



INFORMATION PACK



**BUILDING THE FUTURES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN TO
ENJOY SUCCESSFUL LIVES**

WELCOME TO HOPE FOSTERING

Hope Fostering is a Nottingham based independent fostering provider that works with foster parents who are able to provide foster care to meet the individual needs of children and young people in terms of their culture, religion, ethnicity, gender and age.

Hope Fostering is committed to valuing diversity and promoting equality.

Staff and carers at Hope Fostering Services work to ensure that every child has the opportunity to achieve their full potential

We value diversity, creativity and difference which we see as being crucial in meeting the needs of the range of children in need of care. We therefore need a wide range of carers to provide much needed homes.



WHY WORK FOR AN INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCY?

Fostering with an Independent Fostering Agency can provide you with many benefits. Independent Fostering Agencies are contracted to provide foster placements by Local Authorities.

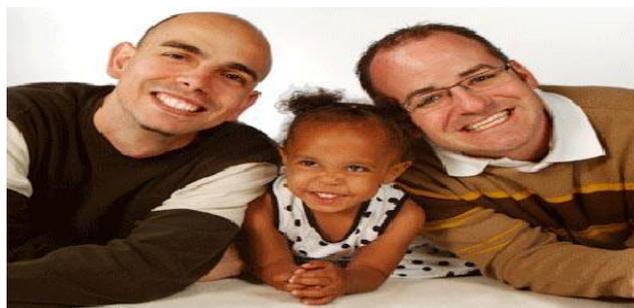
Hope Fostering is part of the D2N2 Framework Agreement and the White Rose Agreement. This means that we place children from all of the local authorities within the East Midlands and South Yorkshire.

At Hope Fostering we are experts in the field of fostering and therefore we have the skills and time to devote solely to our foster carers.

When you foster with Hope Fostering you become part a professional team and that means that you receive a high level of supervision, support, guidance, training and advice. This includes an out of hours duty contact number available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

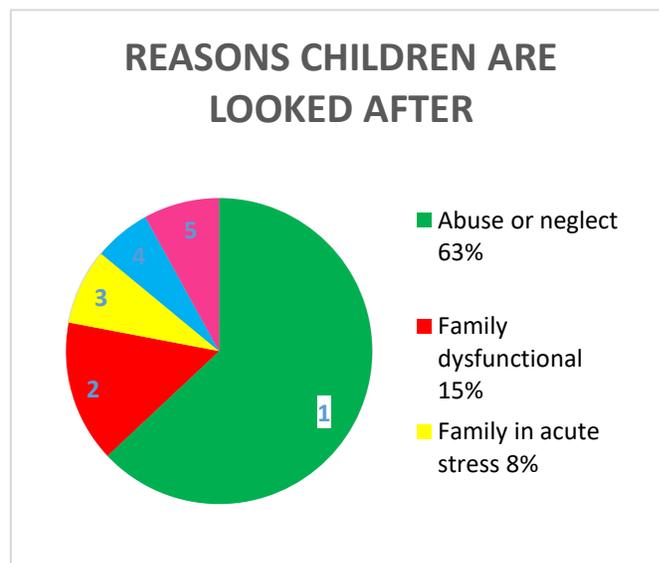
As a foster carer you will work closely with many different professionals and with a child's birth family. It is important that you can work in partnership with a range of people in order to meet the child's needs.

Fostering is unique in that it allows you flexibility, and room to develop your own skills. It is a way of life and is a rewarding, enjoyable and challenging role.



THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WE PLACE

Fostering is the way of providing a stable family life for children and young people of all ages from birth to 18 years who are unable to live with their parents or other relatives. This can be for many reasons including:



Each child or young person all have individual needs and a different history of experiences, some of which may not be known at the point of placement. Foster placements may be needed for different periods of time, ranging from very short periods to longer periods until a child or young person reach 18.

All children and young people have the right to live with a family where they are valued and allowed to develop as individuals. They need a family environment to provide the stability required at very difficult times, for as long as is needed to enable clear plans to be made for their future.

