



Meet Theo

Theo is nine. He has light blonde hair, blue eyes and a great sense of humour. He enjoys playing video games, fishing, spending time outside and reading.

His favourite food is spaghetti bolognese and he has an older sibling, who is fifteen. Sometimes Theo can find it hard to manage his emotions ... but then life hasn't always been easy for Theo or his sister.

Why should I Foster?

There are lots of reasons to consider fostering, but the biggest and best reason is because of the difference you could make to a vulnerable young persons life.

You could help change a child's story as a Somerset County Council foster carer.

Thank you for your interest in becoming a foster carer

With more than 500 children in need of foster homes in Somerset, and roughly 200 in-house foster carers, we're always looking for more individuals, couples and families to join our valued community of foster carers.

In this booklet you'll find lots of useful information about fostering, from basic requirements and the assessment process, to fees, allowances and support. You may also want to visit our website www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk for videos, carer interviews and more.



Foster Carers ...

... provide safe, stable homes for children who cannot live with their birth family for a range of reasons. This could be due to family illness, problems at home or welfare reasons.

... work with professionals to support the child or young person, particularly around their emotional, social and wellbeing needs. Though every child's story will be different, all will of experienced being separated from their birth family.

... help children to achieve their full potential. They may not see their worth, but as a foster carer you will.

... welcome, encourage and support the child or children in their care as if they were their own birth child. It's important to make them feel they belong.

... accept there will be challenges along the way. You will need resilience, compassion and patience. Children in foster care have often been though a lot. They may find it hard to manage their emotions and need help to process and move on from past trauma. Sadly many children in care have experienced abuse or neglect, though not all.

... help maintain and strengthen relationships with the child's birth family where appropriate. Some children cannot see their birth family for safety reasons, but many have regular contact with parents, siblings and other family members. The end goal is always to return the child to their family home, if and when it is safe to do so.

... are our community heroes! We can't change the experiences of children in care, but foster carers can help shape their futures and make a difference.

Watch Theo's Story here: Scan QR code with suitable mobile device, or view the video on our website



Who Can Foster?

Sadly there are lots of common myths and assumptions around who can foster, but the truth is, anyone can be a foster carer provided they:

- are aged 21 or over. There is no upper age limit; experience and wisdom are a bonus
 - have a spare room in their home
 - have no offences against children

We need foster carers as diverse as the children in our care. Things like who you love and whether you own your own home aren't important - we recognise that what matters most, is that you have the qualities and time to support a vulnerable young person or child.

You can foster ...

If you're single, married or in a civil partnership

Your relationship status doesn't matter. Families come in many different shapes and sizes, and we assess everyone who applies to foster in the same way. Some children in care may benefit from being placed with a single foster parent, be that a single male or single female. Others may benefit from the balance of a two parent household. However, having your own support network is really important, be that in the form of family and friends, or within the fostering community. Fostering is a wonderful thing to do, but the rewards often come with plenty of challenges along the way.

If you work

It's important you have time for a foster child, but many parents work, and foster carers are no exception. You can foster alongside your 'day job,' and there are lots of different types of fostering to meet the needs of the children, but some more specialist types of fostering do require a carer to be home based, where fostering effectively becomes their 'job.'

If you're male, female, non-binary, straight, gay, bisexual, transgender ...

Who you love and how you identify doesn't impact your ability to provide a stable and loving

home for a vulnerable young person, and we actively welcome applications from the LGBTQ+ community.

If you have a religion, or if you don't have a religion

When matching a child to a foster family, we're looking for the right family based on their ability to meet a child's needs, and sometimes that includes a child's religious needs if they have a faith. That doesn't mean you need to be religious, or practise the same religion as the child and vice versa. We have a number of multicultural fostering households. Your past experiences can make you a great foster carer

No matter what your ethnicity or cultural background

Somerset is not a hugely diverse county, but we would love to recruit more foster carers from the BAME community to help us build an even stronger, more diverse fostering community.

If you have pets

Many foster carers have pets, from dogs and cats to donkeys and lizards. Pets can sometimes be a comforting friend to a foster child, but it's important to make sure that any pets living with you can safely live alongside any foster children. Your pets behaviour and temperament will need to be assessed as part of the process, and we'll need to make sure things like ponds do not present a hazard to any children, for example, ponds needs to have a safety cover or be securely fenced off.

If you have children of your own, but also if you don't have children of your own

Many of our foster carers have children of their own (often called 'birth children' within fostering), some living with them now, and others who have grown up and left the nest. Sometimes foster carers have birth children at nursery, primary school or secondary school, and foster children of a similar or very different age to their own children. We also have foster carers who do not have children of their own. They may have nieces or nephews, maybe they've worked with children but do not have their own children - and that's okay too. What all of these foster carers do have in common, is that they can all provide supportive, stable homes for our Children Looked After.

