

MAKE A DIFFERENCE
— to the —
LIFE OF A LOCAL
CHILD, EVERY DAY

Information pack

FOSTERING
— with —
Wiltshire Council



Welcome to Wiltshire Council Fostering Service

We've put together this pack to provide you with more information about fostering, what's involved and the kind of people we're looking for.

We hope it answers lots of the questions you might be asking. Throughout the pack you'll also hear from some of our current foster children, foster carers and their families.

All we've done is make him feel safe, loved and accepted. He can be exhausting, but to see him develop and grow as a person is so rewarding."

Laura, foster carer

1 ABOUT FOSTERING

What is fostering?
.....

Who makes a good foster carer?
.....

What are the different types of foster care?
.....

How will it affect my own family?
.....

2 FOSTERING WITH US

Why should I foster with Wiltshire Council?
.....

What will I be paid?
.....

What training and qualifications are available?
.....

What is the application and assessment process like?
.....

3 MORE INFORMATION

Frequently asked questions
.....

Next steps
.....

Call us on **0800 169 6321**

Email us at **fostering@wiltshire.gov.uk**

What is fostering?

Fostering is a temporary arrangement where a child or children who cannot live with their own family are placed in a secure family environment for a short period of time.

Many fostered children return to their own families. If this isn't possible, children can live in the warmth and safety of long-term foster care, with most keeping in touch with their birth family. Some younger foster children may move to live with an adoptive family.

"I don't know what I'd do if I hadn't met my foster family, I think my life wouldn't be as fun and happy as it is now."

Harry, foster child

Why do children need fostering?

When it's unsafe for children to remain with their birth parents due to difficulties at home, we look to move them to live with extended family members. If this is not possible, we place them with a local foster family.

Their parents could be very ill, experiencing a family breakdown, or struggling with addiction. Children are often vulnerable and likely to have suffered from trauma and loss.

Placing a child in foster care is often the best and safest option for their wellbeing.

As a foster carer, what would I be expected to do?

Above all, foster carers are known for their love, warmth, generosity, patience and positivity.

You would provide a safe haven for children while we work with their parents to help resolve their problems. You'd be responsible for the child's day-to-day care and all their educational, emotional, health and social needs.

You'll help the child keep in touch with their birth family and attend meetings to discuss their welfare and future plans. You may also help to return the child to their birth family or, where this isn't possible, move him or her to adopters or long-term foster carers, or they could stay long term with you.

Who makes a good foster carer?

Could you make a difference to a local child's life?

We're looking for couples, families and individuals who can make space in their home and heart to help a child through a difficult time.

You'll need a good sense of humour, plenty of tolerance and understanding, bags of enthusiasm and want to make a positive difference to young people's lives.

You must be at least 21 or over to foster, have a spare bedroom, and drive. There's no upper age limit as long as you're fit and healthy enough to care for our children.

Your background

Our foster carers come from diverse backgrounds.

We welcome applications from anyone regardless of nationality, religion, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. You may live on your own, have children or be retired with an empty nest. Whether you're able-bodied or live with a disability, all that matters to us is that you're ready for the challenge and rewards fostering will give you.

Availability

Pre-school children need to have full-time carers. For children in school, you'll need to be around before and after school and during school holidays. If your foster child is sick or gets excluded from school you'll be responsible for their care.

Is your family ready to make space for another place at the table?



Couples and single people, with or without children, can become foster carers.



Foster carers often have children of their own or have grown up children and grandchildren who come to visit.



You can still work and become a foster carer. Many people work from home or fit work around caring for children.



You must have a bedroom in your home for each child you wish to foster.



You don't have to own your own home to foster. Renters can foster too!

Types of foster care

There are many different types of fostering options for you to choose depending on your own preferences, experience and circumstances.

Your fostering assessment will help us to identify the type of foster care best suited to you and your family. Some foster carers choose to specialise in one area.

"People SHOULD consider fostering. If they have room in their home and room in their heart, the potential to do some incredibly good things for young people is there."

