

**Foster** *with*  
NORTH EAST

**Share your home.  
Shape their future.**

Could you offer the right home,  
at the right time for a child or  
young person through fostering?



# Welcome to Foster with North East

Thank you for choosing to find out more about starting your fostering journey with Foster with North East.

As a collaboration between 12 local authorities in the North East of England, we were formed to support anyone considering fostering in the region. Alongside our partner local authorities, we as the Foster with North East support team, are here to guide you all the way from initial enquiry and throughout the application process.

There is a shortage of foster carers in our region, and we need foster carers for children of all ages including babies, toddlers, young children and teenagers. We also need carers for brothers and sisters, those with additional learning or physical needs, children from ethnic minority backgrounds and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Fostering gives babies, children, and young people the chance to be in a stable family, filled with the trust, love and care that they need. We are looking for people from all backgrounds who can offer a loving home when needed, whether that's for a night, a week, a few months or longer-term. Ultimately all of our children and young people need a supportive and

nurturing environment which will help them to grow. Whether you're in the early days of thinking about fostering, or you're a little bit further down the line in your thinking, we're here to guide you through the process and explore the type of fostering that might work for you. We're also here to dispel any misconceptions you may have and answer your questions.

As with raising any other child, fostering is not always plain sailing and our children come from very different backgrounds and all have different needs. They need your support, time and care to grow, but rest assured you won't be alone in helping them with this and we'll be with you every step of the way.

If you think you have what it takes to share your home to shape the future of children and young people in the North East we'd love to hear from you. Please fill out the enquiry form on our website at [www.fosterwithnortheast.org.uk](http://www.fosterwithnortheast.org.uk) or call us on 0800 917 7771 and one of our Foster with North East fostering experts will contact you by the next working day to discuss your enquiry in a bit more detail.

*Foster with North East support team*





## Content page

<b>Welcome</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Your journey to foster</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>What is Foster with North East?</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>About Skills To Foster Training</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>How we work together</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Support for foster carers</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>All about fostering</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Real life fostering stories</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Who can be a foster carer?</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>FAQs about the children</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Types of foster care</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>FAQs about support and finance</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>The benefits of fostering</b>	<b>10</b>		
<b>Foster with us</b>	<b>11</b>		
<b>Why children need our support</b>	<b>12</b>		
<b>A day in the life of a foster carer</b>	<b>13</b>		

# What is Foster with North East?

All foster carers need and deserve support for the important job they do. We're coming together as Foster with North East, a collaborative project between authorities across the North East of England, to offer even more support to prospective and newly-approved foster carers.

The 12 local authorities from across the North East of England who make up Foster with North East are joining forces to offer a single united support hub for foster carer enquiries and those in the application process. The initiative is supported by the Department for Education.

We know the fostering application process can seem equal parts exciting and daunting. There are forms,

interviews and training too. But having someone on hand to guide you through the process from day one until that special moment where you welcome a child into the home, and beyond, makes everything that little bit simpler.

With Foster with North East, you always have someone you can contact to find answers to your questions – no matter how big or small.

We're here to provide transparency about the approval process and what you can expect from the reality of life as a foster carer. Think of us as your fostering information hub and specialist support during your journey to become a foster carer. We aim to be your guiding support when you need it.

## Will you join us?

The Foster with North East partner local authorities are:

- Darlington Borough Council
- Durham County Council
- Gateshead Council
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- Middlesbrough Council
- Newcastle City Council
- North Tyneside Council
- Northumberland County Council
- Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Sunderland City Council (Together for Children)

## Foster with North East Hub

Whether you're in the early stages of researching fostering or ready to apply, you can contact our Foster with North East hub for support.

The hub provides round-the-clock support for prospective and newly-appointed foster carers. The Foster with North East team is here to answer questions, give guidance and to act as a sounding-board throughout your fostering journey.

Foster with North East regional hub offers:

- Advice
- Training
- Reassurance
- Support for your fostering journey





## How we work together

Foster with North East represents local authority foster care across the whole region. From September 2023, we joined together for the first time to recruit more foster carers and better the experiences and outcomes for foster carers and for our children. We want every prospective foster carer to feel supported in their journey, from their very first enquiry through the application process and beyond.

- We're offering prospective foster carers increased levels of support through the creation of a specialised support hub.
- We've committed to sharing resources for the benefit of children and fostering families.
- We're launching the pioneering Mockingbird scheme across the region to grow branches of support within every local council area.

### Foster for and with your community

Through our 12 local authority fostering teams working together we will be able to grow our knowledge about our communities and the needs of families, children and young people. We are committed to communicating and sharing resources to give foster carers and cared for children the best possible experiences of fostering.

Each partner is a local authority that needs more foster carers to support children and families in their area. As local authority providers, our fostering teams are at the heart of our communities - help us to help them.

