



Information Pack



*Our foster parents are the unsung
heros - they are incredible!*



www.hopefs.co.uk



info@hopefs.co.uk





Dear Prospective Foster Parents,

Welcome to Hope Fostering Services!

If you are reading our information booklet then you are likely considering a career in fostering. I have worked at Hope for over 6 years and I am so proud of our core values and our wonderful community of foster families and staff.

We are a small, supportive and diverse fostering agency based in Nottingham. Our Supervising Social Workers have small case loads and we have a dedicated team of family support workers. We promote therapeutic parenting and our foster parents have access to a psychologist. We offer personalised support, 24/7, alongside matching larger agencies with pay and participation opportunities. Many foster families choose to transfer to us for this reason. We host a range of social events over the year which are very popular.

There is a huge need for foster families in the UK right now. Thank you for considering Hope Fostering Services and we look forward to hearing from you.



Karen Daley

Registered Manager for Hope
Fostering Services

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Why work with us?

Hope Fostering Services is a supportive and independent agency based in Nottingham.

Working with an independent agency can offer you many benefits. Independent foster care agencies are contracted by Local Authorities to home foster children.

Hope Fostering is part of the D2N2 framework agreement and the White Rose agreement. This means that we provide homes for young people from all Local Authorities in the East Midlands.

At Hope Fostering, we are experts in the field of fostering and therefore have the skills and time to look after our foster parents exclusively.

When you foster with Hope, you become part of a professional team which means you receive a high level of care, support, guidance, training and advice. This includes an experienced Supervising Social Worker team that is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Our SSWs have low case loads and because our agency is small, all support is personalised. We have a dedicated team of family support workers who work with some of our young people individually alongside organising some fantastic social events throughout the year.

We are a diverse and inclusive agency. We are delighted to be members of New Family Social, Coram Baaf and FosterTalk.

As a foster parent, you will work closely with many different professionals and with the young person's birth family. It is important that you can work in partnership with a number of people to meet the needs of the child.

The foster care relationship is unique because it gives you flexibility and room to develop your own skills. It is a way of life and a rewarding, enjoyable and challenging career.



Everyone knows each other - its like a big, supportive family.

Could you be a foster parent?

Foster families provide a stable family life for children and young people, from birth to age 18, who are unable to live with their parents or other relatives. This can be down to many reasons, including:

- Abuse and neglect
- Family dysfunction
- Family in acute stress
- Child's disability
- Challenging behaviour

Each child and young person has individual needs and a different history of experiences that may not be known at the time of matching. The length of supporting a young person may vary, from just a few days up to longer periods of time, until the young person reaches 18 years of age.

All children and young people have the right to live in a family where they are valued and can develop as individuals. They need a family environment that provides the stability they need during very difficult times, for as long as it takes to make clear plans for their future.

Many of our children and young people have experienced either neglect, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or a combination of these factors. Their family life may have been chaotic, with little routine or consistency in the care they received. This may have affected their overall well-being, self-esteem, ability to form and maintain relationships, and in some cases, their academic performance.

Children and adolescents whose families are dysfunctional may have behavioural or emotional difficulties. Some children may also have learning needs, special health needs, or developmental delays. Many of our foster families care for sanctuary seeking children and young people who have moved to the UK from overseas.

In many cases, the children's parents have difficulties of their own and may disagree with decisions made by Local Authorities regarding the placement of their children in foster care. We work with local agencies, social workers, foster parents and family members, when possible, within established care plans, to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

While children are in foster care, they are often able to spend regular time with their birth families; some have siblings, and when possible, the Local Authority tries to place children together.



I know that when I pick up the phone and I talk to anybody, they're going to know me, know my children, know my situation and able to guide me, without having to me having to go through absolutely everything.

Could you be a foster parent?

Hope Fostering Services welcomes inquiries and applications from people of all backgrounds - regardless of age, ethnicity, creed or religion, disability, marital status or sexuality. When we meet potential foster parents, we look for enthusiasm, love and the understanding that fostering is a lifestyle - a lifestyle that you are keen to embrace.

You must meet the following criteria:

-  **Be over 21 years old**
-  **Have a spare bedroom**
-  **Be available during the day**
-  **Can drive and have access to a car**
-  **Understand that fostering is a lifestyle**



Other things to consider:

Pets: Some children may have allergies to animals, but most respond to animals that are child-friendly and used to being "part of the family."

