. Any mirrors need to be secured to the wall and window locks/restrictors need to be in place. Beds and cots should be placed away from heaters. Bunk beds should not be used with young people over 14 years old and should not be used for children under 5 years old.

Gardens

You will need to give consideration to the plant content of your garden. Your garden should not contain dangerous berries or poisonous plants. All outside toys such as swings and slides will need to be secured into the ground. Garden fences, walls and gates should be safe and secure. Any garden equipment, including chemicals, will need to be stored in a locked shed or garage. All pathways surrounding the property need to be clear of debris. Any trees or bushes should not be overgrown. Ponds, swimming and/or paddling pools will need to be covered with a rigid cover. Greenhouses must contain safety glass and be adequately secured.

Utilities

All gas and electrical appliances should be serviced on an annual basis and evidence of this kept. There will need to be a trip switch on the electrical fuse box.
Smoking

All matches and lighters need to be kept out of the reach of children. Steps will need to be taken to reduce the risks of passive smoking. This includes not smoking indoors, in vehicles or near children. We strongly encourage any enquirer who smokes to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the NHS to assist them in giving up smoking.

Pets

All pets will need to be fully immunised and vet assessments will be required if you own two or more dogs. Certain breeds of dogs are not permitted. Details of these can be found on the website listed below.

Cars (used for transporting children)

Full driver’s licences, insurance documents and MOT certificates need to be valid, correct and up to date. We will need to see these documents and record their details. Car seats and booster seats need to be used strictly in accordance with legal requirements. Details of these can be found on the website listed below.

Firearms

Any firearms kept will need to have a valid gun certificate and you will need to be able to demonstrate the safekeeping of the gun(s).

Useful websites

www.rospa.co.uk
Includes details of various health and safety advice and information including legislation.

www.safekids.co.uk
Information available on safety issues for children could be used for guidance/discussion with carers.

www.gov.uk/control-dog-public/banned-dogs
Details about prohibited dogs.

www.gov.uk/child-car-seats-the-rules
Includes the new legislative changes required for car seats.

www.bsigroup.com
Lists all the British, European and International standards.

“The house needs to be as safe as possible, so at first everything had to be checked.”
Other options

If it’s not possible for you to foster, or you’ve decided that it’s not right for you, there are many other ways to get some personal satisfaction from helping the community.

Share Friends & Shared Lives Birmingham

These are two separate council schemes for disabled adults.

Share Friends links you up with over-18s with learning difficulties or other disabilities, and you accompany them on leisure experiences such as trips to the cinema or bowling. To volunteer, contact Emma Pugh on 0121 303 0480.

If you would like to offer a disabled adult a place in your home on either a short- or long-term basis, the Shared Lives scheme can facilitate this. Contact Fred Clements on 0121 464 3164.

Independent Visitors Scheme

Run by National Youth Advocacy Scheme (NYAS), this project provides a befriending service to children and young people who are accommodated by the Local Authority, but do not currently see much of their families.

Independent visitors take children out on excursions, and participate in activities with them. They may be required to speak up on the child’s behalf if necessary, and support and protect them as a parent would. All applicants would be thoroughly vetted first.

To find out more please contact NYAS.

NYAS
www.nyas.net
0808 808 1001
Other options

Childcare Information Bureau

To become a registered minder for children under 8, please contact the Childcare Information Bureau on 0121 303 1888.

Other kinds of voluntary work

There are many ways in which you can help others, depending on your age, experience and aptitude.

The Birmingham Volunteer Centre at the BVSC has connections with a huge number of voluntary agencies:

BVSC
138 Digbeth,
Birmingham, B5 6DR
0121 643 4343
www.bvsc.org

“We want to do whatever we can to help people interested in childcare. There are lots of options and a lot to consider. We put children’s welfare first and appreciate all interest and applications to the service.”
Temporary fostering

Temporary foster carers take in children who, because of a family crisis, can no longer live at home. This is a full-time job for you, but it is only temporary for the children. They will stay only until their home situation improves, or matters are sorted out through the courts.

