

**DO SOMETHING
GREAT**



Your guide to
**Fostering
in Bolton**

Foster
with Bolton

Let's find out
if fostering is
right for you...

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GREAT**



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Do something great


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Let's start the journey 



**Fostering makes
life unbelievable
and has made a
world of difference
to our lives as well
as theirs.**

- Ilyas



Welcome

from the Bolton Fostering Team

If you are reading this, you are thinking about embarking on a journey to become a foster carer.

You may have been considering the idea for a while but the time or circumstances may not have been right. It may be that you haven't known where to start, or what questions to ask.

The important thing is that you have now made that first step to finding out more.

Our friendly fostering team are here to support you every step of the way. From providing answers to those initial burning questions and giving the best advice about what it takes to care for children, to supporting you through the assessment process and beyond, we will do all we can to help you along the way.

We know that although the thought of helping children and young people is exciting, it can be worrying and daunting too.

That's why we've made things easier. We've created a step-by-step approach so that at every stage you will find out more about the rewarding role of being a foster carer, while we learn about you, your family and your lifestyle.

Together, we will discover not just whether fostering is for you, but how it can be a life-changing experience for you and the local children who need you.

So, *thank you*
for taking that first step.



“Sometimes people underestimate their own capabilities and wonder whether they can actually become a foster carer.”

- Rita

Is it really hard?

Will it fit in with my schedule?

Am I too inexperienced with children?

Will I be good at it?

What if I change my mind?

Will my children be safe?

Can I do it?

Will I make enough money?

Why is fostering important?

It's about creating a *sense of belonging*

Fostering means providing consistent loving care for children who are dealing with separation, and may even have suffered neglect, abuse or other trauma. It's about giving them the emotional warmth and stability they need.


By becoming a foster carer, you help to give families time to rebuild their lives so that their child may return to them, or while assessments are taking place or decisions being made by the court.

Sometimes, when it is not safe for children to return home, they may stay with foster carers for the long-term.

Research strongly shows that children who are looked after in a family or home environment, grow and develop in a more positive and social way.

Which is why, when a child comes into our care, we look to our in-house foster carers first to provide them with a safe and supportive place to stay.





Every child or sibling group I care for has different circumstances, but they all need a safe and secure place to call home.

- Judith

**By becoming a foster carer, you can
give us opportunities that might
*change our lives.***

Give a child the support they need




Being away from our birth families can be difficult and it can take time for us to understand why our daily lives have changed.

Good foster carers give us the care, security and stability we need to thrive and develop when we're away from familiar people and places.

Like most children, our whole world usually revolves around our family. So when we move to live with strangers, we're often confused, bewildered and vulnerable. We usually don't know what's expected of us. Sometimes we're scared, hurt and wary. It can make it hard to trust people.

Some of us have needs over and above those of other children. And if we have brothers and sisters, it can be really hard to be away from them as well as our parents.



It's a close-knit group and we all support each other. There's always someone that can help if you have a question or a concern.

- Shahida

As a foster carer with your local council,
you're never on your own.

Excellent support network

You'll start by discovering more about the role by joining the Skills to Foster training course. This will help you decide if fostering is right for you.

Then, after you have become an approved foster carer, you'll get excellent support and training. These will build your confidence, skills and experience so that the care you give foster children will have a huge impact on their lives.

When you are newly approved, an experienced 'buddy' foster carer will support you, meaning you'll have someone to talk to outside of the professional network, if you need to.

And because the council provides a wide range of child support services in addition to fostering, you will be linking in with specialist teams that include the child's social and education workers, child psychologists and other childcare professionals.

A highly experienced Supervising Social Worker will visit you regularly to give feedback, supervision and guidance. Your foster child or children will have their own social worker, too.

Support is also on hand all day, every day, with a team of social workers on duty in the office, plus an emergency team during evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

Support and advice from other foster carers can also be incredibly valuable, and you'll be able to join a large local network of foster carers like you. Regular group meetings give you a chance to talk about concerns and share experiences.

High-quality training on lots of relevant topics is available, so you can always be learning new skills to help you in your role.

