



**THERAPEUTIC
FOSTERING**
supporting our carers to care

Information Guide For Prospective Foster Carers

Hello and Welcome,

Thank you for taking the first step to find out more about Therapeutic Fostering. At Therapeutic Fostering we understand that you have probably been considering fostering for some time and may have many questions about what fostering is. We therefore hope that this information guide will provide you with more information, and answer some of your questions or worries. If after reading this information guide you have any further questions or would like to speak to someone in person, please do not hesitate to call or email us. If you are not sure that now is the right time for you to begin fostering, we would be more than happy to talk this through with you.

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1. Our vision

Our vision is to give every child and young person the opportunity to thrive in their foster families, in their schools and in the communities where they live. All children and young people should enjoy a happy healthy childhood that gives them the foundations to transition into adulthood, and the opportunity to achieve the best possible outcomes in life.

2. Who are Therapeutic Fostering?

Therapeutic Fostering is a small Independent Fostering Agency with a whole family approach, that provides foster placements to children and young people across the North West region.

We are privately owned and are not part of a large national fostering agency, preferring to maintain a family feel and approach with our foster families and the children that they look after.

We take pride in ensuring that all our foster carers, children, young people and parents where appropriate, receive the highest levels of support, through supervision, training and attending meetings with them. We recognise that this ensures our carers feel part of the Therapeutic Fostering family and as a result, children and young people achieve positive outcomes within their lives. We are here to offer help, guidance and support at every stage of the fostering process and following approval at the fostering panel.

We place the interests of children and young people at the heart of everything we do. We understand that by working together children's confidence and self-esteem improves, and as a result this prepares them for the transition into adulthood.

The fostering team is staffed by highly experienced social workers, known as supervising social workers and the registered fostering manager.

At Therapeutic Fostering we ensure that our foster carers are involved in all aspects of the development and improvement of the service, and recruitment of foster carers. As such we welcome all foster carers who would like to support us in any way.

3. What do foster carers do?

We recognise that foster carers come from all walks of life. We therefore understand that different carers offer different experiences to children and young people.

All we ask is that foster carers open their hearts and homes to provide care to children and young people who are not able to live with their own families. Some children and young people need to live in foster care for a short period of time, whilst others need to be fostered for longer periods of time. Some children cannot return home to live with their own families and remain in long term foster care or move to an adoptive family.

Our foster carers offer children and young people a home where they can feel safe from harm and abuse and where they are loved and cared for. A foster carer's role in caring for children and young people cannot be underestimated as they provide children and young people with positive life experiences whilst understanding and appreciating the individuality of each child or young person.

4. What makes a good foster carer?

Different foster carers offer different experiences, and it is this that makes each family unique. However, all foster carers need to be understanding, and have the motivation to look after children and young people, who have often been neglected or abused and suffered trauma in their lives. Foster carers are rewarded with the relationships that they develop with children and young people and seeing the positive achievements that they make in their care.

All we ask is that foster carers appreciate how it might feel for children and young people who have been neglected or abused and even separated from their own families and friends.

Foster carers need to be able to support children and young people with contact with their own families. This may not always involve direct family contact and will depend on the individual circumstances that children and young people have been placed in foster care for. Any decisions around contact will however have been agreed through the courts and placing authorities and a contact plan will be in place.

5. Who can foster?

There is no such thing as a typical foster carer. Like the children and young people that they look after, foster carers are diverse and come from different ethnic backgrounds, communities and have different experiences.

However, all foster carers have one thing in common – **they care about children and young people and want to support them through the difficult and traumatic experiences they have encountered in their lives.** **Anyone can apply to foster:**

- Whatever their marital status
- Whatever their religious, cultural or ethnic background
 - If they are part of the LGBTQ+ community
- If they are single
- If they have a disability or medical condition - provided it is monitored and does not impact on their ability to care for a child or young person

- If they have children of their own - provided their children are happy to accept a foster child or young person into their home.
- If they work – there are different types of foster care that enable foster carers to work and provide care to children and young people.
- If they are retired - if they are fit and well to support children and young people for a reasonable period into the future.
- If their own childhood was difficult - if they have been able to work through these difficulties and use their own experience in a positive way to support children and young people.

