



BE LIKE US

Foster With National Fostering Group



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Who we are

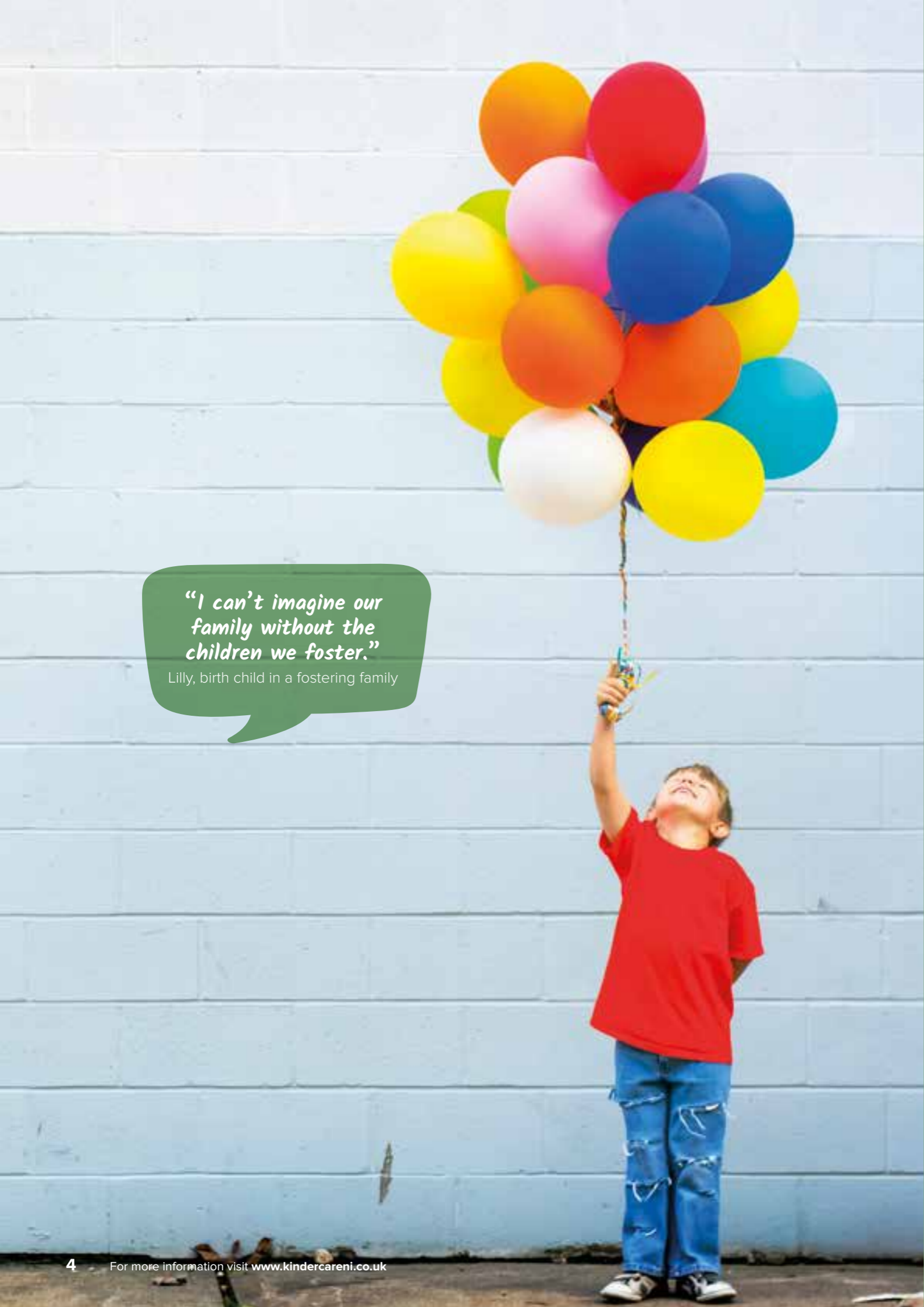
With over 20 years of experience in foster care, National Fostering Group is committed to finding dedicated foster parents able to provide a safe and supportive environment for children and young people across the UK who, for a variety of reasons, need to change their living circumstances.

In England, we are proud of the fact that 100% of our fostering offices, known as agency registrations have been

officially recognised by Ofsted as either 'Outstanding' or 'Good'. Our high standards are replicated and equally highly regarded by the Care Inspectorate for Scotland and the Care Inspectorate Wales. Fostering Agencies in Northern Ireland are not currently subject to inspection.

Our family of specialist, independent fostering agencies cover the entire UK by supporting communities locally. Agencies with The National Fostering group's family are:





"I can't imagine our family without the children we foster."
Lilly, birth child in a fostering family

1. Introduction

Thank you for showing an interest in becoming a foster carer with a National Fostering Group agency and welcome to your fostering information pack.

In the pages that follow, you will find more detail on everything you need to know about fostering and what being a foster carer with us would entail.

You may want to find out more about training and support that will be available to you throughout your fostering adventure, or you would like to understand how the carer allowance works.

No matter which aspects of foster care you want to discover more about, reading this booklet will help you to make a truly informed decision about whether fostering children is right for you and your personal situation.

We are certain that this will be the start of a hugely rewarding journey for you in being able to transform young lives in your community for the better.

Happy reading and don't hesitate to get in touch with our team should you want to know more.

Find out if you can foster!
If you think you could be a foster carer, contact our expert team today who will be more than happy to talk you through the process and have a chat with you.
Call: **028 90 020 247**
Visit: **www.kindercareni.co.uk**



2. What is fostering?

If you're reading this, then you may already have some idea of what fostering is and what being a foster carer involves.



Put simply, fostering is a way of providing a stable family life for children and young people who are otherwise unable to live with their parents.

This allows children and young people the chance to thrive in a safe, secure, loving and caring home environment for as long as is deemed necessary.

What kind of children and young people will I foster?

The children and young people placed with foster carers are from a diverse range of backgrounds and will display different behaviours depending upon their various experiences.

They will likely have experienced varying forms of adversity in their short lives, which can affect how they react to everyday life in a new setting.

Once you have been approved to become a foster carer by our Panel, you will become part of a close-knit team of dedicated foster carers across the UK.

Our foster carers and wider foster families play a pivotal role in not only looking after these children and keeping them safe, but also act as inspirational role models who are able to guide them towards a happy and healthy future.

In many cases, our foster carers will work with one of our **independent fostering agencies** and the local authority to reunite them with their families. Where this is not possible, they may choose to foster a child long-term until they are old enough to live independently, while they could also request to adopt the child or support them into adoption.

What's the difference between foster care and adoption?

