THINKING OF BECOMING A FOSTER CARER?
Thank you for taking the first step to find out all about fostering with Plymouth City Council.

We’re always keen to hear from people just like you who think they could help us change a child’s life.

Our foster carers make a real difference to the lives of children and young people by providing a family to those who really need one. Because of them, our most vulnerable children in care have the security of a family unit and are well taken care of.

We believe that it’s best if families are helped to stay together. However, we also know that there are times when children and young people can’t live in their own home – or might need extra help to do so.

As a Local Authority we want to ensure that we provide the best possible service to children and young people and to our foster carers themselves. To do this it is important that we provide a high level of support to everyone.

As you can imagine, different children need different things so we need carers who provide all types of care.

Our children range in age from infants to older teenagers. They may need care for a few days, weeks or months. Some will need an alternative family for all their childhood. Children need stability and guidance. They need help to understand what’s happened to them and reassurance about their future.

Once you have read through this brochure, please do get in touch or why not speak to one of our foster carers themselves?

We are waiting to hear from you. So are the children.

A. Barker

Alison Barker
Service Manager (Family Placement)
Children, Young People and Families
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“I love my foster family, although I feel like they’re my real family. I know they love me and do everything they can to keep me safe. They take me on great holidays too.”

Charlie - Aged 7
WHO CAN CARE?

We need people like you to help us make a difference in a child’s life. You don’t need any special qualifications or training as we provide you with all the skills you need.

Carers come from all kinds of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds and as long as you’re over 21:

- You can be single, living with a partner, or married
- You may have children or step-children or you may have no children at all
- You may live in a flat or a house
- You may or may not be in paid employment or retirement
- You can be able bodied or living with a disability
- You may be a tenant or a home-owner

What does matter is that:

- You have the time and energy to invest in a child or young person
- You have a genuine interest in the welfare and wellbeing of children
- You have space in your home
- You have the enthusiasm and motivation to make a positive difference to a young person’s life.

“I want to stay with my carers until I am 30. They are kind and make me nice food.”

Kara - Aged 16
WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Our dedicated team of foster carers offer love, support and a secure home to children and young people who, through no fault of their own, cannot live with their own families. All carers need to be committed to providing high quality care and support to vulnerable children. You’ll be helping ensure the child lives in a safe, stimulating environment so they can grow and thrive as individuals and as part of a family.

As a carer you’ll need to:

- ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child
- work in partnership with social workers and other professionals
- help children make the most of their education
- promote the physical and mental health of children
- keep information confidential
- provide comfort and reassurance
- acknowledge and respect the child’s heritage

We understand how important it is for you to have the right support. In recognition of this all of our Foster carers have access to a range of support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. As a foster carer for Plymouth City Council you can expect to have:

- Your own Supervising Social Worker who will visit you regularly to offer you support, advice and encouragement
- An out of hours support service at weekends, evenings and bank holidays.
- Support from other professionals specialising in health and education, including child and adolescent mental health.
- Individual membership to ‘Foster Talk’ which provides a range of information, advice and benefits
- Regular support groups providing opportunities to meet other carers and form friendships through fostering.
- Access to Respite Care, if required to support placements
- Access to a team of dedicated Fostering Support Workers

- A ‘buddying’ scheme for practical support and advice from an experience foster carer
- A comprehensive package of training
- Access to online support and information
- Invitations to regular social events for Plymouth foster carers including coffee mornings, family outings and celebration events
- Opportunities to get involved in the development of the service, such as recruitment events
- Regular Foster Care Forum – an opportunity to meet with managers from Plymouth Foster Care and other services and have your views heard
- A generous financial package
- Access to a range of Plymouth Foster Care discounts
- Plymouth Foster Carers receive an introductory payment for introducing a friend to fostering for Plymouth Foster care when they are approved

“They listen to you and worry about me.”

Jamie - Aged 6
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

To establish if fostering will fit into your life one of our experienced social workers will be contacting you soon to ask a few questions about you, your home, your family and why you want to foster. We are always happy to talk through any questions you may have to help you decide if you want to take the next step.

If you decide to go ahead to the next step one of our experienced Social Workers will arrange to visit you at your home at a time that is convenient to you. The home visit is about getting to know more about you and your family and assessing if you and your home are able to provide a safe and caring environment for a foster child. It is also an opportunity for you to get to know more about fostering and what Plymouth Foster Care can offer you, if you decide to become a foster carer with us. The home visit will also give you the opportunity to ask any further questions and explore any concerns you may have such as health issues, any previous contact with the Local Authority Children’s Services or with the police. If you or someone you live with has a criminal conviction, or caution it will not necessarily stop you from fostering. This is mainly dependent on what the conviction was for and how long ago it was.

