

Could you
Foster
a child like me?



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Could you **Foster** a child like me?

Thank you for expressing an interest in fostering with the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster City Council Fostering Service

Dear applicant,

Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster combined their fostering services in April 2012 to provide a dedicated service for fostering across the three West London local authorities.

Our joined-up service is made up of experienced professionals who are passionate about providing positive and secure foster placements for our Looked After Children and young people. We were classed as outstanding by Ofsted in our first inspection.

We welcome applications from people from all cultural and religious backgrounds.

We are looking for people who are committed to children and young people, people who have sufficient space in their lives and homes and are keen to take on the challenges of looking after someone else's child.

Fostering is not always easy. At times it can be challenging, but it can also be enormously rewarding. This booklet will provide you with information to help you decide if fostering is for you. You will also find details about the type of support our service provides to its approved foster carers.

Should you have any queries, please feel free to contact us on freephone 0800 169 3497 (Monday to Friday 9.30am-5pm).

Yours sincerely

The Fostering Recruitment & Assessment Team

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What is fostering?

- Looking after someone else's child in your own home when his or her family are unable to care for them
- Fostering placements are usually temporary arrangements while the local authority works with the child's family to resolve the issues which led to them being taken into care
- Some children who are unable to return to their birth families may be permanently fostered

"Fostering is not just about making room in your house, it's about opening up your heart."

Stella, a foster carer for six years.

Why do children need to be fostered?

Children and young people, from birth to 18, may need temporary, or sometimes permanent, alternative care away from their birth family. The reasons why children come into care vary, and are often complex. The children will come from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. Some have disabilities, some are part of a sibling group and some are young parents with babies.

Each child's story is different. However there are some common reasons why children need to be fostered.

- A temporary crisis in the family
- Parents struggling to cope
- Issues of neglect or abuse

The role of the foster carer

Looking after someone else's child requires commitment, an investment of your time, guidance and support to develop independent skills.

Fostering can be demanding, and it is not right for everyone. However, it can also be one of the most rewarding and life-changing things you can do. Foster carers make a valuable difference to children's lives and it can be extremely fulfilling to see a child or young person thrive and develop in your care.

Different children require different types of care depending on their age, individual needs and experiences.

A younger child will need lots of practical, hands-on care while a teenager may benefit from more guidance and support to develop their independent skills.

Children and young people's experiences before coming into care can impact on their physical, emotional and behavioural development. This can be challenging for anyone looking after them.

Foster carers require resilience and patience to help children work through these difficulties.



Could you **Foster** a child like me?

Foster carers:

- Provide a child with a safe, nurturing and stable home environment where they can build their confidence, social skills and self-esteem
- Provide a positive experience of family life
- Ensure that a child's physical, emotional and educational needs are met
- Help a child or young person achieve their potential
- Help children to maintain links with their birth families
- Promote a child's cultural and religious needs
- Work as part of a professional network to support plans for the child or young person in their care

"I have cared for 12 children and love the diversity of it. I am always learning from the different people I meet and the whole set of experiences. I find it enriching and challenging and would definitely recommend others to apply."

Dianne, a foster carer for 11 years.

Could you become a foster carer?

You can become a foster carer:

- If you are over 21
- Whether you have your own children or not
- If you are single, married or living with a partner
- Whatever your age, ethnicity, religion or sexuality
- Whether you live in your own home or rent
- If you are working or not *

You don't need any formal qualifications or training to become a foster carer. However you do need to take a professional approach to your career as a foster carer and be willing to attend the training provided by the department. It also helps if you have some experience of working with children, either in a personal or professional capacity.

*Foster carers caring for children from birth to four years need to be at home on a full-time basis (one of the partners if you are a couple). If you are caring for a school-age child and you work, you will need to consider what arrangements you will make to take



the child to and from school and to accommodate school holidays.

"Fostering will change your life forever... for the better."

Paula, a foster carer for three years.

Some questions you might want to ask yourself when considering becoming a foster carer:

- Is now the right time in my life to take on this role?
- Do I have the space in my home?
- Do other family members support me becoming a foster carer?
- Will other household members welcome a foster child into our home?
- If I am single, could I cope with another person living in my home?
- If I'm in a relationship, is it strong enough to cope with a child or young person coming into our home?
- Would I be able to promote a child's cultural and religious needs if they were different to my own?