When fostering a child, all legal responsibility for them remains with the local authority and the birth parents. If a child is adopted, the legal responsibility for the child is granted to the adoptive parents.

"They teach you lots of different things, like how to draw and make friends."

Sarah, Looked after child

We welcome enquiries from people from all walks of life.



Even when fostering placements develop into long-term placements lasting years, they are still categorised as foster care, and not adoption.

If a foster carer or foster family decide that they would like to adopt a child who's been in their care, they would need to seek approval from the child's birth parents and the local authority by going through the formal adoption process.

Am I qualified to be a foster carer?

Being a foster carer is not about qualifications; it's about your ability to offer a vulnerable young person a stable and loving home to grow up in.

When applying to be a foster carer with us, we welcome enquiries from people from all walks of life.

We want to continue to help create and support inclusive fostering communities, with a diverse group of foster carers across relationship status, gender, age, sexual orientation, skin colour, whether you have a mental or physical disability, choice of religion, or whether you already have birth children of your own.

Transferable skills

What's more, you may currently work with children or have done so in the past, which means you could already have acquired invaluable skills and knowledge that could help you to be a successful foster carer.

Even if you haven't previously worked with children or young people, it is highly likely that your chosen career will have a wide range of transferrable skills that you can apply to your life as a foster carer.

There are clear benefits of having already worked with children, whether as a teacher, teaching assistant, nursery worker, health worker or residential care worker, while having been part of the emergency services, as an example, would mean that you are adept at dealing head on with challenging situations under pressure.

Any role which requires having to manage and prioritise workload, adhere to office hours and be in meetings on time will show a child or young person in your care the importance of working hard and being professional.

3. Day in the life of a foster carer

Aside from the basic definition of what fostering is, to place more of a visual image of what day-to-day life as a foster carer in your mind, take a look at the timeline below which describes a typical weekday and weekend when looking after children as part of the National Fostering Group.

A Day in the Life of a Foster Carer

As told by foster parent Sandra

What a typical **WEEKDAY** routine could look like

7:30am

I always allow plenty of time to wake up Finley, who has been diagnosed with ADHD.

Because symptoms of ADHD can involve difficulty in concentration, repetition of requests such as 'time to get up' or 'go and get dressed for school' are often needed as part of the morning routine to make sure he is ready for the day.

7:45am

I then make sure that Jacob is awake and that he is getting ready for school, before checking that Finley has a packed-lunch ready to take to school and that it goes in his bag along with everything else he needs for the day.

8:30am

Drop off Jacob at secondary school, before taking Finley to a primary school, which provides him with the social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) provision that he needs. Before going through the school gates, I will take his bag and show him where his packed lunch, pencil case and class timetable for the day is.

If he seems particularly anxious or loud, it can often help to reassure him that everything will be OK. I will sometimes give him something to fidget with to occupy his mind before going to class.

9:00am-2:30pm

This is where I get the time to dedicate to personal hobbies, part-time work or my home business pursuits.

I would also catch-up on recording any key information and observations about my time with both looked after children, which helps inform the next review meeting with my social worker.

Afterwards, I might make a record of the previous day's doctor's appointment for Finley, noting down any details that may be needed to run past his birth family and social worker.

Call supervising social worker to arrange my next review meeting and discuss more about upcoming local foster carer support groups in the area that I can attend, which would allow me to share knowledge and stories from my fostering experience so far.

I may also explore the option of local or online training courses with my social worker that will help me learn more about de-escalation techniques involving calm, alternative ways of getting across boundaries and house rules to Finley and Jacob.

3:00pm-7:00pm

School pick-up before arriving home and starting to make dinner. Both children greet the family dog and are able to have some time to themselves in their rooms before my partner gets home from work, then we would come together as a family for dinner.

This routine of family time is not only important for building and maintaining relationships with Jacob as part of our foster family, but such structure to the day also helps Finley with his ability to maintain his focus and concentration throughout the day.

On the menu tonight, spaghetti bolognaise. Dinner time is a great time for us all to catch up after a busy day.

7:30pm-10:30pm

After dinner, myself and my partner will try and encourage everyone to sit and watch some TV together.

8:30pm

At around 8:30pm, we start getting Finley to settle in his bedroom. For us, this involves turning off the fish tank light, closing the curtains and ensuring there is as less noise and visual stimulation as possible.

This is a good chance to speak one-to-one, talking calmly to him about his day and praising him if he has done well in school.

"Sometimes, we just have to go with the flow. The little ones sometimes need a bedtime story and sometimes need some alone time and either is always ok."

Paul, Foster Carer



4. Who can foster with the National Fostering Group?

“All the lads I’ve looked after, they just needed a home and someone who believed in them and could help them progress. We can all do that.”
Graham, Foster Carer

When children and young people arrive at a foster carer’s home for the first time, they will often simply be looking for a warm, loving and understanding family environment that can take care of their needs.

There are certain requirements you need if you want to become a foster carer, but there are also many aspects of your life experience and background that we will not discriminate on when it comes to your application.

When thinking about becoming a foster carer with one of the National Fostering Group’s leading foster care agencies, it is totally understandable that you might consider the reasons why you can’t foster, as opposed to focusing on the skills you have which could change a child’s life for the better.

You need to be a **British Citizen**.
Or have **permanent leave to stay** in the UK.

The reality for children in our care is that they will never discriminate towards those looking after them.

Whether you are part of the LGBT community, are single, have a disability or own a pet, there are many reasons why you can add life changing value to a vulnerable child or young person in your community.

LGBT+ and fostering

National Fostering Group are members of New Family Social (NFS), which is the only UK charity led by LGBT+ foster carers and adopters.

The peer-to-peer support network is available for free when you become a foster carer with one of our fostering agencies, and is there to support you every step of the way on your fostering adventure.

We welcome people from the LGBT+ community applying to foster with us, and are firm believers of encouraging anybody who can give a vulnerable child or young person everything they need to succeed in life the chance to become a foster carer.

Pet owners and fostering

A common misconception when thinking about applying to be a foster carer is that having pets will go against you during the assessment process.

While there is a risk assessment carried out within your home as part of the assessment process, it is highly unlikely that you will not be able to foster with us based solely on having pets.

As long as there has been no history of aggression in the past, particularly towards children, and your pet is not on the **dangerous dogs** or **animals** lists under UK law, then you will be able to continue your fostering adventure.

Having pets around the home is more often than not a huge source of comfort to children and young people in your care. Whether you have cats, dogs, fish, gerbils or farm animals, pets are a great way for children to learn how to take care of other living things, as well as providing them with a friend to go to if they are feeling upset.

Exactly what is and isn’t considered when you apply to become a foster carer at one of our independent fostering agencies?

