

# FosterPortsmouth



make a  
difference to  
their life....  
...and yours

# make a difference to their life.... ...and yours

- 3 Why children need fostering
- 4 You can do it—who can be a foster carer?
- 6 Matching you with a child in need of care
- 9 Money matters
- 10 What you can expect from us
- 12 Already an experienced foster carer?
- 13 What happens next—the assessment process

**FosterPortsmouth**

[www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk](http://www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk)  
023 9283 4071



# Why children need fostering

Portsmouth children, from babies to teenagers, are fostered for a variety of reasons. They may have been abused or neglected or their families may be experiencing some difficult times caused by a variety of factors such as illness, addiction or domestic violence. In most cases fostering is a temporary solution for a child, while their family is supported to enable them to return home. A number of children who cannot return home are fostered for a longer period of time and a small number of children are placed for adoption with other families.

Whatever the reason children are fostered, difficult experiences mean that children are frightened, confused and anxious about living with another family. Therefore an important part of being a foster carer is being able to make a child feel welcome and safe in your home.

Being sensitive to the reasons why a child is living in foster care and how this might affect the child's emotions and behaviour is also important.

The national fostering charity, Fostering Network, estimate that there is a shortage of 10,000 foster carers across the UK to support children who need to live with a foster family.

In Portsmouth we urgently need your help to support vulnerable children and young people and give them the experience of a happy family life.

“

**The 18 year old that lives with us came to stay when he was 11 as a short-term placement, but we all clicked and got on really well.**

”



**Sally**, Portsmouth foster carer



# You can do it—who can be a foster carer?



What the foster children say

**If you want to be a foster carer you should have time to listen to us.**

Millie aged 9



The people that come forward to foster are as individual as the children that need their care.

Portsmouth foster carers come from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds and both couples and single people can enjoy the rewards and challenges that fostering brings. Whatever the age of the foster child you feel you could welcome into your home they will need their own bedroom, although brothers and sisters may be able to share a bedroom.

You must be at least 18 or over to foster and have a spare bedroom but it doesn't matter if you are:

- White, black or from an ethnic minority background
- Married, living with someone or single
- Heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bi-sexual
- Able bodied or living with a disability
- Working, unemployed or retired
- Living with or without children
- Renting or buying your home
- Male, female or transgender
- Religious or non-religious
- A parent or childless



What does matter is that you have the time and energy to invest in a child or young person, a genuine interest in the welfare and wellbeing of children, space in your home, enthusiasm and the motivation to make a positive difference to a young person's life.

Day to day foster care is much like the daily routine of most families - making sure everyone is fed, clothed, at school on time with homework completed, making sure dental check-ups and doctors' appointments are made, supporting with school and after school activities, supporting children with their interests, hobbies, clubs and making friends, spending leisure time together, listening and offering comfort when its needed, providing support, encouragement, reassurance, guidance and clear boundaries.

Fostering is different in that you will also need to help the child keep in touch with their birth family, attend meetings with social workers, other professionals and birth parents about the children in your care, and keep written records and manage information that is confidential and sensitive.

Because children who need fostering may have had traumatic experiences, they can display challenging behaviour as a way of coping. As a foster carer you will need to develop strategies to help the young person manage their feelings and experiences. You will need to be tolerant, understanding, open-minded, kind and caring and have the ability to maintain a sense of humour.

**FosterPortsmouth**

[www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk](http://www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk)

023 9283 4071

## Foster carers do an amazing job and you could do it too.



If you work outside the home you will need to consider:

- What happens at the end of the school day, during holidays and if the child is unwell and cannot attend school
- Is your work flexible to enable you to attend meetings and training
- If you are fostering as a couple can you provide 24/7 care between you
- What type of fostering and age of child or young person would best fit in with your personal circumstances and work life

You will bring to fostering the everyday life skills that you already have. Portsmouth City Council can offer you the extra skills you need to foster through training and support.

Although all types of people can become foster carers there may be certain circumstances that would prevent you from being accepted. This includes having a serious criminal conviction. If you or a member of your household has a criminal conviction or a police caution, talk it through with us and we can advise you about your personal circumstances.

“There are so many children who need looking after, I would really encourage people to look into it as it's such an amazing job.”



Emma, Portsmouth foster carer

# Matching you with a child in need of care



What the foster children say

**I am better at getting along with people now I'm with my foster carer. I used to be scared and angry.**

**Robert** aged 8



There are different types of fostering for you to choose from depending on your own preferences, experience and circumstances. Together we will help you to decide what suits you best.

## Short term carers

Short term fostering means looking after a child for anything from a few nights to a few weeks or months while difficulties at home are sorted out or longer term plans are made for the child. Where it is safe, children can be returned home after a period of being looked after. If they cannot return home social workers will be making plans for the child to move on to a permanent home, either with their extended family, long term foster carers or an adoptive family. This can be a very unsettling time and part of your role will be to support the child to move on.