### Support, collaboration and a community that cares

As part of our collaboration, we've stepped up support for all prospective foster carers starting right at that first enquiry. Our hub will also welcome prospective foster-carers for pre-approval Skills to Foster training. And from the point of application, you will also receive help and advice from the individual local authority you choose to work with. As an approved foster carer, you will also become part of the North East fostering community and be able to access events, activities and support groups organised by your local authority.

# All about Fostering

## What is fostering?

When a child cannot live at home or with family they can become a child who is cared for by the local authority. Foster care provides stability, safety and a nurturing environment when this happens. Fostering families give children space and support to flourish and share their own family life with the children they welcome into their homes.

## What is a foster carer?

Foster carers are approved for their important role following a thorough assessment process and training. The role of a foster carer can be challenging but also rewarding and fulfilling. As a foster carer, you're a vital part of a professional team that provides a loving family environment and safety.

## What does a foster carer do?

Foster carers look after children in their home and carry out the day-to-day activities that are needed to meet their needs.

You will build trusting relationships with children and provide a family environment that enables them to flourish and reach their full potential.

On a daily basis, the practical tasks foster carers may do include:

- Make meals
- Drop off and pick up children from school
- Communicate with nursery, school and other educational organisations to support learning
- Maintain the home and involve children and young people in family life
- Spend leisure time together, ensure children have the opportunity to play, relax and lead a healthy lifestyle
- Take children and young people to appointments and activities

Foster carers are also role models for those they look after, offering help, love and patience to children who often need time to trust.



# Who can be a foster carer?

We work with a wonderfully diverse community of foster carers from all over the North East. As a result, we know first-hand that foster carers from different backgrounds make brilliant carers. There are very few barriers to becoming a foster carer. If you do have any concerns that something might prevent you from being considered, we'd urge you to talk to our Foster with North East Hub social workers who can answer any questions you may have.

## Over 18 (some partners 21)

You must also be at least 18 years old to foster, though most foster service providers will require you to be at least 21.

## Relationship status

It does not matter if you are married, divorced, or single, you can still become a foster carer. As long as you can support a child or children in your care, your relationship status is not significant. If you are in a couple, you need to be in a stable relationship.

## Sexuality and gender

There are no limitations to fostering based on sexual orientation or gender, the important thing is making sure you can meet the needs of a child and provide a loving, nurturing environment to care for a child.

## With or without children

Not having children of your own doesn't impact your ability to foster. Children of any age, that still live with you will be fully included in the assessment process. Your children will also be supported throughout your fostering journey.

## Home status

Whether you own your own home or rent, you can foster. Some of our partners will require you to have a spare room but the social workers at your local authority will discuss requirements during the application process.

## Work status

You may be able to foster and work in another job, but you will need to be available to care for a child, attend meetings and training. The assessment will explore how you will meet the needs of children and what age of child would be suitable to foster, alongside your working role. If applying as a couple, some chose to change their current working arrangements to suit the new family arrangements.

## Children elsewhere

During the assessment process we will talk to your children who live elsewhere, whether they are adults or children. We approach this sensitively and in an age-appropriate way and often we get some really good supportive information from your children around how you have parented them.

## Ethnicity

Within fostering you can be from any cultural background. You need to have a good understanding and be able to communicate in English in order to meet the needs of the child and work with other professionals.

## Criminal record

During the process, you will need to be honest and let us know about any offences. We appreciate that some people may have committed minor offences previously. Minor offences should not count against you in your application to foster. During the assessment process you will be asked to complete a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. The check will highlight any criminal conviction so it's really important that you are honest with us from the initial start of the process.

# Types of Foster Care

Whether it's fostering for a night, a week, a month, a year or more, sharing your heart and home can shape a child's life and future for the better. Fostering can take many forms - it can be on an emergency basis, short-term, long-term, permanent, focussed on meeting high-level needs of children with disabilities, supporting parents and babies, or offering a safe home for a young person who is seeking asylum. As a foster carer, some types of fostering may be better suited to your circumstances, and we will work alongside you to explore your skills and which type of fostering may fit best for you.



## Short term

*"We only take sort of short term fostering. But short term can be anything from a day to two years. It just feels like a total privilege. I just feel really lucky that we're able to help these children and that we are in the position that we can."*

*Sarah*

Short term fostering is a temporary arrangement for children in care. We look for short term foster care when parents are unable to care for their child on a temporary basis (usually up to two years) until a child's plan is finalised. Children may also come into short term foster care while parental assessments are carried out or longer-term care plans are made.

Short term foster carers usually meet a child's own family and support court agreed family time. In the role, you can expect to arrange things like travel to and from family time venues. You will also need to prepare and support children for their family time. Foster carers need good communication skills and to share information with professionals.

