



# Become a fabulous FOSTER CARER

Information pack for  
prospective foster carers



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# Introduction to Family Fostering

Family Fostering was established in 2014 by Debi Atkin and Teresa Morgan, both professionally qualified, registered social workers, with over 24 years of collective experience in fostering. Their shared vision and passion for empowering foster carers and improving outcomes for children and young people was their inspiration for setting up their own bespoke fostering service based in Kent.

Family Fostering is a small, family orientated fostering service with a therapeutic ethos. It provides specialist and personalised care and support for foster carers, in full recognition of the complexities involved in fostering, and acknowledgement of the valuable role foster carers' play in supporting children and young people.

Debi and Teresa are both actively involved in the day to day running of the service; Debi as the Registered Manager and Teresa as the Service Manager and Responsible Individual.

## Mission Statement

*“To provide our fostering families with a secure base within which they are equipped and enabled to provide safe, nurturing and loving homes to young people unable to live with their birth families. Working holistically with a therapeutic ethos we will ensure that each child/young person is fully supported through their psychological recovery, enabled to build their resilience and realise their unique potential.”*

# About the Team



We are a small dedicated team with extensive experience in fostering. Teresa and Debi have worked together, within social care since 1999. In 2002 they joined an independent fostering service and Tracy has worked alongside them for over 9 years. Between us we have expertise in all roles within fostering from the assessment and reviewing of foster carers, the delivery of training and workshops, providing day to day support and supervision as well as the management and development of the fostering service. In addition to this we all have previous experience of setting up and delivering services for young people and their families and Teresa and Debi have experience of being part of a fostering family.

We are committed to staying a small service to ensure we can provide personalised, high quality, practical, emotional and therapeutic support to all our foster carers and the children in their care. Our ethos is summarised in the following missionstatement.

## Debi Atkin- Registered Manager



Debi is a qualified social worker with over 25 years' experience working with children, young people and families. As a previously approved and experienced foster carer she also has valuable insight into the realities of fostering and a heart for supporting foster carers in the complex work they do. Debi has a NVQ 5 in Management and has been managing fostering services since 2006.

## Teresa Morgan - Responsible Individual



A qualified social worker with over 25 years experience working with children and families. Teresa's parents were foster carers and she has real insight into the valuable role birth children play and the impact fostering can have on them. She is passionate about ensuring everyone in the fostering family is fully supported.

## Tracy Price – Senior Practitioner



A dedicated social worker with over 17 years 'post qualifying' experience and extensive knowledge of attachment, trauma and loss. Tracy is committed to ensuring foster carers and the children they care for receive the therapeutic support they need to build resilience and help the children through their psychological recovery.

## Chantelle Lacey – Supervising Social Worker



Chantelle is a qualified social worker who is highly motivated and passionate about ensuring foster carers, their birth children and their foster children are fully supported through their fostering journey.

## Sharon Kailou – Attachment Worker



Sharon has extensive experience working as a Foster Carer for Kent County Council. Sharon is passionate about ensuring that Foster Carers are fully supported in the care they provide to their young people.

## Krista McAllister – Office Manager



Krista is a highly experienced administrator with a Bachelor of Arts Degree and a 3-year Business Administration/Human Resources Diploma. She is also a qualified and experienced Teacher of English to speakers of other Languages. Krista is a kind and compassionate individual with a genuine desire to provide help and support to those in need.

## Lauren Hollands – Administrative Assistant



Lauren is currently working towards her NVQ in Business and Administration. She is a highly motivated and organized individual who is always willing to help where she is needed.

# Our Values

At Family Fostering our principles of recognising each individual's unique worth and enabling them to realise their potential are central to everything we do. This is inclusive to all the children and young people within the service, all our foster carers and staff members.

We are acutely aware that the children and young people who are placed with foster carers have experienced trauma, abuse and/or neglect and the huge negative impact this has on their overall development and wellbeing. We recognise that caring for these children and young people is complex and demanding requiring foster carers to have key skills, personal qualities, resilience and strong support networks.

We value foster carers as fellow professionals and work alongside them, supporting them in every aspect of the fostering role. Our foster carers are uniquely placed to make a life changing difference to these children and young people when they are placed in their care. This difference is essentially made in the day to day care they provide within their homes where they consistently demonstrate to each child and young person they are valued. They provide them with the support they need to work through their difficulties and raise their self-esteem, so they have the motivation and resources they need to realise their unique potential.

We strongly believe that ideally children and young people within the care system who are unable to return to their birth family should have the stability of long-term foster placements, as within these they are provided with the best opportunity to begin developing secure attachments vital to their emotional wellbeing.

# Our service to our Foster Carers

We believe the best way of supporting our foster carers in the valuable role they do is by providing them with a personalised, bespoke service where support is tailored to their individual needs and circumstances.

