

“Some children have had only bad experiences before they come to you. They might not understand what it means to be part of a family or to just do the things that normal families do. That’s all children really want – to feel at home – to feel *loved* and *wanted* – to feel part of a *family*.”

For a more hectic, more hilarious, more interesting life – please contact us:

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Fostering *for* Leicester



Each day Leicester foster carers help hundreds of children to find out that the world is a better place than they ever imagined. Could you welcome another child into your family either for a short time or longer?



Besides the fantastic sense of achievement fostering will bring, this is what you can expect from us:

- **All the back-up and security that only a large local authority can provide, with 24-hour support;**
- **Tailored training in person and online to boost skills and confidence;**
- **Fostering allowances with extra weeks for holidays, birthdays and festivals, plus payments to recognise commitment and skills;**
- **Regular placements and planned breaks;**
- **Streamlined service from assessment to matching.**



What is foster care?

Children usually come into foster care because of concerns that their own families aren't caring for them properly. Parents might be ill or experiencing some other temporary problem. More often though, children are removed from their families due to reports that they are at serious risk of neglect or abuse. Sometimes young people from abroad need

foster families whilst decisions are being made about their asylum applications.

Fostering isn't about breaking families up. Foster carers help many families get back together by offering them hope and support at a time of crisis. At other times foster carers prepare children to move onto a new permanent family.

Permanent foster families become a family for life for children who for various reasons cannot be adopted.

Being a foster family involves far more than day to day care for children. Foster families provide comfort and reassurance and do all they can to help children to feel confident about a better future.

“They are part of the family now. When they started to know our names we just fell in love with them. You have this very stereotyped view of what you think foster children might be like, but they are lovely little kids – like any other children.”

Sheila is an experienced foster carer who volunteers to take a turn on the emergency rota. She remembers two brothers who came to her.

“What happened was that their Mum had run off a week or two before. Dad was drunk in the house. The neighbours kept hearing the kids crying, but couldn’t get in to see if they were all right. They called the police who had to break in. The house was full of mess. No food. No telly. Broken bottles. Dad unconscious.

There they were – two tiny boys huddled together in a corner, scared out of their minds and starving. It was Friday night about 11 o’clock when the social worker rang me up and explained the situation. I just said: ‘Right, bring them over. I’ll make up some beds and put some food on’. Someone has to be there when children need them – that night it was me.”

After several months in foster care, the two brothers are now adopted together and are the pride and joy of their new family



“I must admit I like the house to be full again after my own children have grown up. It takes children to make a happy family home – to fill the house with life and interest. Our house is hectic some of the time. Or it’s hilarious. never boring.”

Types of fostering

Which age-group? Some foster families only look after babies and toddlers. Others feel better able to care for older children or teenagers. Many foster all ages.

During your preparation and assessment period you can choose the age-group that suits you. We offer excellent training before and after you begin fostering. This training will help you to get the best out of caring for whichever age-group you choose.

Girls or boys? Some families only foster girls and some only foster boys. Most don’t mind which.

How many children? Some families foster one child at a time. Others have time and space for two, three or more children who could be brothers and sisters who need a home together.

Short-term A child becomes part of your family until he or she can either go back to their birth family or move on to a new permanent family. A child can be with you for days, weeks or months – sometimes longer depending on circumstances.

Permanence A child becomes part of your family until he or she reaches the age where they move onto further education or set up their own home. Permanent fostering is very similar to adoption. The main difference is the legal status of the child. Permanent foster families continue to benefit from training opportunities and full payments for each child until they are 18.

Young people can sometimes remain with carers after the age of 18, depending on their circumstances. Arrangements for this will be negotiated with the carers.

Remand Fostering is a specialist scheme for young people remanded into care due to their offending behaviour.

Short Breaks This is where disabled young people enjoy regular short stays of one or two nights a month with another family. The aim is to give parents the chance to recharge their batteries and devote time to their other children. It is also a great opportunity for a disabled

child to widen their horizons and make new friends.

Independent Visitors Young people who are fostered, or living in children’s homes, sometimes have very little contact with their own families. It can help to have a person separate from their social worker or carer who keeps up regular contact with them. The main idea is to meet up for a few hours a month – either on outings, activities or places where you share an interest – and talk and get to know each other as well as have fun.





“Just looking in on the girls first thing. Checking they’re okay. It’s the reason I get up in the morning. I can’t wait.”

Matching



We always try to get as close a match as we can between children and their foster family. This means that our first choice for a child will be a family that we think can provide the best care for them.