In some instances, a child's plan may change from short term to long term / permanent arrangements to give children a sense of stability and support.

## Long term/Permanence

*"I'd encourage anyone who is considering fostering a child to do so - it gives you a real opportunity to have a life-changing impact on young lives. I'm a long-term carer, currently looking after three children who all have complex needs. It's the most challenging but fulfilling thing I have ever done. And what is great about fostering is it allows me to manage my own time and pursue others interests which otherwise I could not if I were stuck in an office environment."*

*Kath*

Long term/permanent fostering is where a foster carer agrees to care for a child or children for long periods, often into adulthood. Children benefit from greater stability from a young age right through to the age of 18 and beyond, where possible. This long term commitment to a child or young person offers cared for children consistency and support throughout their childhood. For some, it will be their first experience of a stable and caring family life.

Young people may continue to live with their foster family after the child or children turn 18. This is known as 'staying put', which is an agreement from the foster carer that the child can stay within their home until the age of 21 or beyond. In these circumstances, young people benefit from consistency and encouragement and support as they transition into adult life.

## Short Break Support

*"I've also done short-term care for babies when their foster carers have gone on holiday and I've even looked after one for 3 hours when a foster carer had an event to go to and they couldn't take the baby with them. It and it was great for me to be able to help her and her foster carer in this practical way."*

*Leigh*

Short break care is sometimes known as respite care where foster carers look after children and young people for short periods of time. Short break foster carers look after children and young people short periods of time. It can be particularly beneficial to both children and carers of those who have complex needs as it enables children to enjoy new experiences and build trusting relationships with other adults and children.

We often find that short break carers get a taste for fostering and often wish to become full-time foster carers as they have enjoyed it so much.



## Specialist

*"I've been fostering for 14 years, almost always children under two years old and often with additional needs. I'm so pleased I made the decision to foster – it has had a truly positive impact on my life as well as the children I look after. Every child deserves a chance, and sharing your home can make a huge difference."*

**Niki**

Specialist foster care requires carers who are willing to care for children or young people who have higher levels of need. To be a specialist foster carer you will complete extra training. You will look after children who have additional physical, emotional or educational needs. The young people you look after may need to attend more doctor or school appointments. Specialist foster carers may also care for teenagers who need more support. Young people in this age group often need extra guidance and consistency to help them through what is often a tricky and emotional stage of their lives.

For this role, foster carers need to have excellent communication skills to work in partnership with the care team surrounding the child or young person. Collectively, you will provide stability and resilience.

## Parent and Child

*"Parent and child fostering is taking a step back, showing them how to parent and letting them learn because you can't take over. I've had very young parents who just needed a mum to kind of oversee things and make sure they understand routines and what they are doing, if they haven't had that themselves. Then I've had other parents that have had to be fully supervised. But if it works, then you've helped one parent and child to move on, live safely and stay together. With parent and child fostering you have hope that you've broken a cycle of family breakdowns."*

**Joanne**

Parent and child fostering is where a young parent, who may be within the later stages of pregnancy or with a newborn baby, stays with a foster carer. This type of fostering is sometimes called parent and baby foster care. The foster carer shares parenting skills and provides guidance and support for the early stages of a baby's life.

You'll need to complete additional training to be a parent and child foster carer and you will be fully supported by your local authority.

The primary focus of the foster carer is to help the parent and child to stay together as a family unit. Foster carers do this by helping with parenting tasks as well as supporting the parent to develop the necessary skills they'll need to care for their baby on their own in the future.



## Unaccompanied child asylum seekers

*"It's been great fun supporting the young woman from West Africa who lives with me. We initially had a lot of laughs working out which foods she liked and how to communicate with one another, but if you're open, empathetic and patient this type of fostering is incredibly rewarding. I've greatly enjoyed helping her settle and making sure she feels safe and secure, but I've also loved learning about her country and culture in a way I would never have been able to without fostering."*

**Frances**

Across the North East there is a growing number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who have no responsible adult to look after them. Sadly, they have often been forced to leave their families and homes for a variety of reasons, such as a consequence of wars, natural disasters, famine, disease or persecution. The majority of these young people are boys aged over 14. They need a safe and understanding environment to help them heal from the trauma they have experienced. Often, they speak little to no English so will need help from foster carers to support them to adjust to a new culture and with their education. Part of the foster carers role is also to help these young people to maintain their identity, by promoting religion, language, culture and heritage of the young person and help them to plan for their future.

# The benefits of fostering

Fostering is a fulfilling and rewarding role for those who choose to make it part of their lives. Being a foster carer is a vital and valued profession, but it's so much more than a 'job'. As a Foster with North East carer you'll have the opportunity to positively change the lives of children and young people in our region.