If you private rent, are living in council or housing association accommodation, or own your own home

You don't need to own your own home to be a foster carer, you just need a home which is suitable for fostering, with a spare room you could offer to a foster child. What you may need if you are renting is permission from your landlord to foster whilst living in the property, which is often not an issue at all.

If you feel you have a difficult past

Maybe you had a difficult childhood, or found yourself walking a different path in previous years? Do you have some minor offences in your past that you're worried might stop you fostering?

Sometimes the challenges a person has faced, or the life experiences they have, are exactly the reason they would make a fantastic foster carer. Often the children in our care have come from difficult backgrounds or experienced trauma, so your own experiences may help you to connect with that child and relate to what they're feeling. However, it is really important that we provide safe, stable environments for the children in our care, which is why the assessment process can be extremely invasive. We will need to talk to you about your past, your childhood and significant ex partners for example - but we all face our own challenges in life, and as humans, sometimes we make mistakes. What matters most is where you are now, and what you can offer a child in need. Your experiences, bad or good, could actually make you the perfect match for a young person experiencing tough times of their own.

Smoking

Foster carers who smoke are able to foster children over the age of five. It's important that foster carers are a positive role model for the children they care for, so we would ask that you smoke outside and discourage the children you care for from smoking.



Children's Stories

We need foster carers as diverse as the children in our care.

Below are the stories of some children looking for foster homes. The names of the children may have been changed to protect their identity and stock images may have been used. Some of the children may have gone on to be adopted or placed with permanent foster carers, but these profiles should give you an idea of the kinds of children that need families.



Tia is a 15 year old girl who has had a really difficult time. She's experienced parental drug abuse, domestic violence and sexual abuse. This is something she finds very hard to talk about so she will need patience and kindness.

Despite experiencing aggression her whole life, Tia has never hurt anyone.

Tia loves going to school, when she sets herself a goal she will strive hard to achieve it. She has a strong sense of identity, enjoys experimenting with hair and make-up and loves a pamper day.

Tia needs a foster home with calm, clear boundaries and just wants someone to sit and listen to her; to help her work through her tough experiences as a young child.



Jack's Story

Jack is a fun, sociable and mischievous with a great sense of humour – he love jokes and has a real gift for impressions of people and animals. Jack really enjoys going to school and living in a family environment. Like a lot of children his age, he likes watching YouTube commentaries on Minecraft.

Life for Jack began in a very frightening, chaotic way and he's experienced great loss in his life. No one gave him enough care and attention or soothed him when he felt frightened. It's difficult for Jack to understand his own feelings sometimes or to find his sense of self-worth. He needs someone to tell me 'everything's going to be okay', as so often when he was little – it wasn't.

Jack needs someone really committed to him, who's in it for the long haul – someone who will be there for him as he grows up and make Jack feel like he truly belongs.

Meet Our Carers - Jane's Story

Jane is a single carer and one of our valued foster carers across Somerset who help change young lives for the better, every day.

"They came to me with their issues, they came to me with their problems. We had anger issues....but now they've managed to turn themselves around and have been exceeding all the grades they were told they were going to get.

They're coming home and talking to me about everything, confident in their own being, and that is what I wanted for all of them.

And the next part of our fostering journey is the post 16 'staying put' scheme, which means the children will continue to live with me past the age of 16.

With college places and apprenticeships sorted, we are ready to embark on our next chapter together with excitement and trepidation."

But fostering hasn't just changed the lives of the children Jayne has cared for, it's changed her life too.

"I'd say fostering won't make you rich, but these children have enriched my life and that's the biggest thing that I can say about my fostering career. And the journey of ... umm ... you're going to make me cry ... just ... they're amazing."

A poem by Jane

Together these hands survived,
Together they played games,
Together they made meals,
Together they watched the stars!
Together they planted seeds.

Together these hands clapped for our hero's,
Together they fed lambs and kids,
Together they played Lego,
Together they held leads and walked the dogs.

Together these hands wrote stories,
Together they worked out circumferences,
Together they drew pictures,
Together they taught us to help
each other.

Together these hands waved to new people on daily exercise, Together they tidied rooms, Together they chose films, Together they had treats.

Together these hand celebrated victory in Europe, Together they made bunting and a spitfire plane Together they ate tea of scones and cakes, Together they celebrated with water fights in the sunshine.

Together these hands fell out,
Together they healed,
Together they made up,
Together they made problems,
But,
TOGETHER THEY FOUND SOLUTIONS.



Types of Fostering

There are many different types of fostering to meet the different needs of children in care. Some children require foster homes (also known as 'placements') on a short-term basis, while others need a long-term home.

Read through the different types of fostering on the next few pages, and think carefully about which types of fostering may suit you – your skills, knowledge and circumstances. We'll also be able to help you identify the best options for you as we get to know you and your family.

More information about the types of fostering can also be found on our website www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk

Mainstream Fostering

This involves caring for children and young people aged between o-18 years old and is by far our most popular type of fostering. Within it, there is the flexibility to foster children on a short-term or more long-term basis, depending on what works best for you.

