

# Start your fostering journey

with Darlington  
Borough Council



Find out  
everything you need to  
know about fostering in our guide!



**DARLINGTON**  
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# Fostering with Darlington Borough Council

**Fostering can be such a rewarding and fulfilling experience. By providing a safe home and stable family life, you can help a child or young person from a range of diverse backgrounds to thrive. If you are considering fostering for the first time, Darlington Borough Council would love to be a part of your journey.**

Where possible, we try to keep children and their families together. However, there are occasions when this is not possible and foster carers are needed to open up their homes to a child or young person. It is our hope that together with our amazing foster carers, we can make a difference.

No matter where you are on your fostering experience, we will be there to support you every step of the way. We provide ongoing face-to-face and online training opportunities to equip you with the skills and confidence to best care for a child. If you ever need more support, our team includes specialist social workers who can offer advice on a range of issues, including health and education, so you will never be alone.

As we are not for profit, you can trust that we are passionate about providing only the very best match for our foster carers and looked after children. Once you are part of our team, you are within our trusted group of first choice foster carers. You will also have access to other foster carers through support groups, social events and regular activities for your own children and those you look after. This gives you the chance to talk to each other and learn from other foster carers' experiences.



If you need further help, this guide to fostering is designed to be a reference for new foster carers or those who are fostering with Darlington Borough Council for the first time. You will find plenty of information and guidance, as well as the standards of care that are expected from you and in return what you can expect from us.

Lots of people are able to foster and we are interested in your skills and capacity to parent, not your status. So if you would like the chance to be part of a small, committed team and make a positive change in a Darlington child's life, then please read on.



# What does it mean to be a foster carer?

**Foster carers are all different, but they all have one thing in common – the want to help children who are going through a potentially difficult time in their lives.**

Foster caring is parenting and welcoming a child into a warm family environment. Helping children to maintain contact with their brothers and sisters, parents and other family members is an important part of the role.

As one of our foster carers, you should be prepared to attend meetings with social workers, teachers and health professionals about the child or children in your

care. As an advocate for the children you care for, you will help ensure that the right decisions are made about their care, education and health.

Above all, you should passionately believe that every child should have a stable, safe and secure environment to grow and achieve their dreams in. You should also be willing to be a positive role model and take interest in every aspect of the child or children's wellbeing, as highlighted in the Foster Carers' Charter overleaf.

## About you – what we are looking for in a foster carer

**To foster, you could have children of your own, or not, you could be married or single, own your own home or rent, you could be in a same sex relationship, and you could be working or not.**

**Every foster carer is unique, but what is important is that you can offer a safe and nurturing home. It is also key that you have the energy, enthusiasm and commitment to give the child or children in your care all the support, patience and encouragement they need.**

We are looking for people with these qualities, and we provide training and support to not only prepare you

for fostering, but throughout your fostering journey. You don't need any special qualifications – your life experiences, and the skills and qualities you have developed because of them, are what matter the most.

There are some offences, such as crimes against children, which mean that you won't be able to foster. Other minor offences may not affect your application, but you will need to disclose any convictions during the assessment process.

There are also no upper age restrictions, but we would usually only consider applicants aged over 21. If you are fit, healthy and can keep up with a child, you can apply.

## About your home

**All you would need is a spare room, unless you are wanting to care for a child under the age of two years. It isn't essential that you own your home, but you do need to have a secure tenancy and the homeowner's agreement.**

We are very keen to keep Darlington children in Darlington, but it isn't a requirement that you live in the

immediate area. We only ask that you live at a distance which is realistic when transporting children to and from school and contact visits.

While all of our foster carers are different, we do require that you provide a non-smoking environment and, if you wish to foster children aged 0-5, you must be a non-smoking household.

# The Foster Carers' Charter

## What foster carers can expect from the fostering service

### 1. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP – we recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise, and can make the biggest difference to the lives of children in care.

#### **THE FOSTERING SERVICE MUST:**

- Value foster carers' skills and expertise
- Include foster carers in all meetings that affect them and the children they care for
- Ensure that our fostering service will comply with fostering regulations and guidance
- Treat foster carers without discrimination
- Respect confidentiality

### 2. INFORMATION – we know that information is vital for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's needs.

#### **WE MUST:**

- Share all information we have about the child
- Provide this information in writing prior to placement
- Provide foster carers with information on all financial matters
- Provide foster carers with full details of all relevant policies and procedures

### 3. SUPPORT – we recognise that fostering can be a challenging task, and that appropriate and timely support makes all the difference.

