



What is Fostering?

time to care... Fostering
North Somerset

What is Fostering?

The role of a foster carer

Fostering requires the skills of a good parent with additional responsibilities. Helping children come to terms with painful experiences, working closely with social workers and birth family, and participating in ongoing training are all essential to the role.

Fostering is providing a safe, caring home for a child or young person who is unable to live with their own families. Fostering differs from adoption because you don't have legal responsibility for the child or young person, so you will work closely with the social worker and team around the child.

Many children have not had the best start in life, but with love and support, you can help them to reach their full potential at home and at school, giving them a brighter future.

But it's not just the children who benefit, fostering is a rewarding career. You'll meet new people, learn new skills and discover talents that will help you change the course of a child's life for the better.



This pack tells you more about the young people you may care for, what the role of a foster carer involves, who it suits and what the benefits are.

To apply, simply complete and return the **expression of interest form and a member of the team will be in touch or contact us on tel: 01275 888 999.**

The children who need foster placements.

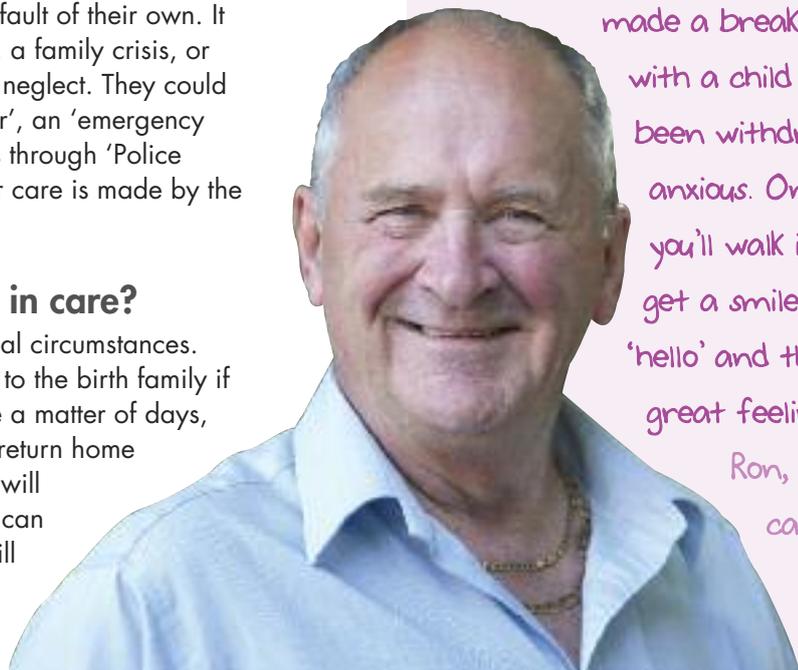
There are over 200 children and young people currently in care across North Somerset. They are aged between 0-18 and include sibling groups and children with learning and physical disabilities and they come from various backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities. Not all children in care live with foster families. Some are in specialist homes or are placed with relatives or family friends.

Why do children come into care?

Children come into care through no fault of their own. It could be because of parental illness, a family crisis, or because they are at risk of abuse or neglect. They could come into care through a 'care order', an 'emergency protection order' made by the courts through 'Police Protection Powers', or the request for care is made by the parent or guardian.

How long will a child stay in care?

This will vary depending on individual circumstances. The aim is always to return the child to the birth family if it's safe to do so, and this could take a matter of days, months or years. Those who cannot return home may be considered for adoption, or will require long-term fostering until they can live independently. Some children will come in and out of care for short intervals throughout their childhood.



'It's so satisfying when you've made a breakthrough with a child whose been withdrawn or anxious. One day, you'll walk in and get a smile or a 'hello' and that's a great feeling.'

Ron, foster carer

In what ways can the children be affected by their experiences?

Loss and upheaval

Most children coming into care will have experienced the trauma of being separated from their family. This sense of loss can manifest itself in challenging behaviour, whatever their age. Foster carers will tell you that a child will often settle down once they've got used to their new foster home, and that this process is incredibly rewarding.

Health, learning and development

Children coming into care may not have had the same chances as other children, perhaps due to poverty, neglect or abuse. They may be behind in terms of their emotional, educational and social development, and some will have learning difficulties, physical disabilities or health problems. Children in care have the same potential to achieve as more fortunate children, and your job is to nurture them with love, patience and encouragement to help them achieve their full potential.

