

A young boy with a backpack and books, smiling, with a woman in the background.

**FOSTERING:
A SENSE OF HOPE**



**achieving
for children**

www.afcfostering.org.uk

A young boy in a blue sports jersey and a woman in a beige hoodie are celebrating on a grassy field. Both have their arms raised in the air, smiling broadly. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a cloudy sky.

ABOUT ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN

Achieving for Children provides foster care services for Kingston, Richmond and Windsor & Maidenhead Councils.

We're unique: we're an independent fostering agency owned by the three councils. Achieving for Children, our parent company, is a successful not-for-profit social enterprise running all social care services for children in the three boroughs. This ensures we continue to work closely across the various teams so we can all best support children and families.

So with us you get the best of both worlds: you will be first in line to have local children matched and placed as you'll be an in-house carer. And you'll also be part of a fast developing independent fostering agency which is looking to innovate and develop a wide range of fostering services.

Following an inspection in September 2019, we are judged 'Good' by Ofsted.

With AfC, vulnerable children have a voice. They help to shape our services. The same is true for everyone on our team - including our all-important foster carers.

FOSTERING: WHY YOU SHOULD CONSIDER IT

When you take the momentous decision to become a foster carer, you're not just putting something back into the community. Right from the start, you're giving each individual child a real chance of a life changing experience.

Every year, for all sorts of reasons, hundreds of children and young people find themselves unable to live with their own families. Many have suffered neglect or abuse and have little trust left in adults. Some have to be steered away from the wrong path in life. All of them need homes where they can feel safe and happy.

Like other roles working with children, fostering isn't easy. It makes a huge difference to people's lives, including your own. But it's rarely about big, life-changing moments, just little steps - many backwards, some sideways - and a few that make it all worthwhile.

Whatever your background, culture, religion, ethnicity, sexuality or relationship status, if you can recognise and empathise with that desperate need for security, understanding, guidance and nurturing... you could be exactly the right person to be a great foster carer.

We're looking for people with all sorts of different life experience who want to work with children. In particular we are looking for people who want to support teenagers, disabled children, unaccompanied asylum seekers and siblings.



It takes a special person to be a foster carer. But not a special set of qualifications, experience or skills. All we ask is that you:

- Have a spare room (it could be in your house, flat or rented/housing association accommodation)
- Are 21 or over (there's no upper age limit)
- Are a full time resident in the UK (or have leave to remain)
- Have the time to care for a child or young person (often on a full-time basis, so if you work, your hours need to be flexible)
- Have some previous experience of looking after children
- Have a strong support network of family and friends
- Are in good physical and mental health (if you have a disability, you can still foster as long as it doesn't prevent you from carrying out the caring tasks)
- Have a good understanding of the English language, with the ability to read and write
- Are able to use the internet and email (or prepared to undertake basic IT skills training)
- Are willing to attend ongoing fostering training (everyone receives training and support to help them develop the skills to meet the needs of children in care)
- Complete the enhanced Disclosure Barring Service check and full medical assessment.

FOSTERING: YOU CAN DO IT

TYPES OF FOSTERING

We provide different types of fostering to meet the needs of individual children.

SHORT TERM FOSTERING

When a child needs support for a relatively short period - it might be days, weeks or months - they're placed with a short term foster carer. This is usually an interim arrangement, until they can return to their birth family or a suitable long term placement is made.

LONG TERM FOSTERING

Sometimes it's months or years before a child can return to their birth family. In some cases it may never be possible. So we need foster carers who can provide safety and stability to children until adulthood.

SHORT BREAK FOSTERING

For children with disabilities, we provide planned short term breaks away from their birth families or carers. These are an opportunity for children with disabilities to gain new experiences and develop new bonds outside their everyday environment - as well as offering their families or carers a much needed break.

RESPIRE CARE

Fostering is a demanding role and foster carers sometimes need a break from their caring responsibilities. We provide children with planned short term breaks away from their birth families or foster carers. Respite

care gives families or carers some time off, and also allows children to gain new experiences and develop new bonds.