Together we will decide on whether or not to continue with your enquiry to foster to the application stage, making sure that both you, and we, are happy to proceed. Once this decision is made you will be asked to complete a formal application form and if accepted your assessment will start.

The assessment

The assessment is one of the most important parts of your journey towards becoming a foster carer. Your assessment will be carried out by a qualified Social Worker who will assess your suitability to be a foster carer, using a document you will often hear referred to as the Form F.

The assessment is a two stage process and everyone who wants to become a foster carer goes through this assessment.

The first stage of the assessment includes the collection of information from various checks and references. These checks and references are necessary to make sure all foster carers are safe and suitable to care for vulnerable children. We will talk to you about the checks and references we need to undertake when we first visit you and will also discuss them as part of the assessment, so you will have plenty of opportunities to talk to us about any questions or concerns that you may have.

During the second stage of your assessment your Social Worker will visit you regularly at home so they can really get to know you and the important people in your life.

At Plymouth Foster Care we value the importance of training and as part of your assessment we will be asking you to attend our Skills to Foster training. This training covers a wide range of topics in relation to children looked after by the Local Authority and the foster carer role, so providing you the information necessary, as a basis, for beginning your fostering career.

When all the information has been gathered, your Social Worker will write a detailed report (Form F). This report will make a recommendation about your suitability to foster and the age and number of children you could look after. You will be asked to read and to comment on the report - but there will be no surprises because once you get to this stage you will have been fully involved and consulted throughout.

The whole process usually takes around 6 to 8 months, depending on your personal circumstances. We know this may seem a very lengthy process. However, it is necessary so that we can build up a comprehensive profile of you and the fostering environment you can offer. This will help us to place the right children with you after you are approved as a foster carer.

If at any stage you or your family decide fostering is not for you, or for them you can withdraw your application and the process will stop.

The Fostering Panel

Plymouth Fostering Panel is made up of a group of people with different life experiences who have an understanding and interest in fostering and looking after children.

Your report is taken to Fostering Panel who will meet to discuss your application and make the final recommendation on whether you are approved to foster. You will be invited to attend this meeting, which may sound quite daunting but your Social Worker will be there with you to support you.
Congratulations – you’re now a foster carer!

Once you are approved you will be introduced to your supervising social worker. Together we will start matching you to children needing a foster family. This is often an exciting yet anxious time for new carers, but don’t worry as you’ll receive plenty of help and support at all time.

“Moving into my foster home has given me a proper life”

Robin - Aged 12
TYPES OF FOSTER CARE...
TIME LIMITED FOSTER CARE

This is the most common form of fostering which gives a child or young person a safe place to stay while their family is helped to resolve problems they are having.

The aim of this placement is to support the child while important decisions are made about their future before returning them to their own family or moving them to a permanent new family.

**Who are the children?**

Children who need to be fostered in Time Limited Placements are aged 0 to 18 and come into care for a wide variety of reasons. Sometimes the problems at home can be sorted quickly. For others, it can take longer for families to get back on their feet.

Occasionally, the difficulties are so serious that a decision is reached that a child cannot return home. If this happens the child will move to a permanent fostering or adoptive home.

**What the foster carers say...**

“Most of the children need a lot of reassurance and support because they have had to leave their own family and must get used to unfamiliar people and a strange home.

“'To see damaged children turn their lives around to become young achievers and contribute to their community, is the most amazing experience. We are so privileged to have been a part of that transformation.

“The support is always there for me. The training is excellent and has given me the ability to prepare a child for moving back to live with their family, or to move on to permanent foster carers or adopters.

“Our two birth sons both say they will foster in the future. We are proud to watch them behave like ‘big brothers’ to the children we have looked after. They both feel they have had their lives enriched by being part of a fostering family.’

Pam.
Children who need permanent foster care are those who cannot return home or move on to an adoptive family for a range of reasons.

This type of care is a long term commitment and you need to be willing to stick with young people through the good and bad times until they reach adulthood.

A permanent foster carer can be the inspiration to turn a young person’s life around, often bringing the carer a deep sense of achievement.

**The children**

Children who need permanent fostering will have been looked after by the Local Authority and cannot return to their own homes for a range of reasons. They are likely to have had troubled early years which could impact on their behaviour in various ways.

**What the foster carers say...**

“I never cease to be amazed at the resilience, determination and ambition shown by children who have faced difficult lives and disadvantage.

“We chose to become permanent carers so that a child has a family who they can turn to in their adult lives and beyond. You go from stranger to carer to being needed and relied upon.

