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St Helens Borough Council
Specialist Foster Carer Scheme

Specialist Foster Care Information Pack



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Are you looking for a career change? Are you approaching the end of your career but are not completely ready for retirement? Do you want to combine working from home but utilise your skills and experience, working with children and young people? Then Specialist Foster Care could be for you!

What is Specialist Foster Care:

Foster4 St Helens Borough Council's Specialist Fostering Scheme has been developed for children with complex needs, who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, trauma and require their carers to have existing experience and skill base, to be able to meet their needs and commit to their care.

For these children, we need people who can provide stable and supportive homes, who can build positive relationships that help grow trust, help a child feel understood, heard, and help them to begin to make sense of their past experiences.

Our Specialist Foster Carers have experience of working with children or teenagers and understand how past trauma can manifest itself in behaviours that others might find difficult. Our Specialist Foster Carers contribute to the team around the child, working in partnership with other professionals and have 24/7 support from professionals and specialists.

Please note this role requires children to live with you in your own home.

Necessary requirements of applicants are –

- A spare bedroom
- UK citizenship or Indefinite Leave to Remain
- Be age 21 or over
- Have experience of working with children in a professional capacity
- One carer must be available for the child full time and have no other work commitments

Purpose:

Children who require Specialist Foster Carer's are:

- children in residential care
- children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum
- parent and child placements
- children with significant complex needs.

Specialist Foster Carers can provide full time or respite care.

Full time Specialist Foster Carers are required to provide both short and long term foster care, depending on the needs of the child.



Who are we looking for?

Specialist Foster Carers must:

- Be caring, child-centred and can act as a champion for the child or young person
- Have 'stickability' – provide unconditional care and commitment through periods of instability
- Be flexible and available for the child and will work with a range of professionals and attend any appointments or interventions required to meet the child's needs
- Feel excited about working therapeutically, learning new approaches and being able to make a difference to a child's life
- Be competent in recording and sharing information and significant events
- Demonstrate an understanding of differences in race, culture, language, and religion



- Work within policies, procedures and have an awareness of legal requirements and fostering regulations
- Be professional and have a positive attitude towards working with a child's birth family
- Have good interpersonal skills and be involved in a mutual support network with other foster carers, as appropriate
- Be experienced in caring for children and young people with attachment and pain-based behaviour
- Be able to self-reflect on interventions and strategies, be open to constructive feedback and to alternative ways of working
- Have confidence and openness to adapt your parenting approach to support the individual child's emotional and developmental needs, including adapting a strengths-based approach and positive parenting strategies
- Be committed to your personal development as a foster carer and undertake training in line with the programme requirements and to support your understanding of the needs of the child in your care



Personal Characteristics:

Caring

Confident

Resilient

Committed

Robust

Experienced

Active

Child Centred

Flexible

Patient

Persistent

Positive

Empathetic

Fun



What are the expectations of a Specialist Foster Carer

- The foster carer will be an integral part of the multi-agency team and will engage in regular meetings for the child and to review the plan.
- They will be committed to the child's individualised care plan.
- They will monitor the child's behaviour and progress and commit to provide regular updates with some expectations to contribute to court assessments.
- The carer will support the child to attend therapy and any skills coach sessions identified.
- The carer will work with the child's social worker and the team to support a child who may be excluded from school.
- They will assist in the training and support of new carers.
- For couples, a commitment from both carers to attend training to develop skills and knowledge and maintain consistency is expected.

Allowance

Specialist Foster Carers receive up to £1,000 per week

Specialist foster carers will be expected to include one non-working carer and to hold demonstrable skills and experience.

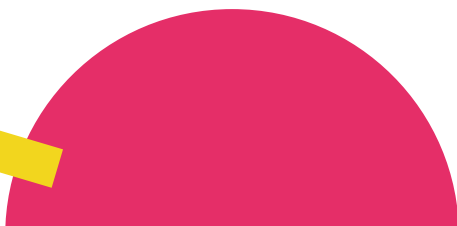
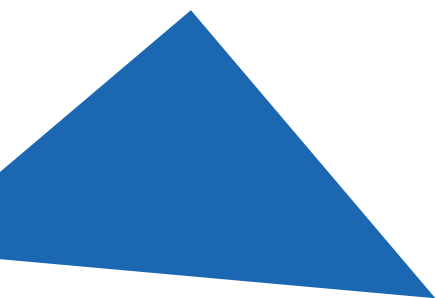
This payment is made on the basis that the children and young people living with them will have been assessed as needing specialist care. These may include children and young people living in residential care who would benefit from a foster family environment and the attachment and bonding experiences gained from living with a foster family.



What is the process?

