**A logo for a company

Description automatically generatedFostering Recruitment and Retention Programme: Generic Content for Information Packs**

**This document is intended to support clusters to create their information packs for prospective foster carers.** It is up to clusters what they choose to include in their information pack. This document provides some generic content which will require tailoring to each hub. As part of their Media Toolkit, Red Havas will provide an empty information pack / leaflet design which regions can add their chosen content into.

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What is not included in this document:

* Personalised welcome to hub
* Introduction to the hub & how LA partners works together
* Personalised ‘why foster with us?’
* A day in the life of a foster carer
* A day in the life of a child in foster care
* Real life fostering stories or case studies
* FAQs on finance
* FAQs on support
* FAQs on children

## What is fostering?

Fostering provides an alternative family environment for children and young people who can’t live at home or with family. Foster carers open their homes to these children, providing them with a safe, stable, and nurturing environment where they can thrive.

Foster carers look after children in their home and take care of their practical day-to-day needs. This may include school drop-offs and pick-ups, making meals, working with schools to support their learning, and offering emotional support and guidance as they grow. They nurture trusting relationships with the children they foster, providing a family environment filled with love, support and patience.

As our foster carers will tell you, fostering is not always plain sailing – there are good days and bad days for every family. However, fostering is extremely rewarding, and our foster carers know that every day they are making a difference in a child’s life.

Whether you just want a bit more information about fostering or you have decided this is a journey you would like to take, our team are here to support you every step of the way.

## Who are the children? / Why children need our support

Social workers try extremely hard to keep families together. When this is not possible, for reasons including family problems, a parent’s ill health or because the child has been neglected or abused, the child comes into the care of a local authority. These children may be babies, toddlers, teenagers, or sibling groups.

All children need food, clothing, shelter, love and safety, but children in foster carer may have additional needs because of their life experiences. Whatever the individual circumstances, these children have often experienced trauma, and will be experiencing grief and often mixed emotions about not living with their parents. Foster carers need to be sensitive, empathetic, and resilient in their approach to supporting the child they care for.

Since 2008, the number of children in care in England has increased every year, while the number of registered foster carers has declined. This leaves us with not enough homes for children that need them. We desperately need more foster carers to offer help and support to children in our communities.

*[Why do we need more foster carers in the region]*

## Who can be a foster carer?

There are very few barriers to becoming a foster carer, and there is no ‘typical’ fostering household. What is important is whether a person can meet the needs of the children they care for.

**Age:** You must be over 18 years old to foster, although some fostering agencies may require you to be at least 21 years old.

**Relationship Status**: As long as you can support a child in your care, your relationship status, whether married, in a civil partnership, divorced, or single, does not matter. If you are in a relationship, it should be stable to provide a supportive environment for the child.

**Sexuality and Gender:** Fostering is open to individuals of all sexual orientations and genders. The most important factor is your ability to meet the needs of the child and provide a caring environment.

**Having Children:** You can be a foster carer regardless of whether you have children of your own. If you have children living with you, they will be included in the assessment process and supported throughout your fostering journey. We speak to all adults and children within the home because we need to understand how fostering would work for you and your family. If you have children living elsewhere, they will also be involved in the assessment process. This will be approached sensitively and in an age-appropriate way.

**Your Home:** You can foster whether you own or rent your home. Some of our local authority partners may require you to have a spare room for the foster child, but this will be discussed during the application process.

**Work Status:** You may be able to foster while working another job, but you must be available to care for the child, as well as attending meetings, and training sessions. The assessment process will explore your ability to meet the child's needs alongside your work commitments. To find out if keeping your current job could be an option for you, we would encourage you to discuss this at the beginning of the assessment process. More employers are developing Friendly Fostering Family Policy to support you to be able to work and foster. Many people also chose to change their current working arrangements to suit their new family arrangements once they are approved as a foster carer.

**Ethnicity:** Fostering is open to individuals from any cultural background. You must have a good understanding of English to communicate effectively and collaborate with professionals.