We are committed to remaining a small, independent service where every individual is known to the team so that we can provide an exclusive family feel to all our foster families and the children in their care. We do this by ensuring each foster family has:

- ✓ A named, dedicated and experienced social worker for support and supervision
- ✓ Monthly supervision and weekly phone contact as a minimum
- ✓ Bespoke/high quality training
- ✓ Therapeutic workshops
- ✓ Local and informal support groups
- ✓ Round the clock support/guidance 24/7 from an experienced social worker
- ✓ An array of social events for all the family
- ✓ A positive response to requests for additional support
- ✓ Honest and open feedback
- ✓ Support at all meetings and conferences
- ✓ Peer support for both foster carers and/or their birth children
- ✓ Support from our independent welfare officer

To achieve this; our supervising social workers support a maximum of 7 families.

We regard each and every one of our foster carers as fellow professionals and as such ensure that they receive a professional fee and full financial support. As professionals we also ensure that the financial fee acknowledges each foster carer's length of service as well as their expertise by having a tiered fee structure. We hope that our objective matches our foster carer's aspiration to move to the top tier by accessing training, ongoing support and experiential learning and development.

Our financial support includes:

- ✓ A highly competitive weekly allowance (£400 - £580)
- ✓ Respite /support payment (2 x weekly allowance per placement)
- ✓ Annual holiday payments (£400 per placement)
- ✓ Expenses payments

- ✓ Four weeks payments for when they are without a placement
- ✓ Exceptional needs payments (for those unforeseen circumstances)
- ✓ Fostering Network membership (Organisational)
- ✓ Foster Talk Membership
- ✓ Insurance cover

We believe in working in partnership with our foster carers to deliver effective re-parenting so that the children in their care can experience a positive and restorative family life experience.

We support local community events, resources and organisations and recognise the valuable role they play in supporting and encouraging all children develop important life skills and social engagement.

These are a vital part of providing children with a secure base from which they may achieve stability, security, resilience and a true sense of belonging and acceptance, where their worth is fully recognised and their true potential is unlocked.

We also work in partnership with local authorities, schools, therapists and other professionals to help achieve better outcomes for each looked after child and young person in our service in relation to health and wellbeing, education and skills and preparedness for adulthood through integrated planning.

# New to fostering?



This section will give you a brief overview of what fostering is. Once you have read this, if you feel fostering may be right for you and you share our values and ethos, the following section will explain how you can apply to become a foster carer with us and what the process for this involves.

## What is fostering?

Fostering is providing a safe, stable and nurturing family home to a child who is unable to live with their own birth family. There are many reasons why children are unable to be cared for by their birth families.

For example:

- Sometimes families have periods of instability due to life circumstances: emotional, mental and physical health conditions, bereavements, family breakdown, learning difficulties, alcohol dependency, substance dependency and families who simply struggle to cope.
- Some children experience harm from family members. This can be in the form of; neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and exposure to domestic violence.
- Some children do not have any surviving family members.
- Some children's birth family are imprisoned or in care themselves.
- Some children have been abandoned or rejected by their birth family.
- Some children have additional needs and their families are unable to meet these. Additional needs can include: severe physical disabilities, specific medical needs, learning disabilities or challenging/complex behaviour.

Local authorities must offer help and support to both children and their families, to enable children to live happily and safely with their own family. If, despite the help and support there are significant and ongoing concerns for the welfare of the children, the Local Authority must take steps to secure a child's safety and wellbeing by providing them with alternative arrangements such as foster care. Being in foster care can enable children to recover from the childhood trauma they have experienced and have a positive experience of family life within which they are able to thrive and reach their individual potential.

## How long are children in foster care?

Each child's situation will be different. How long a child needs a foster placement will depend on their individual needs and circumstances. They may need to be placed in foster care for only a few days; however, sometimes foster placements are needed for months and sometimes for years. Children in foster care may be able to return home after a period or they may go on to be adopted. Other children remain in foster care long term until they reach adulthood.

## What are the different types of Fostering?

- Emergency placements are required when children need somewhere to stay at short notice where they will be kept safe while assessments and plans are made.
- Short term placements can range from a few weeks or months duration to a couple of years. These placements provide children with a positive experience of family life in a safe, stable family home until the long term plan is finalised.
- Long term placements are for children who are unable to live with their families and need a foster home to stay in until they reach adulthood and able to live independently.
- Respite placements provide short-term care for children with the same carer. Ideal for families, couples or singletons who work, respite care usually takes place on weekends or during school holidays to support an existing foster carer or family member.
- Bridging placements are required when a child needs to be prepared for another placement or while a more suitable placement is identified. For example, they may be in foster care for several months while they are matched with a family for adoption or while a foster family with the same cultural background is found.
- Private foster placements are arrangements made by parents for their child to stay with someone other than a close relative. If this arrangement lasts for 28 days or more the Local Authority must be informed as it is their responsibility to assess that the arrangements meet the child or young person's needs.

