

Dundee City Council

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION



Waiting for you.....to change their lives.

www.changetheirlives.co.uk

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

If you have difficulty understanding English, please contact the address below:

যদি আপনি ইংরেজি বুঝতে অসুবিধা বোধ করেন
তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে নিচের ঠিকানাতে যোগাযোগ করুনঃ

如閣下不十分明白英語，請與以下的通訊處聯系。

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਈੰਗਲਿਸ਼ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਕੋਈ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਹੈ
ਤਾਂ ਪਿੱਛਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਪਤੇ ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ:

اگر آپ کو انگریزی سمجھنے میں مشکل پیش آتی ہے تو براہ کرم نیچے دیے گئے پتے پر رابطہ کریں۔

Dundee Translation Unit, Dundee City Council,
Central Library, Wellgate Centre, Dundee DD1 1DB.
Tel: 01382 431563 or 431542 Fax: 01382 431542

Contents

Welcome.....	3
General Information about Fostering or Adoption.....	4
Fostering.....	14
Adoption.....	21
Training.....	25
The Family Placement Service.....	27

Welcome!

Thank you for finding out more about becoming a foster carer or an adoptive parent. We very much welcome your enquiry, because we are always looking for foster carers and adoptive families; especially for 5-15 year olds, groups of brothers and sisters, and children/young people with special needs.



We hope this booklet will answer your questions about fostering or adoption and help you decide whether you wish to take your interest further.

Our aim is to provide information which should:

- Tell you why we need families to look after children and young people and help you to understand that our job is about finding families for children - not children for families
- Give you some idea about the roles and responsibilities of both foster carers and adoptive parents
- Explain the process of becoming foster carers and adoptive parents
- Help you decide whether you and your family could do this job and whether this is the right time for you to apply.

We look forward to hearing from you again in the very near future, but if you have any questions you wish to ask in the meantime please don't hesitate to contact our duty resource worker on 01382 436060.

Margaret Moyes, Service Manager

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

General Information about Fostering or Adoption

Fostering or Adoption is about looking after children and young people who cannot live with their birth families for a variety of, often, very complex reasons.



Fostering is a temporary measure sometimes lasting from only one night to weeks or months, or perhaps longer: occasionally years, depending on a child or young person's individual situation.

The law requires that the Social Work Department's first priority is always to try to return a child to live with his/her own family, if circumstances allow. Thus a child's time in foster care may be very busy, with foster carers being expected to work closely with the Social Work Department, other professionals and the child's own family to achieve this. Older children and young people will be encouraged to be actively involved in this process. Some young people may prefer to remain with foster carers until independence, rather than return home.

If/when attempts to return a child home are not successful, then finding an alternative permanent family for that child becomes a priority, because research and experience tells us that most children, if unable to return to their own families, do best in another family setting.

A new family will be achieved either by adoption, or permanent fostering depending on the age and individual circumstances of the child/young person concerned. For example, for under 8's the route followed will nearly always be towards adoption, whilst for older children/young people ---- especially those still in contact with their birth families --- it might be towards permanent/long term fostering. (Please refer to individual sections for details) Again, foster carers would be closely involved in working towards a successful move for the child or young person.

Both fostering or adoption require patience, commitment and understanding to help a child/young person to cope - not only with the reasons why they cannot live with their own family, but also with the effects of disruptive experiences, plus the loss of their birth family and the loss of trusted care-givers (perhaps more than once). The sadness and insecurity caused by such experiences is often expressed in difficult behaviour; even very young infants can be affected by past events and losses.

Secure, accepting family-based living with foster carers can help repair the damage for many looked after children and help them to move forward. This might mean returning home eventually, or being ready to move to a "new" family or moving on to independent living. Some children/young people will be unable to move forwards until they have settled into a family which they recognise has claimed them: this may take some time.

It is an important part of an adoptive parent's role - or a permanent foster carer's role - to help a child or young person deal with their feelings about being part of two families and it is essential that efforts are made to keep a child's birth family "alive" for that child.

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

What kind of people become Foster Carers?

