Introduction

Fostering is incredibly rewarding. As a foster carer you can make a massive difference to a child or young person and help give them the best possible start in life.

Foster carers are amazing people who provide a loving family home where children and young people can feel safe, settled and happy.

Fostering with Calderdale Council means becoming part of a team that does everything it can to help young people live their lives to the full.

Steve, a Calderdale foster carer, said: “It’s been life changing and so rewarding for us. Knowing that we’re helping young people to be safe and happy is a brilliant feeling.”

If you are thinking about becoming a foster carer, this booklet gives you an overview of what it’s like to foster for the Council, including the support, training and competitive payments that you would receive by pursuing this enriching career.

Our contact details are also included to make it easy for you to ask any questions and take the next steps in applying to be a foster carer. We’d love to hear from you.

What is fostering?

As a foster carer, you will be supporting a child or young person when they need it the most. You will welcome them into your home when they are unable to live with their own family, and you’ll help them build a positive future. Foster carers are ordinary people who understand the needs of children and young people and are able to meet those needs.

Working with Calderdale Council’s Children and Young People’s Services, Calderdale foster carers provide quality care to children from as young as birth through to adulthood, so it’s vital that we recruit people with lots of different skills and experiences. Foster care may be needed for just a few days, or for weeks, months or until a young person is ready to move on to living independently.

If you would like to find out more about the role of a foster carer please get in touch and we will discuss this with you.

Why foster with Calderdale Council?

As a foster carer with Calderdale you will help a child to learn and develop. Children will always remember and value the best care they receive. That makes fostering one of the most rewarding jobs you can do.

Approving foster carers in Calderdale means that young people can stay in their own local area where they have friends, go to school and are near to their birth family. This is less disruptive for the young person and makes it easier for our foster carers to provide transport.

You will receive a wide range of support when choosing to foster for Calderdale. This includes:

- Your own social worker who will guide and support you through your fostering career.
- Friendly, personalised support from a whole team of social workers and a practice manager who will always be on hand to help you and your family.
- Peer support from a more experienced foster carer when you start fostering.
- Support groups for your own children.
- Access to Calderdale’s Foster Carer Association (CFCA).
- Support groups where you can meet up with other foster carers and support each other on an informal basis.
- Comprehensive training, plus support from a full time training co-ordinator.
- Free access to online training courses.
- Free membership of the Fostering Network, the UK’s largest charity for foster carers. This includes access to independent legal advice.
- A foster carer forum which brings together foster carers and professionals to discuss practice issues.
- Annual events, including one for children looked after and one for our foster carers, to celebrate and acknowledge all the fantastic work and achievements throughout the year.
What are the different types of foster care?

There are a number of different types of foster care provided in Calderdale, which are detailed below. Children and young people have different needs, so it’s important that we match children to foster carers to ensure you can meet their needs based on your own circumstances, experience and knowledge. Although having some experience of looking after children is preferred, we support those with limited experience and all our foster carers receive training, support and guidance, no matter which type of fostering you choose. As a foster carer you will be paid a fee which reflects your experience and knowledge. You will also receive an allowance for each child in your care, which is based on the child or young person’s age. There is more information about this later on in the booklet.

Support care

Support care is provided when a child or young person needs only a short period of time in your home. This may be for a weekend or a couple of weeks.

Support care can be provided for a child already in foster care when the carer and/or young person needs support, or when a foster carer is going on holiday and the child or young person is not able to go with them.

The reasons for support care vary, so the time needed can also vary, from a one-off weekend to regular weekend stays or a one-off period longer than a weekend. Some of our support carers choose this option as they work full time and are not able to provide a short or long-term placement.

If you feel you have the time and skills to provide a child with support during weekends or school holidays, or if you have the flexibility to provide support during the week, please get in touch. We ask that carers provide a minimum of one weekend per month or have flexibility to offer support during the week or school holidays.

Short-term fostering

Short-term in Calderdale means providing a placement for a child while their long-term care plan is being decided. You will be responsible for meeting a child’s health, educational, emotional, social, identity, cultural and religious needs during the time they are living in your care.

When a child comes into foster care the Council always considers, as the first option, the child or young person returning home. If this is not an option then a long-term plan needs to be considered. This includes moving to a family member, remaining in foster care long-term or moving onto adoption. Whatever the long-term plan, part of your role as a short-term carer will be to support a child moving on to their long-term placement.

The duration of a short-term placement varies depending on the time it takes to agree the long-term plan and then identify the appropriate long-term placement. Some children have been in placement for only a couple of nights and then return home; others have been with short-term carers for up to two years.