## Sharing your home, shaping lives

Sharing your heart and home can shape a child's life and future for the better. You can give a child a place to call home, feel safe and help them learn how to build trusting relationships.

## A career that challenges and rewards

Being a foster carer is not a 9 to 5 job, it can be challenging but it is also hugely fulfilling. There are few careers that compare to the rewards of fostering, sharing the small moments that show the difference you have made to the lives of children and young people.

Across the region there are opportunities to make a difference and be involved with different types of fostering to suit your circumstances and availability. There are ways to make a difference whether you're able to make a long term, regular or short term commitment.

Through fostering you will discover opportunities to:

- Shape the life of a child or young person for the better.
- Support families in the North East.
- Build long-term bonds with children.
- Model healthy relationships and help children learn how to build trust.
- Give children and young people new life experiences, introduce them to new interests, activities and support their learning and goals.

## A team to support your journey

As a foster carer, you'll be a vital part of a professional team that works together to ensure the needs of vulnerable children are met. You will have a familiar team around you to support you in the day-to-day care of the children and young people who live with you.

Throughout the North East, local authority fostering teams include social workers, support workers, counsellors and education specialists. We'll work together to give you the support you need, so you can focus on giving the children and young people the best possible care.

You may never feel quite 'ready' to be a foster carer but we – and our community of foster carers – can help you feel prepared. Foster with North East foster carers can access mentoring from experienced foster carers. Your foster carer buddies will be able to answer questions and share advice, based on their own personal experiences.

Upon approval, you will receive support and regular supervision from your allocated social worker within your respective local authority. This will allow reflective discussion between you and your social worker, focusing on children's experiences, needs, plans and feedback.

## Training and development for a professional career

You don't need any special qualifications to apply to be a foster carer. In fact, all of the specialist training you will need to become a fostering professional is provided free of charge.

Fostering training is designed to help you build specialist knowledge, expand your skills and allow you to understand the experiences, behaviours and needs of the children and young people in your care so you feel prepared for the road ahead.

## Fostering allowances and tax-free benefits

We want foster carers to feel supported for the important job they do. Receiving fostering fees and allowances doesn't impact your receipt of most benefits and offers financial incentives, such as a dedicated tax-free allowance and Qualifying Care Relief.

# Foster with us

When you share your home and help, love and patience can enable children and young people to develop the trust they need to build relationships in their future lives.

By matching children with the right family home at the right time, we give children better support and care:

- More children will be able to stay closer to their familiar surroundings when safe for them to do so.
- It will be easier for important relationships with friends and family to be maintained.
- We can provide stability and give children continuity by making it simpler for them to attend the same school, sports and other activities they enjoy.

As a North East foster carer, you'll join a community of dedicated and welcoming regional fostering families. Our fostering families come from diverse backgrounds but share a common motivation to

make a difference to the lives of young people in our region. Members of the North East fostering community regularly come together to support one another on their fostering journeys, take part in social activities and build friendships.

Through the Foster with North East partners, you'll be able to access support groups and social activities near your home organised by your local authority.



# Why children need our support

Since 2011, the number of children in need of foster care in the UK has been rising, while the number of registered foster carers has declined. In the North East, we have the highest number of children referred into foster care of all regions and we desperately need more foster carers to offer help and support to children and young people in our communities.

## Why do we need more foster carers in the North East?

Although the number of children coming into foster care is rising across our region, fewer people are choosing to make foster care part of their lives – in fact the number of approved foster carers fell by a third (33%) in the North East in a year. Meaning we simply don't have enough carers for the children who need a home through fostering in our region.

Foster carers offer security, safety and stability at times of confusion and worry for children and they play a vital role in our communities by helping children to stay closer to home when it is safe for them to do so.

By recruiting more foster carers, children will also be able to remain in the North East, nearer familiar surroundings which is so important to their sense of security, belonging and identity. We also need foster carers for brother and sister groups so we can make sure this important relationship is protected, and the children can remain living together and supporting one another.

Our ambition is to grow the number of fostering households that can make a real positive difference for the children and young people in need in our communities. We need foster carers from all walks of life who can provide different types of foster care and provide safety, stability and a safe place to stay for babies, children, young people, teenagers and brother and sister groups in our region.

## The needs of the children

Children don't always need long term foster care. In fact, most cared for children come into care on a short-term basis. Sometimes the circumstances behind this may lead to a need for longer term fostering. However, every child or young person's situation is different.

Foster care provides support and care for children when they can't live at home due to:

- Family emergencies
- Parents struggling with alcohol or substance misuse, who need time to overcome these challenges
- Risk of harm from abuse, neglect or domestic violence in the home

Foster carers also provide short breaks or respite care for children with disabilities and complex needs. Across the region, we need foster carers who can share their home and offer different types of fostering. In particular, we need more prospective foster carers to come forward who can provide homes for teenagers, brother and sister groups and children with disabilities or higher level needs.