6. Why do children and young people need to live in foster care?

Children and young people need to live in foster care for many reasons. Unfortunately, many children and young people in foster care have suffered neglect or abuse by their own families and cannot remain at home with them. Children and young people are therefore placed in foster care for periods of time whilst assessments are undertaken to determine where they will live. This could be in a long-term foster placement or an adoptive family if it is felt that they cannot return home to their own families.

What children and young people in foster care need is security, patience and understanding, to support their transition to adulthood.

We believe that the matching of children and young people with carers is crucial to ensure that stable and positive outcomes for children and young people are achieved.

Even with careful matching, sometimes placements disrupt. This can be for various reasons such as children and young people's behaviours or concerns that they are putting themselves at risk. Therapeutic fostering understands that disruptions in placements can be very difficult for carers and the children in their care. For this reason, we offer additional support to carers and work closely with placing authorities to ensure that any transition to a new placement is undertaken in the best possible way.

7. Different types of fostering

We are aware that within the North West region there are over 400 referrals of children and young people that require a foster placement each month, and unfortunately there are not enough foster carers nationwide to be able to provide placements to all the children and young people who require them.

The following placements are offered to referring authorities across the North West by our foster carers:

- **Emergency**

These placements are made at very short notice, often because a referring authority has concerns about the care and safety of the child or young person.

- **Short-term**

These placements are for children and young people who may not have been in care before, and where assessments are being carried out on their families and presented to the courts so that long term plans can be made. This may include a return home, long term fostering, Special Guardianship (SGO) or adoption.

- **Long-term**

These placements are generally for children and young people where it has been agreed that it would be in their best interests to remain in foster care until they reach 18 years of age or remain with their carers on a Staying Put arrangement.

- **Respite**

All Therapeutic Fostering carers are entitled to **14 nights paid respite each year**. Foster carers offering placements to children and young people with more complex needs may receive **up to 21 nights**.

Children and young people are placed with respite carers in a planned way. Respite carers are therefore seen as an extension to the main foster carer's family.

- **Short breaks**

These are placements offered for children and young people who are not in the care of the Local Authority and live at home with their own families but who, due to a disability, require short breaks care with foster carers to support them and their families.

- **Parent and child**

These are placements with carers who have experience and an interest in supporting and assessing young parents to develop their parenting skills so that they can care for their own children independently in the future. Foster carers therefore play an integral part of the completion of court reports and whether the children can remain with their parents or not.

- **Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or trafficked children**

These children may have been separated from their own families. They may have travelled from war torn countries and experienced significant loss. They may have limited English.

Carers need to offer these children and young people a safe and supportive home during what can be a very frightening time.

8. Transferring to us from another Fostering Agency

At Therapeutic Fostering we are aware that foster carers from other Agencies can sometimes feel dissatisfied with the level of support that they receive, or even the payments and allowances that they receive.

Here at Therapeutic Fostering we provide excellent support from a highly experienced team of social workers and foster carers who provide mentoring to newly approved carers.

We ensure that carers transferring to us are rewarded with a welcome bonus fee if they already have children or young people in placement. We also ensure that they receive the same payments and allowances that they would from their current agency and sometimes the payments and allowances paid may be higher because we believe in rewarding carers for the professional role that they undertake.

The Fostering Networks transferring agency protocol for foster carers is very clear. The Fostering Network has devised guidance regarding the transfer of foster carers from one Agency to another which is called the Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England (2014) and can be accessed with the following link.

www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sites/www.fostering.net/files/content/transferprotocol.pdf

9. What happens next?

If you are still interested in becoming a foster carer and joining the Therapeutic Fostering family, please read the process outlined below:

- **Registration of interest**

You can register your interest by completing the online form or alternatively you can call the office and speak to one of our team who will be more than happy to talk you through the process and gain some more information from you.