Vicky, foster carer

Short-term foster care

This includes children living with you for a few nights, weeks or months until difficulties at home are sorted or we can make alternative plans for the child's future. Anything up to 1-2 years would be considered short term.

Long-term foster care

A permanent home for children and young people who can't return home to their birth family. Our aim is that they remain with you until they can live independently – in the same way any of your own children would.

Short breaks/ Respite care

A one off or regular short breaks for young people or children to give their foster carers a break. You would need to be available to offer at least one weekend per month, but of course you could do more.

Family link

Regular, short breaks for children with disabilities to give their families a break, either during the day or overnight.

Parent(s) and child placements

Intense, short-term care placements for babies and one/both parents. May involve parenting assessments for court proceedings. To offer these placements, you'll need to be an experienced foster carer with strong communication skills to assess parenting potential. Additional specialist fees are payable.

Fostering with the possibility of adoption

This is to provide a stable and secure environment for babies and toddlers in care who are likely to need adoption. They may still be reunited with their birth family. In some cases, the foster carer goes on to legally adopt the child.

How will it affect my own family?

The decision to become a foster carer is one for your whole family. Fostering is a very significant change in anyone's life, even more so for your own children.

They will play an important role in making the foster child or children feel at home.

Birth children sometimes find it difficult to share their home and family with another child. But many also benefit from living with children from different cultures and backgrounds. Most children go on to appreciate their secure and loving family unit much more than before. They will also learn and develop a higher level of patience, tolerance and understanding.

When you become a foster carer, your whole family has access to a range of support including a children's support group and fun activities to help them adapt.

Here's what some foster carers' children told us...

"I like it when we go to the park or on holiday and there are more people to play with."

"I really like being part of a foster family because I get to meet new people and learn lots of new things."

The boys that we foster are all different and I never know what they are going to be like, sometimes they are quiet and shy sometimes they are fun and loud.

I did worry that I would get less time to spend with my family once we started fostering but I was wrong, we still get lots of time together."



"Reward for me is the comments children make such as 'I've never been so happy' and 'I love you, you're the best'.

It's uplifting and makes you feel like you're doing the right thing. I know that the children in my care are happy and loved and they know this too".

Jo, foster carer

Reasons to foster with Wiltshire Council

As a local authority we take our safeguarding responsibilities very seriously.

Wiltshire Council take the time to match the right child to the right family. Unlike some fostering agencies, we always try to keep children within the local area and make sure that siblings find a home where they can stay together.

What really matters to us is keeping children safe and helping families work through their problems so the child or children can return home, where it is safe for them to do so.

"I like being fostered because my foster carers are nice people, their children help me to feel happier, I can still see my sister, and they are always there for me."

Lily, foster child

As a foster carer, you'll have access to:

- A financially progressive and rewarding care role
- Your own allocated social worker from our Fostering team, who's there to support and supervise your fostering practice
- A fostering social worker on call until midnight every evening and every weekend and Bank holiday
- An Emergency Duty Service with social workers available between midnight and 8.30am
- A therapist who's qualified to work with foster carers and children and young people with a high level of needs
- A buddying scheme to link new foster carers with an experienced foster carer.
- Monthly support groups and bi-annual fostering magazine
- Newsflash emails
- 'Branches' – a support group for foster carers' own children
- Social events for you, your family and your foster child(ren)
- Discounts in high street shops in Wiltshire
- Concessions at local sports, recreation and leisure facilities
- Membership of Wiltshire Fostering Association – a foster carer led supportive group
- Our Refer a Friend scheme and the chance to earn £500 for each successful referral
- Additional payments of up to £1,000 per child per annum for birthdays, festivals (e.g. Christmas) and holidays.

Our support programme is designed to build your confidence, skills and experience caring for our foster children, so you can make a huge difference to their lives.

PAYMENTS *for* FOSTER CARERS



Within the fostering service we have **three payment levels*** for mainstream foster carers:

LEVEL 1

EVERYDAY FOSTER CARERS

Includes support from a fostering social worker and comprehensive training. Foster carers for sibling groups at this level are in short supply.