Enquiry and Expression of Interest – Contact Foster4 St Helens Borough Council via our website, social media, phone, email or by meeting us face-to-face at an event. Whatever method you've used to contact us, we'll give you a call to discuss your individual circumstances and see how fostering could work for you. If you're happy to do so, we'll complete an Expression of Interest with you. This gives us a bit more detail about you, your family and what it was that sparked your interest in fostering.

Initial Assessment – Once we've received your Expression of Interest form, we'll do some initial checks including social care records and social media checks, then one of our social workers will give you a call to arrange a time for them to come and visit you at your home. At the visit your experience and skills can be further discussed, alongside the different types of Specialist Foster Care to ascertain which will suit you best. After the visit, the social worker will write a short summary for their manager and discuss what was spoken about in the visit with them. They will then contact you to let you know whether they are recommending you progress. If they're not recommending that you progress, they will explain why. If they are recommending you progress, they will invite you to apply and arrange for you to attend the Skills to Foster training course.



Application - The Foster4 fostering team will send an application form out to you, either in the post or via email. You complete this form and return it to the Local Authority you are applying to foster with. This contains consent for the team to begin statutory checks, such as Local Authority checks and complete your DBS application.

Skills to Foster Training - Skills to Foster is the pre-approval training course that all foster carers in the UK must undertake. We deliver it on a variety of days, at different times and venues across the eight Local Authorities, and the benefit of fostering with Foster4 is that you can attend any of our Skills to Foster courses, so there's always one that will suit your schedule. It's an exciting, inspiring, and very in-depth course which will give you all the basics you need to know about becoming a foster carer. You'll learn all about things such as why children may come into care, the legal process, caring for children safely, record keeping, and how we support you in your role.



You'll take part in some informal discussions and activities with other prospective foster carers that will really get you thinking! Don't worry, there are no right or wrong answers, there are no tests, and you certainly don't need to remember every single thing. It's all about learning the basics and reflecting on your own understanding of the role.

Assessment – You will be allocated an assessing social worker and your formal assessment will begin. It runs in two stages:

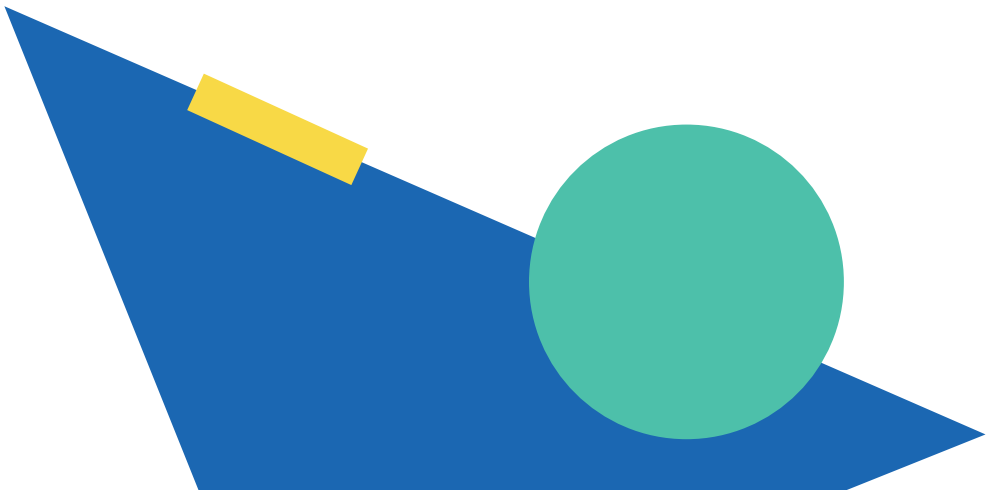
Stage 1 is the checks and references. On the Application Form we ask you to provide the details of a number of personal and professional referees. We'll contact them for references. We'll speak with your own children if you have any and any significant ex-partners you may have, if appropriate. We also ask you to have a medical with your own GP, who will let us know if they feel you are 'fit to foster' and will inform us of anything that may need to be explored further. We'll also undertake DBS checks.

Stage 2 is the written assessment. We want to know all about you! The assessing social worker will visit you on approximately 7 occasions. They will discuss your views on caring for children, how you were parented yourselves, your life experiences and how they may have helped shaped the person you are today. This all helps us to build an in-depth picture of you. Again, there are no right or wrong answers, and there's certainly no such thing as the 'perfect' foster carer. Life experience counts for a lot, we need to see that you would be able to put children's needs first, treat each child as an individual and are able to be reflective, learn and develop your skills. Depending on the type of Specialist Foster Care you express an interest in, you may be provided with additional training and resources to consider as part of your assessment.

Approval – Once your assessment report is completed, you'll be sent a draft for you to add to/ amend any details that may need tweaking etc. You'll then be invited to attend the next Panel. We hold these at least monthly. Your report will be discussed, and your assessing social worker will introduce you to the panel members. Panel will then decide whether to recommend your approval as a foster carer. This decision will be finalised by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) usually within 2 weeks. You will then be formally notified that you are now an approved foster carer and who your supervising social worker will be.