Lastly, you will have access to an independent advice and mediation worker from The Fostering Network.

"The support from our supervising social worker is fantastic and the training we receive is fundamental."

- Ilyas



Meet the family

Long-term fostering...

Mark and
Dawn

Mark was working long hours for the Highways Agency and spending too much time away from home. When his son and daughter had grown up and were living independently, Mark and his wife Dawn felt they still had plenty to give children and young people and that the nurturing side of parenting was something they didn't want to lose.

Together, the couple became foster carers for two brothers. The initial short-term placement soon became long-term with the boys thriving and enjoying family life.

"The boys are very lucky, but we consider ourselves to be lucky too. Seeing how happy they are at home and in school is fantastic as they've made massive progress with their education."

“Deciding to become long-term foster carers wasn't an easy decision but it was definitely the right one. It's so rewarding, and I would definitely recommend it.”

Single-parent foster carer...

Kieran

Being a foster carer was something that Kieran had thought about for a long time. But as a single person who works full-time for a charity, he wasn't sure it would be possible.

"I knew I had something to offer a child and so when I saw an advert online, I enquired. The application process went into a lot of details. It was a very

reflective process and very supportive, as we discussed everything that has happened in my life, so it was quite therapeutic.

"When I became approved it was only a few weeks until I got my first placement. I was really surprised at how well I took to it. I get a lot from it and I know the children feel the same."

“We have a great relationship and I'm just sad that it took me to the age of 42 to apply.”

Tel: 0800 107 1564

email: fostering@bolton.gov.uk



Fostering with a family...

Emma and Martin

Emma and Martin's fostering journey started when their own children were very small and they transferred to Bolton Council from an independent fostering agency to benefit from the fostering team's expert help, advice and support.

They have fostered children and young people

of all ages, taking care of sibling groups as well as more long-term placements.

Families come in all shapes and sizes, and that means Bolton Council needs families who can offer the right size and shape to support any child who needs it, for however long they might need it.

“Life is unpredictable and you don't always know what is going to happen, but we can offer a safe place that gives children a sense of security.”

Empty nesters...

Keith and Julie

When Keith and Julie's two daughters grew up and left home the couple made the most of their new-found freedom, enjoying holidays in their caravan and trips abroad. But the house soon seemed too quiet. They wanted to fill their home with the love and laughter of children and young people who needed a place to stay.

“The application process went very smoothly, and we had a fantastic social

worker supporting us. We were approved in the December, and we were on holiday the following March when we got the email to say that we would have two sisters staying with us once we returned home.”

The two girls remained with Keith and Julie and they became very much part of the family, enjoying holidays together with the couple's daughters and five grandchildren.

“We enjoyed our time together and loved our holidays, but we definitely suffered from empty nest syndrome. We really missed being parents and the feeling of other people depending on you.”

Deciding to become long-term foster carers wasn't an easy decision but it was definitely the right one. It's so rewarding, and we would definitely recommend it.

- Mark and Dawn



Benefits include discount cards and free access to leisure centres

As well as the great support you'll receive, there are lots of other benefits to fostering with Bolton Council.

Benefits of fostering with your local council

We only work with children from Bolton, so you'll be providing essential help for local children, families and communities.

Bolton Council is a not-for-profit organisation, focussed on providing early help and finding the best foster placements for children and young people.

Our foster children generally attend local schools, so you probably won't have to travel far for things like school runs, appointments and family contact visits.

As the local council, we place children with our own foster carers first.

We pride ourselves on finding the best match to suit your family.

You will receive a regular competitive allowance, plus other payments and grants for things like holidays, birthdays, furniture and special equipment (see The Financial Side of Things).

You will be part of a wider team of professionals who work to improve the life chances and quality of life for our foster children.

Regular social activities and group meetings for carers, their birth children and foster children offer fun activities and opportunities to share experiences.

You will receive regular newsletters and information about what is happening in the fostering service, plus useful resources.



There is no such thing as a typical foster carer.

If you are in a relationship, you need to have been together for at least two years and be able to show that you can provide stability for any child placed with you.

Who can foster?



