



(West Midlands) LTD 'Where every child matters today, tomorrow and in the future'

Fostering Agency

FOSTERING INFORMATION PACK

Contents

Welcome letter
Information on fostering
A note about Data Protection and access to your records
Listening to your views/Complaints



WELCOME TO FUTURE FAMILIES

Future Families is a fostering service developed in 2006 under the umbrella of Future Health and Social Care. Since 2009 the agency has gained its status as a Limited company. We are a team of dedicated workers who are committed to recruiting a broad range of foster carers who are able to make a positive contribution to a child/young person's life.

Like all fostering agency, Future Families is regularly inspected by Ofsted, a Government Regulated body responsible for the overseeing of Social Care. In our November 2012 inspection, Future Families was judged as Good, which means we provide a strong service. In addition, the inspector noted that the strength of Future Families is that we provide a high level of support to both foster carers and children, crucial for a successful outcome.

Future Families firmly believe that every child/young person has the right to be brought up in a safe family environment and it is for this reason, that at the heart of everything we do, their needs are paramount. Whether the need is for a short or long term placement Future Families aim is to place every child/young person with caring and committed foster carers who will enable the experience of positive substitute care within a family setting.

We have a matching procedure in place to ensure that each child/young person is matched carefully with a carer and in addition to the support, we provide you with on going training to enable you to undertake your role as a foster carer. From experience, we do know that the road ahead may be long and difficult at times but we would not wish to underestimate the benefits for a child if you are able to provide a nurturing, safe and stable home environment for a child/young person.

The Management Team of Future Families welcomes you and hopes that this will be the beginning of a long and fulfilling relationship with us.

Pauline Wellington
Responsible Individual

Joanne Salmon
Operations Manager



Thank you for your enquiry about fostering with Future Families. We are a multi cultural team who offer a fostering service for all children in the care system. We aim to prepare and support children and families through this process.

We hope this information will answer some of your questions about our fostering service. We will refer to the problems and difficulties that can arise when children are placed for fostering. There can be great satisfaction and rewards in offering a child the chance of a secure loving environment.

WHAT IS FOSTERING?

Fostering is a way of giving children who cannot live with their birth family the experience of family life. Fostering can be short term, long term, or permanent. There can be a variety of reasons for a child coming into foster care, some of which are listed below.

- ✚ Birth parents being unwell, (physically or mentally)
- ✚ Not being 'good enough' at parenting to safely care for their children full time
- ✚ Birth parents may have difficulties in meeting a particular child's needs
- ✚ The family unit may have broken down
- ✚ A parent may have abused the child

Foster care is often used temporarily while birth parents get help sorting out problems. Children are sometimes returned to their birth families in situations where their birth parents are able to demonstrate that they can look after their children safely. Other children may stay in long-term/permanent foster care, some may be adopted, and others who are old enough will move on to live independently.





Not all children want to be adopted especially older children or those who may need to remain in contact with their birth families. These children live with long-term Foster Carers until they reach adulthood and are ready to live independently. In these cases, birth parents will keep their parental responsibility but will share this with the local authority that has a responsibility to arrange Foster Care for the children.

Foster Carers are expected to provide children with a high quality of care, as well as working in partnership with local authorities and the birth parents to raise the children into adulthood, for example this includes the teaching of independent living skills such as cooking and budgeting. Foster Carers may work with/alongside other professionals whilst caring for a child including teachers, therapists, doctors, etc as well as attending regular meetings. In addition Foster Carers would also attend ongoing training, receive regular support and supervision from Future Families.

All Foster Carers are registered with and contracted to a local authority, voluntary or independent agency, such as Future Families. Foster Carers are increasingly viewed as professionals and receive a fee on a basis of being self employed.



WHAT KIND OF FOSTER CARERS DO CHILDREN NEED?

A wide range of families from all cultural groups are required to meet the varying needs of children in foster care. Foster carers may be single, married, living together, gay, lesbian, previously divorced, working or unemployed, childless or with children of their own, still at home or grown-up.



There are no age restrictions for fostering. However Future Families will expect people to be medically fit and mature to work with the challenging behaviours and situations that fostering is likely to present.