There are very few rules about who can foster. Like the children they look after, foster carers come from a wide variety of religious and cultural backgrounds - **they are people like you!**

- All foster carers must be 21 or over.
- They might be a single male or female, married or in a long-term relationship. The important thing is that if someone is in a relationship, it is a stable one. It is also important that both partners are in agreement to making an application to foster.
- They may or may not have children of their own. It is not essential that a foster carer already has parenting experience but we would want to know about what kind of experiences a childless applicant has had with children and young people. If applicants do have children - even adult ones living at home - we would need to know that they agree with an application to foster being made. Fostering is a family-based task, so the whole family needs to agree about doing this job.
- Some foster carers work, however this would limit the kind of placement which could be made. For example, it might be easier for a working carer to look after a settled, school age child than a pre-school child with no day care place, or a child/young person who is often excluded from school. However, a child/young person who is settled at school one day, and keeps good general health, may not be the next! Working carers must then think about how they would manage if a child/young person was ill, and how they would cope with school holidays/in-service days, or periods of exclusion. Working carers must have strategies in place to allow them to attend meetings associated with caring for the child, and these are usually held during office hours. Working carers who receive a fostering fee would be expected to pay for any day-care for children they look after.

- Some foster carers don't do other work apart from fostering, or are unemployed. Please note: fees paid to foster carers are taxable and can affect some (but not all) benefit payments. Please check with your local benefits office.
- Some foster carers own their homes; others rent or lease theirs. The Social Work Department has to check with all landlords, including Dundee City Council, that permission is available for applicants to foster from their rented property.

What about Adoptive Parents and Permanent Foster Carers?

Like foster carers, adopters and permanent carers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience. Some are unable to have their own children, but wish to be parents and see adoption as a positive way of achieving this. For a variety of reasons, others wish to add to the family they already have.

From time to time foster carers "claim" a child they have grown particularly close to. Some permanent carers are experienced parents with a grown up family who feel they can offer a child/young person stability and security from which they can grow to independent adulthood.

- Adoptive parents must be over 21. We do not have an upper age-limit for prospective adopters, but age will be one of the factors, alongside others taken into account for assessment.
- A single person can adopt, but a couple must be married to adopt jointly; this is a legal requirement in Scotland. We ask that couples have been in a stable relationship prior to application. Where 2 single people live together, only

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

one of them can apply to adopt although the circumstances and views of the other person would be included if an assessment was taken up.

- Being employed or unemployed should not hinder your application to adopt, or to become a permanent foster carer.
- You don't have to own your own home but we may need to make checks with your landlord if you rent it.

Points to Note

- If you are interested in fostering or adopting younger children there might be a delay before your application is taken up. This is because most of the children who need families are school age and we have to give priority to finding families for them.
- Children over the age of 12 who are unrelated should ideally have a bedroom of their own.
- All children under 5 years, or a child of any age with a known respiratory condition, should have a smoke-free environment. Carers must not smoke in front of foster children and ensure anyone caring for their foster child (such as family members/babysitters) also abides by this rule. Children and young people should not be allowed to smoke within the foster home and should be actively discouraged from smoking by their carer(s). Carers have a responsibility to encourage young people to seek help in stopping smoking. All carers will receive training and information regarding the harmful effects of passive smoking for children. This applies to fostering or adoption.

- If you apply to foster or adopt you will be asked to give your consent to several kinds of legally required checks being carried out about you, as will adult children, or any other adult living in your home. Information provided by these checks is confidential, but will be discussed with you if necessary/appropriate:
- You will be asked to consent to medical information being obtained from your GP, and you will be required to have a full medical examination either before or after your application has been taken up, depending on your individual circumstances (Our Agency Medical Adviser deals with all medical information, and decisions about medical issues, which might affect progress of an application).
- You will be asked to consent to a Disclosure Scotland check being made. Having a criminal record doesn't necessarily mean you won't be able to foster or adopt, but some kinds of offences may prevent us from taking up an application. Again, any issues would be discussed fully, in confidence, with individual applicants
- You will be asked to sign a declaration about whether you keep firearms. If you do, you will be asked to provide the serial number for your firearms certificate.
- You will be asked to sign a general consent form to allow all other necessary checks such as with public and private landlords, other child-care agencies, schools, nurseries, etc.
- If you have been previously married or in a long-term relationship, we may wish to contact your ex-partner.
- We may wish to contact your current employer and also previous employers, particularly if this involved working with children.
- You will be asked to provide the names and addresses of up to 3 personal referees (not family members) who know you well enough to talk honestly about you in terms of your wish to foster or adopt.