- You must have a **spare bedroom** for a looked after child.
- You need to be **at least 21**. We have foster carers fostering into their 60’s
- You need to have **permanent leave to stay** in the UK
- You must speak and write **fluent English** but it doesn’t need to be your first language.
- Fostering needs to be your **priority**. If you work, it will need to be very flexible.
- You don’t need to work. You receive an **allowance** to foster full-time.
- No qualifications** required! Only some experience and understanding of children.
- You don’t have to be a parent. We will give you lots of **training and support**.
- You don’t need to be a **home owner**. If you rent, we will need landlord’s permission.
- You **don’t need to be in a relationship**. Single applicants are welcome.
- A **criminal record** will not necessarily rule you out. We can discuss in confidence.
- You do not need lots of **money**. Foster children don’t need financially rich carers.

Visit www.kindercareni.co.uk to read all about the fostering experiences of our LGBT+ carers.



“Right from the initial home visit, we felt the fit was right for us. They were honest with us, professional, but most of all didn’t prejudge me on my condition. I went through exactly the same process as every other carer. There was no bias or judgment; I became a carer on my abilities, not my disabilities.”

Jon, foster carer with the **National Fostering Agency**

Disabilities and fostering

If you are living with a physical or mental disability and want to become a foster carer with us, we will help give you the advice and support you need to make it possible.

Because many children and young people requiring resilient, inspiring role models to guide them through to adulthood have already gone through personal battles themselves, having a disability means your ability to empathise and relate to their experience can be vital.

When visiting your home and chatting to you as part of your foster carer assessment, your dedicated supervising social worker (SSW) will simply want to see examples of how you are able to meet the specific needs of children in your care.

Being a single foster carer

While you may see or hear references to children and young people staying with fostering families, fostering as a single carer is absolutely achievable.

Because we want our foster carers to be representative of the diverse communities that the children in our care originate from, and recognise that everyone’s circumstances are different, there are many single foster carers currently thriving off the experience.

As with many myths regarding who is able to be a foster carer, what matters most is your ability to provide a suitably comfortable home in which a child can learn and grow.

This doesn’t have to be as part of a conventional family setting, with your wider fostering support network of family, friends and your local fostering support team all helping you to become the inspiring role model a child in your care deserves.

Army life and fostering

Are you or your partner currently in the military? You might have concerns that this would rule you out of fostering, but we actually have several current and ex-army foster carers current part of the National Fostering Group.

Resilience. Self-discipline. Calmness under pressure. These are just some of the traits adopted as part of a career in the army that can prove instrumental when looking after a vulnerable child and preparing them for life as an adult.

The de-escalation techniques used in combat situations and being able to think clearly during crisis situations can also lend themselves to fostering children with more complex emotional or behavioural needs, meaning that you can ultimately become a specialist foster carer and help children most in need of a caring and understanding home life.

Religion and fostering

When applying to become a foster carer with the National Fostering Group of agencies, we will never discriminate based on your religion. This is because our priority is to find foster carers from all walks of life who can provide a safe and loving home from which children and young people can reach their full potential.

Once you have been accepted as a foster carer with one of our agencies, we will do our best to place a child or young person with you who holds similar religious beliefs. While we feel that a child will benefit the most from being placed within a foster family home that reflects their cultural upbringing, this isn’t always possible.

In this instance, we would provide you with full training on the practicalities of the child’s religion, including specific holidays or dietary requirements, as well as encouraging communication with the child’s birth family where possible. It would be our expectation that you respect and maintain a child or young person’s identity while they are with you.



Renting and fostering

Many people wanting to become foster carers ask us if they can foster if they don’t own their home. Despite one in three people believing that you cannot foster if you are living in rented accommodation, you can absolutely become a foster carer regardless of home ownership.

Renting can often be a personal choice, and does not necessarily reflect your financial stability or ability to take care of a child’s needs. During your assessment, we will just need to make sure that you can afford to keep up with rental payments, your tenancy agreement is set for a fixed period of time, and that your rental is comfortable and welcoming.

The only instance where you may not be able to foster with one of our leading agencies is if you are renting a one-bedroom apartment, which is a requirement for anyone wishing to become a foster carer, as a child will need access to their own room throughout their time in your care.

21 years-of-age to foster

As well as needing access for a looked-after child to a spare bedroom, not having any serious previous criminal convictions and being in good health, you will also need to be over the age of 21-years-old to foster with one of our agencies.

We believe that this allows you enough time to gain your own life experience as an adult that you can impart on a child, as well as being the age where many will have finished university or college courses and be ready for the next stage of your life.

Because we have many current foster carers who are in their twenties, some who have extensive experience of being part of foster families as young people, to those who are in their 50s and 60s, this means that we are able to choose from a diverse community of foster carers where there are no limits on the positive influence various generations can offer children and young people.



5. Why do children need foster care?

There are many reasons why a child might be taken into foster care.

In some cases, this can be due to severe health or financial reasons relating to the child's birth parents or primary caregivers, as well as any other changes in living circumstances which makes meeting the needs of a child unsustainable.

Other children will not be able to return home because a parent has died and nobody else in the extended family is in a position to care for them or provide consistent care.

Some children need a foster family for a very short period of time where there is nobody within their extended family who has the space or ability to look after them. Other children and young people will remain looked after for longer until their parents are helped to make changes to their lifestyle that will enable them to care for their children again.

Most children being looked after by our foster carers have experienced some sort of trauma in their short lives. This can include physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or having had their basic human needs such as nutrition and general health neglected for some time.

Children deserve to grow up in a household upholding safety, affection, care and understanding, as well as the personal freedom and opportunity in which to develop a sense of belonging and self-identity on their place in the world; something which our dedicated network of foster carers across the UK are able to provide.

We are able to readily match appropriate carers who will be understanding of their past and how they may want to move on emotionally.

Guiding children to overcome challenges and adapt to a new way of life

Children who cannot live with their birth family may initially experience a level of uncertainty or confusion at the idea that they cannot live with their birth family. They may exhibit behaviour that reflects their situation and this can present itself in many forms, including being quick to anger or initially appearing withdrawn from those around them.

We continually equip our foster carers with the requisite local support and access to specialist training courses so that you will know how to deal with any challenging situations that arise throughout your foster placement.



Placing the right foster children with the right foster carers

It is important that the needs of each individual child are taken into consideration, which is why our staff are highly skilled in the process of matching each child with their carer.

We work with local authorities across England, Wales and Scotland and with Trusts in Northern Ireland to place children into our safe, nurturing foster homes. It is understandable that these children will require patience, understanding and commitment from adults to stick by them and help them overcome some of the challenges they have already faced so early in their lives.

Each of our independent fostering agencies belonging to the National Fostering Group is confident of finding such carers and is committed to working alongside them to ensure the best experience for both our foster carers and the children in their care.

