the motivations to foster

a toolkit for fostering services

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In autumn 2011, the Fostering Network conducted a survey of foster carers in England to explore what motivated them to foster, and what makes them continue. With more and more children coming into care, and an ongoing shortage of foster carers, it is vital to attract the right people to foster and to retain them.

Over 1,400 current foster carers responded to questions addressing a wide range of issues from the length of time taken between considering fostering and approval, to their family situation and employment prior to fostering.

Based on the results of the survey, this toolkit presents information about who fosters, and what motivates them to start fostering and to continue to do so. It will help your fostering service to think creatively about who to target and how to reach them. This means thinking about the methods that are working well already, as well as taking a fresh look at how to recruit more widely.

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Funding and reasons for doing the survey

The motivations survey and toolkit were produced as part of the Fostering Network’s support for fostering services’ recruitment and retention activities, for which we receive some funding from the Department for Education. A second phase of the motivations survey will be carried out later this year.

Methodology

The Fostering Network has a membership of over 42,000 foster carers in England. Members were approached and asked to complete the survey through a number of communication routes, including:

- Postcard inserted in mailing of Foster Care magazine.
- Facebook and Twitter.
- Our website www.fostering.net
- Mailing to organisational members, including local authorities and independent fostering providers.
- Membership e-newsletter.
- Outreach work through staff.

All members who completed a survey were entered into a prize draw to win a £100 Amazon voucher.

We have looked at key findings and raised talking points to aid discussion within fostering services about who to target and why. This guide is divided into three sections: Who Fosters?, What Makes People Come Forward? and What Makes Foster Carers Continue?.
Age makes a difference

How old are people when they first think about fostering and how long does it take to get in touch?

While the top three ages to start thinking about fostering are 30, 35 and 40, the most common ages on approval are 40, 44 and 45.

On average, it takes three years between first considering fostering and approval, with the process becoming significantly more rapid the older the foster carer was when they first thought about fostering.

‘Fostering was something which I was always going to do one day. [It] just took a while for one day to arrive.’
Who Fosters?

‘Fostering is something that I have always wanted to do from an early age, but it wasn’t until our eldest set up her own home that we were able to begin the process.’

Talking points

- Is the ‘drip, drip’ approach to foster carer recruitment inevitable, or is it possible to increase the speed from first thought about fostering to enquiry and approval?
- Why do potential foster carers seem slower off the mark when they are younger? Do real and perceived barriers exist, such as housing, age of children, career, income or perceptions about being a foster carer?
- What might attract a younger demographic? Is it simply a question of marketing or do you need to change the package you offer?
- Is it worth targeting younger people so that they are more receptive when they are older?

The decision making process is quicker for older applicants

![Graph showing decision making process]

- Years from first thought to approval
- Age first thought about fostering

Under 21: 15-20 years
21 to 30: 10-15 years
31 to 40: 5-10 years
41 to 50: 0-5 years
Fostering works for families

Fostering appears to be an attractive option for families with children of all ages. Eighty-four per cent of foster carers had children of their own when they were approved.

‘I wanted to do it for a long time but when my daughter said “why don’t we foster, Mum?” after hearing an advert on the radio, I realised that she too was ready and the time was right for both of us. I always say that “we have room in our hearts and our home”.'
The sons and daughters of foster carers can be integral to the fostering household – from thinking about fostering and being approved, through to supporting stable placements – so should be considered in promoting fostering to prospective foster carers.

Talking points

- Is there anything else you could do to target families with children?
- Is there anything else you could do to support fostering families?
- Consider using positive images of fostering families in recruitment materials.
- Consider involving sons and daughters in promotional activity.

The Fostering Network’s annual sons and daughters campaign encourages and supports fostering services to recognise their vital role in fostering families. To find out more about exclusive members only resources, how to get involved and what is going on this year, go to [www.fostering.net/sons-daughters-week](http://www.fostering.net/sons-daughters-week)
From employment into fostering

Most people move into fostering from another job and source of income. Prior to fostering, the vast majority of foster carers were in paid work. Almost half were working full-time and a quarter worked part-time. Just 12 per cent described themselves as home makers, and the same proportion were self-employed. The majority (63 per cent) of foster carers had previously worked or volunteered with children, with a concentration of experience in education (one in 10), health (one in 10) and childminding (one in eight). However, a significant proportion (37 per cent) had no such experience. Prior experience of working with children, while a motivating factor for many, is by no means a prerequisite for foster carers.

‘Although I very much wanted to be at home for my own children I still wanted to have a role working with children and to continue to put my skills as a registered sick children’s nurse to good use…. So for me fostering enabled me to be at home for my children, be there for other children and was also a source of income.’
Talking points

- Think about the children you need to find foster carers for. What skills do your foster carers need to have?
- Think about your best foster carers. What skills do they have, and what did they do prior to fostering?
- Think about targeted campaigns for different types of fostering.
- Ensure you are reaching key target groups as well as the diversity of other potential applicants.
Motivated by children, but money matters

Top 5 reasons to foster

- Opportunity for children to be part of the family (86 per cent).
- Good thing for them or their family to do (77 per cent).
- Wanted to work with children (69 per cent).
- Own past experiences (36 per cent).
- Partner wanted to do it (35 per cent).

Financial arrangements for fostering were a consideration in 40 per cent of people’s decision to foster. Almost half saw fostering as a way to work from home.