Caring for someone else's children, who may have had unhappy, difficult and damaging experiences in their lives, can be a tough task and can present a great deal of stress and challenge. It is important therefore, to have good support from family and friends.

We are looking for people who have some skills in relation to children and who are caring, sensitive, tolerant, patient, energetic, and who are able to keep their sense of humour even when presented with resentful, ungrateful, destructive, attention-seeking or other forms of challenging behaviour. Children's previous experiences frequently lead them to behave in such ways towards their Foster Carers as they test out the adult's commitment.



THE CHILDREN

The children that will be placed with our families will have complicated and difficult backgrounds, and will need the positive experience of family life to take them into adulthood. These children may range from 0-16 years. They may also be single children or sibling groups of two or more. Many of the children will have family members with whom they need to keep in contact with.



The children in the care system are white, dual/mixed heritage, black African/Caribbean and Asian. Future Families will vigorously aim to achieve placements which are culturally compatible for children. Some children may have specific disabilities where special care will be required. Other children may have learning difficulties and will need special help at school.

WHAT ABOUT A CHILD'S BIRTH FAMILY?

The child's birth family will remain an important part of the child's life, and there is likely to be substantial regular contact with them. The birth family will keep their parental responsibility for the child, although they may share this with the local authority. Any major decisions about the child will be made by those with parental responsibility in consultation with Foster Carers and other professionals. It is important that Foster Carers are able to understand and accept the child's birth family and the child's need to continue his or her relationship with their family, despite the birth parent's past behaviour towards the child as well as the relationship that develops between child and Foster Carers.

However, in some circumstances it may not be appropriate for a child to have direct contact with their birth family and in these situations Future Families would assist the local authority in deciding what type of contact would be in the interest of the child/children.

It may be difficult at times to understand this need, especially where parents may have behaved in ways that brought distress and even suffering to the child. But it is important that Foster Carers can accept that even parents, who may seem to lack concern for their children at first sight, can be important for the child and that maintaining a positive view of their birth family can be crucial to the child's identity, self-esteem and sense of worth. Where Foster Carers are able to nurture this, the child is more likely to flourish.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DECIDE TO APPLY TO FOSTER?

The decision to apply to become a Foster Carer is an important one and you will need as much information as possible before you make your decision. Usually a social worker will visit you in your home to give you information about fostering and answer some of your questions. At this stage, you may also wish to make enquiries elsewhere, such as your local authority. However once you decide to move ahead with your application, you can only be allowed to be approved by one agency.

You will be asked for written permission for 'statutory checks' to be undertaken. These checks include enquiries of the police, (criminal records bureau) health, (you will be asked to undertake a comprehensive medical examination, which will be carried out by your G.P) probation and social services checks. In addition, we will ask you to provide three personal references of which one must be a relative, (we will require four references from couples).

Following these checks and references, you will need to attend preparation training, (where you will learn about the needs of children in foster care) and then undergo an assessment, where a social worker will spend time getting to know you and your family over several weeks. The worker will also explore your interest to foster, whether fostering would be right for you and for your family, how your skills and life experiences might help or hinder your wish to foster children and what kinds of children's needs you might best be able to meet. The social worker will prepare a report called a Form F which will be shared with you and will be presented to an independent fostering panel who recommend one of three decisions, i.e. that you are approved as Foster Carer, that your application is deferred as information may need further clarification, or that you do not foster.

As well as recommending whether or not you should be approved as Foster Carers, it is the panel's job to consider the kinds of children you will be approved for and will make a recommendation for your approval. You will be invited to attend the panel meeting and any recommendation made by the panel must first be ratified by the agency's Decision Maker, before a child can be placed with you. We treat all the information we receive about you and the information you yourselves give as highly confidential. After consideration by panel, this information is shared only with those who will be making decisions about placing particular foster children.



HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

We try to respond to families' interest in fostering as soon as possible, and begin your assessment and training groups at the earliest opportunity. Generally an assessment will take between 4- 6 months. Although the time scales may seem long especially if you are keen to proceed to help children, it is important that every care is taken to arrive at a decision that will be right for yourselves and for the children needing Foster Carers. Mistakes can cause great pain and distress to children and Carers alike.



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER WE HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED?

