Fostering in Northamptonshire

Your complete guide to becoming a foster carer with Northamptonshire County Council

Children First
Northamptonshire

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Visit us:
www.fosterme.co.uk

Call us:
0300 126 1009

Email us:
a&f@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk
Welcome

Here at Northamptonshire County Council, we believe all children and young people deserve a secure, stable and loving home with people who will support them into adulthood. Of the 170,000 children and young people who live in our county, most of them have a happy, healthy and loving family, but sadly some are not so fortunate.

That’s why we need people like you to work with us to provide these children with the love and support they need. Your care, skills and experiences could make such a difference in their lives.

We support our foster carers through every step of the process with comprehensive training and development as well as being linked with an experienced foster carer to offer you advice and support as well as having a dedicated social worker on hand to guide and answer any questions that you have.

Could you open your home to a child and give them the life they deserve?

This pack tells you about fostering a child with Northamptonshire County Council from the fostering journey you’ll follow, to the types of fostering there are, the reasons to foster with us plus a lot more.

We hope it answers your questions and that you’ll continue your fostering journey with us. If there’s anything you’d like to find out more about, then please don’t hesitate to get in touch with us.
What is fostering?

Fostering is one of a number of care options for children who are unable to live with their birth family.

“In the UK, approximately 80% of looked after children live with foster families who offer them stability, security and often their first experience of a positive family life”
– Fostering Network

Who are our children?

Children need foster families for lots of reasons:

- Parents might ask for help looking after their children because of illness or they might be facing some other temporary difficulty
- Some children have additional needs or disabilities and need full-time care or short breaks with a foster carer
- Some children may not be able to return to their family and we will need to find them a permanent home

Our children requiring foster families are in need of warmth, patience and understanding at a time of stress and uncertainty in their lives. By taking a child into your home at this difficult time, you can have a huge impact on their lives.
Who can be a foster carer?

Our foster carer population is diverse and our carers come from all walks of life. All of our foster carers have something different to give to the role from their own life experiences and skills.

The children and young people in our care need a stable and secure home environment and positive role models to guide and support them through a difficult time.

We want people to foster with us who believe they can make a difference and give a child or young person the life chances they deserve. It is a challenging but hugely rewarding role and we will support you every step of the way.

There are, however, some common criteria that we require:

- to have a spare bedroom with appropriate space for child/young person to live in
- to be a full-time resident in the UK or have appropriate leave to remain
- to be able to give the time to care for a child or young person
- to have no criminal convictions against children

Can I foster?

People often rule themselves out of fostering, buying into misconceptions about who can and who cannot foster:

- You can be single and foster – you will need to demonstrate a network of support
- You don’t have to own your own home – you will need to demonstrate stability
- Your religion will not be a barrier or will not prevent you from fostering – you will need to demonstrate how you can support a child of a different religion from yours or how you would support a child who may be questioning their own faith
- You don’t need any formal qualifications – you will be able to access our training offer and be supported to achieve the Training and Development Standards in England within your first year
- You can work and foster, depending on the type of fostering you want to do and the needs of the children you will be caring for. Caring roles are not a barrier
- There is also no upper age limit to foster; some people foster well into their 70s. What matters is that you are fit and able to care for any child you are approved to foster. Being a foster carer is not easy, but can make a huge difference to the lives of the children who need it
- Your sexual orientation or gender identity will not be a barrier or prevent you from fostering
- Health conditions and/or disabilities may not be a barrier – this will be discussed with you from the beginning and will be subject to a health assessment
Types of fostering

There are many different types of fostering that foster carers can choose to specialise in, each with their own challenges and rewards. It is important to explore which type of fostering will be most suited to you/you and your family.

Short-term fostering

All children usually go initially to live with short-term foster carers while decisions are made about their future.

They may end up staying for just a few days, several months or even years.

Connected persons

A connected person is a relative, friend or other person connected with a child in our care. Connected person carers have additional legal responsibilities around support, training and supervision of the child to those in other foster carer roles. We will help you understand and fulfil these.

Connected person carers play a unique role in helping children and young people remain with someone they know and trust.

Parent and Child

Parent and child foster care is an arrangement for babies and their parents. Parent and child fostering arrangements can be complex and demanding and require foster carers who are experienced, skilled and able to work closely as a part of a team.

Parent and child arrangements carry unique risks due to the vulnerability of often very young children and the potential of having an adult in a carers’ home undertaking parenting tasks.
Case study:

Emergency and short term fostering

Fostering has many challenges, each child is unique and comes with their own personal needs. We have had many highs in our fostering experiences and look back in fondness.

