

Central
Bedfordshire

great
prospects



Fostering in Central Bedfordshire

Everything you need to know

A great place to live and work.

Find us online



www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/fostering

Introduction

Thank you so much for your interest in fostering for Central Bedfordshire Council. We hope you find all the information you need within this booklet but please do get in touch on 0300 300 8181 if you'd like to have an informal chat with us.

This brochure is a guide to fostering and includes:

- The different types of fostering
- The tasks involved
- Foster carer expectations
- The support we'll provide for you and your family
- The process of becoming a foster carer; and
- Additional information you may find useful.

Fostering can be a challenging role but our foster carers would agree the role is extremely rewarding and they enjoy it very much, especially being able to give something back to local children and families in their community.

The difference a foster carer can make to a child's life is incredible and as a Local Authority we value each and every member of our team. If after reading this booklet you wish to take your enquiry further, get in touch, we'd love to hear from you:

Tel: 0300 300 8181

Email:
fostering@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



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What is fostering?

We believe that the best place for children and young people is with their own families and we will do everything we can to try and support families to live together. Sometimes this isn't possible, for example, if families are having a difficult time or are in crisis. Fostering is one way that we can support families during these times.

Children may need foster carers for different reasons and will need a person, couple or family who can care for them and help them to feel safe until they can either return to their own family or, if this isn't possible to move onto a forever family.

Below are some of the reasons a child may need to live with foster carers.

- They may have witnessed domestic violence
- They may have suffered abuse or neglect
- They may be in trouble with the police
- They may have a disability or a special need and the family need support and a short break
- They may arrive in the UK unaccompanied, seeking asylum and in need of a person or a family to support them to independence

- Their parent/s may be unwell or going through a challenging time in their lives when they find it difficult to care for their child/ren
- Their parent/s may have a drug or alcohol problem which means they are not able to care for their children
- Their parent/s might have had a difficult childhood themselves and be struggling to understand what their own children need.

When a child goes into foster care, they can be confused, upset or angry. Put yourself in their shoes and think – have you a place in your heart and home for them? Do you have the desire to reassure them and make them feel safe? If so, then fostering could be for you!

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What types of fostering are there?

There are many different schemes for people and families who are thinking about fostering to choose from. Here are the different schemes you can consider:

Respite

Respite care is ideal for families, couples or single people who want to support fostering but may not be able to take it on full time. Respite foster carers provide a break for a child for a short amount of time. This could be for the day, overnight, for a weekend or in some cases longer. It could also be to support a child at home, helping to prevent a child coming into care on a longer term basis.

If you have experience with children with more complex needs you may wish to consider becoming a respite foster carer for our intensive support fostering scheme (further information about the intensive support scheme can be found later in this booklet).

Short term fostering

Short term fostering is about looking after children and young people for a few days, weeks, months or sometimes even years. During this time the Local Authority carry out the necessary assessments to decide which plan is best for the child's

future, whether that be to return home to their family, to be in long term foster care or to be adopted. As a short term foster carer you may also offer emergency placements for a young person at short notice where they will stay with you for up to 72 hours.

Long term fostering

Long term fostering is about looking after a young person until they are at least 18 years old where adoption is not possible or in the best interests for that child. The young person will be supported by the foster carer through to independence. Once the young person is 18 years of age the foster carer may then choose to continue to support the young person further by something called a 'Staying Put Arrangement' until they are 21 years of age (if agreed by the foster carer, the young person and the Local Authority).



Intensive support fostering

This is about providing intensive support and care to vulnerable young people, of any age, who may display challenging behaviour or have complex needs. This could include alcohol/substance abuse, verbal or physical aggressive behaviour, history of repeated placement breakdowns with previous foster carers, self-harming behaviour or where they are at risk of sexually harmful or exploitive behaviour. You may also provide a placement for young people who are in trouble with the police, and provide an alternative to being remanded in custody. Intensive support carers help young people to work towards positively changing their future and to develop life and independence skills whilst remaining in a caring home environment.

We are also looking for respite foster carers for this scheme to provide short breaks to children with complex needs.

Parent and child fostering

The parent and child fostering scheme is about supporting young parents and their small children whilst we complete an assessment on the parent's ability to care for their child. They will live with you for 12 weeks (sometimes this can be longer) and you will be a key person in their lives to give them support, guidance and practical and emotional support so they can build the confidence they need to help them continue to care

for their child. This scheme is ideal for those people with experience or knowledge of good parenting and who are able to support young people to parent their children in a positive way.