Together you and your social worker will identify a child or children for whom you may be the right family and liaise with local authority social workers who hold the information on the child. Our aim will be to place a child with you as soon as you are approved. However this will depend on a number of factors, i.e. the type of child/children you are approved for, the information on the child including background history that is available, and any assessment (e.g. medical or psychological) which may need to be completed prior to placement. There may also be time delays relating to the local authority processes.

Therefore it is not possible to say how long the waiting time will be before an agreement on the right child for your family is made, but you are encouraged to subscribe to the Be My Parent publication to keep in touch with the current needs of children in care.

Future Families will place children with families on behalf of all social services departments in England and Wales and will endeavour to obtain as much information about a child as is possible for Foster Carers. We are more likely to place children who are living in neighbouring local authority areas. You will be consulted at every step of the way and Future families will aim to provide continued support to our Foster Carers through training and specialised support groups.

WHAT SUPPORT AND HELP IS AVAILABLE?

Future Families believes that a high level of support to Foster Carers is crucial as they undertake this important work. Future Families and the local authority responsible for the child will draw up an agreement with you called the 'placement agreement' which will include the information considered necessary to help you care for the child.



Although the placement and the child's supervision will remain the responsibility of the local authority, Future Families will offer regular support, advice and guidance to Foster Carers, as well as negotiate with the local authority where appropriate in relation to specialist services, (therapy, educational support etc).

We will also offer ongoing training opportunities for Foster Carers in order to increase their knowledge and understanding of children with particular difficulties. Additionally we can often arrange informal contact with other families caring for children not born to them, and this can frequently act as another valuable form of support. We aim to be responsive to our Foster Carer's needs and provide a support service that meets them as fully as possible. We believe that good support increases the chances of a placement being successful.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Foster Carers will receive a fee as well as financial support for each child and this will be discussed during your initial assessment.

I'M STILL INTERESTED, WHAT DO I DO NOW?

We hope that you have found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to know more without committing yourself in any way, please ring us now on

0121- 234 6210



A NOTE ABOUT DATA PROTECTION AND ACCESS TO YOUR RECORDS

Future Families is required to hold written records about you. The information you provide us is described by the Data Protection Act as sensitive, i.e. information such as your racial or ethnic origin, your religious beliefs and your physical and mental health.

We are committed to treating this information carefully and confidentially, observing the eight principles of the Act which are summarised as follows:

1. That the information you provide is processed fairly and lawfully by Future Families
2. That Future Families only use the information for specific and lawful purposes
3. That the information we keep regarding you and your family is adequate, relevant and not excessive
4. That the information we hold is accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date
5. That Future Families does not keep information longer than necessary
6. That any data we hold on you is processed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act
7. That the information you provide is safeguarded against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental damage or destruction
8. That it is retained wholly within the European economic area, unless there are adequate protections in the receiving territory

To conclude Future Families is committed to work in partnership with you to ensure that the records we keep are accurate, organised, concise and free from jargon. You are entitled to have access to your records, as well as highlighting any corrections, inaccuracies or record any differences of opinion.

Finally, if you have any queries regarding any data held on your file, please contact a member of the management team.



LISTENING TO YOUR VIEWS

We want to hear from you and learn how we can improve our service. Therefore we welcome and appreciate your comments.

You have a right to be involved in the decisions we make about our service. To make sure that this happens we will do the following:-

- + Listen to what you tell us
- + Record your suggestions and consider these when improving the service
- + Keeping you informed of any changes
- + Offer you support

There are a number of ways you can tell us what you think. These include:-

- + Talking to a member of staff from Future Families
- + Talking to a member of the management team from Future Families
- + Writing to the nominated complaints officer.

It is vital to the well being of Future Families and the welfare of the child/young person, you as a carer, the staff and all those with whom we work, that it recognises and responds to complaints and that it handles investigations in a sensitive, prompt and fair manner.

Individuals or groups wishing to utilise the procedure are entitled to assistance and support from whoever they chose, in their presentation of their complaint.

Your complaint will be recorded in the Complaints File. You will receive acknowledgement of your complaint within 5 working days. You might be contacted to make sure that we have understood your complaint correctly. You may also be visited by the person investigating the complaint.

If you are not satisfied with the reply you may ask for your complaint to be referred to the Chief Executive, Roger Telphia, who will review the matter on your behalf.