



We Need foster carers

Fostering information booklet

You can change a child's life
www.brent.gov.uk/fostering



Thank you for your interest in fostering for the London Borough of Brent. Fostering is possibly one of the most rewarding things that you could do and this booklet has been designed to give you more information to help you decide if fostering is right for you. We understand that it is a big decision and hope that you'll find the information in this booklet helpful in guiding you towards a future in fostering.

What is a foster carer?

A foster carer provides a home for a child or young person who is unable to live with their own family. Fostering can usually help reduce the pressures on a family, allowing time for difficulties to be resolved so that children can be returned home. However, on some occasions the child or young person is unable to return to their own family and may live with foster carer's long term or with an adoptive family.

Foster carers are usually parents, grandparents, professionals or school teachers. However, as long as you are able to demonstrate the skills, experience, motivation and commitment to caring for a child, you could be the perfect candidate to foster.

Why do children need fostering?

Children need to be fostered for a variety of different reasons. For example their parents may be ill, suffering from drug or alcohol addiction, on-going domestic violence or a family breakdown has occurred. Some children may have been neglected, abused or have come to the UK unaccompanied.

In most cases children are able to return home to their families and whilst the family home is made more secure and issues are resolved, foster carers provide a safer family environment. When it is not possible

for the child or young person to return home, the local authority will need to find permanent carers outside the child's birth family. This can be through a long term placement, a kinship arrangement or adoption.

Some children will be deeply upset about being away from their families, whilst others may find it easier to adapt to their new situation and settle in very quickly. No two children will be the same and foster carers will deal with a variety of different personalities, experiences and characters throughout their fostering career.

Who can foster?

To foster for Brent, you need to be over 21 years of age:

- you can be from any social, ethnic or religious background
- you can be single, married or co-habiting
- you can be in a same sex relationship
- you can be a parent or;
- you can be someone who has experience of caring for children

You do not need to:

- be a home owner
- live in a particular area of Brent, as we need foster carers from within the borough and in some cases, long term foster carers that live outside of Brent
- earn a certain level of income
- be in employment

However, all foster carers will need:

- a suitable space for a child, in most cases a spare room
- indefinite leave to remain in the UK and the ability to communicate well in English
- an enhanced DBS check (Disclosure and Barring Service)
- a medical check and checks with your local authority
- references from employers and people who know you well

Fostering can be a demanding task. You will need to be in good health and able to develop an understanding of the difficulties faced by children and their parents. You will need to be committed to meeting all the needs of the child in your care, which should be shared and supported by all members of your family.

What's the difference between fostering and adoption?

Fostering is different from adoption because when a child is in foster care, the child's parents or the local authority still have legal responsibility for them. But when a child is adopted, all legal responsibility for the child is given to the new family, resulting in the local authority and the birth parents no longer having parental responsibility for the child.

When there is no possibility for a child to return home to their parents, attempts will be made to see if anyone else in the family can care for them, often referred to as Kinship care. If this is not possible, a family must be found that can provide "permanence" for the child, to allow them to feel as secure as possible. This either happens through long term fostering or adoption.

If a foster carer decides that they want to adopt a child, that they are already caring for, they can ask to be assessed as a possible adopter for that specific child.

Foster carers also have the option of applying to become Special Guardians to children that are already in their care that need more legal security but where adoption is not the right option.

What types of foster care are there?

Short term fostering

This can range from providing overnight care up to a period of two years or more, depending on the needs of the child. The foster carer should expect the relationship with the child to be temporary and be prepared to care for plenty of children. Short term foster carers may also provide emergency overnight care and respite depending on their skills, availability and experience.

Long term fostering

This is a permanent arrangement where the child is placed with you until they are 18 years of age or ready to live independently. The child will be matched to the foster carer and should expect to form a strong relationship with that child. Historically many children placed with long term foster carers develop relationships with their carers that last well into adulthood. If the young person wishes to continue living with you after they reach 18, you and the young person can agree to for a specific period under the 'My place' scheme.

Within short term and long term fostering, we have an urgent need for those with the expertise and skills to foster children and young people with complex needs and those that are willing to take in sibling groups to avoid them being separated. Full support will be given in choosing the right option for you.