“When you foster long term, the challenges are testing, the small achievements of the children are enormous and their big achievements are sometimes unbelievable.

“We appreciate that birth parents are still important to a child in care and that some contact, may be needed. In fact, one of the most special experiences for us has been to see how our commitment can be quite life-changing for both children and birth families.

“We’re not denying that it is sometimes hard and that you do face some challenging situations, but it is certainly worth it.”

Allen.
This is a unique type of placement where you welcome not just a child into your home, but also the parents. It’s designed to give a parent - or sometimes both parents- a safe place to live while assessments of their parenting capacity are carried out by a specialist social worker. The foster carer’s role is to support the parent and help the social worker assess their skills. This does not involve you caring directly for the baby.

This is one of the most challenging, but rewarding placements we offer as you can help keep families together.

**The Birth Parents**

Birth parents will need help and guidance in order to cope with the responsibilities that come with being a parent. Being placed in this type of care allows the parents to benefit from the reassurance and advice the Foster Carer can provide while the child is in a safe, nurturing and secure environment of a foster home.

Parent and child carers don’t provide full care of the child (except if required) but they support and encourage the parents to develop their skills.

The foster carer has an important role observing and recording how the parent looks after the child.

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**What the foster carers say...**

“Over the years, we gained a lot of fostering experience, and being parents ourselves started with parent and child care.

“When the decision is made for a parent and child fostering placement, if the parent isn’t coping well and needs extra help but doesn’t have an extended family, it feels great to be able to step up and help develop a person’s practical and life skills.

“Being able to offer consistent and firm boundaries and show parents how to manage their feelings, emotions and behaviour is so important in this role.

“Skills such as discretion and having the ability to step back and be unobtrusive whilst acting as a good role model are also important.

“We get a real sense of achievement when we see the changes that have helped bring a family back from the brink.”

Mike and Mandy
RESPITE FOSTER CARE

This is used to support our foster carers who have children placed with them. It could be that the foster carer requires a break from caring for their child on a regular basis, whilst others might need support for their child just as a one-off arrangement.

The children

Children who need respite foster care are aged 0 to 18. They are in foster care for a variety of reasons.

What the foster carers say...

“It’s important to be there for both children and my fellow foster carers. Offering respite care allows me to have the best of both worlds.

“I often need to be available for several periods of planned and emergency foster care for short periods of time whether this is a one-off arrangement, or on a regular planned arrangement.

“This type of care really makes me feel that I am working as part of a team and that I play my part. The social workers and foster carers do such a marvellous job with the children.

“If you’ve got love in your heart and space in your home you could be a foster carer too.”

Laurie
SHORT BREAK FOSTER CARE

We sometimes offer this to the families of children who do not need full time foster care and will continue to live with their families.

The child may have complex needs, such as a disability or particular medical condition. We also offer short break foster care to families where there is a risk of family breakdown which without support could result in the child coming into full time foster care.

As every family is different, the commitment that is expected will vary. This could be a regular holiday break, weekend or overnight commitment to one or more children. This gives parents the chance to have a break from caring for their child, or if required, the time for parents to work through any difficulties they may be experiencing.

The children

Children who need short break foster care are aged 0 to 18. They need short break care for a variety of reasons.

What the foster carers say...

“Talk to most foster carers and they’ll tell you the same as me: there’s nothing I’d rather be doing instead of fostering. This isn’t a ‘job’ – this is about doing something significant, something that really matters. It makes you feel good about yourself.”

“You’re never on your own as a foster carer. Some children need families who can care for them for short periods of time and give them the opportunity to meet different people and do new things.”

Rose
ALREADY A FOSTER CARER?

We’re always keen to hear from experienced foster carers. Maybe you are currently registered with another fostering agency and wish to move to our team in Plymouth or maybe you’ve just moved to the area and want to continue fostering.

Whatever your reasons for wanting to join us we would love to hear from you!

We must stress though that you can only be registered with one agency at a time. We can visit you to discuss your wishes but if you decide to transfer to us then you must tell your current fostering agency in writing of your intention before we can begin your assessment process.

Don’t worry if you’re not sure how to do this, our team have all the letters and documents you will need and are here to help you through the entire process, so you’ll never feel out of your depth.

You would remain approved as a foster carer with your current agency throughout the process until you are successfully approved as a Foster Carer for Plymouth City Council.

If you are already a foster carer we will aim to fast track the transfer process.

Please contact us if you would like more details on transferring to Plymouth City Council from a different fostering agency.
THANK YOU

If you decide to apply to become a carer, you will be starting an important and hopefully long-lasting relationship with Plymouth City Council. We look forward to hearing from you soon.