Short Term

Short term fostering is caring for children and young people for up to three months. This can also include short breaks for children, either from home or from other foster carers, for short periods of time such as overnight or for the weekend.

Intermediate Fostering

Intermediate fostering involves caring for children and young people for up to two years whilst plans are made for their future. Intermediate fostering would appeal to people who would like a child to settle with them and do not want the constant change of short term fostering.

In practice many carers provide short term and intermediate placements.

Long Term and Permanent Fostering

Long term and permanent fostering is about caring for children and young people for the rest of their childhood. For children in long-term homes, their foster carers are an important part of their family as they mature into adulthood. Most of the children and young people who need permanent fostering will be aged seven years and above.



Occasional Care, Short Stays & Link Carers

Some children and young people do not need full time foster homes, and may instead need a foster carer who could offer them a weekend stay once a month, or during a school holiday.

Children who need this type of carer

• may be in full time foster care, but would benefit from having an additional carer they could build a relationship with in a similar way to having an Aunt or Uncle. It may also be beneficial to their full time foster carer, providing support and an opportunity for some down time.

• may go to residential school, with no family members to care for them during the weekends and holidays. They need foster carers for these periods of time who will also remain in contact with them and support them during term time.

• may need a 'link carer'. This involves building a relationship with a child in or coming out of residential care, similar to that of an extended family member. The child does not live with you full time, but will see you regularly by coming over for dinner, joining you for days out and sometimes sleeping over.

High Needs

High Need foster carers provide long-term homes for Somerset's most complex children, often aged between 12–15 years old.

This is a demanding role, likely to be filled with challenges and obstacles alongside the achievements and rewards, but we'll be with you every step of the way, with careful consideration given to matching the needs of both the carer and child.

Our specialist High Needs fostering scheme offers carers a robust package of emotional and practical support, plus enhanced fees and allowances of roughly £45,000 a year. Carers will benefit from wrap around support, tailored to each child's care plan, in addition to extensive, on-going training and development.

Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones carers support young people, aged between 16-21 years, who are between care and living alone. They want independence but many are not ready to live on their own yet.

Stepping Stones carers provide them with a stable home, whilst helping them gain valuable skills to

help them move towards independent

living. This often involves showing them how to cook, manage their money, and apply for work or college - things some of us have been able to take for granted, that could make a huge difference to these young people.

Stepping Stones placements
typically last from a few months to a
few years, and may be a good option
for people who

- work or have other commitments.
- enjoy being with young adults and are keen to support them.
- are of an older age and would enjoy sharing their home and life experiences with a young person.
- live alone or as a couple, though families can also provide a great environment.

It's also helpful if you live in a Somerset town as it's important our care leavers have access to good transport links, amenities and career opportunities.

Emergency Care

Sometimes children need to be placed in foster care at short notice. This could be for many reasons, including a medical emergency with their parent(s) and no nearby family to care for them, or they may have been removed from their family home by the police due to safety and welfare

concerns.

Emergency foster care is unplanned and typically means caring for a child for several days or weeks.

Often emergency carers have less than 24 hours notice before a child arrives.

Short Break Care

Short Break Care is a specialist service for children with disabilities. They could have a learning disability, a physical or sensory disability, significant health care needs or a combination of these.

Most children in need of Short Break carers are not in long-term foster care, and live with their birth families. They need care on a respite basis for short periods of time, such as one weekend per month or one evening per week. The aim of this service is to broaden the social lives and experiences of these young people. This scheme appeals to people with experience of disability who have limited time to give but want to make a difference to the life of a disabled child and their family. Long term relationships are often forged between short break carers, the child and their birth family.

Parent & Child

Parent & Child fostering is a role that provides support, advice and assessment of a parent (or both parents) and the care of their young child, whilst they live in the foster carers home. Working closely with the Family Assessment & Support Team (FA&ST) these carers give practical and emotional support to young families to help them stay together where possible.

The role of a Parent & Child carer is intense but also rewarding, and requires the foster carer to be home based to provide the necessary level of support and supervision.





Fostering Teenagers

Whilst going through the assessment process, people often say they would prefer to foster a younger child. Teenagers are rarely a first choice for those applying or newly approved carers. A common misconception is that a younger child will be 'easier' and that teenagers will be hard work in comparison.

Remember, all children can present challenging behaviour. Teenagers experience the ups and downs of puberty, and often feel huge pressure from looming exams and their peers, in a world full of Instagram filters and unrealistic images on social media. Teenagers in care will experience all of this, whilst living in a foster home away from their birth family, with the possibility of past trauma and all the emotions that go with it.

The teenage years can be challenging for both parent and child, but it's also the start of an exciting new chapter. A time of transition, discovery and change when our children will develop and grow into the unique individuals they will become, with our help and guidance. As a foster carer, you have an opportunity to make a real different to a child's present and future. In truth, fostering a child of any age is challenging, and you do need to understand and accept that, but it's also one of the reasons fostering is so rewarding.