- **Initial home visit**

A social worker from the Therapeutic Fostering team will visit you in your home at a time convenient to you to discuss fostering further and answer any questions you may have.

- **Pre-approval training**

If you and the Therapeutic Fostering social worker agree to continue your application, you will be invited to complete pre-approval training called 'Skills to Foster'. Sometimes this training is

completed alongside your fostering assessment once your application has been received. Foster carers already approved will not need to complete this training provided their training needs are up to date.

- **Application**

If you wish to continue to the assessment stage, you will be asked to complete an application by completing and signing the form that will be sent to you.

10. The fostering assessment

Once you express an interest in fostering, your suitability to care for children and young people will be assessed. It is a thorough process, but it is necessary to ensure the safety and welfare of any child or young person in your care. Many applicants find the assessment experience very helpful and supportive in understanding their own strengths and skills.

The assessment is in two stages and we aim to complete the training and assessment of all prospective foster carers within an eight month timescale. For carers transferring agencies we hope to achieve this within a shorter period.

During the assessment the social worker will talk with your own children to ensure that they understand how fostering will affect them and answer any questions that they have.

We encourage all prospective carers to contribute to the assessment and attend the Fostering Panel to make the process as inclusive as possible. During this time, you will be able to consider how fostering will affect you, your family and friends, and reflect on issues that may have been raised within the assessment. You will then have the opportunity to read the assessment report and add your own comments before the assessment is presented to the Fostering Panel.

- **Stage 1**

This is the first part of your assessment and is where Therapeutic Fostering will undertake checks to consider your suitability to foster. The checks will include:

Medical completed by your own GP

Therapeutic Fostering service pays for this medical. If you have a medical condition or are receiving treatment, we will ask your GP or consultant for further information. The purpose of the medical is to ensure that you are healthy and fit to look after a child or young person.

Statutory and DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service - Police) checks

You and all members of your household aged 18 years and over will have a DBS check completed. The DBS check requires identification to be verified by the assessing social worker e.g. passport, birth certificate, driving license, utility bills.

Statutory checks will also be carried out. This involves Therapeutic Fostering writing to your local authority, health, probation, and education.

Health and Safety checks

The assessing social worker will undertake a Health and Safety check on your home. This is to ensure there are no obvious risks or hazards in your home and to ensure the safety of yourself and any child or young person you may care for.

References

You will be asked to give the names of at least three referees, one of these referees can be related to you, but the other two should be from people known to you. Your referees will be asked to complete a written reference and will also be visited by the social worker completing your assessment. It is important that you speak to your referees to make sure they are willing to do this and speak honestly about you.

• Stage 2

This is the factual part of your assessment. Your assessing social worker will have arranged a number of appointments with you to talk about your own life as well as your employment history etc. This stage also identifies the types of fostering that you are interested in and will formulate the assessing social worker's overall recommendations that will be presented to the fostering panel.

The fostering panel

The fostering panel will have read your assessment report before your attendance at Panel. However, they will discuss the report and then invite you and your assessing social worker into the Panel. The panel members may want to know how you found the assessment process and look at your commitment to ongoing training. The panel will then make their recommendation which will be sent to the Agency Decision Maker who has overall responsibility for approving fostering families.

11. Post-approval training and development

Following approval all Therapeutic Fostering foster carers receive a full programme of post approval training and support groups. They also receive regular monthly supervision from their supervising social worker. This may be more often for newly approved carers in order that they feel supported.

The Children's Workforce Development Council's training, support and development standards (TDS) and National Minimum Standards for foster care identify the key skills and competencies

required of foster carers. Your supervising social worker will support you to complete the TDS within 12 months of your approval.

The training provided by Therapeutic Fostering relates directly to these standards and ongoing training is seen as a continuing professional development for all of our foster carers.

Following 'Skills to Foster' training, all Therapeutic Fostering carers have access to ongoing mandatory and post approval training which is delivered face to face and On-Line.