Rewards and benefits

In addition to the personal rewards you may receive from fostering, you are entitled to a comprehensive financial package:

- A competitive weekly fee and allowance when a child is in placement. Please refer to our enclosed fees and allowance policy for details.
- Every child receives a holiday grant from the local authority of the equivalent of up to four weeks' allowance per year to contribute towards the costs of a holiday with the foster carer
- Every child receives an additional weeks' allowance per year to contribute towards a birthday gift or activity
- Every child receives an additional week's allowance per year to contribute towards festive celebrations eg Christmas or Eid
- Carers receive an additional week's allowance to cover the costs of activities for every child in placement over the summer holiday period
- A reservation fee is paid when a carer is reserved for a particular child or children, or young people, for a maximum of four weeks per placement.
- A two-week retainer payment may be paid at the end of a placement if the placement has lasted at least six months
- Additional payments and benefits may also be offered, based on the needs of individual children
- Bonus payments in recognition of long service
- Foster carers in the UK enjoy extra tax benefits
- Foster carers are exempt from the 'extra bedroom' housing benefit change introduced in April 2013
- We pay £250 to carers who recommend friends and family members who become foster carers

Other benefits include:

- Social events for foster carers over the course of the year such as our end-of-year celebration and annual awards ceremony
- You will have your own supervising social worker who will visit you at least every six weeks to guide and support you, help with any training needs you might have and discuss your professional development
- Access to a wide range of support from education and health professionals
- Membership of the Fostering Network, giving you access to further support, guidance and perks such as discounted entry fees to theme parks
- A four-day Skills to Foster training programme to help you understand fostering in the three boroughs, and prepare you for your role as a professional foster carer
- Continuing training to help you develop your skills and knowledge as a foster carer
- Accessible support groups to allow you to share your experiences with other foster carers
- Access to an emergency duty team outside office hours.

"It's amazing, and has helped my self-confidence grow, as well as that of the children who come to stay."

Ann, a foster carer for seven years.

Could you **Foster** a child like me?



Fostering schemes in the three boroughs

We expect our foster carers to be flexible and open to accepting children from a broad age range and different circumstances. However, as part of the assessment process we will work with you to understand the age, gender and background you feel you could support best as a foster carer.

The three boroughs offer six types of fostering schemes:

- 1 Mainstream/Short-term fostering**
- 2 Specialist fostering**
- 3 Short breaks**
- 4 Supported lodgings**
- 5 Permanent fostering/Long-term fostering**
- 6 Parent-and-child fostering**
- 7 Family Support Carers scheme**

1 Mainstream

This is a full-time fostering scheme for children up to the age of 18 or 24 if still in education. The foster carers who look after children in the mainstream scheme may look after the child for an overnight stay, or even up to two years, while long-term plans are made for the child. In this scheme, a weekly fee is paid to each carer in recognition of the skills they have and the work they do. Foster carers receive the fee in addition to the allowances paid for each child placed with them.

2 Specialist fostering scheme

This scheme provides foster carers with the opportunity to care for children with significant needs, including children with behavioural or learning difficulties, as well as individuals who may be challenged by their mental health. The weekly fee paid to specialist carers is higher in recognition of the skill required in caring for very challenging young people.



3 Short breaks scheme

This is a respite and part-time fostering scheme which includes three components:

- Caring for children in your own home to give parents a break for a short period
- Offering breaks to full-time foster carers and, in particular, specialist carers
- Offering care for children with disabilities.

The time spent caring will vary depending on the needs of the child and family. It could be one weekend a month, one evening a week or day-time during school holidays. The arrangements for this scheme could last as little as a few months to up to a few years.

4 Supported lodgings

The supported lodgings scheme is aimed at helping young people over 16 who cannot live with their own families to develop independent living skills in a nurturing environment. This will eventually help them live in their own or shared accommodation. When you become a supported lodgings carer, you offer a room in your own home to a young person between 16 and 21. They will have their own key and, with the support of a carer, will eventually do their own shopping, cooking, cleaning, and manage their own money. The young people require the support of adults who will be able to give them sound advice and guidance at a time when they are preparing to enter adulthood. Carers are paid the same fee as the main-scheme carers, including the allowance for the young person. The carer will pay a weekly allowance to the young person, including an allowance for travel.

