

Fostering, Adoption & Family Link

THE BASICS



Introduction

Relationships within families frequently reach crisis point and for a whole range of different reasons. When this happens, or to prevent this from happening, children may be looked after outside their family for a period of time. The amount of time can vary as much as the range of possible crises. Some parent(s) may just need a breather - and this is particularly true for parents of children with disabilities - from the day to day responsibilities of childcare. Others will need to be looked after for much longer periods of time.

When children are unable to live with their own family, alternative homes need to be found. This is where foster carers and adoptive parents come in. This print out is intended to give you a general idea as to what fostering and adoption involve. If, after

reading it, you would like more detailed information on a particular aspect, please telephone or write to us.

What is Fostering?

A foster carer provides a home for children or young people who are unable to live with their own family. The reasons for this are various, ranging from a temporary crisis or illness to situations where some kind of abuse has taken place. By providing an alternative, fostering can usually help reduce the pressures on families, allowing time for difficulties to be sorted out so the children can return home.

The length of time that children stay with foster carers also varies tremendously. It could be a couple of days, a year or much longer, depending on the circumstances. All ages of children need to be looked after, from babies to teenagers. In Haringey, children also come from a wide range of ethnic

backgrounds and religions. Some children will have disabilities of various kinds. All will be unsettled because of changes happening in their lives. It is important that carers are sensitive to their different needs.

Foster carers do not work in isolation and will share responsibility for the children they foster with the parent(s) of those children and with the local authority. They are part of a team. It is important to remember that most children will eventually go home to their own family and this is the goal that is worked towards. Foster carers do not replace parents, who are often very involved in their children's lives while they are fostered, but work with social workers, parents and children to help reunite families that have temporarily had to part. However, there is much more to fostering than 'caretaking'. It involves a real relationship, even if for a short time.

Could I be a foster carer?

Anyone can be a foster carer in theory. Just as there is no such thing as a typical family, there is no 'typical' foster carer and no-one is turned away from applying. You can foster if you're single, married, living together or gay/lesbian; you do not have to have any children of your own nor does it matter if you rent rather than own your own home. It's who you are rather than what you do that matters.

In practice, however, there are limits to who can become a foster carer. You will have to have enough space where you live for your fostered child to have their own room. It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to ensure that children are safe, so the application process is quite rigorous. You will not be able to become a foster carer if you have certain types of criminal record, such as offences of violence or offences against children. For this reason

your application will be checked by the police. You will also need to provide personal references.

Remember that the whole process is designed to be careful, not to put you off! While fostering can be demanding, of your time, your energy and emotions, it is also a lot of fun and very rewarding.

All approved foster carers get an allowance to cover the costs of caring for a child. State benefits are not affected by this allowance, nor is it taxable. Carers also get the support and guidance of a Haringey Fostering & Adoption social worker, local and national support groups and both a preparatory and on-going training programme which includes NVQs.

Family Link

Family Link offers children with disabilities the opportunity to have a short break, either during the day or overnight, with the family of a Family Link carer. Family Link carers are approved in exactly the same way as foster carers and the financial arrangements are very similar.

Children placed with Family Link all have a significant disability. This could be a physical disability, a learning difficulty, a sensory impairment, a chronic medical problem or a combination of some or all of these. Not only does the service give the families of children with disabilities a bit of a breather but it also gives the child a chance to meet new people and build social relationships.

We are looking for people to be Family Link Carers who have prior experience of the needs of children with disabilities - we

will also give you support and run specific training sessions. If you think you would like to know more, please telephone or write to us asking about the Family Link Scheme.

Adoption

Adoption is a way of giving a child a new and permanent family because they cannot be brought up by their own parents. It differs from fostering in the sense that parental responsibility is not shared with anyone else. To adopt, you have to go through a legal process that transfers full parental responsibility for a child to you alone. Some children do keep in touch with their family of origin. Adoption is often portrayed in the media as being about babies or very young children, but this is far from the only scenario. We also need adoptive families for older children, brothers and sisters and children with disabilities or special needs. We try wherever possible to 'match' children with their adoptive

families according to their ethnic background and religious upbringing.

What Now?

If you are interested in finding out more about what has been described in this print out, you can:

Telephone us on:

020 - 8489 - 1458

020 - 8489 - 1481

OR

Write to us at:

Haringey Fostering & Adoption
Grosvenor House
27 The Broadway
LONDON.
N8 8DU

OR

Email us at:

Sarah.Peel@haringey.gov.uk

Haringey Fostering & Adoption is your local agency for recruiting foster carers and potential adoptive parents. We are part of Haringey Council's Children's Care Service.