

BE THE ONE

FOSTER

Become a WALTHAM FOREST carer



www.fosteringwalthamforest.co.uk



Waltham Forest

Welcome to Waltham Forest Fostering Service.

Fostering a child is a stimulating and highly rewarding experience for anyone wanting to make a positive difference to the life of a child or young person.

Waltham Forest carers are passionate and committed people and are an invaluable support in the life of a child in care.

We reward our carers with what we believe to be one of the best packages in the UK. Please visit www.fosteringwalthamforest.co.uk for more information.

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1. What is fostering?

Fostering provides an alternative family environment for children and young people who are unable to live with their own families.

Children who come into care can be babies, toddlers, school age children, sibling groups, teenagers or young parents with their own child. Each child needs a different type of care. Young people who are moving towards independence need supported lodging carers while some carers take on the challenge of teenage care, others find they have the patience and consistency to care for children with special needs or disabilities.

Above all foster carers provide a flexible, community service for local families. They provide support when families have emergencies and assist in helping children and their families to be reunited when it is possible.



2. Who can foster, what skills do I need?

Foster carers are ordinary people doing an extraordinary task.

We need carers from all ethnic groups, single carers and couples of any gender or sexuality, and carers from all age ranges. What is important is that carers have the ability to meet the needs of the children they care for.

Children who are in foster care often have a range of complex needs. To be able to meet these needs foster carers have to develop, or already possess, skills in the following areas.

- **A child-centred approach**
You will need excellent communication skills that enable you to talk to children in a way that they can understand and that treats them with respect.
- **Respect confidentiality**
Foster carers have access to a lot of information about the children they care for. You will need tact and sensitivity around sharing information that belongs to the child.
- **Team working**
Foster carers are part of a team working with children. You will work with social workers, parents, schools and health professionals. This will mean attending meetings, keeping records and sharing information with appropriate people.
- **A warm home**
You will need to give a child a warm, nurturing home environment which provides a sense of belonging and emotional well-being.
- **Primary care**
You must be able to provide a good standard of physical care to all the children you foster.
- **Support network.**
You will need a good personal network of support and a back up carer.
- **Training**
You will need commitment to training and your personal development as a foster carer. Everyone has the capacity to learn and develop.



- Understanding

You will need to understand and continually learn about the impact that fostering can have on a child and their family.

- Culture

You will need an understanding of multi-cultural issues and the impact of discrimination. Foster carers need to have a commitment to treating all children as individuals.

- Challenging behaviour

You will need to be able to manage difficult or challenging behaviour in a way that promotes a child's self-esteem and helps them develop their own value base.

- A child's family

In most cases we are working with children so they can return home. It is important that foster carers have skills to work closely with parents to help this process.

- Resilience

You will need to be resilient and have emotional empathy which enables a child to build resilience factors into their own lives.

Will I need to make any changes to my home?

The foster home should comfortably accommodate everyone who lives there.

Each foster child over the age of three years should ideally have his or her own bedroom and must have enough space and privacy to reflect any specific needs.

All foster carers will have a health and safety accommodation checklist completed as part of their assessment process.

After approval foster carers may be given equipment necessary to care for a child.

Will I need to make any changes to my vehicle?

All vehicles used for transporting fostered children must be safe and appropriate (e.g. have car seats fitted). Foster carers receive a weekly allowance of which a percentage covers transport costs.



3. Who are the children?

All children need basic food, clothing, shelter, love and safety.

Children in foster care have the same needs and because of their life experiences may have additional needs.

In most cases the best place for children to grow up is within their own families. Children come to be looked after by the local authority when their parents for a variety of reasons cannot do this. Whatever the circumstances, children will be experiencing loss and grief and mixed emotions about not living with their parents, or having parents who cannot look after them.

Social workers try very hard to keep families together. When this is not possible children often come temporarily into foster care. Work continues with the birth parents to support their parenting capacity and rebuilding positive relationships with their children.

It is vital that children in foster care maintain close contact with their family members including their brothers and sisters at frequent intervals. Foster carers are in a special position to help children keep in contact with their families.

Children may be relieved to be away from an abusive parent, or they may wish more than anything to be reunited with their parents. In many cases they will probably be confused about their situation.

