

Walsall Fostering Service

Could you be the future of fostering..?



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE



Being a foster carer is a role that rewards like no other. Walsall foster carers provide loving and nurturing homes for children who aren't able to live with their families, helping them to have security, stability and opportunities for a brighter future. We support our community of foster carers every step of the way, developing knowledge, confidence and the skills to provide the very best care possible to our children and young people. Walsall foster carers - helping Walsall children to be safe, happy and learning well.

What is fostering?

Foster carers look after children on behalf of the local authority; foster carers do not have parental responsibility for the children. This remains with either the birth parents, the local authority or is sometimes shared between them.

This means that some decisions about the child, for instance which school they should attend, will be made by the parents and local authority. Foster carers are responsible for the child's every day care and needs.

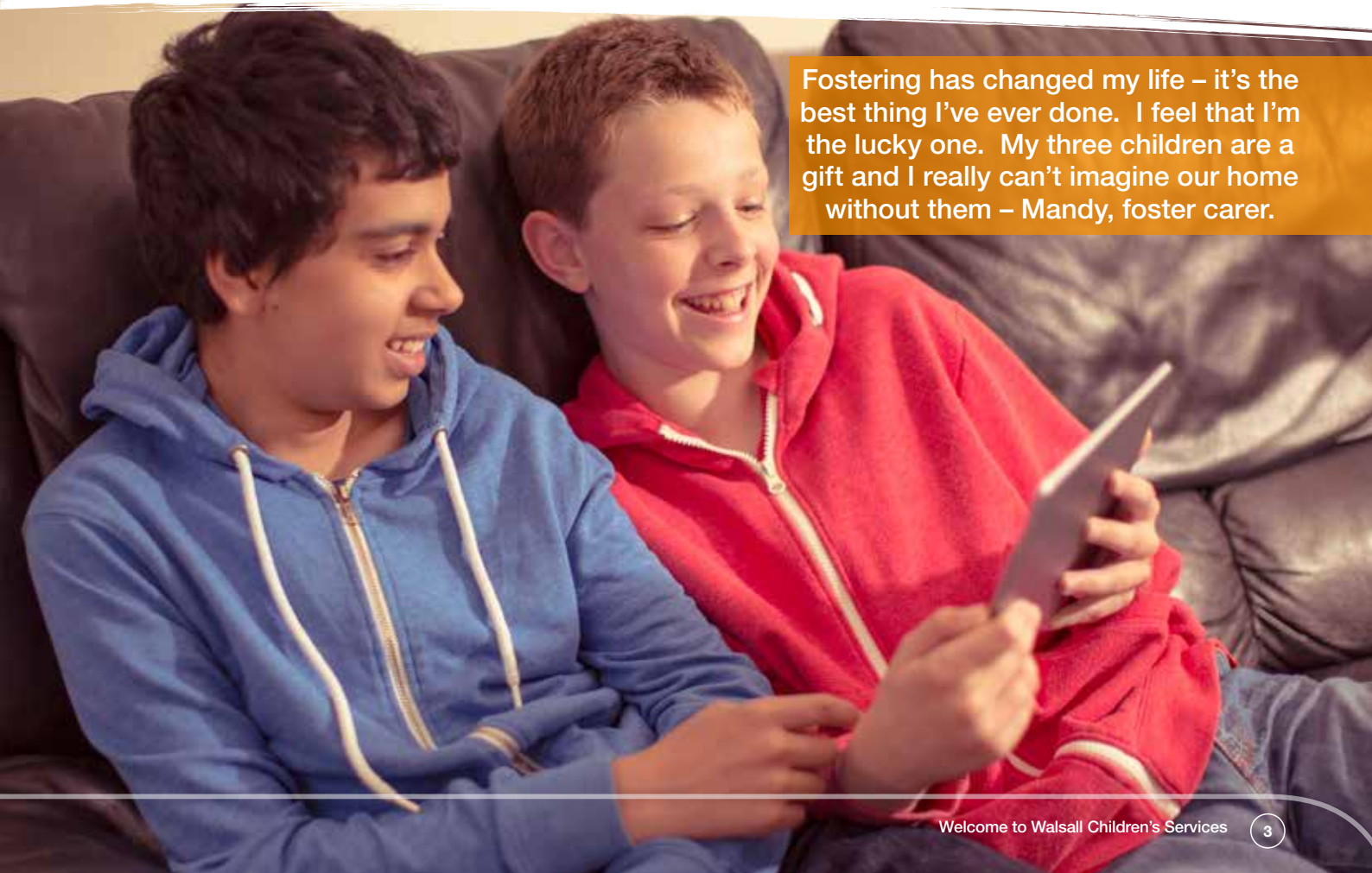
For many of the children placed in foster care it is a temporary arrangement and they later return to their family. Some will go on to adoption, residential care or a permanent fostering placement which will be determined according to the child's 'Looked After' care plan.