Because our foster carers derive from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, we are able to readily match appropriate carers who will be understanding of their past and how they may want to move on emotionally, while at the same time identifying with their roots so that the child can quickly feel a sense of belonging with their new fostering family.



Children deserve to grow up in a household upholding safety, affection, care and understanding, as well as the personal freedom and opportunity in which to develop a sense of belonging and self-identity.



“Every child that has come into our care, has always fit right in with the family. The team at National Fostering Group are very good at getting to know you and what little ones will work well with your family dynamic”

Lynne, Foster Carer

6. How does the fostering sector work together to inspire brighter futures for younger generations?

We anticipate that over 8,000 new foster families will be needed over the next year to ensure that all foster children can stay in a home to call their own.

This means that we work tirelessly with Trusts in Northern Ireland and local authorities across the UK every day to ensure that as many children and young people as possible needing a safe and caring home to stay in have their needs met.

Because the National Fostering Group's 14 independent fostering agencies are well established in their respective regions and are often the preferred fostering provider for their local authorities, we have built tried and trusted relationships with family social workers and supporting council staff over many years.

Care planning with children and young people at the heart of everything we do

Once it has been determined that one of our independent fostering agencies will be needed to help find the most appropriate foster carer for a child, our supervising social worker (SSW) would work with a young person's family social worker to understand more about them and create a comprehensive Care Plan.

A child's Care Plan would inform both yourself as the foster carer of the looked-after child and our fostering agency staff about everyday living arrangements that a child in your care has become accustomed to in the past. This will be communicated with you and a copy of the plan given either before a looked-after child is under your care, or within 10 days of them living with you.

"Before, I used to get angry over silly things. But since living with Stacey I am much calmer as I have a lot more friends."

Lydia, Looked after child



Meeting aspirations and achieving best possible outcomes

Because we have the largest population of foster carers in the UK, we are able to provide more foster carers with a diverse range of life experience and backgrounds to a local authority needing to find a nurturing foster family to take care of vulnerable children and young people.

As an established provider of high-quality foster carer over the last two decades, we understand the varied and unique needs of children requiring care.

With the aim of keeping children as close to their existing school, friends and community where possible, it is important that yourself or someone in your immediate fostering support network are available for school runs at all times, as this is an essential part of the fostering process.

We can offer placements to individual children, siblings, parent and child, as well as emergency or long-term and specialist, therapeutically focused matches.

Our expert **support and training** services mean that our foster carers are always well-equipped to meet challenges head on when looking after children with complex difficulties and significant health needs.

Because we work with local Trusts to individually tailor and subsequently monitor care plans due to the wide ranging needs and desired outcomes of each child placed with us, with the help of our foster carers, we are able to improve the quality of life of every child in that comes under our care.



CARE PLAN

The Care Plan sets out clear and easy to understand guidelines for what is expected from all parties in terms of meeting the specific needs of a child, which usually includes information about:

Education

Whether they can continue attending their current school, have specific SEND requirements, as well as confirmation of how they are going to travel to and from school.

Health

Details on any ongoing illnesses or prominent health issues, as well as current medication schedules and upcoming appointments. This could also involve techniques for managing emotional, social or behavioural challenges, which may be coupled with child or family therapy meetings.

Culture and Religion

A foster carer who is understanding of the needs of a child to pray at certain times of the day or to attend religious services is imperative, and even essential. Language, racial identity, class and family attitudes are all taken into account during the matching process.

Dietary requirements

For medical reasons or otherwise, some children can arrive into your home with certain nutritional requirements that it will be important to maintain. For example, they may need guidance and encouragement to eat at the table as family, or may need regular monitoring because of a previous poor relationship with food in general.

Likes and dislikes

Helping you get to know them and their personality so that you can break the ice with conversations and activities around some of their most fervent interests.

This could include types of days out they enjoy doing as a family, such as going to the park or for a picnic, as well as things they are passionate about at home, including watching films or playing video games.

7. How we support our foster carers

When you become a foster carer with one of our leading independent fostering agencies, you will have immediate access to unbeatable local support which you can always rely on.

From the moment you express your wish to foster with us, we provide you with all the advice and information you need to make an informed decision on whether going into foster care is right for you.

You'll have the support of a friendly team who will talk you through the role in more detail and help you to explore your expectations and feelings about fostering children with complex needs.



"You never feel as if you are on your own, there is 24 hour contact. The support has been phenomenal."

Carol, Foster Carer

Foster Carers Support

Once you have been approved to become a foster carer with the agency nearest to your location, we'll put in place a robust and extensive support network that you can always rely on, which includes:

- **Regular visits** from your Supervising Social Worker, who you will have already got to know well during the assessment process. They can offer you friendly, personalised support and mentoring to help you become the best possible foster carer you can be, as well as being your primary contact with your local authority on your behalf.
- **Regular telephone contact and newsletters** via e-mail filled with helpful fostering tips and advice.
- **24/7, 365 days a year telephone line** with a direct number to a qualified social worker, so that you will have your questions answered when you need it most, even if it's in the middle of the night! Because we know caring for a child isn't time restricted, we work outside normal hours too.
- **Access to industry leading free training courses**, both classroom based with other foster carers and online to access at home at a time convenient for you.
- **Support groups for foster carers.** Giving you the opportunity to meet with, socialise and form a network of other foster carers in your area to support you.
- **Free membership** to **The Fostering Network**, the UK's leading fostering charity who can offer legal and financial advice when needed.
- **Regular social activities** which include events and meet-ups designed with looked-after children, carers and birth children in mind, so that the whole family can join in.
- **A generous fostering allowance** so that you can provide for each child when in placement, as well as having money left over for days out and holidays.

Helping Hands Scheme

We have a team of experienced and skilled Foster Carers who are available to offer peer support, both during your fostering assessment and when you begin to foster. They will offer valuable support and guidance, safe in the knowledge that they have been through the very same experience as you.

Once you have been approved as a foster carer with us, your buddy will introduce you to your local support group and is there to help you fully integrate into the fostering world, safe in the knowledge that they have been through the very same experience as you.

NFA World

No matter which of our fostering agencies you decide to become a foster carer with, you will have your own login details for access to NFA World.

NFA World is a dedicated online information portal that enables you to keep track of your daily recordings, book onto training courses and keep up to date with what's happening within your specific agency in the form of regular newsletters.

You will also find more information on Youth Voice, which is interactive digital platform that allows foster carers, social workers and those involved in a child or young person's care the ability to more frequently and more easily determine how they are feeling about their foster placement.



Financial Support

We really value our National Fostering Group carers and the children they care for, so we believe it's really important for them to have a good quality of life.