Supported lodgings

The supported lodgings scheme is about providing accommodation and support to young people, aged 16 – 17 years, who are not ready to live independently. The purpose of the scheme is to provide a room to a young person and offer practical and emotional support to help prepare them for independence. The young person will have a degree of independence with their own room and will share your kitchen and bathroom facilities. The scheme aims to offer a period of stability whilst the young person prepares to leave care and dependence of foster care onto full independence.

PACE fostering

PACE foster carers provide overnight care to young people aged between 10 – 17 years, who have been arrested, before they attend court the following day. During your week that you have chosen to be on the rota, you will be required to collect the young person from the police station after office hours and provide them with a meal and a bed for the night. The next day you will transport them to court and that is

The Family Link scheme is for those who wish to offer short breaks to children with disabilities of all ages.

your role completed. Young people are assessed by a custody officer and if they are identified as not posing a risk to the public, they are placed overnight with PACE foster carers. If an arrest is made on a Saturday, you may need to care for the child until court on Monday morning.

Family link

The Family Link scheme is for those who wish to offer short breaks to children with disabilities of all ages. This could be a few hours on a regular basis, for a day, a weekend or longer.

Family and Friends

Carers on this scheme are family or friends who offer a home to children or young people who are already known to them.

What do I need to be a foster carer?

Our foster carers come from all walks of life and are from a diverse range of backgrounds. We are looking for people or families who can meet the individual needs of children they look after so we welcome anyone thinking about fostering to get in touch and find out more.

You can be considered to be a foster carer for Central Bedfordshire if you:

- Have a spare bedroom
- Are aged over 21 years (there is no upper age limit to foster, it's more about your health and stamina to care for a child)
- Live in or around Bedfordshire
- If you own your own home or if you rent your property and have a secure tenancy for at least two years
- Have indefinite leave to remain or full residency within the UK.

Anyone who expresses an interest to become a foster carer is assessed

in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and Fostering Regulations to ensure they are considered equally regardless of their ethnicity, sexuality, religion or beliefs.

Many people worry that there may be a reason they cannot foster, the most important thing is that you have the time and space to make a difference to a child's life by meeting their individual needs. You can foster if:

- You are an individual applicant or a couple
- You do or do not have children of your own
- You own or rent your home (if you rent, we just ask that you have secure tenancy for at least two years)
- You are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

The assessment process

You've already made the first step by reading this information pack, but what happens next?

Initially, we just need you to give us a call and make an enquiry. At this stage we will take basic details from you and arrange for a social worker to come and visit you for an initial visit. If you would like to make an enquiry give us a call on **0300 300 8181**.

Initial visit

A social worker will visit you (and your partner if applicable) to give you all the relevant information you need about fostering. They

will explore whether you have the potential to meet the needs of looked after children. This is also a great opportunity to ask any questions you may have; the meeting is really informal and is a chance to ask anything you like. From this visit, the social worker will review the information and confirm if you are able to proceed or not with your application. If you wish to be assessed as a foster carer, we will ask you to complete an application form.

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Checks and references

Once we receive your application form, we will start to collate some references and checks. It's important that the Local Authority ensure that all foster carers can provide a safe home for a child so we will undertake relevant checks, such as:

- DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service).
If you have any criminal convictions or cautions, let us know. It will not automatically exclude you from becoming a foster carer but it's important that we discuss it at the beginning of your assessment and that you are open and honest about your convictions.
- Local Authority checks.
- A medical through your GP.

- A reference from your employer.
- School or nursery references for your own children.
- Ex partner references.
This is where you have had a significant relationship or have had children together. We understand that this may be a worry for some people and we are happy to discuss this further. We are also aware that in some cases the references returned may not be a true reflection of your relationship so very much welcome you to discuss this with us if you are concerned.
- References from your adult children who are over 18 years of age
- References from any voluntary organisations you have or are volunteering for.
This is for organisations who work with children or vulnerable adults.
- SAFFA check.
For those who have worked within the Armed Forces.
- Six personal references.
Two of these can be family members and four from friends or people who know you well. We will also ask if we can visit three of these people who provide personal references (for example one family member and two friends).

Fostering assessment

A fostering assessment usually takes approximately 20 weeks from receipt of your application form to approval. This depends on your own circumstances, the size of your family and the return of the above references and checks.

