

Information

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for County Councillors

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To:	All County Councillors
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Somerset Foster Carer recruitment: FAQs and how you can help

We need more and more Somerset people to become Foster Carers for vulnerable children and young people in care in our county.

This Members Information Sheet shares important information about fostering for Somerset, from our areas of need and the assessment process, to the support available. It also has different ideas for how you can support and promote fostering as Somerset County Councillors and Corporate Parents.

Fostering: Frequently asked questions

Q. What is a Foster Carer?

Foster Carers are people who offer a safe, stable home to a child or teenager when their own family are unable to. There are many reasons why children and young people come into care. They may have complex circumstances, experienced abuse or neglect, or have parents who are unable to care for them.

Q. Who do we need Foster Carers for?

Our biggest areas of need are for foster carers for:

- Children aged 10+
- Young people needing support towards living independently
- Brothers and sisters
- Children with disabilities

It's much harder to recruit Foster Carers for children with these characteristics, as people view them as more challenging or troubled than a baby or a toddler. Lead charity The Fostering Network estimates we need 600 extra Foster Carers across the South West in 2016 alone – a huge amount.

We particularly need Foster Carers who live in and around Somerset's main towns, and especially in or near:

- Taunton
- Bridgwater
- Shepton Mallet
- Frome
- Yeovil
- Minehead.

Q. How many more Foster Carers does Somerset need and why?

We have set a target of 50 households and are aiming for a net gain of 25 households. This is ambitious, as we did not achieve a net gain in 2015-16, but it was 29 the previous year. Our conversion rate is currently good and targeted recruitment is having positive results.

Q. What do you need to be a Foster Carer?

You must be aged 21+, have a spare room and the time and energy to care for a child or young person. We will do background checks, including with previous partners, and a DBS check. You must not have any serious convictions or convictions relating to children or young people.

Ultimately, whatever someone's circumstances, gender, sexuality or ethnicity, what we care about most is what they can offer a child.

Q. What are the typical qualities of people who Foster?

There is no 'typical' fostering family, and we would encourage anyone who is considering fostering to get in touch.

Research by The Fostering Network and anecdotal evidence indicates:

- **Many Foster Carers** (80+% of newly-approved) **have a 'Pioneer' mindset** – this means they are motivated chiefly by wanting to make a difference
- **Women** tend to make the first enquiry
- Prospective Foster Carers often have experience **working in the public, voluntary or caring sectors**, or with children or young people
- **'Empty-nesters'** can be good candidates to foster an older child.

Q. What are the different fostering schemes?

There are lots different types of fostering to meet the different needs of children in care. Placements can be on a long term or short term basis. Some types can be done alongside a 'day job', but some specialist types of foster care need a carer to be home based, where fostering becomes their 'job'.

Mainstream fostering:

Short Term Fostering

Caring for children and young people for up to three months. This can also include short breaks for children, either from home or from other foster carers, for short periods of time such as overnight or for the weekend.

Intermediate Fostering

This involves caring for children and young people for up to two years whilst plans are made for their future. Intermediate fostering would appeal to people

who would like a child to settle with them and do not want the constant change of short term fostering. In practice many carers provide short term and intermediate placements.

Permanent Fostering

Caring for children and young people for the rest of their childhood. Permanent foster carers support children and young people and are an important part of their family as they mature into adulthood. Most children and young people will be aged seven years and above.

School Holiday and Weekend Fostering

Some children and young people go to residential schools and do not have family members to care for them in the weekends and holidays. They need foster carers for these periods of time who will also remain in contact with them and support them during term time.

Specialist fostering: Parent & Child

These are foster carers who are able to care for both a parent and his or her young child. The role is one of support, advice and assessment in close liaison with the child's social worker and your own supervising social worker.

Home Based Care

This is a specialist service for young people who are aged 10 and over. They need one carer to be home based as these young people can be challenging and may not be in school all of the time. Their circumstances are complex and HBCs need to be available at short notice to care for a young person.

Single Placement Scheme for complex children and teens

Our newest scheme represents a rewarding, specialist branch of fostering, focusing on one child or young person at a time. Aged 10 and over, these children and teenagers cannot live with their birth families, and will have high level needs – behavioural, learning, emotional or medical – which means they must be the only young person in the household.

People who become Single Placement Carers will be part of a professional team, committed to supporting the young person with whatever comes up, and helping them make positive steps in their lives. They would need to be home-based, and will receive a weekly fee of £375 a week in recognition of their skills and responsibilities, as well as payments in between placements. Carers will also be given high level support and supervision from the Single Placement Care team, and the chance to attend a bi-monthly support group with other professionals to get advice and discuss strategies for helping the child or young person.

