Foster Care Fortnight™ 2015 press pack

Foster Care Fortnight, which runs from Monday 1 to Sunday 14 June, is the UK’s annual awareness campaign, run by charity The Fostering Network to celebrate fostering, and to highlight the urgent need for more foster carers.

In 2015, we’re asking the public to share their connection to fostering and consider becoming a foster carer, or show their support for fostering. This year alone fostering services need at least 8,370 new foster families to offer children in care the safe and stable homes they need.

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The Fostering Network is the UK’s leading charity for everyone involved in foster care. It exists to make life better for fostered children and the families that care for them.

You can reach The Fostering Network media team on media@fostering.net or 020 7620 6425, or online at www.fostering.net/media, on Twitter and on Facebook.
If you would like to speak to a foster carer or care leaver who is willing to share their views and experiences with the media, get in touch with the Fostering Network’s media team on media@fostering.net.

Local and regional media, please get in touch with your local fostering service for local case studies.

You can find your local fostering service here.

What is Foster Care Fortnight?

_Foster Care Fortnight_ is an annual awareness campaign run by The Fostering Network. The aim is to raise the profile of fostering and highlight the urgent need for more foster carers right across the UK.

Getting involved in _Foster Care Fortnight_ gives you the opportunity to tell unique stories of kindness, love, skill and devotion to supporting some of the UK’s most vulnerable children.

With more children than ever coming into care and looking for a foster family, we need more people to come forward and consider becoming foster carers.
Why do we need more foster carers?

Over the last five years, more and more children have been coming into care.

As the vast majority of children in care live with foster families, thousands of new foster carers are needed now – at least 8,370 in 2015 alone. Children should be able to live with a foster carer whose skills and experience meet the child’s individual needs. The shortage of foster carers means fostering services often struggle to find the right home for a child, first time.

There is a particular need for foster carers to come forward to foster teenagers, disabled children and sibling groups.

As a result, children often have to live with a foster family a long way from their home, are split up from their brothers and sisters, and have to move from family to family and school to school.

A wider pool of foster carers with the right skills and qualities would make it more likely that the right homes can be found for children first time, giving them the best chance of a happy childhood and a successful future.

What matters is the skills a foster carer has. Foster carers come from a wide range of backgrounds and professions, but what unites them all is a desire and ability to help and support children and young people separated from their own families.
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**Foster care skills checklist**

- **Listening skills**
  Do you hear and understand what children and adults are saying to you?

- **Optimism**
  Can you look on the bright side when times get tough?

- **Confidence**
  Can you handle difficult situations without feeling out of your depth?

- **Patience**
  Can you persevere even when you don’t seem to be getting quick results?

- **Stability**
  Do you have a welcoming home, and can you make children feel safe and secure?

- **Team player**
  Can you share responsibility, work with others, and ask for help and support?

- **Observational skills**
  Can you see what is really going on beneath the surface?

- **Energetic**
  Are you full of energy and life?

- **Communications skills**
  Do you get on well with children? Can you speak for others?

- **Sense of humour**
  Can you see the funny side of life?

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**Foster care myths**

- There is no legal minimum age to become a foster carer. Most fostering services will accept applicants aged 21+.

- There is also no official upper age limit on being a foster carer.

- You can have a job outside of the home and still foster.

- Single people can foster as well as married or cohabiting couples.

- There are many gay and lesbian foster carers.

- You do not need to own your own home.

- You don’t have to be a parent to foster.

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“I am a qualified solicitor. After working at a specialist young people’s law centre I decided to leave my job and become a full-time foster carer for two teenage asylum seekers. They are great lads and my family life is much improved.”
Ten steps to becoming a foster carer

Being a foster carer is both rewarding and demanding, and needs the best people to come forward and care for some of the UK’s most vulnerable children. If you think you can come forward and become a foster carer during 2015, here are the 10 steps you’ll need to follow.

To ensure that only the right people are approved to foster it is a thorough process that takes a number of months.

1. Starting point – see couldyoufoster.org.uk for more information and to find local fostering services.
2. Choose a fostering service – get in touch with a fostering service to request an information pack.
3. Find out more – attend an information session and meet current foster carers.
4. Make a formal application.
5. Start the assessment – a social worker supports the applicant through the process, carrying out a thorough assessment on them and their household.
6. Attend training – all prospective foster carers complete pre-approval training to prepare them and their household for a career in fostering.
7. Get checked out – background checks are made on all applicants as fostering services need to be sure children will be safe and well cared for.
8. Fostering panel – when all information has been gathered, a report is made to a fostering panel who recommend whether the applicant is suitable to foster.
9. Become a foster carer – the fostering service then makes the final decision about approval.
10. Look after a child – the fostering service matches a child with a new family which could be the next day or in a few weeks.