Introducing new children/babies into the family home, especially with young children of our own, can be tricky, so we tend to do a quiet day or evening together, so all the children can spend time getting to know each other, by doing arts and crafts, cake baking, playing games and with the younger ones, feeding the ducks and going on walks. We keep our children involved by helping out with little jobs, such as, getting nappies and wipes so they are part of the process and not left out. We have a routine in place, that all the children in the house follow, we feel this helps them settle in quicker and feel part of the family unit.

We continually feel supported in our role and have always had someone on hand to offer advice or information whenever we needed it. The Training we receive benefits us by keeping us informed and up to date with new ideas, strategies and shared knowledge from other foster carers’ experiences in similar situations.

We try and make lots of new memories with our foster children, like: indoor picnics, visiting farms, zoos, train rides etc. We take lots of photos and have regular portraits done, we have also had teddies made from their baby clothes, for their birth families and new families to keep and cherish, to help them feel involved in the child’s life.

Doing emergency placements can keep you on your toes, you never know when the phone is going to ring, day, night even early hours of the morning. We mainly have under 5s, so always have toys set up in the front room, to welcome, settle or distract an upset child. We have found that this works really well and benefits the child.
After considering fostering for several years and many discussions with our own children and extended family we decided to attend a fostering open evening with Northamptonshire County Council to find out more information.

We were concerned that with both of us working full time, this could be a barrier to being accepted as foster carers. However we felt that we were representative of most families of today, where both parents have to go out to work. During the event we discussed this and other questions about our suitability and by the end of the evening we were determined to take the next steps to fostering. This involved a rigorous review of our family dynamics, lifestyle, medical conditions as well as our finances. Although this felt very intrusive at first, it was explained fully as to the reasons for this.

We attended the compulsory skills to foster training course which gave us a good understanding of what being a foster carer involved and the administrative tasks that would be required too. After completing the course, we felt very keen in continuing to become foster carers. It took from May to November for our assessment and to go to panel. We used this time to read up on the kinds of issues that may arise with looking after children and young people who have been taken into care.

Although all foster carers are approved to care for children from birth to eighteen, our preferred age range was of primary school age. When we were telephoned to ask if we could consider looking after a young person aged thirteen years, we hesitated as we were worried that we would not be able to accommodate a teenager’s needs and also risk the perceived negative behaviours that can come with having a teenager in our home. However, after a few minutes, we realised a child was in need regardless of their age. This was the best decision we had made, as the young person has adjusted very well to living with us and as a result, we were approved and formally matched for this young person to live.
with us until they’re 18 years old. However, having been given this approval, we are now looking at the ‘Staying Put’ information to explore options of them living with us until they’re 25 years old. By then, we are certain they’ll not want us cramping their style and wish to be living independently.

Since then we have also looked after a number of children aged between 5 years and twelve years that stay with us for either one night up to three weeks. All of which, come with their own unique personalities, worries and challenges but that’s what we are prepared for and that is what fostering is. We continue to work full time and as long as one person has a flexible work pattern and you are well organised there is no reason why this should be a hindrance into you being a foster carer.

It has been challenging to fit the courses in, complete the daily and monthly paperwork and above all care for children who may have lots of different physical and emotional needs but the rewards of seeing children and young people begin to trust adults and thrive whilst being within our household is priceless.

Our advice to any prospective foster carer is to:

- Make enquiries about fostering, sooner rather than later
- Avoid limiting yourselves to a preferred age range as we would never have been fortunate enough to have our young person in our lives, as our first placement, if this was the case

Finally, why not make the first step, make an enquiry into fostering and maybe you will make a difference to a child or young person’s future too.

“ They are always there for me when I need them most.”

“ My carers helped encourage me to do new things that would benefit me.”
Remand fostering

We need foster carers to support young people in care aged 10-18 years who are in the youth justice system.

This is a specialist foster carer role, and we are looking for people with skills and experience of working with teenagers to really make a difference and help them turn their lives around.

Remand foster carers can receive full training, 24-hour specialist support, four weeks paid holiday and an annual allowance.

Case study: Remand fostering

Throughout my whole career I have worked, in one form or another, with families in need. I have created, maintained and supervised many types of interventions and initiatives to support parents and young people through very difficult times in their lives. I took a secondment opportunity with a new type of intervention team; it was during this period that I met my first young person who was in remand foster care. From the very start, I was able to see a consequence based service which strived to encourage and support, but also ensure the young people knew that if they decided to make the wrong decisions, they would be responsible for the outcome.