You would be required to do a minimum of 1 weekend a month and at least 10 days during the school holidays.

PARENT AND CHILD PLACEMENTS

Parent and child placements give parents with young children the opportunity to develop their parenting skills, by living with a specially trained foster carer. These placements can help to keep families together.

EMERGENCY CARE

There are times when a child may need to be placed in care due to unforeseen circumstances. Having emergency care available at short notice means children can be placed in a safe environment without delay.

SUPPORTED LODGINGS

Supported lodgings placements are a stepping-stone to independence for young people (16+) at risk of homelessness, as well as for those leaving the care system. Providers offer emotional support and the chance to learn vital, practical life skills in a safe place, but they don't have the same legal responsibilities as a parent or foster parent. The young person will have their own dedicated social worker or personal advisor.

Fostering isn't easy, but it makes a huge difference to people's lives, including your own.

APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS

1

ENQUIRY AND INFORMATION

If you have any questions or need more information about fostering with AfC, call our Recruitment Officer on 020 8547 5355.

2

INITIAL DISCUSSION AND HOME VISIT

If you've decided you're interested in becoming a foster carer, call us on 020 8547 5355. We'll have an initial discussion over the phone to gather some basic information. Based on this, a member of our team will visit your home to discuss fostering in more detail and to see the space you have available for a foster child.

3

PREPARATION TRAINING

After our initial visit, we will discuss whether this is the right time for you to progress. We'll then invite you to the preparation training course, Skills to Foster, which is run over three days to give you a good idea of what's involved in being a foster carer.

4

APPLICATION

Once you've completed the preparation course, if you're interested in applying to become a foster carer with AfC, we'll ask you to complete an application form.

5

TWO-PART ASSESSMENT

The assessment has two main parts: background checks and interviews (these are completed concurrently).

5A

Your assessing social worker will complete background checks within the area where you currently live, in addition to local authority checks on addresses that you lived at in the past. You'll also need a check-up with your GP (we provide a form for your GP to complete). We ask for three referees who know you well, one who should be a family member, and we'll meet with at least two of these during the assessment. We'll also need to witness certain documents such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, details of household income and details of car and home insurance.

5B

The second part is the interview stage. We'll schedule around six to eight meetings between you (and your family) and your assessing social worker. These will cover matters such as your family background, your relationship history, your family lifestyle and your parenting experience or experience with children. Your assessing social worker will talk to you about the needs and circumstances of children in care, and you'll discuss how you can manage these needs.