Smoking: Hope Fostering is committed to providing a smoke-free environment for children and encouraging this. Our policy is not to place any child under the age of 5 in households where smoking occurs and to discourage smoking around children or young people, regardless of age. This also applies to the use of e-cigarettes.

Approval: Have you already been approved by another fostering agency?

Foster carers can only be approved to foster for **one** Fostering Agency at any time. If you are already a foster carer and looking to change agency, transferring is a relatively easy process and if you have a child in placement this can continue without disruption.

How can I become a foster parent?

It is important that a child is placed in a foster home that best meets his or her needs, and it is critical to match the child with the best available foster family. To accomplish this, we need to know your background and experience.

As a result, the foster care application process is extensive and takes an average of 5-7 months.

Applying to be a foster carer is an extensive process during which you will be asked to provide a lot of information about yourself, your family, and all aspects of your family life. This includes filling out forms, attending training, weekly home visits and undertaking references and relevant checks. You may also have many questions, which we will answer as honestly and openly as possible.

It is important that Hope ensures you can meet the requirements to be a foster parent and that you are confident that being a foster family is the right decision for your household.

This is a time-consuming process and you need to be sure you are able to commit to the assessment process before making an application.

1. Initial Enquiry



You will speak to a specialist advisor who will answer any specific questions you might have. More information will be sent to you following this call.

2. Initial Visit



If you decide to proceed further, one of our Social Workers will visit you at your home. This will give you an opportunity to learn more about fostering and discuss whether it is right for you and your family.

3. Home Study Assessment



A social worker will visit you to compile a report about your background, experiences and what skills you will bring to fostering. This happens over a number of weeks and is very detailed. You will also attend training sessions.

4. Panel



The Social Worker's report will be presented to the Fostering Panel. They will make a recommendation as to whether you are suitable to be approved as a foster parent

5. Agency Decision



The agency will make a decision based on the fostering panel's recommendations.

6. Approval



When you are approved, you will be able to look after children immediately. You will be required to attend regular training sessions which will help you to meet the Fostering 'Training, Support and Development Standards' (TSDs).

Support



Personalised support



We have a Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and manager available for support - 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Knowing all our families ensures all guidance is personalised.



Personalised training



We provide a wide range of free training, designed to enhance your skills and experience. The training days are arranged around the school day and refreshments and lunch are provided. We also provide specialist support and training from our Dr Zoe Webb who provides monthly consultations with the carers that are specific to their young person's needs



Allocated SSW



A dedicated social worker will work with you and your family on a one to one basis to ensure you receive the best support possible. They will visit and meet with you regularly and work closely with the Local Authority social worker and other professionals.



Foster Talk Membership



All our approved foster parents automatically receive full membership to Foster Talk. This gives you access to comprehensive independent support and advice. You will also be able to access fosterline, a free confidential helpline.



Support groups



We hold regular support groups for you to meet with other foster parents and share experiences. These meetings also enable us to keep you informed about the developments within the agency and for you to share ideas with us. We offer a buddy service that links newly approved foster parents with experienced ones.



Family support



We have a team of experienced family support workers and a social work assistant. They complete direct work with children, host 'birth and foster child' groups and arrange social family events through the year. We also offer access to our child psychologist for 1:1 consultations or group sessions.



Financial rewards



We offer a highly competitive salary (in line with much larger agencies) and a £2000 referral bonus. Foster parents are eligible for tax relief and blue light discount.

Types of fostering

Sibling Groups

This allows brothers and sisters to continue living together in the same household. This helps young people to feel safe and less vulnerable in a new home.

Parent & Baby

Offering a home for a young child or baby, along with their parent. This will be a short term home to assess the young person's parenting skills.

Unaccompanied young people

A young person who has been separated from their family and family and travelled alone to the UK from another country.

Emergency

Providing a home for young people with no planning or preparation time. You may receive very short notice and limited information so flexibility is required.

Long term

Young people live with their foster family on a permanent plan. This will be until they are a minimum of 18 years old.

Short term

This may be weeks, months or a couple of years. Often children are still in contact with family. Support care is for a few days or weeks to give birth or foster parents a break.