‘I wanted to give children the best possible start in life.’

‘I lived alone and worked full time for many years, always looking at the fostering adverts and wondering….I decided that I should find out about fostering and make an informed decision [then] I realised I would have the opportunity to work in a paid capacity.’

‘My wife was a nurse and she relayed to me her experience of two premature babies withdrawing from drug dependence. When they were well enough to be discharged they couldn’t be as there were no foster carers who could take them. The main driver was compassion but we were also both medically trained and we felt we had the capacity, ability and family that could help.’
Motivated by family and personal experience

Family and personal experience are prominent factors in terms of initial motivators, ranging from personal experience of being in care or growing up in a fostering family, to wanting to build on personal or professional experience of looking after children.

Fifty-eight per cent of men and 30 per cent of women cited that their partner wishing to foster was a definite motivator for them. In the majority of cases women appear to be the driving force behind a family’s decision to foster, but men also play a crucial role in promoting fostering too.

‘If I could stop one child having a rough childhood like my own, it’s worth it.’

‘I felt that all children should have love and security and I can offer a child those things.’

‘We had our own children and 15 years later we were finally in a position where it was financially viable to foster. Being able to foster really has been a dream come true.’

‘We had no children and wanted children to be a part of our lives.’
What makes foster carers continue?

Motivated by altruism and job satisfaction, dependent on support and fostering income

Top 5 reasons to continue to foster

- I really enjoy working with children (90 per cent).
- I want to offer children the opportunity to be a part of my family (89 per cent).
- Fostering is a good thing for me/my family to do (80 per cent).
- There is space in my home to foster (75 per cent).
- I have the opportunity to improve my skills (64 per cent).

Support

Essential support comes from a partner, fostering service and other foster carers.

Money matters

Sixty-five per cent of foster carers are able to continue because they receive an income from fostering. Fostering is the only source of income for 42 per cent.

Motivations to continue fostering mirror the motivations to become foster carers in the first place.

Talking points

- Think about fostering as a product. Do you have the right level of support, allowances and pay to recruit and retain foster carers?
- What services and support do your foster carers most value, and what else could you provide?
Appendix of questions

- What is your gender?
- What is your ethnicity?
- What age group are you in?
- How old were you when you first thought about fostering?
- How old were you when you were first approved to foster?
- When you were first approved to foster, what was your relationship status?
- Do you have your own children?
- If yes, how old were they when you were first approved?
- Which of the following best describes your work commitments prior to being approved as a foster carer?
- What was your role or profession prior to being approved as a foster carer?
- Prior to being approved as a foster carer, were you working with children and young people or did you have experience working with children and young people?
- What prompted you to become a foster carer?
- What type of fostering service do you work for?
- What is the name of your fostering service?
- What was the main type of foster care that you were first approved to provide?
- Which of the following factors are the reason that you continue to foster?
- What is the best thing about being a foster carer?
The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK’s leading charity for everyone involved in fostering and is dedicated to making foster care better for children.

We support fostering services to recruit and retain foster carers, including:

- **Foster Care Fortnight**, our awareness campaign, is held every year in May to raise the profile of fostering and help fostering services to recruit more foster carers. To get involved contact [fcf@fostering.net](mailto:fcf@fostering.net)

- Expert support to fostering services, providing advice on how to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers. Contact [jackie.sanders@fostering.net](mailto:jackie.sanders@fostering.net).

- Year-round media activity to maintain the profile of fostering and promote public understanding of foster care. For help and advice contact [media@fostering.net](mailto:media@fostering.net)

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**Useful resources**

- **All About Fostering** – a bright, informative magazine packed with information for prospective foster carers. [www.fosteringresources.co.uk](http://www.fosteringresources.co.uk)

- **Making the Most of Foster Care Fortnight: your guide to getting involved** [www.fostering.net/foster-care-fortnight](http://www.fostering.net/foster-care-fortnight)

- **Maximising Media Coverage** – a guide for fostering services on how to maximise media coverage during **Foster Care Fortnight**

- **Making the Most of Online Opportunities to Recruit Foster Families** [www.fostering.net/all-about-fostering/resources/good-practice-guidance/making-most-online-opportunities-recruit-foster](http://www.fostering.net/all-about-fostering/resources/good-practice-guidance/making-most-online-opportunities-recruit-foster)

- **Attracting and Keeping Carers** – a bi-monthly newsletter updating you on local and regional activity and events to support the development of recruitment and retention strategies. Email [emma.hypher@fostering.net](mailto:emma.hypher@fostering.net) to receive your copy.
Useful contacts

The Fostering Network  t 020 7620 6400
The Fostering Network media and campaigns team  t 020 7620 6425
The Fostering Network information service  e info@fostering.net

Fosterline – a confidential advice line for foster carers and prospective foster carers, providing independent, impartial advice about fostering issues, based at the Fostering Network.
   t 0800 040 7675 (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday)
   e fosterline@fostering.net
   (Textphone users dial 18001 before 0800 040 7565)

Membership of the Fostering Network

Being a member of the Fostering Network helps you to work effectively as part of the fostering team and helps us to make foster care better for children across the UK. With over 56,000 foster carers and nearly 400 fostering service members, we connect everyone involved in fostering and campaign for change.

Members get access to expert advice, the latest information about fostering and the right support when it is needed. All our members also get access to exclusive content on our website.

www.fostering.net