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

What to do next

If we have enclosed a Registration of Interest form, we hope that completion of this is self-explanatory: it will give us some important information about you, as well as telling us what you would like to do next. Please fill this in and return it to us within the next 2 weeks. There is a SAE for that purpose in this pack.

Please phone our duty worker (01382 436060) if you have any questions about the form or about procedures for returning it.

If you decide you would like to take your interest further, as soon as we receive your completed form, we will arrange for a family placement worker to contact you to arrange to visit you at home within the next 2 weeks, to discuss this further. At this visit you can discuss any questions you may have.

If you decide you do not want to pursue your interest in fostering/adoption at the moment, or at all, we will keep your response form on file for up to 6 months.

Next Steps

Once we have received your completed form and if you have asked for someone to visit you at home, a family placement worker will contact you within the following 2 weeks to arrange a suitable time to do this. During this visit he/she will talk with you in more detail about your interest in fostering/adoption and about your own family circumstances. This worker will also explain our procedures and tell you more about the tasks involved in being a carer. You will also be given a “task description” which will give you a fuller idea of what is expected of a carer. He/she will also begin to look at whether or not we can take you to the next step in this process, which is completing the Application Form.

The decision will be based on several things such as whether this is really the right time for you and your family to go through an assessment. You may have medical or other issues or concerns that you and/or the worker would prefer to be checked out prior to application – in this case the worker would process your medical or other forms with your consent, and then get back to you once these have been seen by our Medical Advisor or other relevant professional - with your permission.

If it has been mutually agreed that you proceed to the application stage, an application form would be left with you. This form includes most of the consent forms to allow us to carry out the statutory checks mentioned earlier on you and your family.

When we receive your completed application form we will invite you to attend a family interview, either at our office or in your home, with 2 family placement workers (this may be the worker who came to meet you at home, along with another worker who may carry out your assessment). This helps us to make a final decision about whether or not we can take up an application from you.

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

- If an application is to be taken up, the workers will explain what happens next such as when the next training course will start. Training is an important part of the process and attendance is compulsory.
- You would be allocated your own worker who would process your statutory checks straight away and would hope to have these back within a month -- sometimes it could take longer. If there is a problem with your checks, your worker will arrange to see you to discuss this and what it means.
- You would begin your assessment either before, during or after the training. The assessment will look at you and your family and why you want to foster or adopt, what you feel you have to offer and how much you understand about the tasks involved. Professional opinions will be discussed openly throughout the process.
- If there is any doubt about whether an application should proceed at any stage, then our Fostering or Adoption Panel will become involved in any decisions about outcomes.
- An assessment should be completed 6 months from an application being received. However, there can be unforeseen delays such as medical issues or a change in circumstances which requires "time-out".
- Your assessment will be presented as a report written by you and your worker together, at our Fostering or Adoption Panel which will make a recommendation about whether or not your application should be approved and on what basis.

- This panel comprises of experienced childcare social workers and managers, other professionals such as our Medical Adviser, and independent members such as an experienced adoptive parent or foster carer. You will be invited to attend the panel when your report is presented. Our Agency Decision Maker, who is a senior manager in the Social Work Department makes final decisions about approval. There is a right of appeal if you do not agree with an agency decision.

After Approval

- It is impossible to say how long it might take for a child to be placed with newly approved carers. This might depend on whether you are foster carers or adoptive parents; also on the age range you have been approved for.
- The period after approval, when waiting for a placement, can be particularly stressful especially for adopters waiting to be matched with a longed for child.
- You will receive regular/appropriate support from your designated family placement resource worker and from any other appropriate sources such as support groups and other professionals.