Some children are boisterous and outgoing so we look for foster families with the same outlook.

Some children are quieter and will do best with families who are sensitive to their needs. Some children may enjoy having other children around; others may fare best if they are the only child in a family. We also try to match by interests – such as what kind of leisure pursuits a child and

their carers enjoy. Where possible we try to match children to families of the same race, religion or culture. However this is not always possible and so we ask all our families to be prepared to foster children of a different race, religion or culture to their own. We will train you and support you to do this.

“Is it hard to let a child go? The honest answer is, yes - sometimes. If you are a short-term foster carer, a child could be with you for a few months. But it can be longer – perhaps even a year or so while social workers are working with the child’s family to get them home or trying to find an adopter. The children become part of your family. You and your own children are bound to become very attached to these children – you wouldn’t be human if you didn’t. And of course they become very attached to you. But you always have to think about what is going to be best for them for the future. It is part of your job to fill a child full of confidence and help them to move on. It’s hard

sometimes, but you know that, as one child is waving goodbye, there is always another coming along who needs you just as much. Our family is an important stepping stone for several children not just one.”



“What spurs me on with every child is to see them achieve something. To see them feel proud of themselves. I don’t need anything more than that.”

Adoption

Adoption and fostering are very different Adopters become a family for life for children who cannot return to their birth family. A court will confer full parental responsibility on the adopter and often the children will take the adopter’s family name.

There are similarities between adoption and permanent fostering. Both provide secure permanent families for children. The big difference is the legal status of the child.

If you are a short-term foster carer you may have to prepare children to move onto adoption and facilitate initial meetings between adopters and the child in your home.

On very rare occasions short-

term foster families go on to become permanent families or adopters to the children they have fostered. However you should not go into short-term fostering expecting this to happen.





“When Amy first came to us, she’d never speak. Now we can’t shut her up. She’s the life and soul of our family.”



Disabled children

Disabled children and young people deserve to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as other children.

Every year, at the Fostering and Adoption Centre, we find short-term and permanent families, as well as short-breaks families, for disabled children of all ages. These children can have health conditions ranging from physical disabilities to autism or learning difficulties.

Some children may require ground-floor facilities or need carers with experience such as through nursing. We offer training to applicants without experience; and specialist staff continue to offer support and training once you are fostering.

Help from a range of professionals is available for as long as families need it.

Annetta enjoys being a Short Breaks family alongside a busy working life.

“I’ve been a Short Breaks family for the last 10 years. I honestly get such a lot out of it that I sometimes

feel quite selfish because I enjoy it so much. Having children around gives me an excuse to go to the zoo and do all the things I enjoy doing and wouldn’t otherwise get the opportunity to do. It is so rewarding because, as well as getting to know the children and seeing them progress over time, you also get to know their parents and you can see just how much you are helping an entire family. Everyone wins with Short Breaks.”



“The best bit of the day is when we all sit round the telly together having a laugh.”



Who *are* foster carers?

Leicester foster families are

- From all areas of Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland and bordering counties
- Usually aged over 25 – there is no upper age-limit
- Married and unmarried couples and couples in civil partnerships. Whatever your situation, you must have been living together for a minimum of two years.
- Single people including single parents
- Parents and grandparents as well as people without their own children
- Gay, lesbian, heterosexual or bi-sexual
- From all walks of life
- From all communities
- Working, unemployed or retired
- People with all levels of physical ability including disabled people
- Of all ethnicities
- Of all religions or no religion



If you are considering fostering does this sound like you?

- I enjoy having children around. ✓
- I can get onto a child's level and understand how they see the world. ✓
- I have experience of looking after children – my own or other people's. ✓
- I am honest with myself and others. ✓
- I have a sense of humour. ✓
- I am an optimist at heart. ✓
- I am patient and a good listener. ✓
- I'm not perfect. ✓
- When I get things wrong I'm not afraid to admit it and try to put things right. ✓
- When things don't go to plan I can bounce back. ✓
- I can ask for advice when I need it and I can accept advice. ✓
- I can stand back and think things through rather than always rushing in. ✓
- I can work as part of a team with all the other people involved in a foster child's life. ✓
- My home is clean and comfortable. If I rent it, I have a secure tenancy that will allow me to foster. ✓
- I have enough flexibility in my life for the demands a child will make of my time – particularly a younger child. ✓
- I have a spare room which can be made pleasant for a child or young person. Bedrooms should usually be on the same floor as the carer's bedroom. In some cases, young children can share with your own children. Babies can share your room. ✓
- I have a good network of people around to help me. ✓
- I am in reasonably good health. Disabilities or minor health problems will NOT rule you out. Our Medical Advisor will consider all the factors and make recommendations on your suitability. ✓
- I understand that, if anyone in my household is a smoker, I will not be able to foster a child aged under five or most disabled children of any age. If I have previously smoked, I need to have given up for at least 12 months. ✓
- Everyone else I live with is as keen to become a foster family as I am. ✓
- I am prepared to be open with the fostering team about all aspects of my past and current life and I understand that thorough checks will have to be made about me and everyone who lives in my house. ✓