We can never say for definite how long this temporary period will last – it can range from a few nights to a year or more – but it is important to realise that the child will not be staying with you permanently. When they move on, either back to their family or to a permanent home elsewhere, you will then be expected to care for another child.

Children and young people will almost always need temporary foster care at short notice. Ranging in age from week-old babies with foetal alcohol problems to homeless 17 year olds, they may arrive at any time of the day or evening, and we may know very little about them.

Sometimes parents will have requested temporary foster care for their children, but in other cases there has been a court order to remove them. Children often come in sibling groups of two, three or more who want and need to stay together. Physical comfort and security is important, and you will need a spare bedroom, or adequate space for a cot in your room in the case of babies from 0-18 months old.

Emotional support is equally important. This is a traumatic process and children are likely to be distressed, confused or angry, which can lead to temper-tantrums, bed-wetting, telling lies, being withdrawn or refusing to eat. Life in your home will seem strange at first and will take time to adjust to, so in order to minimise disruption we try to place children in families from a similar background and who speak the same language.

Life as a temporary foster carer is consistently demanding. When the child first arrives you may be required to purchase clothing or other necessities, accompany them to an initial medical examination and as the ‘placement’ progresses, take them to any routine hospital or therapy appointments and help administer any regular medicines.

You will be expected to support the child’s education, including taking them to and from school if necessary, or helping with homework. It is also crucial to understand and accommodate children’s cultural and religious needs, and help them to understand their situation. You may need to supervise contact time with other family members, or make regular visits to brothers and sisters in other foster homes if applicable.

You should keep a record of the foster child’s progress and any significant developments, and notify their social worker if any issues arise – such as if they are injured while in your care. Regular review meetings will be held to draw up and amend Care Plans, and if the child has suffered harm in the past there may also be Child Protection Case Conferences to attend, or court reports to contribute to.

If a child is to be placed for adoption, you will help to compile a Life Story book for them, with photos and other mementos of their stay with you. You will also be expected to extend hospitality to the prospective adopters during introductions to the child.
Employment

You will be expected to be there full-time for the child in order to build up a relationship. As a result the main carer cannot be in paid employment if the child is under 5 years old and can only work up to 16 hours per week if the child is in full-time education. However, the job will need to be very flexible and you will need to consider how work will fit around the needs of the foster child and school holidays. Even in the case of teenagers, it is still important for foster carers to be available during the day. If young people are excluded from school or not in employment, you may need to accompany them to the job centre, the youth court or the police station.

Temporary Foster Carers are entitled to paid leave, but you must be available for at least 48 weeks of the year. Once you are an approved carer, you can take a break of up to 6 months in between placements – any longer and you will need to be re-assessed before fostering another child.

Support networks

This may all seem daunting, but there are support networks there for you: monthly supervision with your own supervising social worker, local cell groups and the Birmingham Foster Care Association (BFCA). Training is available in key areas such as managing difficult behaviour – but a stable network of family and friends who can offer both practical and emotional assistance is essential. For example, someone must look after your children if you’re at a training session, if you’re ill, or if your children need collecting from school.

In any number of situations, you need someone you can trust to shoulder some of the responsibility – the kind of person who would be happy to complete a Criminal Records Disclosure before they can baby-sit.

Your family

With all this in mind, think about the impact that fostering will have on your own family, particularly if you have children of your own. Any child you foster may have been sexually abused or subjected to violence, and may react aggressively. It is important to help your children understand what is happening.

Foster children should not share bedrooms with your children. If the foster child is under 18 months, they can share the carer’s bedroom provided there is enough room for a cot and the child’s belongings. They can share a bedroom with their own sibling if they are placed together.

If you have a partner, it is vital that they are fully supportive throughout the process, but your whole extended family needs to be behind you too.
As the name implies, long-term fostering is a substantial commitment. You will be expected to care for the child or children until they reach the age of 18 (or longer if they choose to pursue higher education), or until they leave home. Children in need of long-term fostering are already living in a temporary foster home but are unable to return to their birth family.

Some older children may be in your care for only 4 or 5 years – but it’s increasingly common for children as young as 5 or 6 to need long-term foster care, particularly if they are part of a sibling group. But whether it is 5 years or 15 years, you will need to persevere with them through all difficulties.