- You will receive a generous fostering allowance for a child in your care
- You may also be exempt from paying tax on this allowance
- You'll need to register as self-employed and pay NI contributions
- You might also be entitled to Working Tax Credit

• What does the allowance cover?

It's intended to cover all the needs of each foster child including food, clothing, travel, activities, savings and so on. Everyone's fostering allowance is different, because it's dependent on the type of care provided, for example if a child has complex needs. It also depends on the age of the children and whether you are fostering in London, the South East or the rest of the UK.

• Will I be taxed on the allowance?

In general, foster carers are exempt from paying tax on the fostering allowance. The exception would be if a foster carer with multiple placements or additional work gave an income above the current government threshold.

• Will I have to pay National Insurance?

All foster carers must register as self-employed and pay National Insurance contributions.

• Do I qualify for tax credits or additional benefits?

Fostering counts as self-employment, so you may be entitled to Working Tax Credit and also Child Tax Credit if you have children of your own.

A Little Extra Help

Max Cards

Max Cards are an established scheme for foster carers, helping you create positive lasting memories for the children in your care. As a valued National Fostering Group carer, you have the opportunity to receive a card assigned to yourself – not a child, making it easier to access discounts.



Bridging Retainer Payments

There can never be a price on the value you bring in building incredible futures for the children and young people you look after. We understand your fostering allowance is pivotal and we do all we can to bring you financial peace of mind.



In order to provide you with more security in between placements, we provide our carers with a weekly bridging retainer payment, plus another payment to be made at the start of your next placement.

If you are available for fostering and have no children placed with you, you will qualify for Bridging Retainer Payments if the following criteria are met:

- You have been an approved foster carer with National Fostering Group for one year or more
- You have not already received 6 weeks of Bridging Retainer Payments in a rolling 12-month period
- You are not 'on hold' with your agency, or offering respite care only



Free membership to The Cinema Society

All approved carers in the National Fostering Group can enjoy up to 40% off the price of taking the family to the cinema.

High Street discounts through The National Fostering Group Hub

As a foster carer with us, you can access the National Fostering Group Hub. This is a fantastic online programme providing discounts and cashback with over 800 retailers and service providers.

From the high street to holidays, groceries to gardening, before you buy anything – take a look at the National Fostering Group Hub to save money on everyday purchases, utilities or special occasions.



Save money on London West End shows

The National Fostering Group Theatre Club is a special service to help book tickets to London theatre – and save money.



The Theatre Club features discounts and special offers to a wealth of West End musicals and plays in London, plus special theatre and dinner packages and hotel and theatre breaks.

Free use of the Encyclopaedia Britannica online library

Finding information online to support a child through any stage of their education can be a minefield. Free access to Encyclopaedia Britannica for all National Fostering Group Carers helps you access high quality and trusted information quickly and easily. Encyclopaedia Britannica can be used by any child, young person or adult in your fostering household.

Foster carer ID card

All carers in the National Fostering Group can have access to an ID card, to help make things run a little smoother.



The cards are free to you, and can help with some of the day to day aspects of fostering. They give you evidence of being a foster carer when completing tasks such as arranging appointments or ordering prescriptions.

Training (see page 30)

When you make the decision to foster with us, a package of high-quality training and development programmes open up to you.

Find out more about our agency support

Contact our expert team today who will be more than happy to give you more information.

Call: **028 90 020 247**

Visit: **www.kindercareni.co.uk**

8. Why should you choose a National Fostering Group agency?

There are around **65,000 children and young people living with almost 55,000 loving foster families in the United Kingdom.**

However, there are currently over 8,000 more foster families required to ensure that every vulnerable child and young person requiring a caring home for however long they need one always has the opportunity.

Foster carers are part of the professional team who work in partnership with the National Fostering Group and local authorities to provide a safe, secure and nurturing family environment and allow children to stay in contact with their birth families whenever possible.



“My carer is like Andy from Toy Story, Andy never gives up on the toys and my carer never gives up on me.”

Chloe, Looked after child

What does Kindercare Northern Ireland offer you as a potential foster carer?

As well as becoming part of a professional and dedicated fostering services team, you will receive a nominated and highly qualified supervising social worker.

You will also have a minimum of one telephone call per week and one supervision visit per month so that we can check in to see how you are getting on. This gives you an opportunity to talk through any landmark moments, celebrations and even challenges you may be facing along the way.

Invitations to support groups in your local area to meet with other foster carers can really help you integrate into your very own fostering community, and for every child you have in placement, a generous fostering allowance will be paid on a monthly basis.

Training and Development

Kindercare Northern Ireland provides foster care training courses that are available to all our foster carers.

These courses are completely free and are conducted by expert foster trainers, delivered in a high-quality, flexible and straightforward format. Each session is designed to give you valuable skills and insight you will need into the life of a foster carer, helping you to grow in confidence towards becoming a foster care expert yourself.

Our foster care training has been created to fit around your schedule with a child or children in your care, so you won't have to go far to find

one of our training courses. You can also access additional online training courses from your computer, tablet and smartphone, which can be completed in a time and place suitable to you.

We also offer overview courses for new foster carers, including our **Skills to Foster training** which introduces you to the basics of foster care and what it takes to successfully raise a vulnerable child or young person, as well as more bespoke training which ensures you are ready to become involved in more **specialist types of foster care**.

Allowance

We really value our foster carers and the children they care for, and we believe it's important for the whole foster family to have enough money to maintain a good quality of life.

That's why we provide a substantial fostering allowance when you become a foster carer (exact allowance amount can change dependent upon complexity of care needs required and amount of children and young people you care for in total).

With this allowance, you would be able to meet all the needs of a foster child or young person, as well as having some money left over to help with living costs for the household.

Quality and Excellence

We are proud of our fostering services and continue to work hard with staff from each of our independent fostering agencies to ensure that we can maintain and build upon the high standards of foster care provision we have established over the years.

This is a particularly pleasing score considering that Ofsted reports are based upon professional inspections, feedback from our carers, our children and young people and our respected network of partners.

Our agencies in Scotland are monitored by the Care Inspectorate for Scotland and in Wales

it is Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), formerly known as the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). Our agency in Northern Ireland is primarily regulated by the Northern Ireland Assembly.



Benefits National Fostering Group agencies offer children and young people

For many children and young people that come into the care of our foster families, they will have experienced levels of abuse, trauma or neglect that can be difficult to comprehend.

By making the decision to become a foster carer with one of our agencies, you will be placed in an endlessly rewarding role as an inspiring role model who can help them overcome some of the social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that can appear as a result of their past experiences.

Simply giving a child access to a safe and nurturing foster family with a stable network of family and friends can provide a vulnerable child or young person with a sense of identity and belonging which they may not have felt in the past.