Dan: “I found it daunting to apply. Most foster carers are women and to be honest, as a single divorced man, I felt uncomfortable putting myself forward. It wasn't just that I'd be the only bloke at some of the training sessions; I thought people would look at a man wanting to foster and be very suspicious of his motives. In fact everyone I met at fostering was welcoming and accepting. Don't get me wrong, the background checks are very thorough; and incredibly searching questions are asked.

You know that, although the social workers are very nice, they are not going to put you through to look after children if they have any doubts about you at all. And I think anyone who seriously looks into fostering can completely understand that. We're all here to protect children and nobody would want to take any risks where their lives and happiness are concerned.”





“I thought if I could just change one young person’s life and give them a better chance for the future then that would be worth it for me. But then I had to consider my son who lives with me. We talked it over between us and the fostering team involved him all the preparation and he was fine for me to go ahead. He has helped me out a lot with fostering and he’s got on well with all the children.”



Tim’s story

“My first memories are of quite a turbulent time. I must have been about three or four when me and my younger brothers were taken away from my mum and had to live with a foster carer. After that, we would go back to mum and then back into foster care several times till I was eleven. Then I was told I was going to live with a foster family permanently.”

“Moving in felt a bit strange after everything I’d been through. Although I was sad at not being able to live with mum, I felt quite optimistic about life. I realised that mum just couldn’t look after us properly and that this new

home was probably the best thing for me.”

“Our new foster home felt comfortable and safe straightaway. I wasn’t used to strict rules and boundaries so that took some getting used to. But I was part of a family and that gave me a sense of stability that I’d never really had before. It’s hard to explain to anyone who hasn’t been through some of the things I have, but it was just a relief to put the past behind me and concentrate on normal things like having a social life and enjoying school.”

“I went on to study sociology and social policy and then went

on to get my Masters degree. I put the work in, and always remained positive, focussed, and resilient, but without my foster carers and other people encouraging me, my life could have been very different.”

“I’d say to anyone thinking of fostering: it’s not a job. Fostering requires a serious commitment. You can’t just switch off with young people. Some of the young people you foster will have had a very tough start to life through no fault of their own. Fostering them may not be easy and they will need real love and commitment from you. It’s a big thing to do and you will have a very big impact on someone’s life.”



Foster carers' own children

Teenager Anna has seen first-hand the “amazing” difference a caring foster family can make to the life of a vulnerable child. Her family has been fostering for nine years, and, although she was nervous about it at first, she now enjoys helping the youngsters who stay.

“At first I was scared I might get pushed out and the children might not be nice. But once I

talked to my parents about it, they reassured me,” Anna says. “I’m really happy we foster. The difference between the children when they come to us and when they leave is amazing. We once had this little girl who didn’t even know how to play or talk when she came. Soon, she was much happier and a chatterbox.”

Members of the fostering team work hard to support the children of foster families because they know that quite often the children do the hardest job. They can sometimes be the ones that bond with the foster child most and gain their trust. If a foster child is worried, they will quite often turn to someone their own age within the foster family.

Anna says:

“We had this girl who cried and cried when she first came. She went straight to her room and just cried. But after a while she was happy, and even though she was a little bit quiet at school, at home she was always so excited and happy and nice.”

Fourteen year-old Milan says:

“The best thing about fostering is that you’re helping to give the children a normal life. I feel like I’m sharing with them the great childhood I’ve had and I’m sometimes helping them to be a child again themselves.”



What happens next? Application *and* Assessment

“I’ve got a piece of pottery on top of my telly. It might not look that great to some people. But to me it’s a masterpiece. It was made for me at school by the first child I fostered and I will treasure it forever.”

If you want to find out more about becoming a foster family, the next step is to fill in the Registration of Interest form in this pack and send it back to us. If you are viewing this online, please e-mail us or ring and we will send you a pack.

If there is anything you wish to discuss at any stage of your enquiry, or if you need any help completing the form, please ring our enquiry officer during office hours.