What is important is that you can help and want to care for a child who needs love and attention. You'll need to be patient, understanding, resilient and empathic.

A sense of humour is an enormous bonus too!

Foster carers live in all kinds of homes. Terraced, semis, detached and flats. Just as long as you have a spare room so that they can have their privacy and a space they can call their own.

Foster carers come from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which helps to reflect the huge cultural diversity in Bolton.

You don't need to have had children of your own, but you do need experience of caring for or supporting children.

You should be 21 or older. There is no upper age limit, but you must be in good health and have the energy, time and enthusiasm to look after children.

People from all walks of life and backgrounds can apply.

You can be:

- ✓ In a relationship or single
- ✓ Gay or straight
- ✓ Employed, unemployed or retired
- ✓ A parent or never have had children of your own

Do you tick the boxes?

- I have a spare bedroom
- I am over 21
- I am a UK citizen or, if applicable, have indefinite leave to remain in the UK
- I don't have any convictions for offences against children
- I have enough time and energy to look after children
- I have previous childcare experience through family, work or volunteering
- I can transport children to school, family-time visits and appointments
- My spoken and written English is good enough to talk about the children's needs at meetings
- I am a non-smoker (in order to foster children under the age of five)
- I am patient, caring, adaptable, happy to foster children from any background, and like to have fun!



Just as there are different types of children and carers, there are also different types of fostering.

Fostering to suit you

Short-term fostering can be anything from an overnight stay to several months or up to two years. Short-term foster carers provide a temporary place to stay until the child can return home to their own family or longer-term arrangements can be made.

Long-term fostering is when children or young people cannot return home or be placed for adoption, so a foster carer looks after them until they are old enough to look after themselves and live independently.

Enhanced foster carers are highly-skilled, experienced foster carers who can look after children with more complex needs or challenging behaviours

Short break foster carers make a regular commitment to spend time with a child who has a physical and/or learning disability. They invite children to come and stay with them in their house for either a few hours, overnight or a weekend stay.

Emergency foster carers are those with specialist skills who can be available at short notice. They may work in other careers which don't allow them to foster full-time, but instead can be called on in an emergency to take overnight or short term placements.

The financial side of things

You will receive a professional fee for the time and skill you devote to each child.

Plus, you will also receive a maintenance allowance for each child to cover everyday costs.

The exact amounts change every so often, so please see or ask for our accompanying leaflet outlining the current allowances.

Bolton Council pays a retainer fee for up to eight weeks per year, per child, if foster carers are available to take placements, to cover any gaps between fostering children.

There are allowances for birthdays and holidays, as well as festive or religious celebrations such as Christmas or Eid.

Discretionary grants to cover special needs and particular equipment are also available.

You will be self-employed and there are beneficial tax arrangements for foster carers.

As a foster carer you may be entitled to claim benefits and tax credits.

For further information visit the government's HMRC website



Making that first move

It usually takes around four to six months and we will support you through every stage.

The first move in becoming a foster carer is to find out whether it's right for you.

If it is, you'll follow a step-by-step process to becoming an approved foster carer at a pace that suits you and your family.





1

Initial enquiry

Start by making an enquiry to our fostering recruitment team. We'll answer any questions about becoming a foster carer and clarify if you meet the essential criteria.

2

Registration of interest

One of our experienced recruitment team will help you to complete a registration of interest form.

3

Home visit

A social care worker will meet you to get to know you, provide advice and information, and see your home and spare room.

4

Essential checks

We carry out a number of checks, including with the Police and Probation Service, the local council and the NSPCC. We also ask for some references.

5

Skills to foster

You'll complete six training modules with other potential foster carers. These cover the role of the foster carer, diversity, working with others, understanding behaviours, safeguarding and transitions.

6

Assessment

A highly knowledgeable and supportive Supervising Social Worker will work closely with you to complete your full assessment. You'll be able to read the report and offer your thoughts on it.

7

Fostering panel

You will be invited to the fostering panel and may be asked some questions. The panel will make a recommendation about your approval.

8

Final decision

You'll get a final decision from the agency decision maker within ten working days.



Any questions?

