



Fostering

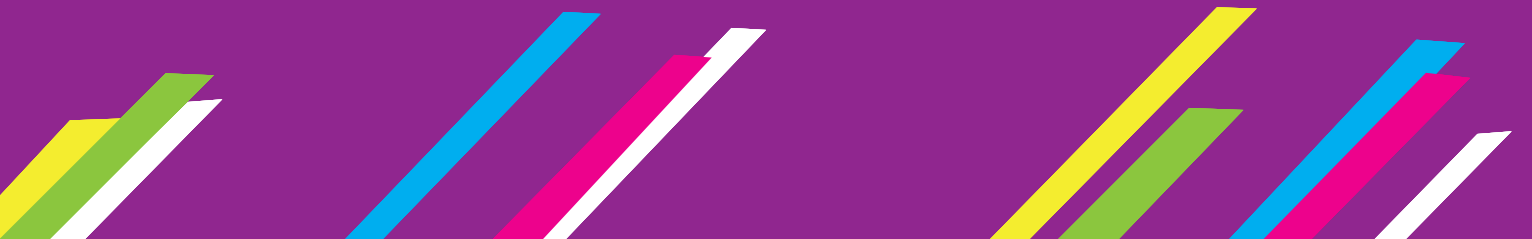
Putting children first

“Life with my foster carers is brilliant, they love and treat me like one of their own.”

“The best thing about my foster carer is that she supports me and is always there for me.”

“Fostering is important because it helps children like me to be able to live a better life.”

- Foster children in Lincolnshire



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What is fostering?

Fostering is a way of providing a stable family life for children and young people who are unable to live with their birth family. This allows children and young people to thrive in a loving and secure home with their foster carers, and can be for a short or longer period of time.

Whilst fostering is extremely rewarding, the children and young people who live with foster carers come from a diverse range of backgrounds and may display some challenging behaviours depending on their past experiences.

Fostering is different to adoption as an adoption order ends a child's legal relationship with their birth family. As a foster carer you are not the legal guardian of the child or young person as this remains with the birth parents and / or the local authority.

You will need to be available to take children and young people in your care to regular health appointments, as well as to attend meetings about

their care and educational needs. Fostering also involves working closely with a range of people including social workers, teachers, health professionals and birth families.

Once foster carers are approved they are supervised and supported by a named allocated supervising social worker which involves regular phone contact, home visits, attendance at meetings, and training events.

Children and young people in foster care have their own social workers who will visit them regularly in their foster home to talk to them about how they are being cared for, any problems they may be having, and future plans.

Fostering with your local authority

Children come into care through their local authority. In Lincolnshire we always strive to place children with our carers in-house first. As a local authority carer you'll get more regular placements.



Types of fostering

Children and young people who are fostered are not able to live with their birth family, which can be for any number of reasons.

Therefore, foster carers may be required to care for a child or young person for a short period of time, perhaps due to a crisis in the child's or young person's birth family, or for longer periods of time where it has been decided that a child or young person can't be safely cared for within their birth family.

During your assessment your supervising social worker will discuss with you what types of children you are open to fostering, and will make a recommendation about what type of foster care to approve you for.

Short-term fostering

Emergency care

Being an emergency foster carer can be very rewarding. There are infants, children and teenagers all living locally who have a genuine and urgent need to be cared for away from their own homes for a short time.

Individuals able to offer emergency care would need previous experience of working with children or young people, and have no children of their own under the age of 16 living at home. One carer also needs to be home-based.

Respite care

Respite care is a short-term placement where a child or young person is placed with a foster family to allow birth parents or other foster carers time to recharge their batteries so that they can continue to care for their child. This can be a

regular, planned arrangement where a child is cared for once a week or once a month as part of a support plan, or a one-off period of care if a foster carer is unwell or taking a pre-planned break.

We only accept applications for respite carers where you are able to commit to frequent and regular periods at weekends and during school holidays when respite care is most in demand.

Task centred care

Task centred fostering is used to focus on a particular task for a child. This can involve looking after a child or young person whilst family difficulties are resolved so they may return home, or decisions are made about their long-term future care and a permanent or adoptive family is identified. Placements may be from two days to two years, and the ages of the children and young people placed range from birth to 18 years.

Long-term fostering

Permanence

Some children are not able to return to their birth parents or wider family because it would not be safe for them to do so.

We strongly believe that permanent foster carers should be identified for these children where they can remain until they reach adulthood and beyond.

Permanent fostering requires a high level of commitment because the child may have experienced many moves, abuse and neglect before the decision to find a permanent placement is made.



Can I foster?

