

# Make a Difference

Become a foster carer



# Introduction

Thank you for your interest in fostering.

Foster carers provide invaluable care and support to vulnerable children and young people in the Richmond Borough. We can have up to 100 children placed in foster care at any one time. We need carers who are able to care for children of all ages, and we currently have a particular need for carers who can provide a home for sibling groups.

Fostering can be an incredibly rewarding as well as challenging role at times.

We hope that this guide helps to answer some of your questions about fostering for Richmond upon Thames. If you should have any questions a member of the Fostering Team will be happy to help. Thank you again.

## *The Fostering Team*



# Why are foster carers needed?

There are times when children and young people cannot stay with their family. When this happens, foster carers will often provide temporary care whilst the family receives the help they need.

There are many reasons why children and young people need to live with foster carers. These include:

- Their parents are ill, have mental health problems or have a drug or alcohol-related problems that affect the care of their child
- There are relationship problems and tensions that mean young people need to be away from the home
- The child has experienced abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional), or has been neglected by someone in the home
- The child is an unaccompanied refugee or asylum seeker
- They are a young parent with a child of their own in need of extra support and supervision to adjust to their parenting role.

We aim for children to return to their families as soon as possible, but this could take anything from a few days to a few weeks. Depending on the situation this could be much longer, anywhere from several months to a year. In some cases children cannot return home and they will stay with a carer on a long term basis or until a permanent home is found for them.

## Who can be a foster carer?

In Richmond upon Thames, we are looking for people who have the time, space and willingness to commit to the fostering task. There are no typical foster carers; we need carers from all backgrounds. We welcome carers of all faiths, whether you are single or applying with a partner, employed or not employed, straight or gay, renting or own your own home.

We need a diverse group of carers because we know children are more likely to thrive if they are placed with carers who are a good match for them in terms of culture, language and background.

To be considered as a foster carer for Richmond upon Thames, you must have the space in your home to accommodate a foster child. You also need to have sufficient time to foster, including being available for some daytime meetings and to care for children if they are not at school. You should also be physically able to care for a child and have a home which is free from health and safety hazards.

You must also be willing to be assessed, undertake initial and ongoing training and be willing for checks and references to be made.

# What do foster carers do?

Foster carers play a big part in the life of a foster child. Carers are part of a team helping to make changes and improvements in a child's life. They help the team by providing a safe and secure environment for the child; carers are often asked to report on how well a child is doing with them. This means that carers need to make sure that every aspect of the child's care is considered. This includes their emotional and physical health as well as making sure the child does well developmentally and academically.

Some of the everyday tasks that carers do include:

- promoting contact with birth parents and family;
- helping with independence skills and preparation for adult life;
- encouraging children to participate in out-of-school activities;
- supporting children's health and emotional needs;
- attending meetings and advocating for the children;
- moving children on to adoptive families; and
- supporting rehabilitation plans to return children to their birth family.

# Frequently asked questions?

## What age child can I foster and how many children can I have?

The age of the child or children you foster will depend on a number of factors. A member of the Fostering Team will be happy to discuss your preferences and what age group will be best for you.

Some carers prefer to look after teenagers and others prefer only babies; we need carers to care for all ages. The number of children you can foster is mostly dependent on the space you have in your home, but cannot exceed three.

Generally, children 14 years and older should have their own room. However, younger children may be able to share if they are siblings. Children under the age of 3 can often sleep in a cot in a carer's room so may not require their own space.

## Can I foster if I have a criminal record?

Anyone who has been cautioned or convicted of an offence against a child will usually not be able to foster. Other convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence, how long ago it was committed, and the context in which it occurred.

### **Is there an age limit for fostering?**

The minimum age for foster carers in Richmond upon Thames is 21. In normal circumstances, foster carers will be expected to retire at 70. Applicants 68 or over will not normally be considered.

### **I smoke – does that matter?**

If individuals smoke it will be necessary to assess how this would impact on children placed, and could mean that an applicant is not suitable to foster. Where carers are approved they are required to agree to not smoke in the foster home. Smokers will not generally be approved to care for children under 10 years.

### **I have pets does that matter?**

Having a dog, cat or any other animal in your home will not necessarily prevent you from fostering. A member of the fostering team will consider any health, hygiene or safety issues and assess whether there are any risks to children.