How are the children matched to foster carers?

When you apply to become a foster carer, you'll be asked to consider what type of fostering would suit your circumstances (e.g. short term, long term, respite or specialist). Our job is to match the children (their backgrounds, needs and interests) to you and your family's, so that there's every chance they'll blossom in your care.

See [What type of fostering is right for me?](#) page 3



Children come into care for all sorts of reasons and for varying lengths of time, so we offer a variety of schemes designed to meet different requirements. Some of these fostering schemes will suit you better than others, taking into account your home circumstances, work commitments and preferences.

This overview will help you consider what type of fostering is right for you.

Mainstream fostering

Short-term fostering

As a short-term foster carer, you're offering a safe and nurturing place for a child to live until it's safe for them to return home, or while plans are made for adoption or long-term fostering. This type of care is needed for all ages and often for sibling groups. This may last a few days or up to two years depending on the situation.

Suitable for...

Flexible carers who can take children in at short notice. You'll prepare the children to return home (which may involve contact with the birth family), or for a longer-term placement. You'll need to be prepared to say goodbye when it's in the best interest of the child for them to move on.

Specialist placement scheme

We offer a specialist placement scheme to cater for children and young people with additional needs, such as physical or learning disabilities, and challenging behaviour.

Long-term fostering

Some parents are unable to change their lives in a way that will keep their children safe or meet their needs. These children may be adopted or placed with another family member, but where this is not in their best interest, long-term fostering can provide a loving family environment until they are ready for independence.

Suitable for...

Carers who feel they can offer commitment to a child or young person until they're grown up (16+). You'll need to be prepared to fully involve them in your family life and to help them in their transition to adulthood.

Respite care

Respite carers offer children regular stays, usually at weekends and during holiday periods. This enables families or foster carers to take a break in agreed circumstances.

Suitable for...

Carers who have less time available i.e. those who work full or part-time, but are able to offer care at the weekends or on a regular basis.

Other schemes

If mainstream fostering doesn't suit your circumstances but you want to help children and young people, we can advise on the following schemes. For more information on their benefit packages, assessment and qualification criteria, please contact the appropriate team.

Family Link (or short-break care)

Family link carers offer regular breaks to families who have a child with a moderate to severe learning disability and/or a moderate physical disability. The range of disabilities is very wide and can include children with autism, sensory or communication impairments. The children are not in the care of the Local Authority.

Suitable for...

Patient, flexible people who have an interest in working with disabled children and who can work as part of a team. Carers will be asked to make a regular commitment that can vary from overnight, one weekend a month, or day care at weekends and during school holidays.

Supported Lodgings

Supported Lodgings hosts rent rooms in their homes to young people aged 16–18 who are in/or have previously been in foster care or a residential home. You'll offer a stable environment as the young person develops the practical skills and confidence to live independently, providing guidance and support where required. They may live with you from three months to two years depending on their progress.

Suitable for...

Individuals or couples who'd like a more hands-off role or who can't foster due to work commitments. You'll be required to attend training and work closely with a social worker, and it's important that you take a genuine interest in the welfare of young people.

Don't worry if you're still not clear on which scheme is right for you. If you decide to take your enquiry further we'll discuss the options together.

If you already have a preference, please indicate this on your [expression of interest form](#), enclosed with this brochure.

Who can apply?

We need carers from a wide range of backgrounds to reflect all of the children in our care. You can apply regardless of your sexuality, race, religion or marital status, and you don't need to own your own home. No professional qualifications are required.

Application criteria:

- A spare room in your home
- You are over 21 (there is no upper age limit)
- The support of your family (e.g. partner and children, if applicable)
- For mainstream fostering: enough spare time and energy in your day to meet the needs of the child

If both partners work full time, please consider Respite care, Family Link or Supported Lodgings.
For more information see page 3.

Qualities that make a good foster carer

- A stable, caring nature
- Patience and understanding
- A sense of humour
- Resilience
- An ability to support and encourage children and young people to reach their full potential
- Commitment to learning

'Talking to an experienced carer at an information evening convinced us that fostering was the right thing to do!'

Mandy, foster carer





The application process

Taking on responsibility for other people's children is a serious task, so we hope you'll understand the necessity of a thorough application process to ensure children will be safe and well cared for.

How long is the process?

It will vary depending on individual circumstances. However the process normally takes 6–9 months from the point that you make a formal application (Step 4 in our table, see page 7).