I’ve been fostering for just over 3 years. A lot of the lads I have fostered through the remand scheme have just made the wrong decisions, which have lead to them being remanded into the care of the local authority. I have witnessed an even amount of first time offenders versus more prolific offenders. In my opinion, the young people I foster don’t need parenting, they already have parents.
What they need is mentoring and for first time offenders, what a brilliant opportunity to implement task focused interventions in a whole new environment.

As a remand carer you get a lot of support and we have created an infrastructure which can be implemented at very short notice with each new young person, no matter what their circumstances. There certainly isn’t a lack of support and importantly I feel a valued member of the team we have created. I receive monthly supervision which is where, with my supervising social worker, we look at my needs as an individual as well as the needs of our service. During these sessions, we review how I am dealing with the current placement, social time, holidays and ensures I find as much balance in life as possible.

I can honestly say, I have not experienced the horror stories which can litter mainstream media. Before becoming a remand foster carer, I thought the challenges would be the stereotypical aggression, substance misuse etc, that hasn’t been the case. On the whole, I have found the lads I care for to be pleasant and respectful of my home that said, they are still teenagers!

I have found remand fostering an absolute privilege. Your life experience makes you the person you are, not the person you could be. I’ve learned so much about myself during my journey. I’ve had many times where I have sat with a lump in my throat dealing with lads that most people have given up on. It doesn’t matter where you have come from in life, if you are resilient, thoughtful and can think on your feet, then why not?

Probably the most important moment I’ve had whilst fostering is with a lad I had taken through the criminal justice system and then moved him onto independent living, he’d lived with me for about 6 months. When he found out his father passed away, he travelled thirty miles to come and tell me. We had a cuppa and he had a good cry. I told him what I’d consistently showed him during his time with me and that was, that I was here for him and he’d be ok, and he was.

“They have helped me get into college, fulfil my potential and my dream.”
Family Link Short Breaks

Family Link offer children with disabilities in Northamptonshire the opportunity to experience new social activities with another family, also offering their family a short break. This could be for an afternoon or a few days.

Family Link carers come from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They may be families with children, couples without children, single adults or single parents.

We are looking for people who have good experience of caring for children with disabilities and special needs.

"I know that the little bit of time I am giving is making a huge difference to children and their families."

Case study: Family Link

After I retired from a residential child care unit, I wanted to continue to care for children but did not want the full time commitment of being a foster carer again. As a family link carer I provide short breaks (respite care) in my home for young people with additional needs. At present I am matched with two teenage girls who each have a weekend break a month. I love having these young people to stay; and enjoy becoming involved in their interests and activities.

Over the years I have been linked with about eight children, had lots of fun and become an expert on Harry Potter, Frozen, Mr. Bean, Cliff Richard, Ikea, fun fairs and lifts. My education now continues with all the chart hits!

These breaks give parents valuable time to spend with siblings whose needs cannot always be a priority. Being an older single carer also means I have plenty of time and patience to help encourage independence skills; such as shopping, baking, cooking and personal care. The children settle in really quickly and tell anyone that they enjoy coming to stay; they become part of my extended family.

Another aspect of being a part time carer has meant that I have been available at times to provide emergency care at short notice for a limited amount of time when needed. It has been good to be able to recall my previous fostering skills in helping to reassure children in what are often very traumatic experiences. Day care for two very lively toddlers was certainly a trip down memory lane!

Family link is really flexible; some families only require a break of a few hours a week which could suit busy working people. This could be the ideal role for anyone who is
interested in caring for these lovely children and young people, who will enrich your lives as they have mine.

I love being a family link carer but also like the fact that I have time to myself to see friends, family, go to the gym, have holidays and visit my grown up children who live in different cities and countries. This role helps me to have an interesting and varied life.

"I work full time so I didn’t even consider that I could support a child. I enquired, and happily I discovered this wasn’t the case and I could be a family link carer. I now have a child come to stay with me one weekend a month. My daughter loves it and has a new friend to enjoy time with."
Why foster with us?

- You will be supporting Northamptonshire’s looked after children
- We will always explore our in house carers before we approach external providers
- We offer an age preference to our carers
- We provide an extensive offer of training and support
- Our training venues and fostering panel are based within Northamptonshire
- There are established carer support groups in your area
- Allowances to support caring for our looked after children
- We provide competitive allowances to include skills payments in line with additional training

“We are looking forward to becoming foster carers to give a child a loving and supportive home where they can learn to spread their wings and develop life skills.”
The Process

"Just wanted to say thank you again for guiding us through the fostering assessment process with Northamptonshire County Council.

There are many misconceptions that may stop people enquiring about fostering – I would urge anyone to speak to the team as you never know until you ask! We found the process logical and the discussions we had with our assessing social worker really helped us to understand if fostering is right for us. We found our social worker took us through the process incredibly well. She treated us with respect, answered our questions and explained everything in detail.

