

## **FOSTERING INFORMATION**

### **WELCOME**

Thank you for your interest in fostering. West Dunbartonshire HSCP is committed to finding local foster families for local children who, for whatever reason, cannot live with their own family. This pack will provide you with some of the information on what is involved in looking after foster children, as well as how you can apply to become a foster carer.

West Dunbartonshire HSCP needs families for children of all ages, sometimes children on their own or with their brothers and sisters, with a wide range of needs. All of these children need a secure, nurturing family who can care for them until they can return to their own family, or move onto a permanent family and sometimes until they move onto Independence as young adults.

There are all sorts of ways to support children, from offering respite for a few days per month, to supporting a child until they can care for themselves independently.

Foster carers don't need to have qualifications — they need to be genuinely interested in supporting vulnerable, distressed children, and to provide them with a safe family experience. Foster carers will also be required to work as part of the team in supporting the children and their family.

I hope this pack will help you decide what kind of help you feel you could offer. Your interest in fostering is appreciated and the Fostering and Adoption Team look forward to hearing from you,

## **FOSTERING**

Foster families are urgently needed for children of all ages, including those with physical and learning disabilities and larger sibling groups.

You may have what it takes to be a foster carer. Some people want to help children through a difficult period in their lives. They feel that their own family is complete and whilst they enjoy caring for vulnerable children they may not want children to be a permanent part of their lives.

Fostering can be a short term way of offering a child a home until they can return to their parents. However some children cannot return home but still feel part of their own families and wish to continue to have contact with them.

If a child is placed with a family on a long term fostering basis it is anticipated that the child will grow up with these foster carers and remain there until the time is right to move on to independence.

Foster carers come from all walks of life although age, health and criminal records will all be taken into consideration. You must be over twenty one, sufficiently healthy to cope with the emotional, psychological and physical demands of caring for other people's children and be without a criminal record for certain offences, such as offences against children.

Children who need a foster home come from a wide variety of backgrounds. You'll need a real commitment to caring for children, plus plenty of energy, understanding and patience. A sense of humour can be a lifesaver.

It doesn't matter if you are married, divorced, living with a partner or single: own or rent your home: have a job or not. Applicants are welcome from all sections of the community. The one thing that everyone must have is a commitment to children and young people and preferably a spare room.

## **WHAT WE OFFER FOSTER CARERS**

Every Foster Carer will have their own specialist fostering Social Worker, usually their assessing Social Worker. This person is different from the child's Social Worker.

Foster Carer's are offered post approval training in child protection, separation and loss, safe caring and departmental procedures. There is a rolling programme of training offered to Foster Carers. All West Dunbartonshire HSCP Foster Carer's will

be provided with relevant equipment required to undertake the task of caring for accommodated child, including, cots, highchairs and bedroom furniture you may need to make a child feel comfortable and secure in your home.

Allowances are paid to all Foster Carers in line with the Fostering Networks recommendations. In addition fees are paid to Foster Carers in West Dunbartonshire HSCP.

New and existing Foster Carers are invited to attend quarterly meetings with the Fostering and Adoption Team, which gives you the opportunity to meet with other Carers, discuss any issues and learning about future events that may be of relevance to you.

For Information regarding specific allowances please contact the Fostering Team at the number provided on the website.

## **WHO CAN FOSTER**

Foster carers must be over 21, can be single, married, widowed, divorced or cohabiting in a stable relationship. You may or may not be in employment, but if working you need to have sufficient time and flexibility to meet the needs of a child. Children who are accommodated are likely to have some emotional and behavioural difficulties due to their early experiences. Carers need to have patience; understanding and resourcefulness to help the child overcome these challenge.

Foster carers may either own or rent their homes. They may live in a flat or a house. It is preferable for the child you foster to have a room of their own though younger children may share where appropriate. Very young babies may be able to share at room with a carer.

## **SHORT BREAKS**

Short Break carers offer children and young people, short stays in their homes, usually on a planned basis.

Short Break carers will offer existing interim and long-term carer's regular breaks on a planned and occasionally emergency basis.

Short Break carers may also offer planned breaks to children still living at home but where there are difficulties and offering respite is part of the child's care plan to prevent the child from being accommodated.

Short Break carers must be over 21, but can be single, married, widowed, divorced or cohabiting in a stable relationship. You may or may not be in employment, but if working you need to have sufficient time and flexibility to meet the needs of a child. Children coming into care show their distress in a variety of ways and to be effective in helping them you need to have patience, understanding and resourcefulness.

Short Break carers may either own or rent their homes. They may live in a flat or a house, it is preferable for the child you foster to have a room of their own though younger siblings may share where appropriate.

## **INTERIM FOSTER CARERS**

Interim (sometimes known as temporary) foster carers look after children of all ages who can no longer stay with their own families. As an interim foster carer you may be asked to look after children for a few days or a few weeks. In some instances, children can remain in interim care for a year or two years depending upon their individual circumstances.

Children may need to be looked after in foster homes for a variety of reasons such as:

- Parental abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Parental physical or mental health problems
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Physical or emotional neglect family relationship difficulties
- Bereavement

Foster carers need to be welcoming, warm and confident people who will help children to feel safe and bring some stability into their lives.

Caring for the child is just one aspect of the role of the foster carer. Of equal importance is their ability to work with parents and with professional staff in order to further a plan for the child. When a child comes into short term /temporary foster care the priority is to work in partnership with the family to enable the child to return home. Children who see their parents regularly are those most likely to have better outcomes. Foster carers should have an understanding of the difficulties that parents face and be non-judgemental. Carers will assist the child to maintain contact with their birth family.

Despite all efforts, some children may not be able to return to live with their parents and another family will be sought for them who can provide either long-term care or adoption. The role of the short-term carer will be to help to prepare the child to move on to their alternative family.