It’s vital to establish a bond with your foster child, and you need to be sure that you’ll be compatible. Unlike temporary fostering, if you are approved as a long-term carer there will be a wait before you are matched with a child who may be suitable, and we will provide detailed information about them before you meet. If you get on after a face-to-face meeting and would like to know each other better, we will then arrange for them to stay with you on a number of occasions before they move in properly as part of the family.

Once the child is with you, you will continue to receive advice and financial assistance from the Long-Term Fostering Support Team and regular visits from the child’s social worker, who will consider the child’s development, ongoing needs and any contact arrangements. You are also entitled to help from the Birmingham Foster Care Association.

Although you take on most of their day-to-day care, it’s important to remember that unlike adopted children, foster children are not legally yours and ultimately remain the responsibility of the Local Authority. Should you wish, after a time, to take out a Residence Order, obtain Special Guardianship, or even adopt the child, you would (if such an order was granted) cease to be a paid foster carer and would assume full parental responsibility (PR) yourself.

**What kind of children will need long-term fostering?**

Most children needing long term fostering will have complex needs that will take time and patience to understand and manage. The majority are over 6 years old, and many will be of secondary school age before they join your family – often having been rejected by their own.

All children will already have been through significant emotional turbulence, and most have never had the basic love and parental support that many of us take for granted. Resulting feelings of guilt, anger or low self-esteem can lead to self-harm, drug or alcohol abuse, physical aggression or sexualised behaviour. While they may appear robust on the surface, these children are often vulnerable and mistrustful, and will need a lot more love and attention than the average child.
Long-term fostering

A number of children will also have behavioural conditions such as autism or attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or conditions such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). For any number of reasons, they may find it difficult to form a good attachment to you.

If you’d prefer to build a relationship from an early age, bear in mind that younger children in need of long-term foster families tend to be those unable to find an adoptive family, either because of significant health issues – such as cerebral palsy, FASD, or global developmental delay (GDD) – or because of complications with their background, such as a history of mental illness in the family. Or it may be that they are part of a large sibling group who want to stay together.

It is therefore very unlikely that you will be matched with a single child under 5 years old on a long-term fostering basis, unless that child has particular special needs.

We also work with an increasing number of ‘unaccompanied minors’ coming to the UK from other countries, particularly refugees from the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe and other countries affected by war or famine. They may have been exposed to violence or other atrocities, and may be deeply traumatised by the loss of their families, and will need sensitive handling in a culturally-appropriate setting.

How will my family respond to this?

Although most of the children we look after can bring a lot to your life, they will also make big demands on you and your family. We advise against taking on a long-term foster child if you are planning a pregnancy in the next few years, or if your own children are very young or close in age to the children needing fostering. If they are older, be sure to include them in the process and help them understand how life will change.

Experienced parents whose own children are teenagers or independent adults are especially welcomed as long-term carers, as are people with extensive hands-on experience of childcare through work or extended family, but perhaps no children of their own.

Do I need a spare bedroom?

Foster children should have their own bedroom, although they can share a bedroom with their own sibling if appropriate. Many fostered children have been subjected to violence and sexual abuse in the past, and therefore it would not be appropriate for them to share a bedroom with your children. It’s important to make a fostered child feel welcome, but you must also protect your own children.
Long-term fostering

Contact with the child’s family

As a long-term foster carer, you must be prepared to accept that for many children you will only ever be ‘second best’; a substitute for their birth family. Most foster children want to stay in contact with some or all of their relations, and many hope that they will eventually return to them – whether parents, grandparents or siblings.

Although you will be briefed on the level of contact a child needs and expects before they move in – anything from a weekly phone-call, to a monthly visit on neutral ground, to nothing at all – their situation can easily change as they get older, or as ‘missing’ parents come back into their life. Maintaining a positive relationship with the child’s family throughout the process can help you to understand their circumstances, and to build a stronger relationship with them as a result.