**Health Issues**: Physical or mental health issues do not necessarily prevent you from becoming a foster carer. What matters is that you are physically fit and emotionally stable enough to provide consistent care and support for a child or young person. All prospective foster carers must undergo a medical assessment with their GP. The findings from this assessment will be used by our Medical Advisor to determine whether any existing health issues may affect your ability to care for a child or negatively impact in your health.

**Criminal Record**: You must be honest about any previous offences during the assessment process. Minor offences should not necessarily prevent you from fostering, but you will be required to undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check which will highlight any criminal convictions. Honesty from the outset is crucial in this process.

If you do have any concerns about something that might prevent you from becoming a foster carer, please get in touch with our hub team who can put you at ease and answer any questions you may have – big or small!

## Types of foster care

Fostering is about opening your home to a child in need, and there are many ways to do it. You can foster for a short time, like a night or a week, or for longer, even permanently. There are also special types of fostering, like helping children with disabilities, supporting parents and babies, or giving a safe place to a young person seeking asylum. We're here to help you figure out which type of fostering fits best for you.

**Short term fostering** provides temporary care for children when their parents are unable to look after them. This could be for a few weeks, a few months or a few years whilst parental assessments are happening or longer-term care plans are being made. Short term foster carers play a vital role in maintaining family connections and supporting court-agreed family time, through arranging visits and supporting children during these times. Short term fostering is the most common type of fostering. In some cases, a child’s plan may evolve from short-term to long-term or permanent arrangements to ensure stability and ongoing support for the child.

**Long-term fostering**, also known as **permanence**, is where a foster carer agrees to provide stable and ongoing care for children for long periods, often into adulthood. Permanence aims to ensure that children have a sense of belonging and security throughout their childhood and as they navigate their formative years. Young people may continue to live with their foster family after the they turn 18, known as ‘staying put’. This arrangement allows them to continue living in a familiar environment, receiving ongoing support and guidance as they transition into adulthood.

**Emergency foster care** is when you provide a child somewhere safe to stay overnight or for the weekend.

**Short break support,** sometimes known as **respite care**, is when foster carers look after children for short periods of time. Short break offers temporary support and relief for families and caregivers looking after children with additional needs. It provides a short-term break for primary carers, allowing them to recharge and attend to personal needs, whilst providing a safe and welcoming space for children to stay.

**Specialist foster care** caters to children with specific needs or circumstances, such as additional physical, emotional or educational needs. This type of fostering provides vital care and stability for children who may require additional support to thrive. Specialist foster carers might also care for teenagers who have higher levels of need and require more support. To be a specialist foster carer you will need extra training. You also need to have excellent communication skills to work collaboratively with the care team surrounding the child or young person.

**Parent and child fostering**, or parent and baby fostering, involves providing support and guidance to both a young parent and their child within the foster home. The parent may be in the later stages of pregnancy or have a newborn baby. The primary focus of this type of foster care is to help the parent and child stay together as a family unit. Foster carers in this role offer practical assistance, guidance, and encouragement to the parent, while also providing a safe and nurturing environment for the child. To be a parent and child foster carer you will need extra training.

**Fostering for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children** involves providing a safe and supportive home for children who have arrived in a new country without a parent or guardian. These children have often fled their home countries due to conflict, natural disasters, persecution or other forms of violence. Foster carers for these children offer the much-needed stability and care, and guidance to help these children adjust to their new environment and heal from the trauma they have experienced. Often, these children speak little to no English so need help from foster carers to support them to adjust to their new environment and culture, whilst also support to help them maintain their identity through promoting their religion, language and heritage.

## The benefits of fostering

Fostering a child is a highly rewarding experience that offers the chance to make a positive difference on a child or young person’s life. Fostering isn’t always plain-sailing or without its challenges but knowing that you're making a difference in a child's life, providing them with love, stability, and opportunities for growth, is incredibly fulfilling. As a foster carer, seeing the positive impact of your care on a child's wellbeing and development is a source of immense joy and satisfaction.