#### **WE MUST:**

- Ensure there is a robust post-approval induction process
- Respond positively to requests for additional support, including respite/short break support and out of hours support
- Provide foster carers with regular supervision
- Give foster carers honest and open feedback
- Pay foster carers' allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner
- Ensure that there is a local group where foster carers and their family can find support and share experiences
- Support foster carers when facilitating contact with birth families

- Recognise the contribution foster carers make to fostering

### 4. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT – we believe foster carers must have learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career to ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need.

#### **WE MUST:**

- Ensure all foster carers have an individual annual training plan
- Provide foster carers with appropriate, accessible and relevant training
- Support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care
- Continue to provide all foster carers with other development opportunities

### 5. FAIR TREATMENT – we recognise the foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances.

#### **WE MUST:**

- Consult with foster carers before changing terms and conditions
- Ensure honesty and openness in all of our discussions and communications
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations
- Ensure that foster carers are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support
- Ensure that foster carers know the arrangement for payment of fees and allowances

### 6. COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION – we believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

#### **WE MUST:**

- Ensure that we consult with foster carers in a meaningful way on matters that affect them
- Give foster carers timely feedback
- Provide clear information on how foster carers can give us feedback

The Foster Carers' Charter was launched in March 2011. This was co-produced by the Government, fostering organisations, charities and children, and is part of the Government's wider programme of reform to improve the entire care system. This includes improving the quality of children's homes, and reducing barriers and delays to adoption. The overall aim is to ensure that all children in care have greater stability, less upheaval, and a better chance of a stable family life.

# What fostering services can expect from foster carers

**1. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP** – you should demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct. Open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship, so you should aim to build a meaningful and collaborative relationship with social workers.

**YOU SHOULD:**

- Demonstrate your expertise and make use of your skills
- Provide children with a positive experience of family life
- Attend meetings about the children and young people you care for
- Work with the individuals and agencies involved with the child
- Work with birth parents, wider family and other significant people in a child's life
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance, and follow policies and procedures
- Inform your supervising social worker about factors that impact on your fostering
- Inform your supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise
- Inform the child's social worker about any concerns related to the child
- Respect confidentiality
- Maintain an open dialogue with the fostering service

**2. RESPECT FOR THE CHILD** – every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential.

**YOU SHOULD:**

- Develop a meaningful relationship with the child – understand their needs, support their growth, become an advocate and champion for them
- Care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their identity, including their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural heritage
- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as you would your own child
- Support the child to make decisions regarding their own lives
- Support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care

**3. LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT** – you must access learning and development opportunities throughout your fostering career in accordance with the needs of the children you are caring for.

**YOU SHOULD:**

- Be willing and able to develop your skills throughout your fostering career
- Attend relevant training
- Be willing to attend and contribute to support groups

For more information  
about the Foster Carers' Charter,  
please visit the Fostering Network.

# Meet our foster carers

## Claire\*

10 years ago, my husband and I picked up the phone and nervously rang Darlington Borough Council to enquire about fostering. We wanted to help children who needed someone to be there for them and to support them during difficult times, and it turned out to be the best decision we've ever made.

We have now fostered over 25 children of all ages. Some come for a short stay, others stay for longer, but as each one leaves, we feel privileged to have been a part of their lives and to have made a difference.

Along the way, the Council have provided us with the support, skills and training needed to do our role effectively. Even during the difficult days of lockdown in the coronavirus pandemic, our social worker called us regularly, and gave us access to online training and support. So don't hesitate, get the ball rolling and give the Council a call!

\*Name has been changed to protect anonymity

## David and Alaine

We started respite fostering eight years ago when our daughter and son left home for university. We wanted to share our home, give our time and attention to a child, with little disruption to our busy working lives.

The child-centred approach training prepared us well and we chose to support the age group 5-17 years. We provide respite foster care one weekend a month to give the child's current family (birth, adopted or foster) a break.

The weekend stay has several benefits and the list is endless of the activities we have revisited whilst fostering, including swimming, baking, bowling, bike rides and the cinema. The energy and excitement of the child can illuminate the home, or sometimes a child may require a quiet, calm environment. We've also been able to continue to work, whilst having a positive impact on a child and helping to make a difference in our community.

## Amy and Tom

My husband and I have recently been approved to become foster carers for Darlington Borough Council.

The process was made easy and enjoyable by our assessing social worker, who made us feel very comfortable and relaxed throughout. We particularly enjoyed the Skills to Foster training and found it very informative and insightful.