What will stop me fostering?

- No spare room
- Certain medical conditions (please contact us)
- Certain criminal convictions (not all offences will stop you fostering, particularly if they were a long time ago, so please talk to us in confidence regarding this issue).
- We cannot place children under six-years-old with smokers.

'My own children have grown to see how other's lives can be affected by events through no fault of their own. They've become more caring and patient as a result.'
Penny, foster carer

We value the work our foster carers do and in return offer a generous package of support. This covers financial assistance, everyday guidance and ongoing training.

Fostering allowances

Fostering allowances are paid to cover the cost of each child who lives with you. The weekly allowance will vary according to the age of the child/children.

This allowance should be spent in full on the child, and you'll receive guidance from your supervising social worker on how to divide it between items such as food, clothing, travel and a contribution towards household bills.



Fees for skills

All of our carers receive a fee based upon their assessed skill level. This is paid in addition to the children's allowance.

The fee paid to you will depend on the type of fostering you offer, your experience and what training you've completed.

Newly-approved foster carers start on foundation level and we'll encourage you to progress further by undertaking the relevant training. See [Training](#), page 6

Please note that with the exception of the specialist placement scheme, allowances and fees are only paid to carers when they have a child living with them.

Current allowances and fees are outlined on a separate sheet enclosed with this brochure.

Additional benefits

Foster carer events and forums

One of the benefits of being a carer with your council is that you're joining a local team! You can meet up with other carers at regular coffee mornings and events, providing an opportunity for friendship and peer support. You will have the opportunity to be involved in a range of different foster carer support groups. You will also have access to the free independent counselling service, and out of hours support.

Free access to local leisure centres!

Your whole family will get free access to North Somerset leisure centres all year round (including swimming, gym, court games, holiday play schemes etc).

Regular updates

Updates from the fostering team keep you up-to-date with forthcoming events, training and fostering news. We encourage participation from all our carers in terms of ideas, articles and case studies.

Practical and therapeutic support

Fostering with North Somerset Council means you're a valued member of a professional team and you'll always have someone to turn to for help or advice! We provide you with the following free services.

Supervising social worker

Your own social worker will visit you regularly and be available for support and guidance. The child will have their own social worker.

Out-of-hours service and the Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

If you experience any difficulties outside normal office hours, you can speak to a member of the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) service.

Respite breaks

Should you need a short break due to difficult or unforeseen circumstances, we can arrange respite care to help.

The Virtual School system

A team of teachers are on-hand to ensure that children are receiving the correct levels of support in their school.

Health practitioner/Lead nurse (for children in care)

You can receive help and advice on health concerns, health care services and how to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Consult

Specialist social worker and psychologist provide advice and guidance for foster carers of children with emotional difficulties, including techniques that you can use to avoid and manage challenging behaviour.

Leaving Care Personal Advisers

A team of professionals will be on hand to advise young people on finance, training, employment and finding accommodation – so it's not all up to you!