Employment

For children over the age of 5 and in full-time education, the main carer can work outside of the home up to 16 hours a week. However, it is important to consider how your work will fit around the needs of the foster child and school holidays. Even teenagers need carers who are available for them during the day, as some may be excluded from school, or may need to be accompanied to youth court.
Out of hours (emergency) fostering

If you can prove that you already have extensive experience of caring for children – for example as a current foster carer, or perhaps a childminder, nursery nurse, youth worker, teacher or children’s residential worker – you may wish to consider Out of Hours fostering. This is a specialist branch of fostering in which carers take in a variety of different – and often difficult – children at very short notice.

Out of Hours foster homes operate when the main social work offices are closed (weekdays between the hours of 5.15pm and 8.45am, and also weekends and bank holidays). They work closely with the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) whose workers cover the crises that happen to families during these times. Out of hours carers often receive children in the middle of the night. The children may be upset, angry or confused and without much clothing. They may not be well. Carers must be able to adapt to the situation quickly, cope with potentially high levels of trauma and empathise with the child.

To become an Out of Hours carer, you must be able to accommodate a minimum of two children - aged 0-16 years - at any given time, in a clean, comfortable and adequately furnished environment. Should you wish to apply for the maximum number of three children, you must have at least two spare bedrooms. Different genders must have separate rooms, and if non-siblings are sharing we will complete a full risk assessment in each case.

You will be expected to look after each child until their social worker can arrange a non-emergency foster home to suit their needs. Ideally this will be within 72 hours, but depending on circumstances it may be longer, and it may be part of your role to help restore the child’s daily routine – transport to and from school, contact with family, appointments and so on – to help minimise disruption before they move onto their new home.

It’s a hugely demanding job, and you will be paid accordingly. Out of Hours carers work on a six week rota, with four weeks on call and two weeks off. Placements will only be made through the EDT, who will pass on any details they have about the child before the placement begins – although only limited information may be available at the time.

Due to the nature of emergency fostering, children could be from any ethnic origin or culture and have any number of behavioural or medical issues – and it’s essential that anyone considering the role is fully aware of this.
Tax, insurance & benefits

The current system for tax and benefits for foster carers is briefly outlined below, but details are subject to change. More detailed information and a leaflet from Fostering Network is available on request.

**Tax**

There is now a new two-element system of tax relief for foster carers. First the tax office calculates an individual tax-free limit, which will vary according to how many children you care for, and how old they are.

Every foster home is allocated a fixed tax-free limit of £10,000 for a full year, which is then supplemented by an additional amount per child for each week (or part-week) that you provide care. For a child under 11 this equates to £200 per week, while children over 11 are allowed £250 per week.

- If your fostering income for the year totals less than your individual limit, you do not have to pay any tax at all on that income – although any non-fostering work you do will be taxed in the normal way.

- **If your fostering income totals more than this, you must inform HMRC** and can choose how you are taxed on a new simplified basis – either as a business, or purely on the ‘profit’ you make over and above the threshold.

**Case studies**

Miss Jones fosters a 10 year old child for a full year. Given that the child is under 11, an allowance of £200 per week, for 52 weeks, is added to her fixed limit of £10,000. Miss Jones’ total individual limit, therefore, is £20,400.

Her income from fostering is £135 per week, plus an allowance of £140 per week. Over the 52 weeks, this totals £14,300 – considerably lower than her tax-free threshold, and so she does not have to pay any tax on that income.

Ms Smith fosters one 11-year-old for the whole of the year, and one 8-year-old for ten weeks of the year. No other foster children live in her house. On top of her fixed allowance of £10,000, her individual limit will include 52 weeks at £250 for the older child (£13,000), plus 10 weeks at £200 for the younger child (£2,000). Therefore Ms Smith can earn up to £25,000 from fostering that year, tax-free.
Tax, insurance & benefits

National Insurance

When you are approved as a carer, you must inform the National Insurance Contribution Agency. Failure to do so may result in a fine.

Fee-paid foster carers (from Level 3 upwards) who do not exceed their tax threshold can apply for a Small Earnings Exemption (SEE).

Carers receiving Income Support or Jobseekers Allowance in their own name will have their National Insurance contributions credited by the Benefits Agency automatically, provided they inform them.