£350 

per week, per child
(up to £18,200 per year)

LEVEL 2

EXTRA SUPPORT FOSTER CARERS

These foster carers can evidence additional skills and experience of either fostering or working with children and young people e.g. teachers, child care workers or paediatric nurses.

£450 

per week, per child
(up to £23,400 per year)

LEVEL 3

COMPLEX NEEDS FOSTER CARERS

These highly experienced foster carers support children with complex needs, with greater support from their social worker and enhanced training opportunities and expectations. At least one carer to remain at home full time.

£650 

per week, per child
(up to £33,800 per year)

IN ADDITION,
WE PROVIDE UP TO
£1,000
PER YEAR, PER CHILD

This is a festival, birthday and holiday allowance.

The money is split into: birthday (£250), summer holidays (2x £250) and a festival allowance, for example, Christmas (£250).

Payments are made for each child, each week they live with our foster carers.

* Payments are only made for the specific time that children are living with the foster carer(s).

Training and qualifications

Welcome to our friendly fostering team

When you become a foster carer, you become part of our team. There may sometimes be difficult situations to deal with, but we'll always be on hand with advice, guidance and practical support to help you along the way.

There are lots of learning and development opportunities available to our foster carers. Skills to Foster is the foundation level training course you must complete before you welcome a child into your home.

As you progress in fostering you can take more advanced training to develop your own skills.

These include:

- First aid skills
- Safe caring
- Child protection
- Managing behaviour.

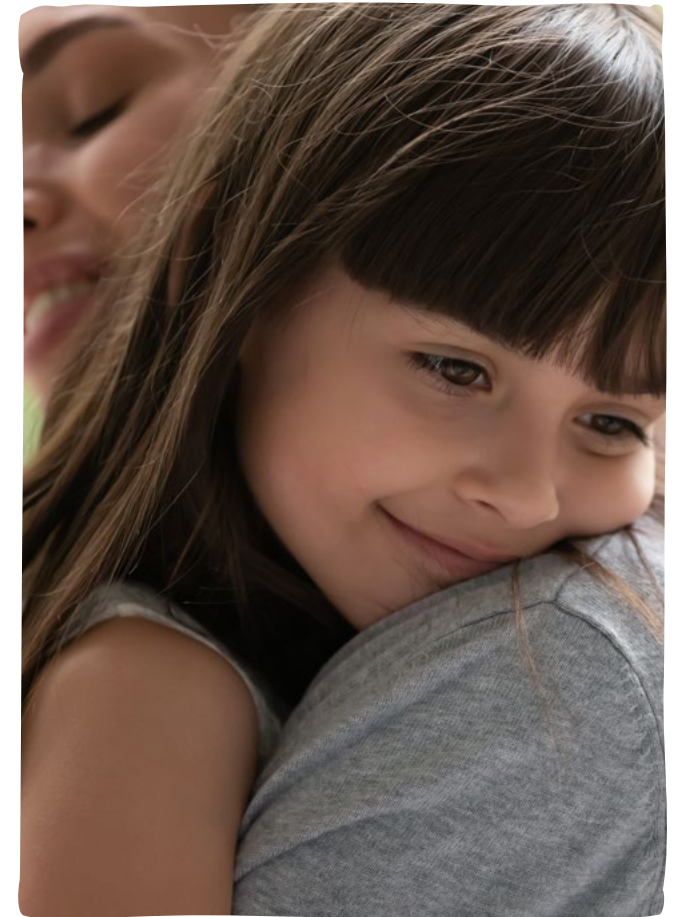
Training courses are held at times and venues to suit you and your commitments.

Advanced training courses

Some foster carers decide to take their learning further and develop fostering into their full-time career. We are able to enrol some of our foster carers onto the Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young Peoples Workforce, which is an online distance learning accredited qualification that's free to foster carers.

"We give and obviously our family give but you get rewarded as well...you get that little glow inside thinking you made that difference."