Patience is a huge factor. You need to be compassionate and you need to be loving.

Training

Skills to Foster (Pre-approval preparation)

All applicants are expected to attend the 'Skills to Foster' training course as part of the assessment. This is a three-day course designed to provide as much information about foster care as possible. This will assist you in your decision to become a foster carer. It is also an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have and for us to learn a little more about you.

We hold the course usually on weekdays at our office based in Nottinghamshire.

It is a chance to meet other people applying and existing Hope foster parents to share experiences of fostering.

The training will also cover:

- Child protection /safeguarding issues
- Managing challenging behaviour
- Safe caring
- Health and safety
- Working in partnership
- Expectations of Hope Foster Parents
- Support we provide.



The agency is really small and actually, we're not owned by a larger organisation. So we tailor the services to the needs of the foster carers and the children that we're currently looking at.

Ongoing Training (Post-approval training)

Training is a mandatory requirement for all foster parents.

All our training events are free and are held at our offices during school hours. We also ensure our wide-ranging training programme reflects the developmental needs of foster carers and is focussed and relevant.

All foster parents are required to complete 'Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers' within 12 months of approval. This is a National Programme designed to demonstrate the basic information and skills necessary to work as a foster carer. Foster parents must continue to evidence that they are meeting the TSD's each year.

Our Core Training Programme consists of a range of training courses designed to cover all aspects of the fostering role and the tasks involved. Together, with your Supervising Social Worker, relevant courses are identified and all parents will have a unique Personal Development Plan which highlights individual training and development needs.

Hope also offers a number of specialised training courses which address more specific and complex areas. These are designed to meet foster parent's specific needs and will also be discussed as part of your Personal Development Plan.

The Process

01

Start by making an enquiry on our website or by telephoning the office. This will help you find out more about becoming a foster carer.

02

If your enquiry is positive; our Recruitment and Family Finding Officer will contact you to arrange a suitable time to visit you at your home. This is another opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have, and for us to talk with you about becoming a foster carer.

03

The initial home visit helps us gather further background information about you and your family. We also check you have appropriate space and meet the other necessary requirements.

06

Stage Two - At this stage, your Form F Assessor will visit you and your family to talk about your life experiences and gain a picture of your family life, skills and knowledge. This assesses your ability to foster. The information gathered is presented in a Form F report; which highlights your skills and experiences to ensure we can match you to the right child or young person. This stage is expected to take up to 3 months to complete.

05

Stage One - Once we have received your completed application; you will enter stage one of your assessment. This stage lasts approximately 1 - 2 months and is where we make all the necessary checks and complete your references. We will also introduce you to your Form F assessor who will guide you through the entire process. You will be expected to attend the Skills to Foster preparation training course, along with other people who are being assessed by Hope.

04

If you meet the criteria and you feel that fostering is right for you; we will send you an application form to complete. You will need to; Provide references - both personal and employment. Undertake a medical check with your GP (paid for by us). Consent to other checks with Local Authorities, schools & other agencies. Enhanced DBS checks will also be completed

07

Following completion of your training and fostering assessment, the Form F report will be submitted to our Independent Panel for approval recommendations to be made to the Agency Decision Maker; in terms of suitability and the numbers and ages of children that can be placed with you. You will be asked to attend the Panel with the social worker who has completed your assessment.

08

The Panel recommendation is then considered by the Agency Decision Maker to confirm the details and decision made in relation to your approval as a foster carer. You will be informed of both the recommendation and the final decision once made; which will be confirmed in writing.

09

Once approved you will then be a registered foster parent with Hope Fostering. You will meet your Supervising Social Worker, who will help and support you and work hard to match you with a child / young person whose needs match your skills and abilities.

Bedrooms

Hope Fostering Services must ensure that foster homes can comfortably accommodate all who live there, including appropriate sleeping arrangements for the child or young person.