To find out more about the role of a short-term carer, please get in touch with us using the contact details on page 19.

Long-term fostering

Long-term foster carers offer a child or young person a family home until they are ready to move on to independent living.

Most children in long-term foster care continue to have contact with their birth family. The Council and the birth parents retain parental responsibility, but the day-to-day care is provided by foster carers to give the child or young person an enriching family life.

Often long-term foster carers have had experience as short-term foster carers first, as this enables them to experience the demands of looking after someone else’s child. It also provides foster carers with an insight into the rewards of giving a child or young person experiences they wouldn’t otherwise have had.

However, we do assess applicants to become long-term carers without previous experience as short-term carers - we consider other relevant experience of looking after other people’s children, whether this is in a professional capacity or otherwise. If you feel you would like to consider providing a child or young person a long-term placement please get in touch and we will be more than happy to talk you through the details.
Emergency fostering

Occasionally children and young people are brought into care in an emergency; this can be due to a parental emergency/illness or to protect the child or young person from harm. This could happen during the night or at weekends, meaning foster carers would need to be available to provide emergency support. In Calderdale we provide additional financial assistance in these cases.

The duration of emergency placements can vary from overnight to several weeks, depending on the circumstances of the child’s family. Our foster carers are approved to provide emergency foster care in addition to other approval terms rather than being emergency carers only.

When applying to be a foster carer you don’t need to commit to only one type of fostering. A social worker will discuss all the options with you and will help you decide what would be best for you and your family. Often foster carers are approved for more than one type of placement as this gives us flexibility to match the right child to you and your family. As your experience and knowledge grows throughout your fostering career, the type of fostering that you provide can also be changed.

Short Breaks Scheme

Our short breaks scheme offers disabled children or young people the chance to stay with another family for a short period of time and get involved in everyday family activities. As a short breaks carer you will receive support from the Council’s fostering team and disabled children’s team to ensure that your skills and knowledge are appropriate for the children in your care.

Short breaks foster carers are matched to a number of families, providing support to children who live at home with their parents/carers. You will usually provide care for five days out of seven to up to five families, so you regularly support the same families and the children/young people are allocated a set amount of days per month, on a rota basis.

To find out more about our short breaks scheme please get in touch. If it’s right for you we will arrange a home visit with our fostering team and disabled children’s team.
What skills and experience do you need to be a foster carer?

As the children and young people in our care are all unique, we need a diverse group of foster carers to meet their needs. You don’t need formal qualifications to foster – we’re looking for people with the enthusiasm and commitment to meet the needs of children.

What you need:

• A spare bedroom.
• An understanding of, and commitment to meet, the needs of children and young people.
• The ability to work with other people to meet the needs of children and young people.
• A keen interest and commitment to develop your knowledge and experience of working with children and young people.
• A safe home environment.
• A sense of humour – children and young people like to have fun!
• Mental and physical health to meet the needs of children and young people. All applicants receive a full medical.

• A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. The safety and wellbeing of children and young people is our top priority, so we are not able to progress fostering applications from people who have offences or cautions against children. Calderdale Council provides all applicants with a full DBS check.

We are totally committed to equal opportunities and welcome foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds:

• Male or female.
• Single, married, co-habiting, same sex couple, divorced or widowed.
• With or without their own children.
• Of any religious faith or none.
• Of any cultural background.
• Homeowners or renting.
• Employed, retired or on benefits.
• With or without qualifications.

We understand that all families have their own individual circumstances, so if you’d like to talk to us about anything please get in touch.

What you could earn

We offer competitive payments to our foster carers to recognise their hard work and the skills they bring to fostering.

You will receive a weekly allowance for each child in your care:

• **£123.06** – children aged 0-4 years
• **£139.02** – children aged 5-10 years
• **£159.04** – children and young people aged 11-15 years
• **£185.01** – young people aged 16-18 years

This is to cover the daily costs of caring for a child or young person.

In addition to the weekly allowance, we also offer a competitive skills-based payment. These fees recognise the carer’s skills, experience and qualifications in caring for children and young people, based on your assessment by the fostering team. The payments are made on a weekly basis when you have a child or young person in your care:

• **Group 1 carers** - If you have less than six months’ experience of caring for other people’s children you do not receive a skill-based fee but you are supported to achieve this within your first year of approval, where you can gain the six months’ experience as required.
  • **Group 2** - **£138.74** per child in placement
  • **Group 3** - **£277.76** per child in placement
  • **Group 4** - **£386.54** per child in placement

This scheme recognises that fostering is an increasingly professional task and is therefore designed to encourage and reward continued professional development.