Independent counselling service

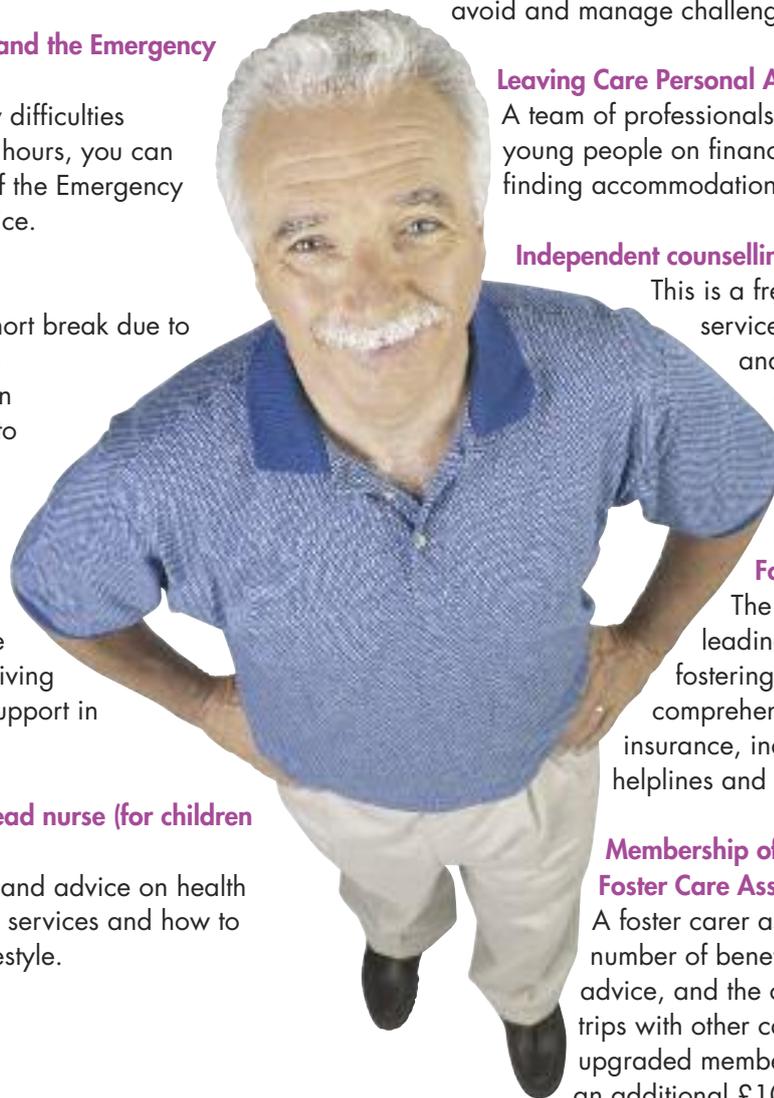
This is a free, confidential counselling service available to all foster carers and their families. Experienced counsellors can advise on all issues, fostering related or otherwise.

Free membership of the Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the leading national charity for fostering. Membership includes comprehensive legal protection, insurance, independent advice, telephone helplines and a range of other benefits.

Membership of North Somerset Foster Care Association

A foster carer association which has a number of benefits, such as support and advice, and the opportunity to get involved in trips with other carers and children. An upgraded membership can be purchased for an additional £10 per year.



Training is an integral part of your fostering role. During your assessment and throughout your fostering career, you'll undertake basic childcare training and be encouraged to attend a range of more specialist courses.

Pre-approval and foundation training

During your assessment (i.e. before you are approved to be a foster carer) you'll attend a Skills to Foster course to prepare you for your role as a foster carer.

You can read more about the assessment process on page 7.

On approval (registration), all carers are required to fulfil foundation training, covering:

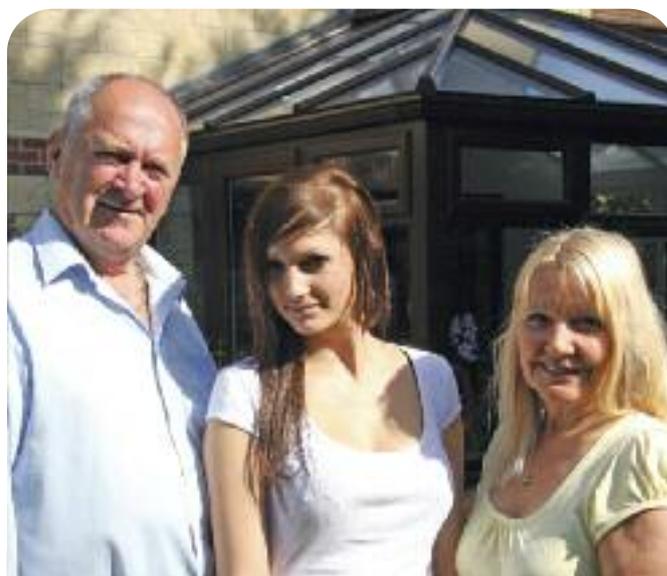
- ✓ First-aid training (this is a statutory requirement and will be updated every three years)
- ✓ how to keep children healthy and safe
- ✓ how to predict and respond to certain behaviours
- ✓ how to promote education and life-long learning
- ✓ how to set appropriate boundaries
- ✓ how to work in partnership with childcare and youth workers
- ✓ valuing diversity

We'll provide guidance to help you complete the Training, Support and Development Standards for foster care. All carers in England are expected to complete the standards within twelve months of their approval as a carer or eighteen months for connected persons carers. This involves recording evidence of their learning and skills in a workbook.