Why do children need fostering?

It is impossible to describe the typical foster child – they can be any age from birth to 18 years old and can be from any social, ethnic or religious background. The one thing that many have in common is that for some reason their family is in crisis and the child or young person may have been harmed or abused. For that reason they need to leave the family home and be placed with foster carers.

All children placed with foster carers need warmth, patience and understanding.

In Walsall we need foster carers who can care for children who come from all kinds of backgrounds, cultures and faiths. We particularly need carers who can look after brother & sister groups, older children & teenagers and also carers who may be able to care for young people who have disabilities. Unaccompanied young people who may come to the UK from other countries to seek asylum and a place of safety are sometimes cared for by foster carers too.

A photograph of two young boys sitting on a dark leather sofa. The boy on the left is wearing a blue hoodie and is looking towards the right. The boy on the right is wearing a red hoodie and is holding a tablet, looking at it with a smile. They appear to be in a relaxed, home-like setting.

Fostering has changed my life – it's the best thing I've ever done. I feel that I'm the lucky one. My three children are a gift and I really can't imagine our home without them – Mandy, foster carer.

What do foster carers do?

Foster carers can make very real differences to the lives of children and young people who need safe, caring and loving homes. Working as part of a team of professional people, they can help to support a child or young person through some very difficult times in their lives by providing stability, security and warmth.

Foster carers help children and young people feel respected, valued and cared for whilst they are away from their families. Supporting elements of the child's care plan, such as contact with birth family, helping children to have a positive understanding of their heritage, religion, culture or ethnic origin and promoting the development of the child with respect to health and education are all part of the foster carer role.


The team of professionals involved in a young person's care and support is very important, and foster carers are a vital part of this. Carers will be asked to attend family meetings, participate in reviews, case conferences and court hearings and also to keep written records of placements and contribute to reports about the child.

Rewards:

Fostering can be hugely rewarding for you and your family. Foster children sometimes look back on the memory of foster care as the one positive thing that made a difference to their lives. Fostering can enrich your experience of life and it can also be a rewarding career option. You will receive practical, emotional and financial support and training & development opportunities.

By becoming a foster carer you will be:

- Making a real difference
- Helping to keep families together
- Helping families re-unite
- Giving children and young people a positive experience of family life
- Helping children to feel good about themselves.



'It is the most rewarding thing we have ever done and I couldn't imagine our life in any other way now' – Steven, foster carer.

Different types of fostering? Which is right for you?

Short Term Fostering: This is most people's idea of fostering. Once you become an approved foster carer, children will come to stay with you for a few days, several weeks or several months until they can return home or move on to adoption or permanent fostering.

Long Term Fostering: Long term or permanent fostering involves caring for a child until they become an adult and can live independently.

Short Term Breaks: The 'Short Term Breaks' scheme allows young people with disabilities to have regular short breaks with foster carers. Young people receiving a service can have a wide range of needs. Foster carers provide essential support to both the child and their family.

Specialist Fostering: Specialist fostering placements are needed to care for children and young people with complex needs who would otherwise be placed in residential care. Children who will benefit from these placements may have experienced significant trauma and need experienced, resilient foster carers who can show patience and empathy to help them return home to family or to settle into a fostering household. People who have experience of working in professions such as police, youth justice, probation, ambulance or fire service, social care, education etc may be suited to specialist fostering. A bespoke package of support, training and appropriate fees & allowances are provided for this role.

Who can foster?

You need to think carefully about why you want to be a foster carer. It is often not an easy role and can have an enormous impact on your family, especially for your children and other family members.

Foster carers for Walsall Fostering Service need to:

- Ideally be 21 years of age or over
- Have a spare bedroom – if you are planning an extension to your current home we advise that the work is completed before you apply.
- Have some experience or an interest in caring for a child or young person
- Have a good level of spoken and written English. This is in line with the duties of the 'Fluency Policy' adhered to by Walsall Council.
- Have the time to dedicate to caring for a young person.
- Be available to care out of school hours and during holidays,
- Be available for meetings with relevant professionals.