Short Break Care

A specialist service for children with disabilities. They could have a learning disability, a physical or sensory disability, significant health care needs or a combination of these. Most are cared for on a respite basis for short periods of time, such as one weekend per month and one evening per week. The aim of this service is to broaden the social lives and experience of these young people.

Stepping Stones

This scheme provides help, care and support to young people aged between 16–21 years who are between leaving care and living alone. The aim is to help them to develop their social and independence skills.

Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO, previously MTFC)

This scheme aims to support and nurture children aged three to twelve, who are struggling to manage their behaviours and may have difficulties in the future as a result. The foster carers will work closely with a professional team, including psychologists, social workers and teaching professionals, to provide the right levels of support and nurturing that each child needs.

Emergency Fostering

This scheme aims to provide emergency placements for children and young people in the evenings and at weekends. Carers would need to be contactable and available from 5pm–8am on weeknights and all weekend on their 'on call' week, and have flexibility to be available the morning after a placement is made.

Q. What is the assessment process?

The assessment process takes between 6-8 months depending on individual circumstances. (Please note the assessment process is slightly different for Stepping Stones carers.)

Step 1 – Initial enquiry

People can enquire about fostering by phoning 0800 587 9900 or visiting www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk If a person phones, a social worker will have an initial chat with them, answer any questions they have and take some details. If they enquire through the website a social worker will phone them. Enquirers are invited to an information event or will be visited at home.

Step 2 – Tell us you're interested

Once a person has decided they want to proceed and apply, they will complete some paperwork and be invited to attend initial training.

Step 3 – Training

A prospective foster carer will attend 'Skills to Foster' or 'Preparing to Adopt' training. Their assessment (step 4) may begin before their training depending on training dates and their availability.

Step 4 – Assessment

A social worker will visit an applicant several times to get to know them, their family, home and experiences to make sure they can offer a child security, stability and safety. We will also do checks, e.g. a DBS and medical check.

Step 5 – The Panel

The applicant's assessing social worker will write a detailed report about them to present to the foster panel. The prospective foster carer will see the report and can attend the panel. The panel decides whether to recommend them for approval, and a senior manager then considers this to reach a decision.

Step 6 – Placement

Once they've been approved, the fostering team will seek to identify an appropriate child for them and their family.

Step 7 – On-going development and support

Approved Foster Carers are given **on-going training**, and allocated a fostering **supervising social worker** who will give them support, supervision and guidance.

Q. What support is available for Foster Carers?

As mentioned above every Foster Carer is given on-going training and an allocated supervising social worker. But there are also other forms of support...

- Foster Carers can contact the **Emergency Duty Team** if a serious issue arises. In June 2016 an **out-of-hours Foster Carer Support Line, 01823 358192, line**, managed by staff within the service, is going live across Somerset, which means Foster Carers will have support any time; anywhere.
- **All Somerset Foster Carers are invited to become members of the Somerset Foster Care Association (SFCA)**, established in 2015. The SFCA is a voluntary organisation run by foster carers for foster carers. It aims to bring foster carers together, providing them with a stronger voice that could influence and develop support services. For example by increasing mentoring or buddy schemes, social events and fun events supported by fundraising activities.
- **Support groups are run regularly**, aimed at Foster Carers working in different parts of the county, and on different schemes. These are spaces for them to catch-up, spend time with like-minded people, and support one another by sharing good practice, experiences and advice.
- If a Foster Carer needs a break, we may be able to provide **respite care**.
- A carer can receive help and advice on any health concerns and health care services for their child from a **dedicated Health Practitioner**. And can get help and advice from a **professional** if a child is having emotional difficulties, including techniques to avoid and manage challenging behaviour.
- All Foster Carers have **free membership to Foster Talk** which provides legal advice, financial and tax advice, a counselling helpline called Fosterline, discounts and an online forum, among other benefits.
- We provide an **insurance policy** for Foster Carers which covers theft or material damage by a child or young person to a carer's property (if not already covered by the carer's home insurance).

How much are Foster Carers paid?

All approved Foster Carers receive a weekly fostering allowance to cover day-to-day expenses, and a fee payment which increases dependent on skills, experience and learning.

The fostering allowances and fees vary according to the age of the children in the placement, and their specific needs. For example, Foster Carers caring for a child aged 0-4 would receive a weekly allowance of £147.57 in 2016-17; £163 for 5-10 years; £203.59 for 11-15 year-olds; and £247.67 for children aged 16+.

We also have a **pay and progression scheme** giving additional rewards for carers who care for sibling groups and help brothers and sisters stay together.