5 Permanent fostering

Some children who cannot return to their birth families and are not adopted may need to be looked after permanently in a fostering arrangement. Children in permanent foster care would stay with their foster carers until they are 18 or until 24 if they are in education.

6 Parent-and-child fostering

Parent-and-child foster carers support and nurture birth parents and their child/ren. Parent-and-child foster carers help new parents develop confidence in their parenting skills in a safe environment. This could be guiding a parent on hygiene, healthy eating, play and stimulation for their child. Parent-and-child foster carers also form part of a team assessing parents' ability to look after their child. Parent-and-child placements are usually for an agreed period.

Parent-and-child foster carers are paid a weekly fee and allowance. The needs of each young parent will be different so the specific role and responsibilities of a parent-and-child foster carer will be established at the start of any placement.

"Fostering has definitely kept us young! It's so enjoyable and you learn as much from the children you're fostering as they do from you. Several of my previous foster children still come back to me for help or advice – it's really rewarding to know they will still turn to me, and I enjoy keeping in touch with them."

Richard, a foster carer for 24 years

7 The Family Support Carers Scheme – An Introduction

Family Support care provides respite care when families are in crisis. The Family Support Carers Scheme may only be used to support the families of children who are not Looked After for a maximum of 48 hours per week and no longer than a period of 3 months.

This is occasional temporary time limited care in their own homes for children and young people up to 18 years old. Carers for this scheme all reside within London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster City Council or a neighbouring borough within close proximity to ensure that there is minimal disruption to the child's daily routine.

They will work with professionals to provide a local tailor-made support service for each child or young person and their family via a referral with very clear criteria to ensure that the system is used appropriately.

Could you **Foster** a child like me?



Fostering Assessment Process

Initial Enquiry

Making an initial enquiry is easy and this can be done by email or by phone.

You may email our duty service your interest and a duty worker will phone you or you can call us directly (freephone 0800 169 3497). You will be able to speak to a member of the team over the telephone to answer any questions you have and to discuss whether fostering is right for you and your family. We will complete an initial enquiry with you to find out more about your reasons for considering fostering, your previous experience of caring for children, your housing space and the time you have to care for children. The information would inform us whether you are a good candidate for fostering. Following this call you will be sent an Information Pack, which will contain information around the eligibility criteria, types of fostering, fees and allowances, and the fostering assessment process. If you wish to progress you will be invited to an information event.

Information Event

Attending an information event will provide you with an opportunity to find out even more about the fostering process, learn about the children who need foster placements and meet some of our social workers. You will benefit from the open discussions of the group and personal testimonies from some of our foster carers. It is recommended that all applicants attend these events. However, if you are unable to attend, we will discuss this and would conduct an initial home visit.

Initial Home Visit

A social worker from the duty team will visit you at home to discuss fostering in more detail and answer any additional questions you have. They will complete a brief assessment with you and your partner (if applicable) in relation to your consideration into fostering. The visit will also give you the chance to share your motivation, understanding and ability to meet the needs of Looked After Children. You will be able to discuss the fostering role and have the opportunity to highlight any experiences you have had that may strengthen your application to foster. We will ask about your family and support system and their feelings about fostering. The social worker will make a recommendation to the duty team manager and a decision will be made whether we progress to the assessment stage or if there is additional work/learning that needs to take place prior to this.

If the decision is to progress you will be provided with an application form which will need to be completed and returned prior to commencing Stage 1 of the process.

Stage 1

Assessment (8 – 10 weeks or 2 - 2.5 months)

During the assessment stage a number of checks will be undertaken which include: your local authority, probation, finance, employment and education. If you have a school age child, we will also complete personal references. You will be expected to undertake a health assessment with your doctor. We will need to complete a Disclosure and Barring



Service (DBS) check on you, your partner and any members of your household who are over 18.

The Skills to Foster Preparation Training

You will be invited to a four-day training course for prospective foster carers. Attendance at the course forms part of the assessment process and allows you to gather information. All applicants are required to attend. The training will cover a variety of topics in order to prepare you for the fostering role. Following the course, the trainers will discuss with you whether you have the skills to foster at this time.

Stage 2

Assessment (up to 4 months)

The Assessment

If you and the Skills to Foster trainers agree to proceed and there are no child protection concerns regarding your checks we will begin to complete a comprehensive assessment. You will be allocated an assessing social worker who would have a discussion with you about your: background, life experiences, parenting skills, and the qualities you would bring to fostering. You will provide evidence of your ability to care for children or young people; and the social worker would talk to your children and any adult children who have left home, and any former significant partners, where applicable.