# A day in the life of a foster carer

Karen has been a short term foster carer for 11 years alongside her husband Brian who works as a motor vehicle technician. They live with their 18-year-old daughter who works a nursery school and son (11 years old) who attends a SEND school and they are currently caring for a 7 month old baby.



## I started my day...

Baby wakes early, usually 6am which is when Brian gets up, so he gives him first bottle and nappy change then brings me a cup of tea at 6.45am. This is the quietest part of the day and I enjoy the peace. Our son wakes at 7am and has breakfast. I help him get ready for the school taxi which comes at 7.50am.

## My morning looked like...

Once taxi has left, I take time to have another cup of tea and play with the baby. He loves to play with his toy arch and bashing the hanging toys together. It is then time to get baby ready and give him his breakfast. He has only recently started weaning and enjoys his porridge very much. He will have a little milk afterwards and this is when he falls asleep. This gives me time to tidy the kitchen, start the washing machine and clear up the living room! Around 11am we go for a walk around the park where he enjoys looking at the tree branches and the sun filtering through them.

## My afternoon looked like...

Once we're back home I hang up the washing then prepare lunch for baby and myself. After a quick tidy of the kitchen, it's time for more play. Baby is soon tired and ready for another nap. I take this chance to tidy upstairs and send some lovely videos I've made to the baby's prospective adopters. They are delighted to see them and it's one of my favourite parts of the day.

If he sleeps long enough, I can watch something on tv – my favourite is property shows. The school taxi returns at 3.50pm and my son plays some games with baby, like peek a boo which makes him laugh. My daughter gets home from work and will help with both children when needed. My children have always been brilliant with the young people I have cared for, and I love watching the way they interact with them.

## My evening looked like...

Teatime for the baby is at 4.15pm and my son will have a snack and a drink. He plays with toys and goes on the iPad while I bath baby and get him ready for bed. My son has additional needs and is a little picky over what he will eat so he has his tea around 5.30pm.

Brian gets home around 6.30pm and I give baby a bottle around then. He falls asleep and we take him upstairs to bed. It's time to read a schoolbook with our son and then he has time to read or play before a shower and bedtime. He likes one of us to sit with him for 10 minutes before the lights go out and it's always a nice relaxing time together.

I take some time to fill in a daily diary for our social worker to read when we next meet up. This includes information about what we've been up to, the baby's development and our daily activities. I also spend time replying to emails about upcoming adoption meetings.

My husband and I take turns cooking tea depending on who is sitting upstairs and then we sit down together with our daughter at around 8pm to eat. Once we are tidied up and showered, we love to watch a tv series and it's a great way to relax after a busy day.

## I ended my day by...

Watching tv from 9pm after sorting clothes for tomorrow and checking school bag is packed. 10.30pm is usually bedtime.

We have lots of appointments between my son and baby. There are lots of visits from social workers which are enjoyable as we get updates and have a nice chat. Sometimes we get lots of appointments in a short space of time, so it pays to be organised.

My number one tip for adjusting to life as a foster carer is to be organised and flexible. Sometimes a social worker will be nearby and ask to pop in and this is never a problem unless we happen to be out!

# Your journey to foster

## Applying

To find out more about fostering you will need to complete an enquiry form on our website or by calling 0800 917 7771. Our Foster with North East hub will then contact you to get some more information and to answer any questions. This information will be shared with your Local Authority (LA) fostering social worker who will carry out an Initial Visit at your home. If after the Initial Visit you and your LA are happy to proceed, you will need to complete an application form. This requires information around your education, employment, addresses and relationships. You will also need to consent for DBS checks and medicals.

## Form F Assessment.

The Form F Assessment is completed by a fostering social worker. For applicants who are in a relationship, the social worker will meet you both individually as well as together. The social worker will also want to talk to your children and any other household members.

The assessment will explore what has shaped you into the person you are now, and you will be asked to provide information which will contribute to the final assessment report. The assessment will identify your strengths and any areas you may require some support, and will note the type of fostering you can offer and the ages and numbers of children you wish to care for.

## Post approval

Support doesn't end at approval. You will continue to have a fostering social worker to offer you advice and guidance. You will be invited to training and support groups which gives you a great opportunity to develop your knowledge and build relationships with other foster carers and professionals, so you truly feel part of the fostering community.

## Training

You will be invited to attend two day Skills to Foster Training, with the Foster with North East hub team. The course is specially designed to help you to understand the role of a foster carer, gain an understanding about the needs of children and learn skills to care and support children who may have experienced trauma. You'll also learn about the other professionals and family members that you may work with.

