Foster *with* Flintshire

make a difference to a local child

www.flintshirefostering.org.uk

# How to become a **foster carer**

CYNGOR Sir y Fflint Flintshire COUNTY COUNCIL

# What is fostering?

## You could make a difference to a local child's life today

By sharing your family home, you could give a child a life away from abuse and neglect or give their family a chance to sort out their problems.

Foster carers look after children when they are unable to live with their own families. This can be anything from a few days to a few years. Fostering can involve looking after all ages of children, from babies to teenagers and beyond their 18th birthday. You can choose an age range to suit your family but this should be as wide as possible.

It's not easy but it might be one of the best things you ever do with your spare room.

Fostering with your local Council gives you the chance to help local children. Help them to stay in their local area and local schools. With support and training on your doorstep and an experienced team nearby that you can trust to be there every step of the way. Join over 120 local families who already foster with us.

# How do I become a foster carer?

## Part One: Information

| | |
|---|---|
| Initial enquiry | |
| Information pack | |
| Attend information evening | You will be given some forms to complete. |
| Initial visit | We will need to check your ID and the suitability of your home. |
| Police and health checks | |

## Part Two: Assessment

4-6 Months

| | |
|---|---|
| Skills to foster training | This is a 3 day course covering all aspects of fostering. |
| Assessment | The social worker will visit you at least six times to get to know you. |
| Panel | Your social worker will present their report to the panel. You can also attend. |
| Approval | The panel will make a recommendation to the agency decision maker for approval. |

# Who can foster?

## ✔ Spare room

You must have a spare bedroom. Foster children should have a separate bedroom from your own children. If you are fostering siblings or children under 5 of the same sex, then they may be able to share a bedroom.

## ✔ Time and energy

You will need time to attend training courses, meetings and collect children from school or regular free time at weekends and school holidays. You can continue to work part time or full time. One person must be at home during the day when caring for children under age five or on a specialist scheme.

## ✔ Age

You must be old enough to act as an appropriate parental figure, but there is no upper age limit.

## ✔ Personality

You will need determination for the good times and bad, and a sense of humour.

## ✔ Good health

You must look after your own health. Children under the age of five years old will not be placed with anyone who smokes. You won't be ruled out if you are overweight or have an illness, but you must be healthy enough to provide a caring stable home.

## ✔ Choose an age range to suit you and your family

If you work full-time or smoke, we recommend that you foster school-age children. You will need to consider arrangements for school hours and school holidays.

## ✔ Stable relationship

You can be single, married, civil partners, divorced or living with a partner. If you are in a relationship, you must be together for 2 years or more. You can be of any sexual orientation.

## ✔ No violent convictions or convictions against children

You must agree to police checks and be free of any convictions of violence or sexual abuse and have no convictions against children.

# What are the different types of fostering?

When choosing which type of fostering is best for you, you need to consider...

**Will someone be available at home in the daytime?**
**Can you do the school run, flexible hours?**

**No**

### Respite Carers

Offer support to full time foster carers to give them a break and provide an extended family for the child. They can also offer a safe place for a child to stay in an emergency or for a short period to help a family.

### Short Break Carers

Provide regular weekend overnight visits and a week's holiday for a disabled child (aged 5-19) for many years. The children live at home with their family.

**Yes**

**Are there any smokers in the household?**

**No** — Age range **0-18+**

**Yes** — Age range **5-18+**

**Are there any other children in the household?**

**No**

**Yes**

Choose an age range younger than your own children

### General Foster Carers

Look after children (aged 0-18+) with the aim of returning the children to their birth families. If the child can not return home, foster carers can help children move on to a new adoptive family or support them into adulthood.

### Specialist Fostering

As you develop your skills, you may be considered for specialist fostering; looking after children and young people with challenging behavior or parent and child together. You will need will-power and determination. Specialist fostering provides an enhanced payment.

# Finances

When a child is living in your care, you will receive a fostering allowance (per week per child) to help cover the costs of caring for the child such as food, heating and clothing.

As you develop your career as a foster carer, you will receive additional carer's payment (per week). Payments are made when a child is living in your care. Payments are made direct into your bank account.

## Plus

- birthday allowance
- religious festival allowance
- annual holiday allowance

## Specialist Fostering

Specialist carers receive the fostering allowance (per week per child) plus an enhanced payment. We are not recruiting to historic schemes.