The whole team have been very welcoming and we are looking forward to a long future with them!

# What are the different types of foster care?

There are various types of foster care that you can apply for with Darlington Borough Council. Take a look at each one and see which would fit your circumstances best.

## Short term

Short term fostering involves providing a child or children with temporary care, so they would stay with you for a short time. This type of care could involve a few hours a week, a weekend, a week or a few months, but they will typically stay with you until their future plan is finalised.

## Long term

In some cases, a child may need to move in with a foster family for a longer period of time. For this type of fostering, we ask you to be able to make a long term commitment and offer a child the chance to grow up in a safe and supportive environment. You must be able to provide them with the appropriate care whenever possible and the opportunity to keep in contact with their birth family, where appropriate.

## Short break

Short breaks provide invaluable support for children and young people with a disability, and their families. They offer opportunities for children to form new friendships outside their family, to become more independent, and to have new experiences. At the same time, their families get respite and a chance to recharge.

## Emergency

Sometimes children may be removed from their parents due to an emergency. It may be that you are contacted to care for a child at very short notice, usually until a more permanent placement can be identified. You may be contacted any time during the day or night.

The length of your fostering placement will depend on the type of fostering you are interested in and the circumstances of the child. They can last for any amount of time, from a few days, to several months or even years. It is key that you are prepared to help a child or children through any feelings of anxiety or distress and support them how you can for the entirety of their stay.



# Supported lodgings

**Supported lodgings providers offer young people aged 16-21 who have left care and are ready to take the next step towards independence a space to live and learn.**

The aim is to provide them with a safe place to call home and help them to develop the skills they need for independent living. This could include learning to cook and clean, learning how to job search, and building confidence.

As with other types of fostering, providers can be from all differing backgrounds and can include families, couples and single people who feel they can offer a room in their home, and some level of practical and emotional support.

## What's involved in becoming a supported lodgings provider?

As a provider, you will be asked to:

- Ensure a spare bedroom is available for the exclusive use of the young person
- Provide meals and access to other facilities within the home
- Create a safe and emotionally stable environment where a young person can mature and develop the necessary skills for independent living

All providers will need to complete an application form and undergo an assessment, which includes taking up character references and checks via the Children's Social Care department and Criminal Records Bureau. You will also be invited to attend training to help you build on the skills you already have.



## Who are the young people?

There are all types of young people who need supported lodgings. They are typically care leavers, but may also need a place to live because:

- Their family situation has changed
- They are unaccompanied asylum seekers
- They are pregnant and don't have family to support them
- They have mental health issues or learning difficulties

You will be able to meet the young person that we think will be a match for you before you offer your home to them so you can be sure that they're a good fit.

The time period for this kind of care can vary from a few weeks up to a few years, so it's key that you have time and patience to commit to them.

# Who are the children?

**In Darlington, there are many children aged 0-17 who are in need of foster placements and you could help them. We are looking for foster carers to meet the needs of:**

- Brothers and sisters to ensure sibling groups can stay together
- Children and young people who are over the age of 11
- Children with disabilities, including short break respite care
- Children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

We provide support and training to our foster carers so that you can understand the impact that different backgrounds and past circumstances could have on a child to best prepare you for your caring journey.

Each situation is unique, but we will work together to help the children and young people in your care to process their experiences.

The quality of care for the children is our utmost priority, but we will aim to pair you with a child or children that may best adapt to your home and life. You will be able to choose an age group to support and the type of fostering you'd like to do, or we can offer advice on what may best suit you.

## UASC

**As well as children from Darlington, we are also seeking foster carers to specialise in fostering unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. We need people with good spoken and written English to provide support, guidance and care for vulnerable children as they start to settle into their new life in the UK.**

Unlike fostering a child from the UK, we may know very little about asylum-seeking children when they arrive. But what we do know is that they will have experienced varying degrees of strain prior to leaving their home countries, such as family separation or conflict. Whatever the specific reasons, they are likely to be tired, sensitive and possibly very frightened.

As a foster carer, you will need to support these children in their recovery of resilience, emotional spirit and self-esteem by creating a safe environment. They may need your help to learn the language, the customs, and to feel that someone is there to protect them. You may also be required to support them through the process of applying for permission to stay in the UK or prepare them to return to their home country.

We try to place children with families where some of their culture or language may already be in place. However, this isn't always possible, and so we need foster carers who are resourceful and will be able to support a child in maintaining their culture. We will work very closely with you and provide specialist training to help you with this and in caring for an asylum-seeking child overall.



