Foster Care Fortnight 2016

Time to Foster, Time to Care

Your guide to getting involved
Monday 16 to Sunday 29 May 2016

This is your guide to Foster Care Fortnight™ 2016, full of suggestions and ideas for how you can tailor the campaign to maximise its impact for your service and improve outcomes for children in foster care.

Foster Care Fortnight is The Fostering Network’s annual campaign to raise the profile of fostering. It is the UK’s biggest foster carer recruitment campaign. The campaign annually receives over 1,000 pieces of media coverage across print, radio, TV and online.

Chief among the reasons behind Foster Care Fortnight’s success is the involvement of fostering services who use the campaign theme and create a buzz in their local area. We hope this year will be no different and that this guide will help you make the most of Foster Care Fortnight 2016.

Time to Foster, Time to Care

The theme for Foster Care Fortnight 2016 is Time to Foster, Time to Care.

The pressure to recruit new foster carers is ongoing. Fostering services recruited over 6,000 new foster carers in 2014/15, which was a great achievement. However, this was a significant reduction on 2013/14 and fell far short of The Fostering Network’s recruitment target of 8,370. The challenge remains: The Fostering Network calculates that a further 9,070 fostering families are needed in 2016.

Now is the time to foster...now is the time to care.

Finding sufficient numbers of the right carers is a challenge faced by all fostering services, especially if placement choice is to be expanded within each service. Many fostering services are developing their recruitment key messages to be clear about what the local need is – be it for teenagers, siblings, children with disabilities or unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Why is it time to care in your area?

We know that people think about fostering for a number of years before coming forward. Be honest and passionate in your messaging as to why now is the time to foster, and especially why now is the time to foster in your area – the need for foster carers for teenagers, sibling groups or whatever your particular need is.

The key objective of Foster Care Fortnight is to support all fostering services to recruit and retain the foster carers they need.

Time to Foster, Time to Care has been developed to provide a unifying theme to assist you and your colleagues with your recruitment and retention activity.

Introduction to Foster Care Fortnight 2016

• There is a separate Guide to the Media which you will be able to download from our website from the beginning of March. Visit www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fcf-services to download the guide.

• Keep up to date on activity relating to Foster Care Fortnight by subscribing to the monthly Attracting and Keeping Carers blog. Email fcf@fostering.net for more information.

• This year, for the first time, we have a Foster Care Fortnight logo which is available to fostering service members. The logo, along with the theme, will help bring coherence to the campaign. When you use the logo on your promotional materials, website and so on, you are showing that you are part of a national campaign, led by the UK’s leading fostering charity. It will also bring an element of endorsement of your local campaign from The Fostering Network.
As part of Foster Care Fortnight, and the Time to Foster, Time to Care theme, we will also be making use of the statistic that every 20 minutes across the UK a child comes into care in need of a foster family. This equates to 1,008 children during Foster Care Fortnight.

Of course, the exact figure will vary from region to region and fostering service to fostering service, but it’s a useful statistic on which to develop some local media and recruitment activity. It will also form the basis of our placard which you can use for social media engagement.

Some of our initial ideas on how the statistic could be used are below, but we would like to hear ideas from you which we can share across the sector. Email recruitmentandretention@fostering.net with your ideas.

**Every 20 minutes across the UK a child comes in to care in need of a foster family**

- Find your local statistic (‘one child comes in to care in need of a foster carer every xx hours in xx county/town/region’ or ‘in xx county/town/region, during Foster Care Fortnight, xx children will come in to care in need of a foster carer) and use that as the basis of a local media story.
- Make short films of your fostering service team/local celebrities/local politicians and so on talking about the best 20 minutes of their lives which you can post on your website and social media and contrast against the statistic.
- Have a local celebrity or politician undertake a photo-worthy activity for 20 minutes which could act as a PR opportunity to contrast against the statistic. You could have a range of people competing against each other in a 20 minute challenge.
- Make a large ‘totaliser’ which goes up by one every 20 minutes during Foster Care Fortnight. You could place this in a prominent local position (shopping centre, council offices and so on) and use that as a focal point for your promotion and recruitment.
- Ask fostered children to write about their favourite 20 minutes ever (or in foster care) and use them across your digital channels.
- On your promotional stands/in local offices etc set an alarm clock to go off every 20 minutes as a conversation starter.
- Encourage your foster families and fostering service staff to take part in a 20 minute fundraising challenge (see pages 10 and 11).
Time to...set objectives
What are your objectives for Foster Care Fortnight 2016?
• Raise the profile of fostering in your area?
• Raise the profile of fostering for your service?
• Increase the number of enquiries you receive?
• Recruit foster carers as a result of the campaign?
• Recruit foster carers for a specific group of children or young people?
• Target new groups or areas for prospective foster carers?
• Improve retention among your existing foster carers?