Many of the children and young people will have experienced either physical, sexual and emotional abuse or a combination of these. Their family lives may have been chaotic with few routines or consistency in the care they received. This will have impacted on their overall well-being, self-esteem, ability to make and sustain relationships and in some cases their educational attainments.

Children and young people who have experienced family disruption may have behavioural or emotional difficulties. Some children may also have learning problems, specific health needs or developmental delay.

In many cases the children's parents may have had difficulties themselves and disagree with the Local Authorities decisions regarding their children needing to be fostered. We work together with Local Authorities, social workers, foster carers and family members; where possible, within specified care plans, to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

Whilst the children are in foster homes they may have regular contact with their birth families; some will have brothers and sisters and where possible the Local Authority will try to place the children together.



COULD YOU BE A FOSTER CARER?

Hope Fostering Services welcomes enquiries and applications from people from a wide variety of backgrounds; regardless of age, ethnicity, faith or religion, disability, marital status or sexuality. However you do need to meet the following criteria:

- ❖ **be aged over 25**
- ❖ **have a spare bedroom** – you need at least one spare bedroom large enough to comfortably accommodate a child. It doesn't matter whether you own your home or if it is rented as long as you have a secure tenure.
- ❖ **do not have any children under the age of 5** – this is because many of the children we place have complex needs.
- ❖ **be able to drive**, have a driving licence and access to a car.
- ❖ **have at least one person at home/available during the day** – foster carers need to be available during the daytime as there may be times when a child may need to be cared for. You also need to be available for meetings and to attend training.
- ❖ **have some experience working with or caring for children** - It is often easier to foster a child if you have some experience of caring for or working with children but more important is the transferable skills you may have, your life experiences, enthusiasm and willingness to make a full time commitment to fostering.

Other things to consider;

- ❖ **do you have pets ?** - some children may have allergies to animals, however most respond to animals that are child friendly and used to being 'part of the family'.
- ❖ **does anyone in your household smoke ?** - Hope Fostering is committed to offering a smoke free environment to children and to promote this. Our policy is not to place any child under the age of 5 in homes where people smoke and to discourage smoking in front of any age child or young person placed. This includes the use of e-cigarettes.

already approved by another fostering agency ? - foster carers can only be approved to foster for one Fostering Agency at any time. If you are already a foster carer and looking to change agency transferring is a relatively easy process and if you have a child in placement this can continue without disruption.

HOW DO I BECOME A FOSTER CARER?

It is important that a child is placed in a foster home that can best meet his/her needs and matching the child to the best possible available foster home is crucial. In order to do this we need to know about your background and experiences.

Therefore, the process of becoming approved as a foster carer is comprehensive and takes on average 4-5 months.

Applying to become a foster carer is an in-depth process throughout which you will be asked to provide lots of information about yourself, your family and all aspects of your family life. This will include completing forms and returning these to us. You may also have many questions which we will answer as honestly and openly as possible.

It is important that Hope ensures that you are able to meet the requirements of foster carers **and** that you are sure that fostering is the right decision for you and your family. This is a time consuming process and you need to be sure you are able to commit to the assessment process before making an application.



STEPS TO FOSTER



1. Initial Enquiry – when you contact us a member of our team will have a discussion with you and answer any questions you might have



2. To proceed further one of our social workers will visit you in your home. This will give you an opportunity to learn more about fostering and discuss whether it is right for you and your family



3. Your allocated supervising social worker will visit you at home to complete your assessment and compile a report about your background, experiences and what skills you will bring to fostering



4. Your supervising social workers report will be presented to the fostering panel. They will make a recommendation as to whether you are suitable to be approved as a foster carer



5. When the agency has made a decision to approve you as a foster carer you will be available to have children placed with you

SUPPORT YOU WILL RECEIVE FROM HOPE

24 hours support

We always have a staff member available 24 hours for 365 days throughout the year to help with any issues.

Full training

You will receive a wide range of training designed to enhance your skills and experience. This will help you to develop in your role as a foster carer and provide the best care possible for the challenges that may be posed by the children and young people. Training is free and provided by Hope. The training days are arranged around the school day and refreshments and lunch are provided. There is always further training in all areas that benefit carers to help support their young person. We also provide specialist support and training from our Dr Zoe Webb who provides monthly consultations with the carers that are specific to their young person's needs.