Continuing professional development

Once you've completed your foundation training, we'll tell you about a range of further professional development courses to enhance your skills as a carer, including:

- ✓ Drug and alcohol abuse
- ✓ Sex and relationships for young people in care
- ✓ Caring for children who've experienced bereavement and loss
- ✓ Caring for children who've experienced abuse



'We've attended all the training available and we're never scared to seek advice. Knowing more about how to talk to and respond to young people means that they find it easier to relate to you, and it helps them enormously.'
Lynn and Ron, foster carers

Benefits of training

Career Development

Many carers have used their extensive training as a springboard to a career in working with children and young people.

Some of our foster carers are now qualified NVQ assessors and trainers, delivering our own training programmes.

Higher fees

As you gain fostering experience and complete the professional development training available, you'll be rewarded with higher fees.

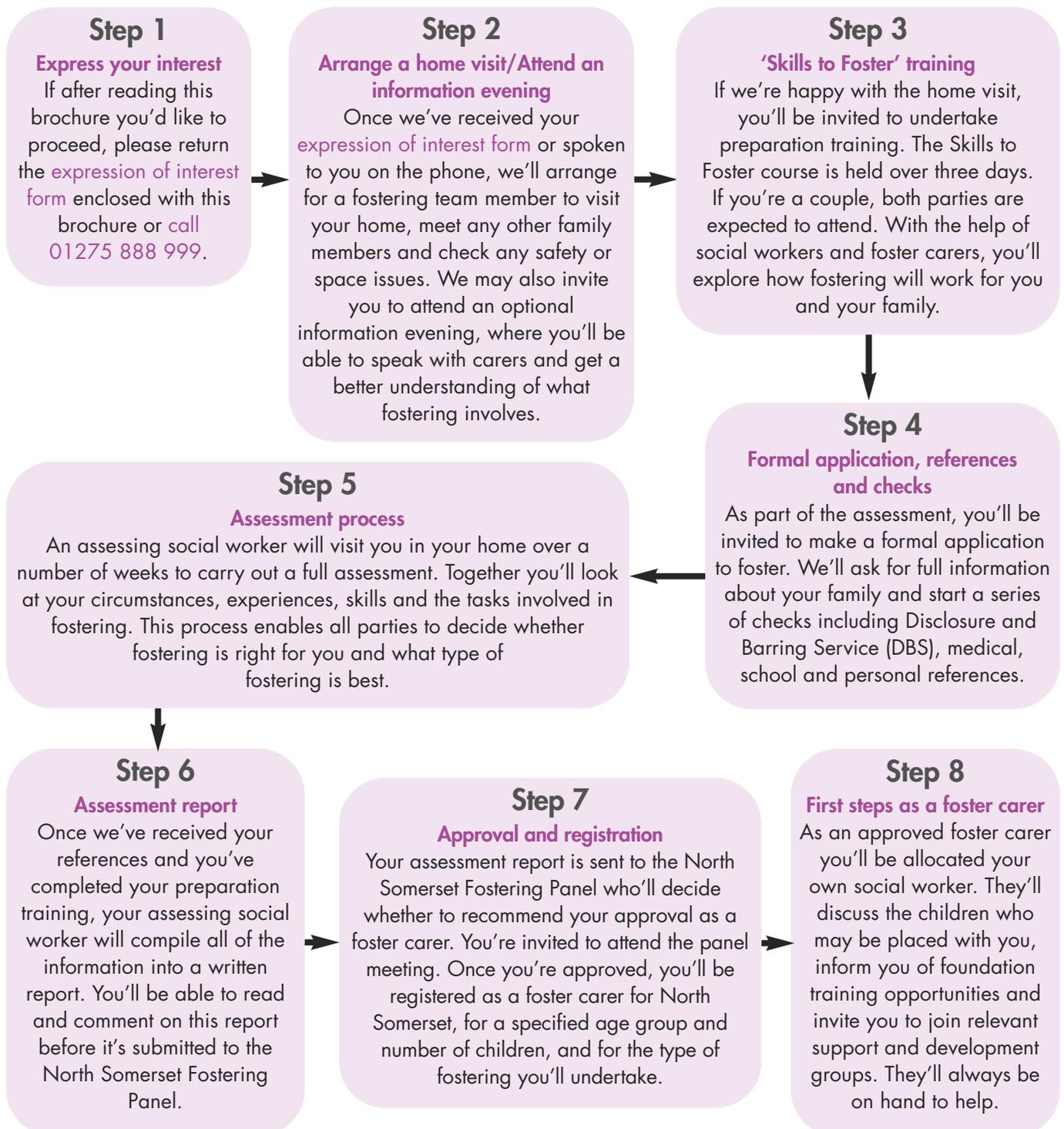
Current rates are enclosed.