“You need a lot of patience with children who have been damaged. You need to stick with children, some test you to the limit, then a light switches on and you see a change and you know they’re safe.”

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**Fostering stats – the need for more foster families**

Over 63,000 children are living with foster families today in the UK. Foster care provides children with a safe, secure and nurturing family environment, and often allows them to keep in contact with their own families.

In the UK there are around 52,500 foster families. The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need a further 8,370 foster families in 2015 alone, to replace those who leave and to increase the pool. People are particularly needed to provide homes for teenagers, disabled children, and sibling groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK</th>
<th>8,370</th>
<th>England</th>
<th>6,900</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>6,900</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>1,200</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>450</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>Yorkshire and Humberside</td>
<td>720</td>
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<td>Wales</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>West Midlands</td>
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<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>490</td>
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<td>East of England</td>
<td>640</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>London</td>
<td>1,020</td>
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<td>South West</td>
<td>550</td>
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<td>South East</td>
<td>910</td>
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### Fostering stats by nation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Children Living with Foster Families</th>
<th>Percentage of Children in Care</th>
<th>Number of Foster Families</th>
<th>Need for Recruitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>England</strong></td>
<td>51,340</td>
<td>nearly four-fifths (78%)</td>
<td>44,800</td>
<td>6,900 foster families</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on 31 March 2014</td>
<td>of the 65,630 children in care who are looked after away from home</td>
<td></td>
<td>in the next 12 months</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Ireland</strong></td>
<td>2,156</td>
<td>more than four-fifths (86%)</td>
<td>2,060</td>
<td>170 foster families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on 31 March 2014</td>
<td>of the 2,501 children in care who were looked after away from home</td>
<td></td>
<td>in the next 12 months</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scotland</strong></td>
<td>5,533</td>
<td>three-quarters (76%)</td>
<td>4,450</td>
<td>750 foster families</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on 31 July 2014</td>
<td>of 7,255 children in care who are looked after away from home and family</td>
<td></td>
<td>in the next 12 months</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wales</strong></td>
<td>4,405</td>
<td>over four-fifths (82%)</td>
<td>3,650</td>
<td>550 foster families</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on 31 March 2014</td>
<td>of the 5,755 children in care looked after away from home</td>
<td></td>
<td>in the next 12 months</td>
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Fostering FAQs

What is fostering?

Fostering offers children and young people in care a stable family environment if their own parents are unable to look after them.

What is the difference between fostering and adoption?

Fostering is a way of offering children a home until they can return to their family, although many live with foster carers for years, and some for their whole childhoods.

Fostered children continue to be legally part of their own family, even if there is limited contact with them.

Adoption ends a child’s legal relationship with their birth family and the child permanently lives with a new family. About 6,000 out of the 78,000 children in care away from home in the UK are awaiting adoptive families.

Why do children need fostering?

Foster carers look after children so families have the chance to sort out their problems. These problems can range from a family member’s short-term illness to a parent’s depression or drug or alcohol abuse. Many children have been abused or neglected.

Some children will need to be looked after for only a short time until they can return home, while others will stay with foster carers for the longer term or move elsewhere.

Why foster?

Foster carers play a key role in transforming children’s lives. Fostering is not easy, but it offers the opportunity to make a huge difference to children and can be a very rewarding experience. People who want to foster need to care about children, have great communication skills and be ready for a challenge.

What does a foster carer do?

Foster carers provide children with their day-to-day care and much more. They may have to help these children come to terms with difficult or traumatic experiences. They will support children in their education, look after their health and promote social wellbeing. The role is varied and challenging, and also includes attending meetings, keeping records, managing behaviour and promoting contact with birth families.

Foster carers receive pre- and post-approval training and support to help them develop the skills needed to do this challenging and rewarding work.

On any one day, over 63,000 children live with almost 55,000 foster families across the UK.
Who can be a foster carer?

Almost anyone can apply to be a foster carer, but as with any job, some people will be more suited to it than others. Prospective foster carers need skills and experience that will enable them to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people who are separated from their families.

Fostering services need to recruit a variety of foster carers to offer as much choice as possible for children and young people.

People who have ever been convicted of a sexual offence or a violent act towards a child are not able to become foster carers.

Do foster carers get paid?

All foster carers receive a fostering allowance which should cover the cost of caring for a fostered child. These vary across the UK, but in England, Wales and Northern Ireland there are national minimum allowances agreed by government.

Some fostering services also pay their foster carers a fee on top of the allowance, in recognition of their time, skills and experience.

How long does the application process take?