# Meet one of our care leavers

I'm Chloe and I'm 23 years old with a little girl aged two. I found my experience of being a child in care was quite different to others in the local authority as I became looked after later in life at age 15.

I was put on an emergency placement where I was going to spend two nights with a foster family and ended up staying in a settled placement for the best part of four years. I lived in a house with a couple, their son and three other fostered teenage girls, who I had a good strong family relationship with. We had holidays and trips away like any family would, and Christmases and birthdays were no different!

I worked from the age of 16, and my foster carers were extremely understanding and supported me to gain good life skills. I owe them both big thanks today as it has helped the way I parent my little girl.

I found that the staff at Darlington Borough Council were always there to help. I have had the same personal advisor throughout my looked after time, and I wouldn't be the person I am today without them and the support they have given me.



# What are the benefits of fostering?

Fostering can change your life in so many ways. Developing a bond with a child and helping them make steps towards a positive future when they need it most can be incredibly rewarding. While this is the ultimate reward of fostering, there are several other benefits to ensure you, your foster child and your family are fully supported.

- **CONSTANT SUPPORT** – we never want anyone to feel alone in their fostering journey. We provide ongoing face-to-face and online training opportunities to ensure you have the confidence and skills to best care for a child. We also encourage our carer community to support each other through groups, social events and regular activities.

- **THE CHANCE TO LEARN SPECIALIST SKILLS** – the skills and knowledge you can learn from fostering are invaluable. From safeguarding to attachment, and child protection to child development, you will be able to gain an understanding in so many areas of child care. Not only will you learn during our training sessions, but you will also be able to gain an insight and develop your parenting style whilst caring for a child.
- **LONG-LASTING BONDS** – no matter how long a child is in your care, they'll often remain in your heart forever. Some of our foster parents stay in touch with the children they cared for, even once they are grown up. The bond between a foster carer and child is something that can't be replicated, and can last for a lifetime.
- **FINANCIAL AID** – we value our foster carers as part of our professional team and provide a generous fostering allowance to support them. The amount you earn will depend on your levels of experience, and on the ages and number of children you care for.

## Payment to our foster carers

All of our foster carers receive a weekly allowance designed to cover the cost of caring for a child. The level varies according to the age of the child, up to £246.47 for teenagers aged 16 and over.

Foster carers also receive a 'professional fee' for each child in their care per week. There are three bands – Band A - £100, Band B - £125, Band C - £200. The band you fall into will depend on your existing experience, knowledge and skill as a foster carer.

For example, a new foster carer would be in Band A. If they were caring for two siblings aged three and four, they would receive £200 per week in professional fees, plus £285.74 per week in foster care allowance. This means they would receive £485.47 per week.

An experienced foster carer would typically be in Band C. If they were caring for children aged four and eleven, they could expect to receive a total of £745.45 per week in professional fees and allowances.

As well as these standard payments, an additional allowance will also be made for each child prior to Christmas and the school summer holidays.

If you're interested in becoming a supported lodgings provider, there is a different payment scheme in place. You will receive a weekly allowance of around £250 per week for providing a home for a young person over 16. Contact us for more information.

# Step-by-step guide to

1



## Registering your interest

It's very easy to register an interest in fostering with Darlington Borough Council. You can submit an interest form on our online enquiries page, via email or over the phone. Once you have spoken with a member of the fostering team, you will be invited to apply and undertake some training sessions.

2



## Home visit

Once we've taken a look over your completed interest form and confirmed that you're happy to go ahead with the next step, we will book a home visit. This is so we can check that your home is appropriate and meets our requirements, which include having enough space for a child and a spare bedroom. If we are satisfied with your home, you will be invited to fill out a detailed application form.

3



## Application form

We'll ask you to fill in an application form as best as you can to help us understand you, your home and what you can provide for a child. We'll need you to be as thorough as possible to make sure that you are a match for one of our children in care. You will receive a response to this form in around 10 days, then we can move on to the next stage.

4



## Assessment and checks

Once your application form has been approved, we will perform some checks, including Disclosure and Barring Service checks, medical checks and personal references. You will also be invited to attend the Skills to Foster course where you will find out more about fostering. This course will teach you about the children who need foster carers and how you can prepare for becoming a foster carer. When you've completed the initial training, you will be assessed.

A fostering supervising social worker will work with you to complete this, so they will visit you regularly to get to know you and assess your suitability. They will also spend time with your own children to ensure their views form part of the assessment too. Your social worker will prepare a report using their knowledge and experience of the role of a foster carer, and you'll have the chance to make any comments before it's sent to the fostering panel.