What's most important are your individual qualities. Do you have:

- Patience
- Honesty
- Tolerance
- Dedication
- Ability to work as part of a team
- A sense of humour!

Common myths about who can foster:

- **I'm single, can I foster?** - You can be single, living with a partner, married or from the LGBT community. It's helpful if you have a supportive network of family or friends around you.
- **Am I too old to foster?** - There's no upper age limit for foster carers! As long as you are fit and able to care for a child then there is no official age where you are 'too old' to foster. We have excellent carers of all ages, including those in their sixties.
- **I don't own my home, can I foster?** - You can live in either rented or owned accommodation. If you are a tenant then your landlord just needs to confirm to us that they are happy for you to foster. It's important that each child you care for has their own bedroom, a space just for them.
- **Can I foster if I don't have children of my own?** - You don't need to have your own children to be a good foster carer. Time spent caring for nieces, nephews or working or volunteering with children will be valuable experience too. In addition to ongoing support from your dedicated supervising social worker there is lots of training to develop your skills and knowledge.
- **I am a foster carer for another provider, can I transfer to Walsall Council?** - We welcome applications from people who are already fostering with other agencies or with other local authorities. It's not a complicated process and we follow the established Fostering Network transfer protocol. This means that you could be a Walsall Council foster carer in as little as four months. We do need to discuss your individual circumstances so please call us on 0800 923 3706.
- **Can I work and foster?** - It depends how many hours you work, how flexible your current employer is and on the ages and needs of the children you foster. We pay allowances to cover your household costs and an additional amount for each child you foster. Some employers, including Walsall Council, have a Family Friendly policy which may provide flexibility and support if you decide to become a foster carer.
- **Can I foster if I've got pets?** - We understand that your pets are part of your family and we will include your pets in our assessment, looking at their temperament and behaviour, to make sure that you are all ready to foster. Having pets can be beneficial to the children in your care.





'We know there will be hard times and many challenges to overcome, but equally we know that there isn't another career out there that could offer us the same level of fun and reward.' –
Luke, foster carer.

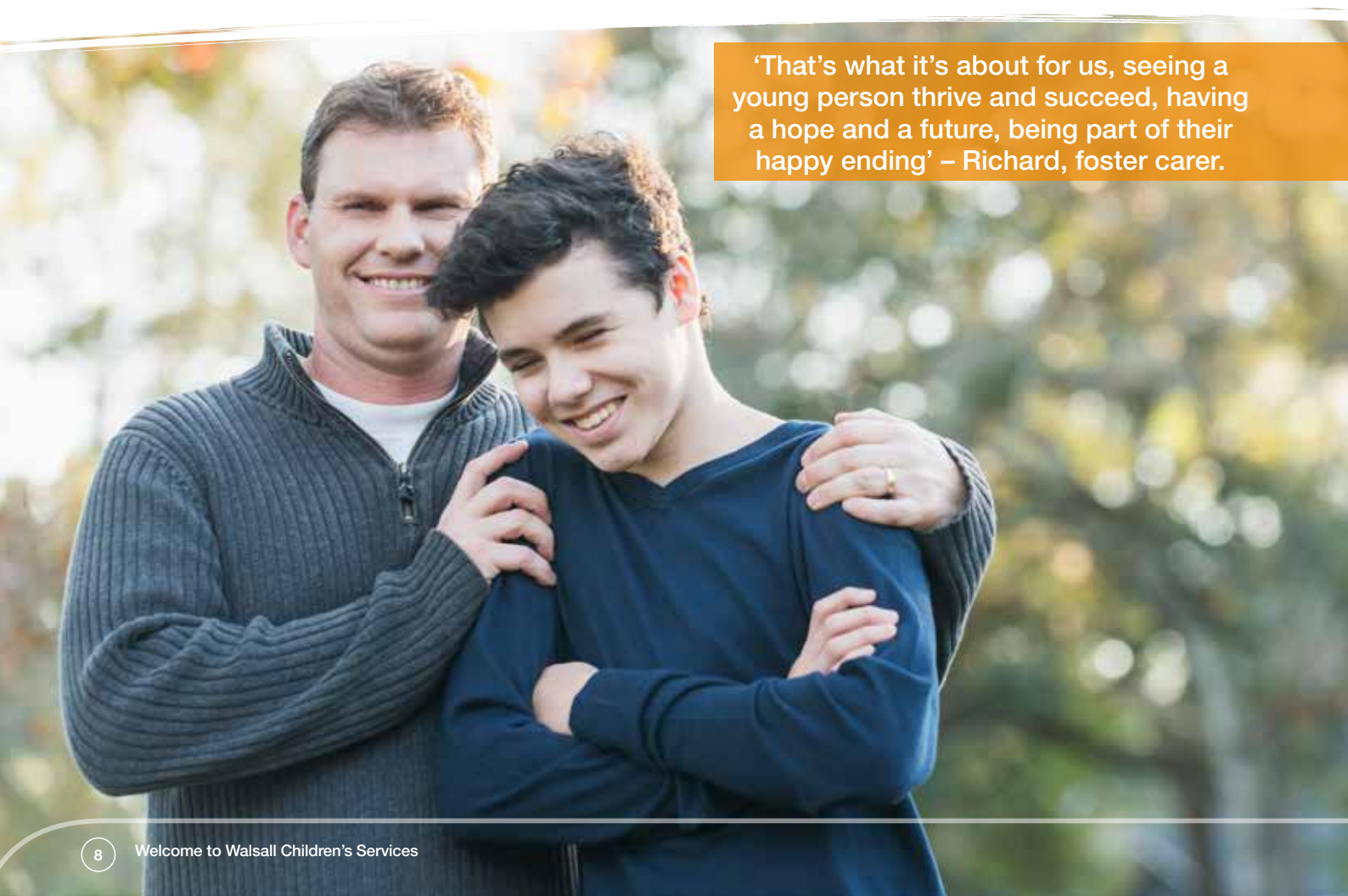
The application and assessment journey:

1. Make contact with us and complete an 'Initial Enquiry'.
2. We answer any questions that you might have.
3. A social worker makes an 'Initial Visit' to you at home.
4. You attend the 'Skills to Foster' preparation course.
5. A social worker begins your assessment.
6. A 'Fostering Panel' date is set and you read your assessment before you attend panel.
7. You attend 'Fostering Panel' with your social worker. Panel make a recommendation about whether you should become a foster carer.
8. Walsall's 'Agency Decision Maker' decides whether you are approved as a foster carer.
9. Upon approval you are ready to welcome your first placement.

This journey often takes six months. Some of the steps above can run concurrently

Why Foster with Walsall Council?

- **We are responsible** for finding foster placements for the children in our care and we always try to place them with our own foster carers first. This means that as Walsall foster carers you are more likely to have regular placements with children in the age ranges you are skilled to work with.
- **We don't make a profit** from caring for Walsall children and young people. We want the best possible placements available for our young people to grow and thrive, so we invest in recruiting and supporting people who will make great foster carers to make this a reality.
- **Fees - Can you expect to be paid** between £200 to £600 per week for caring for children for Walsall Council, dependent on how many children you care for and your skills and expertise. Usually, you will not be paid a fee when you are not caring for a child. You also receive an age-related allowance for each child in your care. We provide an additional allowance at birthdays and festival times. You can also claim fostering related mileage and expenses.
- **We offer a wide and varied training programme** to help build your skills and confidence as foster carers. Introductory 'Induction Workshops' and more specialist courses such as Paediatric First Aid, Attachment, Sex & Sexuality and the 'Solihull Approach' course are available. Our training courses take place in venues in and around Walsall so will always be local and accessible. An online training programme is available too.
- **Your supervising social worker is local** to you and easily reached. We have an 'out of hours' team too, so you have 24 hour support. We work with many different professional teams to help with the children in your care such as health services and educational professionals. The introduction of Fostering Network's 'Mockingbird' programme also offers extra support to our Walsall fostering community and you may be able to join one of our Mockingbird constellations.



'That's what it's about for us, seeing a young person thrive and succeed, having a hope and a future, being part of their happy ending' – Richard, foster carer.



'Fostering has given us a new lease of life. Our only regret is that we didn't do it sooner!' – Lucy, foster carer.