Fostering teenagers

Providing stability to a teenager right through to adulthood, encouraging continuation of their education whilst offering a family environment that can give them the love and support they need to prepare them for future independence.

Enhanced fostering

Some young people present very difficult behaviour and many of these young people would have experienced a very traumatic childhood, little routine, are often absent from school and may have ordinarily been placed in residential care. We need people with significant experience of working with or caring for young people. You will need patience, understanding and the ability to care for a young person with complex needs to bring about changes in their life. Foster carers on this specialist scheme are paid a significant professional fee in addition to the fostering allowance for each child.

OTHER TYPES OF FOSTERING

Kinship fostering

This is when children who are looked after by the local authority are cared for by people they already know like aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, grandparents or other close family friends. This can be very beneficial for a child causing minimal disruption whilst still allowing them to remain within the extended family network.

Private fostering

This is when a child under 16 (18 if they have additional, complex or severe needs) is cared for and provided with accommodation for more than 28 days by an adult who is not an immediate relative. This is a private arrangement made between the parent and carer. By law parents and private carers must notify Brent council of private fostering arrangements to safeguard the child.



The fostering assessment process

After you have contacted us and attended an information session, an initial home assessment will be carried out. This home visit is to assess your suitability and also to allow us to assess your home, to ensure that it is suitable to care for a child. If suitable, you will be invited to proceed to stage one of the assessment process.

Stage one

This is where you provide the department with factual information about yourself, partner and children (if applicable). A series of checks will also be carried out regarding your medical and criminal status. You will be invited to attend preparation training to learn more about what is involved in fostering. You will only progress to stage two of the assessment process, if we are satisfied that you have met all the criteria in stage one.

Stage two

Once your application has been accepted, the second stage of your assessment will begin. You will be allocated your own social worker who will write a report often referred to as a home study or Form F. It will be based on your discussions with your social worker, personal references, checks and medical report, and will include recommendations on the kind of child or children that you would best be able to care for. You will also be invited to write some parts of the report yourself. Finally, you will be asked to read and sign the report and make comments before this is presented to the fostering panel. By this stage, you will usually have worked through any issues that may have arisen during the assessment

process. However, if there are any aspects you do not agree with, it is very important to raise them and comment in writing, before signing the report.

The fostering panel will discuss the positive qualities you have to offer, as well as any areas of concern. The prime consideration of any decisions or recommendations will always be what is in the best interests of the child. After your report goes to the panel, the recommendation is considered by the agency decision-maker, who is usually a senior manager and makes the final decision based on the panel's recommendations.

If your application is successful, you will be approved to foster. The panel will also make a recommendation as to the age and number of children you may be most suited to caring for, as well as the type of fostering e.g. permanent (long-term), short-term, or emergency.

It usually takes about six months to go through the assessment and approval process to become a foster carer, although sometimes it can take longer.

What is...?

Assessment

Fostering is a major decision with lifelong implications for you, the child, and your family. Because of this, there are a number of key factors we must consider before approving your suitability to foster and your home study needs to be really thorough. During the assessment, you will be asked lots of personal questions which may feel at times intrusive. Remember that the aim is to find the right family for a child or group of children, so it is important to be as open and honest as possible.

Personal references and statutory checks

We have to carry out a series of statutory checks on all prospective foster carers. This includes checks with your local authority, employer, and the Disclosure and Barring Service. You will need to see your GP for a medical examination, as we need to make sure our foster carers are healthy enough to care for a child.

We will ask for the details of up to three personal referees who must be happy to meet with your social worker and speak honestly about you. Only one referee may be related to you, and each should have known you well for at least two years. If you are already an approved foster carer with another local authority or independent fostering agency, in normal circumstances we only require a reference from your current agency. However, if we are not satisfied with the reference, we may ask for an additional reference from a friend or family member.