Where brothers and sisters need foster care we try to keep them together in the same foster home. Portsmouth particularly needs foster carers who can look after larger sibling groups.

Some carers offer emergency short term placements to children who need care and support unexpectedly, for example an unaccompanied asylum seeker or a child being removed from an abusive situation.

## Long term carers

A permanent foster home is sometimes needed for children and young people who are unable to return to their birth family. These

**FosterPortsmouth**

[www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk](http://www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk)

023 9283 4071





are often older children who still have an important relationship with their birth family. The plan will be for the young person to live with their long term foster carer until they are able to live independently.

This type of care is a long term commitment and you need to be willing to stick with young people through the good and bad times until adulthood. You need to embrace them as another member of your family while respecting that they still have a relationship with their birth family. Long term foster carers often continue to support the young person after they reach 18 under Portsmouth's funded 'Staying Put' policy, to help the young people successfully make the transition into adulthood just as most families do for their own children.

A long term foster carer can be the inspiration to turn a young person's life around, bringing the carer a deep sense of achievement.

### Parent and child placements

There has been an increase in requests for carers who can provide care to babies and young children alongside one or both parents. These arrangements are usually short term, offering support and advice so that parents can care for their own child, and could also include parenting assessments and court proceedings. These placements are intensive and foster carers doing this work need good communication skills and the confidence to monitor and assess parenting potential.



What the foster  
children say

**Going into  
foster care  
was the best  
thing that  
ever happened  
to me**





## We can offer different types of fostering options to best suit your needs.

### Be a part time carer - Family Link, Respite Care and Supportive Lodgings

If you cannot commit to being a full time foster carer - we still need your help. As a respite or family link carer you can offer support to a vulnerable child whatever your own commitments. Whether you're free for a regular weekend each month, set days or school holidays, we can use your skills, experience and enthusiasm to help make a difference for children.

As a Supportive Lodgings carer you will be responsible for providing accommodation to a young person who needs some support to find their way in life.

**Respite carers** provide breaks for children who usually live in full time foster care or children who do not need full time foster care. This could be a regular holiday break, weekend or overnight commitment to one or more children, or a one off break to different children. Respite care involves providing breaks for children and young people to give their parents or other foster children a break.

**Family Link** carers are linked to families of children with complex needs, such as a disability or medical condition, to provide regular, planned care for a child. As every family is different, the commitment that is expected will vary. Family Link gives parents the chance to have a regular break from looking after their child,



What the foster children say

**I like going swimming and on holiday with my foster carers. We went to Spain and I jumped in the water.**

Leo aged 11



while giving the child opportunities to meet different people and do new things.

### Supportive Lodgings carers

The supportive lodgings scheme pays people to provide lodgings accommodation for young people aged 16 to 21.

We need people who can provide accommodation and a minimum of 10 hours support a week to young people taking their first steps into independence.

Many of these young people will have previously been placed in foster homes or residential homes or are homeless 16 and 17 year olds.

Could you be a young person's inspiration and mentor and help them get off on the right start to a successful independent life.

**FosterPortsmouth**

[www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk](http://www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk)

023 9283 4071



# Money matters

Every Portsmouth foster carer receives a generous allowance and paid annual leave for each child in their care. The amount depends on the age of the child and is paid weekly. The fostering allowance is to cover food, clothing, pocket money, a contribution towards travel, housing costs and other household expenses associated with day-to-day living. Foster carers also receive set allowances to cover "additional costs", such as additional travel, caring for a child over Christmas or another significant religious festival and the child's birthday. Foster carers can claim expenses when attending meetings or training. This allowance does not usually affect any benefits you receive or tax you pay.

In addition to fostering allowances, depending on your experience and skills, it is also possible for foster carers to benefit from a skill-fee. This will be discussed with you during your assessment to become a foster carer. Carers with the skills to care for more complex young people can receive competitive skill payments which can provide an alternative to working outside the home.

If you are considering giving up work or reducing your working hours to foster, please note that allowances and fees are only paid when children are in placement.

In most cases if your experience has been gained through looking after your own children, or the children of family and friends, you will receive a fostering allowance only, however you will have the

opportunity through gaining skills and experience to progress to a skill level which attracts a fee.

If you have professional child care experience, or are already an experienced foster carer, you would receive a skill fee with Foster Portsmouth for each child placed with you in addition to a fostering allowance.

Finance is only one element of the support package offered to foster carers who look after a child for Portsmouth City Council.

“

**I would say to people that are considering becoming a foster carer... go for it, enquire, look into it... we need you!**

”



**Dianne**, Portsmouth foster carer

# What you can expect from us

There are lots of benefits from fostering with Portsmouth City Council.