Allocated Supervising Social Worker

A dedicated social worker will work with you and your family on a one to one basis to ensure you receive the best support possible. They will visit and meet with you regularly and work closely with the Local Authority's social worker and other professionals.

Membership of Foster Talk

All our approved carers receive full membership automatically giving you access to comprehensive independent support and advice. You will also be able to access *fosterline*, a free confidential helpline for foster carers

Regular support groups

We hold regular support groups for you to meet with other carers and share experiences. These meetings also enable us to keep you informed about the developments within the agency and for you to share with us your ideas. We offer a budding service that links newly approved carers with experienced carers. They provide running training to learn from their experiences and offer ongoing support.

Children's activities

We run many family events and activities for children such as day trips, special activities such as scavenger hunts, picnics, celebrate important festivals.

Financial remuneration

You will receive full allowances to cover the child or young person's needs. Our rates are competitive with other IFAs and local authorities.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

We hope you have found this information useful and it has given you more information about fostering and also about our agency, which we are very proud of. We would be delighted to help you on your journey to becoming a foster carer and please let us know if you have any further questions.

Thank you for thinking about helping children who are unable to live with their families for whatever reason and wanting to make a difference. Without foster carers willing to do this, we cannot achieve the outcomes we all want for children and young people.

We hope you decide to join Hope Fostering Services and take the first steps to making a difference in doing so. If you wish to take your interest in fostering further please:

1

Contact a member of our team and ask any further questions you may have **or** tell us you wish to continue further with your interest in becoming a foster carer

2

You will then be contacted by a member of our team to arrange an initial visit to your home.

3

We will then discuss with you completing our application form.

EMAIL

info@hopefs.co.uk

TELEPHONE

0115 9002795

WHAT OUR FOSTER CARERS SAY

'Hope is a great Fostering Agency that treats every individual with the respect, help and support they need. I am very lucky to be part of their team.'

I enjoy the training courses and for me it's also an opportunity to meet other carers and share a few jokes and also share experiences. The staff are friendly and cheerful which means a lot.

We appreciate knowing that advice and support is there if needed and we are always made to feel welcome

All the staff are very helpful; couldn't imagine working for anyone else.

Social events are great
- very exciting for children and great contact for carers.

'Great commitment from Hope to support both the foster carers and children. Always there is someone to answer any queries at any time and to give additional support when needed. For us everything about working for Hope Fostering is positive and a great pleasure.'

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FOSTERING

Fostering involves different tasks dependent upon the needs of the children and young people concerned. We aim to match you with children and young people who will benefit most from the skills and environment that you have to offer. It is important that you have an idea of the types of children you are comfortable caring for, taking into account your own and your family's circumstances and views.

To this end we will discuss with you the sort of fostering placements that are required, the issues you may face and the needs of children and young people you may care for. This will happen both at the enquiry stage and then again during the assessment.

Things you may need to consider include:

- Which age range would be best suited to your family.
- Which length of placement would be preferred
- Whether you have space for one child or more – it is common for siblings to need to be placed together.
- What type of behaviour and experience you can manage
- Are you able to care for a child from different religions or ethnic backgrounds

Any of the below placement types may be needed the same day. Whatever type of fostering best fits you and your family; flexibility is a crucial requirement to be able to provide the support needed by a child or young person at their time of need