Pension

You may want to consult [www.gov.uk/foster-carers](http://www.gov.uk/foster-carers) for more information on state pensions and fostering.

Other state benefits

If you are receiving Income Support, Tax Credits or other means-tested benefits, your fostering payments are disregarded when working out your benefit*. However, it is your responsibility to inform the office that deals with your claim that you are a foster carer.

* Based on details supplied by the Fostering Network, and correct at the time of going to print.
Fostering story one

Temporary foster carer: Marcia

Having been a Temporary Foster Carer for six years, Marcia is currently caring for Mia (2) and Jordan (7), but over her career has cared for 20 children of varied ethnicities, both individually and as sibling groups, ranging in age from a few weeks to 8 years old.

Marcia used to be a nursery nurse, but wanted a job where she could be at home for her own 10 year old daughter. She’s a single parent and thought at first that she would not be eligible for fostering, but was pleasantly surprised to discover that she did not need a partner.

“Once I started investigating the process, I was convinced I could do it,” she smiles. “Although I’m single, I have a lot of support from my family, lots of friends, and my mum can help out at the drop of a hat. My daughter, Alisha, is a very mature child who understands when my time is taken up with the other children, or with social workers’ visits. But I do have to make sure that she’s not losing out.”

“I enjoyed all the things I learnt through the training. It really opens your eyes, when you realise the effects of abuse and neglect. But you feel encouraged to do something to help. Once I was approved as a carer, I had a grant to help me buy a new cot and some of the bedding I needed. I also acquired my Foster Carer’s Handbook, and was introduced to my supervising social worker.”
Fostering story one

“It was a couple of months before I was given my first foster child. Zareen was a 2-week-old baby of mixed parentage, whose mother had misused alcohol during pregnancy. I cared for her for eight months, until she was placed with an adoptive family - including taking her to all her medical appointments, and the weekly contact visits with her birth mother. I attended all the meetings that were going on, and with the help of my social worker, prepared a report for the court.”

“I also took part in the planning meetings with the adopters. It was a real struggle to give her up – my whole family had bonded with her, even though she was a difficult feeder and cried a lot. But the adopters were lovely people, and I told myself that she would have a great life with them. I could go on doing what I was best at: helping other children who needed a temporary home. I can’t say it was easy, but I was able to hand her over with the knowledge and satisfaction that I had played a significant part in giving her a great start to life.”

“All my placements have been different. Some children have been hyperactive, others withdrawn. Many have suffered from Attachment Disorder, which makes it difficult to form a real relationship with them. Most have been neglected, many abused. I’ve had children who wet the bed, and some who have soiled. Others have no idea how to behave, and just rush round in a whirlwind.”

“A lot of the children – especially babies – have had medical needs, and I’ve been back and forth to the hospital up to three times a week. I’ve also had to cope with the children’s behaviour after contact with their parents: it’s important to keep in touch, but they are often upset and you have to reassure them as best you can.”

“The main thing is, I’ve not been alone. Temporary fostering is about teamwork, and I’ve worked with many different social workers, teachers and health professionals. I’ve done more training, and I’m always learning. It’s a profession and you have to be business-like, but you can put your heart into it too.”
Emma and John have fostered 11 year old Charlie since he was eight. “We’d often thought of fostering in the past,” begins John. “But we never had the space, or the time. Now our three children are grown up, we thought: ‘Is this the right time at last?’ We’re a very settled couple: Emma is at home all day, and we both felt we wanted to offer something to other children who have not been so lucky as ours.”

“We realised as we went through the training that fostering is very different from having your own children,” Emma continues. “But we were not deterred, and in the end were approved for a child between the ages of 7 and 12.”

“When we first heard about Charlie, we weren’t sure we could take him on,” admits John. “He looked really cute in his photograph, but came with reports of very ‘challenging’ behaviour. ‘What does that really mean?’ we thought. He was said to be suffering from an attachment disorder, and he attended a school for children with Special Educational Needs.”