## Short breaks

Short break carers receive an allowance for 6 hour, 12 hour or 24 hour/overnight stays up to £48.81 for an overnight stay.

## Tax and National Insurance

As a foster carer, you are required to register as self employed. Foster carers are eligible for substantial tax and national insurance exemptions.

## 2019/20

| Age | 0-4 | 5-10 | 11-15 | 16+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Level 1** ‘new to fostering’ | £181 | £165 | £179 | £217 |
| **Level 2** ‘core training complete & some fostering experience’ | £181 + £65 | £165 + £65 | £179 + £65 | £217 + £65 |
| **Level 3** ‘advanced training complete & experienced foster carer’ | £181 + £125 | £165 + £125 | £179 + £125 | £217 + £125 |
| **Level 4** ‘qualified & experienced foster carer’ | £181 + £230 | £165 + £230 | £179 + £230 | £217 + £230 |
| **Specialist Fostering** | £181 + enhanced payment | £165 + enhanced payment | £179 + enhanced payment | £217 + enhanced payment |
| **When I am ready** | | | | £206 |

Per week when a child is in your care.

**Key**

- ☐ Fostering allowance
- ■ Carer’s payment

# The next step

After reading this information pack, we would like to invite you to an information evening to find out more. We will give you some forms to complete to undertake background checks. We will then visit you at home to check your ID and the suitability of your home.

## Skills to foster training

This initial training will give you an insight into the process, the challenges and rewards of fostering. Everyone involved in caring for the child should attend, including you and your partner (or family member) and even your own children (depending on their age).

Skills to Foster training involves three full days where we discuss the foster carer's role, the children, working together, safety, behaviour and letting go.

There is a separate morning training session for your own children.

The training will help you to make an informed decision about whether fostering is right for you.

# Who are our foster carers?

## Anwen

Anwen, along with her husband, has been a foster carer for over 8 years. Initially fostering with an agency for 2 years before choosing to transfer to the local Council. Anwen initially provided respite care, which provides full time carers with someone to support them and give them a break when they need it.

“The main foster carers are having a break for a weekend or a week and they can come back fully refreshed and we feel we have given them a great rest and they really appreciate it. They’ve had time to recharge their batteries. We say to the children “it’s your holiday”. It’s like going to a family member or relative. They love coming here.”

Anwen has cared for all ages of children from babies to teenagers.

“The reason they are in care, is because they have been neglected or possibly abused. What they need is normality. It’s an ordinary day for us, but it’s not for them. They may not have had that care and attention before, it might be new to them.

You do build up a relationship and you do get fond of them, but hopefully a lot of the children can move on and you feel as if you’ve helped them along the way to an adoption or back to their own parents.

We are not anything special or out of the ordinary, we are just normal people with a good sense of humour.”

# The Assessment

## Background checks

### Criminal record checks

Police checks are required for every member of your household over the age of 16.  We will also contact probation teams in the areas you have lived.

### Health checks

We will contact your GP to make sure that you are in good health to care for a child. We will ask you to attend a medical appointment with your own GP.

### References

You will be asked to provide two personal references per person. The referees should be someone other than a relative who has known you for over two years and ideally live locally. The referees will be asked to complete a form and we will also visit them. We will also contact your employer for a reference.

### Overseas & military checks

If you have lived overseas or served in the armed forces we will also contact the relevant authorities.

### Child protection

We will also check any history of contact with Social Services for Children in the areas you have lived. We may also contact your children's schools to assess attendance and commitment to education.

When you have attended training and your background checks are complete, you will be assigned a social worker (as soon as there is availability) who will conduct your assessment. We need to prioritise the allocation of social workers to suit the current need so there may be a delay in your allocation following training.

# Home study report

Your social worker will visit you at least six times to conduct the assessment. These visits can be in the evening, although a larger portion of work can usually be covered in daytime sessions. Completing homework will also help to speed up the assessment process. This may feel like a very intrusive process, but by the end of this we will have a very clear picture of your needs as well as the needs of the children in care. This will help us to match you together successfully.

The home study report will include your background, education, employment, interests and personality.

## Ex-partners

If you have been involved in a previous significant relationship, we are under strict guidance to contact your ex-partner for domestic violence checks. We can only decide not to contact them if you can provide significant evidence that this would cause distress or threat to your family.

