



WELCOME TO YOUR GUIDE TO

FOSTERING



WELCOME

TO YOUR GUIDE ON FOSTERING WITH SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL

Congratulations on making the first step to becoming a foster carer! By becoming a foster carer, you can change the lives of children who need a caring family.

This booklet provides information about becoming a foster carer, the process for getting approved and the benefits of fostering for Swindon.

FOSTERING

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THE CHILDREN OF SWINDON

WHO NEED YOUR HELP

WHAT IS A FOSTER CARER?

As a foster carer, you will provide a lifeline, helping local children and teens. Foster carers within Swindon support children to have a safe and secure home at a time when their own family are unable to look after them (this is different from adoption).

When a child in Swindon can no longer stay with their family, the Council has the responsibility to make sure that child is safe and cared for. This is often achieved with children living with foster carers.

Many children who live in foster care do so temporarily, while our Children's Services team work with their parents to try to help resolve any family issues so their child

can return home. The need for children to live with foster carers can range from several days, to a couple of months, years or sometimes until adulthood, depending on their family circumstances and the needs of the child.

Children may need a foster family for a number of reasons, such as parental illness, relationship breakdowns or concerns over safety.

As a foster carer, you and your family would work with our fostering team to provide the support and guidance a child needs. You will have the opportunity to make a positive difference to the lives of children in your care.

MAX'S STORY



10-YEAR-OLD MAX COULD NO LONGER LIVE WITH HIS FAMILY AFTER EXPERIENCING NEGLECT, PARENTAL DRUG USE AND PHYSICAL AGGRESSION.

Max and his brother had to move more than 100 miles away from Swindon because there weren't any local foster carers for them. Max's needs are complex, and he requires therapeutic support. He's now in a children's home, living away from his brother.

WHY ARE WE ASKING YOU TO CONSIDER BECOMING A FOSTER CARER?

Over 300 children, from babies to teenagers, are in care in Swindon Borough Council because they can't stay at home. Many of these children live more than 20 miles from home because there aren't enough foster carers in Swindon for those children to stay living close to the town they know.

With more foster carers, our children would no longer need to live miles away from Swindon, separated from their family, friends and schools. Research tells us that children who stay in their local community achieve better outcomes.



THE VOICE OF OUR FOSTER CARERS AND CHILDREN

KAREN, WHO HAS BEEN FOSTERING TEENAGERS FOR OVER THREE YEARS, SHARES WHY SHE FOSTERS.

“I’m Karen and I have been fostering for 3 years and I tend to foster children 12 years and above. It’s the best thing I have ever done. I absolutely love fostering. I love seeing the change in children and I love the fact that they feel safe, and just watching them grow is amazing.

There’re all different types of fostering, if you could just consider any of them, even if it’s just respite, which is just weekends and holidays.

We are just desperate to keep our children in Swindon. So, anybody that’s got a spare room, please get in contact with Swindon Borough Council and they will give you all the information on fostering you will need”.

Becoming a foster carer could be the most rewarding thing you ever do. It gives you the opportunity to make a hugely positive difference to a child or young person in need of care. Bringing any child into your life is always a big commitment and fostering is no different, so it’s important to be clear in your own mind why you want to foster. Our fostering team can talk you through any questions or concerns you may have and will support you on your journey. **To foster you will need to be 21 or over and have a spare bedroom for any child age 3 and above.**