Help and advice on completing training is always available, so please don't worry if you've not studied for a while or you need special help because of difficulties, such as dyslexia.

Our training promise

- ✓ Free professional development and skills training
- ✓ Fees for skills
- ✓ Simple, online booking available
- ✓ Expert trainers
- ✓ Help and advice on completing training





If you're already registered as a foster carer with another council or a private agency, we may be able to fast-track your application. Please call 01275 888 999 for more information.

Take that next step and contact us today!

Call 01275 888 999 or complete and return the enclosed expression of interest form.

Frequently asked questions

What is the difference between fostering and adoption?

Adoption is the legal and permanent transfer of parental responsibility for a child from the birth parents to the adoptive parents. Foster carers do not acquire legal parental responsibility and will work alongside other professionals – and in some cases the birth family – to care for the child. In some cases the Local Authority holds legal parental responsibility for children so you may be carrying out these duties on our behalf. If you'd like to explore adoption alongside fostering, please call the adoption team on **01275 888 236**.

What about the foster child's own family?

Most children continue to have regular contact with their own families, who remain an essential part of their lives. The role of a foster carer is to positively support this relationship. The frequency of contact will depend on the needs of the child.

What experience do I need?

You don't need professional qualifications, but if you can listen to others, work as a team, be patient and show resilience, that's a great start. The skills you don't have, we'll teach you.

Do I have to have children of my own?

Foster carers with or without children are welcome to apply! If you do have children, their needs will be taken into account during preparation and assessment.



I'm already a registered carer with another council/independent agency. What do I need to do to become a carer with North Somerset Council?

Just get in touch and we'll discuss whether we can fast-track your application.

Is all fostering the same?

No. A child may need a home for just a few days or a lifetime, and some may need specialist care. We'll help you work out what type of fostering is best for you, based on your circumstances and preferences.

What is the age limit?

You can foster from the age of 21 for as long as you want! Many of our carers are retired.

Do I need to own a home?

It doesn't matter if you own or rent your home or whether you're in council accommodation. Provided your house is a safe place to be, and you have a spare room, you can foster!

Do you need to be in a partnership or married?

You can foster regardless of your sexuality or marital status. As a single carer, a strong support network of wider family and friends can help.

What if I have a disability or health problem?

Please contact us to discuss your circumstances at an early stage. We'll consider whether your condition would put you or a child at any risk. We request a medical report on all applicants and will seek specialist advice if necessary.

What if I smoke?

Smoking does not prevent you from becoming a foster carer with us, however we cannot place children under six-years-old with someone who smokes. Given that living in a smoking household does present an increased health risk, we would encourage you to give up and can provide support to help.

What if I have a criminal conviction?

People with criminal convictions or cautions can foster, although much depends on the seriousness of the offence, how long ago it was, and how you've lived your life since. You won't be able to foster if you have certain convictions or offences against children. Please contact us to discuss the issue with you in confidence.

Are foster carers paid?

We pay a generous tax-free allowance to cover the costs of care and necessary equipment. You also receive a weekly fee according to your skills, experience and level of training acquired. Current fees and allowances are supplied on a separate sheet accompanying this brochure.



Yes! I'm interested in fostering.

I/We have read the information pack and would like to proceed with my/our enquiry.

Please use the freepost envelope enclosed to return this form, indicating your preferred next step

Fostering Recruitment Team, The Resource Service, Children and Young People's service, Town Hall,
Walliscote Grove Road, Weston-super-Mare BS23 1UJ

1. I/We will be attending the information evening

or

I/We would like a member of staff from the Fostering Recruitment Team to contact us to provide further information and arrange a home visit.

2. **What type of fostering are you interested in (if known):**

Short term

Long term

Respite care

Specialist placement scheme

Supported Lodgings

Family Link

3. **Please complete your full details, including the names and dates of birth of all members of your household, including yourself:**

Full name:

Date of birth:

Relationship:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Address:

.....

Postcode:

.....

Landline:

Mobile:

Email:

.....

4. **Please indicate the total number of bedrooms in your house, and the number available for fostering:**

Bedrooms:

Available for fostering:

5. **Please indicate the best time to contact you:**

Morning:

Afternoon:

Evening:

Landline:

Mobile: