Fostering with Sefton
Introduction

Thank you for taking the first steps to being part of our friendly team as a foster carer in Sefton. If you join us, we will do our utmost to ensure that fostering children is the most rewarding life choice you ever make. But before you and your family decide what to do, we want to give you all the information you need, which is where this book comes in.

Inside you will meet our experienced carers to get the inside track on the varied life of a foster carer and what it is like to open your home to a child; learn about the different types of fostering you can do, our fantastic training programme and payment for your expertise, which is very competitive as fees progress up a payment scale when you gain experience and complete your training.

You will find out that being LGBT, single, older, renting your home or having your own children are not barriers to being a foster carer with us, and that there are 6 key steps to becoming an approved carer that will make the 6 month process go very quickly.

You might find it useful to visit seftonfostering.co.uk or give us a call on FREEPHONE 0800 923 2777 where our team will be happy to chat all things fostering, offer advice and help you make your decision.
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What is fostering?

Fostering provides a secure and stable family home for children and young people who are unable to live with their own families. Children may need to be looked after for only a short time until they can return home, while others will stay with foster carers for the longer term or move to an adoptive family.

We truly value our foster carers for the vital role they have, helping to transform children’s lives and building a better future for them.

Children who are looked after face challenges in their lives - welcoming them into your family will not always be easy. What we can guarantee is that your patience, kindness and understanding will make a huge difference to them and will probably be the most rewarding thing you ever do.

Can I be a foster carer?

There is a lot of misunderstanding about who can and cannot join our fostering service.

We simply want people from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences, who are dedicated, passionate, caring, understanding and above all patient.

You can foster children with us if you are single, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender), older (there is no upper age limit), have your own children or rent your family home. We welcome carers of all ethnicities and faiths.

The main things that you need to become a foster carer are:

- A spare room in your home – children in your care will need space and privacy.
- Be over 21 years of age.
- Be healthy, with energy and time to dedicate to caring for a child.
- Have no serious convictions or convictions relating to children or young people.

“We knew when we had our Civil Partnership that we wanted to have a family. So we explored different avenues of doing that and fostering seemed like the obvious and best solution for us and our wider family so we made enquiries.”

Foster Carers Sinead and Leanne
What makes a good foster carer?

There is no such thing as a typical foster carer. The qualities we look for in people joining our team to foster children and young people are:

1. Enthusiasm and a positive outlook.
2. Patience and empathy – sometimes they just need you to listen.
3. Being open minded and non-judgemental – there are many reasons children cannot live with their families.
4. Good communications skills - to not only help children, but to help others understand children and their needs.
5. Be ready for a challenge – you will need to persevere when children come into difficulties.
Fostering in Sefton

The majority of children in our care are placed with our foster carers. We are totally committed to making sure they are given the care and support they need to succeed and affect a positive change in their lives.

We need carers for children of all ages, but even more so for sibling groups to keep brothers and sisters together; teenagers, babies and toddlers and children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

To make good matches we try to place children with our own carers first, if we are unable to find a suitable placement we would then look to independent agencies. This means our in-house foster carers have regular placements.

Who needs your care?

If a child or young person needs your care, they are likely to have suffered abuse or neglect.

Their parents may experience problems that make it difficult to cope, whether it be a family illness or bereavement, poor mental health or other health problems such as misuse of drugs or alcohol.

Being moved from their home can be distressing for children, as they experience loss and anxiety when separated from their birth family; something they often struggle to understand. They may appear angry or withdrawn, and will need all of the love, patience, support and understanding you have to give.

If issues with their family are resolved, they will return home. If issues with their family remain, they will go to a permanent foster or adoption placement.

"It’s the little things that count, like when people comment on how well-mannered the children are and you realise just how far they’ve come”

Lynn – Foster Carer

"We have a lot more going on in our lives than other kids. So we need you to understand that and help us to deal with it. More than anything though we need you to care about us no matter what. If you don’t then who else will? We only get one chance at life; we need you to help us make the very best of it”

Rebekah, young person in care
I want to foster in Sefton, what kind of placements are there?

So you have decided that fostering is for you and you want to care for children with us at Sefton Fostering and Adoption Service? Whether you are an all-rounder providing more than one kind of placement, or want to specialise, the following fostering placements are something you need to know about:

**Long Term Fostering**
Long term fostering means that children who can no longer live with their birth family are given a secure family life until they reach adulthood or are ready to live independently. This type of fostering provides a good alternative for permanence when adoption is not an option for them.

**Short Term**
Most children who enter foster care will need short term placements, ranging from a few days to over a year, while assessments and plans are made to decide whether they return to their birth families or move on to long term fostering or adoption.

**Emergency**
Emergency fostering means taking a child into your home at very short notice, and usually involves children staying a few nights while a more suitable placement is found. It can happen at any time, whether in the middle of the night or on a weekend.
Respite care
Fostering children can be a very demanding role and at times you will need a short break. Respite foster carers look after children to give carers that break, with respite ranging from a few days to a couple of weeks. Respite foster care is planned and can occur at regular intervals and may offer a flexible option for carers who work full time.

Teenage fostering
We need carers to specialise in fostering for teenagers, for whom we have the greatest need. Foster carers play a fundamental role in giving young people the knowledge, skills and self-confidence to successfully move on to adulthood.

“Teenagers are often given a bad press, so when I was first asked to take a teenage placement I was a little apprehensive, however the experience has been so different to what I imagined. It’s not that teenagers are more demanding; in fact some of the younger children I’ve fostered have been more so; it’s just that teenagers have different challenges. But there’s always lots of training on offer to help build your skills. My social worker arranged for me to attend ‘The art of Parenting Teens’ training course; which really helped to give me some confidence!”

Sue – Single Foster Carer

Sibling Placements
It is important that we keep brothers and sisters together, especially when there is disruption and trauma in their lives. Some of our carers specialise in providing safe and secure environments for siblings groups.

“I came into fostering because I wanted to make a difference and give something back, but I’ve gained so much more. When you know you’ve been instrumental in changing a child’s life you just want to do it all over again”

Kelly - Foster Carer
No two days are ever the same!

Whatever type of foster care you practice, no two days are ever the same and every child or young person you foster brings something unique to your home. While the life of a foster carer is extremely varied, there are certain tasks you are expected to do for all children:

- Be part of making decisions about the routine care of children and young people and provide support and guidance in relation to education, health and social well-being.
- Attend meetings, keep written records, manage information that is confidential and sensitive and help make plans for a child’s future.
- Some children and young people can display difficult and challenging behaviours. As a foster carer you need to be able to recognise the possible causes of such behaviour and, with our support, develop strategies to help the child manage their feelings.
- Contact with their own families is very important to children and young people in foster care. As a foster carer you will need to help promote contact with their parents and relatives wherever possible.

The preparation process will help you to understand the experiences that foster children may have been through. Our excellent training takes place throughout the year and will help to enhance your skills as you develop your career in fostering.

"It was so rewarding knowing I helped a child be reunited with their family."

Phil - Foster Carer

"It was so rewarding knowing I helped a child be reunited with their family."

Phil - Foster Carer
Becoming a foster carer

It is important you understand fully what is involved when you become a foster carer. We want the best carers for our children and the best fostering career for you. Your assessment will help us to do this while teaching you about the demands and the rewards of fostering. The magic number for your assessment is 6: it takes 6 months for you to complete 6 steps to becoming a foster carer.

**STEP 1 Enquiry**
When we receive your enquiry one of our friendly team will call you for a chat, take some details, answer any questions you have and discuss what to do next. You will also be invited to one of our information sessions to find out more and meet experienced carers.

**STEP 2 Home Visit**
By now you have had time to think about fostering and what is involved. A member of our team will visit you at home for a more in-depth chat so you can explore your interest in fostering further, the options available to you, and find out if it is right for you and your family.

**STEP 3 Assessment**
The assessment helps us find out about you as a potential foster carer. It involves one of our social workers visiting you several times and finding out about the qualities and experience you already have.
Over the course of the visits we will discuss a range of subjects about you and your family and issues you will come across when caring for looked after children and young people.
The assessment is comprehensive – it is important for you and children you may look after, that every aspect of being a foster carer is extensively covered.
We will ask your permission to carry out various checks, including a health check with your GP. Information held by agencies who we contact about you, will not necessarily stop you from being a foster carer; it depends on the nature of that information. Please discuss with us if you have any concerns with this process and would like further advice.
We will also ask for references from people who know you well, current or past employers and your children's school.
Once the assessment is complete your social worker will write a detailed report, outlining your skills and strengths. You will be able to see the report and have a chance to add your own comments.

**STEP 4 Skills to Foster Preparation Training**
You will be required to take preparation training, which will help you understand why children and young people come into care and the effects it may have on them. You will get to meet our experienced foster carers to find out first-hand what fostering is really like.
This training can happen prior to or during your assessment.

**STEP 5 The Fostering Panel**
In the Fostering Panel there are a range of professional and independent people with expertise in fostering.
Your assessment report will be presented to the panel, who will recommend whether or not to approve you as a foster carer; usually on the same day. The final decision rests with the Agency Decision Maker, who is a senior officer in the Local Authority.
You will be invited and encouraged to attend the panel meeting. This may seem daunting, but lots of carers find it an extremely positive experience.

**STEP 6 Approval and Placement**
Once you are approved to be a foster carer, you will be assigned your own social worker who will work with you to find a suitable match for you and your family and support you in your role as a foster carer. You will also be given useful information about excellent training we provide to improve your skills as a foster carer.
What about my own children?

Being a foster carer has a huge impact on your family, especially your own children. They will have to share their parents, their toys, their friends and cope with difficult behaviour.

For your sons or daughters, living with foster children can be very positive and benefit them through companionship, friendship and a sense of self-worth in sharing their homes and themselves with children who need them.

We value the children of foster carers and recognise the role that they play in fostering. We always ensure that they are consulted and involved in the assessment process. In order to fully support them, we run regular Foster Group preparation sessions to provide support and a chance to talk and ask questions.

Fostering with us

Now you are part of the team and a foster carer with Sefton, what next? Our unofficial motto is “you never go it alone” and we are proud to say we live up to that promise.

We have a comprehensive support package for our carers, ensuring that foster placements are successful for both you and our children.

Allowance and Fees

We believe in treating our carers as childcare professionals, valuing their skills and paying them accordingly.

Payments are divided into two parts:

- An allowance to cover the daily cost of caring for a child or young person.
- A payment that recognises your skills and knowledge as a foster carer.

The scheme allows you to progress through higher fee levels as your experience and personal development as a carer grows.

Foster carer tax relief means that as a carer you will pay little or no tax on your fostering income.

Training

No one expects you to know everything about fostering straight away. We understand that good quality training is crucial in supporting you in your role as a foster carer.

We offer a comprehensive training package, which will enhance your skills and knowledge.

There are regular training events and development to ensure that, throughout your fostering career, you have the skills needed to support children and young people through difficult times.

“If I ever have any problems or just need a chat, even if it’s not my social worker I know there’s always someone to talk to who can sort things out for me. I know I’m not on my own.”

Carol – Foster Carer
Expert Supervision

One of your most important sources of support will be your supervising social worker. They will offer advice and practical support to help you feel confident about fostering, assist you in building your skills and guide your learning.

Each child will have their own social worker who will visit them regularly. They have responsibility for overseeing the care planning and coordinating arrangements for that child.

Our team of placement support workers are on hand to provide a range of additional support to foster carers and carry out direct work with children. If you need help outside office hours, our emergency duty team is only a call away.

You will also be offered support from other carers through our Foster Carers Support Group. The group gives carers the chance to share their experiences of fostering and give each other advice and support.

Specialist Support

Looked after children’s nurses ensure the child’s health needs are taken care of. They are on hand to offer advice and direct people to specialist health services.

Education support is provided by a specialist team who are committed to improving the education of our looked after children. They help liaise with the child’s school and help provide one-to-one education to those children who need it. As they improve in education settings, you will have the opportunity to nominate them for Sefton Council’s annual No Limits Awards to recognise the achievements of children in care: sefton.gov.uk/nolimits

The Children’s Participation Officer supports and ensures children in care to have their say, to help them take part in making decisions about their lives.

Dedicated Therapeutic Support

Therapeutic support is provided through our specialist team who provide expert and on-going support for children and young people that have been subject to developmental trauma, abuse and neglect. They utilise evidence based therapy models such as Theraplay to provide a systemic and holistic approach to therapies that considers all parts of the system around the child. Therapy can be provided both individually or with foster carers or in joint sessions.
**Frequently Asked Questions**

Although we have taken great care to make sure we give you all of the information you need as clearly as possible, we have also been doing this for a long time and know the kind of questions people ask us when they are thinking about a career in fostering. We hope you find the answers below helpful.

**Am I too young / too old to foster?**
As long as you are over 21 you can be considered as a foster carer. There is no upper age limit providing you are in general good health. We find many older people make excellent carers.

**Would a criminal record stop me from fostering?**
Not necessarily; it would depend on the nature of the offence. However most minor offences would not exclude you; the important thing is to discuss this with us at the earliest opportunity.

**Once approved will I wait long for a placement?**
No; currently we have children waiting for placements. Following your approval your social worker will support and advise you in finding a suitable match.

**Can I foster if I smoke?**
Yes. However there will be limitations with the children you are able to foster.

**Can I still apply if I’m gay or lesbian?**
The simple answer is Yes; applications are welcomed from gay, lesbian, bi or transgender couples and single applicants.

**How long will the process take?**
The process from enquiry to approval will take approximately 6 months.

**Do I need a spare room to foster?**
Yes. It’s important that foster children have privacy and space for their own things. Babies up to the age of 18 months are able to share a room with their foster carers.

**Will I have to give up work to foster?**
No, but you will need to consider if your work is flexible enough to allow you to foster. For example if you need to take time off due to a child’s illness, school holidays or to attend occasional meetings or training. You will also need to think about after school provision.

**Do I need to have any previous experience in working with children?**
It is helpful to have previous experience but not essential. What is more important is that you are able to communicate and have an ability to build a relationship with a child.

**Do I need to have any special qualifications to foster?**
No particular qualifications are necessary, it is your personal attributes and skills which are most important. We provide a comprehensive training package which will develop your skills as you continue your career in fostering.

**I already have children of my own, can I still foster?**
Yes. We value the skills and experiences you can offer as a parent. Your own children would be involved in the approval process too, as their views are important.

**How much will I be told about a young person before they’re placed with me?**
We will provide you with as much information about the young person and their background as possible, before you decide whether to accept the placement. Sometimes we have to place children in an emergency; in this circumstance we may have very little information. But a planning meeting will follow very shortly and we would hope that by that stage more would be known about the child’s circumstances.
Meet Denise

I began fostering seven years ago when my own children left home. At the start I cared for children aged 5-16 years. But now I specialises in caring for teenagers who want semi-independent care.

My home has always been a family home. It was just too quiet without someone to share it with.

I believe that by giving young people a safe space and a place to belong it gives them a springboard to their own life. While they are living with me I like to give them loads of chances to make happy memories. Sometimes they face disappointments and difficulties and you live through that with them.

I have a great relationship with my supervising social worker. She lets me talk through any worries or concerns I have and together we try to make plans that will best suit the young person I’m caring for.

Some people ask me how I cope fostering teenagers and I say don’t knock it if you haven’t tried it. It works for us, it might for you.”
Contact us

If you want to find out more, or tell us that you want to begin your fostering career, contact us on FREEPHONE: 0800 923 2777 or by email: fostering.adoption@sefton.gov.uk

You can also contact us on

Facebook: SeftonFostering
Twitter: @SeftonFostering
seftonfostering.co.uk

Alternatively, you can write to us at:

Sefton Fostering Service,
1st Floor, Merton House, Stanley Road,
Bootle, Liverpool,
L20 3JA