12. What support will I receive?

We see our carers as an integral part of the Therapeutic Fostering family and as such, the service involves our carers in everything that we do. We believe that by doing this we all work together to provide the best care and support we can to the children and young people our carers look after.

We provide the following to ensure that our carers feel supported and involved in our service:

- 24-hour support 365 days per year. We have an On-Call service where carers can contact a named social worker/manager who will know you and the children and young people in your care.
- A named supervising social worker who will undertake at least one supervisory visit per month (this can be more frequent if required) and maintain regular telephone contact with you.
- 14 nights paid respite each year. Foster carers undertaking therapeutic or complex needs foster care may receive up to 21 nights.
- Support with children and young people's contact.
- Arranged activities during school holidays.
- Christmas party for children and young people.
- Excellent matching of children and young people to carers to ensure stability of placements.
- Excellent training and ongoing learning opportunities.
- Regular support and reflective practice groups.
- Mentoring for newly approved carers by an experienced foster carer.
- Outreach support where this is agreed and deemed appropriate.
- Children's guides. We have a range of children's guides which can be used by our foster carers to provide children and young people with information about Therapeutic Fostering,

what foster care is and how to complain, as well as providing contact numbers for other services to support them.

- Competitive fees and allowances in recognition of the work our carers undertake.
- Reward payments for carers who recruit other carers who can provide full time placements: This would not include carers who would provide respite care only.
- Welcome bonus payment for carers transferring fostering agencies with children and young people in placement.
- Annual membership to “The Fostering Network”. Who can provide foster carers with information and additional support where required.

13. Foster carer payments and allowances

A foster carer’s priority is the children and young people that they care for. However, we recognise that foster carers need to be paid generously so that they can care for children and young people to the best of their ability.

In order to recruit and retain good quality foster carers, our payments and allowances are realistic in recognition of the roles involved in being a foster carer.

The amount that you receive will vary depending on the type of placement you have i.e. If you have siblings or unrelated children or young people in placement, or complex needs.

Allowances and fees are monitored and reviewed annually. All foster carers are paid fortnightly in arrears, in accordance with the annual payroll timetable circulated to foster carers prior to the start of each calendar year.

Although not an exhaustive list the Allowances and Fees paid include the following:

- Medication.
- Presents, Gifts and rewards.
- Club membership, including equipment costs
- Extra Tuition fees.
- Personal equipment, spectacles etc.
- Clothing.
- Pocket money.
- Savings
- Bus fares.

- Dinner money.
- Birthdays.
- Holidays.
- Christmas presents.
- School trips, school uniform, school equipment.
- Nursery fees and equipment.
- Additional insurance (home and vehicle).
- Additional household equipment.

Payments will not be made until a child or young person moves into placement with the foster carers and will commence in the next available fostering payroll run. However, we recognise that in some circumstances this can be difficult, and we will therefore support carers and may provide an advance on the allowances and fees paid to them.

When there is no child or young person in placement, because the child or young person has moved, a retainer fee is payable for up to six weeks, if foster carers are available and willing to take further placements. This payment does not apply to respite carers.

Tax

As a foster carer you have self-employed status and as such are responsible for declaring your income for tax purposes.

There are also generous tax allowances available to foster carers, irrespective of the agency or Local Authority that they are approved with. Further details about tax is provided to foster carers but can also be obtained from the [HM Revenue and Customs website](#).

Further information can be gained from the following link.

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/courses/syob2/fc/index.htm>

Insurance cover

Therapeutic Fostering's Public Liability' policy provides cover for approved carers but not the child or young person in placement and you should advise both your home and car insurers that you are fostering and ensure that your policy cover extends to fostered children and young people.

In order to transport looked after children in your car it should be insured for business purposes. Most insurance companies do not charge additional fees to include this, but you should speak to your insurance company to make sure.

14. The next steps

Therapeutic Fostering hopes that you have found the information and guidance within this information guide useful and informative.

If you have any further questions or would simply like to progress your interest in becoming a foster carer with the Therapeutic Fostering family, please contact one of our team on:

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Email: info@therapeuticfostering.co.uk