Filling in this form isn’t like applying for a job and there are no right or wrong answers. It will simply help you to think through all the ways that fostering might affect you and your family.

When we receive your form, one of our team will ring you and, where appropriate, arrange a visit to your home.

Visit to your home Here we can discuss in detail your own circumstances and how fostering could fit into your life.

Assessment and Preparation If fostering seems right for you, one of our team can begin your assessment and preparation. This will involve weekly visits to your home and a three day training course held locally.

Don’t worry if you haven’t done any training for a while or weren’t particularly academic at school. Our training and preparation is very informal and doesn’t require too much written work. We try to make everything as relaxed and fun as possible.

Assessment and preparation usually takes around four to six months. It involves you and anyone

else who lives with you. Your own children would be included as they play an important part in fostering.

During your assessment, you can decide which age-group and type of child you feel happiest to foster.

If fostering seems to be wrong for you we will suggest that you reconsider and advise you on what to do in the future.



“You really get to know the social worker who visits you at home and it’s all very friendly and relaxed. Even so, the questions we were asked were quite personal some of the time, but I felt they needed to be. If my children had to go into foster care I would want to know that whoever they were going to were vetted – wouldn’t you?”



Background check Criminal convictions or cautions for minor offences in the past need NOT prevent you from fostering. Much depends on the seriousness of the offence, how long ago the crime was committed and how you have lived your life since. It is important though that you tell us right from the start about anything in your past that might be a concern.

People with convictions or cautions for serious offences against children or for violence cannot foster.

You and anyone aged 18 and over who lives in your home will have to sign a consent for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Anyone aged over 16 should also sign for other essential checks to be carried out.

Health check When you begin your assessment, we will ask you to arrange a medical with your own

doctor which we pay for. Disabled people can foster so long as the disability will not prevent you from looking after children.

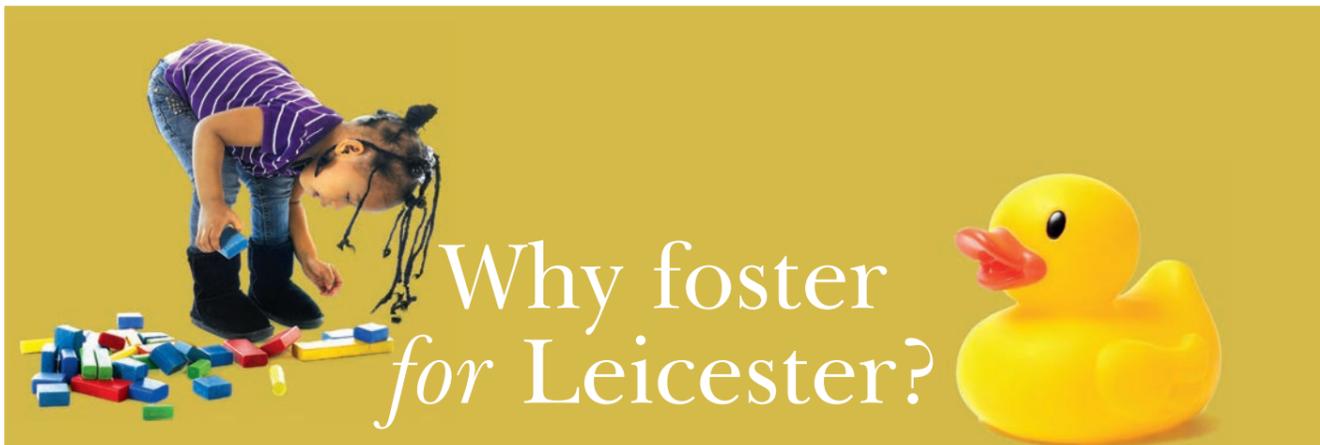
References are taken up during your assessment.

Approval An independent panel examines a report prepared by your assessing social worker and decides whether or not you will be approved. The great majority of our applicants who complete their assessment are approved and we would not encourage anyone to go this far if we thought there would be a problem.

Once you are approved You will be assigned your own supervising social worker. As soon as you are ready to start, your supervising social worker will match you to a child and arrange an introduction.

Your supervising social worker will sort out payments and any

bedding or other equipment you need to get started. They will also make sure you have phone numbers for 24 hour support, your foster carer's handbook and other documentation you may need as well as a list of support groups and professionals you can call on. Your supervising social worker and the child's social worker will visit you regularly to help you and make sure everything is okay. You will have a list of phone numbers you can call for help or advice whenever you feel you need it.



