

Foster for



**Sandwell**

Children's Trust

# FOSTER FOR SANDWELL

Join Sandwell's biggest family



call us on

**0800 358 0899**

or visit [www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org](http://www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org)

 **Sandwellchildrenstrust**



# FOSTERING FOR SANDWELL



**Thank you for showing an interest in fostering for Sandwell Children's Trust.**

**We need more foster carers to join our team and help us care for children who, for whatever reason are unable to live with their birth family. If you feel you have room in your heart as well as your home and can demonstrate the patience, commitment and understanding required to care for children who need love and care, then you're in the right place.**

The work carried out by Sandwell's foster carers means that children in our care can get the stability and support they need. Foster carers can make a real difference to the lives of children in Sandwell.

We are a not for profit fostering agency. We are owned by, but independent from, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. This means that we are responsible for all children in care in Sandwell. We only provide foster care placements for children who reside in the Sandwell area, meaning you are far more likely to be successfully matched with a local child or sibling group with access to fantastic support when you join our network of foster carers.

We are proud to call ourselves 'Sandwell's Biggest Family' Our sole focus is to provide the very best for each child in our care and this is where you come in!

We know that making the decision to foster is a huge step. Sandwell Children's Trust aims to guide and support you on every step of your journey as you make one of the biggest, yet most rewarding decisions anyone can make.

Please enjoy learning more about our service and what you can expect from fostering with us within this booklet.



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**Children settle into their new foster homes due to the dedication and understanding of the foster carers. Foster carers build positive relationships with the children.**



**Ofsted 2021,  
Good inspection**

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“ Foster carers are strong advocates and have high aspirations for the children they care for. ”



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Good inspection

# WHY DO CHILDREN NEED FOSTER CARE?

**Fostering means looking after someone else's child or children in your own home at a time when their own family are unable to care for them. Sometimes it is not safe for children to continue to live at home, or their family may not be able to provide the level of care and support a child may need. Our foster carers provide children with a safe and caring home for as long as they need it.**

Children need foster care for lots of different reasons. Their parents may be going through a difficult time such as illness or relationship difficulties. Some children may have been neglected or physically/emotionally/sexually harmed. These past experiences can have an impact on their behaviour and development.

There is one thing all children who need foster care have in common; they all need a safe, stable home, whether it's for a day, a week, a month or for many years.

Where possible and if it's safe to do so, children will eventually return to live with their own families but need a temporary home to give them stability while we work with their family. Other children may not be able to return home and will need longer term care with a foster family.

It is important that children have as much stability as possible during what is often an unsettling time for them - our aim is to keep children local to their family, friends, school, or nursery.



# WHAT IS FOSTERING?

**As a fostering service it's our responsibility to find families who are able to care for children who need a safe, secure and loving home. Without people coming forward to foster, we would not be able to provide our children with the positive futures that they all deserve.**

At Sandwell Children's Trust we value our foster carers and are proud that we can boast long-serving, committed carers. We need people to come forward who are determined to make a real difference to children's lives and who are ready for a challenge.

There is no upper age limit for fostering however you will need to be at least 21 years old and have a spare bedroom available for a child.

Foster carers are expected to promote and support the development of any children and young people in their care by encouraging them to reach their full potential. When recruiting foster carers, we look for applicants who are warm, friendly, robust, emotionally resilient, and able to provide a stable, loving family home.

The fostering role can often be quite a demanding one, so we need to make sure that our foster carers are physically and emotionally capable of responding to the needs of our children. There is no 'typical' or 'standard' foster carer, each fostering household is unique and valuable.

The children and young people in our care come from many different backgrounds and walks of life, so it makes sense that we need families from an equally diverse range of cultures and lifestyles to join us and represent Sandwell's biggest family.

Everyone in your home (even your pets) will be part of the fostering journey. If you have your own children for example, they need to play a big part in your decision to foster. After all, they'll be sharing their home, their parents, their belongings and their lives with another child/young person. Fostering will involve everyone in your household.