## Home, garden & neighbourhood

Your house and local area will also be assessed for safety, facilities and access to schools. Garden ponds and water features must have a permanent child-safe plastic cover or grid, when fostering children under 8.

## Household members

Your assessing social worker will hold individual discussions with every member of the household to discuss feelings and attitudes towards fostering.

## Pets

Any pets in the home will also be assessed for safety, to ensure that there is no danger to the child. Any applicants who have dogs classified under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 will not be considered. Dangerous dogs include Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino and Fila Braziliero.

## Finances

The family income and out-goings will be discussed, to help you assess the finance involved in fostering. Any loans and debts may also be discussed, to ensure that your home is secure.

## Portfolio

We will ask you to collect pieces of evidence for your portfolio to show what skills and experience you have.

## Photo Album

A photo album of your family and home is a good addition to your portfolio and a great way for us to introduce your family to a foster child.

# Panel

Once your assessment is complete, your social worker will present your assessment to the fostering panel. You will be invited to attend.

The panel is made up of people who have experience of child care and fostering. They may ask you some questions. These may be in connection with your assessment, but are more likely to be about our service to you. This is also your opportunity to ask the panel questions.

After meeting you, the panel will politely ask you to leave the room for a short time while they discuss your case. The chairperson of the panel will then join you to inform you privately of the panel's recommendation.

The agency decision maker will receive panel's recommendation and write to you with the final decision on your approval.

Most people who attend panel are accepted as foster carers. You will usually be informed of any potential problems with your application during the assessment process.

# Who are our foster carers?

## Gavin

Gavin has been fostering for over 8 years. Gavin is a single carer, looking after children aged 8 to 18.

"When I say I'm a foster carer, people think I must be mad, I think they expect foster carers to all be middle aged couples. Being single and working full time is not a barrier to doing this. It can be busy, but you can fit it in with your availability. It does mean that you have to be very organised and disciplined with your time, but there are many benefits to being a single carer. The children and young people really seem to value the one to one attention they get. They have often not experienced that in their home lives."

"I love all of it. I feel like I'm contributing to young people's development. It's very satisfying to know you played a part in it. You form a close relationship with them. The young people like to know that someone cares. It's very satisfying, and probably the most fulfilling thing you can do.

"To anyone thinking about it, I'd definitely say "Do it." The support you receive is brilliant and approaching your local Council gives you the opportunity to care for vulnerable children who live in your area. It's the most rewarding experience you'll have."

# When you begin fostering

## When the children arrive

When a child comes into care we will carefully match their needs to your family and skills. We will contact you with details of the child to see if you are able to provide care. The child's social worker will then visit to introduce you to the child.

Emergency placements may arise from time to time, when a child has to be removed from their home immediately for their own safety. We will discuss with you if you would be open to emergency placements, as these may arrive at your home in the early hours of the morning and with very little warning.

The child's social worker will continue to keep in touch with the child and attend regular reviews. You will be asked to attend some meetings. The children may meet up with parents and siblings on a regular basis, if it is considered safe to do so.

Your social worker will regularly visit and call to support you. Our fostering handbook will also be available to guide you. The placement will be regularly reviewed to see what levels of support or training you may require.

Every year you will have an annual review as a Foster Carer to see how things are going.

## Further Training

You will be expected to attend a core set of foster care training within the first 6-12 months from approval. You will also have access to other courses offered by Flintshire County Council. Attending training is essential for developing your skills and to increase your foster carer payment levels.

# What does a foster carer do?

## Care for Children & Young People

- Set rules and boundaries for children
- Help children to be healthy, develop and do their best in school
- Help the child to maintain their origin, religion and culture
- Help the child to move onto the next stage of their life

## Provide a Safe and Caring Environment

- Keep the child safe and teach them about safety
- Help the child to keep in touch with siblings and relatives
- Represent the child, when they need an adult's voice to speak on their behalf

## Work as Part of a Team

- Keep records of behaviour, care and attend meetings
- Keep information about the child and their family confidential
- Work as part of a team with social workers, the child and their family

## Improve your own skills

- Attend training and support meetings

# Foster care support group

## Social events

The foster carer support group arranges social events throughout the year which give you the opportunity to meet experienced carers and have fun in a relaxed atmosphere.

The group involves all Flintshire foster carers, from new carers to people who have been fostering for over 20 years.