OUR CHILDREN SAY, A FOSTER CARER SHOULD

- ✓ **Be good at listening** - have at least one ear for me
- ✓ **Be non-judgemental** - I’m in care, so does that make me a problem?
- ✓ **Focus on the person not the process** - get to know me for who I am, accept me and help me grow
- ✓ **Be consistent and stable** - are you going to stick with me, will you be there for me long term? Will you give me clear, fair rules and will you stick to them?
- ✓ **Be empathetic** - try to understand me, but don’t feel sorry for me
- ✓ **Be honest** - don’t beat around the bush, just tell me
- ✓ **Be genuine** - don’t hide behind your role, no jargon please
- ✓ **Be a good time keeper** - it is good manners, you should set a good example if you expect it of me
- ✓ **Be contactable** - how will I get hold of you?
- ✓ **Be resourceful and flexible** - I deserve the best you can give
- ✓ **Help me feel I belong** – I need to feel I am part of your family, but remember I have a birth family too
- ✓ **Be able to negotiate** - can we discuss the rules and agree to compromise on some things? All children are not the same, one size does not fit everyone
- ✓ **Be kind** - listen to me
- ✓ **Let me try things** out and be there when it goes wrong
- ✓ **Cook the food I like**
- ✓ **Make me feel like I belong**



CAROLINE, IS ONE OF OUR BRILLIANT FOSTER CARERS. SHE SHARES THE PROGRESS SHE HAS SEEN IN HER FOSTER CHILD:

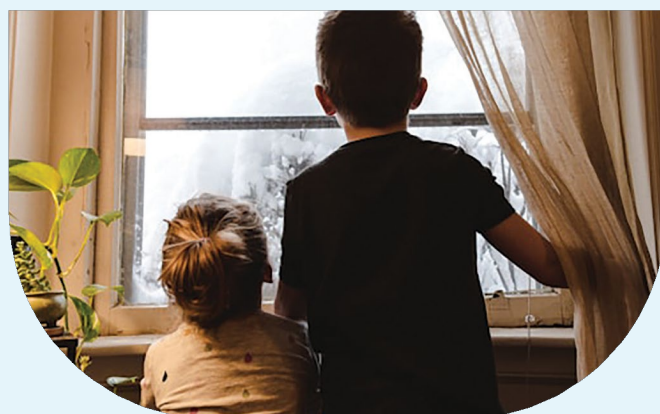
"It's a long road but only 10 months in and we are seeing a real change in the young person with us. The most rewarding part is seeing the change in the children. It's the little things like when you hear them using your words to another child in a positive way. It's when you see them becoming a part of the family and feeling comfortable and at home".

DO YOU HAVE THE QUALITIES TO CARE FOR SAM AND HOLLY?

Eight-year old Sam and four-year-old Holly could no longer live with their family due to domestic abuse and physical abuse from their step-father.

Due to both Sam and Holly being so young, they're likely to need a great deal of emotional support to manage the feelings of being separated from their siblings and mother.

Sam and Holly need foster carers who live in Swindon so they can keep going to their school, see their Mum, Grandparents and their friends. They need resilient foster carers who have lots of time and the emotional understanding to look after them while a long-term plan is put in place.



We offer truly specialist training to help you look after our children, with the support from our dedicated Training Officer. We have an ongoing programme of development to enable you to increase your knowledge. You'll start learning right from the beginning at our 'Skills to Foster' preparation course. It is a great way of meeting other carers and getting support while developing your skills and experience.



"DO I NEED ANY QUALIFICATIONS TO BE A FOSTER CARER?"

No. Training and qualifications in child care are not a requirement before signing up to join our community. We will train you throughout your journey.

WHY YOU SHOULD FOSTER

WITH US?

Our mission is to provide positive and stable family environments for the children living with our foster carers. With the support of our foster carers, they can thrive emotionally and academically.

Our goal is to recruit a variety of foster carers from all backgrounds to provide a safe home, care and support for local children who need it.



HOW MUCH DO FOSTER CARERS GET PAID?