EMERGENCY	Often children need a foster home with no planning or preparation; to provide somewhere safe to stay immediately. This can happen at any time of the day or night; and last for differing periods of time depending on the needs of the children. Emergency care is always at short notice and flexibility is needed.
SHORT TERM	Sometimes there may have to be some assessment before plans can be made for the child/children. They will need to remain with foster carers whilst this is carried out and either return to their own family, move to a long term placement or an adoptive family is

	found. This may take weeks or months and throughout this time the child/children will continue to have contact with their parents and perhaps other family members; which may take place several times a week.
LONG TERM	For many reasons long term foster care is needed when children cannot return to their birth families and adoption is not considered appropriate. These placements are likely to be on going for 12 months or more. Children's long term needs are ideally met in a suitable family of the same race, religion, language and culture as themselves
SHORT BREAKS	A child is placed with you for a few days or weeks; to give 'birth family' or other carers a short break from caring for a child or young person.
PARENT AND BABY (OR BABIES)	Parent and child placements offer a home to a baby or young child together with its parent (mother and/or father). The aim of this is to provide a safe, family based environment for a child or young person who has had a baby before or whilst being cared for by a foster carer; to provide parenting support and guidance. These placements can be short or long term.
UNACCOMPANIED CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON	An unaccompanied child or young person is under 18 and is separated from parents/family; outside their country of origin to seek asylum in the UK; usually applying for asylum in his/her own right. They are often from places such as Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan or the African continent. Often little is known about their background, their journey to the UK or the situations they may have witnessed or experienced. For most English is not their first language and so communication is difficult.
SIBLING PLACEMENTS	These enable brothers and sisters to continue living together in the same foster carer household. A sibling group can range between 2 to 5 children and despite the challenges of meeting the children's collective and individual needs, fostering siblings is hugely rewarding.

The Process - explained

Start by **making an enquiry** on our website or by **telephoning the office**. This will help you find out more about becoming a foster carer.



If your enquiry is positive; a worker from Hope will contact you to arrange a suitable time to visit you at your home. This is another opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have and for us to talk with you about becoming a foster carer.



The **initial home visit** help us gather further background information about you and your family and to check you have appropriate space and meet other requirements necessary.



If you meet the criteria and you feel that fostering is right for you; we will send you an application form to complete. You will need to;

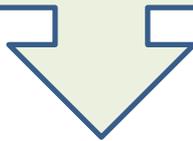
- **Provide references** – both personal and employment
 - **Undertake a medical check with your GP** (paid for by us)
 - **Consent to other checks with Local Authorities, schools and other agencies**
 - **Enhanced DBS checks will also be completed**
- 

Stage One – Once we have received your completed application; you will enter **stage one** of your assessment. This stage lasts approximately 1 – 2 months and is where we make all the necessary checks and complete your references. We will also introduce you to your **Form F assessor** who will guide you through the entire process. You will be invited to attend the **Skills to Foster** preparation training course, along with other people who are being assessed by Hope.

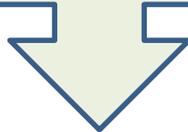


The Process – explained continued

Stage Two - At this stage your **Form F Assessor** will visit you and your family to talk about your life experiences, gain a picture of your family life, skills and knowledge to assess your ability to foster. The information gathered is presented in a Form F report; which highlights your skills and experiences to ensure we can match you to the right child or young person. This stage is expected to take up to 3 months to complete.



Following completion of your training and fostering assessment, the Form F report will be submitted to our Independent **Panel** for approval recommendations to be made to the **Agency Decision Maker**; in terms of suitability and the numbers and ages of children that can be placed with you. You will be asked to attend the **Panel** with the social worker who has completed your assessment.



The **Panel recommendation** is then considered by the **Agency Decision Maker** to confirm the details and decision made in relation to your approval as a foster carer. You will be informed of both the recommendation and the final decision once made; which will be confirmed in writing.



Once **approved** you will then be a registered foster carer with Hope Fostering. You will meet your **Supervising Social Worker**, who will help and support you and work hard to match you with a child/young person whose needs match your skills and abilities.



TRAINING

SKILLS TO FOSTER – PRE-APPROVAL PREPARATION TRAINING

As applicants you will be invited to attend the Skills to Foster Training Course.

This is a 3 day course designed to provide as much information about foster care as possible to assist you in your decision to become a foster carer. It is also an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have and for us to learn a little more about you. We hold the course usually on week days at our office base in Radford.

It is a chance to meet other people applying and also existing Hope carers to share experiences of fostering.

The training will also cover:

- Child protection /safeguarding issues
- Managing challenging behaviour
- Safe caring
- Health and safety
- Working in partnership
- Expectations of Hope foster carers and support provided.