Fostering offers the chance to expand your family and create meaningful bonds with children who need a caring and supportive environment. Whether you're a single individual, a couple, or a family with children of your own, fostering brings new perspectives and relationships into your home.

Fostering also comes with a network of support to assist you on your journey. Like any family dynamic, there will be bumps in the road, but you will never be alone when navigating them. Social workers, support groups, and training are available to provide you with the guidance, advice, and resources you need to succeed. Additionally, our active community of foster carers are ready to offer assistance and encouragement whenever needed.

## Your journey to fostering

We understand that the application process can feel daunting, and it's completely normal to feel anxious, but our dedicated team are here to support you every step of the way.

**Application:** To begin the fostering process, you will need to complete an enquiry form on our website or by calling [number]. Our team will then reach out to gather some more information and to answer any questions you may have. Following this, a social worker from your Local Authority (LA) will carry out an Initial Visit at your home to discuss your interest in fostering and provide information about the fostering process. This visit also serves as an opportunity for you to ask questions and allows the LA to assess your suitability for fostering and gather preliminary information to guide the application process. If both you and your LA are happy to proceed after the Initial Visit, you will need to complete an application form providing information on your education, employment, addresses and relationships. You will also need to consent for DBS checks and medicals.

**Skills to Foster Training**: You don’t need any specific qualifications before you begin your journey to fostering. The Skills to Foster training is designed to provide you with the necessary tools and knowledge to be a foster carer, and help you make the best decision for you and your family about whether fostering is right for you. Through the training, you will gain insight into the experiences of children and young people in care. We understand that fostering comes with its own set of complexities, and this training will help you navigate these challenges with confidence and resilience. Additionally, the training offers a valuable opportunity to connect with other foster carer applicants, building a strong support network from the very beginning of your fostering journey.

The Skills to Foster training is mandatory prior to approval. [Details about how Skills to Foster training is delivered in the hub, including how it is delivered and how long training is]

**Form F Assessment:** The Form F assessment stage will be completed by your Local Authority's (LA) fostering team to assess your suitability to become a foster carer. A fostering social worker will speak to you, and your partner if you are in a relationship, to understand more about your background, skills, and experiences. They will also want to talk to your children or any other members in your household. The assessment covers various aspects, including your motivation to foster, parenting abilities, support networks, and understanding of the fostering role. Throughout this assessment, we’ll be here to listen, support and encourage you every step of the way.

**Assessment and Panel:** Your fostering social worker will share the Form F Assessment report with you and make a recommendation on your approval. You will then be invited to attend a fostering panel alongside your assessing social worker. Panel members have relevant experience in fostering and will review the complete assessment report prior to the panel. At panel, members will discuss your assessment, ask questions, and provide an informed recommendation regarding your approval. They will also specify the age range and number of children you will be able to care for. This recommendation is presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), who will review all information and make the final decision around your approval.

**Post approval:** Following your approval as a foster carer, you will have access to ongoing advice and guidance through your local authority. You’ll also be invited to training and support groups, where you can connect with foster carers and truly feel part of our fostering community.

## Support for foster carers

We understand that taking the journey to becoming a foster carer can feel intense at times, but we're here to support you every step of the way. Our team are here to answer any questions you have, no matter how big or small. We'll provide you with all the information and support you need to make informed decisions and feel confident in your role as a foster carer. Remember, you're not alone on this journey.

*During application [requires tailoring to hub]*

You will have several support options open to you throughout your journey to foster including:

* A dedicated phone line you can call to ask questions, find out about the process and seek support and advice.
* Training events led by a specialist team to introduce you to the realities of foster care and prepare you for fostering.
* A ‘buddy’ mentor scheme, which links you to experienced foster carers in your area who can share their experience of fostering and answer questions.

*During assessment*

Once your enquiry is passed on to your local authority, they will become your point of contact and you will be assigned an assessing social worker. Our team will continue to support you on your journey, checking in with phone calls, answering your questions and explaining each step of the process.