We consider each application on an individual basis, so you can be a foster carer regardless of whether you are:

- Single, married or unmarried
- Heterosexual or LGBT
- Disabled or able-bodied
- Employed or receiving benefits
- Have your own children, or not
- Are a home owner or renting
- From any ethnic or religious background
- And there is no upper age limit to foster

What else do I need to know?

- You must have a spare bedroom for a foster child or young person to use.
- If you have any criminal cautions or convictions for offences against children, or sexual

offences against adults, then you will not be able to foster.

- If you are applying to foster as a couple, you need to have lived together for a minimum of 18 months.
- It is important to remember that fostering will have an impact upon your own children. From experience we know how crucial they can be to creating successful placements. For this reason they will be part of the application and assessment process and we will always seek to answer any questions or concerns they may have. We hold a one-day (non-mandatory) course designed specifically to help prepare your children for fostering. We also run a support group for birth children within foster families called the Supportive Superstars who meet throughout the year to take part in fun activities and to talk through anything that may be bothering them.
- If you smoke (including e-cigarettes) you cannot foster a child under the age of 5 years.

Lifestyle considerations

Lifestyle choices are considered for all prospective foster carers in order to ensure that children and young people in care have positive role models for a healthy lifestyle as well as being protected from the direct harm passive smoking, alcohol, obesity and lack of exercise can cause.

Smoking

There is considerable evidence to show that smoking and passive smoking have long-term effects on health. Passive smoking can damage the health of children and we promote smoke free homes for all children.

Applicants wishing to foster can expect their smoking habits to be considered within the assessment process. Applicants who smoke, including e-cigarettes, are not able to be considered as carers for children under the age of 5 years.

Alcohol

There are prescribed healthy limits relating to alcohol consumption. Currently it is no more than 14 units a week for both men and women. Alcohol consumption of applicants will be discussed as part of the fostering assessment process in the context of a healthy lifestyle and factors associated with this.

Applicants should consider the impact their alcohol consumption may have on children and young people they care for, as many will have experienced inconsistent and frightening parenting where alcohol dependency was a factor in their birth family.

Weight

There is medical evidence to suggest that obesity, weight and eating difficulties can pose dangers to

health. The result can be an increased risk of body damage e.g. cardiac problems, liver damage, diabetes and hypertension.

We will consider whether weight issues have an impact on activity and energy levels during the assessment process. A full medical is not normally required other than for permanent carers, but information from your GP is considered by our medical advisor who may require a full medical to be completed if it is considered to be necessary.





Don't foster misconceptions!

Think you can't foster because you're...



Single



A different
ethnicity



Unemployed /
low income



In a same-sex
relationship



Too old



Not a home
owner



Disabled /
health problem



Without own
children

Think again!

Foster carers are needed from all walks of life to meet the diverse needs of the children in their care.

So, before you rule yourself out, count yourself in!

Your journey to becoming a foster carer

Step-by-step we will be with you, supporting you through the whole process and beyond.

Enquiry stage

1. Enquiry

You can apply to become a foster carer by filling out the Initial Expression of Interest form online at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering, or by calling our friendly Recruitment Team on **01522 554114**.

2. Initial visit

A member of our team will visit you at home to explain more about fostering and the process to become a carer in detail to you.

The worker will leave an application pack and workbook with you to have a look at in your own time.

The workbook is nothing to worry about - it is designed just to get you thinking about the different experiences and backgrounds of foster children, their needs, and how your own skills and knowledge can help you to care for them.

3. Formal application

To officially start the process to become a foster carer you will need to complete the Registration of Interest form in the pack the worker will have left with you and return it to us in the self-addressed envelope.

Stage one

This first stage takes two months to complete.

4. Checks and references

Stage one of the process starts once we have received your completed Registration of Interest form. During this stage we will carry out various checks and references, including:

- A medical check, simply to ensure that you are fit enough to cope with the rigours of fostering.
- A criminal background check to confirm that you have no convictions that would prevent you from being a foster carer. Having past convictions doesn't necessarily exclude you, but it is important that you share anything that might come up with us so that there are no surprises and we can work through any potential issues with you.

5. Training

You will attend a three-day course with other prospective foster carers to help you explore the benefits and challenges of fostering. You will also have the opportunity to meet experienced carers and talk to them about the realities of fostering.

As well as key parenting skills, this training covers the special skills, knowledge and understanding foster carers need to care for children who may have experienced neglect and abuse. The aim of the course is to give you the skills you will need to successfully foster.

6. Pre-assessment decision

Based on the information gathered during this stage we will make a decision about whether you



can continue to stage two which you will be informed of in writing. If we decide you are not suitable to continue to stage two then we will give you a clear explanation of the reasons why. Should you wish to make a complaint about how we made this decision, you can do so using Lincolnshire County Council's complaints procedure.