- **We provide FREE membership to the 'Fostering Network'** for all of our approved foster carers. Membership to the national leading fostering charity includes access to the charity's events and conferences, special discounts at leading retailers, access to legal advice & counselling and an ever growing community of fellow foster carers for support.
- **We provide a 'Max Card'** which entitles foster carers to discounts from national retailers and discounted days out and fun activities to do together.
- **We value all of our foster carers** and recognise this with celebration events. We have recently recognised carers long service with visits to the Mayor's Parlour and more social and celebratory events are arranged during the year.

Mockingbird Fostering Programme

We are the first local authority in the West Midlands to be part of the Fostering Network's 'Mockingbird' fostering programme. The programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model which provides sleepovers, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.

The Mockingbird programme creates a 'constellation' where one experienced foster home offers planned and emergency sleepovers, advice, training and nearly 24/7 support to six to ten 'satellite' fostering families. Relationships are central to the programme. The hub home carer builds strong professional relationships with their fostering service and with the support of their liaison worker is able to work proactively to prevent problems escalating or to offer crisis support to avoid placement breakdowns. Newly approved foster carers may be offered the opportunity to join a supportive Mockingbird constellation.

For more information about the Mockingbird programme please call 0800 923 3706. You can also find out more by visiting www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/mockingbird or www.fosteringinwalsall.co.uk



Fostering Network's Mockingbird Programme



Frequently Asked Questions:

Are all foster children challenging or difficult?

No but every fostered child is facing a crisis in their life and this is upsetting for them. They have had to cope with moving out of their own home and this may mean that they need sensitive care. Each child will react differently to this stress and loss. Some may present as aggressive and noisy, others over-polite and willing to please. Children and young people present in lots of different ways but all will need sensitive, nurturing support.

Can I foster if I have a criminal record?

Checks are made with the Disclosure and Barring Service when people apply to become foster carers. Applicants with any offence against a child or any violent crime are unlikely to be selected. However, having a criminal record won't necessarily disqualify someone from becoming a foster carer. Much depends on the type and circumstance of the offence and how long ago it was committed. If you have any concerns about this please discuss it with us.

Will there be contact with the child's family?

Quite often there will be contact with the child's birth parents. Children in foster care have already had to deal with separation from their family home. It is usually better for them to be fostered close to where they live so they can keep in touch with family and friends and stay at the same school. The contact is usually by organised visits and also through letters and phone calls.

Does fostering lead to adoption?

Children are initially placed with foster carers short term whilst their family situation is assessed. If it is assessed that they can't return home, or move to another family member, alternative permanent options will be considered. This will usually be to an adoptive carer or permanent foster carers. Looked after children do not usually stay with the carers they are initially placed with.

Can I choose the age of the children I want to foster?

Walsall Council approve all foster carers to look after children 0-18 years of age. Within this broad age range you will be able to suggest a 'matching preference' with the age or gender of children placed with you. Your social worker will discuss your matching preference with you and it will be based on your skills, expertise and the age of any other children in the household.

The next steps

If you have read all of the information in this pack, discussed it with your friends and support network, and feel fostering could be for you, then please contact our Customer Service Advisor, Liz Heywood on 0800 923 3706, who will go through the 'Initial Enquiry' form with you. Your allocated social worker will then make an appointment to come and see you at home for your 'Initial Visit', where you can ask more questions about fostering and learn a little more about the process of becoming a foster carer. The visit is an opportunity for you to again consider if fostering is for you, and also for us to make a decision about progressing with your application to foster.

Useful Information

www.fosteringinwalsall.co.uk

This is the website for Walsall Council's Fostering Service. You will find lots of useful information here, specifically about fostering with Walsall Council. There are also blogs and stories from actual Walsall foster carers which will give you a real insight into what being a foster carer is all about.

www.corambaaf.org.uk/

Coram BAAF Adoption and Fostering Academy – Lots of useful information about fostering and adoption.

www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be. The Fostering Network support those who foster, improve opportunities for fostered children and young people and provide expert guidance to all fostering services.



'To watch a child that is placed with you make positive steps to improve whatever issues they are trying to work through is worth all the hard work.' –
Kuldip, foster carer





Please note: Walsall Fostering service completes mandatory checks on social service databases and social media websites as part of the fostering process. We will send you details of relevant fostering information or events. Your details will not be used for any other purpose, or passed to any third parties without legal and justified reason. For more information on how we use your data, please visit https://go.walsall.gov.uk/privacy_statement. To opt out of receiving information or if you have any questions, please email us at fosteringinwalsall@walsall.gov.uk or telephone 0800 923 3706.





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 **walsall.fostering.service**