There are **additional allowances to help carers organise holiday trips and birthdays, and we pay retainers for our specialist schemes**, which provide an income between placements where carers are required to be home-based. We also provide financial support for foster carers attending training courses.

Under the **Foster Carer progression scheme** (which is to be reviewed):

- A Level 1 carer receives: £50 for the 1st child in placement and £75 for the 2nd and 3rd child in placement
- Level 2: £75 – 1st child in placement; £100 – 2nd and 3rd child in placement
- And Level 3: £125 – 1st child in placement. £150 – 2nd and 3rd child in placement

Weekly fees also vary – e.g. a Home Based Carer would receive a £225 weekly fee, in addition to the standard fostering allowance, and a Single Placement Scheme Carer £375/week, plus the allowance. For full details on fostering fees visit www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk

We also **pay some travel costs** – more details below.

Why would someone choose to Foster for Somerset?

- We offer excellent support and training
- Our Foster Carers say they enjoy working on 'the frontline' as part of a not-for-profit organisation
- We offer our foster carers a fee as well as a weekly allowance, which many other local authorities don't, and have a fee progression scheme. We also have specialist foster care schemes that pay higher fees; and payments in-between placements for specialist scheme carers, which other agencies don't offer
- We pay all mileage a Foster Carer does in respect of the child in placement; most agencies do not pay mileage until they have completed a specific number of miles.
- Our carers are paid to attend training courses to promote a learning culture; other agencies do not pay carers for attending training.
- We have seen an increasing number transfer from external agencies to foster with SCC – sometimes because of the overall package of support we offer, sometimes because they are not getting regular placements from the agency.

How can I help?

As a figurehead in your community, there are lots of things you can do to really help raise awareness of the need for Foster Carers in your part of Somerset.

- Encourage people interested to visit www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk or phone the friendly team on 0800 587 9900
- Submit a piece or column to your local paper or parish magazine about the need for Foster Carers in your area – email dblacklock@somerset.gov.uk or phone 01823 359745 if you need more information
- Help publicise positive Somerset news stories or articles about fostering
- ‘Like’ Fostering in Somerset on Facebook or follow @fostersomerset on Twitter, and re-Tweet our posts and Tweets to your own followers
 - Add the Fostering with Somerset heart on social media, (Facebook or Twitter), your website or dedicated web page, and/or a link to www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk to show your support. You can find the heart online by following this link: <http://twibbon.com/support/support-somerset-fostering>
- Invite the Fostering Recruitment Service to a well-attended local community-focused event to give a talk or a presentation
- Put up our posters in hubs or other key locations you know of in your community – email dblacklock@somerset.gov.uk or phone 01823 359745 to have copies sent to you
- Do you have a personal connection with fostering you’re happy to share or would you simply like to get involved with the campaign? Email Daisy on dblacklock@somerset.gov.uk or phone 01823 359745.

Articles by Somerset Foster Carers

A number of our Foster Carers have shared their accounts of why they became foster carers for Somerset, as well as the benefits and challenges of then role. Click the links below to read these.

Trudy & Matt’s YouTube Fostering blog: Watch Episode 1!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?edit=vd&v=08epcPn2Imc>

We’re the Stepping Stones! Meet Bryan and Pam:

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/were-the-stepping-stones/>

Chris and Ian’s LGBT Fostering Week blog:

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/chris-and-ians-lgbt-fostering-week-blog/>

“He’s the most amazing little boy” – Our Fostering to Adopt Story:

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/hes-amazing-little-boy-fostering-adopt-story/>

“You’ve got to have open arms with young people” – Jade’s story:

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/youve-got-to-have-open-arms-with-young-people/>

INTERVIEW with Eve and Matt: “We prefer fostering teenagers!”

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/interview-with-eve-and-matt-we-prefer-fostering-teenagers/>

Sons and Daughters Month: Trevor's Blog:

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/sons-and-daughters-month-trevors-blog/>

A Short Break Carer's story: "Children have great determination and courage"

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/a-short-break-carers-story-children-have-great-determination-and-courage/>

Justine: "It's astonishing how it feels to have even 24 hours of not worrying" <http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/justine-its-astonishing-how-it-feels-to-have-even-24-hours-of-not-worrying/>

Rachel's blog: "We foster as a family"

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/rachels-blog-foster-family/>

One man's fostering journey captured on film:

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/one-mans-fostering-journey-captured-film/>

Allie: 'Being fostered put me on the straight and narrow'

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/allie-fostered-put-straight-narrow/>

Belinda's message to future foster carers:

<http://www.fosteradoptsomerset.org.uk/belindas-message-future-foster-carers/>

You also can find a 'Day in the Life' of a Foster Carer attached (from the Your Somerset newspaper).

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