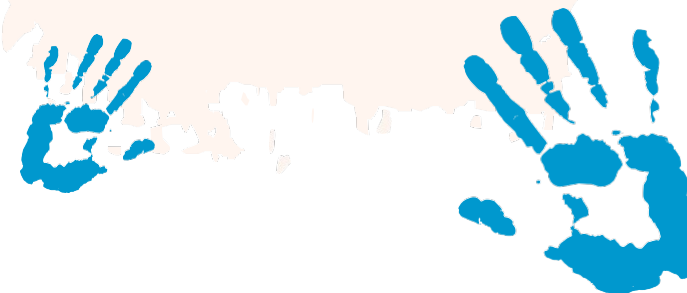
Swindon fostering payments start from £408 per child, per week, depending on the foster carer's skills and needs of the child. Plus, additional allowances and tax exemptions.

ADDITIONAL ALLOWANCES:

- Birthday/name day, festival and holiday allowances
- Birthday/name day - extra one week's allowance
- Festival - extra one week's allowance paid at the start of December
- Holiday - extra two week's allowance paid at an agreed time, to be used for holidays, day trips and activities

This weekly allowance is for each child in your care to cover childcare costs, such as food, clothing, extracurricular activities and travel. Our foster carers receive a skills payment and as you develop your fostering experience with us and progress through the skills levels, payments will also increase.

More information about tax exemptions can be found on the Fostering Network [website](#).



WE WILL BE WITH YOU

EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

As a foster carer with Swindon Borough Council, you'll become a valued member of our team and wider community of foster carers. We strive to offer our children the best support and care, to make a difference to their life.

We'll be there for you every step of the way through the recruitment process and beyond. We are a dedicated team who provides support, advice and guidance to you, including:

- » An allocated assessing social worker during your assessment.
- » An allocated supervising social worker after you are approved as a foster carer.
- » Support from our team of social care workers, training officer and recruitment and retention officer.

You will also be part of our community of foster carers who support each other as friends and regularly meet for coffee and catch ups. Many of our foster carers value this as one of the most important parts of fostering with us.

You will also get access to:

- Regular support groups (inc. men's group, walk and talk plus more)
 - Kids United is for children who foster aged 7 to 11
 - Inspiring Youths for children who foster aged 12 to 17
- Refer a friend scheme for our foster carers (up to £750)
- Being part of a local network of closely connected foster carers
- Becoming part of a skilled and supportive team so that children have the best access to services, care and support
- Membership with Fostering Network
- Membership with Swindon Foster Carers Association (SCFA)
- Access to discounted days out
- Discounted holidays at our very own caravan
- Access to a Blue Light Card and other benefits
- A variety of events including: coffee mornings, family fun days, award ceremonies, BBQs and more
- Opportunities to progress in your fostering career i.e. training, supporting with recruitment, exploring your areas of interest and more
- Swindon Borough Council is a fostering friendly organisation, which provides additional support for employees who Foster with Swindon.



TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

We offer truly specialist training to help you look after our children, with an ongoing programme of development to grow skills and knowledge, as well as support from our dedicated Training Officer.

You'll start learning right from the beginning at our 'Skills to Foster' preparation course, where you can meet other people on the road to becoming foster carers. This course is designed to provide you with a basic knowledge and understanding of fostering. [Read more on pre-approval training.](#)

When you are approved, the fostering service will provide you with a wide range of professional courses. These courses will enable you to improve your knowledge and

understanding of caring for children who have experienced trauma. This will ensure they thrive in your care. [Read more on post-approval training.](#)

When you are fostering, in addition to our mandatory training, we also offer a wide variety of comprehensive additional courses. [See our full list of additional courses.](#)

All training is local and held at different times and venues to make it as convenient as possible for you. It is a great way of meeting other foster carers and getting support whilst developing your skills and experience, which can increase your skills level and the skills payment you receive.



"IF I HAVE MY FAMILY AT HOME, WILL THEY ALSO GET SUPPORT?"

Of course, as a Swindon foster carer you will have access to resources that can support you, your family and the children you look after.

Being a foster carer for a Swindon child means you and your family will get the very best service and benefits from fostering, with support right on your doorstep.



SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL VS INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCIES (IFA'S)

WHY YOU SHOULD FOSTER WITH A LOCAL AUTHORITY?

