

Fostering

See children
blossom before
your eyes...

...when you foster



Thank for your interest in fostering for Tower Hamlets. This booklet is designed to give you some information to help you decide whether you would like to continue with an application. After reading the booklet, you may have more questions to ask; we are always happy to talk to you to help you make the right decision for you and your family. You can call us on the number below.

0800 279 9850

www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk



What is a foster carer?

Foster carers offer a home to someone else's child where the birth family is unable to provide the care they need. Both the child's parents and the local authority will be involved in making decisions about his/her life. Foster carers also need to facilitate contact with the birth family and attend meetings to discuss the child's welfare and future plans. As a foster carer, you may help to return a child to their birth family or to move him/her to adopters or long term foster carers.

Why do children need fostering?

Children need to be fostered for many different reasons. For example, their parents may be ill, in prison, suffering from drug or alcohol addiction or having relationship problems. Some children will have been neglected or abused. A large number of children return to live with their families; foster carers provide a secure family environment while we work with their parents to help them resolve their problems. Where this is not possible, the local authority will need to find permanent carers outside of the child's birth family.



What type of person fosters?

Like the children they look after, foster carers come from a range of backgrounds. However, what they do have in common is that they care about children and want to help them through a difficult time in their lives.

We need carers from most ethnic backgrounds to look after a wide age-range of children including babies and teenagers, sibling groups (brothers and sisters whom we don't want to separate) and children with disabilities.



I'm single / I'm cohabiting. Can I foster?

Yes, you don't need to be in a relationship, married or have children of your own.

I'm gay. I'm lesbian. Can I foster?

Yes. We welcome applications from gay and lesbian people.

I'm unemployed. Can I foster?

Yes. In fact, fostering can be a time-consuming occupation and not working can be an advantage. Being a foster carer can also help you develop new skills, which you can use in the future.

I'm well over 40! Can I foster?

Yes. You need to be over 21 to foster, but there is no upper age limit. Mature people have life experience that is extremely valuable in caring for children.

I don't own my own home. Can I foster?

Yes, but whether you own or rent your home, you need to be in a secure housing

situation and have sufficient space to accommodate a child. Ideally you will have a spare bedroom (this is essential for over 12s), although babies can sleep in a cot in the carer's bedroom.

I live outside the borough. Can I foster for Tower Hamlets?

Yes. However, you will need to live within about 40 minutes travelling distance of Tower Hamlets and be prepared to bring children into the borough for school and contact. You will also need to attend meetings and training.

What qualities do I need to be a foster carer?

You need to be calm, warm and welcoming and able to take problems in your stride. You need to have patience and the time to listen and understand things from a child's point of view. In addition, you should be willing to attend regular training to increase your skills and knowledge.

Is there anything that might prevent me becoming a foster carer?

You can't be a foster carer if you have a criminal record for serious sexual offences or offences against children. There is no automatic bar with regard to other offences and we would consider whether it would affect the care you are able to give to children. Generally, more minor offences in the past would not prevent your approval. What is important is that you tell us if you have a criminal record, so that we can discuss it with you.

What are the rewards?

Fostering is hard work, but making a difference to a child's life and seeing their confidence and self-esteem grow can be very rewarding. As a foster carer, you are a valued member of the team working with the child and family. You will develop your skills and knowledge about working with children who have experienced difficulties in their lives and can work towards NVQ Level 3.



What is fostering really like?

Fostering is different from parenting your own children. You will be working as part of a team, including parents and social workers, to care for children.

You will be faced with situations which are unfamiliar or challenging, such as saying goodbye to a child going back to their own family or moving onto adoption. Some children may express their feelings about what has happened to them through challenging behaviour and we will work together to find ways to manage this.

Fostering cannot be done in isolation. It affects your family and friends. If you have a partner you must both be equally committed. You will need to think carefully about how it might affect your own children, who will have to share your time, their home and their possessions.

What help will I get?

You won't be left to cope on your own. We will visit you regularly and match you with a mentor when you are first approved. The mentor will be an experienced foster carer who will be available to give you support

and advice. We run training courses on a wide range of subjects, such as dealing with children's behaviour, child development and how to support children with their health and education. There are monthly support groups and foster carers have their own association which offers peer support to all carers.

What about financial help?

You will receive an allowance for each child you look after. You can ask for details of these.

What are the different types of foster care?

Short term fostering

We often require short term placements in emergency situations in order to make sure that a child, who may be at risk of harm, is in a safe place. Short term placements may last a few days, but can continue for up to about two years. During this time, we will be working to return the child to his/her birth family and if this is not possible, to identify a suitable permanent substitute family.