You absolutely **Cannot judge a book by its cover**, and the same must be said for fostering.

Teenagers are often written off as 'hard work,' but so is looking after a 2 year old.



How Do I Foster?

Deciding to foster is a big decision. You've probably been considering it for a while, or thought about it before.

Fostering is unlikely to be something you rush in to (and for good reason), but finding out more and registering your interest means just that. You're not committing to anything by getting in touch or reading this pack. At this stage, our aim is to provide you with everything you need to help you gage whether or not fostering could be something you'd like to consider further, either now or in the future.

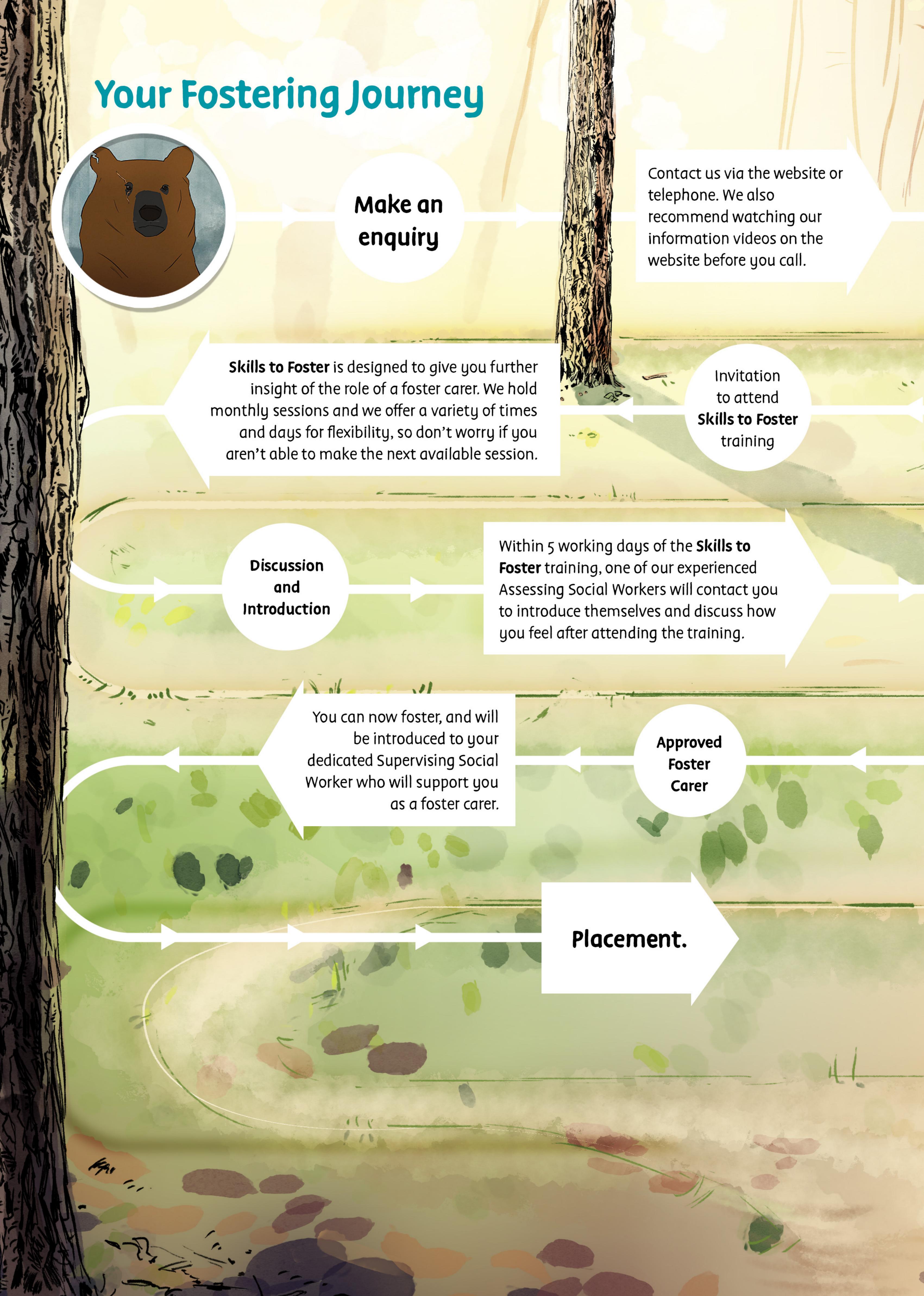
Regardless of when the right time is for you to foster, the first step is always talking to us via phone or email, by making an enquiry – something you've probably already done. If after an initial chat you're happy to pursue fostering further, we can arrange a more detailed face to face chat, which we call an 'Initial Home Visit'.