And how will you know you have achieved your objectives? Foster Care Fortnight is a celebration, but is also a great opportunity to improve and enhance a number of aspects within your service. Set clear performance targets within each objective and be bold with what you want to achieve.

Time to...raise awareness
The theme of Time to Foster, Time to Care is a tool to raise awareness of fostering, both in your area and UK-wide. The Fostering Network will be using the theme as an umbrella for our media and social media work, but we hope that you will take the theme and develop it in a way that will be of the most use to your fostering service. By using the theme and the Foster Care Fortnight logo, and developing your local angle, you will be part of a UK-wide awareness raising campaign that is relevant to your local situation.

Finding sufficient numbers of the right carers is a challenge faced by all fostering services. Many are enhancing key messages to be clear of what the local need is – be it for teenagers, siblings or young parents and their children. We know that people think about fostering for a number of years before coming forward. Be honest and passionate in your messaging as to why now is the time to foster.

Ultimately we want Foster Care Fortnight to raise the profile of fostering throughout the UK, to help in the recruitment of new foster carers, and to let existing foster carers know how vital they are and how much they are valued.

Time to...engage your foster carers
It is no secret that foster carers are the lifeblood of all fostering services and many have the willingness and aptitude to make a contribution beyond their role as a foster carer.

Invite foster carers to share their experience through case studies, interviews and information sessions as to why they decided it was the right ‘time to foster’. Their experiences may in turn inspire others to consider fostering.

You could also ask foster carers to be part of your promotional stands, events, enquiry evenings and so on during Foster Care Fortnight – they are often the best advocates for fostering and your fostering service.
**Time to...care about foster carers**

Foster Care Fortnight is also an ideal time to say thank you to your existing foster carers. Many fostering services put an emphasis on the recruitment of new foster carers, but it can be just as important to retain your current carers. ‘Time to care’ is an opportunity to celebrate the work of your existing foster carers.

Many services choose to hold thank you events or hold award ceremonies during Foster Care Fortnight, or to reward foster carers for length of service or outstanding contributions. Exceptionally long service by a foster carer can also make a good local news story.

**Time to...engage colleagues and wider services**

Everyone in your organisation should contribute and can play their part in recruiting foster carers. Not everyone will see this as the case. This is particularly evident in local authorities and other services with a broader remit than fostering.

Foster Care Fortnight is a prime opportunity to remind all staff of the needs, values, aims and objectives of the fostering service, and help them consider their role in meeting these.

Foster Care Fortnight 2016 could also be a good opportunity to launch your Fostering Friendly employers scheme, detailing your service’s commitment to helping foster carers balance fostering and other work. See www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/Fosteringfriendly for more information.

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**TOP TIPS**

- Be clear about who you are trying to reach with your recruitment activity during Foster Care Fortnight. A small amount of targeted marketing activity is often more fruitful than a larger amount of more general activity.

- Say thank you to your current foster carers. The Fostering Network has a range of mugs you can purchase for your foster carers (and your social workers). These could be a great way to say thank you during Foster Care Fortnight. You can purchase mugs at www.fosteringresources.co.uk or phone Kirsty on 020 7620 8403 if you would like to bulk purchase.

- Make use of the theme, the Foster CareFortnight logo and the hashtag #FCF2016 to ensure your local campaign is linked in with the national campaign.

- Your foster carers are often your best recruitment resource. Don’t forget to make use of them during the fortnight.
Many fostering services use the annual Foster Care Fortnight theme as the basis of all their campaign activity – which we positively encourage! Time to Foster; Time to Care (and the associated every 20 minutes statistic) has the potential to be used during the fortnight, through offline and online activity or aspects of either. The following provides some ideas for how you can use the campaign.

**Offline**

Fetes, fairs, high streets, stations and supermarkets are prime locations for foster carer recruitment activity during Foster Care Fortnight. Having chosen your location based on previous or predicted successes, a fostering stand or stall could feature information about the type of children needing fostering, and why now is the time to care for them. As mentioned above, we would strongly recommend having your existing foster carers (and young people) helping to staff the stand – it’s great for recruitment and shows how much you value your foster carers.

Given the theme, you could perhaps choose a location with a physical clock – below a clock tower in a market place, for example – to act as a visual reminder that now is the time to foster.

We will be producing placards for your foster carers, fostering service staff and members of the public to write on and to share online, but why not make a massive placard to have at your recruitment events?