Home study/Form F

As part of your assessment, your social worker will make a number of visits to your home, approximately 4 to 6 visits over a period of several months. They will meet with everyone in your immediate family, talk to you in detail, and look at your living arrangements. We will ask about your family structure and support network (such as relatives, friends and neighbours). It is important that your family structure is stable and secure and there are no major changes or upheavals expected. We will explore aspects of your childhood, employment, and relationships past and present, including any past break-ups or divorce. We will look at your strengths and limitations, and identify any possible areas needing development.

Your social worker will ask about any children you already have, and how they feel about you fostering a child. They will interview your children to get their views.

During your assessment, do not be afraid of saying if there are areas you need support with. We will work with you to identify where you need training and support and will determine the kind of child or children you would be most suitable to care for.

Preparation training

The Preparation training will provide you with an opportunity to learn about the fostering process, the issues involved in caring for someone else's child and the rewards and challenges of fostering, as well the chance to meet experienced foster carers and hear about their experiences. You may also get the opportunity to meet a foster child who will tell you about their experiences of being fostered.

Preparation groups usually consist of three sessions covering a wide range of issues including:

- understanding the assessment and legal processes involved
- understanding why children become looked after
- how children feel when they are separated from their birth families
- understanding children's experiences of separation, loss and trauma
- managing the behaviour of children who have experienced neglect or abuse
- learning how to provide safe care
- understanding what is child development
- understanding what is attachment
- understanding a child's past
- understanding identity and diversity
- welcoming a child into your family
- working with birth parents, which includes managing contact
- the support, supervision and monitoring you will receive
- preparing to say goodbye when the child is ready to move on.

Fostering Panel

The Brent fostering panel usually meets once a month and is made up of up to ten people who have personal and professional experience of fostering including social work professionals, a medical advisor, a legal advisor, councillor, management representative of a voluntary agency, and several independent members such as foster parents or fostered adults. You will be invited to attend the panel with your social worker. The panel will discuss the positive qualities you have to offer, as well as any areas of concern. The prime consideration of any decisions or recommendations will always be what is in the best interests of the child. Once the agency decision maker has ratified the recommendations, you will receive confirmation within 10 working days.



Frequently asked questions

I don't have a spare room – can I foster?

In most cases you will need to have a spare bedroom, to ensure the child you foster has the privacy and space they require. The exception is with babies who can usually share a foster carer's bedroom up to the age of two.

Can single people foster?

Although many children need two-parent families, there are equally those who would benefit from the one-to-one attention that a single carer can provide.

As with all people who apply to foster we will ask you about your support network; the friends, family and neighbours you will rely on for support when bringing up your child.

Is there a maximum age to become a foster carer?

There is no upper age limit, although we would expect you to have a level of stability and security in your life, and to have the health and stamina to be able to care for somebody else's child.

Do I have to be a British citizen to become a foster carer?

There is no requirement for you to be a British citizen to be a foster carer in the UK, however, you will need to have indefinite leave to remain in the UK in order to foster for Brent. We know that fostered children come from a wide range of backgrounds and need foster families who reflect their culture, heritage and identity.

Do you have to speak English to a high level to be a foster carer?

You will need an adequate level of spoken and written English to be able to communicate with professionals, support a child's education, make notes and keep records. If you have any particular communication needs, we would be willing to discuss this with you.



We are a religious family; will that affect our application to foster?

It does not matter what your religion is and this should not affect your application to foster. Children should be placed with foster families that can meet their needs, including religious needs. When considering fostering you should consider, if you could care for a child who did not share your religion. During the assessment process, you will have the opportunity to discuss issues such as alternative religious beliefs and sexuality with your social worker, to ensure you will be able to abide by our policies.

Frequently asked questions continued

Can you foster if you have a long term health condition?

It is important for fostered children to have a stable family life without any preventable disruption, such as a foster carer becoming seriously ill due to a long-term health condition. For this reason, all prospective foster carers have a full medical examination by their GP. Being overweight should not rule you out as long as it does not cause you to have serious health problems which could affect your care of a child. We always seek advice and guidance from Brent's medical advisor before any decision regarding health is made.

Are foster carers paid?

All Brent foster carers receive a generous fostering allowance which covers the cost of caring for a fostered child. The fostering allowances should be used for all aspects of the child or young person's care, including hair and skin care, leisure activities, holidays and birthdays. Payments are made on a fortnightly basis and go directly into your bank account.