5



## Fostering panel

Your assessment will be presented to the fostering panel. This is a group of people who have knowledge of fostering, including a foster carer, representatives from Children's Services and independent members. The panel will make a recommendation on your suitability as a foster carer. Following this, the agency decision maker (a senior manager) will make the final decision to approve you as a foster carer.

# applying

6



## Following approval

Following approval, you will be asked to sign the Foster Carer Agreement. This sets out what you can expect from the fostering service in terms of support, and our expectations of you and how we work together. You'll be allocated a fostering supervising social worker who will help you to prepare for a child coming to stay with you. They will continue to support you throughout, making sure you get the help and support that you need, and identifying any types of training that you might need to help you.

During your first year, you will complete an induction, and in following years, you will have a personal development plan which will identify your training and learning needs.

# Fosterin



## **Who can become a carer?**

We need a range of families to join our community of experienced foster carers. We want to make sure that every child who needs a foster home is suitably matched with a family who can meet their needs. It's key for us to welcome foster carers who have a variety and breadth of knowledge, skills and experience to help a child.

## **I'm not married, can I still foster?**

Absolutely! You can foster whether you are single, living with a partner or divorced.

## **Am I too old to foster?**

There is no upper age limit for becoming a foster carer. However, you will need to be healthy and have the energy to keep up with the children or young people placed with you.

## **Can I foster if I rent?**

As long as you can provide a secure and stable environment for a child, it doesn't matter if you are renting or own your own home. It's also important that the child you foster has their own bedroom, so make sure you have a spare space for them to call their own. If you are renting, the property owner will be contacted to provide permission.

## **I have a criminal conviction, can I foster?**

People with minor convictions can foster children, but much depends on the seriousness of the offence, how long ago the crime was committed, and how you have lived your life since. People with convictions for violent or sexual offences against children will not be considered as foster carers.



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# FAQs

**It's only natural that someone new to fostering would have a lot of questions, so here are some FAQs to help you out.**

## **Can I foster if I smoke?**

We ask that all of our foster carers provide a non-smoking household. If you foster a child over the age of five and you are a smoker, you should only smoke outside of the house only. If you foster a child under five, or a child who is disabled or suffering from heart disease, glue ear or respiratory problems, you must be a non-smoker.

## **I'm out of work, can I still foster?**

Yes, we welcome people from all backgrounds, regardless of their employment or financial status. However, your financial situation must be stable and as a foster carer, you won't be eligible to claim child benefit for any child in your care.

## **Does it matter if I have no previous fostering experience?**

No previous fostering experience is necessary, but knowledge around looking after children or young people is vital. This may have been gained from raising your own children, or working with children in an educational or childcare environment. We provide lots of support and advice to first time foster carers to help them on their way, so there's no need to worry about having no fostering experience.

## **Are there a lot of checks?**

We know that no one enjoys filling out forms or going through checks, but they are essential for fostering. We carry out checks to make sure we don't appoint people who have a history of violence or convictions for crimes against children. For example, a full Disclosure and Barring Service check will be done. We will also contact any previous local authorities in areas you have lived in to see if you have had any involvement with Children's Social Care. If you have children living at home, we will obtain school references and require a reference from your current employer.

## **How long will the assessment process take?**

The assessment could take up to 16 weeks, but delays can occur whilst the information required is collected. The timescale can be affected by your availability, or by delays in receiving the references and checks. However, we will try to be as efficient, but thorough, as possible.

## **What if I decide that fostering isn't for me?**

You can withdraw from the fostering process at any point, should you decide that it isn't right for you. You can talk through any concerns you have with your social worker and the fostering services team, and they will advise you. Sometimes you may want to think things over before you progress to the next stage. This is fine too and the whole process can go at a speed that suits you. It should be an open and honest discussion, so you should feel comfortable asking your social worker questions throughout.

## **How can I get more information?**

It's a good idea to do plenty of research before submitting interest in fostering. You can visit our website at [www.darlington.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/fostering) to read lots of helpful information and take our quiz to see if your circumstances would work. There are also lots of other fantastic external websites and case studies that you can read to help you, such as The Fostering Network and the GOV UK website. The best way to get more information is to speak to us directly, so give us a ring on 01325 406222.

## **I think I've done enough research.**

## **What's the next step?**

Once you've read all of the information in this guide, taken a quiz and browsed our website, you can register your interest. You can either use the contact form on [www.darlington.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/fostering) or call us on 01325 406222 to get the ball rolling.



# Fostering

[www.darlington.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/fostering)

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