David, foster carer



THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS *for* FOSTER CARERS

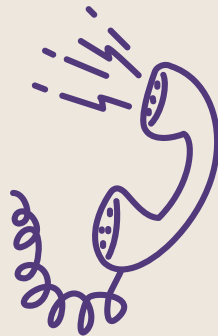


1

PHONE CALL *with a* RECRUITMENT WORKER

This provides the opportunity for people to ask any questions and have an initial discussion about their own personal circumstances.

0800 169 6321



Feel free to contact us as many times as you wish.

2

HOME VISIT EITHER VIRTUAL *or* IN PERSON

If you wish to proceed with becoming a foster carer, we will arrange a home visit either virtually, via video call, or in person, to answer further questions and to find out more about your family and personal circumstances.



3

COMPLETE YOUR APPLICATION FORM

When we both agree to proceed with a fostering assessment, we will send an application form for you to complete and return.



THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS *for* FOSTER CARERS



4

MEET YOUR SOCIAL WORKER

Once your application form is received, you will be allocated a social worker to start your fostering assessment.

We aim for the fostering assessment to last no more than 4 months. (Although there can occasionally be delays.)



6

SKILLS TO FOSTER COURSE

During your assessment you will be invited to a 'Skills to Foster' course. This course aims to provide you with an introduction into the role of a foster carer, the professionals you will be working with and how to care for a child in your home.



5

YOUR FOSTERING ASSESSMENT



During the fostering assessment we will complete police checks and you will be asked to book a health assessment with your GP. We will also obtain references and interview at least two of your referees.

Alongside this, you will meet with your social worker to talk about yourself and your family. We will find out about your support network and any particular skills or experience you will bring to your role as a foster carer.

7

COMPLETION *of* FOSTERING REPORT

When your fostering assessment has been completed, all your information will be brought together in a report, which you will read before it is shared with fostering panel.

The fostering panel consists of a variety of people, including professionals and lay people, who have a special interest and experience relevant to fostering.



8

WELCOME *to the* WILTSHIRE FOSTERING FAMILY

If the fostering panel recommend that you are approved as a foster carer, a senior manager will make the final decision within 10 days. Once you are approved, you will be welcomed into the Wiltshire fostering family.



Here's a bit more about the assessment

The assessment has two stages.

Stage one – Checking you're safe and suitable to care for vulnerable children.

Stage two – The fostering assessment and panel interview.

"We get so much fun and enjoyment out of having the kids here... and I can't see why anyone wouldn't want a houseful of kids."

David, foster carer

If you've already been a foster carer or have relevant skills and experience in childcare we may 'fast-track' your application.

The fostering assessment is always carried out by a qualified social worker and they will involve you throughout. You'll be able to read and comment on their report, which will make a recommendation about your suitability to foster.

The fostering panel is made up of professionals and laypersons connected to fostering e.g. a foster carer or health professional. The panel makes a recommendation to a senior manager, who then makes the final decision on your suitability as a foster carer.

Once you're approved, you'll meet your supervising social worker and together we can start matching you to children needing a foster family.

What happens if I change my mind?

If you and your family decide fostering isn't for you, you can withdraw your application at any stage.



"We've been fostering a gorgeous 8 year old boy for nearly 2 years. Initially for respite and then short term. He never used to smile...could barely read or write... grunted more than talked and survived on very little sleep.

Now he smiles all the time, reads better than some of his classmates, corrects our spoken English, has had a head teachers award for his handwriting, rarely stops chattering away and sleeps 12 hours a night.

Laura, foster carer



Frequently asked questions

What qualities do I need to be a foster carer?

You need to be calm, warm and welcoming and able to take problems in your stride. You'll need to have patience and time to listen and understand things from a child's point of view. You'll be able to provide a safe space for our children to grow and flourish. You will be open to attending regular training to increase your skills and knowledge.

Is there anything that might prevent me becoming a foster carer?

Yes – if you don't have a spare room to accommodate a foster child or have a serious criminal conviction we would not be able to progress your application.

What's the difference between adoption and fostering?

Adoption means taking a child into your home permanently and legally as part of your family. Fostering is offering either a temporary or permanent home to a child or children until they either return home or move into independence.

Can I foster if I smoke?