Listed below are several ways in which National Fostering Group staff and foster carers alike help improve the lives of children and young people:

Renewed trust in adults

Children who come into foster care may naturally find it difficult to trust adults and guardians of their care again.

While adjusting to a new environment in a foster carer's home may feel strange initially, after a period of time showing them care and attention as part of a close-knit family routine, they will start to realise that there is still good in the world and that all adults aren't to be mistrusted.

Hope for the future

Particularly relevant to older children and teenagers coming into foster care, having a foster family that encourages personal and academic development can really help them to pursue hobbies, activities and school subjects that can help them to build a confident sense of self.

This new sense of direction and empowerment can lead them to thinking more about what they would like to do in the future once they have left school, as well as seek the love and compassion shown to them by a foster family that they will want to find for themselves one day.

Older children and teenagers coming into foster care, having a foster family that encourages personal and academic development can really help them to pursue hobbies, activities and school subjects that can help them to build a confident sense of self.

Education

As their home life became increasingly more uncertain and troubled, this can also have an impact on their attitude to school and education.

Inconsistent school attendance and difficulty performing to their full abilities can mean that children and young people have developed a negative association with school life.

Finding a foster family that can provide them consistent transport to and from the school gates, as well as motivate them to complete homework and take a new found interest in their academic performance are just some of the ways our foster carers help them to achieve their full potential.

NFA Group's Acorn Education division also devised an Acorn Digital Learning (ADL) real-time online teaching platform.

Aimed towards children and young people studying at Key Stage 3 and 4 level requiring an alternative learning environment, this immersive and high-quality distance-learning provision allows children who cannot attend mainstream school for medical, mental health, anxiety or behavioural reasons, the opportunity to continue their studies.

Therapeutic care

As many children and young people under the care of our foster carers have social, emotional and behavioural needs, it is imperative that they have access to the right therapeutic and/or medical treatment that can help them manage their symptoms and become happy and healthy individuals.

By taking them to GP, hospital and therapy appointments, as well as attending our therapeutic courses to understand more about de-escalation techniques and ways to manage emotional difficulties in children under your care, you can make a significant difference to their overall wellbeing.

"I feel happy that we are the ones doing it and helping children. It is a tough thing to do but if you have people around you, you will get through it."

Harvey, Birth child in a fostering family



What extra benefits will I receive as a National Fostering Group Carer?

Max Cards

Max Cards are an established scheme for foster carers, helping you create positive lasting memories for the children in your care. As a valued National Fostering Group carer, you have the opportunity to receive a card assigned to yourself – not a child, making it easier to access discounts.



Bridging Retainer Payments

There can never be a price on the value you bring in building incredible futures for the children and young people you look after. We understand your fostering allowance is pivotal and we do all we can to bring you financial peace of mind.



In order to provide you with more security in between placements, we provide our carers with a weekly bridging retainer payment, plus another payment to be made at the start of your next placement.

If you are available for fostering and have no children placed with you, you will qualify for Bridging Retainer Payments if the following criteria are met:

- You have been an approved foster carer with National Fostering Group for one year or more
- You have not already received 6 weeks of Bridging Retainer Payments in a rolling 12-month period
- You are not 'on hold' with your agency, or offering respite care only



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9. What exactly happens during the approval process when I want to become a foster carer?

There is a total of seven key stages when starting your fostering adventure towards approval as a foster carer with one of our agencies.

Taking on average between four to six months in total, your dedicated supervising social worker will be with you every step of the way. They will be on hand to provide expert support by answering any questions you have about fostering in general, as well as offering clear updates about what is required for each distinctive step of the approval process.

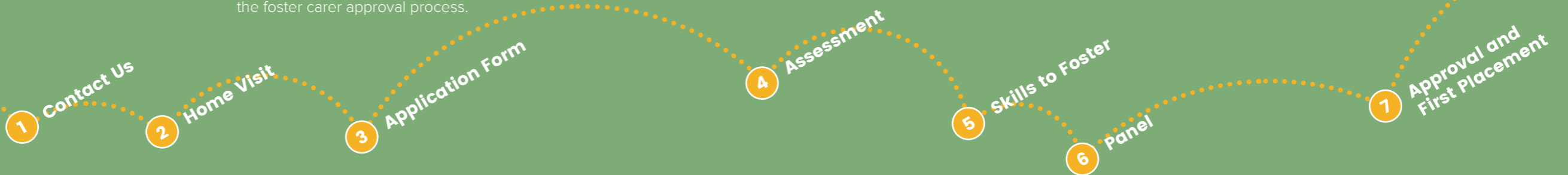
Ultimately, deciding to become a foster carer is one of the most significant decisions you will make in your life, and we wouldn't want that decision to be made lightly either by you or others in your family and friendship circle would make up your fostering support network.

Therefore, our staff are well versed in making you feel comfortable throughout each of the approval stages. While they have to remain thorough in terms of making sure you will be able to meet the needs of a vulnerable child or young person, they are primarily there to help you build a case for why you should be approved to look after a child in need.

Here is a brief guide on what to expect at each stage of the foster carer approval process.



"The process for us was about 4 months. I quite enjoyed it and it felt very therapeutic. The panel was over quickly and we were supported by our assessor all the way through."
Shannon, National Fostering Group Carer



1. Contact Us

You'll no doubt have more questions about your individual circumstances, which might not be covered in this guide.

If you have any questions about this process, no matter how big or small, don't hesitate to contact a member of our friendly team today on **02890 020 247** or **make an online enquiry** and we will endeavour to get back to you as soon as possible.

2. Home Visit

After you've had an initial chat with a member of our team and feel ready to proceed, we will arrange to meet you and your family at your home. We call this an Initial Home Visit. This is where we will discuss your expectations of being a foster carer, more about the role of a foster carer and the children we support. We will also look at the indoor and outdoor space you have that will benefit a child and begin to gather information about you and your family to help get you started.

3. Application Form

The next step is to complete a foster carer application form so that you can be assigned an assessing social worker for your assessment. Your foster agency will support you throughout this process and will always be there to help you.

4. Assessment

During the assessment stage, where we work with you to impart and gather information your assessing social worker will plan with you to visit regularly over 8 to 10 weeks. It is a great opportunity for you to learn more about the role of a foster carer and get to know us and for us to get to know you and your family members who will play a role in a foster child's care.

4. Assessment

The assessment is called a Form F. Your assessing social worker will work with you to complete a Form F report and help prepare you, discussing in detail all aspects of the fostering task. The Form F is completed by the assessing social worker and outlines all the details that will be the basis on which we can provide evidence of your ability to be a great foster carer.

We will also gather several personal references and complete medical and DBS checks, which helps us make sure that both you and the child in your care would be safe.