“He’d been in temporary foster care since he was six, when his mother said she could no longer manage. She had asked for help when he was still a toddler, and Charlie had already been in three foster homes before his mother decided she couldn’t have him back again. All his life she’d told Charlie he was no good.”
Fostering story two

“Our supervising social worker, and Charlie’s social worker came to see us to talk over the kind of care that he would need. They were very frank, and we spent a long time thinking about it. We knew that if we took him on, our lives would change drastically – and we weren’t sure that we were up for it. We also had a discussion with our children, explaining that if Charlie came, he’d be with us until he was 18 at least – perhaps a lot longer. They’d need to support us and accept him as part of the family. Our kids were great: when they read about Charlie’s problems they said, ‘Isn’t that what fostering’s all about?’ and we had to agree.”

John adds: “We had to wait a while before we met Charlie. The social workers had to meet to discuss whether we were right for Charlie, and the ‘match’ – as they call it – had to go to the Fostering Panel for approval. While we were waiting for that to happen, we realised how much we were looking forward to having Charlie. So when the Panel said ‘yes’, we were thrilled.”

“We were introduced to Charlie just after Christmas, and he came to us in February after we had spent a lot of time talking with his temporary carer and getting to know him. We took him out with us, and brought him back so he could see the room he would have, and meet my youngest daughter, who is still at home. Then the day came when we had to commit ourselves, and we did.”

“Learning to care for Charlie has also taught us a lot about ourselves; it’s been a voyage of discovery on which we’ve found the most amazing reserves of patience and resilience. Our main aim has been to try and provide him with a loving home environment, and the necessary support for his development. He, in return, has renewed our sense of purpose, bringing us lots of laughter.”

John holds up a note from Charlie’s school, explaining that he has achieved a major milestone today. The look on both their faces says it all. This is what it’s all about; giving each of these children the chance to be the best that they can be.
Out of Hours foster carers: Barrington and Shivanthi

It’s 1am, and Barrington and Shivanthi are on standby, expecting the arrival of three new foster children. They’ve been Out of Hours carers for a year now, and know they have to be prepared for anything.

Lorna, the Emergency Duty Social Worker, phoned them an hour ago to say that Chloe (11), Jamie (8) and Shane (3) had just been removed from their family home after neighbours had called the police. Earlier in the evening there had been a noisy drunken row with the sound of objects smashing. Their parents were seen leaving, and four hours later had not reappeared.

The children were alone in the house, and Chloe did not know the address of any relatives that could be contacted. None of the neighbours wanted to get involved, saying that the parents were ‘trouble’. So the police arranged a Police Protection Order, granting the Local Authority temporary care of the children.

At 3am Lorna and a colleague arrive at Barrington and Shivs’s house with the three children, carrying some basic clothes, toys and belongings, but without a great deal of information. Chloe is feeling carsick, and all the children are understandably tired and distressed. The couple welcome the children in a warm and reassuring way, making them a drink and helping them to bed.

All three need support in different ways. Jamie has autistic behaviour and little Shane has a wheat allergy.
Chloe is concerned about the future, and whether she will be blamed for what has happened. She is worried about missing school tomorrow as she is already in trouble for non-attendance.

Barrington and Shivs have a lot to do over the next two days. With the children constantly with them, they must buy extra clothes, stock up on gluten-free food for Shane and attend medical appointments, while keeping detailed notes of everything the children say and do.

Mohammed, a social worker covering the area where the children live, reports that he has found their mother at home with a bruised face. She says she is depressed, can’t manage the children and needs time to sort her life out. Their father has disappeared. Until the matter can be investigated further, Mohammed decides to apply to court for an Interim Care Order so the children can still be looked after.

The children are continually anxious about what will happen to them, and Chloe and Shane want to see their mother. They all wet the bed, Jamie has withdrawn even more and does nothing but spin a saucer he has brought with him, and Shane has spectacular tantrums every mealtime. Chloe won’t let the little ones out of her sight and is very wary of Barrington.

Barrington and Shivs have to take all this behaviour in their stride, making sure that each child has the appropriate attention, and that they understand what is going to happen next. The information they give Mohammed will help him find the right temporary carers for the children. After 72 hours the children have gone, and the out of hours carers are on standby again for the next night.
Our service

We want to provide the best possible service we can.