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Foster carers may either own or rent their homes. They may live in a flat or a house. It is preferable for the child you foster to have a room of their own though younger siblings may share where appropriate.

## **LONG TERM FOSTERING**

Long-term foster carers are required where it has not been possible to return a child to their birth family. These children tend to be older. They understand they cannot live with their own family but will still have a sense of identity with them and may maintain some limited contact.

When a child is placed with a family on a long term fostering basis it is anticipated the child will grow up with the foster carers and remain there until the time is right to move on to independence. While the day to day decisions which affect the child will be made by you as the foster carer, some decisions, such as a trip abroad, will require consultation with the Social Work Officers.

One of the main objectives of long term fostering would be to provide care for the child throughout their childhood and to provide a safe and stable environment to enable him or her to grow both physically and emotionally and to reach their full potential. Long term foster carers, like other foster carers, require to work alongside other professional staff in order to further the plan for the child.

In many situations long term foster carers will also be required to facilitate and support some form of contact between the child and the birth family, if this is deemed to be in the child's best interest.

## **PERMANENT FOSTER CARERS**

Permanent Foster Carers are similar to long term carers but the child's placement will be secured by a legal order called a Permanence Order. In most cases this means that parental rights and responsibilities are shared between the carers and the local authority.

## **THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

### **Initial Interview**

Following receipt of this pack, a Social Worker from the Fostering and Adoption Team will undertake a home visit to discuss your application further and to explore with you your reasons for applying to foster and any child care experience you may have. The worker will compile a short report following this visit and will include a recommendation to the Assistant Principal Officer of whether you wish to proceed to the next stage of assessment, the Preparatory Group.

### **Preparatory Groups**

Preparatory Groups are held over two full days and two evenings or three full days and cover a wide range of issues about being a carer for an accommodated child. The Preparatory Groups will begin to consider issues surrounding Fostering and the Law, Separation and Loss, and begin to look at issues surrounding abuse and neglect for the accommodated child.

These Preparatory Groups are an important part of the assessment process and it is expected that all applicants attend.

### **Home Study**

This is the longest part of the procedure as it can take up to six months from the signing of the application form to presentation at the Fostering Panel. The Home Study Report is very detailed as we must be sure that you can offer a safe and caring home to a child or young person. It is also opportunity for you to think about whether you really want to become a carer — and if so, what type of fostering would suit you best.

The assessing social worker will visit you a number of times to talk in detail about the qualities you will need and for you to demonstrate your skills and experiences. He or she may also want to talk to your wider family and any other people who are important to your support network. Together you will work out how many children you could foster and what ages. Your Assessing Social Worker will also undertake a variety of detailed checks, including Police and Health Checks.

In doing this Home Study Report your assessing social worker will build up a detailed picture of your strengths and abilities, your home life, your relationship (if you are applying as a couple) and the commitment you could give a child. You will have the opportunity to find out more about the rewards and reality of fostering.

Finally, the assessing social worker brings all this information together into a report on your potential as a foster carer. Once the assessing social worker has completed the report, you will receive a visit from the manager responsible for Fostering and Adoption Services who will complete a further brief report on you for the Fostering Panel. You will have the opportunity to read these reports and add your own comments.



## **FOSTERING PANEL**

The last stage in the approval process is for the assessing social worker to present his/her assessment to the Fostering Panel along with any other relevant information that may assist the Panel in making a decision. You will be invited to attend the Panel. Although your assessing Social Worker will be with you, you may also bring along a family member or friend for support.

The Panel chairperson has a background in childcare and fostering. The panel members all have a great deal of relevant experience. They include current foster carers, an adoptive carer, educational staff, a medical advisor and senior social work staff with experience in child care.

It is their task to consider all the information, to talk with you and your assessing social worker, then to decide whether to recommend you for approval to the Head of Children's Health, Care and Criminal Justice Services Chief Social Work Officer who then has 14 days in which to make the final decision. You will be advised of this final decision.

## **FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

### **Allowances**

Allowances and Fees change therefore details of these will be provided by a Social Worker from the Fostering and Adoption Team.

### **Equipment**

West Dunbartonshire HSCP ensures that carer's are provided with the equipment they require to undertake the task, for example, cots, beds, bedding, bedroom furniture, baby equipment.

The allowance, although left to the carers discretion as to how they are spent to meet the needs of the child should also cover the cost of replacing furniture because of general wear and tear.

### **Clothing**

Allowances cover the cost of clothing.

At the point of placement an additional allowance can be paid to enable the carer to purchase any clothing a child may require. This should be discussed with your Supervising Social Worker.

### **Travel Expenses**

Car mileage or the cost of public transport is paid for any meeting a carer must attend with or in respect of a child.

Travel costs to training are also covered.

### **Child Care**

There are occasion's carers looking after pre-school children are required to attend training or meetings where the children cannot accompany them. The carer is asked to discuss possible alternative care arrangement with their Supervising Social Worker.

## THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A FOSTER CARER

Phone/E-mail

Info Pack Sent Out

Home Visit/Initial interview

Attend Preparatory Groups

Assessment & Medicals

Panel

Decision/Outcome

Placement

## How to Complain

Complaints should be brought to the attention of staff directly involved, or their manager, to be dealt with as they arise (this is stage 1 of the complaints process).

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of this resolution, or if you do not wish to pursue this option, please contact us to submit a stage 2 complaint at:

**West Dunbartonshire Health & Social Care Partnership**  
**Hartfield Clinic, Latta Street, Dumbarton, G82 2DS**

**Telephone: 01389 776833**

**E-Mail: [wdhscp@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:wdhscp@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)**

Our **Complaints Leaflet** provides our service users with details of how to make a complaint and our complaints procedures.