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Tower Hamlets needs more foster carers to care for local children

Thank you for showing an interest in fostering for Tower Hamlets Council.

Foster carers make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable children. The work carried out by our foster carers means the children in our care can get the stability and support they need.

We need more foster carers to join our fostering family to help us care for children in our borough who, for whatever reason, are unable to live with their birth family.

As a council, we are passionate about fostering. We want our children to thrive whilst they are in care and we believe that they get the best support when our foster carers feel supported too. We approach fostering as a family; working together as a team, celebrating success and supporting each other through challenges.

All of our foster carers receive comprehensive benefits, support and training. Fostering is a rewarding and challenging role, with the chance for foster carers to make a real positive difference to a child or young person's life.

We do not make any profit from fostering, unlike private fostering agencies that run as a business to maximise profit for shareholders.



Why choose Tower Hamlets as your fostering agency?

When you become a foster carer for Tower Hamlets, it's not just a loving and stable home you will be offering a child, there's also the opportunity to make great friends and be part of a supportive and friendly fostering community.

The fostering role is hugely rewarding but we also recognise that it can often be challenging and therefore offer a wide range of benefits, training and support to help you including:

Fostering fees and allowances

We offer competitive fostering fees and allowances. Fees paid are to cover the cost of looking after a child along with a reward element. Rates vary depending on the number of children you care for and their ages. Rates of pay increase as you complete further training and become better skilled. We also pay enhanced rates to foster carers who look after children with more complex needs. Please see our payment sheet for further information on what you would be entitled to.

All foster carers need to register as self-employed with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. There is no effect on Income Support if people register as self-employed foster carers, as any income received from fostering is not taken into account. For more information visit www.gov.uk/foster-carers

Training opportunities

We have lots of training opportunities for our foster carers. Our training programmes are organised by our dedicated training coordinators and your supervising social worker can help you identify the right courses for you. Courses are held over weekends and evenings as well as during the day to enable all foster carers to have the opportunity to attend. You will also have access to a variety of online courses.

Within the first twelve months of being approved, you are required to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) for foster care. The standards set out expectations for foster carers.

During your fostering career you will be expected to complete several training courses each year as part of your continuing development.





Twenty-four hour, 365 days a year support

You will have access to round the clock support as we recognise that emergencies don't just happen during office hours.

Support groups

Lots of our foster carers enjoy meeting up on a regular basis at various support groups to talk about different issues and offer advice, helping each other. Your supervising social worker will advise you where and when these groups are meeting.

Mockingbird

It's essential that all foster carers receive 24-hour quality support. But we believe carers need more and that's why we are committed to rolling out the Fostering Networks' Mockingbird programme to every foster carer. This exciting new scheme links a group of foster families together so that carers receive extra valuable peer support and respite care. Families regularly

get together and experience social activities such as bowling and trips to the seaside. Foster children soon make friends and find comfort from other children who understand what it's like to be in care.

"Now we are like a big family. We share things and can use the Mockingbird hub to help with any problems. There's always a safe and familiar place for my foster children to go." Foster carer



In addition to the above, you'll also receive:

- Regular supervision from your dedicated supervising social worker
- Two weeks paid holiday per year
- Access to an experienced 'mentor', who can offer advice and support
- Membership of the Fostering Network
- All necessary bedroom furniture and bedding
- Fuel payments of 40p per mile – for training, contact etc.
- Opportunities to take part in exciting outings and events for foster families

- Newsletters and service updates
- Membership to the Tower Hamlets' Foster Carers Association, an independent body to voice the needs of the foster carers

Every year, we enjoy a big celebration of our foster carers' achievements at our annual dinner and dance. Carers receive gifts, awards are presented, and everyone enjoys a three-course dinner and a dance. It's just one of the ways we like to say thank you!





Become a fostering star

Our foster carer Afia has been awarded a top fostering award for her dedication. We're always looking for more inspirational people to join her.

"I came into fostering to make a difference to children, but actually they've made a difference to my life. The support I have received from my supervising social worker has been fantastic and Tower Hamlets has a really great bunch of foster carers who support each other."