**FosterPortsmouth**

[www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk](http://www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk)

023 9283 4071



## The rewards are great

We give you lots of help along the way as we recognise that support is vital.


## Being part of the team

When a child is looked after, they are taken into the care of their local authority who are responsible for making sure that the child receives the care that is appropriate.

As part of the local authority Portsmouth Fostering Service works closely with the child's social worker to place the child with the best match foster family for the child's needs. Portsmouth foster carers are busy people whose services are used frequently, so there are few gaps between any placements unless the foster carer chooses to take a break. Portsmouth foster carers are respected as part of the local authority 'team around the child' and play a vital role in helping to plan for a child's future.

## Helping the child achieve

An important consideration in placing children is to try and keep them, where it is safe to do so, in a familiar environment. A child will be better able to cope with the stressful change of moving to live with a new family if they are able to continue their education in familiar surroundings, see their friends and family and keep doing their usual activities. This is much easier with a local placement in



**The personal satisfaction and recognition that you have made a difference to a child's life.**

the local area, and that's why Portsmouth City Council needs more foster carers in Portsmouth and surrounding areas.

### Support

At Portsmouth we recognise that support is vital to help you really help a child. Foster carers have access to a range of support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. As a Portsmouth foster carer you can expect:

- Your own support social worker to offer you support, advice and encouragement
- Regular one to one visits from your support social worker
- A comprehensive package of training
- An out of hours support service at weekends, evenings and bank holidays
- PCC foster carers receive an introductory payment for introducing a friend to fostering for PCC when they are approved and care for their first child
- Support from other professionals specialising in health and education including child and adolescent mental health
- Respite care to support placements
- Regular support groups providing opportunities to meet other carers including a male carers support group. Many carers form firm friendships through fostering
- Support from the foster carers liaison group (a group of carers and managers whose aim is to advocate on behalf of carers)
- Equipment needed to care for children joining your family such as a buggy or a cot
- Generous fostering allowances and skill-fee
- Access to Portsmouth City Council staff benefits (e.g. discounts)
- Free Portsmouth Leisure Card entitling you to discount at great attractions and sports facilities
- Opportunities to get involved in the development of the service such as recruitment events

“

What the foster children say

**It gave me another shot at my life which I am so grateful for and I can now see a successful future. Please give another young person the same chance that I have had.**

**Wayne** aged 19

”



# Already an experienced foster carer?

## Transfer to Foster Portsmouth!

If you are thinking of transferring to Foster Portsmouth get in touch and we will arrange an informal chat with you. Together we will go through what is involved and discuss if transferring to Portsmouth City Council is a good option for you.

We understand that changing foster agencies is a big decision, which is why we make the process as streamlined and hassle-free as possible. Throughout the transfer process, we will work closely with you, your existing agency and the local authority for any children placed with you to make sure everyone understands what will happen, ensuring that any children or young people placed with you are not affected.

To ensure that all transfers are fair and safe we follow the Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol 2014 set up by The Fostering Network.



©John Birdsall. Posed by models

“

**Transferring to Portsmouth City Council was the best decision we have made. The quality of support is so much better, and the matching process is all about ensuring the placement succeeds.**

”

### Why choose Foster Portsmouth

- Regular placement opportunities
- Children matched that best suit your skills and experience
- Competitive allowances and fees
- Extensive support network
- Excellent training opportunities
- Be part of the local authority team working together to ensure that goals and aspirations for all Portsmouth looked after children are achieved

**FosterPortsmouth**

[www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk](http://www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk)

023 9283 4071

# What happens next—the assessment process

If you apply to be a foster carer with Foster Portsmouth we will take you through an assessment process, to make sure fostering is right for you and your family and to assess what you are able to offer a looked after child. The assessment process, from the initial home visit to being approved as a foster carer, should take no longer than five months.

## Step 1: If you would like to know more

When you call 023 9283 4071 you will reach a friendly team. If you are looking for more information, want to chat over your personal circumstances or are ready to apply to foster we will be happy to help you.

At this stage we will ask a bit about you - why you want to foster and how you feel a foster child will fit into your life. To establish if fostering would fit into your life we will ask questions about your home, your family, if you work what job you do and your experience of children and young people.

We will aim to answer any questions you have to help you decide if you want to go onto the next stage.

## Step 2: Meeting you at home

If you have decided to go ahead to the next stage a member of the fostering recruitment team will visit you at home at a time that is convenient to you. A home visit will last about an hour and

a half to two hours and will include a look around your home, and garden if you have one.

The home visit is about getting to know more about you and your family, and assessing if you and your home are able to provide a safe and caring environment for a foster child. It is also an opportunity for you to get to know more about fostering and Foster Portsmouth, and what we can offer you should you decide to become a foster carer with us.