During the assessment we welcome you to ask further questions or to discuss with us anything you are unsure of. It's also really important to talk to your own children about fostering as it is a way of life for the whole family, not just the parents.

During your assessment we'll ask you to take part in some training including first aid, safeguarding and our skills to foster training. There are further training opportunities available through the Service's comprehensive training programme, including elearning.

You'll be allocated a social worker who will get to know you and your family over time by collating information about you and your family using something called a Form F. This is an assessment document used to gather information about your family life, your history and background and your relationships you have had through your life. The social worker will visit you at your home over a number of weeks to talk to you about these areas to find out how fostering

might impact you and your family and to build an idea of your strengths as prospective foster carers. You will also discuss the type of fostering you wish to do and the ages of the children that you think you are most suited to.

Once your social worker has completed your Form F you will have the opportunity to review the information before it is passed to the next stage, Fostering Panel.

Fostering Panel

Once your assessment is completed, your social worker will present your Form F to the Fostering Panel. The panel is made up of professionals who work in Children's Services, Health, Education and some members who are foster carers themselves. You will be asked to attend panel and they will ask you some questions about the information from your Form F. This sounds daunting but it's not as bad as it sounds! Your social worker will be with you every step of the way and the panel are very friendly.

From this panel a recommendation is made to the Agency Decision-Maker. They will review your Form F and the discussions from panel and will make the final decision about whether you are approved to be a foster carer.



What is the role of a foster carer?

A foster carer is the key person in a looked after child's life to protect them and care for them as if they were their own child.

As a foster carer you will be asked to:

- Provide a warm, safe, loving and stable home to young people
- Help a child to reach their milestones, to develop and learn
- To encourage school age children at school and support them with their homework
- Encourage children to have friends and take part in hobbies and interests
- Attend meetings about children where your contribution will be valued
- Work as part of a team in making plans for children's futures
- To record certain information within our guidelines
- Ensure children's health appointments are attended and up to date
- Support children with their emotional health, helping them to express their feelings wishes and views
- Value and promote the relationships between a child and their birth family
- Respect a child's confidential information
- Attend mandatory core training and any other relevant training required to develop your skills and knowledge as a foster carer including completion of the TSD Standards for Foster Care
- Set boundaries and manage behaviour within our guidelines without physical or inappropriate discipline
- Let us know as soon as possible if you are experiencing any problems
- Let us know if there are any changes in your household or circumstances that may impact on your fostering role.

What support will I get as a foster carer?

Our foster carers are one of the most important people who work with our looked after children so support is one of our key priorities.

Foster Carers are never on their own and we will support you from the moment you first contact us about fostering, through the assessment process and throughout your time as foster carers for Central Bedfordshire.

As foster carers you will be provided with the following support:

- An allocated social worker who will visit you regularly
- Access to a comprehensive learning and development programme, with access to local training during the day, the evenings and at weekends as well as varied elearning choices
- A foster carer fee and an allowance for the child. We will ensure that all allowances and expenses are paid promptly and correctly
- An open door policy during office hours. We ensure that there is always a member of the team, a duty worker or a manager available for foster carers

- Access to out of hours support. We appreciate that you may sometimes need to speak to someone out of office hours so there is always someone to speak to during evenings, weekends and through the night, either through our fostering out of hours telephone line or the Emergency Duty Team





When you become an approved foster carer you become part of a vital team

- Support for your birth children which includes training and fun days out with other children who's family foster
- The chance to meet other foster carers who live locally to you at our social events and support groups
- Support from a foster carer mentor
- Membership to an Independent Fostering Charity who can provide support and guidance for you and your family

- To provide you with as much information as we can about children placed with you
- To provide you with opportunities to meet with senior management and members of the team to help influence policies, procedures and services available to children and foster carers
- Support from clinicians based within the service.

When you become an approved foster carer you become part of a vital team that helps ensure children's needs are met in the most appropriate way in order that the best outcome is achieved for the child or young person. Here is some further information about some of the people we've mentioned above:

Fostering supervising social worker

When you are approved as a foster carer you will be allocated a supervising social worker. Your social worker will visit you regularly to offer support and supervision, making sure you have everything you need to care for the children placed with you. They will make sure you receive access to training opportunities available and will be your 'link' to the rest of Children's Services. You can ring them to discuss anything you are unsure of, any problems you may be having or to request help.

Child care social worker

Each child has their own social worker who will visit them regularly to see how they are, check they are healthy and happy. It is also their responsibility to make plans for the next step in the child's life.