They may alternate from being angry with themselves, believing they are to blame, to being angry with their parents. Foster carers can help to clarify the situation for a child and help them make sense of the turmoil they may be feeling. Foster carers need to be sensitive resilient and demonstrate emotional empathy in their approach.

Behaviour

If a child is faced with situations and people who have been abusive they may learn ways to cope. They may scream and shout or run away. They may hurt themselves or other people. Some of this behaviour can remain even when they move to a safer environment. It may seem their behaviour is inappropriate however it is usually a demonstration of their feelings.



Behaviour management is part of the overall care of a child. Foster carers receive specialist training and support from their social worker to manage this.

Meeting children's needs

Whatever a child's ethnic background they need to feel positive about their culture and identity. Some children may also experience forms of discrimination and need help to deal with this. Being placed with carers who reflect their racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs can help. Where such a placement is not possible additional training, support and information will be considered to enable the child to develop a positive understanding of their heritage.

Special needs

Some children have special needs depending on their specific condition which can mean learning or physical disabilities. Caring for a child with a disability is often a demanding yet very rewarding task. Parents and carers may need extra support and in some cases this can include respite care. Foster care is usually a better option than residential care for a child or young person.



4. How to become a foster carer

If you are interested in becoming a foster carer you can;

- Fill in an application form online
- email us direct at

fostering@walthamforest.gov.uk

- call the fostering team direct

020 8496 3437

STAGE ONE:

We will respond to your enquiry within two working days.

You will be given dates of fostering information sessions where you will be able to meet people who foster already and members of the fostering team. The information sessions give you more information about fostering and the application process.

If you wish to proceed you may be offered an appointment with a social worker who will talk to you face to face about the fostering task. If this meeting is successful we will put you forward to the initial training group.

Appointment with a social worker

This is an initial assessment to discover whether fostering is right for you. The meeting will take place in your home.

You will be asked to provide proof of your identity with original documents for your criminal record check from the Disclosure Barring Service (DBS check).

This is an impartial confidential document detailing an individual's criminal record and where appropriate, giving information about those who are barred from working with children and/or vulnerable adults.

A record of convictions will not necessarily stop you from fostering. It is the type of offence that is considered and whether it is relevant to caring for children in your home (i.e. violent crimes, offences against children). A DBS check will be required of everyone over the age of 16 years in your home and any regular visitors that may visit your home. **<https://www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/documents-the-applicant-must-provide->**

Please ensure that along side the original documents you have copies for us to take away. Following your appointment you will receive an email with a link complete your online DBS form.

At this stage we will also ask you to complete a medical consent form. The medical assessment is to ensure that there is no medical reason that would prevent you fostering.



Following your appointment with the social worker, a decision will be made on whether you progress to the 'Skills to Foster' training programme. If you are applying as a couple, you will both be expected to attend. There will be some fast track cases where stage 2 begins after the appointment.

Skills To Foster – preparing you for the task

The Skills to Foster training programme is a series of structured group sessions that run over three days or evenings and are held regularly. You will be offered dates to attend and identify when would be suitable for you.

The groups are typically led by fostering assessment social workers and experienced foster carers.

You will hear from young people who have been, or are currently in foster care and hear their experience of living with foster carers.

The Skills to Foster training groups are a two way process. You will find out more about fostering and we will have a better idea about you and the approach you might take to fostering.

You will explore the following topics:

- What do foster carers do?
- The experiences of children and young people who come into care
- Working together with other professionals and agencies
- Safer Caring
- Understanding behaviour
- Moving on

There are several steps in the assessment process. They are designed to help us get to know you and to help you absorb the information we give you to feel sure about your decision. On completion of the 'Skills to Foster' programme some applicants will be invited to Stage Two of the assessment process. You will be asked to sign a fostering assessment agreement. Once this is signed you can start Stage Two.

STAGE TWO Assessment

An assessment social worker will make a series of appointments to meet you at your home.

They will speak with all members of your household and they will be particularly interested in talking to your own children if you have any, as you will be fostering as a family.



A report will be written by the assessing social worker in which you will be actively involved. The report is an analytical assessment that considers your competencies relating to the fostering task and evidences how you meet these competencies. Your assessing social worker will explain what the competencies are and what evidence is needed in more detail with you.