- Remand foster placements are for children who have been ‘remanded’ by the Court to the care of a Local Authority.
- Short breaks are for children with disabilities or special needs.
- These are designed to give a child a regular and enjoyable stay with known carers enabling their parents/foster carers a short, well earned break for themselves.

## What does a foster carer do?

Foster carers play a central role in a team of professionals that includes social workers, therapists, teachers and health professionals. They work in partnership to ensure the children in their care get all the help and support they need. Foster carers are responsible for the day to day care of the children they look after. Parental responsibility is retained by birth parents and/or the Local Authority.

There are many tasks that foster carers agree to undertake including:

- Encouraging and supporting children with school attendance and achievement
- Ensuring they attend health and therapy appointments
- Encouraging the children to engage in activities in the community
- Supporting contact with their birth family

## Who can foster with us?



We are committed to recruiting individuals and couples who share our values and absolute commitment to caring for children and young people in accordance with our therapeutic ethos. This means being willing to learn, develop, embrace and adopt therapeutic approaches to care for children and young people.

It also means being committed to work in partnership with therapists and psychologists, which may include supporting a child or young person to attend regular therapy sessions, being part of the therapy sessions and/or adopting strategies and accepting advice provided by specialists.

We are looking for people who are passionate about caring for children, who are patient and kind, slow to anger and quick to forgive, openly committed, determined and ready for one of the most challenging and rewarding careers there is!

If this is you and you believe you have the key skills and personal qualities needed we would love to hear from you. You will need to have a spare bedroom suitable for a foster child and the time to devote to them.

## Other Frequently Asked Questions:

### **Do I need to be a parent to foster?**

No, you don't need to be a parent but you do need experience of caring for children.

### **Do I have to have a partner to foster?**

No, you can be single, married or have a partner (as long as your status has not recently changed).

### **Does it matter if I am working?**

No, as long as you can evidence that either you or your partner will have the time to devote to a foster child.

### **Can I claim benefits while I am fostering?**

Yes, more information about benefits can be found at [www.fostertalk.org](http://www.fostertalk.org).

### **Do I have to own my own house?**

No, you can be in a rented property as long as your tenancy is secure and your landlord is in agreement.

### **Are you looking for foster carers with particular cultural backgrounds or beliefs?**

No, you can apply to foster whatever your cultural background and religious beliefs.

### **Does it matter if I am in a same sex relationship?**

No, we welcome applicants from same sex couples as well as heterosexual couples.

### **Is there an age restriction to fostering?**

You can be considered from the age of 21 and can continue fostering past retirement age, as long as your health is good.

### **Do I need any formal qualifications?**

No, you don't need any formal qualifications.

# How to become a foster carer with us



As you will appreciate, the process for becoming a foster carer involves a thorough assessment of your suitability to foster and stringent checks. These are vital to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children/young people within our service. The following will provide you with a brief overview of the process we follow which is in accordance with fostering regulations set by the Government, regulated by Ofsted, and guidance set by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). This process usually takes 3 months (with a maximum of 8 months if there are any complications). Once you contact us the process begins!

# Becoming a Foster Carer – Step by Step



## Initial Visit

During the initial telephone call, we assess if you meet our criteria and if so we will arrange a suitable time to visit you at home. This is called an initial visit and it gives us an opportunity to explain more about fostering and more specifically about fostering with us. It also gives us a chance to get to know you and your family. We will also look around your home to make sure it meets the health and safety requirements for fostering; this will include checking the bedroom/s available for a foster child/young person.

Following the visit you will have time to think about whether fostering with us is right for you and your family. Likewise we will give full consideration to your enquiry. A brief written summary of our visit will be completed and will assist us in deciding if we can proceed with your application. We will contact you within 10 working days to inform you of the decision. If we cannot proceed with your application, we will provide the reasons for this in writing along with a copy of our Compliments & Complaints Leaflet.

If we can proceed you will be asked to complete your application form and return to us as soon as possible.

## Application form

If, on receiving your application, there are reasons we cannot continue, we will write to you to explain what the reasons are. We will also send you our Compliments and Complaints Leaflet.

## Consent and declaration form

Successful applicants will be informed in writing that we wish to proceed and will be asked to sign and return consent to medical/statutory check forms and a declaration form. These forms give us permission to carry out the required checks. Once we have received your consent forms Stage 1 of your Assessment begins. This Assessment is called a Form F Assessment and will usually take 3 to 6 months to complete.