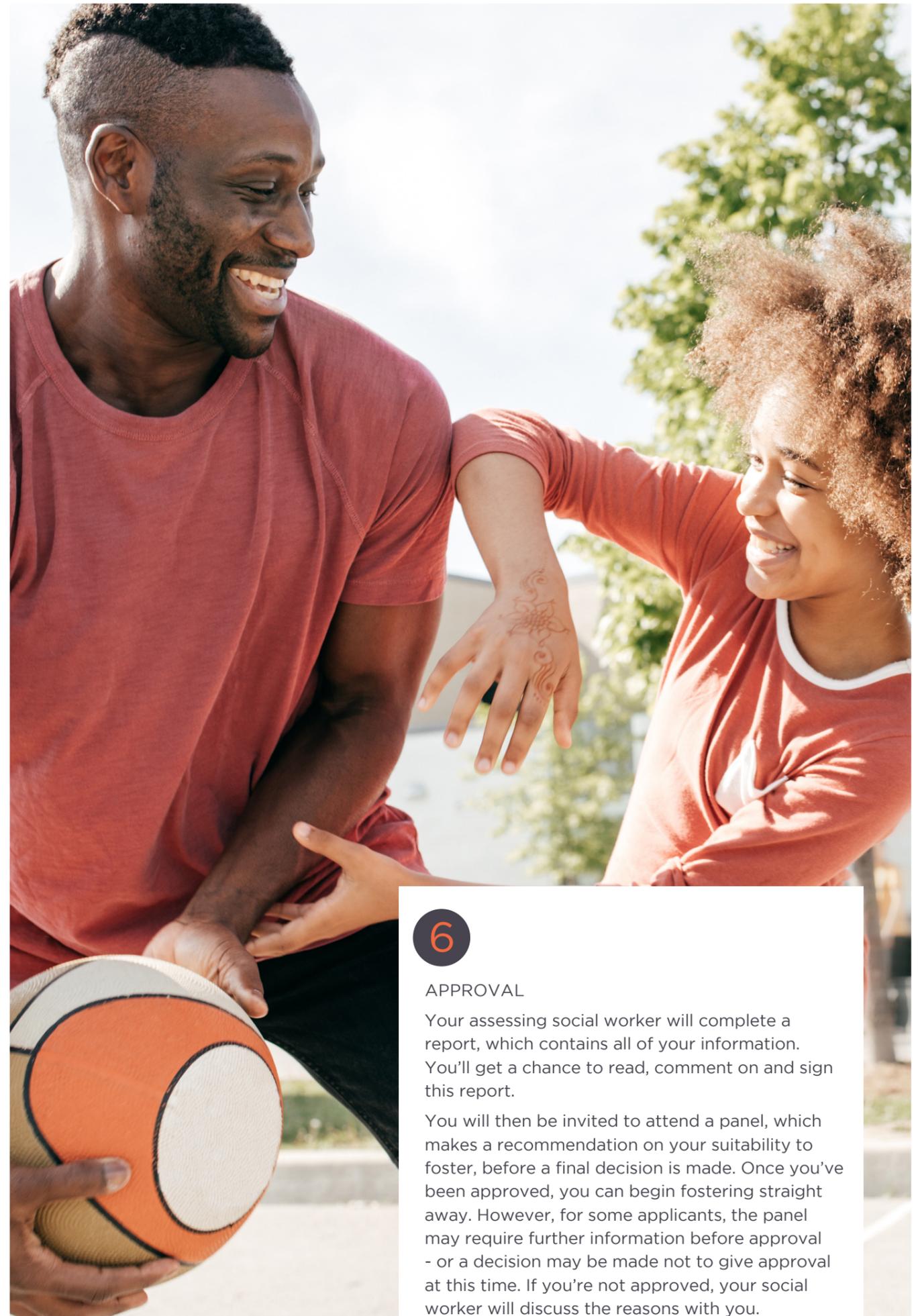
Not everyone who begins the assessment process will complete it. Sometimes applicants decide to withdraw their application, or sometimes information comes up that puts the assessment on hold for a time. We'll always be clear with you, at all stages of the assessment, about your progress. The average length of time to complete the assessment, gather the necessary paperwork, and get to know you well enough, is four to six months. Some assessments can take longer and some may be a little bit shorter.

6

APPROVAL

Your assessing social worker will complete a report, which contains all of your information. You'll get a chance to read, comment on and sign this report.

You will then be invited to attend a panel, which makes a recommendation on your suitability to foster, before a final decision is made. Once you've been approved, you can begin fostering straight away. However, for some applicants, the panel may require further information before approval - or a decision may be made not to give approval at this time. If you're not approved, your social worker will discuss the reasons with you.





PAYMENT AND TRAINING

Foster carers receive an allowance to cover the cost of caring for a child. The Department for Education set guidelines on the rates of these payments every April.

As a foster carer at Achieving for Children, and with a child in placement, you'll receive a fostering reward fee in recognition of your valued role as a foster carer. These are paid to our approved foster carers according to the child's needs and the carer's skills and experience and includes:

- A banded reward fee based on your experience and skill level
- A supplementary fee, paid per child in placement if the child reaches a threshold level of need or complexity.