With so much on offer, what are you waiting for? Start your fostering career now by giving us a call!

0207 364 1246

www.fosteringtowerhamlets.co.uk

Why do children need foster carers?

Children of all ages, sometimes even new-born babies need foster homes. According to the government in December 2019, there are over 78,000 children in care across the UK – and there are a number of reasons why they need foster care.

It may be because of a family illness, family breakdown and problems at home, or a situation where their welfare is threatened. Many will have experienced neglect and physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

Sometimes an adult's dependence on drugs or alcohol will mean they cannot put their children's needs first.

And while every child's background will be different, each child will have faced loss and separation from their birth family and will need help and support to come to terms with this.



**"Foster carers feel highly valued; they receive good support and extensive training focused on meeting the needs of children. Good training opportunities are available in support groups, hubs, and one-to-one during supervisory visits."
Ofsted inspection, June 2019.**

What do foster carers do?

By becoming a foster carer, you will be providing a welcoming and caring home environment where children and young people will be safe from harm. You will be giving them the opportunity to grow and develop to reach their full potential, by helping to ensure that their emotional, health and educational needs are met.

The difficult backgrounds that many children and young people in care have experienced mean they may find it hard to build relationships. With support, patience and reassurance, you can help a child or young person to build their self-esteem and confidence.

Fostering involves working closely with others involved in the welfare of the children you are caring for. Foster carers need to be strong advocates for the children they care for.

Our children come from diverse backgrounds with different life experiences. Your role will be to help

a child understand and feel positive about themselves.

We believe that foster carers need lots of support to be able to be successful. You will not be on your own and you will have lots of opportunities to develop your skills.

“My husband and I decided to foster 12 years ago when our two children had grown up. We’ve now looked after over 30 children and we keep in touch with so many of them. We have big family picnics together. To anyone thinking about fostering, I say give it a try. It’s hard work but hugely rewarding.” Kim

Who can foster?

Most people can be considered as foster carers, but there are some requirements:

- Ideally, you will have a spare bedroom for the sole use of a foster child (babies aged between 0-2 can share your bedroom).
- You must live in reasonable traveling distance to Tower Hamlets
- You must be aged over 21
- You must have some experience of caring for or working with children or young people
- If you are a couple then you must be able to demonstrate your relationship is stable and are both equally committed to fostering.
- You must not be pregnant
- You must have no convictions for offences against children. Any other criminal history you have, may affect your ability to foster

Foster carers come from all backgrounds. What’s important is your interest in caring for a child.

You can be:

- Single, married, divorced or living together
- In a same sex relationship
- Identifying as any gender
- From any ethnic or religious background
- A homeowner or living in rented accommodation
- Employed or in receipt of benefits
- Already a parent
- Living with disabilities



What is important:

- You have the skills to work as part of a team
- You can show lots of kindness and understanding
- You relate well to children and young people
- You feel able to work with birth families and extended family
- You are able to participate in a range of meetings to talk about children's wellbeing
- You are able to keep written/ electronic records

Be part of an inclusive and diverse team supporting children together

We are proud to be members of 'New Family Social' – the UK's only national LGBT+ adoption and fostering charity.



Myth Busting

Can I work and foster?

YES. There are several ways of fostering and we can help you choose one that will fit in with your lifestyle. If you work and are considering fostering it is essential that your employer is flexible and you are available to attend meetings, promote contact with the birth family and be at home to care for the children or young people when required. You could also become a respite carer where you will provide short, regular periods of care such as a few days in the week, regular weekends and short breaks in the school holidays.

I am unemployed, does this rule me out as a foster carer?

NO. Children benefit from having someone to care for them full-time and as a foster carer you will receive fostering allowances and other payments to cover the cost of caring for a child or young person.

I'm single, can I still foster?

YES. Some children benefit from having one-to-one attention. What you will need is a committed support network.



Does a foster child need a room of their own?

This is dependent upon the age of the child. We are looking for foster homes which provide adequate space to a suitable standard. Our expectation is that foster children over the age of two will have their own bedroom. You can foster if you rent or live in council or housing association accommodation.

I am a smoker, can I still foster?