5. Skills to Foster

While the assessment underway, you'll be able to take our Skills to Foster training course.

5. Skills to Foster

This is designed to introduce you to other potential foster carers, get advice and to teach you the skills you need to be ready for fostering. It's fun, informative and offers real insight into what lies ahead.

6. Panel

Once the assessment is complete, your Form F report and background checks are given to a group of fostering, educational and care professionals, known as a Fostering Panel.

Panel meetings will take place at a local fostering office and your assessing social worker will be at your side to offer support throughout, this is a formal part of the process during which we will be there to guide and support you.

7. Approval and First Placement

You may be asked some questions during the panel process, but your assessing social worker will have worked with you in advance to help prepare you. The Panel will then consider your assessment and make their recommendation.

7. Approval and First Placement

The panel will recommend you to be approved as a foster carer and then you will be able to look forward to being matched with a child needing a foster home. Our team continue to support you, visiting regularly and remain a constant source of professional guidance and advice as and when you need it.



10. Your fostering allowance

At each and every one of our fostering agencies, we understand that fostering is a huge commitment to make for you and your family and that it may mean you or your partner leaving full-time employment to enable you to give the time needed to support the child placed with you.

Therefore, we pay generous weekly allowances, which can help you with the usual expenses of caring for a child and as a form of income to compensate for your hard work and dedication in providing a child with a stable family environment.



What is the allowance for?

We believe it is important for the children in your care to have a good quality of life and, wherever possible, the same opportunities and experiences as non-looked-after children.

As well as including a professional fee for your efforts, the allowance is intended to cover all the needs of the children in your care including food, clothing, travel, hobbies and sports, family activities, savings and more.

We will provide guidance on how you can best spend the money so that a child has a healthy, happy and balanced life, but we also want you to have the freedom to use the money to support a child in your care to embrace the enormous benefits and sense of wellbeing that comes with being part of a positive family life.

It is important to note, this amount is accrued weekly over a yearly period, and is only paid when you have a child in your care, not when you are between placements.

If you do find yourself between fostering placements, you will have access to bridging retainer payments for up to six weeks that you are without a child in your care. If you want to find out more about bridging payments, you can speak to your local agency team when you enquire to become a foster carer with us.

However, becoming a foster carer with one of our independent agencies gives you the best chance of finding regular or continuous placements, given our track record for being able to offer local authorities a suitable variety of foster carers with diverse skills and backgrounds and high-quality matches.

Self-employment and further benefits

As a foster carer, you are classed as self-employed for tax and national insurance purposes, so you need to register with **HMRC**. You may also be able to claim a range of benefits.

Once you are approved, you will be given a starter pack with advice on how to go about registering as self-employed.

You can also gain further support and advice from **The Fostering Network**. As an approved carer with a National Fostering Group agency, you will be entitled to free membership with them.

As a foster carer, you will be approved rather than employed by us, and this status has an effect on means tested benefits. In the main, fostering allowances whereby a child is placed with a foster carer are disregarded when calculating welfare benefits.

Alternatively, foster carers may be able to claim Working Tax Credit because fostering is regarded as 'work' by HMRC when they have a child in placement. You will need to contact your local benefits office and relevant agencies to discuss your individual circumstances.

Will I be taxed on the allowance?

In general, foster carers are exempt from paying tax on the fostering allowance. Find out more about taxation relating to your own personal circumstances by viewing [current government guidelines](#).



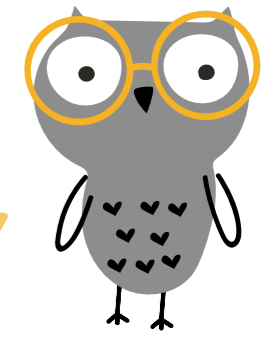
Our generous allowance enables you to meet all the needs of your foster child and give them a healthy and happy start in life.

11. Training



“The training is fantastic because it is so varied. Any question you have or situation you find yourself in, there will be training to cover it. The trainers are lovely people also, you get to know them over the years.”

Peter, Foster carer



When you make the decision to foster with us, a package of high-quality training and development programmes open up to you.

Our training is designed to meet you wherever you are in terms your existing fostering knowledge and skillset, equipping you to make a life-changing difference to a child or young person needing a stable home life with inspiring role models.

All our training and development programmes are linked to national standards and nationally recognised qualifications. We offer a number of easy and convenient ways you can access and complete training material to prepare you for the foster care journey, so you can go at a pace that fits in with your specific routine when looking after a foster child.

We’ve all heard the phrase, ‘you never stop learning’, and as a foster carer, this is absolutely true. Every child, every new challenge, every little win; such as hearing them say please and thank you, discussing their brilliant day at school or kicking a football for the first time, are all part of the glorious transformational journey that you will get to play a key role in.

Learning the basics

When applying to become a foster carer with us, you will attend a three-day ‘Skills to Foster’ preparation course before you are approved as a foster carer.

On this course conducted by knowledgeable trainers specialising in foster care and child behaviour, you will have the opportunity to discuss the broad issues involved in becoming a foster carer, including:

- **Safe caring**
- **Child development**
- **Managing behaviour**
- **Equality and diversity**
- **Working together**

An existing foster carer for the agency attends part of this training to share their practical knowledge and experience to the group, alongside a manager who speaks to the group about how being a foster carer with a National Fostering Group agency works, as well as further details of what specific support you will receive.

Our training is designed to meet you wherever you are in terms your existing fostering knowledge and skillset.

Approved carer training

Once you have been approved at panel to become a foster carer with us, we provide a wide variety of courses every year to assist with carers’ development. Examples of training courses available include:

- **Cognitive behavioural therapy**
- **Supporting children with autism**
- **Theraplay techniques in foster care**
- **Attachment and bonding in abused and neglected children**
- **Parent and child fostering**

Depending on how you want to progress your knowledge and skills as a foster carer, you will consult with your supervising social worker at various stages to decide which courses may be most beneficial to you.

Specialist training courses such as ‘supporting children with autism’ and ‘parent and child fostering’ will be recommended should you wish to explore more complex fostering types, of which can be the most rewarding in the long-term.

Other forms of therapy training enable you to apply a range of tried-and-tested practical methods of helping a child overcome any behavioural, emotional or social barriers to their happiness and overall development.

Real-time online training development whenever you need

There are also additional online learning courses available on a wide range of subjects which can be completed at home. This can be especially useful if you need more information on a subject at short notice without waiting for the next available face-to-face course.

New professional development courses are created each year in response to the needs of children who are placed with our foster carers and in consultation with foster carers at the training courses, support groups and regional meetings.