The placards ask people to share their favourite 20 minutes of last year. This acts as an opportunity to highlight the fact that while they were enjoying those 20 minutes a child came in to care in need of a foster family. We would encourage you to ask your foster carers to write in their favourite 20 minutes of being a foster carer – it might be the time their fostered child first slept through the night, or the first time they saw a child they used to foster who was now settled back at home or with an adoptive family.

**Online – your website**

Alongside foster carers, your website is one of your greatest assets in recruiting foster carers. Providing compelling and engaging information on the full range of fostering subjects will increase the likelihood that an individual will follow up their search with a firm enquiry. From the basics of inviting visitors to your fostering pages to sign up to receive email bulletins, or holding online Q&As, Time to Foster; Time to Care can be used to illustrate how often a child comes into care in your service. This could be expanded to include a running total of the number of children who have come into care during Foster Care Fortnight. It is important to clarify that these children will be cared for, while stressing the need for more people to come forward so the right foster carer can be found for each child, first time.
**Online – social media**

The primary social media sites are now an accepted channel in the foster carer recruitment marketing. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube have been well utilised to raise awareness of fostering, convey local issues and build relationships with a highly targeted audience.

Challenge your social followers to share their favourite 20 minutes, or to take a photo with the placard and post it.

We will be using the hashtag #FCF2016 through the fortnight and would encourage you to use it throughout your social media too.

During the fortnight we will also be having thematic days which will give you the opportunity to focus on particular aspects of fostering, through tweets, Facebook posts and blogs. Visit our website, www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fcf-services for a list of the themes (available from the end of March).

**Involving local businesses**

Combining fostering with other work is a reality for a number of foster carers. The Fostering Network’s report Combining Fostering and Other Work explores some of the key challenges faced and makes recommendations for fostering services to consider. We have developed our own Fostering Friendly employer scheme, including a policy for fostering services and other employers to adapt locally. (See www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fosteringfriendly for more information.)

Increasing numbers of businesses are developing foster friendly employee policies to recognise the role and needs of foster carers in their organisation. Support businesses in your area to do so by highlighting the role of foster carers, why organisations need to give foster caring employees the ‘time to care’, particularly when welcoming a new child into their home.

**TOP TIPS**

- Choose a location for your promotional activity which will enable you to reach your specific target audience.
- Make use of the placard (we can send you some or you can download them from www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fcf) and use them at events and across your digital channels.
- Use the every 20 minutes statistic to create engaging web content, including blogs or videos from your foster carers talking about their best 20 minutes of being a foster carer.
- Use the hashtag #FCF2016, the every 20 minutes placard, and the Foster Care Fortnight logo to be part of the national campaign.
- Join in the theme days to give a focus to your social media engagement.
- Make sure everyone in your service is engaged with Foster Care Fortnight. Perhaps use a fostering quiz as a way of getting over the key statistics and needs for your fostering service. Or have a pledge board, inviting each person to put forward one thing they will do to promote Foster Care Fortnight.
Engaging the local media

The Fostering Network aims to generate significant media coverage across the UK during Foster Care Fortnight, with over a 1,000 pieces of coverage for each of the previous few years.

Local media outlets are often primed to respond to national issues if they can make a local connection. This year’s theme therefore provides the perfect opportunity for your fostering service to make the most of the heightened interest in fostering in your area, and ensure that if local people are motivated by the Time to Care, Time to Foster message they know where to go in response.

The Fostering Network’s Guide to Engaging the Media has suggestions and top tips on how to maximise the profile of Foster Care Fortnight in your area. Visit our website (www.thefosteringnetwork.org/fcf-services) from March to download the guide or, for more information, contact media@fostering.net

Celebrity support

Celebrities can play big part in creating a buzz and excitement in your Foster Care Fortnight campaign.

For the past few years The Fostering Network has been fortunate to have the support of a range of celebrities for Foster Care Fortnight. We share quotes and photos of celebrities on our website, and member fostering services are welcome to make use of them.

A celebrity does not necessarily have to be ‘A’ list. A locally recognisable weather presenter, politician, radio or news presenter or sports person will be far more appropriate and give a local connection to your service. You can invite your celebrity to the launch of your campaign, present at an awards event

- Download our Guide to Engaging the Media for lots more support and ideas.
- Make use of local celebrities to endorse your local campaign.
- Use the every 20 minute statistic to gather some local media coverage.
Reflecting on your own practice

You do not have to reinvent the wheel this Foster Care Fortnight. A lot of your existing recruitment and retention activity will fit seamlessly with this year’s theme and tie your endeavours into the national activity.

Take some time to reflect on previous years’ Foster Care Fortnights. What’s worked well? What hasn’t? Are there things you are planning on doing this year simply because you always do them? Do you have accurate methods for tracking the impact of your promotional activity? If not, what do you need to do this year to make sure that you do?