## Assessment and panel

Your fostering social worker will share the Form F Assessment report with you and use the information gathered to make a recommendation on approval. You will be invited to a fostering panel alongside your assessing social worker. Panel members have experience related to fostering and will read the full assessment report ahead of panel. At panel members will talk about your assessment and ask some questions and make an informed recommendation regarding your approval. They will also outline the age range and number of children you will be able to look after. This recommendation is provided to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), who will read all the information and make the final decision around your approval.



# About Skills to Foster Training

We don't expect prospective foster carers to have any specific qualifications when they come to us. What we are looking for are individuals and couples who are motivated to shape the lives of children in our region for the better.

You will need a willingness to learn about the life experiences of the children and young people you will care for and how to support them. Foster carer training will build the skills and confidence you need to tackle the challenges of this fulfilling role.

When you start your fostering journey, you will be invited to attend Skills to Foster Training which will provide a solid starting point by introducing you what fostering involves. The Skills to Foster Training is mandatory prior to approval and it's delivered by our Foster with North East specialist hub team which includes experienced fostering social workers.

You'll learn about issues and challenges that might arise and ways to resolve them. You'll learn about the experiences of children and young people who come into care and how to help and support them.

Training will go into greater depth about the realities of the role, so you can begin to picture how fostering might fit into your life and the types of foster care you'd like to be involved with.

## What do foster carer classes cover?

During your Skills to Foster training, you will:

- Learn about the life experiences and challenges faced by cared for children and young people.
- Develop skills to help you build positive relationships and manage challenging situations.
- Have the opportunity to build friendships with others new to fostering and extend your fostering network.
- Be able to ask questions and learn about how fostering works and the support and training we offer.

## How long does foster care training take?

The Skills to Foster Training runs over a series of sessions. We want you to be able to get as much as possible out of the course and want every applicant to have the chance to attend.

## How long does it take to train as a foster carer?

Skills to Foster Training is one element of the foster care approval process. With Foster with North East, you could become an approved foster carer in as little as 4 to 6 months. This enables you to have a thorough assessment, develop a solid understanding of fostering and feel prepared to foster children and young people.



# Support for Foster carers

## With you throughout your journey

Foster with North East will work alongside your local authority to help you prepare for your fostering journey and offer specialised support for your application milestones along the way. Our hub provides a fixed point of contact for the application journey. Foster with North East social workers are knowledgeable about the whole journey to fostering and the role of a foster carer in our region. The team will help you navigate your fostering journey, so you know what to expect and feel prepared.

There are core support elements that applicants going through their journey to foster and newly approved foster carers can access across all partner authorities, including:

- A dedicated phone line you can call to ask questions, find out about the process and seek support and advice.
- Training events led by a specialist team to introduce you to the realities of foster care and prepare you for fostering.
- Once you become an approved foster carer, you will also be able to access the support and ongoing training from your local authority.

## Foster Carer Information Events

Although it's not essential to attend a Foster Carer Information Event, you may find it beneficial to do so. As well as monthly online introductory events run by the Foster with North East Hub team, the 12 partners who make up Foster with North East run their own regular fostering events across the region and online, so there's always an information event coming up to suit you.

All our events are informal and there's always plenty of opportunity to find out more – head over to our website to view our upcoming events.





## Mockingbird

We are extremely excited to be the first region in the UK to be fully signed up to The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme. The Mockingbird initiative has been developed to offer peer support and nurture relationships between cared for children, young people and foster families. By bringing together six to ten fostering families as a group known as a constellation, the families effectively act as an extended family to one-another. They are led by a constellation host and members support each other through group get-togethers and informal conversations in a way that feels natural and sociable. It's like having an extended foster family you can call and who get together for activities, celebrations, sleepovers and short breaks.

*"I like Mockingbird because I met new people and our days out are good, everyone enjoys themselves."*

- Young person.

*"Our group has slowly grown in confidence and has shared skills, opinions and knowledge amongst each other. You will always find that there will be someone who has been there or dealt with a situation. We both feel so lucky to have this opportunity and look forward to continuing to grow and develop a positive future for everyone involved."*

- Lesley, Home Hub Foster Carer

## Ongoing training

Foster care training doesn't end once you've become an approved foster carer. Each partner within Foster with North East offers its own programme of post-approval training, which you will be able to access free of charge. To help you develop as a fostering professional, there are also opportunities to complete additional training to qualify you for specialist types of fostering such as becoming a parent and child carer.

## Events, activities and support groups

As an approved foster carer you'll be able to access a programme of events and activities where fostering families can meet, socialise and support one another in your local area. Individual partners run their own events and support groups to connect you to other fostering families in your local area.



# Real-life fostering stories



“It’s given my daughter that sort of sibling relationship, even though it’s not full time and it’s not forever. I also think it’s made her grow up to be a more empathetic person, to have more patience and to understand that some families aren’t like our family and some children don’t have all the nice things she has had growing up. It has really made a difference, I think.”