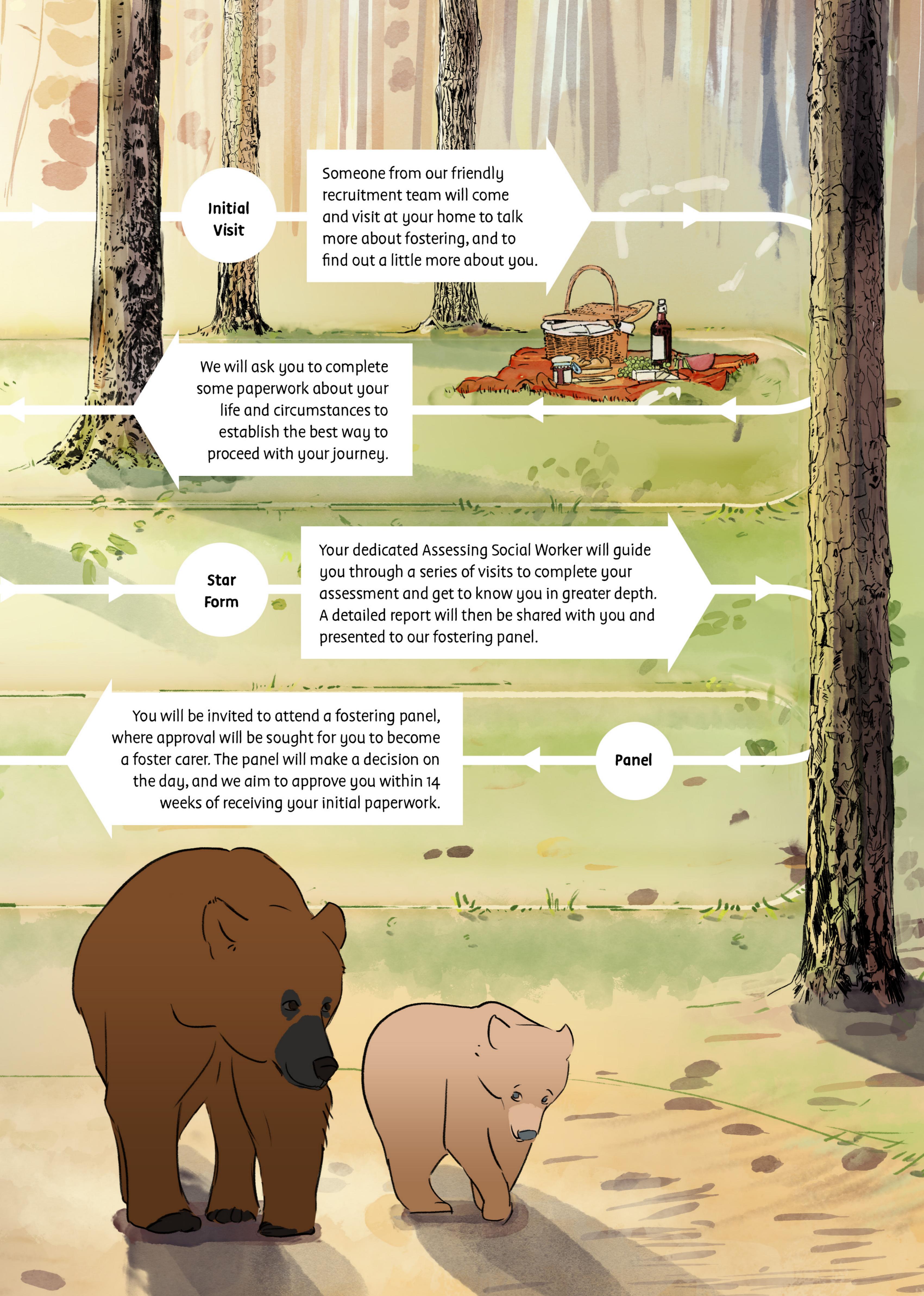
Following an initial home visit, we can provide an application form and book you on to our 'Skills to Foster' training course.

The main part of your application will be around the formal assessment, which will be completed by your assigned Assessing Social Worker, who will work with you throughout the process to complete the form and basic checks, along with any other relevant paperwork.

The final part of the process is 'going to panel'. Your assessment will be sent to the Somerset Foster Panel, who all being well, will then make a recommendation for you to be approved as foster carers.

To read more about each of these steps in the fostering process, please visit the relevant sections at www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk.





Meet Our Carers - Geoff & Emma's Story

Geoff & Emma were both in the Air Force for 38 and 21 years respectively, and retired about the same time. They started their fostering journey with Parent and Child.

"Parent & Child fostering is where you support a mum and/or dad, and their baby, usually straight from hospital though sometimes the child is a bit older, and they stay with you so the social workers and courts can see if the parents are able to look after their child. We did that for almost 3 years.

A typical day was a busy day, supporting the parents in best practise ways to look after their child.

