



Key worker status for foster carers

About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network in Scotland has 100 per cent organisational membership of local authorities and independent voluntary fostering providers and 97 per cent of foster care households in membership. Our views are informed by our members, as well as through research; in this way we aim to be the voice of foster care. We also run the Scottish Government funded helpline, Fosterline Scotland, which provides support and advice to all foster carers in Scotland.

1. One-off payment for frontline care givers

Foster carers are an essential part of the social care workforce and have put their own lives on hold – and at risk – to care for some of the country's most vulnerable children and maintain children's relationships with birth families. We believe that foster carers should be included on the key worker list.

In Scotland, there are 4,730 children living with foster families¹ and 3,758 approved foster care households (excluding specifically short break foster care households)². These fostering households provide loving, caring, safe and nurturing environments for some of Scotland's most vulnerable children. In addition, they maintain their relationships with birth family, have contact with the children's social workers and support children's mental health, wellbeing and education, and drastically improve their outcomes.

Foster carers have not been able to access all of the same support networks (such as peer support groups and short break care) during the pandemic, and the majority have not been able to benefit from any government financial support schemes due to the requirements being based on taxable profit and foster carers, in general, generate zero profit from fostering.

All the while, foster carers have continued to care and perform their vital role in the social care system. For example, foster carers are required to meet social workers and other professionals as part of the care they offer to young people, including letting them into their homes. Most children in foster care also meet with birth families (including large sibling groups who may be living separately) on a regular basis to ensure relationships are maintained. As a result, many foster carers and their families are exposed to multiple households in their fostering role which increases the risk of contracting the virus.

Foster carers have continued to take new placements throughout the pandemic, some of which have come from covid-19 positive households. Fosterline Scotland has received a call, for example, of a foster carer accepting a sibling group into their home whose main carer was taken to a high dependency covid-19 ward.

¹ Scottish Government [Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland, 2018-19](#) September 2020

² Care Inspectorate [Fostering and adoption 2018-19: A statistical bulletin](#) July 2019

In addition, our [State of Scotland's Foster Care](#) (2019) report showed that over 40 per cent of the foster carer population in Scotland are over 50 years old. Comparing this to the Ofsted data in England, which shows that as of 31 March 2020, 65 per cent of foster carers were over 50 years old and 25 per cent were over 60, we expect the actual proportion of foster carers over 50 in Scotland to be far more than 40 per cent. As the risk from coronavirus increases with age, foster carers are at a raised risk and should be protected as far as is possible to ensure it is safe for them to continue to foster.

Compared to others on the list, we feel that children's residential home workers are presented largely with the same risks to the coronavirus. Many social workers have had the opportunity to do virtual visits and meetings throughout the pandemic, and we have heard anecdotally from our members that many children in foster care have not had a face to face meeting with their social workers since the beginning of the pandemic. While this is understandable given the risks, foster carers have continued to offer face to face care but are inexplicably excluded from this £500 payment.

2. Priority coronavirus vaccinations for foster carers

We are now receiving regular reports from local authorities in our membership that they are currently struggling to place children in foster care, and this is directly due to the pandemic. Fostering services have asked us to specifically raise with you the importance of rolling out the vaccine to foster carers urgently.

There is no doubt that prioritising foster carers for the coronavirus vaccine would ensure we protect the health of one of the most critical groups in society. Foster carers perform a vital role we simply cannot do without. Awarding priority status would also represent a huge morale boost to foster families across the country and would be warmly welcomed by The Fostering Network.

Conclusion

On any given day in Scotland, there are nearly 5,000 children living with foster carers. It is vital to recruit and retain foster carers across Scotland, which includes protecting and valuing them, to ensure we provide loving and stable homes for children and young people who can no longer live with their own families. We are very concerned about the many pressures that foster carers face. This has undoubtedly increased as a result of the pandemic and we cannot afford to see a further drop in the number of foster carers who are willing to provide a home for our most vulnerable children.

As we have emphasised, foster carers' role is vital. Yet, time and time again, they are undervalued and this cannot continue.

The Fostering Network recommends that the Scottish Government:

- Honours The Promise that was made to improve the care system and the workers within it and try and bridge the profound disconnect between carers current treatment and their actual social value.
- Should immediately include foster carers on the key worker list such that:
 - they qualify for the £500 one-off payment,
 - get priority access to the covid-19 vaccine due to be rolled out next week, and,
 - of equal importance, such that they are given some recognition for the important role they play looking after children on behalf of the state, and for the excellent job they do in improving outcomes for children.

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