12. Who will be supporting me throughout my fostering adventure?

From the moment you enquire to become a foster carer with us, to assisting you through your assessment and preparing for your first placement, we provide an experienced network of professional support including social workers, trainers and therapeutic counsellors.

Take a look at examples of people you may meet and be able to rely upon for help and advice during your foster carer adventure, and together we can have a real chance of making lasting change to young lives.

Meet the agency team...



Supervising Social Worker – James

You will be assigned a dedicated Supervising Social Worker just like James. He's part of our team of professional social workers who'll be with you right from the off; helping with your application, to your very first placement, and beyond.

They will arrange regular home visits (usually monthly, but more frequently if you wish) to help you plan in future training modules you would like to attend, keep updated with and make sure you're getting all the support you need.



Foster Care Trainer – Sean

This is Sean. Sean and the team have expert knowledge in many specific areas including complex needs, special needs and safeguarding. Our range of training programmes will not only give you the skills to foster, they can also lead to professional qualifications.

Support worker – Jackie

Say hello to Jackie. She supports placements that may be a little more fragile than others. Jackie and the rest of the full-time support workers' team offer support to strengthen particularly sensitive placements, working with both the children and their carers in areas such as bereavement support.

Local Office Support – Ali

Meet Ali, she's just one of several team members based in our network of local offices situated around the country. Like all the teams based in our local offices, Ali is there to help with forms and general enquiries, or if needs be, put you in touch with an appropriate member of the team.

Counselling – Nina

Introducing Nina, she's on hand to offer advice on behavioural and



emotional needs. She can equip your foster child and birth children with the necessary strategies to adapt to the new circumstances.

Nina and the team also offer group counselling surgeries in a local officer near you, with fully trained psychologists to provide you with nationally recognised and proven skills to manage behaviour at home.

Education Liaison Support – Kim

This is Kim, one of our team of service managers. Along with operations managers, supervising social workers and foster carers, people like Kim run support groups to help you assist a child who is under-achieving, finding school-life difficult or has additional needs.

These groups create a pathway for a child in your care to realise their full potential, and is a prime example of our focus on a wrap-around foster care service which incorporates all facets of a child or young person's day-to-day life.



"I have an excellent intuitive relationship with my social worker. We just clicked immediately. I do feel it's important to have a strong bond like this."

Claire, National Fostering Group Carer

13. Birth children

How will fostering impact them?

There are many positive aspects for a birth child which come with being part of a fostering family, so much so that many birth children go on to foster themselves when they're grown up.

Their lives will be a bit different when they are part of a fostering family, but we are here to support the whole family throughout your fostering journey.

The development of emotional intelligence and maturity in birth children, who are able to experience first-hand the resilience in the face of adversity that less fortunate children and young people go through cannot be underestimated.

We also have special child and young people's events where we ask for their thoughts on fostering and come together with your local fostering family communities at various fun-filled days out and activities in your local area.

Will my family be supported when a child moves on?

Although it is sad when a child or young person moves on, it is always positive when they do well in their new placement or back home. Your family supervising social worker will help support you at this time and will talk with you so you're able to speak about your thoughts and feelings.

Do you think about the needs of birth children when a child is placed?

Absolutely! The information we get from your assessment at the very beginning will be passed on to our placement teams to think about during the 'matching' stage', which is when we look at the whole picture of your house and everyone living there to see if a new placement will be a good fit for the family and for the looked after child.

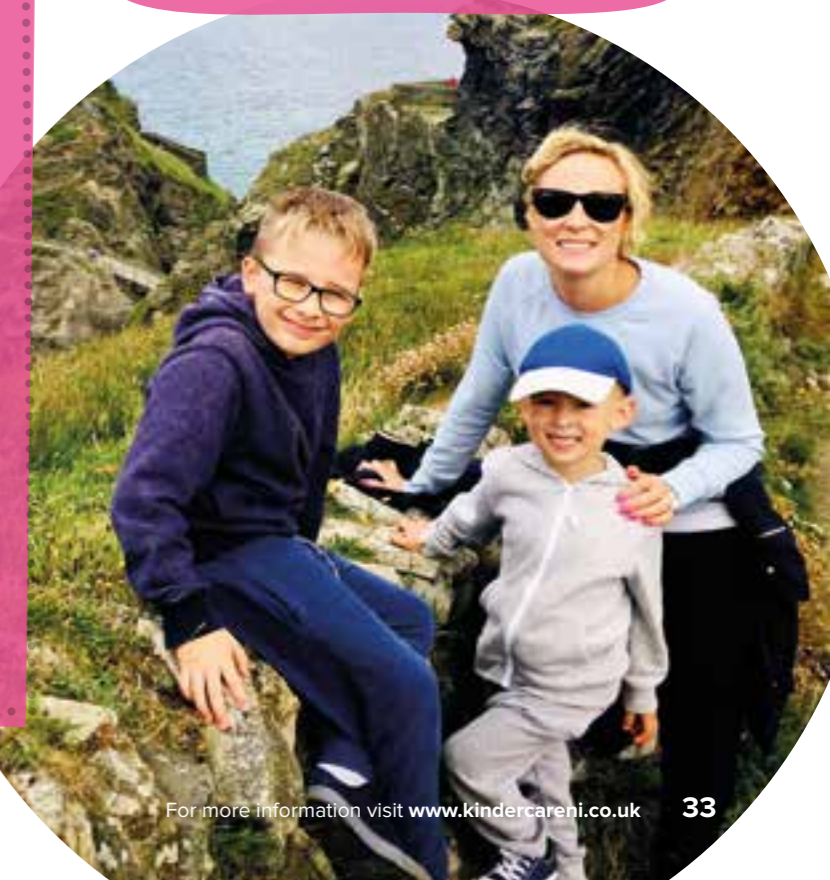
We know that it is important for us to think about the needs of birth children when someone new comes to stay in your home as this helps to make sure things go well.

"The house is never quiet or boring. The kids are great. It's a rewarding feeling, I take a lot of pride in the fact we are the ones fostering."

Harvey, Birth child in a fostering family

There may be some changes both you and your birth children will need to be aware of and told about, such as:

- They may become a role model and someone to look up to for any looked after children.
- They will be sharing time with you and your attention.
- They may have many different feelings, some very positive and some less positive, whilst experiencing the different sides of fostering.
- They can gain the company and friendship of other children and young people who come to live in your home.
- They will most definitely have a sense of doing something worthwhile as sons and daughters of you as a foster carer.



Next step

*Are you ready
to start your
adventure?*



Yes...

*I am ready to talk to
a member of the team.*

*Visit our enquiry page, leave
us your details and one of our
team will be in touch soon.*

**www.kindercareni.
co.uk/contact-us/**



For further information

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WE BUILD INCREDIBLE FUTURES, SO CAN YOU

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