We'd support them with everything from bathing and changing to night feeds. We had newborn twins once, that was exhausting.

We are still in touch with some of the parents and their children which is lovely."

After fostering for eight years, do you have any advice or things you wish you'd known before you started?

"When you become a foster carer, you don't go into this by yourself, you're part of a team. You have a supervising social worker to talk to, but also other foster carers with experience. We have several groups of foster carers that we contact if we ever need advice or support.

To be a good foster carer you have to be resilient, and remember that children need and often like boundaries. We have found more so with children who come to us who have never had boundaries.

If anyone was considering fostering I would say go for it. You're not signed up for a certain amount of time, you could stop after your first placement, but I think you'll probably find that you enjoy it, and all the challenges."

We always love to hear about happy memories and Geoff & Emma have plenty to share.

"A favourite but possibly odd one was of a toddler we were looking after who has been severely neglected. She didn't express her emotions or anything. Very quiet, very timid. A very scared child.

And after she had been with us for about four months, she had a two-year old's tantrum. We were so happy, because it was typical toddler behaviour.

I know that sounds like a really weird

memory but for us it meant that suddenly she felt safe and she could be herself. She could just be a little two year old, which was really nice to see."

Fostering is often described as very rewarding, but what do you find rewarding about the care you offer?

"I think the biggest reward for us is when we see in the end of a

placement. A lot of people say to me they don't know how we foster, and they would find it hard to give them up, but they are not our children to keep. For us, the reward is seeing them move on to their families, whether that is returning home because it's now safe to do so, moving to a long-term foster home, or being adopted. Seeing them settled in new homes ... really does bring a lump to your throat.

I think that's definitely the biggest reward, seeing them move on to safe homes."

Assessment and Panel

Assessment

The main part of your fostering application will revolve around your assessment, which will be completed by your dedicated Assessing Social Worker, who will work with you to complete what is called a 'STAR Form.'

Your Assessing Social Worker will visit you several times to get to know you, your family, your home and your experiences, to make sure you can offer a child security, stability and safety. The assessment can sometimes feel quite intrusive as we will cover personal subjects including your own childhood and your relationships with your family, as well as discussing any significant ex partners. There are also additional checks we have to do as part of the assessment process, to make sure you can safely look after a child. These include:

- Disclosure and Barring Service (Police check)
- A medical report via your GP
- A SSAFA check (Soldier, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) if you have served in the Armed Forces
- A certificate of good conduct or similar if you have lived abroad for more than 90 days.
- A household risk assessment
- Employment checks
- Ofsted check if you are or have been a registered childminder
- References from family and friends
- An education reference from your child's school (if you have children of school age)
- A reference from anyone you have parented with, such as an ex-partner. We are mindful that this is not always comfortable but in practice this rarely presents any difficulties. You can speak to your social worker completing your assessment if you have particular concerns about this.

You should also be aware that depending on your individual circumstances, the assessment process can take between 6 - 8 months, mostly due to the time it takes to complete these checks.

Panel

Your Assessing Social Worker will write a detailed report about you to present to the foster panel. You will see the report and you can (and are often encouraged) to attend the panel.

Using the report and information collected from your STAR Form assessment, the panel will then discuss and decide whether to recommend your approval for fostering. If they are happy to recommend you as a foster carer, a senior manager will then consider their recommendation and make a final decision, where all being well you will be 'ratified' and officially join our fostering community. You can find carer videos and further information about panel on the Fostering in Somerset website.



Support For Foster Carers

As you progress through your fostering journey, we will support you every step of the way with ongoing training and guidance, as well as offering practical and emotional support. Once ratified, your Assessing Social Worker will step back to continue assessing other fostering applicants, and you'll be assigned a Supervising Social Worker who will support and work with you and your family. You'll also have the opportunity to get to know other foster carers, and attend regular support groups and family days if you wish. There is no obligation to do so, but many foster carers find great strength and support among other carers.

- All foster carers are provided with their own dedicated Supervising Social Worker that will visit regularly and be available to help with any issues or difficulties that may arise. If you have an emergency or concern out of normal office hours, you can call our support line between 5pm 11pm on weekdays, and from 8:30am 11pm on weekends and bank holidays.
- We provide 'Skills to Foster' preparation training as part of your assessment, and there is an annual programme of ongoing training to help you build up your skills. See the training section for more details.
- Existing foster carers can be allocated as 'mentors' to individuals and families as they begin the assessment process to become foster carers themselves. 'Mentors' can also be allocated to support foster carers in other areas, such as helping them to complete their fostering plus portfolio.
- We arrange events like family fun days and coffee mornings, whilst also supporting social events so you can meet other foster carers and share experiences.
- If you need a break we may also be able to provide 'Short Stay' care to provide some respite.