Out of hours fostering support service

As well as the Emergency Duty Team (see below) there is a telephone support line that you can ring after the working day, out of office hours. It is run by social workers within the fostering team who have direct experience of fostering issues, who are there to offer advice and support when problems arise.

Emergency duty team

When our fostering out of hours service is closed, the emergency duty team are available. They are the out of hours support team that you can call for advice or direct help during an emergency, for instance if a child runs away.

Foster carer mentors

Mentors provide additional, formal and practical support and guidance to carers who are new and experiencing their first placement, or to existing carers experiencing challenging times.

Independent fostering support

As a foster carer you will have access to a National Fostering Support Service and a local Foster Carer Association. This includes access to advice, guidance, helplines, local events and mediation when required.

Other foster carers

Meeting other foster carers individually, at support groups, or at social events can help provide a valuable source of support. We'll make sure that there are regular events to give you the opportunity to meet foster carers local to you.

There are many other people you may work with, such as teachers, medical advisors, therapists and solicitors for example. All these individuals will work with you to provide services to fostered children.

Can I transfer to Central Bedfordshire Council from another Authority or Agency?

Foster carers have the right to foster for an Authority or Agency of their choice. Central Bedfordshire Council welcomes anyone fostering for a Local Authority or an Independent Agency to get in touch to find out more about transferring.

Central Bedfordshire is a non-profit organisation that has a dynamic fostering community who are looking after local children and young people. The benefits to fostering a child for Central Bedfordshire Council are:

- We know and place our children
- We work directly with the children, families, childcare social workers and foster carers so that we can quickly, efficiently and accurately share the relevant information to those that need it
- There is no middle agency to deal with
- Local training, support groups and events. We are a great place to foster as everything you need is right on your doorstep
- We work together with the best interests of the child at the heart of everything we do

- As a Local Authority, our priority is to always place our children with our own carers. If you choose to transfer to Central Bedfordshire Council you are unlikely to ever have a vacancy unless it's your choice
- We will know your strengths and will have extensive knowledge about the children which means we can better match our children with our foster carers
- Our allowances and fees are very generous, we will match the fees and allowances you currently receive for any children you already care for and you may even find that you are better off financially fostering for us.

Interested in transferring to Central Bedfordshire Council?

We would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about the process of transferring to Central Bedfordshire. Give us a call on 0300 300 8181 or email us at fostering@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk to find out more.

Our stories...

Jenny

Jenny is a single carer and has made some great friends along the way of her fostering journey. She tells us what she enjoys about fostering:

"Fostering was something that I knew I wanted to do with the support of my teenage daughters. I chose Central Bedfordshire to foster with because I wanted to make a positive impact within the community I live. For us, as a family, we wanted to make a positive long term change in a child's life and for them to become part of a family.

It has been an amazing experience, the world afresh from the eyes of a child who had no idea there was a world out there to explore.

Sometimes the progress can be slow but the happiness and proudness you feel compares to nothing else when little steps are achieved.

Central Bedfordshire Fostering Team have given us, as a family, amazing support and I would highly recommend them for your journey into fostering.



During support groups you get to meet other foster carers who really understand and help you not only through the difficult times but celebrate with you the achievements our children make.

If you are thinking of applying to foster, just go for it! See where your journey leads you. Myself and my daughters have loved making a difference to a child's life and intend to continue to do that for many years to come.

Start your journey today, pick up the phone and have a chat with the team."

Karl and Tim

Karl and Tim have always had a great rapport with young people and wanted to offer a home to teenagers:

“When we enquired about fostering, we knew that we wanted to help teenagers by providing a non-judgemental home where they could be themselves whilst they work through a difficult time in their lives. We also had experience of working with teens, so it made sense to look after older children.

Teens can sometimes be shy, withdrawn, angry or upset and often confused as to why they are in foster care and not living with their family. Sometimes they just need space and time until they are ready to express how they are feeling. Other times they need a bit of additional help and we all work together with other professionals to help them deal with their worries. We help them to build on their independence skills, provide them with tools to deal with their emotions and to just have fun and help them enjoy life.

We're not going to lie, it's not always easy and fostering teens can be challenging but we have a good network of friends and family to

support us which is important. Central Beds are always available at the end of the phone too and the social workers have given us some great strategies over the years.

The rewards are so worth it! Once you get to know the kids and they see that you are not going to give up on them, you can really start working together to make their outcomes the best they can be.

Our final thought...it's been the best decision we ever made and we wouldn't change a thing!”

