



Could you Foster
a child like me?

h&f
putting residents first


THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA


City of Westminster



Dear applicant,

Thank you for expressing an interest in becoming a foster carer for the Tri-Borough. We welcome applicants from all backgrounds, cultures and religions. This means you can become a foster carer regardless of your ethnicity, gender or sexuality; whether you are with a partner or not; or whether you are disabled or able bodied, if you successfully complete the process. All applicants will be assessed on their ability to meet the diverse needs of children & young people that are being looked after by The London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea or Westminster City Council.

We are looking for people who can give commitment to children and young people, have sufficient time and adequate space in their homes and are enthusiastic to take on the challenges of looking after someone else's child or young person.

The children who are looked after come from various backgrounds and can be from birth to 18 years. As part of our assessment, we would explore with you your suitability and commitment to meet these diverse needs.

This booklet will provide you with some general information to help you decide if fostering is for you. You will also find information detailing what support and advice we provide to our approved foster carers.

We look forward to speaking to you and should you have any queries please feel free to contact us at any time on freephone 0800 169 3497.

Yours sincerely

The Fostering Recruitment & Assessment Team





What is fostering?


- Looking after someone else's child in your own home when his or her family are unable to look after them
- Fostering placements may last for short periods to support a family through a crisis (a matter of days or weeks) or for longer periods of months or even years
- Some children who are unable to return to their birth families may be permanently fostered
- Providing a safe, stable and nurturing environment allowing children to thrive and develop
- Helping a child or young person to come to terms with difficult issues
- Helping children & young people to maintain contact with their birth families
- Working as part of a professional network to support plans for the child or young person
- A career and lifestyle choice.

Fostering is not always easy. It can be challenging and stressful at times, but it can also be enormously rewarding and a lot of fun.

“Fostering is not just about making room in your house, it’s about opening up your heart.”

Stella, a foster carer for five years.





Who will I be caring for?

Children and young people from birth to 18 years old may need temporary, or sometimes permanent support. Children and young people in foster care come from a variety of background's and ages. There are also children with disabilities, sibling groups and young parents with children.

Each child's story is different and unique to them, although many children need a foster home for the following reasons:

- A temporary crisis in their family
- Illness
- Parents struggling to cope
- Physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Neglect
- A child or young person has been in trouble with the police and needs extra support outside their family
- Drug or alcohol difficulties in the family
- Violence in the family.





Who can apply to foster?

There is no typical foster carer. We welcome applications from people from a variety of backgrounds and all walks of life to meet the varied needs of children who need to be fostered in Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster. We always try to match children with a foster family who shares their ethnicity, language and culture. Foster carers must be able to promote the ethnicity, language and culture of all children they look after in a positive way.

"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 10 years.





You can foster if^{*}

- You are 21 years old or above
- You have the time, space & commitment
- You are single or with a partner
- You practice a religion or not
- You are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or heterosexual
- You have got your own children or not

You can foster if you are working, not working, or a full-time parent at home. Foster carers caring for children from birth to five 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.

*please also refer to the eligibility criteria which accompany this pack for further details.

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

Paula, a foster carer for two years.



What support will I be offered?

The Tri-Borough Fostering Service offers a comprehensive package of support & training to all its foster carers:

- 'Skills to Foster' preparation training to give you an understanding of fostering for the Tri-Borough and prepare you for your role as a professional foster carer
- You will have your own supervising social worker who will visit you at least every six weeks to guide and support you, identifying any training needs that you might have.
- Ongoing training to help you develop your skills and knowledge as a foster carer. All carers also have the opportunity to complete the QCF (formerly known as NVQ) Caring for Children and Young People qualification
- Support and guidance to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) standards
- Accessible support groups to enable you to share your experiences with other carers
- Support for other members of your household
- Social events for foster carers over the course of the year
- Bonus payments in recognition of long service
- Access to a wide range of professional support from education, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and health
- An annual award ceremony with the Mayor(s)
- Membership to the Fostering Network
- A weekly fee and allowance in line with the national minimum recommended amount
- Access to an emergency duty team outside office hours.



Fostering
Schemes
in the
Tri-Borough

We offer four types of fostering schemes.

These are:

- 1 Main-scheme / Fee-paying
- 2 Specialist Fostering
- 3 Short Breaks: Part-time and respite fostering for children with disability and young people in specialist foster care
- 4 Supported Lodgings

Main-scheme/Fee-paying

This is a full-time fostering scheme for children from birth to 18 years. In this scheme, a weekly fee is paid to each carer to recognise the skills they have and the work they do. Foster carers receive this in addition to the allowances paid for each child placed with them.