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

Fostering - What is Fostering?

Fostering is about looking after other peoples' children in your own home. These are children and young people who need to live apart from their own families for varying lengths of time, for a variety of reasons. It involves taking responsibility for some aspects of direct parenting and also working closely with the Social Work Department, to give these children and young people a positive, caring experience. Fostering is an increasingly skilled job, with expectations which match the needs and circumstances of the individual children and young people involved.



There are all sorts of reasons why children and young people can't be at home with their own families. Many will have experienced difficulties, possibly involving physical, sexual or emotional abuse and neglect. Some will have come from families with a history of mental illness, learning disabilities or drug/alcohol abuse. Others will need to be looked after because of a family crisis.

Some will have had several 'parent figures' or a number of different moves already; perhaps including previous stays with foster carers. They may have been let down by several adults in their past, so learning to trust again can be difficult and scary for them. Some will need extra support and guidance to work through adolescent issues. Some will have other difficulties to manage, like conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or perhaps a physical or learning disability.

A child or young person's past difficult experiences will probably be reflected in how she/he behaves, so being a foster carer can be a challenging experience when your patience may be tested to the limit. On the other hand, there are many rewards including the satisfaction of helping a child in your own community.

Don't worry! You won't be left to deal with these challenges on your own. Fostering is about working together with the Social Work Department to achieve the best possible outcome for each individual child or young person. Each carer family has its own family placement worker -- an experienced, qualified social worker -- who has regular contact and is on hand to give advice, guidance and support as appropriate/necessary.

Placements

There are a variety of placements which fall into a broad framework, although each child or young person's situation will be dealt with individually.

If you decide to apply to foster, time will be spent during the assessment looking at the kind of placements you are interested in offering and deciding what is appropriate for you and your family, depending on your skills, experience and circumstances.

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

Emergency Placements

As suggested, these are required at very short notice and are often made after 5 p.m., during the night, or at weekends by our Out of Hours service. Emergency placements are usually needed because of a family crisis, or because a child abuse investigation is being undertaken, or occasionally because a placement with another foster carer has broken down for some reason. Often when an emergency placement is made, there is little or no information available about a child/young person, or his/her family background.

It is difficult to define exactly how long an emergency placement might last for -- it could be one or two nights, or it could be several weeks -- but it will usually be time-limited in relation to a child or young person's individual circumstances.

We particularly need carers who can provide emergency placements for older children and groups of brothers and sisters, across as wide an age range as possible; for example, 0 - 12 years, 5 -15 years, or 0 - 15 years. We also need carers who are able to accept the very challenging and difficult behaviour which might result from a child or young person being removed suddenly from familiar surroundings.

Short Term Placements

It is also difficult to define the length of this kind of placement, which might happen for a variety of reasons. For example:

- Extension of an emergency placement to allow work to be done with a family to help return a child back home.

- A planned period of a child/young person being looked after, with the consent of birth parents, to work through family difficulties.
- When a decision has been taken that a child/young person cannot return to his/her birth family, either his/her current placement, or a new one, will become a 'bridging' placement where he/she will be helped to prepare for a move to an adoptive, or permanent foster family. The length of time this may take will vary and could last up to two years or sometimes longer.

Long Term Placements

Occasionally there are reasons why older children and young people who can't return home also can't be considered for adoption or permanent fostering. Such children and young people still need a secure, positive experience of family life where they can receive unconditional acceptance, support, guidance and friendship to help them move successfully into independent adulthood. These children/young people will need to stay with foster carers on a long-term basis.

The kind of people we need

We are looking for individuals, couples and families who:

- Have experience of looking after children, with knowledge of both the challenges and rewards they can bring.
- Can accept the importance of the child/young person maintaining links with members of his/her own family.