Currently we do not place children under-five or vulnerable children who have respiratory, heart or other medical conditions, in homes where there is a smoker (this includes the use of e-cigarettes). We prefer foster carers to not smoke as smoking is unhealthy and we will encourage you to give up.





Fostering as a family

Fostering cannot be done in isolation. It affects your family and friends. If you have a partner you must both be equally committed. You will need to think carefully about how it might affect your own children, who will have to share your time, their home and their possessions.

Your children will probably build good relationships with foster children, but sometimes they may find it hard to adapt if it is time for a child to move on. There may be times when your own children will experience difficulties getting on with a foster child. They may become upset at any special treatment or attention they feel is being given to them.

As a foster carer you will need to think about how you support your own children so that they still feel important and valued. We also run support groups for carers own children so that they can share experiences and spend time with other children who understand what it's like to be in a foster family.

We recognise the importance of the role that your own children and other family members contribute towards the success of fostering within the family. As a foster carer, your family will be offered support from a member of the fostering team to enable you or your family members to discuss any concerns or worries.

Fostering is balancing the needs of both your own family members and the foster children you care for - your own children will be part of this, and we want them to feel equally valued.

I am a disabled person, can I foster?

YES. People with disabilities do become foster carers and make a valuable contribution to fostering. As part of the approval process for all foster carers, your GP will need to verify that you are mentally and physically able to look after children and are not putting your own health at risk.

I have no children of my own, can I foster?

YES. We are looking for people who like, and have a genuine interest in, caring for children and young people. You must have had some experience of caring for or working with other people's children.



Saying hello, saying goodbye...

When it has been planned for a child or young person to come into care, you often have the chance to meet them before they come to stay, giving you and the child the opportunity to prepare.

Sometimes a planned move is not possible and you may only have a short time to get things ready. Children and young people can arrive upset, angry, confused and often frightened, even though they may be putting on a brave face. Some may welcome the chance to talk, while others just need time to settle.

Whatever the circumstances, getting it right needs patience and understanding. Different children cope in different ways, and you will need to look at each child as an individual, even when they are part of a family.

A child could be with you for a few weeks or much longer. Saying goodbye is, and always will be, difficult. No matter what the circumstances or how long you have looked after a child or young person, if it is time for them to move back to live with their family, to their adoptive family or on to another placement, a foster carer has to learn to adapt and this is what fostering is all about.

As a foster carer you will look after children and young people, help them to keep links with their family and work in partnership with other agencies to achieve the best outcomes for them.

Helping children to keep in touch with their families

Children and young people who are separated from their family may find this upsetting and confusing. Helping children stay in touch with family and friends and maintain relationships, where it is safe to do so, is an important part of fostering.

Sometimes visits with family can impact on your own family's routine. Anger and confusion can be common reactions and some children may cry or become withdrawn around visiting time.

It is important that as a foster carer you are empathetic to the way a child is feeling. For some children, visits with their family could be as frequent as every day.

- **Would you be able to encourage and support a child to visit their family?**
- **Would you be able to assist with transporting a child to and from visiting their family?**
- **Would you be able to support a child to have phone calls or write letters to family members?**



How do I become a foster carer?

We understand that starting your journey to become a foster carer can seem daunting. You may feel anxious about what you will be asked or what we are looking for. We believe in looking for the strengths that you have and supporting you in any areas where you may need to develop. Our friendly team will be happy to reassure you and answer any questions you have.

We can also put you in touch with one of our foster carers to find out what's it really like to foster. Just ask!

Step 1 - Initial enquiry

Give us a call on **0800 279 9850** or make an enquiry on our website **www.tbc**. If you give us a call, one of our friendly team members will have an initial chat with you, answer any questions you have and take some details. If you make an enquiry on our website, we will call you back to have the initial chat. You will be invited to an information event or we will come out to see you in your home.

Step 2 - Home visit

A social worker from our fostering and permanence teams will contact you to discuss your interest and arrange a convenient time to visit

you and your family and talk through any questions you may have.