Leigh

“ I specialise in fostering 0–2-year-olds, and although I’ve only been fostering for a year, it really is the most fulfilling thing I have ever done. My father used to foster when I was a child and I saw first-hand the impact he had on those children, so when I retired from nursing, I wanted to do something equally worthwhile.

Summara

# More real-life fostering stories

“I think you’ll find once you’ve started, you won’t stop it. You kind of get hooked. But, yeah, just give it a try. Don’t rule yourself out for having children, having no children, being on your own, being in a couple, it doesn’t make any difference to fostering. If you’ve got time and patience, you can do it, without a doubt.”

Joanne



“I would advise anybody thinking about getting into fostering to explore it further. I’m a long-term carer, having been fostering for 15 years, and in that time, I’ve fostered 23 children. Currently I’m looking after two siblings – I’m so pleased that they still have each other and I’m able to make a positive difference to their lives. Fostering really is the most rewarding thing I have ever done, and there are so many different kinds of children you can help.

Vivienne

## More real-life fostering stories

My husband and I have spent the last 35 years doing long and short-term fostering, and I can honestly say it really is the most rewarding thing I've ever done. There are so many different kinds of fostering to consider – you just have to find what works for you. I'm so pleased we did it. Every child deserves a loving home, and it's amazing to see the improvement you can make to their lives.

Liz

It's challenging, but with the support and the help, you will learn how to parent these children and help them flourish. We all learn every day. We teach them in a different way to start and take pride in themselves. They start to see the benefit they bring to the world, and that is really what makes everything worthwhile.

Lesley

# FAQS

## About the child

### Can I make day-to-day decisions about the child's life?

As a foster carer, you will have some decision making responsibility for the children and young people you look after. However, in most cases, the child's own parents will retain legal responsibility alongside the local authority. How long the child has stayed with you alongside other factors can also play a part in the decisions you may be allowed to make on behalf of the child.

For clarity, your social worker will outline in writing where and when decision making lies with you and where you will need others to review. This way, you will know whether you have delegated authority for decisions like taking a child to get a haircut or to get immunisations.

### Can you choose what age child you foster?

Throughout the North East, we need foster carers for children from just a day old up to 18 years of age. Right now, there are babies, toddlers, primary aged children and teenagers in need of safe and stable homes.

You will discuss any preferences as part of your assessment. As part of your fostering assessment, your social worker will consider your experiences and transferrable skills and together you can agree what type of fostering will be the most suitable for you. Your social worker will make a recommendation in your assessment around the type of fostering, age range and number of children you can care for. As you become more experienced, undergo more training or as your own circumstances change, your approval may change and evolve.

### Do I have to take my foster child to school?

When you pick up and drop off a child at school it helps them to feel more secure. Being there as they head into school and after school to chat through their day or talk to teachers also gives an awareness of how things are for them at school. For these reasons, depending on the age and stage of education of the child, foster carers should ideally be able to take children to and from school and also to extracurricular activities.

### Can my foster child go to school closer to where I live?

Same teachers and friends, which can provide stability and continuity. In many instances, the goal of fostering is for the child or young person to return to their family, when it is safe to do so. Staying at the same school can help to minimise changes and make transitions easier for cared for children.

If a long-term care plan is needed, fostering may become permanent. In these circumstances, consideration will be given to a child attending a school in your local community to enable them to establish local connections in the area they will continue to live.

### Can I take my foster child on holiday?

Before booking a holiday abroad you'll need to ensure the child has a passport and (dependent on circumstances and child's legal status) the children's parents have given them consent to travel.

You'll need to consider:

- Any specific health or wellbeing needs when choosing somewhere suitable to go, where you stay and the activities you do together.
- Before booking a holiday abroad you'll need to ensure the child has a passport and the children's parents have given them consent to travel.

### Will I meet the family of the child I foster?

Foster carers are likely to meet with the family of the children they foster.

The frequency of family time may vary, but it's important to approach visits positively and without judgement. Foster carers are expected to support any court agreed family time arrangements. As a foster carer, you will support children by taking them to family time and being there for them afterwards too. It can be a difficult experience for some children, and they may really need your support afterwards. You will also keep social workers and other professionals up to date about any worries or issues.

# FAQS

## Support and finance

### What support will I get during the assessment process?

Whilst the assessment process is structured and transparent, we know that it can feel intense at times. Our job at Foster with North East is to support you through this process. We will work with you so that you know what to expect during your journey to foster.

Our hub social workers will take you through Skills to Foster Training, which will give you the skills and knowledge you need to foster.