Here at Birmingham City Council’s Fostering Service, we want to provide the best quality care - and the best choice of care - for the hundreds of our children who need a foster home.

Every child or young person we look after deserves a home that makes them feel comfortable and cared for – a home that’s right for their age, ethnicity, religion and overall needs, and which can cater for any disabilities or special requirements they may have.

We look to you, the general public, to provide that caring home. And we want to make sure that whatever section of the community you come from, you’ll get the best quality advice, training and support you need to do the job properly.

Our Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Line is open Monday to Friday, and if you need further advice, there will be someone there to talk to you about your individual situation during opening hours.

If you can only contact us outside our office hours, please leave your details on our online contact form www.adoptandfoster.co.uk/contactform or email us, giving us your full name, telephone number and address so we can phone you or post you any written information.

Opening Hours
Mondays 8.45am – 5.15pm
Tuesdays 8.45am – 5.15pm
Wednesdays 8.45pm – 5.15pm
Thursdays 8.45am – 8.00pm
Fridays 8.45am – 4.15pm

Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team Contact Details

Team Address:
1 Lancaster Circus, Queensway, Birmingham, B4 7DJ

Postal Address:
PO Box 16262, Birmingham, B2 2WX

0121 303 7575
www.adoptandfoster.co.uk
a&frecruit@birmingham.gov.uk
Our service

We’re always keen to improve.

Improving our service
We strive to offer an efficient and effective service to all enquirers to the Adoption & Fostering Service, but are always keen to improve.

Access to our service
We endeavour to make our service accessible to all sections of the community. Should you require an interpreter, a signer or any other special arrangements, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate. It would help us if you do this as soon as possible to avoid delays.

Eligibility
In order to recruit people who will do the best possible job in ensuring the children in our care are in the safest and most stable position, we work from strict selection criteria – including government standards and specific fostering legislation. As a result, some applicants will unfortunately not be accepted as foster carers.

Should your offer be turned down and you feel you have been treated unfairly at any stage or are not happy with our reasons, please let us know and we will investigate as fully as possible.

We are acting on behalf of Birmingham’s children, some of whom are extremely vulnerable. If you do not meet our criteria we will not be able to reverse our decision.

You should put your complaint in writing to the appropriate Team Manager (see below), who will examine the complaint thoroughly and liaise with Senior Managers, if appropriate, to resolve any issues. You can also contact the Customer Relations Team if you wish:

Customer Relations Service Manager
Karen Holland
PO Box 16262
Birmingham B2 2WX

Even if you do not wish to make a complaint, in the interests of continual improvement we are grateful for any comments and feedback. The information you provide will help us to improve the way we attract and retain the carers we urgently need.

Delays
If you meet our criteria and are fully committed to fostering, we very much welcome your application.

Should any issues arise, we will always aim to process enquiries within an appropriate timescale. To help us achieve this, please ensure that you complete and return forms fully, accurately and as quickly as possible.

Given that we liaise with other agencies and departments however, delays are regrettably sometimes out of our control.
Our service

Contact details for our Team Managers

**Head of Service**
Janet Denny  
PO box 16262  
1 Lancaster Circus  
B2 2WX

**Lancaster Circus**
Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team Manager  
Adoption & Fostering Panel Team Manager  
0121 303 1010

**Lifford House**
Fostering Support West & Central Team Manager  
Fostering Support South Team Manager  
0121 303 9523

**Tamebridge House**
Fostering Assessment and Training Team Manager  
Fostering Support East (inc. connected persons) Team Manager  
Fostering Support North Team Manager  
Fostering Support Assessment Team Manager  
0121 303 9523
Our service

For Comments & Complaints

Submit a feedback form at:
www.birmingham.gov.uk/contactus

Or write to:
Customer Relations Service
Birmingham City Council Feedback
Freepost License 15136
Birmingham
B1 1BR

Or call:
0121 464 9995

If you can only contact us outside of opening hours, please enquire on our online form at
www.adoptandfoster.co.uk/contactform or send us an email, but please include your full name, contact number and address so we can phone you and/or send further written information.

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