### **What about my health?**

Part of your application to foster includes a medical examination. Your GP will be asked to comment on whether your health will be adversely impacted by the demands of fostering or if there is anything in your medical history that may impact on the fostering task. Once approved carers are expected to repeat this medical every three years.

### **Does my partner need to be involved with my application?**

Where you are living with a partner it is important firstly that they support the application to foster. The decision to foster should be a joint decision. Partners are required to be part of the application process and are expected to undergo the same training and checks.

### **What if I have my own children?**

Just as we would hope that fostering would be a joint decision if you were applying with a partner, fostering should also be a family decision. Fostering will have an impact on everyone in the family, and it is important that everyone is ok with the idea and understands what fostering will mean for the family.

Your own children will be asked for their views and opinions about fostering as part of your application. We can also provide opportunities for your children to speak with other children whose family fosters just in case they have questions and want to ask children who have experienced it for themselves.

# Are there different types of fostering?

There are a number of different types of fostering, but the main ones are:

- Task-centred fostering
- Permanent (long-term) fostering
- Respite fostering
- Specialist fostering

## Task-centred fostering

Foster carers look after children while plans are made for their future.

Often the plan will be for the child to return to their birth family, and where this is not possible younger children will usually be adopted. If older children are not able to return to their birth families then task-centred foster carers may look after them until they reach adulthood and can live independently.

## Permanent or long-term fostering

Sometimes children cannot return to live with their birth families and adoption is not appropriate. Usually this applies to children who are considered too old for adoption, and who often continue to have regular contact with their birth families. These children and young people need to live with permanent or long-term foster carers.

## Respite care

Respite fostering is where foster carers provide very short periods of care for children who either live at home or with a foster carer. This will usually be a regular arrangement such as one weekend a month or up to two-week periods during holidays or in other specific circumstances.

Respite care is usually for more challenging, and often older children, so we particularly need respite carers who can look after teenagers.

## Specialist care

Specialist foster carers provide care to 'hard to place' young people between the ages of 10 and 18. Carers for this scheme are paid the equivalent of a salary to provide care to young people with multiple needs and challenging behaviour. Carers must have a spare bedroom and be available full-time to be considered for this scheme.

# How do I become a foster carer?

There is a process of checks, assessment and training which is required for all foster carers before they become approved as a carer and can start taking foster children. This process will be similar to most other local authorities and private agencies and is outlined in the application flow chart in the information pack.

## What does the assessment involve?

The assessment involves visits by a social worker who will work with you to complete a detailed report. The report will look at your history, experience and ability to care for a foster child. Where you are applying with a partner, it is an expectation that they be included as part of the assessment.

The assessment will include:

- interviews with all members of the household including your children or grandchildren if they live with you;
- checks with the Criminal Record Bureau and other agencies for all household members over the age of 16;
- a medical examination with your GP;
- visits to three referees, one of whom should be a member of your extended family;
- written references from current employer, previous employer (if the post involved children) and any former partners; and
- work with the social worker to complete an assessment report including evidence of your suitability to foster.



# What support do I get as a carer?

All approved foster carers will receive an allowance which is intended to cover all day-to-day costs of caring for a child, and is based on the age of the child or young person. Some carers receive a reward element based upon their professional development and experience. Please contact us for more information on our allowances and rewards. All payments are reviewed annually and meet national minimum standards.

The Fostering Service also provides carers with:

- Regular training opportunities
- A mentoring scheme
- Independent Foster Carers Association
- Fostering Network Membership/Foster Talk
- Annual foster carers events
- Opportunities for further training
- Regular support from an allocated social worker
- Out of hours social work support
- Foster Carers Forum

## Translation advice

Please contact us if you need this leaflet in Braille, large print, on audio tape or in another language, phone 020 8891 7600 or Minicom 020 8831 6001.

## I'm interested, what next?

If you would like more information or to speak to a member of the team about the next steps, please contact Fostering Services on freephone 0800 085 7072.

You can also email: [fostering.info@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:fostering.info@richmond.gov.uk)

Or write to us: Fostering Team, 42 York Street, Twickenham, TW1 3BW.

Alternatively you can visit our website at [www.richmond.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.richmond.gov.uk/fostering) and complete an online expression of interest form.