Fostering with a local authority means supporting children to remain local, instead of potentially having to move out of area to receive the care they need.

Staying in Swindon helps children stay connected to their family and friends, and remain at their current school or college. This provides stability at an uncertain time in their lives, and enables them to thrive and be the best they can be.

When fostering for a local authority, like us, you also get the additional benefits of being local and you will be supporting children from Swindon. This means your fostering team is also close by and will be able to visit and support you easily and quickly when you need it.

As a local authority, we are a non-profit fostering service and our fostering allowances are competitive with IFAs. Many foster carers have transferred to us from other fostering agencies. If you are an approved foster carer with another organisation and are thinking about moving, we can help.



Making the move to Swindon Borough Council is easy and there are many benefits, including:

- We search for home for our children with our Swindon foster carers in the first instance, wherever possible. This means that children placed with you will be from Swindon
- All professionals working with our children are nearby and will be able to visit you when required, including your supervising social worker, so you can access support easily and quickly when you need it
- As a foster carer for your local authority, the gaps between children living with you will likely be shorter
- You will not need to travel far to support groups and training

Fostering Network's transfer protocol can be found here: [Transfer protocols | The Fostering Network](#)



OUR FOSTER CARERS ANNA AND STEVEN, WHO TRANSFERRED FROM ANOTHER FOSTERING AGENCY, SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH MOVING OVER TO SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL.

"Since transferring from another provider, we have been so impressed and excited about the diversity Swindon Borough Council has to offer with their training program. Every month there is such a variety of topics, some which have not been available to us before. For example, the adoption process, support for unaccompanied asylum seekers and Enuresis, to name but a few.

We feel confident moving forward there will be plenty of training available which will help us best support the young people we look after."

We recognise that fostering presents a unique challenge and we appreciate the skills that you bring. To help you progress, we offer an encouraging learning environment in order to build on your existing skills. [Read more about the training we have for experienced foster carers.](#)





HEAR FROM OUR FOSTER CARERS

CHRIS IS ONE OF OUR FANTASTIC FOSTER CARERS WHO MOVED OVER FROM AN INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCY (IFA) AND HE SAID:

"Since transferring to Swindon from an Independent Fostering Agency we have been very impressed with the diversity and frequency of training available to carers. The 'Men Who Foster' support group is a new and positive experience. We are able to support the young people who stay with us for short breaks in their home town and facilitate family time and schools locally."

SHARON HAS BEEN FOSTERING WITH US FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS. HERE'S WHAT FOSTERING MEANS TO HER:

"Fostering to me is a lot of laughter and joy, with the pleasure of celebrating each and every small reward of seeing them overcome challenges. There are no words to express how you feel as you watch a child achieve even the smallest thing."



ONE OF OUR FOSTER CARERS, MARK, WHO MOVED OVER FROM ANOTHER FOSTERING AGENCY, SHARES HOW HIM AND HIS FAMILY PROVIDE CARE TO CHILDREN ACROSS SWINDON.

"I can still have time with just my partner and with our little boy as well. I've realised that, although the foster children are part of our family, it's okay to want that time with just them too."

The main reason that we moved from the IFA was due to the long gaps between placements, which meant there were often times where we didn't have a child with us. And when we did have a placement, they often weren't very well-matched, but with the Council, they've all been pretty well-matched so far, and when it hasn't been, it's been dealt with really well.

I think it's also important to know that you don't have to take a placement. The matching processes with the Council are really clear so you have an idea of what the child will be like so there aren't any big surprises because the team are clear and open with you."



MANY OF OUR FOSTER CARERS HAVE THEIR OWN CHILDREN AND FOSTER AT THE SAME TIME. IT CAN BE REWARDING AND BENEFICIAL FOR YOUR OWN CHILDREN, AS WELL AS THOSE THAT YOU FOSTER. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU'RE LIVING WITH YOUR OWN CHILDREN, STEP-CHILDREN OR WITHOUT CHILDREN.