To do this, we would require the following:

- Fostered children and young people over the age of 3 years should have their own bedroom. This should be decorated appropriately and provide adequate privacy and space for each child alongside space to keep their belongings.
- It is expected that every child aged between 0-12 months (or sometimes older), should sleep in the foster parent's bedroom in a crib next to the foster parent's bed. At no point should a baby of 0-12 months, or older, sleep in the foster parent's bed. Bedroom provision should be anticipated in advance of when the child is ready to move into a bedroom of their own. These arrangements will need to be agreed with the Local Authority for that child.
- Unrelated children cannot share a bedroom unless agreed by Hope Fostering Services and the Local Authority.
- Siblings, of the same gender, or close relatives, may be able to share a bedroom together. This is subject to risk assessments and must be agreed with the placing Local Authority.
- Bunk beds need special consideration, as they do not always allow for privacy for the child. These need to be risk assessed and agreed by the Local Authority.



I just thought I could do this for many children that need a home - a loving, caring home.

Allowance

You will receive a carer payment from Hope Fostering Services to cover living costs, children's allowances and also a reward element in recognition of the important contribution of foster parents.

Hope considers that a foster parent is undertaking a career in working with children and therefore should be rewarded accordingly.

Hope's carer payments and fees are at a competitive rate to reflect this. The amount of payment you will receive depends on the type of placement and other factors such as the age of the child and other possible challenges with their behaviour.

The weekly cost can be up to £970 for a sibling group of two.

This payment reflects living costs and allowances for young people including:

- Food
- Travel costs
- Household bills
- Clothing
- Activities
- Pocket Money/Savings



When I arrived, I was given a phone, bus pass and was enrolled in the local college. We used google translate to communicate to begin with.

Benefits and Tax Credits

Ref: FosterTalk Nov 2024

Income/Profits

Foster parents are classed as self-employed which means you must register as self-employed with HMRC and file tax returns.

Foster Parents are also entitled to qualifying care relief which means you will earn £12,570 (per household) from fostering before you have to pay tax. You also get tax relief for every week you foster a child.

HMRC has special rules for foster carers to simplify the calculation of their profit, by comparing a 'Qualifying Amount' to their total fostering income.

Total fostering income is the total income received by the carer from their fostering agency, which includes reimbursable expenses, holiday money, birthday money and allowances.

The Qualifying Amount is the total of the following elements:

- The first element is an annual fixed rate of £12,570, which has to be apportioned if you were approved part way through the tax year.
- The second element is a weekly rate of:
 - £375 per week per placement under the age of 11
 - £450 per week per placement over the age of 11

If your total fostering income is less than your 'Qualifying Amount' then your profit is deemed as £NIL. If your total fostering income exceeds the qualifying amount, the excess is your taxable profit from fostering.

Benefits

State benefits can provide vital support for fostering families. Benefits for Foster Carers can include Income Support or Working Tax credit (legacy benefits) or Universal Credit. All new benefit claimants will be offered Universal credit which is a means-tested benefit paid to low-income households to support their income.

You may also be able to claim:

- Disability benefits for your foster child if they meet the criteria
- Carers Allowance (if your foster child gets disability living allowance or personal independence payment)
- Council Tax relief

National Insurance Contributions (NIC)

It's important for Foster Carers to pay National Insurance contributions. These contributions allow you to receive state benefits and a state pension at retirement age.

There are different classes of National Insurance:

Class 1 – paid if you are an employee (deducted from your pay on your payslip.)

Class 2 – paid by the self-employed and collected via the self-assessment system.

Class 3 – voluntary contributions paid to make up gaps in your contribution record – these are more expensive than Class 2 contributions (2020/21 Class 2 per week £3.05. Class 3 per week £15.30 per week.)

Class 4 – paid by self-employed people with high profits (over £9,500 in 2020/21)

You can seek further tax advice from HMRC as: <https://www.gov.uk/support-for-foster-parents/tax-arrangements>

Find out more

Are you considering a career as a foster parent? Here is how you can find out more:



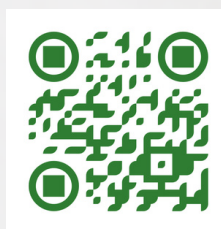
Got a question about fostering?

Speak to our specialist advisors by calling **0115 900 2795** or email us at **info@hopefs.co.uk**



Want to learn more about Hope FS?

Visit our website, **www.hopefs.co.uk**, which is full of information, blog posts and media all about fostering and working with Hope.



Follow us on Social Media:

We are proud of our supportive community of foster families. Join us on:



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