Step 3 - Registration of interest

Hopefully after having a home visit, you will have decided fostering is right for you. You will need to complete an application form which gives us permission to start obtaining your checks and references including from the police, your local authority, medical, employment, school, and personal references. You will be supported at every step of the process.

Step 4 - Skills to foster training

To prepare you for the role, you will attend training.

The course covers:

- **Understanding the role of the foster carer, the child's social worker and other agencies**
- **Training, support and development standards for foster care**
- **Child development**
- **Separation and loss**
- **The impact of early childhood experience on attachment and behaviour**
- **Positive approaches to managing behaviour**

- **Health needs of children and young people**
- **Diversity and identity**
- **Child protection and handling disclosures of abuse**
- **Safer care practices**
- **Maintaining links and moving children on**

Step 5 - Assessment

A social worker will visit you several times to get to know you, your family, any frequent visitors, your home, and your experiences to make sure you can offer a safe, secure and stable environment for a child.

The social worker prepares a detailed report covering all the information you have shared, outlining your abilities and attributes. You will see this report and can add your own comments in writing.

Step 6 - Attending the fostering panel

Your detailed assessment report will then be presented to the fostering panel. The fostering panel comprises of members who have experience in fostering or may have spent time in foster care themselves. You will not be alone and will have the support of your assessing social worker who will attend with you.

The panel decides whether to recommend your approval to the Agency Decision Maker, who then considers their recommendation to reach a decision. You will then receive a letter confirming this.

If you haven't been approved, your assessing social worker will explain why, and you may be able to reapply in the future.

Step 7 - First placement

Once you've been approved, you will be appointed a supervising social worker who will support you as you have your first placement. We will match you carefully with a child to help build your confidence as you start your fostering career.

Step 8 - Ongoing development and support

You will receive ongoing, support and guidance from your supervising social worker. You will also receive support from an experienced foster carer to help you develop your skills.

Types of fostering



Lots of people don't realise that there are many different types of fostering and that being a foster carer does not always involve a full-time commitment.

Some carers choose to specialise in one area of fostering, but others may opt to take children with a variety of needs

Short term fostering

Short term placements may last a few days but can continue for up to about two years. You'll be asked to provide a safe and secure home environment for a child to live in, while Children's Services work with the child's family and work out a long-term plan. At the same time you and Children's Services will help the child understand what is happening, and find out what they need to grow up safely.

The aim of a short-term placement is to help the children return home to their own family or, if this is not possible, to support them to move on to a permanent placement - either an adoptive family or long-term foster carer.

We try to place children in a planned way so that you will have lots of information about them before you meet them. However, sometimes children need to be placed in an emergency in order to make sure that a child, who may be at risk of harm, is in a safe place.

Long term fostering

Sometimes it becomes clear that children will not be able to return to live with their own families. Perhaps the family has not been able to change their lifestyle in a way that will protect the child from harm, or the parent's mental or physical illness has deteriorated. Many parents love their children dearly, however, because of things that have happened in their own lives, they may never be able to care for them safely.

You'll provide a safe and secure home for children to grow up in and help prepare them for adult life, whilst at the same time help to keep them in contact with their birth family and relatives.

Parenting and baby fostering

A parent and child placement is a specialist type of fostering where a parent and their own child, often a young mother and baby, come to stay in your home to have extra support and guidance.

There are many reasons for a parent and child placement but most often, a mum is having difficulties looking after her new baby. They may not have experienced great parenting themselves and so need an experienced parental figure to help them become a better parent. In other cases, the parent may have a learning difficulty or mental health challenges that cause them to have difficulties becoming a parent.

Parent and baby foster carers provide the crucial support and consistency that a young parent needs with reassurance, guidance and support during the transition to parenting. As a foster carer, you would be helping them to develop their own parenting skills and confidence whilst ensuring the child was in a safe, secure and nurturing environment.

The foster carer also has an important role observing and recording how the parent looks after the child and works with other professionals to identify additional support which may be needed in the future.

Foster carers receive support from their own social worker and work alongside the young person and child's social worker in meetings and in putting together information which can help in assessing how the parent is able to meet the child's needs.

Placements generally last 12-24 weeks but may be extended if longer term support is needed.