- We can support foster carers in situations such as problems with a child's school, or concerns about anything to do with their education. Your Supervising Social Worker can advise on this.
- You can also receive help and advice on any health care services and concerns, and we can also provide help and advice from a psychologist if a child is having emotional difficulties, including techniques you can use to avoid and manage challenging behaviour.
- All foster carers have free membership to Foster Talk which provides legal advice, financial and tax advice, a counselling helpline called Fosterline, discounts, an online forum plus much more.
- by foster carers for foster carers. The Association aims to bring foster carers in Somerset together, providing them with a stronger voice that could influence and develop support services in the county. Carers will benefit by having opportunities to come together, sharing ideas and social networking that will develop the service for them and the children in their care. Read more on the Fostering In Somerset website.
- Somerset also has a consultative group of foster carers who meet quarterly to discuss service developments and issues.
- Rest and Reflect (R&R) groups are for foster carers to attend once they have completed the attachment based parenting training. This is facilitated by a clinical psychologist from the Emotional Health & Wellbeing Team and a Supervising Social Worker. The group provides support, emotional support around challenging placements, or simply the opportunity to rest and reflect on experiences and placements.





We value the contribution the birth children of our foster carers make to our fostering community, and appreciate that they may also benefit from some additional support, so we created we care?

We know that being a member of a fostering household can be both wonderful, rewarding, and at times ... challenging.

weCare2 is a group specifically for the birth and adopted children of foster carers in Somerset. It is a friendly, approachable group run by the Senior Social Work Assistants in the Fostering Team.

We offer the children of foster carers three fun group sessions a year.

They may find themselves rock climbing, walking along high ropes, bowling or going to the cinema. We also offer training to support them in their role, and at every session an opportunity to sit and chat with other children whose families foster. Friends are waiting to be made and fun is waiting to be had!

The other service that we offer is one to one sessions. If your birth child or children are struggling with a child that you have staying with you, or are finding it hard to say goodbye because a child is moving on, the Senior Social Work Assistants are here to support them through it, whether the support be by telephone calls or hot chocolate in a local café, they are not alone.



Fees & Allowances

It's important to consider fostering for the right reasons, but we also recognise that income is often an important consideration for many families thinking about fostering - after all, you need to know you can maintain financial stability whilst fostering, and continue to support your own family too.

Foster carers receive two weekly payments - a fee, and an age-related allowance.

A weekly allowance payment is made for every foster child who is living with the foster carer, to cover the costs of food, clothing, pocket money, bills and activities. The allowance varies depending on the age of the foster child.

Foster carers are also paid a weekly fee, which is paid in addition to the allowance received for the child.

Foster carers also receive additional payments for mileage, Christmas, birthdays, school holidays and sometimes school uniform. Details on all additional payments can be found on our website.

We also offer a range of discounts and extra rewards on everything from shopping to holidays.

Allowances

A fostering allowance is paid to foster carers for each child in their care, to cover the needs of the child. Part of the allowance is a contribution towards extra utility bills that come from having an extra person living in your home, such as gas, water and electricity bills as well as phone calls and wear and tear on appliances. The rest of the allowance is for the child or young person's food, clothes, trips, pocket money etc.

One extra week's allowance is paid for a child's birthday, to go towards a present and a celebration. One extra week's allowance is also paid for Christmas.

During the summer holidays, two weeks extra allowance is paid in instalments to help with extra expenditure and trips in the school holidays.

Fees

All foster carers are paid a weekly fee to reflect the type of placement they offer and the skills, experience and commitment they bring to fostering. The fee recognises the commitment that foster carers make to children in Somerset. Fees vary depending on the type of fostering a carer offers.

For up to date fees and allowance and more in-depth information, please visit the website or refer to the information sheet included with this pack.





Training

Fostering Training Plan

During your assessment and throughout your fostering career, you'll be encouraged to undertake training to help you develop your skills as a foster carer. More information on this can be found within our **Fostering Training Plan**, available on the website.

Skills to Foster

Foster' preparation training that will give you basic information on caring for a foster child. Foster carers and social workers deliver the training, and it is a great opportunity to meet other people going through the assessment process.

There are two extra days training on attachment and safer caring that you should attend before your panel date.

National Induction Standards

All foster carers are supported to complete the mandatory National Induction Standards for foster carers during their first year of fostering. The training covers:

- First aid
- How to keep children safe and healthy
- How to predict and respond to certain behaviours
- How to promote education and life-long learning
- How to set boundaries
- Valuing diversity
- How to work in partnership with internal and external agencies / other professionals involved in the care of the child/young person.

You receive a bonus payment on successful completion of these standards.

Continuing Professional Development

We also have an annual programme of training which includes courses on:

- Sex and relationships for young people in care
- Caring for children who've experienced abuse and trauma
- Keeping safe online and on social media

Help and advice on training is available. Don't worry if you haven't studied for a while – we are here to support you.

A small payment is made to you when you attend training to encourage continual professional development, and all travel and child care costs are covered.

Why Foster With Us?

When you foster with Fostering in Somerset, you're fostering for your Local Authority. But why should you consider fostering with us?

