WANTED

Foster carers in Swindon
Thank you for considering becoming a foster carer with Swindon Borough Council.

This booklet provides more information about being a foster carer, the process for getting approved and the benefits of working with our fostering team.

By becoming a foster carer, you could change the lives of young people who are often in need of a caring family at a critical point in their lives. Often, support and guidance at the right time will set a child on a positive path through their life and open them up to experiences they never would have had otherwise.

You will find contact details at the back of this booklet should you need any further information or advice.
Why are foster carers needed?

When a child can no longer stay with their family, as a Local Authority we have the responsibility to look after that child. Foster care is often the best way to make sure a child is safe and cared for while they’re away from their family.

Foster care is where a child goes to live with a foster family. Many children who live with foster carers do so temporarily while our Children’s Services team work with their parents to try to help resolve any family issues so the child can return home. These placements could last for anything from several days to a few months.

There can be many reasons why a child might come into our care and need a foster home, including:

- Relationship problems
- Family separation
- Welfare concerns
- Parents’ illness

Some children are not able to return to their families and may live with foster carers until either an adoptive family or long-term foster carer is found for them.

As a foster carer, you and your family could provide the support and guidance a child will need to continue to develop in what can be a very challenging time in their life.

Last year, over 350 children in Swindon needed a foster home and by fostering with Swindon Borough Council, you could provide a much needed lifeline for future children in need of care.
Can I become a foster carer?

We welcome people from all walks of life, as long as you can provide a home for a child and meet their needs to help them develop and thrive.

- You must be at least 21 or over to foster
- You must have a spare bedroom
- It doesn’t matter whether you’re male or female
- You can be married, single or living with a partner
- We welcome people regardless of their sexuality
- You’ll need to be in good health to meet the needs of a child placed with you
- It doesn’t matter if you’re living with your own children, step-children or without children
- You can either live in your own house or be renting
- You can be in work, unemployed or retired

Do I want to be a foster carer?

Becoming a foster carer will have an impact on your life, others around you and the child in your care. Although it’s a big decision, it gives you the opportunity to make a positive difference to a child or young person in need of care which can also bring benefits to your own life as well.

It’s important to be clear in your own mind why you want to foster before deciding to register your interest.

As a foster carer, it’s also vital to have a strong support network in place, and our Children’s Services team will provide you with 24-hour support.
Why we foster

Graham and Ruth have been foster carers for around 20 years. Here’s their story...

It really has been quite a journey, with lots of very positive experiences. At the moment, we have a sibling group of three living with us, two boys and a girl, and they’ve been with us for six years now.

When we first started thinking about fostering, we were quite nervous because we have two girls of our own who were quite young at the time. But, they were getting older and we’d decided not to have any more children so we thought ‘we have the space and, as a family, we could make a difference to a child’s life’.
Our girls are now 25 and 27 and our foster children have become part of their extended family as well, so it’s really enriched all our lives and made us a better family.

There were some challenges early on when we realised that sometimes children have developed ways of coping in worlds that are actually quite frightening. But we’ve found support in all sorts of ways: from other foster carers, social workers, other agencies and through schools.

As you spend time with the children, you can see little changes and they make you realise that this is worth it and they’re gaining things that will really help them in life. As you build up trust, they might share something with you about their lives, and you might be the first person they’ve spoken to about that and that’s a very, privileged position.

We’re extremely proud of the children we’ve had with us. We go to parents’ evenings and absolutely beam when they’ve caught up in education, they’re doing well, they’ve got friends and have pizza nights on Fridays where they can bring their friends round.

Our advice for anyone considering becoming a foster carer is to have a look because it’s really worth exploring and ask lots and lots of questions, no question is too silly.

We really do believe that being foster carers has helped us to develop as people as much as it’s helped the children.
Types of fostering

There are different types of foster care and we’d work closely with you to decide which type is right for you.

Full time foster care
Most children need this kind of foster care. It involves providing care for a wide range of children including babies, primary school age children and teenagers. Children can stay with you for a few weeks to several months while Children’s Services work to try to return the child home or move a child into an adoptive family. For some children, permanence is found within long-term foster care by carers who can meet this need.

Respite
Respite foster care provides short breaks for children who may be living with their birth family at home or with full time foster carers. These short respite stays can give foster carers time off or help keep birth families together by giving them the break they need to help them to cope. Children tending to need respite care are often aged from five years old and some may have additional needs.

Parent(s) and child
We need more carers who can provide care to babies accompanied by one or both parents in your own home. These placements tend to be intensive so good communication skills are important as well as the ability to observe and assess parenting skills. They tend to be for 12 to 16 weeks and could include being involved with supporting parenting assessments and supporting the team around the child with information proceedings. Higher fees are paid to carers with the skills to provide these specialist placements. A requirement is that one carer must be at home full time.
**Home and Away**
This type of care enables children and young people with disabilities, including children with complex health care needs, to have a regular short break away from home. Home and Away care is a carefully planned arrangement designed to give families a much needed break from the pressure of care day-to-day with a child. They also provide new opportunities for the child. This can be once a week after school for a few hours, or maybe one weekend a month.

**Supported lodgings**
This type of care enables young people, aged 16 to 21, (to 25 if in education or training) to live independently to some degree within a safe, secure family environment.

Supported lodgings act as a stepping stone for young people who have been in a care setting and need support to develop skills to enable them to live on their own effectively.
What it’s like to foster with us?