ON-GOING TRAINING – POST APPROVAL

Training is a mandatory requirement for all foster carers. All our training events are **free** and are held at our office base in Radford and take into account the children's school day; to enable carers' attendance. We also ensure our wide ranging training programme reflects the developmental needs of foster carers and is focussed and relevant.

All carers are required to complete 'Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Carers; within 12 months of approval. This is a National Programme designed to demonstrate the basic information and skills necessary to work as a foster carer.

Our [Core Training Programme](#) – consists of a range of training courses designed to cover all aspects of the fostering role and the tasks involved; for all foster carers. Together with your [Supervising Social Worker](#) relevant courses are identified and all carers will have a [Personal Development Plan](#) which highlights individual training and development needs.

[Specialist Training](#) – Hope also offer a number of course which addresses more specific; complex areas designed to meet foster carers specific needs; these will also be discussed as part of your [Personal Development Plan](#).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

If you have any additional questions please ask, we will answer all of your questions so you know all the facts

Can I still be a foster carer if I am single?

Hope already has a number of foster carers who are single, and we would welcome any applications from individuals looking to foster. Some children in the care system benefit from the individual care a single carer can provide. You will however, need to have a support network available to you.

I would like to foster but I live in rented accommodation?

Renting does not exclude you from fostering, but you will need permission from your landlord.

I do not have a spare bedroom, can I still foster?

A spare bedroom is essential in order to foster. Children in Care must have a room of their own and cannot share with your own children.

Sometimes siblings that are placed together may be able to share; if the room is large enough to accommodate this.

Our children are young, can we still foster?

We do not take applications from anyone who has children under the age of 5 years. At Hope we have a careful matching process which will take into consideration the age of your own children and family circumstances. A member of the Hope team would be happy to discuss this with you in further detail.

I would like to continue working, can I still foster?

The role of a foster carer is a full time, demanding task and increasingly requires a commitment to be available to attend various meetings and training events.

A member of the Hope team would be happy to discuss this with you further.

Foster carer, for example a conviction relating to a sexual or violent offence towards a child. All applicants will be required to undergo an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Check (England), before becoming a foster carer, so early disclosure of any offence is essential.

How long will the assessment process take?

This is dependent on individual circumstances and experience, but we aim to complete the process within **6 – 8** months. The process will commence once we have received your completed application form.

I would like to transfer from the Local Authority/ another Agency, how long will this take?

Hope welcomes applications from carers currently approved by another agency. We recognise that there are many reasons for wanting to do that and we aim to make the transition as quick and smooth as possible for you.

Please contact us for further information about transferring.

What kind of checks do I need to go through in the assessment process?

The checks carried out as part of our assessment include;

- Disclosure and Barring Check (Enhanced)
- Medical
- Local Authority Social Services/NSPCC
- References from friends, family and employers and sometimes ex partners (if applicable)
- Health and Safety assessment of the family home.

You will also need to provide proof of identity, valid driving licence, car and building and contents insurance (where applicable).

<p>I have a criminal record. Can I still foster?</p> <p>This will depend on the nature of the offence and each case will be dealt with on its own merits and in the strictest confidence. There are certain offences which will prevent you from becoming a</p>	<p>Will I need training before becoming a foster carer?</p> <p>Yes, at Hope prospective foster carers are expected to attend a three day course held over a number of weeks, prior to their assessment going to Panel.</p> <p>There is also a requirement to attend the range of training courses available once approved.</p>
<p>Will my partner need to be checked and attend training?</p> <p>Anyone over the age of 18 years and living in the family home will be subject to a Disclosure and Barring Check (England). If your partner is living in the home with you they will also be part of the full assessment process and checks undertaken, as well as being required to attend the preparation training course.</p> <p>Do I receive payment if I am a foster carer?</p> <p>You will receive a generous weekly payment depending on the children's individual needs. However the allowance is only paid when you have a child in placement.</p> <p>Do I get tax relief as a foster carer?</p> <p>In April 2003 the government brought in Foster Carer Relief. This means you will be exempt from tax as a self-employed person if your receipts do not exceed the qualifying amount. Often many carers are not liable for any tax.</p> <p>For more information on the qualifying amount, you can contact your local Inland Revenue Office.</p>	<p>Can I choose not to take a placement?</p> <p>At Hope we match carers with children very carefully. We listen very carefully to the needs of you and your family and the types of placements required by the Local Authority. This is to ensure that the provision that you and your family can offer will provide the best outcome for both yourselves and the child.</p> <p>Any placement will be discussed with you in full and the final decision is yours as it is important you only take placements you feel are right for you and your family.</p> <p>What kind of support can I expect from Hope?</p> <p>Your designated Supervising Social Worker will provide support and supervision a minimum of every two weeks. During office hours they are contactable by phone or email. Out of hours we have a member of the team available to take your call 24 hours a day 7 days a week 365 days a year, You are never on your own.</p>