Once your enquiry is passed on to your local authority, they will become your point of contact and you will be assigned an assessing social worker. But the Foster with North East hub advisers will continue to support you on your journey, checking in with phone calls, answering your questions and explaining how different parts of the process will progress.

### What support is available to foster carers once approved?

Your pre-approval Skills to Foster Training and the guidance you will receive is just the start of your fostering journey. Foster carers across the region can access core elements of fostering support alongside additional partner-specific support. This includes:

- **A buddy mentor scheme** which links new foster carers to experienced foster carers in their area for knowledge sharing and support.
- **Regular fostering support groups** in your local area where you can socialise with other fostering families and gain peer support.
- **Invites to regular training** where you can develop your skills and build relationships with foster carers and professionals.
- **A named allocated social worker**, who will visit you regularly, providing supervision, advice and signposting to training and additional help.
- **A 24/7 duty service** with social workers to provide help and advice for any emergency issues.
- **A programme of events and activities** in your area and the region to allow fostering families to meet, socialise and support one another.

### What fostering training is available?

Your initial foster training and preparation course will help you discover what life as a foster carer is like. The course is designed to equip you with the skills, knowledge and understanding you'll need to start fostering. You will get a good idea of whether foster care is the right role for you and your family. There is also the chance to meet other foster care applicants and make friendships.

The 12 partners within Foster with North East provide ongoing development for foster carers. Fostering training programmes include a mix of online and in-person workshops. We understand that flexibility can really help foster carers to dedicate time to development so training is delivered at a range of times.

Local authorities plan and deliver ongoing training on relevant topics and emerging issues, such as:

- Looking after children who have suffered adverse childhood trauma such as abuse, neglect, separation and loss.
- Support to complete the national Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) programme during your first year after approval.
- Additional optional training for specialist fostering such as caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, parent and child fostering or caring for children with disabilities.

### How do foster carers get paid?

As a Foster with North East foster carer, you'll be paid by the local authority you are fostering for. The amount you receive will be based on the number of children and young people in your care and other factors such as their needs and age.

# FAQS

## Support and finance

### Do foster carers pay tax?

Almost all income from fostering is exempt from tax, thanks to Qualifying Care Relief from the Government to support foster carers. The Qualifying Care Relief (2023) gives households a tax exemption on the first £18,140 they earn from fostering.

You also get tax relief for each week or part week a child is in your care, reducing the tax paid on any fostering earnings above this amount. You could earn up to £25,000 without paying tax.

### Can I afford to be a foster carer?

We value the vital and professional contribution our foster carers make across the North East region. We appreciate you have outgoings and monthly costs and provide competitive pay, as we want you to be able to focus on meeting the needs of the children in your care.

We appreciate that many individuals and couples decide to give up work or reduce their hours to become foster carers. Qualifying Care Relief can make fostering a more affordable option for these families.

We understand that everyone's financial situation is different. Our Foster with North East partner local authorities will be able to advise you about payments.

### Do I have to give up work to be a foster carer?

There is no typical fostering household. Sometimes foster carers choose to leave other jobs or reduce their hours to focus on being a foster carer or apply after retiring. In some fostering families, one partner works outside the house full-time or part-time but someone needs to always be available to care for a child, attend meetings and also go to training.

Where individual circumstances allow, foster carers can and do keep their current jobs alongside fostering. To find out if this could be an option for you, we would encourage you to discuss this at the beginning of the assessment process. More employers are developing Friendly Fostering Family Policy to support you to be able to work and foster. You could have a chat with your employer to see if they already have one or if they could develop a policy.

What's important is that you can meet the needs of the children and young people in your care. The fostering assessment will consider how you can do this alongside any existing commitments. You can also talk through what types of fostering would be suitable for you. Your assessing social worker will work with you to agree what works best for you and your situation.

### Will I be classed as self-employed whilst fostering?

As a foster carer, whether you work for the local authority or an agency, you are classed as self-employed and will need to register with HMRC.

## About you

### Will my family have to be assessed?

Yes, all members of a household will be included in the fostering assessment process. We speak to all adults and children within the home because we need to understand how fostering would work for you and your family.

The application process places the needs of all children at its centre. As part of the process, we will consider how you will continue to meet the needs of any children already living with you and those who you'd welcome into your home. We'll work with you to explore arrangements and needs to assess how different types of fostering might be a fit for your family and circumstances.

### Can I foster if I have health issues?

Physical or mental health issues will not necessarily prevent you from becoming a foster carer. What is important is that you are fit and emotionally healthy enough to provide stable care and support for a child or young person. Each prospective foster carer must have a medical assessment with their GP. The report will be used by our Medical Advisor to assess whether any on-going health issues may impact on your capacity to care for a child or cause a deterioration in your health. If you have any preliminary questions about health conditions, please do get in touch with the Foster with North East foster team.



Find out more at

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