The support and advice through the application process and attending the introductory courses was invaluable to help us to understand what is involved in our role as Foster Carers. The preparation training was fun and informative – it rarely felt like “learning” even though we learnt so much.

The Fostering Panel were also a very friendly group of people who made us feel welcome. We were delighted to be approved and now, very much, enjoying caring for our recent child placed with us. “
Your fostering journey

We will work with you and support you every step of the way through the fostering process to ensure that fostering is right for you and your family as well as the child/children you may be matched with.

**Step 1: Your enquiry**
Get in touch to let us know you’re interested in becoming a foster carer. You can do this by:
- completing our online enquiry form
- texting FOSTER to 80010
- calling the team on 0300 126 1009

Once we know you are interested you will be invited along to one of our open evenings where you will be able to learn about the children and young people needing foster homes, meet foster carers and talk further to the team who will answer your questions and tell you more about the process of becoming a foster carer.

There is no obligation to take your enquiry further if you are not ready at this stage, we will work together with you to make sure the time is right and that you have everything needed to become a foster carer.

**Step 2: Home visit**
If you are happy to proceed to the next step, and you have all the requirements needed to be a foster carer, a social worker from our team will arrange a time suitable to visit your home to talk through your enquiry in more detail including your personal circumstances and answer any further questions you may have.

**Step 3: Stage one**
At this stage you will be allocated a supervising social worker who will work through a fostering assessment pack with you which includes detailed background checks, a health check and references. Your social worker will support you through this.

Children and young people who are fostered are very vulnerable, and this helps us to find out about your potential as a foster carer. It also helps us decide together with you about the type of fostering you could do, and the different children and young people you could foster.

At stage one, you will also begin a training programme to help develop your skills and knowledge in different areas connected to fostering which will help prepare you for the role.
Step 4: Stage two

Stage two involves a comprehensive assessment including your family background, your family life and relationships. During this step we will confirm the type of fostering that is best for you and your family, and the age range of the children and young people you could foster.

You will continue your training and also be linked with a buddy foster carer who is experienced in fostering and will give you support and advice when you need it.

When your assessment is complete, you will be given the chance to read it before it is presented to the fostering panel for consideration.

Step 5: Fostering panel

Our fostering panel is made up of experienced children’s social care professionals who will consider your application to become a foster carer with us.

The panel will make a recommendation to the decision maker, and it will then be decided if you are approved to become a foster carer. Your social worker will keep you updated and will give you all the support you need during this step.

Step 6: Approval

If your application is approved by the decision maker, they will confirm that you are approved as a foster carer with Northamptonshire County Council, and it won’t be long until you are welcoming a child or young person into your home.

Your social worker will keep you informed and will work closely with you to match you with the child/children the needing foster homes.

Step 7: Training and support

Once you are approved you will be able to take part in a vast range of training courses to help you develop and grow in your role as a foster carer. Training courses are run by friendly, experienced professionals and include different topics such as behaviour, attachment, health, disability, communication, drugs and alcohol, internet safety, life story work – to name a few!

You will be put in touch with local foster carer support groups and there will be support for your own children if needed. You will be invited to join the Northamptonshire Foster Carers’ Association (NFCA) and be given membership to national fostering organisation, The Fostering Network.
Support for foster carers

By becoming a foster carer with us you will bring your own experience, skills and expertise. We will give you the support you need to really make a difference to a child’s life

- Financial Support, with additional payments to cover a child’s holiday, birthday and religious festivals
- Support and supervision from a designated social worker
- Payment in line continuous professional development opportunities including e-learning and face to face training
- Access to local foster carer support groups
- A quarterly magazine with lots of information, events and activities
- Advice and support on a variety of health issues
- Support for your own children
- Automatic membership to Northamptonshire Foster Carer Association (NFCA)
- Peer support such as buddying schemes
- Being part of a professional team who will work closely with you
“Fostering sibling groups may sound daunting, but it keeps us busy!

We fostered a brother and sister with five years age difference, so there was extra demand on our time with different school and nursery runs. As is the case with any foster child, it took time for them to settle into our home and become part of the family and get used to the day-to-day routine. We found once this happened they became stronger as brother and sister – they really began to support each other! It is great to see them play and interact in ways they never did when they first came to us. If you are fostering siblings you do need a strong support network, a vehicle large enough and the ability to understand the changing dynamics between children from the same family. We wouldn’t have wanted anything else though, the rewards in seeing it work are huge!”
Start your fostering story with us.

Visit:
www.fosterme.co.uk

Call:
0300 126 1009

E-mail:
a&f@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk

Join us at our next open evening – see our website for details