- We are one of the largest Fostering and Adoption services in the East Midlands and we are constantly helping people to fulfil their ambition to become short-term or permanent families for children.
- Feedback from our foster families consistently shows a high level of satisfaction with the excellent support, training and placement matching they receive.
- Our staff can draw on years of experience preparing people to become foster families and supporting them once they have children with them.
- You will have your own social worker to support you once you are approved.
- Our foster families have regular placements.
- Our families can take planned breaks from fostering.
- We offer on-the-job training up to a Diploma in Social Care if carers want to extend their skills.
- We pay allowances at the top national recommended rate – with extra weeks for birthdays, Christmas or other religious celebrations and an extra two weeks for summer holidays. Allowances do not affect any tax you pay or benefits you receive.
- As you gain experience and new skills you can benefit from additional payments for each child on our Accreditation Scheme which rewards your commitment and skills.
- We provide all the bedding, clothing (including school uniforms) and any equipment you need to get started.
- Payments are available for children's activities and holidays, etc.
- Leicester carers have free access to local and national support groups as well as a wide range of professional services.
- You will receive free access to many council facilities as well as exclusive invites to film screenings, leisure events and parties.
- You can foster for Leicester if you live anywhere in the city, county, Rutland or areas bordering Leicestershire.



“My first child, a 12 year old girl, was due to arrive. I didn't sleep the night before, worrying how we'd get on. When I heard the gate open, I went straight out and saw her standing there with her social worker. I just gave her a big smile and she smiled back. I think we were both as relieved as each other. It was as if something else kicked in then and I saw quite clearly that this child needed someone to care for her and protect her and I was the one to do it. She still visits even though she moved on some years ago and I really enjoy seeing her.”



What Foster carers say

“Paperwork is a chore, but I realise it has to be done. It can’t all be fun can it?”

“The choice is ours about whether or not we are ready to foster another child. Nobody minds if you say: ‘No, I need a break’. You can be as busy as you want to be. In fact, we love what we do, so we are usually happy to say ‘yes’.”

“When we get the photo albums out, it makes us think back about all the children and all the times we’ve had. Some of the photos have us laughing out loud and some still bring a lump to our throats to this day. We tried our best and we’ll never forget any of them – even if they were only with us for a week or two. And they never forget us either. We must get the biggest sack of Christmas cards in Leicester.”

“There were two brothers – they’re adopted now and doing great. When they were with our family, I think they never got over the idea that they’d actually get something to eat every day. I loved watching them eat – you’ve never seen anything like it. Their teacher told me they used to run and show her the lunch boxes I made up for them and they’d tell her exactly what they’d had for tea the night before and what they’d be having today. Ordinary family things were amazing to them. And believe me we’re not talking posh nosh at our house – just your regular chips and stuff.”

“Since I started fostering, I have enjoyed the training courses you can go on. You get to meet really nice people who foster as well. The things I’ve learned mean I can do a lot more for the children I look after. It also makes fostering more fun and rewarding for me.”

A photograph of two children running in a field at sunset. The child on the left is taller, wearing a striped sweater and dark pants, with their arms outstretched. The child on the right is smaller, wearing a purple sweater with a white star and light-colored pants, also with arms outstretched. They are running on a dirt path with a puddle in the foreground. The background shows trees and a bright sunset sky.

What Foster children say

“The worst thing about being in foster care is that people think it must be my fault. They think I must have done something wrong or that there’s something wrong with me.”

“Thank you for everything you have done and for making me one of your family.”

“Marie you were my foster mummy for two years. Thank you for the love and care you gave me. We had our ups and downs, but this card has special words to say I loved you like my own mum.”

“Me and my sister still get letters from our Mum. Sonya doesn’t remember much about Mum. But I do. Mum’s letters make me feel sad. I can’t always remember what she looks like, but I still think about her and wonder what she’s doing now and how she is. It’s good to have somebody to talk to about it. Don and Jackie (permanent foster carers) always listen and always help me feel better.”

“Thank you *for* everything. I’m Going *to* miss you.”



“We go out to places. We are a family and we treat each other like one. Our foster carers take good care of us and help us with things. We have lots of fun and if we have any worries we can talk to them.”

“I like everything about my foster home. I like days out. And I love Jean (my carer) and Toffee (Jean’s dog).”

“My foster family are very very loving people to have as a family and you get to do lots of fun things like go to the park, do judo, play out. But I love them no matter what we do. If you are like my foster family then you will be a good foster family too.”