Visit www.afcfostering.org.uk for further details.

Short break carers receive a percentage of the rate paid to other carers, based on the number of nights' accommodation they provide for a child.

Payments for fostering don't usually affect state benefits. Guidance about tax, national insurance and pensions is provided in the foster carers' handbook.

All foster carers receive training, every year. This actually starts with a preparation course, which serves as your introduction to fostering prior to assessment and approval.

You're expected to complete mandatory training and meet the government's Training, Support and Development standards during your first year, as well as to attend ongoing training to build on your skills each year.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This is a big deal, we know that. It's natural to have doubts or concerns. To help you make up your mind, here are answers to some of the questions that people typically ask when they're considering becoming foster carers.

But if you've got any other questions, including the ones everyone asks - 'Am I right? Am I ready?' - do please call us on 020 8547 5355 or email fostering@achievingforchildren.co.uk and we'll come back to you as soon as possible.

CAN I FOSTER IF I HAVE PETS?

Yes, you can. In fact, some young people may be matched with you and your family because you have pets. Animals, especially cats and dogs, can be a great ice breaker, particularly on that first day when you and the young person might be feeling nervous around each other.

A social worker will carry out a pet assessment to ensure that yours pose no risk.

I HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD - DOES THAT STOP ME FROM FOSTERING?

It depends what the criminal record is for, but if it was something like stealing and it was quite some time ago, you could now be a good role model for a young person who may be going down the same path as you when you were younger. Don't let a criminal record put you off speaking to us as you could have lots to offer. Be honest with us and we'll let you know if your past will be a barrier to fostering.

I CAN'T DRIVE - DOES THAT MATTER?

If you're happy to use public transport for school runs and appointments, this shouldn't be a problem.

WE ARE A SAME SEX COUPLE - CAN WE FOSTER?

Yes, absolutely. We're always looking for foster carers to reflect the diversity of young people coming into care. You don't even have to be in a relationship. Also, some young people can't be placed with a particular

gender, for various reasons, so same sex foster carers may be the best match for them.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I GO ON HOLIDAY?

We encourage you to take your foster child on holiday with you, so they really feel part of the family - but we also understand if you need a break from fostering, so we can place a child with a respite carer while you're away. If you want to take your foster child on holiday abroad, it's important to plan ahead because not all children will have passports.

WHAT IF I FALL ILL DURING THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

The process takes between four and six months to complete. We understand that during this time you may have illnesses, family bereavements, holidays, etc. We're very flexible and can extend your approval date further into the future if necessary.

I RENT MY HOME - CAN I FOSTER?

Yes, you can. We'll need a note from the owner to say that they're happy for you to foster in their property - but this doesn't usually present any problems.

I PRACTISE A RELIGION - CAN I FOSTER?

Yes, you can. We're always looking for people from different backgrounds, cultures and religions, so we can match children with the foster carers who are best suited to them and their cultural or religious needs.

CAN I CHOOSE THE AGE OF THE CHILDREN I FOSTER?

We prefer foster carers to have an open mind, as this enables you to look after a greater number of children and young people. For example, if you've given broad approval for 0 to 18 years old, we might ask you if you'd like to look after a sibling group with ages ranging from 6 to a teenager.

We do take your preferences into account, but we really encourage you to look at the individual child - not their age - and then decide if you can help them.



WHAT TO DO NEXT

QUERIES OR REGISTER YOUR INTEREST

If you have any queries you would like to discuss please call us on 020 8547 5355 or fill in the online form on our website at www.afcfostering.org.uk/contact/ and we will get back to you.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Check out our website and facebook page for more information and upcoming events:

www.facebook.com/AfCFostering/
www.afcfostering.org.uk

FOSTERING TEAM LOCATIONS

Kingston & Richmond

Guildhall 2, Kingston upon Thames, KT1 1EU

Windsor & Maidenhead

Town Hall, St Ives Road, Maidenhead, SL6 1RF



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