If you are the owner of a dog, your assessment will need to involve a dog temperament assessment which is conducted by a relevant trained professional. You will receive the completed report following the assessment.

If you are the owner of a cat or any other pet, necessary pet questionnaires will form part of assessing the care of such animals.

On completion of the assessment, the report and the safeguarding statutory checks are presented to the borough's joint independent adoption and fostering panel by your assessing social worker. They will make a recommendation to the panel to approve you as a foster carer for Waltham Forest.

Back-up carers

As part of your assessment a 'back-up carer' must be identified who might care for the children placed with you at times of emergency. This person needs to be able to provide practical and emotional support to you as a foster carer. If the back-up carer is not a member of your household, then a separate assessment report will be made that will also include DBS checks and a health and safety check of their home, should a child stay there. Alternatively a back-up carer can provide this care from your address if that is believed to be more suitable for the child. The assessment of a back-up carer will be undertaken by either the assessing social worker (during your own assessment in Stage Two), or by your supervising social worker once you are approved. It will entail meeting members of that household and the back-up carer must provide two referees.

Like your own assessment report, this report will also be presented to the fostering panel for recommendation to be approved as back-up foster carers for you as the named foster carer.



The adoption and fostering panel

This panel is made up of independent professional people who make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about your approval to become a foster carer. Potential carers are expected to attend the panel.

Your approval will specify how many children, what ages and what gender of children can be placed with you. You will be informed in writing within 7 days of the Agency Decision Maker's final decision. The Agency Decision Maker will give clear reasons if your approval cannot be made. In the event your approval is not made you have the right to appeal. This will be explained in more detail with you at the training sessions held during Stage One.

How long will it take to become a foster carer?

Stage one usually takes around two months and stage two takes four months. However this timescale is dependent on the return of statutory checks, medical and assigned home tasks being completed by you/and your partner. This will be covered in more detail at the 'Skills to Foster' training.