- How will your messaging develop the theme? And how will it vary for each of the audiences you are seeking to reach?
- What will your call to action be? Go to a website for further information? Make a phone call, and/or attend an information session?
- One of the key personality traits of most foster carers is that they prefer to make decisions after one-to-one conversations. Do your current plans allow for this to happen?
- Review and refresh your whole process. For example, is your website easily navigable to the key issues, and is it up to date? Do you have enough well-informed people to take phone calls? Do you have everything in place for if you were to see a sudden upturn in enquiries?
- Make sure you understand the process of what happens when an individual submits an enquiry, where do they go on their ‘customer journey’?
- Ensure you have an effective tracking system in place for those who express an interest in becoming a foster carer.
- Do you want people to rule themselves out before speaking with you, or do you have sufficient resources to process all enquiries to see if you are able to rule more people in?
Fundraising weekend – 21 and 22 May

This Foster Care Fortnight we will be having a focus on fundraising during the middle weekend (21 and 22 May). We have a range of ways that you can get involved in this weekend.

As well as raising funds to support The Fostering Network as we help transform fostered children’s lives, fundraising is a great way to raise the profile of fostering and to bring people together during Foster Care Fortnight.

Organising a fundraising event can feel a little daunting if you haven’t done it before, but it’s a really wonderful way of adding to any recruitment or celebration events you are planning or organising this year.

To help and inspire you we’ve launched a range of new fundraising ideas to encourage foster carers, social workers and fostering service team across the UK to get together with their friends, family and colleagues to support The Fostering Network!

Why do we need your support?

Like you, we are passionate about the difference foster care makes to children and young people. Like you, we believe foster care changes lives. And like you, we want to ensure all fostered children have a positive experience of family life. That’s why we work to help every fostered child to overcome the challenges of their early lives, to achieve their very best and to make a positive contribution to society.

To make this happen, we are focusing our work with children and young people on four key themes: stability and relationships; education; health and wellbeing; and confidence and life skills. Your fundraising will help us to develop and deliver programmes, projects and activities to improve outcomes for fostered children and young people in these areas.

Our membership income only covers one third of what we do. That’s why we need your support to help us to transform fostered children’s lives.

Fundraising ideas and inspiration

Be creative! Throughout the fortnight, your service may find time to bake or walk for fostering to help raise funds for The Fostering Network; time to draw or write for fostering to inspire sons and daughters or fostered children to express their thoughts on fostering. For the more adventurous, time to abseil or sky dive for fostering could provide a spectacular PR opportunity.

**TREK 2016**

**for Team TFN**

Climb one of the UK’s highest peaks
- Ben Nevis
- Snowdon
- Scafell Pike

Friday 13 to Sunday 15 May

Raise money to help make foster care better

Sign up at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/treks

If trekking isn’t for you, find out about other ways to raise funds at thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/fundraise
Foster Bake
Bake sales and tea parties are fun ways to
fundraise for The Fostering Network. It’s the
perfect opportunity to get together with your
colleagues, friends and family while helping to
make foster care better.
www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/foster-bake

Foster Quiz
Foster Quizzes are fun, competitive, and bring your whole
community together. They’re also extremely easy to host
especially as we can provide the questions
(and answers!).
www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/foster-quiz

Foster Walk
You can support Foster Care Fortnight by
organising a sponsored Foster Walk. These 5km
family friendly walks will bring foster families
together for a great day out and help us to
continue our life-changing work transforming
fostered children’s lives. If you live near London, The
Fostering Network is hosting our own Foster Walk
in London on 22 May, as well as walks in Cardiff and
Glasgow later in the year.
www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/foster-walk

Foster Care Fortnight Treks
Do you and your team want to go the extra mile to
support The Fostering Network? This year we’ve arranged
something extra special as a great way to launch Foster
Care Fortnight - we’re holding three simultaneous treks
up the UK’s highest peaks, Ben Nevis, Snowdon and Scafell
Pike. These treks will take place over one weekend at the
start of Foster Care Fortnight, Friday 13-15 May 2016.
www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/treks

20 minute challenge
Could you or your foster families take part in a fun,
challenging or quirky activity for 20 minutes – and at the
same time raise money for The Fostering Network? How
about bouncing on space hoppers, sitting in a bath of
custard or reading Shakespearean sonnets for 20 minutes?
www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/20-min-challenge

Our fundraising team
Our experienced fundraising team is on hand to
provide fundraising advice, event planning tips and all
the resources you need to make whatever fundraising
idea you have a success!

If you are interested in celebrating Foster Care
Fortnight with a fundraising event please get in touch
with our fundraising team today at fundraising@
fostering.net or 020 7620 8403.