Keys Facts for Foster Care

- ❖ Around 65,000 children are in care in England on any one day
- ❖ Around 75% are in foster care
- ❖ There is a national shortage of foster homes – that will enable children to live as part of a caring family.

BEDROOMS

Hope Fostering Services must ensure that foster placements can comfortably accommodate all who live there including appropriate sleeping arrangements for the child or young person. In order to do this we would require the following;

- children and young people over the age of 3 years; placed with foster carers should have their own bedroom. This should be decorated appropriately and provide adequate privacy and space for each child and space to keep their belongings.
- It is expected that every child aged between 0-6 months (or sometimes older), should sleep in the foster carer's bedroom in a crib next to the foster carer's bed. At no point should a baby of 0-6 months, or older, sleep in the foster carer's bed. Bedroom provision should be anticipated in advance of when the child is ready to move into a bedroom of their own.
- Unrelated children cannot share a bedroom
- Siblings, of the same gender, or close relatives, may be able to share a bedroom together. This is subject to risk assessments and must be in agreement with the placing Local Authority.
- Bunk beds need special consideration, as they do not always allow for privacy for the child.



FOSTERING ALLOWANCE

Allowances to cover living costs and provide a reward

You will receive a carer payment from HOPE to cover living costs, children's allowances and also a reward element in recognition of the important contribution of foster carers.

HOPE considers that a foster carer is undertaking a career in working with children and therefore should be rewarded accordingly. Hope's carer payments and fees are at a competitive rate to reflect this.

The amount of payment you will receive depends on the type of placement and other factors such as the **age of the child and other possible challenges with their behaviour**. The weekly cost can be up to **£425.00**, of which **£260.00** is the carer element, the remainder is for the care of the child (as detailed above).

The payment also reflects living costs and allowances for children incurred including:

- Food
- Travel costs
- Household bills
- Clothing
- Activities
- Pocket Money/Savings



BENEFITS AND TAX CREDITS

Income/Profits

Foster carers are treated as being in “qualified remunerative work” and are generally treated as self-employed for income tax purposes. Profits received as a foster carer are exempt from income tax if the total receipts do not exceed an individual limit. An individual's limit for the year of assessment is comprised of a fixed amount of £10,000 plus £200 per week for each child under 11 years of age and £250 per week for each child 11 years or older.

Tax Credits

As a foster carer you will not be liable to claim Child Tax Credit for a child for whom you receive a fostering allowance. You can however get Child Tax Credit for any child of your own under normal rules. If you are doing sufficient hours as a foster carer (minimum 16 hours per week) you may be able to claim Working Tax Credit.

CHILD BENEFIT

If a Local Authority has placed a child with you, you will not be able to claim Child Benefit for that child.

National Insurance Contributions (NIC)

Income from fostering is deemed to be income from self-employment. As such you are liable to pay Class 4 NIC on annual profits (i.e. gross fostering income less exempt amount or expenses). If however, your receipts from fostering are exempt, you will not need to pay Class 4 NIC as you will have no profits from foster care.

You should seek your own tax advice regarding foster payments which is available from;

<https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers/help-with-the-cost-of-fostering>

The HMRC also have a helpline for foster carers regarding tax credits: Tel : 0845 300 3900