When you apply to foster, you will be assigned a social worker who will support you throughout the process and carry out a thorough assessment. During this time you will be provided with training known as ‘pre-approval’ training by the fostering service.

The social worker will send a report to a fostering panel. The fostering panel will make a recommendation to the fostering service whether you are suitable to foster, and the fostering service decides whether to approve you or not. The assessment, training and approval process should take around six months, but can take longer. In England, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 state that the suitability of a prospective foster carer must be decided upon within eight months of their application to foster.

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celebrity supporters

Jacqueline Wilson

Award-winning author, and creator of Tracy Beaker, Jacqueline Wilson is continuing her long-time relationship with the Fostering Network by supporting Foster Care Fortnight again during 2014.

“For years I looked after Tracy Beaker in her special world, and through her have met lots of wonderful children, and know of thousands of others living in Tracy's situation in real life. They all need those special foster carers to step forward - just like Cam - and help them through their childhoods and beyond. There is always a need of those special people, ready to open their hearts and their homes. Many of the kids haven't had a great start in life for varying reasons and the fostering network will give continuing support as well.

“I am proud to be supporting Foster Care Fortnight 2014, and the Fostering Network itself, amazingly now in its 40th anniversary year. I hope that if you've ever considered fostering before, you will make this the year you make that life-changing decision. Think about it, talk about it, and apply to become a foster carer - and if you haven’t considered it before this could be a wonderful new direction for your future, a remarkable and special profession. There is nothing more special or worthwhile than positively changing the life of a child.”

Lorraine Pascale

Celebrity baker and television personality Lorraine Pascale has thrown her support, and indeed her words on her experiences in foster care, behind Foster Care Fortnight.

“I am supporting the Fostering Network’s Foster Care Fortnight because I want people to know that great foster carers helped me when I needed someone to be there for me the most.

“Growing up in and around the care system isn't easy, but using your skills and experience to provide a loving home for a child can make all the difference to what their future becomes.

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“So if you think you can be there for some of the UK’s most vulnerable children then go on, I urge you, consider becoming a foster carer.”

**Gareth Gates**

Gareth Gates, star of stage and screen, is supporting Foster Care Fortnight 2014.

The singer is supporting the campaign because he feels, as the son of a foster carer, that more people need to take up caring for children.

“Fostering has always been a part of my life. My parents have fostered over 50 children since I was a small boy. I have three sisters, but have had many more foster brothers and sisters.

“My parents provided love and stability to many less fortunate children and brought them into our family. It may not have always been easy but is something I would never change.

“It’s a huge decision and of course it isn’t for everyone but it’s incredibly rewarding. I know that it’s not only changed the lives the kids who’ve spent some time in our family over the years but also mine and my sisters.”

**Cathy Glass**

Cathy Glass, best-selling author and foster carer, has supported the Fostering Network with blogs since 2012 and this year she has again thrown her weight behind Foster Care Fortnight.

“You don’t have to be married, own your home or have your own children to foster, but you do need empathy, patience and love.

“If you have room in your home and heart, why not think about fostering? I did - over 25 years ago - and it was the best decision I ever made. That’s why I’m supporting the Fostering Network’s Foster Care Fortnight campaign again this year.”
contact the media team and ask the experts

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Dominic Stevenson – senior media officer

Daniel Sinclair – communications manager

As well as a media team, The Fostering Network has a range of experts who are available at request for interview. These include:

Jackie Sanders – director of public affairs - Expertise includes foster carer recruitment, how foster care has developed over the last decade, the Government’s approach to foster care and foster care across the UK’s four nations.

Melissa Green – director of operations – Expertise includes innovation in fostering, the Mockingbird Family Model, social pedagogy and foster care in England.

Lucy Peake – director of development - Expertise includes children in care councils, education, social pedagogy and fostering across the UK.

Sara Lurie, director of The Fostering Network Scotland - Expertise includes the current state of foster care and the future of foster care in Scotland and the Scottish Government’s approach to foster care.

Margaret Kelly, director of The Fostering Network Northern Ireland - Expertise includes the current state of foster care and the future of foster care in Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Assembly’s approach to foster care.

Emily Warren, director of The Fostering Network Wales - Expertise includes the current state of foster care and the future of foster care in Wales and the Welsh Government’s approach to foster care.

Vicki Swain, campaigns manager – Expertise includes leaving care, delegated authority, housing benefit reform, parliamentary affairs, local and national Government affairs, foster carer recruitment and campaigning work with elected representatives.

James Foyle, recruitment and retention consultant – Expertise includes foster carer recruitment and retention.

In addition to the above, many more experts are available in a range of UK-wide, national, regional and local foster care issues.

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