Stage two

This stage can take up to six months to complete.

7. Assessment

A supervising social worker will visit you regularly at home to assess your ability to foster. This involves lots of conversations with you, your partner, any children you may have, any other people who live with you, and with some of your wider friends and family. These conversations are designed to help us get a rounded picture of you and your family.

If you have been in a significant previous relationship we may wish to carry out an

ex-partner reference, especially if you have had children together.

Once the assessment is complete your supervising social worker will gather all of the information together in a report about your suitability to become a foster carer, which is then presented to the fostering panel.

8. Approval

The fostering panel will review the information prepared by your supervising social worker and consider it in detail before a recommendation is made on whether to approve you as a foster carer.

The final decision about your approval is formally made by the Agency Decision Maker who, in Lincolnshire, is an Assistant Director of Children's Services. You will be informed of the decision in writing within seven working days of the panel making its recommendation. If you are not approved there is a right of appeal which we can give you more information about if needed.

Support for our foster carers

We offer you a great combination of support and rewards every step of the way on your fostering journey.

Local support

We believe that having a local support community goes a long way in helping you to successfully foster. You will have access to:

- Support and supervision from a designated supervising social worker.
- Supportive Superstars - our support group for birth and adopted children in foster families.
- Regular foster carer support groups across the county.
- A buddying system with an experienced foster carer.
- Education support and advice through the pupil premium and virtual school.
- A regular e-newsletter containing the latest events, information, guidance and advice about fostering.

Ongoing training and development

Fostering is incredibly rewarding and we want you to get the most out of it. We offer our carers a range of training courses and e-learning modules tailored towards your needs, including safeguarding, first aid, safe care, diversity, managing difficult behaviour, attachment, and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention.

We also give our carers the opportunity to get involved in recruiting new foster carers by attending and helping out at information events, as well as at preparation training courses. Becoming a foster carer can also be the first

step on the ladder to a career in children's social care, becoming a child minder, social worker, or youth worker.

Independent advice

Sometimes you may want to access independent advice on fostering issues. That's why we provide our carers with membership to the Fostering Network who offer advice and information to foster carers on a range of issues, including income tax and finance, legislation, contact visits, and allegations.

Rewards

To thank you for the hard work you and your family do, we offer our carers:

- Reward days - For example, this currently includes free Lincoln City football tickets for birth and foster children within a foster family, and discounted adult tickets.
- Max Card - A discount card for foster families offering free or discounted entry into numerous attractions nationwide, including Drayton Manor Theme Park, LEGOLAND Windsor Resort, Castle Howard and Go Ape! Woburn Safari Park.
- Annual BBQ and Christmas party.
- 14 days paid holiday for permanence and task centred carers in agreement with your supervising social worker.

Respite

Fostering is incredibly rewarding but we understand that from time-to-time you may need a break. That's why we ensure that when required we provide respite care for those carers requesting a break from their fostering role.





Information evenings

We hold a full calendar of information evenings throughout the year for people who are considering fostering.

The evenings consist of several experienced foster carers talking about the realities, challenges, and rewards of fostering children and young people.

You will also have the opportunity to speak with the carers as well as our social workers who will be able to answer any questions or concerns you may have about the process to become a foster carer in a safe and secure environment.

We also aim to give the view and experiences of some children and young people who are or have been in foster care at the evenings so that you

can get an idea of some of the backgrounds the children and young people you may be looking after have come from.

A member of our team will also give a short presentation about the Supportive Superstars, our support group for birth and adopted children within foster families.

Response to these information evenings has been overwhelmingly positive and we recommend you come along if you can.

For more information and to book your place on one of our evenings, log on at

www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fosterevening

or call our friendly Recruitment Team on

01522 554114.

“As a foster carer you have the privilege to support young people to blossom into the person they truly are. Nothing is more rewarding than knowing you played a part in that, and the friendship that forms between you gives them something solid to have faith in, while they learn to have faith in themselves.”

“It’s truly amazing and deeply warming to see how the children in my care are developing educationally, mentally and emotionally as they start to progress down the road to achieving their full potential as young adults.”

“Our role as foster carers is to give children security, reliability, and consistency. Security in always being there for them, reliability in always turning up when you say you are going to, and consistency in having the same rules and boundaries every day.”

- Lincolnshire foster carers



Ready to join the family?

You can complete the Initial Expression of Interest form online now at
www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fostering

Alternatively you can speak to one of our friendly staff by calling our dedicated Recruitment Team on **01522 554114**.