When we enquired about fostering, we knew that we wanted to help teenagers by providing a non-judgemental home where they could be themselves

Frequently asked questions

Here are the most common frequently asked questions, but if we don't cover yours, feel free to give us call and we'd be happy to talk it through with you.

Q. Do I get financial help?

Yes. We pay a fee to the foster carer and provide an allowance for each child. This is payable when you have a child or children placed with you.

We also provide additional allowances such as mileage for certain journeys, birthdays. We are happy to provide an up to date copy of our current allowances and you should have received a copy with this booklet.

Q. Is there an upper age limit to foster?

No! We just ask that you have the fitness, health and stamina to care for children.

Q. Is there a minimum age limit to foster?

Yes, you would need to be at least 21 years of age.



Q. I'm worried how fostering may affect my own children, do they get support too?

It is important that you talk about fostering with your children and that you allow them to share their feelings about fostering with you. Many children say that they really enjoy fostering and have learnt a lot from it and made new friends. It can be hard to start with to share their parents and their things but most children thrive as a foster sibling and love being able to help their parents as a fostering family. We also have a group specifically for children of

foster carers where they meet up regularly for fun days out, training and to be able to support each other. They can also talk to your families social worker about any worries they may have.

Q. What do foster carers do?

Foster carers provide a stable, welcoming and safe environment. Most of the children and young people will have been through a difficult or traumatic experience being separated from their family. Some will arrive at your home confused as to why they are not living at home with their parents or family. Some will be angry or upset. Some will be disoriented or confused. You will need to explain things to them such as your house rules. Above all, you will need to reassure them and make them feel safe.

Q. Do I need a big house?

No, but you do need a spare bedroom that would be suitable for a young person.

Q. I'm single, can I foster?

Yes, we have many great foster carers who are single.

Q. How will I know if I can cope and be able to let the young person go?

Everyone responds differently to situations and it is difficult to say goodbye to children when they move on. That's why the support of your family, friends, your social worker is so important. Most carers would say that they get a great sense of achievement when they help a child move on to a brighter future. We can also provide training to help you deal with welcoming a foster child and managing your own emotions when a child moves on.

Q. I foster for an agency, can I transfer to Central Bedfordshire?

Yes, foster carers have the right to transfer if they wish. We will need to reassess you but we try to do this as quickly as possible. We would welcome anyone who is fostering with an agency or another Local Authority to get in touch.

Q. Do I get training as a foster carer?

Yes, all foster carers will be provided with Skills to Foster training before they begin fostering. We will also ask you to attend first aid training and complete safeguarding training (which can be completed online). These courses need to be completed before you attend Fostering Panel.

Once you are approved we provide an induction programme and you will be required to attend certain training each year, as well as completion of the TSD Standards (Training, Support and Development Standards). This will link in with



the tiered payment scheme and our training policy which you're assessing social worker will discuss with you.

We offer a comprehensive training programme which covers a wide range of topics such as how to manage behaviour, attachment, trauma and recovery and more tailored courses that depend on foster carers individual needs and the needs of the children you look after. Our courses are available during weekdays, evenings and weekends and some are available online to help you complete your training at a time that suits you.

Q. Do I get the choice of who I foster?

Yes, part of the assessment process is finding out which young people you feel you can offer the most to. We will always give you as much information as we have available to us about any child we place with you.

Children need stability and therefore it's important that we don't move them around too much. As a result, we will match the child's needs to the skills, experience and approval of a carer.

Q. Can I foster if I have pets or animals?

Yes, we would just need to do an assessment to ensure your animals and the way in which they are kept would be safe.

Q. I'm moving to a new house soon, can I apply before I move?

We are more than happy to talk to you and take your details over the phone. We would need to see your home where you would be fostering from so would just put your visit on hold until you have moved and settled into your new home.

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet

We hope this has been useful and helped you to make the decision to become a foster carer. If you would like to take the next step and make a difference to a child's life, please call the Fostering Team on 0300 300 8181.

We are there to help you and want to give you as much information as possible to help you make the decision if fostering is for you.

If you have any questions or worries, please do pick up the phone and speak to a member of our team, all questions are answered in confidence.

We really look forward to speaking to you and supporting you on your fostering journey!

Get in touch:

Tel: 0300 300 8181

Email:
fostering@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Central Bedfordshire in contact

Find out more

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0300 300 8181

Please recycle me!

When finished with, please put me in your recycling bin or bag.