The allowances are generally tax free and do not affect any state benefits which you may claim. Sometimes there are exceptions and these will be explained to you during your assessment if they apply.
In addition to the previous fees and allowances we also provide the following financial support:

- Mileage allowance for a child whose school is over three miles away from your home.
- Mileage allowance when taking a child or young person to see their birth family (known as family contact).
- Festival allowance (for example, Christmas or Eid).
- Birthday allowance for the child in placement.
- Up to two weeks’ holiday allowance per child in placement to help with the costs of taking a child on holiday.
- Up to three weeks’ paid absence for foster carers.
- We help to fund school trips where these are educational and over £50 per child.
- A clothing grant for children who come into placement with very little or no clothing.
- Essential equipment for newly approved carers who need support to buy essential bedroom equipment or car seats.
- MAX cards (discounted or free entry to a number of activities across the UK).
- Leisure passes for all children looked after.
- Calderdale foster carers receive a discount on leisure passes, in line with Calderdale employees.

Moving from a fostering agency or another council is straightforward. As with any job we appreciate that at times people want to consider other options, and if after reading this booklet you feel Calderdale would be more suited to you than your current agency please get in touch.

The Fostering Network has provided a transfer protocol which is supported by all fostering providers. This ensures the transfer process is supportive of foster carers and children and young people, if you currently have children in your care.

Following a home visit, if you and the Council are happy to progress with the transfer then we ask that you inform your agency/council at this point.

A meeting will then be held between the Council and your agency, where we agree on timescales for presenting your assessment to our fostering panel.

If you are currently going through an allegation with your agency/council we are unable to progress your application until this has been resolved.
The assessment process

1. Initial enquiry
When you first contact us, we will ask for some basic information. Providing you meet the mandatory criteria, we will make an appointment to come and visit you at your home to go through fostering in more detail and offer our full support.

T: 01422 266020
E: fostering@calderdale.gov.uk

2. Home visit
When we visit you at home we will ask you some more in depth questions, discussing why you want to foster and your family circumstances. You will also be able to ask us any questions you may have. Following this visit, if everyone is happy with the information shared you will be invited to move to the next stage.

3. Application form
You will be asked to fill in an application form so we can begin the formal process. Don't worry, we will be on hand to give you any support you need.

4. Stage 1
The first stage of the assessment involves statutory checks: DBS checks, a medical, references and council checks. DBS checks will be carried out for everyone in the home who is over 18 years old.

5. 3 Day ‘Skills to Foster’
You will need to attend a preparation course with other applicants. This is your chance to find out more about what fostering involves. If you are part of a couple you will both need to attend.

6. Stage 2
Your own dedicated social worker will visit you at home six to eight times. They will talk you through everything that being a foster carer involves and how it will affect you and your family. We will discuss your experience and knowledge to consider your ability to meet the needs of a child and fulfill the role of a foster carer. Your social worker will complete a report (your fostering assessment) for you to read and comment on. It will then be presented to the fostering panel. This is when a recommendation is made about whether to approve you as a foster carer. A recommendation is also made as to the age, number of children and type of foster care which are best for you.

7. Fostering Panel
The fostering panel is a group of independent professionals who consider your fostering assessment and recommend whether you can become a foster carer. The people on the panel have the relevant skills and experience but don't work in the Council’s fostering team. This ensures a fair recruitment process. You will be invited to attend the panel with your assessing social worker who will be there to support you.

8. Approval
You will find out the fostering panel’s recommendation on the day of panel. This is then considered by our Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who takes into account the panel recommendation and makes the final decision about your approval. This is usually completed within 10 working days of the panel date and you will be informed both verbally and in writing.
Frequently Asked Questions

Why foster?

Becoming a foster carer is one of the most rewarding things you can do. You'll be helping a vulnerable child or young person by being there for them, nurturing and guiding them and building their self esteem.

Why do children need foster care?

Children may be unable to stay in their own family home for a number of reasons – this could be while family issues are resolved or because of a family illness where the child’s parents have no other support.

Unfortunately children and young people are likely to have experienced some difficulties and will need your understanding and patience to help them with this. What all children have in common is the need to be in a safe and secure environment with care, kindness and stability.

What’s the difference between fostering and adoption?

Children in foster care are in the care of the Council, who usually share parental responsibility with the child’s parents.

Foster carers are responsible for day-to-day care but don’t make decisions requiring parental consent, such as medical procedures.

Adoptive parents have full parental rights and responsibilities. The adopted child loses all legal ties with their birth parents and becomes a full member of the new family.

How can I become a foster carer?