We offer support to your own children, including fun groups where they can meet other foster carers' children and take part in regular activities and events.

Smoking and vaping doesn't prevent you from fostering with us but we cannot place children under five years old with someone who smokes/vapes. We can provide you with support to help you quit smoking.

Your employment status will not affect your application. You can be in work, unemployed or retired. We also have lots of foster carers who combine their fostering responsibilities with their work so this might be possible, as long as you can dedicate enough time to supporting children in your care.



WHAT IS REQUIRED TO FOSTER?



You must be at least 21 or over to foster. There's no upper age limit to who can become a foster carer. Everyone has different life experiences and this can be really helpful when caring for children. So 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.



You must have a spare bedroom for children age 3 and above. You can either live in your own house or be renting. You can also have pets. Cats, dogs, reptiles and other small animals are great for children.



We welcome people regardless of their gender or sexuality. You can be married, single or living with a partner, as long as you can provide a safe and nurturing home for a child.



THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO FOSTER

THERE ARE SEVERAL DIFFERENT TYPES OF FOSTERING.

You may have an idea of what it will be like to foster. We know from our current fostering families; that fostering can change as your progress along your journey .

» SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM

Most children need this kind of foster care. Children may live with their foster family for anything from several days to a couple of months or even several years into adulthood, depending on the needs of the child.

Children's Services work to try to return children to their family where this is appropriate. Some of our foster carers play an important part in supporting some children to move onto their adoptive family; other foster carers will continue to look after a child until they are 18 years old.

» EMERGENCY SUPPORT

This involves caring for a child or brothers and sisters for a short period of time in an emergency, same day situation. This could be during the night or at weekends and happens at short notice so this type of care is good for carers who can be flexible.

» RESPITE

This type of care provides support for children, as well as their primary carers, to have a break. It is sometimes known as planned breaks. Respite is either provided as needed, or provided as a regular arrangement on weekends or for a few weeks during the school holidays. Foster carers may also cover holidays and emergency situations for short periods of time.



» HOME FROM HOME

Our Home from Home carers provide day and overnight short breaks for children with disabilities. This part of the service is designed to support parents of children with disabilities by providing children with the opportunity to enjoy different experiences.

» UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN

We need foster carers to provide care for children who have fled their homes from across the world and have arrived in the UK on their own. There has been an increase in unaccompanied children seeking refuge in Swindon.

» PARENT AND CHILD

This is a specialist type of fostering where carers are responsible for the safety and welfare of the child, whilst also supporting and guiding the parent to bond with their child and to parent safely.

» SUPPORTING BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO STAY TOGETHER

We need foster carers who have the time and space to support brothers and sisters to stay living together. In some instances, siblings may be able to share a bedroom depending on their age and circumstances. However, it is best when children can stay living together and have their own bedroom as they grow.