Everyone in the household is involved in the decision to foster and in undertaking the fostering task, so it is important to involve your children and wider family at an early stage when considering if fostering is right for you. The home visit is a good place to talk about how fostering might affect your own children and to answer any questions your children may also have.

The home visit will aim to answer any questions and explore any concerns you have such as health issues, previous contact with social services or the police. If you, or someone you live with, has a criminal conviction or caution it will not necessarily stop you from fostering. This is mainly dependent on what the conviction was for and how long ago it was.

Together we will decide whether or not to continue with your enquiry to the next stage of the assessment process. We will make sure that both you, and we, are happy to proceed.



What the children of  
foster carers say

**I like fostering because it's fun and there is always someone to play with. I like to help look after everyone.**

**Kira** aged 12, birth child of a foster carer





What the foster children say

**I just love living here. If you're thinking of being a foster carer, just do it and someone will love living with you.**

**Georgia** aged 15



**As a foster carer you will receive plenty of help and support.**

### Step 3: Finding out more about you - the assessment

Once you have made your decision to apply to become a foster carer you will be asked to complete a formal application form and your assessment will start.

Everyone who wants to become a foster carer has to go through a thorough assessment.

The assessment to become a foster carer is a two stage process. Stage 1 includes the collection of information from checks and references and your attendance at a preparation to foster training course. Stage 2 includes the writing of an assessment report evidencing your suitability to foster. The assessment report is undertaken as a series of home visits by a fostering social worker.

If at any stage you or your family decide fostering is not for you or them you can withdraw your application and we will stop your assessment.

#### In stage 1

At this stage checks and references will be taken up, including a Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS) for everyone over 18 years living in your household, and at least two personal referees will be interviewed. You will also be asked to have a (free) medical examination undertaken by your GP, to make sure there are no

health reasons why you should not foster. These checks and references are necessary to make sure all foster carers are safe and suitable to care for vulnerable children.

We will talk to you about the checks and references we need to undertake when we visit you and as part of the assessment, so you will have plenty of opportunities to talk to us about any questions or concerns you may have.

#### The skills to foster

During stage 1 we will invite you to attend a preparation to foster course 'The Skills to Foster'. This is run over three days by members of the fostering team and experienced foster carers. It is a great opportunity for you to meet other people who want to become foster carers and to learn much more about fostering. The training is informal, easy to follow and helps you prepare practically for a foster child arriving to live with you and your family.

#### In stage 2

You will be allocated a fostering social worker who will get to know you and your family through a series of regular home visits. Your social worker will want to understand more about your life experiences, attitudes, your family, your support network and your skills and abilities in looking after children, in order to assess what you can offer a child in need of a foster home.

**FosterPortsmouth**

[www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk](http://www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk)

023 9283 4071





What the foster children say

**My foster carers look after me. I eat a lot of vegetables because at home I didn't. I eat healthy and look after my teeth.**

**Robert** aged 8



As your social worker talks to you about the ages and number of children you feel best able to look after, they will talk to you about issues that may impact on this decision like your own health, if you are a smoking household, the needs of your own children, any work commitments you have and the available space in your home.

The assessing social worker will talk to you about the needs of looked after children and the support needs different ages have, such as encouraging and actively participating in school work or preparing young people for living independently. Your worker will talk to you about how, as foster carers, you can make a positive difference to a child in important areas of their development and help them make progress to reach their full potential.

When the social worker visits they will want to speak to everyone in the home including your children and make sure that everyone wants to foster and has no concerns or worries.

When everything has been discussed with you and all the information gathered, your social worker will write a detailed report which will make a recommendation about your suitability to foster and the age and number of children you could look after. You will be asked to read and comment on the report.

If you have already been a foster carer or have professional skills and experience in caring for other people's children, we will aim to

fast track your assessment by completing stage 1 and stage 2 at the same time.

#### Step 4: Meet with the Fostering Panel

The report is taken to Portsmouth Fostering Panel who will make the final recommendation on whether you are approved to foster. The Panel consists of a cross section of people including professionals and lay people who have an understanding and interest in fostering. You will be asked to attend the fostering panel along with your social worker.

The Fostering Panel will make a recommendation to Portsmouth's Agency Decision Maker, who will make the final decision about your approval and the age and number of children you can look after. If your application is not successful you will be told the reasons for this by your social worker and given the opportunity to appeal against this decision.

#### Step 5: Congratulations you're a foster carer

Once you are approved your assessing social worker will introduce you to your support social worker. Together we will start matching you to children needing a foster family. This is often an exciting but anxious time for new carers, but don't worry you'll receive plenty of help and support.

**Call for a chat today on 023 9283 4071.**



make a  
difference to  
their life....  
...and yours

## Interested?

For more information on becoming a foster carer visit [www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk](http://www.fosterportsmouth.co.uk)  
Email [fostering@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@portsmouthcc.gov.uk) or call for a chat on **023 9283 4071**