Will fostering have an impact on my welfare benefits?

If you currently claim welfare benefits you are likely to be able to continue with this arrangement whilst fostering. Foster carers are approved rather than employed, and this status has a particular effect on means tested benefits. For more info visit the HMRC website.

Can I still foster. I work full-time?

Foster carers are expected to be available to care for children, attend meetings, training, support groups and promote and support contact between a child and their family. We would not usually consider it appropriate for a fostered child to be in full-time day care whilst their foster carer is working. It is often possible to work part-time particularly if caring for school-age children, and depending on the needs and age of children it may be possible to work full-time.

Can I continue caring for a child once they reach 18 years of age and is still in full time education?

The 'My place' scheme is when a young person wants to continue living with a foster carer until they have completed their education. This arrangement usually occurs when the young person has been living with the foster carer for some time and they have an established relationship. Prior to reaching 18 years old, the young person will agree to a pathway plan. The foster carer will no longer have day to day responsibility for the young person but will receive reduced allowances, to enable the young person to continue living in their home. This arrangement will cease once their education is completed.

Can I foster if I've had previous financial problems?

Previous financial problems should not prevent you from fostering. However, you will need to be able to show that you are now financially secure enough to provide a stable home for any children that are placed with you, and that you are able to manage the fostering allowances paid to you.

I am moving house soon, can I apply to foster before I move?

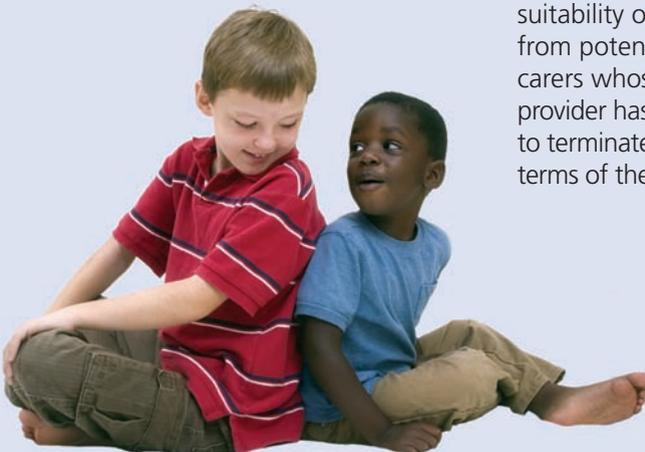
It is unlikely that we would begin the assessment process if you are moving as your home forms an important part of the assessment process. You must be able to demonstrate that you can provide a suitable and safe environment for children before you can become a foster carer.

What will happen if a decision is made to terminate my assessment?

On some occasions during the assessment process there may be issues that we are unable to resolve and as a result the assessment cannot continue. Usually both parties are in agreement and we will mutually terminate your assessment. However, if you do not agree with the decision, the assessing social worker will compile a report highlighting the issues of concern taking into consideration your views. This report is then presented to the fostering panel and a recommendation will be made to uphold or overrule the decision. If you aren't happy with the decision, you can apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review of your case.

Who is the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)?

The IRM is a review process conducted by a Review Panel which is independent of fostering service providers, which came into place on the 1st April 2009. Their main remit is to review the suitability of fostering applications from potential and current foster carers whose fostering service provider has decided not to approve, to terminate or want to change the terms of their approval.



Why choose Brent for fostering?

We recognise and appreciate just how important the role of being a foster carer is, and will provide you with a support package to assist you if you decide to foster with Brent.

Here are just some of the things we offer:

- A generous allowance and foster carer insurance cover
- Regular contact with a qualified supervising social worker
- A range of learning, development and training opportunities
- Start up equipment (where applicable)
- Advice from our Education of Looked After Children Team
- Service and advice from our health and well being services – including CAMHS
- Regular newsletters
- Foster carers' support group
- Social events for both you and your foster child

To find out more contact us:
fostering@brent.gov.uk 020 8937 4538
www.brent.gov.uk/fostering