We will happily talk through any queries you have, but here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions.

Do I need qualifications to foster?

You don't need any specific academic qualifications to be a foster carer. We provide training both during and after your approval process and will continue to help you with additional training and support once children are placed with you.

Foster carers are expected to have a good standard of written and spoken English and be able to work with professionals.

Do I need to live in Bolton?

No, but you should bear in mind that you will need to transport children to school, family contact visits, appointments and the like, and that you will need to attend meetings in Bolton.

Can I foster if I have children living at home?

Yes, as long as you have a spare room for a fostered child. Clearly, you will need to consider the impact of fostering on your own children and you should involve them in making the decision to foster. The age of your children at home is important in deciding the ages of fostered children placed with you.

These things will be discussed with you throughout your enquiry and assessment to help prepare for future placements. We also run a support group for foster carers' birth children so they

can meet other children who share their homes and family with fostered children.

Do I need a spare room?

Yes, you will need a spare room to be able to foster a child. Fostered children cannot share a bedroom with your children. Babies under one year can be placed in a cot in the carer's bedroom but typically we look to recruit foster carers with a spare room to help plan for the future.

If you have a spare bedroom because your own child has moved out of the family home, for example to university, you should consider whether they are likely to still require that room during holidays or after their course has finished.

Can I foster if I live in rented accommodation?

Yes, but you will need a spare room for the child to sleep in and permission from your landlord (see Do I Need a Spare Room?).

Can I foster if I don't drive or have a car?

You can still foster but you should think about how you would safely transport children to school or family contact visits across Bolton. You will also be expected to attend training events and meetings about the child at different locations across the town. If you do not have a car or don't drive, we would need to take this into consideration

when matching you with placements.

Can I foster if I work?

Your working hours need to be flexible to make sure that the children placed with you can be looked after, taken to school, cared for during school holidays and transported to family contact sessions. There are no rules about the hours you work but they may need to be adapted to meet the needs of the child, which have to be prioritised.

If you are interested in fostering pre-school children, one carer would need to be available at all times. To help with consistent care for fostered children, attendance at after school clubs or play schemes are not always considered appropriate.

There are also a number of training sessions and meetings you would be expected to attend during the day as part of your role as a foster carer.

Can I foster if I smoke?

If you or any other person living in your home uses tobacco or e-cigarettes, then you will not be able to foster children less than five years of age. If you smoke and have children placed with you over five years of age, then you must smoke outside the house and out of view of foster children, for health and role modelling reasons.

Can I foster if I have a criminal conviction?

Having a criminal conviction does not necessarily prevent you from fostering and every application is considered individually and on its own merits. However, if you have any offences against children, or other serious offences, then you will not be considered for assessment as a foster carer.

All applicants are subject to an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check, along with any members of your household aged 18 or over. No convictions or cautions can be considered as 'spent' and you should inform us immediately if you have any convictions or cautions, no matter how long ago they were committed.

Will I need a health or medical check-up?

A medical check-up is a legal requirement for all applicants. However, this doesn't mean that having medical conditions would stop you from becoming a foster carer. Many won't. The important thing is that you enjoy good health and are able to cope with the physical and emotional demands that fostering may present.

Can I foster if I recently moved to the UK?

If you have just moved to the UK, we need evidence you can live and work indefinitely here. You also need to show that your language skills are good enough for you to communicate clearly with children and the professionals involved with caring for them.

You will also need a support network with friends or family to encourage and support you in your role as a foster carer.

Can I have pets in the house?

Yes, as long as they are happy to live around children. We may need to do a pet assessment. Pets can be great companions for children, but when placing children with foster carers we need to take into account things like any allergies they may have.

Can I take a foster child on holiday or abroad?

Yes, but you will need to gain consent and permission from the local authority and the person with parental responsibility for the child. You cannot take a child on holiday for longer than 28 days or during school time.



Everyone has a purpose in life.



Some help others find theirs.



Contact your friendly fostering team to find out more.

Tel: **0800 107 1564**

website: **www.bolton.gov.uk/fostering**

email: **fostering@bolton.gov.uk**

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