You can start the process by contacting the Council using the details on page 19. There’s no commitment at this stage and our friendly, experienced team will be in touch so that you can ask questions.

Can I foster if I work full time?

Yes, but most foster carers who work full time are support carers, meaning they only look after a child or children at weekends or during holidays.

If you want to do short-term or long-term fostering you’ll need to consider your working hours and how you’ll get a child to and from school and care for them in the school holidays. You’ll also need to be able to attend training sessions and have time to meet regularly with your social worker.

Can I foster if I have children already?

Yes you can. A lot of foster carers already have their own children, feel they’ve done a good job raising them and want to give other children a good start in life.

You’ll need to think about the difference that fostering will make to your own children and talk to them about it. Calderdale Council provides a support group for your sons and daughters to ensure they feel supported throughout your fostering career.

Can I foster if I smoke?

Having a smoker in your home means you can only foster a child or young person over the age of five years. You’ll need to make sure that no one smokes inside the house.

Can I foster if I don’t drive or have a car?

Yes, but if you don’t drive or have access to a car you will need to think about how you will get children to and from school or to any meetings with their birth family.
What kind of home do I need?

It doesn’t matter what type of house you live in. You’ll need to have a spare bedroom for a looked after child as they cannot share with your own children; space for the children to play indoors; and access to space outdoors.

If you don’t have your own garden you can still be a foster carer. Children will need somewhere to do their homework and to store their clothes and belongings. You don’t need to own your own home and can foster if you’re renting.

Do I need a spare room?

Yes, in Calderdale we require each child or young person to have their own bedroom. Some sibling groups can share a bedroom if this is assessed as appropriate, but children who are looked after and the foster carer’s own children are not able to share a bedroom.

Do I need any qualifications?

You don’t need any specific qualifications to be a foster carer. We are looking for people who are caring, enthusiastic and committed, with the time, skills and ability to care for children or young people.

Are there any age limits?

There is no upper age limit to foster with Calderdale Council, but you need to be over 21. It’s important that you have the experience and stability in your own life to support a child as well as the health and energy to care for them.

Your age will help us to work out what age group of children you might be best suited to caring for.

Do I need a medical check up?

It’s important that you’re able to cope with any physical and emotional challenges that fostering may bring, so you’ll need to have a medical check up as part of your assessment. This is a legal requirement under the Fostering Regulations.

Many conditions may not stop you from becoming a foster carer but it’s important you’re in good health. You need to be emotionally resilient to deal with the challenges that fostering might bring. We’re always here to help you through any challenging times, and so are our other foster carers.

Do I need to be in a relationship or married?

No you don’t – we welcome applications from people who are single, living together, married, divorced, separated, straight, gay or bisexual.

If you are single it’s important to have as much support as you can from family and friends, as fostering can be challenging at times.

Each child in foster care needs as much stability as possible, so it is important to consider your long-term plans.

If you’ve been in a relationship for a short time and are thinking of fostering as a couple, we suggest living together for at least 12-18 months before you start the process. Fostering a child will have an impact on your home life so it’s important to be settled before starting the assessment process.
Does it matter if I have criminal convictions?

Having a criminal conviction doesn’t automatically rule you out of fostering. An enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check will be carried out on you and anyone in your home who is aged 18 or over.

Each fostering application will be considered individually, but we won’t progress your application where there are convictions for serious offences or offences against children.

Any convictions will be considered by the fostering service manager before the assessment is presented to the fostering panel, which is made up of independent professionals who will recommend whether or not you can become an approved foster carer.

Will the child change school?

We want the fostering process to go as smoothly as possible for the child or young person. We do everything we can to keep them in the same school to minimise disruption to them and their education. Part of your role would be to take the child to and from school.

If you are caring for a child on a long-term basis, a transfer to a local school will usually take place. This would have to be agreed by everyone and be beneficial to the child.

What happens next?

If you’re thinking of becoming a foster carer with Calderdale Council, please get in touch and a friendly member of our team will be happy to talk through the process with you. You can make your initial enquiry in whichever way is best for you – by phone, email, our website or social media – and we will support you through the whole process.

The process from enquiry to approval can take up to six months to ensure the best possible outcome for you and the child or young person. We will keep you updated regularly along the way.

Thank you for choosing Calderdale. We look forward to hearing from you.

Contact Information

Telephone: 01422 266020
Email: fostering@calderdale.gov.uk
Website: www.calderdale.gov.uk/fostering
Social media: @foster4calderdale
Josh wants to make the team...

But first, he needs a loving foster family.

We're working with Calderdale Council to help find loving and caring foster families for children in Calderdale. Do something incredible!

Find out more at youcanfoster.org/calderdale