Your assessing social worker will put all the information gathered during the assessment in one report. You will have a chance to read, make comments and sign the finished report before it is presented to the independent fostering panel.

Midway Review

Halfway through your assessment, your assessing social worker and their manager will undertake a midway review, which requires them to meet with you, either in your home or in your place of work. This is an opportunity to check that the assessment is on track and put in place plans to address any issues which may have arisen during the assessment. You will have the opportunity to raise any challenges or concerns you may have about the assessment or the assessor.

The Fostering Panel

Your assessment will then be processed to the fostering panel which you would be invited to attend. The fostering panel is a group of professionals independent of the service. The panel will make a recommendation to the agency decision-maker on your suitability to foster. The agency decision-maker considers the panel recommendations and make the final decision.

Post Approval

Once you are approved as a foster carer, your assessing social worker will arrange for you to be enrolled on our payment system and transferred to a supervising social worker, who will help you to order any equipment that you will need for a placement and arrange any training and support you may need to be ready to take placements.

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Anti-discriminatory practice

We believe we have a duty and responsibility to challenge discrimination. We believe in people's right to be respected regardless of their age, disability, ethnicity, gender, health, religious beliefs and sexuality.

We aim to provide:

- polite, courteous, positive and encouraging responses to all inquiries
- relevant information to the public
- a process that will seek to include rather than exclude potential foster carers and take full account of people's individuality, differences and life experiences
- a balanced decision about how applicants can best meet the needs of children and young people

"I thought: 'Wouldn't it be nice to have another child in the house?'. I wanted to share a bit of my family and my love for my children."

Rosaline, a foster carer for 14 years

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of our service please contact:

Sally Pillay

Head of Service

Fostering Service

First floor
Hammersmith Town Hall
King Street, London
W6 9JU

The Complaints Department

Fostering Service
2nd floor Kensington Town Hall
Hornton Street, London
W8 7NX

Further information on fostering

British Association of Fostering & Adoption (BAAF)

www.baaf.org.uk
0207 421 2600

The Fostering Network

www.fostering.net
0800 040 7675



What our foster carers have to say



"We have been fostering since January 2003 and have looked after eight children from 8 - 18 years. We find it so rewarding. We love giving children consistency and unconditional support to

help them develop confidence and trust. We help young people develop into independent adults and help them achieve their personal best in all they do. Our own three-year-old now has friends to play with and she can learn about different cultures and backgrounds while the foster children live with us. We would love to encourage more people to come forward to be foster carers."

Yerga and Tesfai



"We would encourage anyone who loves to help and who loves children to consider fostering. It is extremely rewarding, and our whole family has enjoyed helping our foster children to feel loved, safe,

and taken seriously. It is always a special moment when we see our foster child smile and laugh out loud – and to see him achieve is just wonderful. Being foster carers means that we also get to know the families of our foster children. One of the most special experiences for us has been to see how only a little bit of help can sometimes be quite life-changing for the families.

We're not denying that it is sometimes hard and that you do face some challenging situations, but it is certainly worth it."

Daniela and Scott



"I began fostering because I wanted to help children and care for them as part of my family. I started with older children and recently I've been mainly fostering babies. My daughter enjoys their company. It feels

great when you see the changes you have helped bring to children's lives, when they grow up and learn to smile and trust you. I really feel I am 'giving back' to society."

Azieb



"I started fostering because I really love children. It's so important to be there for them, to protect and to listen to them. Children are our future. I am looking after a boy with learning difficulties and really feel

that I am working as part of a team when I play my part in helping him. The social workers do such a marvellous job with the children and with us as foster carers. If you've got love in your heart and space in your home you could be a foster carer too."

Naima



"I have been fostering for more than 20 years and I really love looking after children and young people of all ages. It is great to see how they develop and grow up. It really makes me feel I am

giving something to society. I began fostering after I had been caring for my siblings. I thought fostering would be a good way to carry on caring for children after they left. The support is always there for us. The training is excellent. I learned such a lot from the 'Fostering Changes' course."

Jackie

By:design – April 2015, By:design 020 8753 3826, 106_32na.

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