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

- Can work alongside the Social Work Department, sharing responsibility for the care and development of the child or young person.
- May have their own dependant children, but still feel they have space in their lives for a group of brothers and sisters who need to be placed together, as well as individual children or young people.
- Can offer support to children and young people with special needs.
- Could sometimes accommodate a vulnerable young mother with her baby, for example, to help teach parenting skills.
- Can be tolerant, flexible and strong enough to provide a secure base from which a young person can work through adolescence and move into independence.
- Can be available to transport children to and from school, and contact with birth family (if you have a car).
- Can attend meetings such as Children's Hearings, which are also attended by birth parents.
- Can be available for pre-school care, school exclusions and school holidays.
- Can be flexible about the kind of placement they offer, to minimise the need for children and young people moving from carer to carer.

Fees and Allowances

In Dundee we have a skills based fostering service with different types of carers available to offer placements. Payments are based on a carer's ability, availability and willingness to undertake specific tasks.

Foster Carers - Ace

These are our professional carers who require qualifications in childcare up to and including SVQ level 3. Ace carers provide an alternative to secure or residential school, and are recruited separately.

Foster Carers - Fee

Fee paid carers will have completed our initial training/assessment course successfully and will have been assessed as competent to carry out the tasks required of them.

Fee carers receive basic allowances for each child placed with them. This allowance is age-related and is specifically for covering expenses incurred in looking after a particular child or young person. These allowances are not taxable; and they should not affect benefit payments because they are made in respect of the child concerned.

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

A weekly fee per household is paid, regardless of the number of placements involved. If more than one child/young person is in placement, then an additional 75% of the weekly fee is paid, again per household.

Fee carers are paid on the basis of placements made, with a maximum 4-week retainer to cover gaps between full-time placements. This is only paid if carers are available to take another child/young person and may be withheld if a carer ends a placement prematurely without the agreement of the Social Work Department.

Carers are self-employed in terms of their fee so are, therefore, responsible for paying their own National Insurance and Income Tax, and for their own pension arrangements. An annual statement of total fees paid will be issued to each carer. Please note: if you are unemployed, becoming a fee paid carer might affect certain benefits. Please check with your local benefits office.

All Carers

Additional allowances are paid per child in placement to cover Christmas, holiday and birthday expenses.

If they wish to, carers can nominate 4 weeks per year when they will be unavailable for fostering. They may take paid leave, or receive additional monies with this paid leave if taking a child or young person on holiday when them.

Adoption

Adoption is about providing a permanent, alternative family life for children who are unable to live with their own parents or relatives. Adoption gives these children the clear message they are part of their 'new' family forever.



Most children being placed for adoption have spent some time living with foster carers because of problems in their own family. During this time, work will have been done to try to return them to their own families. Adoption will only be considered once it is clear attempts to support a child in his/her own family are not going to succeed.

Sometimes foster carers do adopt a child they have been looking after but usually fostering or adoption are quite separate.

Adoption is a legal process which involves a court transferring all rights and responsibilities of birth parents to adoptive parents. A child usually takes the last name of his/her adoptive parents and will inherit from them. All legal ties to the birth family are broken, although some children may stay in touch with some members of their own birth family. This could be in a variety of ways depending on individual circumstances ranging from sharing information -- (for example when adopters send photos and/or letters occasionally, to let a birth family know how a child is getting on) -- to a child having some face to face contact with family member -- (for example where brothers and sisters have been placed with different families).

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

The move to a new family can be a particularly difficult time for children who have lost everything which is familiar to them, so they need families who can understand their sadness and work with it. Helping children to overcome earlier difficult experiences and to cope with separation from their birth families, and also their foster carers, can be a long and challenging process. It can also be very rewarding.

The Children Waiting for Adoption

Although adoption in Scotland mostly used to be about placing very young babies, things have changed. Now the majority of children placed are older pre-school children, or primary school age.

The number of very young healthy babies relinquished for adoption by their birth parents, is extremely low. People who are interested in adopting babies and infants have to be aware they may be faced with very long delays and there is no guarantee a placement will be made.

At the moment, our priority has to be to find families for the children we have waiting for adoption in Dundee. As is the case in the rest of Scotland (and the whole of the UK) many of these children are over 5 years old. Some are groups of brothers and sisters, some have special needs and for many children there will be some issues which complicate matching with a new family, such as legal delays.