We want our children to be as healthy as possible. Being a smoker would not rule you out as a foster carer, but we do follow recognised national guidelines. We don't place children under five or those with physical conditions that could be adversely affected by a smoky environment in smoking homes. Your social worker would discuss this with you during the assessment process.

Can I foster if I have a criminal record?

If you, or someone in your household, have been convicted of certain serious offences you cannot foster. It's best to be honest about minor offences or convictions during the application process so we can talk it through together. The type of conviction, the circumstances, and the length of time elapsed since the conviction will all be taken into account. Some foster carers may have had difficult episodes when they were young adults. This has not prevented them from fostering.



Frequently asked questions continued



Will I be told everything about a child who comes to stay with me?

We will provide you with all available information about the child's history and behaviour. It's essential for you to understand what the child needs and to help you care for them safely.

Will I meet the child's parents or other family members?

The plan for many children is to go back to their families so it's important to continue with regular contact. This may involve telephone calls and/or occasional visits in your home. You'll be involved in deciding how this is managed. Contact may also take place away from your home if appropriate.

What effect will fostering have on my own family?

Fostering involves your whole family, although we appreciate that in many situations one of the adults is often the main carer. Birth children sometimes find it difficult to share their homes and families. We offer a support group and activities to help children adapt.

Will the child go to their own school or attend a school in my community?

We like to try and keep things familiar for our foster children, including going to their regular school with their friends. For long-term placements children may transfer to a school within your community. We always take the child's individual circumstances into account and discuss with you as their foster carer. This is one of the reasons for wanting to secure local foster carers for local children in Wiltshire.

What happens if the child does not get along with my family?

We'll discuss options with you and your family during the matching process and before you agree to care for a child. Too many moves can be damaging for children, so if you experience problems we will support you to find a solution. Sometimes the only option is to move the child(ren), but with every move there is likely a sense of rejection or trauma, so we work very hard to try and prevent this from happening.

Frequently asked questions continued

Can our foster child come on holiday with us?

Yes, mostly. We encourage you to include your foster child on your family holiday but there are a few circumstances when it may not be possible, which your social worker can discuss with you. An annual holiday allowance is payable for each child/young person living with you. This is a contribution towards additional costs of holidays. If it's not possible for a young person to join you, we will consider other suitable alternatives with you, which might include extended family care or a respite foster carer.

Will I have to give up work?

Some carers work and still foster. It depends on individual circumstances, we need to consider the age of your foster child, the type of fostering required, whether you are a single carer or can balance childcare duties between you and your partner whilst working.

Will I have to pay tax?

The government gives generous tax allowances for fostering, which means that most foster carers pay no or very little tax on their fostering allowances and fees. The foster carer allowance covers the needs of your foster child. You are not classed as our employee but as being self-employed and must register with HMRC. Visit www.hmrc.gov.uk for guidance.

How will I know what type of care I can provide?

The assessment process helps to explore your strengths and what you and your family can offer a child. You and your assessing social worker will agree what suits you and your family and the social worker will recommend this to the foster panel as part of the assessment process.

Can a foster child share a room with my children?

You must have a separate bedroom available for a foster child. Sometimes foster siblings can share a room.

Is there a lot of paperwork involved?

You'll need to keep some written records (i.e. foster carer diary sheets) of the child's time with you, but we'll give you guidance on how to do this. It quickly becomes a straightforward task to complete.

What support will I get to manage any difficult behaviour?

Foster children's behaviour can be affected by their experiences and living away from home. Being part of a secure family environment is the best way to help them to feel settled. Every foster carer receives support, training and guidance on how to manage difficult situations and support the child. It can be difficult, but it is also very rewarding to see each child overcome adversity and flourish whilst in your care – it is an amazing feeling and what keeps many of our carers fostering for years and years.

MORE INFORMATION



Next steps

If you have any questions about the information in this brochure, or would like to start an initial application with us, please use the details below to get in contact.

Call us on **0800 169 6321**

Text fostering to **XXXXX**

Email us on **fostering@wiltshire.gov.uk**

Or visit our website **fosteringwiltshire.uk**

