

PRIVATE FOSTERING

Your comprehensive guide to private fostering in Brent

brent.gov.uk/privatefostering

020 8937 4300

FOREWORD

We do not know how many children are privately fostered in the UK, although it is suspected to be in excess of 10,000. What we do know is children who are privately fostered are a diverse and vulnerable group, with many not having a parent figure in a position to safeguard them.

The [death of Victoria Climbié in 2000](#) brought the issue of private fostering into the public spotlight, and new legislation and guidance was developed to ensure that children in these arrangements were safeguarded. Local Authorities have a duty to assess private fostering arrangements and raise awareness of private fostering within their communities. The law also says that parents and private foster carers also have a legal responsibility to inform the local authority when these arrangements are made.

Brent Council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of privately fostered children in our borough and this booklet has been produced specifically for parents, families and carers who are looking after someone else's child.

This booklet will provide you with information about what private fostering is and how to determine if you are a private foster carer, what needs to happen before and after a private fostering arrangement begins, and what you can expect from the local authority when you are caring for a child or young person in a private fostering arrangement.

ABOUT FOSTERING

Private fostering is when a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if they have additional, complex or severe needs) is cared for by someone who is not their parent or a 'close relative' for 28 days or more.

A 'close relative' is a grandparent, sibling, uncle or aunt (whether full blood, half blood or by marriage) or a step-parent.

Members of the extended family however, such as a cousin or great aunt can be considered a private foster carer, as can a friend of the family, the parent of a friend of the child, or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child.

However, private fostering is different from fostering where a person that is unknown to the family of the child in care is looking after them. This person is a foster carer who was recruited by the local authority specifically to look after young people who cannot live with their birth family.

Could you be a private foster carer?

If you are you looking after someone else's child and if the child or young person is:

- under the age of 16 (18 if the child has a disability)
- not a close relative – a close relative would be a grandchild, niece/nephew, sibling(half or full) or step-child
- in your care for more than 28 consecutive days

THIS IS WHEN YOU ARE A PRIVATE FOSTER CARER.

Children can be in private fostering arrangements for many reasons including when:

- their parent(s) are in hospital for an extended period
- their parent(s) are in prison
- their parents are separating, divorcing or undergoing a family crisis
- they have been sent to the UK from overseas to stay with friends or relatives due to concerns over safety, education or quality of life
- their parent(s) have gone overseas for an extended period to visit relatives, deal with a family crisis or work

What you need to do

The parent(s) of the child and the private foster carer must inform us of the arrangement at least six weeks before it begins. If you are currently caring for someone else's child, and have not informed us, you must do so immediately. Call us on 020 8937 4300.

Why you need to tell us

We ask you to do this because we are responsible for making sure that all privately fostered children are well cared for and safe and that you are supported. Things we will do:

- complete disclosure and barring checks on private foster carers and anyone aged over 16 living in that household
- ensure that the carer receives relevant support and advice
- ensure the child's educational, emotional, cultural and physical needs are met
- help or assist parents and carers to work together for the benefit of the child
- take action if the care provided is not satisfactory.

CASE STUDY

Ahmed and Daniel's story are real life case examples of children who are in a private fostering arrangement. Names have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.

Ahmed

Ahmed's story first came to light when his private foster carer, Ms Farida Bilal, applied to the UK Border Agency (UKBA) for permanent residency for herself, her three biological children and Ahmed. UKBA raised concerns to Brent Social Services about Ahmed's living arrangements.

Brent social workers visited Ms. Bilal and found that Ahmed was living with Ms. Bilal and her children since he was two years old when his mother abandoned him and returned to Africa. Ahmed's mother was friends with Ms. Bilal before she left the UK and Ahmed was living with Ms. Bilal under a private fostering arrangement.

Ms. Bilal showed that she was able to care for Ahmed and had been doing so for a number of years. Brent Social Services made sure that Ms. Bilal was receiving all the benefits she were entitled to, including Child Benefit, and Child Tax Credit for Ahmed. Ms. Bilal also received help in applying for Ahmed's right to permanent residency and his British passport. More recently, Ms. Bilal received support from Brent social workers when it came to telling Ahmed who his real parents were, as Ahmed was previously unaware.

Daniel

Daniel, a 15 year old British boy, came to the attention of the local authority when his school

notified the service to say that Daniel was no longer living with his mother. For several months, Daniel had been sofa-surfing at friends' houses' before settling in with his godmother, Ms Matthews. Daniel did not want to be at home because his mum had a new boyfriend who he didn't get along with. Daniel's godmother offered him her spare bedroom and agreed with Daniel's mother for him to come and live with her for the time being. The local authority made sure that Daniel was happy and settled in his new home, and that all his needs were being met appropriately.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question: My child is in a private fostering arrangement. Does this mean I am giving up all rights to my child?

Answer: No. You remain the person with parental responsibility for your child and you should continue to be involved in all decisions concerning your child's healthy development. It is very important that you remain in frequent contact with your child whilst he or she is in the private fostering arrangement.

Question: What if I decide to change where my child is being privately fostered?

Answer: We are there to make sure that your child is living in a safe environment and is properly cared for. We can only do this if we know where your child is. If your child becomes looked after by another person and moves to a new address, it is your responsibility to let us know.

Question: What if I can't find out what's happening to my child in a privately fostered arrangement?

Answer: If the carer is not giving you enough information about your child, you are unhappy with the standard of care your child is receiving or you have any doubts, you should contact us

Question: immediately. We will do everything possible to help safeguard and promote the welfare of your child.

Answer: What should I do if a private fostering arrangement comes to an end?

The person with parental responsibility and the private foster carer should advise the Local Authority in writing within 48 hours if the arrangement comes to an end. They should also notify the Local Authority of the name and address of the person who will be caring for the child.

DO YOU KNOW OF A CHILD BEING PRIVATELY FOSTERED?

Someone you know may have someone else's child living with them. There could be different reasons as to why they may have been asked to look after the child. If you know of a private fostering arrangement please let us know on 020 8937 4300.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Brent Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Phone: 020 8438 1249 - Advice Line

Email: brent.cab@brentcab.co.uk

Website: brentcab.co.uk

Family Rights Group

Keeping children safe in their families

Phone: 0808 801 0366

Website: frg.org.uk

Fosterline

A confidential, independent and impartial advice service about fostering issues, including private fostering.

Phone: 0800 040 7675

Website: fosterline.info

Prisoners' Families Helpline

Information service for anyone with relatives in prison

prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk

Victoria Climbié Foundation

An independent rights-based charity working with children and families; offering a link between statutory agencies, care services, and BME communities.

vcf-uk.org