## Checks and References

All potential foster carers will have to agree to the following checks and references;

- A Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS check) for every adult living in your household (previously known as a police check or CRB).
- A Local Authority Check

If you have previously been approved as a child minder, foster carer or a prospective adopter, a reference will be sought from the agency you were registered with and the records they hold about you will be checked.

- Where you have previously lived abroad, a Protecting Children and Uniting Families across Borders Check will be required.
- If your birth children are still at school, an Education Check will be requested.
- A minimum of 2 Personal References are required.
- An Employment Reference is required.
- A reference from previous partner/s where appropriate.
- A health medical by your GP.

## Your information

Information received back from your checks and references will be strictly confidential and we have a clear policy on how long we will hold the information for. You can request to see any information we are holding. When we have received all the information a final decision will be made regarding your application progressing to Stage 2.

## Skills to Foster Training Course



You (and your partner if applicable) will be invited to attend the ‘Skills to Foster’ Course. This will give you a good insight into the day to day realities of fostering, the implications of fostering on foster carers and their friends and families, and an understanding of the legal framework foster carers work within.

This course will help you to make an informed decision on whether fostering is right for you and your family at this stage of your lives. It also gives us a clearer picture of your suitability to become a foster carer. Feedback from the trainer of the course will be included in your assessment.

## Form F Assessment

The main part of your assessment is completed by an experienced, qualified and registered social worker (known as the assessing social worker). This report is called the Form F and for this to be completed properly your assessing social worker will need to interview you, your partner, your children, other members of your household/support network and your referees. You will be seen individually and together with your family several times to enable the assessing social worker to gain a good insight into each of you individually and how you are as a family. They may also contact your adult birth children who no longer live in the family home. You will be encouraged to be actively involved in contributing towards the assessment, and supported to provide your own written report/portfolio for the fostering panel to evidence your capabilities and to support your application.

The assessing social worker will assess your skills, competence and potential, relevant to your capacity to care effectively for a child or young person placed with you. They will record all appropriate factual information and address issues including your understanding of key areas including the following:

- Caring for children
- Contact between children and their birth family
- Helping children to make sense of their past
- Sexual boundaries and attitudes
- Awareness of forms of abuse
- Health and health promotion
- Promotion of education
- Approaches to discipline
- Awareness of how to promote secure attachments
- Values, beliefs, cultures and religions
- Standards of living and lifestyles
- Experience and attitudes to disability
- Awareness of equal opportunities and anti discrimination

- Understanding and dealing with young people's behaviour
- Encouraging children to take responsibility for their behaviour and helping them to learn how to resolve conflict

You will be given a copy of your completed assessment report to check through and add your comments. You will be invited to attend the fostering panel where your report will be presented. We will provide you with a copy of our panel guide which fully explains the panel process.

# Already fostering and thinking of fostering with us?



We are passionate about the service we provide and would love to hear from like-minded, experienced foster carers who share our core values and absolute commitment to caring for children and young people in accordance with our therapeutic ethos. If this is you and you would like to find out more about transferring to Family Fostering, please contact us – we would love to hear from you.

We are aware that making the decision to change is not something you do lightly and there will be various factors to consider. You are welcome to ring for a chat or pop in to see us and talk through any queries or concerns you may have.

Here are some of the frequently asked questions;

## Do I have the right to change agencies?

As a self-employed foster carer you have the right to change agencies. This right is enshrined within the Fostering Network's, Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England (2014) which can be found on their website. This Protocol is now considered the accepted process for managing the transfer of foster carers to another agency.

## Will I lose any children I have in placement if I change agencies?

No. They have been placed into your care and should move with you. You can be assured that throughout the transfer process we will ensure any children you currently have in placement are not disrupted or distressed by the transfer.

## What is the process for changing agencies?

When you contact us we will provide you with further details of our Service and give you the opportunity to come and meet the team.

If you decide to transfer to us, the next step is for you to speak to your current agency about your plans to transfer and the social worker of any children in placement.

If you have children in placement you will need to inform your agency and the social worker/s of your intention to resign/ transfer. If you have no children in placement you can resign giving 28 days notice. Both a resignation and an intention to resign must be made in writing.

If you have children in placement we will arrange a meeting with your current agency, the social worker/commissioner of each child in placement and yourself to ensure a smooth transition for you and the children in your care. Full details of this process can be found in Fostering Network's, Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England (2014).

A social worker from our team will complete a new Form F Assessment with you.

Your new assessment will be presented to panel and panel will make a recommendation. Our Agency Decision Maker will make the decision on your approval.

Following your approval a transfer date will be agreed by all concerned.

**There's lots more information on our website.**

**Please visit**

**FamilyFostering.org**

# Get in Touch

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Or pop in and visit us ☺