Our foster carers say:

**"it has been very useful to us as we are able to meet and talk to other carers to find out what it is really like"**

**"meeting other carers, having a laugh and a chat, sharing common issues"**

**"getting together, making new friends, getting a night out"**

## Telephone line and buddy

You will have the phone numbers and email of experienced foster carers, if you want a reassuring chat.

## Secure website

"Fosterweb" is a secure website for Flintshire foster carers to access information about news, events, training, online forms, handbook…

## Support for your own children

We run a support group for foster carer's own children, which offers training, support and fun events to say thank you to your own children.

> "when I first started thinking about fostering, I wanted to make sure my own children were happy with the idea.
>
> Young Fosterers gives them a fun trip as a treat every school holiday to say thank you"

# Helen

Helen has been a foster carer for the last 8 years, looking after children from the age of six weeks to 16 years old. She has cared for 27 children.

“Each child is an individual; they come from different homes, experiences and have their own set of problems. Many of the children I’ve cared for have issues with food because it gives them comfort and they’ve come from a home where there wasn’t regular meal times and food wasn’t always available.”

“As a foster carer you need structure and boundaries. You need commitment to the child and commitment to attend training, especially in your first year of fostering. Training helps you to understand the children’s behaviours, the different traumas that these children have faced and how to deal with that.”

“There is always someone at the end of the phone. I’ve always had good support from Flintshire Fostering Service whenever I needed it.”

“If you are thinking about fostering you need to consider if you can give the commitment and the time that’s needed. You need to discuss long and hard as a family and decide if this is the right time.”

## Q. Can I work as well as foster?

Yes, however, if you are fostering children under age 5 or specialist fostering, we require one carer to be home during the day.

## Q. Can the children share bedrooms?

You must have a spare bedroom. Foster children should have a separate bedroom from your own children. This gives your own child and the foster child their own space. If you are fostering siblings or children under 5 of the same sex, then they may be able to share a bedroom. Babies can share a room with the foster carer, but a spare bedroom must be available when the child is 18 months old.

# Frequently asked questions

**Q. Do I get paid?** We will provide a fostering allowance to help pay for household bills. As you develop your career in fostering, you will also receive a carer's payment. Specialist fostering provides an enhanced payment.

**Q. Can I choose what age of child I foster?** Yes. You can decide what age range of child will fit into your family. You can request to change this age range or gender if your circumstances change. You will need as wide an age range as possible.

**Q. How long does it take?** The assessment takes at least 6 months. Most people could be approved as foster carers within 12 months from their first enquiry.

**Q. Why does it take so long?** Becoming a foster carer involves a detailed and in-depth assessment to see if fostering is right for you. We need to carry out background checks to assess whether children would be safe in your care. We also want to get to you know and prepare you for your new role, because we want fostering to be successful and rewarding for you, your family and the children in your care.

**Q. What kind of children will we get?** The children who need fostering will be in the age band and gender you have specified, but they are all very different. Some may come from an abusive background, they may have been neglected or their parents may have struggled to care for them or keep them safe. Some families don't have a support network in times of need or ill health, and the child may need to be looked after while problems are resolved or health is improved.

**Q. Will the birth parents know where I live?** Parents will be told where their children are living, when it is considered safe to do so.

**Q. What happens when the child turns 18?** Many young people in foster care are not ready to live on their own at 18. The foster carer can choose to take on a supportive landlord role until the young person is ready.

# Contact us

## For more information:


Flintshire Fostering Service

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Flint,  Flintshire, CH6 5BD

T: 01352 701965

E: fostering@flintshire.gov.uk

Facebook ‘Flintshire Fostering’

www.flintshirefostering.org.uk

Twitter @Foster_FCC


If you would like to make a suggestion, compliment or complaint about our service, please write to:

**Compliments & Complaints Officer**

Flintshire County Council

Social Services for Children, County Hall,

Mold, Flintshire, CH7 6ND

If you are unhappy with how we have resolved your complaint, you have the right to contact the Care Standards Inspectorate or the Children’s Commissioner for Wales:

**Care Standards Inspectorate**

North East Wales Regional Office

Broncoed House

Broncoed Business Park

Wrexham Road, Mold, Flintshire, CH7 1HP

**Children’s Commissioner for Wales**

Penrhos Manor, Oak Drive, Colwyn Bay,
Conwy, LL29 7YW

Tel: 01492 523 333