The parent and child benefit from experiencing parenting in a nurturing family environment and the young parents gain tremendously from the support and advice offered by the foster carer which at times can be the first positive experience of parenting and family life they have encountered. It also enables some young mothers to complete their schooling or to have a job.

Parent and child fostering can be very rewarding but is also complex and challenging and due to this there are additional fees and allowances offered to foster carers who are able to offer their commitment to this crucial role. Parent and baby foster carers make a real difference to the lives of children.

Some foster carers really enjoy having a child live with them long-term. Children become part of the family and many young people go on to have lifelong relationships with their foster family.



Specialist fostering

Tower Hamlets' specialist fostering scheme is a challenging but hugely rewarding role caring for young people aged 11-17 years.

If you have experience of working with young people with challenging needs, you could be perfect as a specialist foster carer. Your experience could make all the difference in helping children by being able to offer them a level of empathy and understanding they have not experienced before.

These young people will have had very difficult experiences and may have a history of previously failed foster placements. They will have spent much of their childhood feeling unsafe and uncared for. Some will be out-of-school, have little routine in their lives and may feel rejected, unhappy or rebellious. They may have been in trouble with the police, be exposed to drugs or gangs or be at risk of being exploited. But it's not too late to turn things around.

We're looking for foster carers who will offer empathy, understanding and patience. Specialist carers will be able to build positive

relationships with the young person in their care and help them to see a positive future for themselves.

In recognition of this challenging role, specialist foster carers receive enhanced allowances and lots of clinical supervision. If you are interested in learning more about our specialist fostering scheme, please ask for a copy of our, 'Make all the difference', booklet.

"I get lots of support from my supervising social worker and we work well together. The training really helps your skills in dealing with behaviour and gives you practical advice.

"Fostering can be hard work and challenging but the rewards are fantastic. Many teenagers put up barriers and need lots of emotional support but over time they become part of the family. It is so lovely to watch them transform and become happier and doing well."

Veronica

Respite fostering

Depending on your circumstances, you may want to think about respite fostering. Respite usually takes place at weekends and school holidays to support a child in placement with one of our existing foster carers. It could also be for a child in a residential school who needs some family life.

Respite fostering is ideal for families, couples or single people who work full-time but still want to make a difference to a child's life. It may also provide you with valuable insight and skills should you feel nervous about becoming a full time foster carer.





“Caring for a disabled child is definitely a challenge, especially when they are not well, but when you see the smiles and excitement on their face when they see you, it really makes it so worthwhile.

Fostering children with disabilities

We are always on the lookout for people who can care for children with a wide range of disabilities. As a carer for disabled children you will be offering specialist care to children who may have autism, learning difficulties, physical disabilities or medical conditions. Becoming a foster carer for disabled children can seem quite daunting, but don't worry, you will be provided with plenty of training, advice and support groups, to ensure that every disabled child is able to achieve to their fullest potential.

For children with more complex health needs, we offer an enhanced fee in recognition of your specialist skills.

“I have been told that I don't give up on my foster children and to hear that makes me feel so happy and proud. I just want to see these children happy and reaching their potential.” Gertrude

Do you have space in your home to care for siblings?

Keeping siblings together is very important. Often these children have experienced many changes in their lives and helping them stay together maintains security, comfort and stability. If you can take on siblings, you'll be helping to keep these children together.

Tower Hamlets welcomes existing carers

We have had many existing carers join us for many reasons. Some felt they weren't being offered many placements and wanted to join Tower Hamlets as we prefer to place our children with our carers. Others felt they weren't getting the support and training they needed and felt we offer more.

If you choose to join Tower Hamlets, we will fast track your application if you are an existing foster carer to help make the transition as easy as possible. We would encourage you to attend the Skills to Foster course but it is not mandatory for existing foster carers.

We will renew your Form F assessment and undertake all the necessary checks such as disclosure and barring service (DBS) checks, medical and personal references. You will also receive a £1,000 bonus once you have been successfully approved at panel and have your first placement.

We can consider foster carers who have children in placement from another local authority. Please get in touch to talk about your specific circumstances.