As a foster carer you would become a valued member of our team of over 70 other foster carers. We have a highly skilled fostering team who will manage placements as well as providing support.

**Support**

24-hour support is available and you’ll have your own fostering social worker who will provide you with advice, guidance and practical support to help you along the way.

We also hold regular drop-in sessions where our foster carers can get together, share experiences and support one another.

**Fees and allowances**

We offer generous allowances and fees to cover the costs of caring for a child. You’ll receive a weekly allowance for each child in your care to cover full childcare costs, including food, clothing, household costs, pocket money and travel costs. We also pay Christmas/religious festival, birthday and holiday allowances.

You may also receive additional payments which reflect your experience, training completed and the type of care you provide.

**Training**

There’s an ongoing programme of training and development for foster carers to build your skills and knowledge. This includes many learning and development opportunities to help you carry out your role as a foster carer. This begins during the assessment process with our ‘Skills to Foster’ preparation course.

As a foster carer, you’ll be able to access further training throughout your career that fit in with your needs such as safe caring, child protection and managing behaviour. Training is held at different times and venues to make it as accessible as possible.
Myths about fostering

“I already have children at home so I can’t foster”
Many foster carers have their own children and foster at the same time. This can be really rewarding and beneficial for your own children, as well as the foster children.

“I’m single so I can’t foster”
Your relationship status doesn’t matter, as long as you can provide a safe and nurturing home for a foster child we’d be delighted to hear from you.

“I work full time so I can’t foster”
Lots of foster carers combine their care responsibilities with their work so this might be possible, as long as you can dedicate enough time to be available for the child.

“I’m a bit older so I can’t foster”
There’s no upper age limit to who can become a foster carer. As long as you’re in good health and have the skills and energy to look after children, we’d love to hear from you.

“I have a criminal conviction so I can’t foster”
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 in confidence.

“I smoke so I can’t foster”
Smoking does not prevent you from offering foster care 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.
Contact our friendly team who will be happy to discuss your interest in becoming a foster carer:

**Step 1**
If you feel you could make a difference to a child or young person’s life by becoming a foster carer, please do get in touch.

You can call us on 07917 503 447 or register your interest online at www.swindon.gov.uk/fostering

**Step 2**
Once you’ve registered your interest, we’ll give you a call to get to know you better and answer any questions you may have at this stage.

**Step 3**
A member of our fostering team will arrange to visit you at home to discuss what happens next. They’ll gather some information with you and will answer any questions you may have. It’s important that all members of the household are present at this initial home visit.

**Step 4**
If we all agree that this is the right time for you to consider fostering, you’ll be invited to our ‘Skills to Foster’ preparation course. This is run by members of our fostering team and experienced foster carers.

This is a chance for you to meet other people interested in fostering and to learn more about what being a foster carer means for you and your wider family.
Step 5
We’ll send you an application form to complete with your personal information and consent for us to carry out the checks and follow up references.

Step 6
Your assessing social worker will visit you in your home over a number of weeks. They’ll speak to you and people living with you. Together, you’ll look at the task of fostering in more detail, as well as your personal circumstances and qualities. Once the assessment is complete, you’ll read and sign the report.

Step 7
Your report will be considered by Swindon’s Fostering Panel. If the Panel recommend that you’re approved to foster, the Agency Decision Maker will then make the final decision. If the decision is that you can foster, you’ll then be registered as a foster carer for:

- A specific age range
- Number of children
- Type(s) of fostering

We’ll inform you of this decision about two weeks after the Panel meeting.

The process of becoming a foster carer should take no more than six months from when we receive your application form.

If you decide that fostering isn’t for you, you can withdraw your application at any stage. There may also be a scenario where our social workers don’t feel that fostering is appropriate for you and your family. In this situation, we’ll be upfront and honest and will explain the reasons for our decision.
Further details about becoming a foster carer

As a foster carer, you would care for the child to make sure their physical, emotional, educational and social needs are met. Alongside our social workers, you’d help the child keep in touch with their birth family and attend meetings to discuss the child’s welfare and future plans. You may also help to return a child to their birth family or to move him or her to adopters or long-term foster carers.

These are some of the qualities we look for in our foster carers:

- Have a down-to-earth attitude, take things in your stride and find solutions to problems
- A good humour; children are fun and need you to help them learn to be a child
- Confidence; to be a good role model for children and be able to nurture confidence in others
- Patience; can build trusting relationships with children and be a good listener who can respond appropriately will make a big difference
- Commitment; fostering needs a commitment to the children and to your own learning and development
- Good communication; be able to share information sensitively and keep in touch with others to make a difference to a child’s life
- Open-minded; things change and you need to be able to work with this
- Teamwork; to be a part of a team around the child
Already a registered foster carer?

If you’re already a registered foster carer from another local authority or independent fostering agency and you’re thinking of transferring to Swindon Borough Council, we’d be delighted to hear from you.

The transition is straightforward and we can fast-track you through it; you’ll soon be fostering local children.

Contact us and tell us you’re already approved to foster.
Please do get in touch

If you feel you could make a difference to a child or young person’s life by becoming a foster carer.

You can call us on 07917 503 447 or register your interest online at www.swindon.gov.uk/fostering3

We hold regular information sessions about becoming a foster carer. Visit our website for details of when these are held.

If you require this information in large print or another format please contact Customer Services on 01793 445500