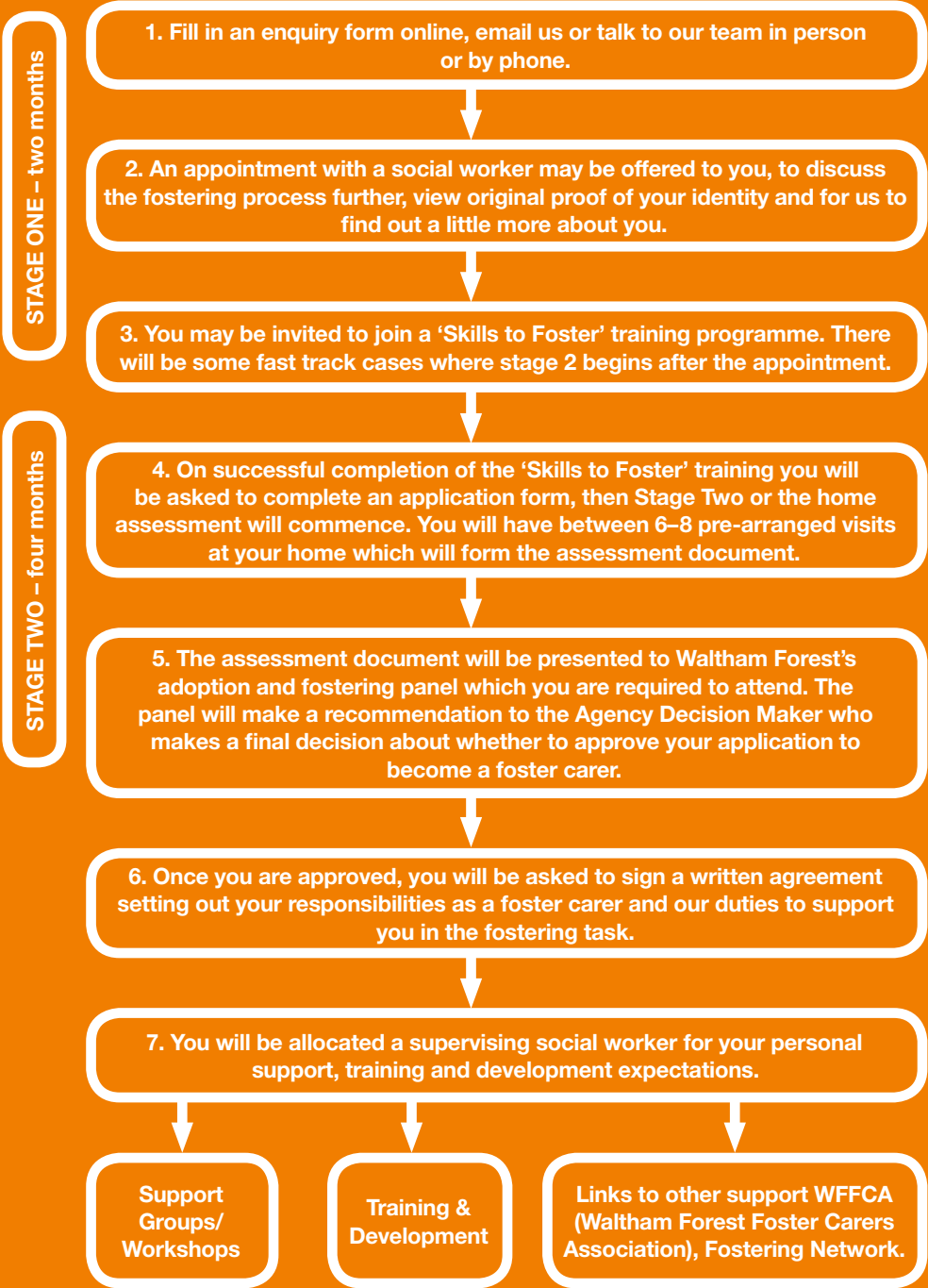
After approval

After you are approved at the panel you will be allocated a supervising social worker who will undertake the induction process with you. You will be given the Waltham Forest foster carer's handbook and other materials relevant to your new role as a foster carer.

As an approved foster carer you must sign a written agreement. This sets out your responsibilities as a foster carer and the Local Authority's duties to support you. Your approval as a foster carer is reviewed every year to take into account any changes in your circumstances.

On approval back-up carers will also sign a foster care agreement.

5. Flowchart of application and assessment process





6. Once you are approved as a foster carer

Support and developing you as a foster carer

Foster carers are essential to the work of Waltham Forest Children and Families Services. Their task is one of the most challenging of those involved in supporting children and families. Waltham Forest offers financial support, professional support and comprehensive training for foster carers to help them in their fostering task.

The payment

In Waltham Forest foster carers receive a competitive allowance and fee based on their skills, knowledge and experience.

The allowance is intended to cover all costs of looking after the child (including hidden ones like household maintenance). It also includes payments for savings, food, pocket money, clothing, presents, travelling, holidays, social activities, heating, laundry, cleaning, toiletries, telephone calls for the carer and the child, entertaining and insurance. (This list is not exhaustive). The allowances are reviewed every year.

Fostering allowances also contain a supplement known as 'a skill element' payment which is linked to skills, knowledge and experience. It recognises the skills and experience the foster carer brings to the role.

Any equipment essential for looking after a child will be provided by fostering service when you begin. This may include beds, bedding, prams, buggies, wardrobes, chests of drawers and other baby care items. Other items may be required for specific children and these will be considered at the time of placement. Your supervising social worker can give you more details.

Support for you and the child

We recognise that foster carers look after children who may have been affected by their life experiences. At times their emotions and behaviour may be difficult to understand and cope with. We expect foster carers will need support and help with difficulties, both with the general task of fostering and with particular children.

Foster carers have their own supervising social worker to talk about any fostering issues. They can put you in touch with other experienced carers and networks of support. They will also help to identify your training needs and steer you towards courses and workshops as part of your personal development.



Regular carer support groups run in the evening and the day time, including a popular men's group. These groups offer a safe place to learn, share and support each other in the fostering task.

The child's social worker has responsibility for the child and the child's care plan. They will have an active role in working with the child and their birth family. They also work closely with foster carers to ensure the care plan is implemented.

Telephone support for foster carers

When the offices are closed all approved foster carers have access to a telephone support line which offers support and advice outside of office hours, at weekends and over bank holidays.

Emergency Duty Team

Carers also have access to our Emergency Duty Team (EDT) of social workers which can offer advice after midnight and before 9am if ever needed.

Training and professional development

Everyone has the capacity to learn and develop and we enrich our lives in the process. The assessment process is an opportunity to learn and reflect. The 'Skills to Foster' training offers the chance to hear from experienced carers and fostering social workers along with people going through the same process as you. Other people in the group may become the foundation of your support network of foster carers.

You will be required to attend a minimum of 4–5 daytime or evening support groups per year. Support groups are tailored by age group and provide a good opportunity to network and meet other carers. You will be required and encouraged to attend core or mandatory training and additional training relevant to your developmental needs.

There are regular workshops that will support you to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS). The TSDS is a mandatory requirement for all foster carers, and must be completed within a required time frame.



All courses are advertised on **www.fosteringwalthamforest.co.uk** in an 'approved carers', section. You will be given a password to access the details and book the courses. These training courses and workshops are run by internal and external professional trainers and are held on weekdays, evenings and Saturdays. We also offer online training that can be completed at home.

After approval you will also have the option of using other forms of support (for example the Waltham Forest Foster Care Association [WFFCA]) and Fostering Network. A great deal of the learning happens with experience. Each child placed with you will teach you something new and this is perhaps the most rewarding aspect of being a foster carer.



7. Useful contacts

The Fostering Service

London Borough of Waltham Forest
Sycamore House
Town Hall Complex
Forest Road
E17 4JF

Tel: 020 8496 3437

Email: fostering@walthamforest.gov.uk
www.fosteringwalthamforest.co.uk

WFFCA (Waltham Forest Foster Carers Association)

Sycamore House
Town Hall Complex
Forest Road
E17 4JF

Tel: 020 8496 3437

The Fostering Network

87 Blackfriars Road
London
SE1 8HA

Tel: 020 7620 6400
www.fostering.net

Compliments, comments and complaints

We always try to provide good quality services but we know that sometimes we get things wrong. Comments and complaints can help us to get things right. We try to resolve differences as soon as they arise between people.

Complaints Manager
Social Care Complaints Team
Residents First
Waltham Forest Town Hall
Forest Road
Walthamstow
London
E17 4JF

Tel: 020 8496 3247
www.walthamforest.gov.uk



www.fosteringwalthamforest.co.uk



London Borough of Waltham Forest Foster Carers' Charter

Children come first

- Children in foster care deserve to experience as full a family life as possible as part of a loving foster family with carers who can make everyday decisions as they would their own child and without the child feeling that they 'stand out' as a looked after child.
- Children must be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, fulfil their potential, and take advantage of all opportunities to promote their talents and skills. Above all, they should be listened to.
- Listen to, involve foster carers and their foster children in decision-making and planning, and provide foster carers and their foster children with full information about each other.
- In making placements be clear about the continuing care or support there will be (including for the child into adulthood), be sensitive to the needs of the foster carer and the child in making and ending placements and have contingency plans should the placement not work.
- Treat foster carers with openness, fairness and respect as a core member of the team around the child and support them in making reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of their foster child.

Waltham Forest Fostering Service will:

- Recognise in practice the importance of the child's relationship with his or her foster family as one that can make the biggest difference in the child's life and which can endure into adulthood.



- Ensure that foster carers have the support services and development opportunities they need in order to provide their foster child with the best possible care. That includes liaising with local foster carers groups and seeking to respond to problems and disseminate best practice.
- Make sure foster carers are recompensed on time and are given clear information about any support, allowances, fees, and holidays they will receive including in cases of dispute with the service or during gaps in placements.
- Support their foster child and do all they can to make the placement work. Take part in learning and development, use skills and approaches that make a positive impact and enable the child to reach his or her potential. Support their foster child to help them to counter possible bullying and discrimination as a result of their care status.

Heather Flinders

Heather Flinders
Strategic Director – Families

Foster carers will:

- Provide positive adult role models, treat the foster child as they would their own child, and be a “pushy parent” in advocating for all aspects of the child’s development, including educational attainment and physical and emotional health and wellbeing and co-operate fully as part of a team with other key professionals in the child’s life.

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