It's also essential to have a strong support network of friends and family for practical and emotional support, as a foster carer you will have the support and training of our staff team and other foster carers.







# WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FOSTERING AND ADOPTION?

**Choosing whether to foster or adopt is a life changing decision for both you and your family. Whilst children are in foster care they remain the responsibility of the local authority.**

Foster carers are regarded as professionals, who offer children the best possible care. They are supervised and supported by Sandwell Children's Trust fostering service and are paid fee's and allowances for their time and commitment.

Adoption is an option for children in care who cannot be brought up by their own parents. The adopters become the legal parents of the children and are granted parental responsibility by the family court.

(Foster carers) support children to develop appropriate independence skills. This increases children's confidence and self-esteem and successfully prepares them for their next steps into adulthood



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# "I'D LOVE TO FOSTER BUT..."



There are many misconceptions when it comes to fostering and we frequently find that some people think that their situation rules them out of applying to foster. Here are some of the common misconceptions:

## LET'S DO SOME MYTH BUSTING...

### **Myth 1: I'd love to foster but I'm single**

You do not have to be in a relationship to become a foster carer. Just like there are many brilliant single parents, you can also be a single foster carer.

### **Myth 2: You don't need to have your own children to become a foster carer**

You don't need to have your own children to become a foster carer. However, experience of looking after children is really important. It could be that you have looked after children within your family or taken part in paid or voluntary work involving children.

### **Myth 3: I'd love to foster but my own children live at home**

Having your own children is brilliant experience for being a foster carer! It's definitely not a barrier to you providing a loving, stable home for other children to enjoy. You might find that your own children can help to create that 'family atmosphere' that is so important in helping children to settle into a new home. As long as you have a spare bedroom to give a child the space they need, of course you can still foster even if your own children are still at home.

### **Myth 4: I'd love to foster but am I too old?**

There is no upper age limit to becoming a foster carer. We will ask for a medical as part of your assessment. We need to ensure that you are physically and emotionally able to foster.

### **Myth 5: We'd love to foster but we're a same sex couple**

You can be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQ+) and foster for Sandwell Children's Trust. We don't assess people based on their sexual orientation, we assess all applicants on their ability to look after children.

### **Myth 6: I'd love to foster but I'm religious**

A large proportion of Sandwell Children's Trust foster carers have a faith background. Practicing a religion will not prevent you from fostering, provided you can meet the religious needs of any children you look after.



### **Myth 7: We'd love to foster but we also need to work**

We understand that you may want to carry on working and we will support you to look at how fostering can be combined with your work. It may be that looking after school age children will combine better with fostering depending on circumstances.

### **Myth 8: I'd love to foster but I have a criminal record**

A police check for everyone over 18 in your household is compulsory during the initial checking process. There are some specific offences that will make you unsuitable to foster, but there are circumstances when having a criminal record does not in itself stop you from fostering. All circumstances are different so please talk to us before ruling yourself out.

### **Myth 9: I'd love to foster but I don't live in a big house**

It is important for children and young people coming into foster care to have a space to call their own, so foster carers do need to have a spare bedroom. Around 50% of children who need a foster home have at least one brother or sister, who should be kept together - they may be able to share a room with their sibling, but not with other children in the household.

### **Myth 10: I'd love to foster but I don't have any qualifications**

Our foster carers come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some people have lots of qualifications, and some have none. What we ask is for people to have a good level of spoken and written English. The ability to use a computer to take part in training and meetings that involve decision making for the children in your care.

Foster carers are also required to keep daily recording logs and contribute to reports for each child they look after.

### **Myth 11: I'd love to foster but I don't own my own home**

Whether you own your own home or not does not matter. Provided your home is safe for children and maintained to a good standard, you can foster. We always visit you at home as part of our assessment process and part of the reason is to be sure that – whether or not you own the property – it's safe and suitable for fostering.

**If you have any other questions about your eligibility to foster then please do not hesitate to contact us.**



# WHAT MAKES A GOOD FOSTER CARER?

**As an approved foster carer, you'll be expected to provide a good level of care that will enable any child you are looking after to make progress and reach their potential.**

We know that making the decision to foster is a huge step. Sandwell Children's Trust aims to guide and support you on every step of your journey as you make one of the biggest, yet most rewarding decisions anyone can make.

Just like parents, foster carers have many responsibilities which need to be undertaken to bring out the best in a child. You will need to:

- Establish and maintain a good routine for children.
- Treat all children as individuals and as part of your family.
- Work as part of a team with staff and professionals from many agencies.
- Actively encourage children to learn, and help them to feel positive about their background, culture and religion.

**“Foster carers are strong advocates and have high aspirations for the children they care for.”**



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- Promote the healthy growth and development of a child, particularly with regards to their health and education.
- To speak up for the child (or children) in order to ensure that they receive good care and the opportunities to develop.
- Build relationships with children and also assist them in keeping in contact with others who are important to them, in order to promote, sustain and create good relationships.
- Deal responsibly with confidential information, keeping written records about each child's care and contribute to reports about the child.
- Complete the appropriate training courses provided to develop your skills.
- Provide a safe, caring and nurturing environment for the child(ren) or young people you look after.
- Ensure, at all times, that the child(ren) you're caring for are kept safe from harm and abuse and taught how to get help if anything untoward should happen to them.
- Be able to manage a child's behaviour without resorting to physical or inappropriate punishment.

You will receive on-going training and support, have your own dedicated social worker and receive regular supervision. You will also have access to other services that are available to support and assist you and any children you may be caring for. As a foster carer you will need to continue learning and developing your skills throughout your fostering journey.



# WHAT OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US MAKES A GOOD FOSTER CARER

Children are integral members of (foster carers) families. As a result, children develop a strong sense of belonging



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*Prepare me for the future*

THEY PROVIDE US WITH NICE THINGS

**Include me in shopping**

Ask me what I want to do for my birthday

Help me to achieve

Caring

Experience of looking after children and young people

**HONESTY** Talk with me rather than about me

**Help with school work**

**Guidance** Give me options

**HAPPY SUPPORT**

Support me to move into my own flat and live independently

They meet my needs

**ASK FOR MY OPINION**

**Kind** TALK TO ME ON MY LEVEL

**Loving and stable home**

**Ask me what I want**

Allow me to be involved in choices and decisions

**HELPFUL Big Heart**

Treat all children in the house the same

**SUPPORT MY RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL BELIEFS**

Respectful

They see caring for me as more than just a job! **THEY ARE FAIR**



# TYPES OF FOSTERING

There is no such thing as a typical fostering situation. Children and young people become 'looked after' for a variety of reasons and, although many of them return home after a short period of time, some remain 'looked after' for anything from a few weeks to several years.

If you decide to become a Foster carer, you will have plenty of opportunity to explore which type of fostering would be right for you and your family.

To get you thinking about what could be right for you, your family and the child you will be caring for, here are some of the options:

- **Short Term Fostering**

This can mean anything from a few days to a period of several months or years. Short-term foster carers provide a temporary place to stay until the child can return home to their own family or a longer-term plan can be made.

- **Long Term Fostering**

Sometimes children will not be able to go back to live with their own families for whatever reason. Long-term fostering allows children and young people to stay in a fostering family where they can feel secure, whilst maintaining contact with their birth family. Children and young people can stay with their foster carers until they reach independence.

- **Parent and Child**

These are specialist placements for a parent and their child. As a time-limited placement, usually around 12 weeks in duration, both parent and child enjoy a safe family environment whilst developing their parenting skills with your support and experience as foster carers.

- **Specialist Fostering**

Some children and young people's experiences have been so difficult they need additional help and support. For example, a young person may need to be supervised closely, display complex behaviours, or find it hard to form positive relationships with others.

Our focus is on supporting the young people who have made significant progress while in residential care and would now benefit from a foster home environment.

Whilst caring for children and young people as specialist foster carers can be highly rewarding; it is also very

demanding. For this reason, you will have access to an enhanced package of support and receive a specialist fee in recognition of the skills and commitment required to be a specialist foster carer.

- **PACE Fostering**

PACE Stands for Police and Criminal Evidence. A PACE bed is used as a one-night only resource when requested by the police for a young person who would otherwise be held in police custody overnight until they appear in court the next day.

- **Emergency Fostering**

Emergency foster carers provide short term care for children and young people where there is a need for them to be in a safe and secure environment at very short notice: for example, if it's felt that they are at immediate risk of harm. We need foster carers who are willing and ready to care for our children and young people at the drop of a hat, emergency foster carers are usually required outside of normal office hours and work on a rota basis.

- **Short Break Fostering**

Short break foster care (or respite care) covers a number of different types of part-time care, which allows our full-time caregivers a 'break' for short periods of time.

This type of fostering is required in a number of different circumstances. For example, a 'full time' foster carer may have urgent family commitments or a particular situation which mean they are unable to care for the child or children as they normally would. Alternatively, children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs may need a break from their caregiver or their caregiver may need a break from their caring responsibilities to recharge their batteries.

Short breaks foster carers provide care for a child or children for a maximum of a week or two at a time, for example during school holidays, or at weekends, depending on the child and/or the family's needs.





## IF IT'S NOT THE RIGHT TIME FOR YOU TO FOSTER, ANOTHER OPTION MIGHT BE...

- **Supported Lodgings**

Supported lodgings is when you share your home with a young person who may require some additional day-to-day support. You would provide a safe home and help them learn to live on their own. Most young people who need supported lodgings are aged 16 to 18 and they may have left foster care or experienced a family breakdown. Supported lodgings give a young person a room in a home environment and the support and guidance of an adult living there.

This might include helping young people develop life skills such as:

- Budgeting skills
- Basic personal skills
- Social skills.

It might involve helping them to use public transport on their own and manage their own health, or more challenging areas such as managing difficult behaviour.

”  
You might be temporary  
in their lives, they might  
be temporary in yours.  
But, there is nothing  
temporary about the  
love or the lesson

“  
Tonia M. Christle,  
writer & adoptee



# MEET SOME OF OUR CARERS...

## CASE STUDIES



### Angela's story

**Angela has been fostering for Sandwell for over five years and now specialises in mother and baby placements.**

#### **Can you remember what your first placement was like?**

Oh yes, very clearly – probably because we're still in touch and I'm soon to be godmother to her

child. Initially it was very difficult, very challenging, the young lady had a number of issues and took a long time to settle. But you can usually find the good somewhere.

#### **How do you find the support you get as a foster carer?**

My supervising social worker is excellent, and I can call her at any time, we have regular reviews. I've found her very supportive, very interested in what's going on and very mindful of how the placement might be impacting on my family. So that's been really helpful.

#### **What would you say to someone who's thinking about fostering?**

I'd say become a foster carer because it's really important. It's a worthwhile way to make a difference to someone else. It is rewarding, it is challenging, and you do need a lot of patience. You need to approach it for the right reasons, but you do look back and think 'yes, I made a difference to that young person's life' and somewhere along the line, they will remember that.

**To read Angela and Pam's case studies in full, visit our website at [www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org/fostering/whats-fostering-really-like](http://www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org/fostering/whats-fostering-really-like)**



**“ I do enjoy working with teenagers. Some people may see them as difficult – I don't, it's just part of their nature, part of their experience and I think understanding their experiences helps me provide them with a better home life. ”**

Pam, Rowley Regis, fostering for Sandwell for over 20 years



“ Children settle into their new foster homes due to the dedication and understanding of the foster carers. Foster carers build positive relationships with the children. ”



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### Pam's story

**Pam's been a single foster carer for over 20 years, has two children of her own and now looks after teenagers mostly. She's looked after over 30 children, but if you include respite children more than 60 children have benefited from Pam's home and support.**

#### Why become a foster carer?

I first thought about becoming a foster carer because one of my own children was at school with a looked after child and asked me if he could come and live with us, so I explained that we can't have this child, but we could have other children come and live with us. Both my children said yes, so it was really my own children who got me into fostering and I'm really grateful for that!

#### Are you still in touch with some of the children you've looked after?

I am. Some of the children that have moved on to adoption I receive regular updates, which is absolutely lovely and my older children that have moved on to independence they visit regularly. One young lady comes round every week for Sunday lunch and another young man turns up occasionally on the sofa if he's had an argument with his girlfriend – and it's because they know where their home is. This is and always will be their home and this is their family.

#### Is it possible to sum up your time as a foster carer?

I honestly don't think it's possible to sum up the whole experience as a foster carer because it's an ongoing journey, it's always changing, there's always a new experience with every child that comes through the door because every child is an individual. I know a lot of our carers because I've been involved in training new foster carers, which is a great joy because it allows me to share my knowledge. It's nice when foster carers that I've trained, phone me when they have a child in placement. So it keeps you thinking all the time and learning all the time. If I tried to sum it up I suppose I'd say it's been a fantastic, chaotic and wonderful experience.





# SUPPORTING YOU ALL THE WAY...

“ Our job is  
to support you,  
to support  
Sandwell's children  
Mike Tomkinson,  
Fostering Team Manager

”

Once you are approved as a foster carer you will become an important part of our fostering team.

Children and young people are at the centre of what we do. However, to ensure that they have the best care available we recognise that we need to provide all our carers with high quality support, learning and development opportunities.

Choosing to become a foster carer is one of the biggest decisions you will ever make, so we think it's important to offer you the best possible support throughout your fostering journey.

In your first year with Sandwell you will work through the Training, Support, Development Handbook (TSD). This is a requirement for all foster carers nationwide. But don't worry you will have the support of your supervising social worker to help you complete your workbook! Sandwell will also provide you with an ongoing and individualised training and development package to support you throughout your fostering career. This will cover the mandatory training that all foster carers must complete in their first year to refresh and update your skills and guidance on the additional training and development you can access to help you reach your goals as a foster carer. We offer a blended approach to learning with both online and face-to-face courses.





# AS AN APPROVED FOSTER CARER FOR SANDWELL CHILDREN'S TRUST YOU WILL HAVE:

- ✓ Your own dedicated Social Worker who will visit you regularly to offer you support and guidance in fulfilling your fostering role.
- ✓ 24-hour support including access to a Social Worker on duty during office hours and 24/7 telephone support which means you can always get advice & support, whatever the day, whatever the hour.
- ✓ Regular foster carer support groups give you the opportunity to meet with other foster carers and members of the fostering team to share experiences, get the latest service updates and discuss any challenges you may be facing, so we can support each other with practical solutions.
- ✓ Coffee mornings that give you a chance to meet up with other foster carers in an informal setting with an open agenda which is set by those who attend. It's also a way to keep in touch with the friends that are often made during your training to become a foster carer.
- ✓ Financial package - We offer all of our foster carers a career progression fee based on their skills and experience. Carers are able to progress through the 6 skills stages as they gain more confidence and experience.
- ✓ Membership with 'FosterTalk' as an applicant or an approved foster carer with Sandwell, you will automatically have membership of FosterTalk, the leading national independent support service that offers confidential, impartial advice, support and guidance to foster carers across the UK. They also provide 24-hours support for their members.

My supervising Social Worker is excellent, and I can call her at any time, we have regular reviews. I've found her very supportive, very interested in what's going on and very mindful of how the placement might be impacting on my family. So that's been really helpful - Angela, Sandwell foster carer



# WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If you've decided that fostering for Sandwell is for you, it's time to start your journey to become a foster carer.