Specialist fostering scheme

This scheme provides full-time foster care to young people between the ages of 10-18 years who are difficult to place with mainstream foster carers due to the complexity of their needs. There is a similar arrangement for payment to the fee-paying scheme, though the carers' fee is higher in recognition of the higher level of skill and the greater demands on the specialist foster carer in caring for very challenging young people.

Short breaks scheme

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

- part-time fostering, which is caring for children in your own home to give parents a break
- respite care to full-time foster carers and in particular, specialist carers.
- respite care to 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 for as little as a few months to up to a few years.

The average is somewhere in between.



Parent & Child fostering*

Parent & child foster carers provide a family environment of support and nurture for a young parent & their child. Parent & child foster carers help young parents to develop confidence in their parenting skills in a safe environment. Parent & Child foster carers are paid a weekly fee and allowance for the parent & child. The needs of each young parent will be different so the specific role and responsibilities of a Parent & Child foster carer will be established at the start of any placement.

*Please also refer to the Parent & Child procedure document for further details.

“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 23 years (name has been changed for confidentiality reasons).

What we need from you?

- A commitment to children and young people
- The time, space and enthusiasm to foster
- A willingness to take part openly and honestly in the assessment process
- A commitment to sharing personal information with us about yourself and your family
- An understanding and acceptance of the legal and procedural framework of local authority fostering
- A commitment to attending support groups and training.

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

Ann, a foster carers for six years.

How do I become a foster carer?

You can call us to ask for a fostering information pack, or speak to a member of the team to discuss whether fostering might suit you. We will ask you about your reasons for considering fostering, your previous experience and the room you have available in your home. Then, if we are both happy to carry on with your application to foster, we will arrange to visit you in your home.

Home visit

A social worker from the fostering team will visit your home to decide whether it is suitable for fostering a child. The visit will also give you the chance to show the social worker what you are like as a person and highlight any experiences you have had that may make you a suitable foster carer. We will also ask about your family and their feelings about fostering.

The social worker will discuss your application with other members of the fostering team and then decide with you whether it would be right for you (with your partner, if applicable) to be formally assessed as a foster carer.

The Skills to Foster preparation group

This compulsory 3 day course will give you an understanding of fostering in the Tri-Borough. With the help of group activities, the Skills to Foster preparation group will help you to understand why children come into care, as well as your role and responsibilities as a foster carer. This is an integral part of your fostering assessment.

The course may take place before the formal assessment visits to your home, or after the assessment has begun. Following the course, a joint decision will be made by the trainers and you as to whether fostering is right for

you. Information about your contribution to the course will form part of the final report.

The assessment

The formal assessment can take up to five or six months and a social worker will visit your home many times. You will talk about your background, your own experiences of education and employment, and your lifestyle.

This will include religion, culture and day-to-day living, as well as your skills around caring for children and young people. The discussion will also cover the impact that fostering may have upon you and your family.

We will carry out various checks on you, your partner (if applicable), and any other member of your household who is aged 18 or over. These checks will be made with your local authority, the Criminal Records Bureau, the NSPCC and your doctor, and will show whether you are suitable to be a foster carer.

We will also ask for references from previous and current employers, as well as personal references from people who know you well and can comment on your ability to care for a foster child.

The fostering panel

Once the assessment is finished, the social worker will write an assessment report to present to the fostering panel. You will have a chance to read your assessment report before it goes to the panel, and will be able to point out anything with which you may not agree. You will also be invited to attend the panel.

The fostering panel is a group of professionals drawn together from a variety of backgrounds to advise the council on the suitability of people who apply to become foster carers. They will decide whether or not to recommend that the council approves you as a foster carer, although the final decision rests with the agency decision maker (the head of Family and Children's Services).

"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 (name changed for confidentiality reasons).





Anti Discriminatory Practice

We recognise that there is an imbalance of power within our society which results in specific acts of discrimination against certain individuals and groups. We believe we have a duty and responsibility to counter discrimination. We believe in people's right to respect in relation to 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 adopters 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/ young people.

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

For more information about fostering

**Call the fostering service
on freephone:**

0800 169 3497

Email:

fostering@lbhf.gov.uk

Visit us:

www.lbhf.gov.uk/fostering

www.rbkc.gov.uk/fosterus

www.westminster.gov.uk/fostering

Additional information about fostering

Fostering network

www.fostering.net

020 7620 6400

BAAF (British Association for Adoption & Fostering)

www.baaf.org.uk

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please call freephone 0800 169 3497.