Long term fostering

Where a child is unable to return to their birth family, we will seek another family to care for him/her. Adoption is usually the best option for children in order to provide them with a sense of belonging and a secure environment in which to grow up. However, for some older children long term fostering is preferred, as they can maintain some contact with their birth family.

Teenage fostering

Our teenage scheme is for young people over the age of 13. Once approved, teenage foster carers attend a course consisting of 12 weekly sessions about managing challenging behaviour. After successful completion of this, they are entitled to receive an enhanced fostering allowance. Please see the Teenage Fostering leaflet for further information.

Remand fostering

Remand foster carers provide short-term care for young people between the ages of ten and seventeen whilst their case is heard in the Youth Court. Please see the Remand Fostering leaflet for further information.

Short breaks for children with disabilities

Short breaks relieve some of the pressure on families who are caring for children with disabilities. Carers are linked with a family and provide care on a regular basis depending on the needs of the family, for instance weekly, monthly or during school holidays. This form of foster care can suit people who are not in a position to offer full-time care, but want to make a regular commitment to a child or children.

How to become a foster carer for Tower Hamlets

Having read the information in this booklet, you may decide you want to find out more and take the process to the next stage. Please contact us on 0800 279 9850 and we can talk about whether to arrange a visit to your home for a more in-depth discussion.



Initial home visit

During the home visit, we will be able to tell you more about fostering and answer your questions. We will ask you about your background, skills and experience and your reasons for wanting to become a foster carer. The social worker will also need to look at your accommodation to ensure that it is suitable for fostering. After this visit, we'll decide together whether you are in a position to go ahead with a fostering application.

Assessment and preparation training

If you are continuing with your application, we will ask you to complete an application form, which will give us permission to start taking up your checks and references. A social worker will be allocated to start your assessment and you will be invited to attend the preparation training. The course will give you a chance to learn more about fostering with other people, who are also hoping to become foster carers.

In order to complete the assessment report, the social worker will visit you and your family over a number of months. The assessment helps you to think about how fostering will affect you and your family; it

also allows us to assess your suitability to be a carer. We will do this by seeking evidence of your skills and knowledge around areas such as childcare, working as part of a team and your ability to keep information confidential.

One of the ways that we evidence your suitability is by taking up references from personal referees, family members, children's services and the schools your children attend. We also carry out checks with the police and you are required to have a medical examination by your GP.

We have to do all these things to ensure that any child in your care is safe.

The Fostering Panel

If we are recommending your approval, the social worker will present their report (which you will have read and signed) to the Fostering Panel. The Panel is made up of people who have expertise in this field and they will make a recommendation about your approval, which will be confirmed by the Head of Children's Social Care. the leaflet Attending the Fostering Panel for further information.

I'm approved as a foster carer. What now?

You will be allocated a supervising social worker (SSW) who will provide you with support and will also be responsible for ensuring you offer a good standard of care to foster children. Initially the SSW will ensure that you have the necessary furniture and equipment and a copy of the Foster Carers' Handbook. We will also link you with a mentor, who is an experienced foster carer who you can contact for support and advice and give you information about our training programme and support groups.

If we need a placement for a child, we will contact you by telephone to give you information about the placement and will ask you if you feel able to meet the child's particular needs. If it is a short term placement, the child may be placed quite soon afterwards. Throughout the process you will receive ongoing support from your SSW and the child's social worker.

What if I am not happy with the process?

The team manager of the Recruitment and Assessment Team can be contacted on 0800 279 9850 and will attempt to resolve whatever issues you have. If you are still unhappy, you can make a complaint through the Complaints Procedure.

What happens now?

If you want to be considered as a foster carer or if you have any questions, you can contact us on 0800 279 9850 or email us on fostering@towerhamlets.gov.uk.



Useful Contacts

Here are some contacts that may be useful to you, either whilst thinking about fostering, or after having fostered a child.

British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering (BAAF)

Skyline House, 200 Union Street,
London SE1 0LX
Tel: 020 7593 2000

BAAF is the leading national organisation, which promotes high standards of practice in adoption and fostering and social work with children and families. BAAF, as well as being a publisher and supplier of books on fostering, also publish Be My Parent, a newsletter featuring children currently in need of fostering and articles of interest to anyone involved in fostering.

The Fostering Network

87 Blackfriars Road,
London SE1 8HA
Tel: 020 7620 6400
Email: info@fostering.net

Ofsted

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA
Tel: 08456 404045
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
Tower Hamlets is regulated and inspected by Ofsted.





TOWER HAMLETS

Interested?

For more information or an informal chat,
call us on 0800 279 9850.

fostering@towerhamlets.gov.uk
www.fosteringandadoption.co.uk