- Your council fostering service is entirely not for profit and always has the child's best interests at heart. Every single penny of your taxpayer's money is spent on delivering a good service to the children and their foster carers
- Join our team and you'll be helping local children stay in their communities. This means they can go to the same school, see their friends and have contact with their families, if it's safe to do so
- We usually look to our own foster carers first to find a local home for vulnerable children. You are unlikely to have long gaps between children, and there is the flexibility to choose the types of fostering you offer, and the age range of the children you prefer to look after.

- All our approved foster carers will receive not just the weekly age-related allowance, but also a weekly fee that recognises your skill and experience. Many foster carers who have transferred to us from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) have been surprised to find that our payments are competitive, with payments also made for mileage.
- We support you throughout your fostering journey and offer ongoing training, which is always held locally so you won't have to travel out of county for this.
- When you foster for us, you'll join a friendly and supportive fostering community that meets regularly to share information and learn from each other. You'll be connected to other carers in your area, giving you a local support network.
- There are great opportunities to expand your skills and increase your income if you choose to move through our progression scheme.



Already a Foster Carer?

Are you fostering for an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) but living in or close to Somerset?

Whoever you foster for, we want to thank you and encourage you to continue to foster, but we would also encourage you to consider fostering with us, your local council, given the excellent fostering offer we have available.

Regular placements

We try to place children with our own Local Authority carers before looking at independent agencies, which means foster carers are likely to have regular placements.

Fostering with us means you are helping local children in your area, stay local

The children we place are 'our' children. We have a commitment to ensuring we provide sufficient foster homes for each of them. An Independent Fostering Network survey in 2015 revealed that children placed with local authorities were placed on average 11 miles from their birth family home; children placed with IFA's were on average placed at least twice as far away. We want to keep children close to their homes, and with carers that we know and support where possible.

We are a 'not for profit' fostering service

Every single penny of (your) taxpayer's money is spent on delivering a good service to Somerset children and/or foster carers. Many years ago, most IFA's were also 'not for profit', but nowadays many are limited companies operating as businesses.

Our payments are competitive

Many foster carers who have transferred to us from IFA's have been surprised to find that they could be financially better off with us. After approval, all foster carers receive not just the age-related allowance but also a fee, which for experienced carers can rise to in excess of £200 per week per child. Our specialist schemes such as Step Forward and Parent & Child fostering can offer payments commensurate with the rates paid by IFA's when allowances and fees are combined.

We also pay all your fostering-related mileage, and retainer fees between placements on some specialist schemes, so you will have a regular income whilst you are a registered foster carer.

Local training & excellent support

We know that whilst important, finance is not everything. We provide excellent local training, support and social groups, including regular social activities for birth children of foster carers and a welcoming community where new carers can receive support from a foster care 'buddy'.

Discounts and rewards with 'My Staff Shop'

All Somerset County Council foster carers have access to a huge range of local and national deals and discounts via a 'My Staff Shop' card

I'm an existing carer with another agency. What's involved when I switch to Somerset?

We know that being assessed as a foster carer is an onerous process, and the thought of going through another assessment is understandably not particularly attractive, but our aim is to make the process as smooth as possible. We strive to protect the welfare of children while allowing carers the freedom to switch.

We will obtain from your existing agency a copy of your form F which we will need to update along with several checks, however we will only update sufficiently to satisfy ourselves and our foster panel of your suitability and strengths. We will always invite you to attend our 'skills to foster' course should you wish, but provided you have completed the course and kept your training updated, it's unlikely we would insist on attendance.

In short, we would aim to complete any transfer in four months, during which time you will continue to be approved by your existing agency.

What's Next?

By now, you probably know whether fostering is something you want to consider further.

Firstly, it's important you and your family have an honest chat about fostering. What are everyone's initial thoughts? Do you have concerns you'd like to chat through? Maybe you'd really like to talk to an existing foster carer about what it's really like? We can certainly arrange this if so. We'd also highly recommend having a good look through our website and facebook page. There are some really useful videos on both which you may find helpful to watch.



facebook.com/fosteringinsomerset



instagram.com/fosteringinsomerset



twitter.com/fostersomerset



www.fosteringinsomerset.org.uk

From here, there are a number of options and routes.

It could be that you're really keen to move forward with fostering now; in which case you need to let us know. If you haven't already had an initial home visit we can book one at a suitable time, but if you have, it's now time to get in touch and complete an initial application form. You can contact us on **0800 587 9900**, or email fosteringteam@somerset.gov.uk

Perhaps you're really interested, but for one reason or another, now just isn't the right time. We can leave you to call us if or when things change, or we can arrange to contact you again in 6 or 12 months.

Or maybe you now feel that fostering really isn't for you, and that's fine too. Fostering is an amazing thing to do, but it's not for everyone, and it's important we match the right people to the children in need of foster homes.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this information booklet.