*Post approval*

Once you become an approved foster carer, you will be able to access the support and ongoing training from your local authority. Each partner within [hub] offers its own programme of post-approval training, which you will be able access free of charge. You will also be able to access events, activities and support groups where fostering families in your local area can meet and support one another.

In our region, we are proud participants of The Fostering Network’s Mockingbird programme. The Mockingbird programme is designed to foster peer support and cultivate meaningful relationships between children, young people and foster families. Through the Mockingbird programme, fostering families come together in groups called ‘constellations’, consisting of six to ten families. Within these constellations, families effectively act as an extended family to one another, facilitated by a dedicated constellation host. Through group get-togethers, activities, celebrations and informal support, they act as a support system to one another in a way that feels natural and sociable. It’s like having an extended foster family you can call on.

## Finance

We understand that everyone’s financial situation is different.

In [region], foster carers receive a competitive allowance and fees.

All foster carers receive an allowance to cover the costs associated with caring for the child, including food, clothing, toiletries and other necessities. This financial support helps alleviate the financial strain of fostering, so you can focus on meeting the needs of the child in your care.

Fee payments are made on top of allowances to recognise that foster carers are essential to our work to support children in our area, and that their task is one of the most challenging of those involved in supporting children and families.

As a foster carer for [hub name], you will be paid by the local authority you are fostering for. The amount you are paid will be based on the number of children and young people in your care, as well as other factors such as their age and needs.

As a foster carer you are classed as self-employed for [tax and national insurance](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances/tax-and-national-insurance) purposes, so you need to register with HMRC. You may also be able to claim a range of [benefits](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances/claiming-benefits).

Qualifying care relief means that households do not pay tax on the first £18,140 they earn from fostering. On top of this exemption, you can also get tax relief for each week (or part week) a child is in your care, reducing the tax paid on any earnings above this amount. This means you do not have to pay tax on some of your earnings over £18,140.

## Myth-busting

It is normal and understandable to have some concerns or anxieties when thinking about fostering and the application process.

However, there are many myths and misconceptions about fostering. Let’s debunk them!

1. **Myth: Perfection Required**

It is a misconception that foster carers need to be flawless. There’s no such thing as a ‘perfect’ or ‘typical’ foster family. We understand that everyone comes with their own set of strengths and weaknesses. With the right support and training, you can become a capable and confident foster carer, well-equipped to tackle challenges and make a real difference in a child's life.

1. **Myth: Unable to Handle Complex Needs**

It's natural to feel hesitant about supporting children with complex needs. Every child in care is unique, with their own background, experiences, and needs. However, the fostering journey is a learning process, and facing challenges head-on is a fundamental part of the role. Your life experiences and resilience can serve as valuable tools in navigating these challenges, allowing you to provide the understanding and stability that foster children need.

1. **Myth: Lack of Support Available**

At [hub name], you make it our priority to support our foster carers throughout their journey. We are here to answer your questions and provide you with the information you need to make the right decision for you. We are committed to building your confidence and supporting you every step of the way.

1. **Myth: Long-Term Commitment Required**

Unsureabout committing to long-term fostering? That’s perfectly ok! Foster carers can start small, for example with respite fostering, and still put their skills and experience to good use.

1. **Myth: You Must Be Fully Committed Before Enquiring**

It's a common misconception that only those fully committed to fostering should enquire about fostering. Our hub offers a safe space to ask questions and explore best option for you. You can contact us with no obligation. Remember, if you never ask a question, you’ll never know!

We encourage you to speak to our hub team about any concerns you might have – our hub is a safe space to ask any questions, voice concerns and work through issues with our dedicated and supportive team. We will do all we can to help you acquire the answers you need to make the right decision for you.

One of the best ways to find out more about fostering in [region] is by hearing the firsthand experiences of our foster carers. Contact the hub team, and we’ll gladly connect you with a foster carer in the region. Their firsthand insights can provide invaluable perspectives on the everyday realities of fostering and help you gain a clearer picture of what to expect.