Fostering – Congratulations, welcome to the fostering family! Your supervising social worker will come out and visit you to do your induction. Here, they will welcome you to the service and give you all the documents you will need to get you started. You will likely get a telephone call within a few days/weeks from the social worker on duty, who will discuss a child or children with you. This is known as the referral. The referral contains all the information the fostering team have received about the child, including the reasons they have come into care, what the future plan may be, the family time arrangements that will be in place for the child you care for, where they go to nursery/ school/ college etc, their likes and dislikes, and any other information that will help you to make the decision about whether or not you could provide care for them. In some instances, the social worker may need a decision from you fairly quickly, in others, you may have a bit longer to consider things. If you decide that you can provide the care for the child, the social worker on duty will make the arrangements for them coming to you. They will discuss the equipment you may need. You will undoubtedly eagerly await their arrival and may well be very nervous.

Don't worry! All foster carers were new at one time, and even the most experienced still learn with every new child or young person that comes through their front door. You won't get everything right all the time, but your life experiences, training and nurturing instinct will certainly help you to do the best you can to provide safe, consistent care for a child or young person when they need it most. Whilst children are in your care, both your own supervising social worker and the child's social worker will be in regular contact with you to provide any support and advice you may need.



What support do Specialist Foster Carers receive?

- Allocated Supervising Social Worker who will visit you regularly, to provide advice, support, and guidance. They are also available via telephone and email as and when you need them.
- A duty worker on the fostering team, to provide immediate support, available all day, every day, during office hours.
- Emergency Duty Team who are there to provide emergency support and advice outside of normal office hours.
- Children's Social Worker who is there to oversee the child's care plan, but who will also be a support network to you, so we can together achieve the best outcomes for children.
- Annual Fostering Review where you will review the last 12 months and receive oversight and support from our Independent Reviewing Officer. You may also see these workers at your support groups.
- Therapeutic training and support: We currently work with the NATP (National Association of Therapeutic Parenting)
- An active Foster Carer Forum where you can share ideas and experiences, with our dedicated fostering managers. We want to hear from you....



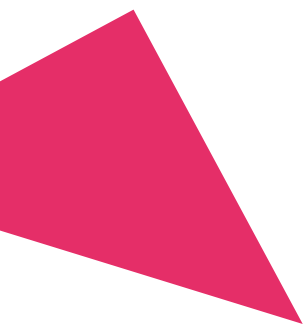
Benefits to Fostering with Foster4 St Helens Borough Council:

We offer –

- Competitive fostering allowance
- Foster Carer ID Badges for all carers
- There is a special tax scheme for foster carers called Qualifying Care Relief (QCR). It allows foster carers to receive payments from their fostering service up to a certain level (called their 'tax threshold'), without having to pay tax. Qualifying Care Relief means that many foster carers have little or no tax to pay on their fostering income
- Mileage
- Quality training including Therapeutic Parenting approaches
- Membership to The Fostering Network
- Six weekly Support Groups
- Buddy System for new carers or carers who need some extra support
- Regular activity days, celebration events and award ceremonies to socialise and celebrate the achievements of children and carers



- Discounts at local council leisure centres
- Blue Light discount card
- Foster Carer Champion role for those who may wish to support the team with training, events, and support
- Dedicated Facebook, Instagram, and website to provide updates on news and events
- Monthly newsletter to all carers
- We will provide financial support for the equipment agreed for you to provide care to a child, for example car seats, prams, and bedroom furniture
- Free tickets to St Helens RLFC home games at the Totally Wicked Stadium
- Opportunity to benefit from our superb community and local business relationships, such as pantomimes, shows and other events
- Refer a Friend Scheme and for each successful approval, you will receive £500
- Town centre location with good transport links and nearby community services



Final Thoughts:

If you are interested in becoming a Specialist Foster Carer but need help to decide whether to apply, why not chat with one of our approved foster carers who can answer your questions and share what being a foster carer is like for them? We have several foster carers who can provide insight into the varying lives and circumstances of fostering households, from Specialist Foster Care, to single foster carers, foster carers with birth children, same sex couples, foster carers who work, to name but a few.

Finally, please accept our thanks for your interest in becoming a registered Specialist Foster Carer with St Helens Borough Council, part of Foster 4, a Local Authority provider in Cheshire and Merseyside.

We hope you've found this information useful and above all, inspiring. We look forward to supporting and guiding you on your journey through the most valuable and rewarding career, fostering!





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In the meantime, if you need to speak to the team,
please call **0345 6460098** or email **enquiry@foster4.co.uk**