## Step 1 – Get in Touch

Now you've read this information booklet you can get in touch with us by visiting our website, email or by calling us.



## Step 2 – Initial Home Visit

A member of our team will come and visit to find out more about you and your home. Once the initial home visit has taken place and you have a little more information, we know that it is very important for you to have the opportunity to consider with your family whether fostering is for you.

## Step 3 – Application

Next we will ask you to complete our simple application form so that we can use the information to carry out a range of checks and references. These will include a Criminal Record Check (DBS) and a medical with your GP.

## Step 4 – Attend Skills to Foster Training

You will then be invited to attend the preparation course which is usually held over three days with other applicants. You will be able to ask questions and find out more about what the fostering role entails as well as starting to build your fostering support network.







“(Foster carers) support children to develop appropriate independence skills. This increases children’s confidence and self-esteem and successfully prepares them for their next steps into adulthood.”



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WELCOME



### Step 7 – You are now a registered foster carer with Sandwell Children’s Trust

You and your family will meet your dedicated Supervising Social Worker who will provide you with ongoing advice and guidance. You are now ready to welcome a child into your home. We will look at matching you with a child and young person depending on your type of approval and the needs of the child or young person.



### Step 5 – Fostering Assessment

You will be assigned a dedicated assessing social worker to complete your Fostering Assessment, they will visit around 8 times. During this time the Social Worker gets to know you and your family and spends time helping you think about what strengths you could bring to caring for a looked after child or young person. We will talk to you about your family background and your present circumstances. During this stage we will have to ask some very detailed and personal questions, so we ask you to be as relaxed, open, and honest with us as possible. On completion of the assessment, it is written up into a report, you will have the opportunity to read and comment upon the report.



### Step 6 – Fostering Panel

The Fostering Assessment is taken to Sandwell’s Independent Fostering Panel. You will be invited to attend the panel meeting with your social worker. All panel members will have read your assessment and will have some questions to ask you. You will also have the opportunity to ask any questions that you may have.

The panel will make a recommendation regarding your approval. Once the panel has made their recommendation, this is then considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), who makes the final decision to approve you as carers.



# TAKE THE FIRST STEP ON YOUR FOSTERING JOURNEY

WE HOPE YOU'VE ENJOYED  
READING THIS BOOKLET  
AND GETTING A BETTER  
UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT  
BEING A FOSTER CARER FOR  
SANDWELL IS ALL ABOUT

If you have any further questions or feel ready to take  
the next step on your journey into fostering:

## Get in Touch with us

visit us on

**[www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org](http://www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org)**

email us at **Fostering\_Info@  
[sandwellchildrenstrust.org](mailto:Fostering_Info@sandwellchildrenstrust.org)**

call us on

**0800 358 0899**

find us on

**f t Sandwellchildrenstrust**



Children are  
integral members of  
(foster carers) families.  
As a result, children  
develop a strong sense  
of belonging.



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## NEED SOME MORE INFORMATION?

If you would like to explore fostering further then visit these websites:

Foster Talk: **[www.fostertalk.org](http://www.fostertalk.org)**

Foster Line: **[www.fosterline.info](http://www.fosterline.info)** which will provide you with general advice about fostering.

The Fostering Network:  
**[www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)**

If you are looking at making a permanent addition to your family, we would recommend that you explore adoption.

To find out more about adoption contact Adoption@Heart on 01902 55 3818 or by emailing [info@adoptionatheart.org.uk](mailto:info@adoptionatheart.org.uk)

## ALREADY A FOSTER CARER?

If you are already a registered foster carer and would like to know more about transferring to Sandwell Children's Trust, we would be happy to talk to you. All transfers are undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

“ Take the plunge,  
take the first step.  
Don't be nervous, don't  
be afraid and find out  
for yourself whether it's  
going to suit you and  
your family.

Pam, Sandwell  
Foster carer ”





Foster for



**Sandwell**  
Children's Trust

# FOSTER FOR SANDWELL

**Jump in to something new**



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