Please note: sometimes we do not take any applications from people interested in adopting children in the 0 - 5 age group, but if this is the age group you are interested in, we will be happy to discuss your interest and let you know of when this may change.

The Kind of People we are Looking for

We need lots of different kinds of families because the children who need adoptive placements are all very different themselves. They come from a variety of backgrounds and have different, often complex, individual needs.

We particularly need individuals and families who:

- Have previous experience with children and can understand both the challenges and the rewards children can bring (this does not necessarily mean you have to have children of your own).
- Have a strong network of family and friends they can turn to when things become difficult.
- Have the flexibility and tenacity to help a child through any difficulties; the ability to stick with the child come what may.
- Can accept a child's own background story and can help that child make sense of his/her family history.
- Can cope with delays caused by legal uncertainties.
- Are comfortable with a degree of contact with a child's birth family, as described previously.
- Have space for group of brothers and sisters.

FOSTERING OR ADOPTION

- Can consider older primary school age children.
- Can look after a child or children with physical disabilities, e.g. deafness, cystic fibrosis,

Please note: If you have been undergoing tests or treatment, for infertility then we ask that you have taken these as far as you want to by the time we take up an application from you. This is because in our experience it is hard for people to think through the issues involved in adoption, if they are still involved directly in the process of dealing with tests and treatment for infertility.

Allowances

In occasional circumstances, adoption allowances will be provided but they are not available automatically with all placements. Each case is assessed individually at the time a child is approved for adoption. In general, these allowances will be paid to people who adopt children with disabilities, older children and groups of brothers and sisters together. Adoption allowances are regularly reviewed. The maximum allowances are equivalent to nationally agreed fostering rates, less Child Benefit.

Adopters can claim Child Benefit for any children placed with them. Your family placement worker will advise you about how to claim this and when.

Training for Carers

Initial Training

Our initial training and assessment courses for carers are held in Dundee, approximately once every 3 months. Experienced foster carers and adopters take part as trainers, along with family placement workers. Relevant information is shared with assessing workers, and through them, with applicants.

- Courses are usually run over a period of 3 full Saturdays plus 2 weekday evenings. When and where training/assessment courses are held depends on how many applicants we have at any one time.
- Our initial training/assessment course is designed to help all applicants get a clearer idea of what fostering or adoption involves and how it will affect them and their families. The course also helps us to get to know you in a different setting.

If you have asked for a worker to visit you, he/she will be able to give you details about what issues are covered in this course.

Applicants' Children

Fostering or adoption each have implications for your own children, so we aim to provide induction groups for them too. If this is not possible, we will try to offer other appropriate support, such as a link with the children of an experienced foster carer, or with those from an adoptive family. The age of children being placed and the age of your own children, if you have any, would also be taken into consideration.

After Approval

We have an extensive programme of post-approval training for foster carers, including the opportunity for experienced carers to undertake an SVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. Some of this training is available to interested adopters and permanent foster carers.

The Family Placement Service

Dundee City Council has had a specialist family placement service, (part of the Social Work Department, Children's Services), for several years.

There are 3 teams within the service which work closely together to cover all aspects of fostering or adoption. Their work includes: recruiting, assessing, training and supporting foster carers, adopters and their families; providing adoption counselling (for adopted people tracing their roots and sometimes for birth parents who gave up a child for adoption in the past) and also working with children/young people in preparation for permanency, or those already placed with a 'new' family.

We also provide an 8.45 a.m. to 5 p.m. telephone duty system for colleagues looking for foster placements and general phone enquiries service about fostering or adoption issues.

We work closely with our colleagues in other parts of Children's Services, with carers, with other professionals and with family placement colleagues from other areas.

If you would like to speak to a family placement worker, please contact us at the following address:

Family Placement Team
Children's Services
Dundee City Council Social Work Department
Jack Martin Way
Claverhouse East
DUNDEE
DD4 9FF

Tel: 01382 43 60 60

Fax: 01382 43 84 12

Email: reception.claverhouse@dundeecity.gov.uk

Web: www.dundeecity.gov.uk or www.changetheirlives.co.uk

A duty worker is available between 9am and 5pm weekdays on 01382 436060