» SUPPORTED LODGINGS

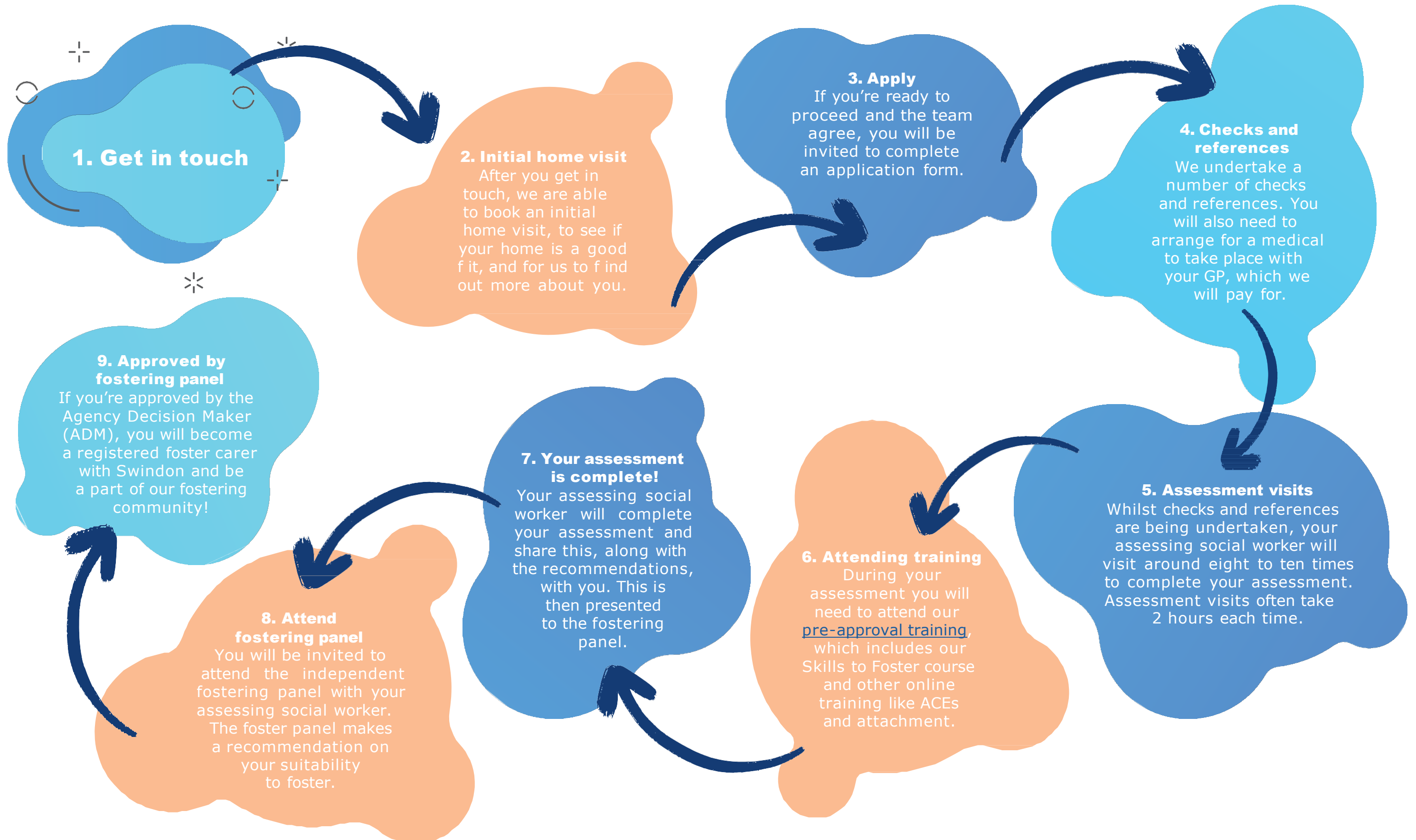
This type of care enables children aged 16 to 21 (or 25 if in education or training) to live independently to some degree within a safe, secure family environment. Supported lodgings act as a stepping stone for children who have been in a care setting and need support to help prepare them for living independently.

[Read more on types of fostering, including fostering to adopt.](#)



YOUR GUIDE TO THE FOSTERING JOURNEY

WHAT'S NEXT ON YOUR FOSTERING JOURNEY?



GET IN TOUCH TO FIND OUT MORE

INTERESTED IN STARTING YOUR FOSTERING JOURNEY?

Speak to our friendly team at the South West Fostering Hub by calling us on **07917 503447**.

You can also:

- head over to our [website](#)
- email fosteringrecruitment@swindon.gov.uk
- Pop along to one of our [fostering information sessions](#)

Our fostering information sessions will help you find out more about fostering with Swindon. You can speak directly to our incredible foster carers. The sessions are relaxed and often happen over a cup of tea.

Let us know you're coming along by emailing us on fosteringrecruitment@swindon.gov.uk or calling **07917 503447**.



