Press Pack - Foster Care Fortnight

*Foster Care Fortnight*, which runs from Monday 14 to Sunday 27 May, is the annual awareness campaign run by the Fostering Network to highlight the urgent need for more foster carers.

Every 22 minutes a child comes into care across the UK and needs a foster family. This year alone fostering services need at least 8,750 new foster families to offer children in care the safe and stable homes they need.

This pack provides key facts, information and case studies to help media report on fostering and the urgent need for more people to come forward.

**Contents**

- What is Foster Care Fortnight?
- Why are more foster carers needed?
- Fostering FAQs
- Fostering stats
- Celebrity support
- Case studies

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.

Visit www.22minutes.org.uk to watch films of foster carers and read their blogs.
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 across the UK.

This year’s campaign runs from Monday 14 to Sunday 27 May. Highlighting the fact that a child comes into care and needs a foster family every 22 minutes across the UK, it will encourage more people to come forward and consider becoming a foster carer.

Fostering services – local authorities and independent agencies - throughout the UK join in the campaign to run local activity promoting the specific needs they have for foster carers in their area.

For more information about fostering visit [www.22minutes.org.uk](http://www.22minutes.org.uk) to watch foster carers talking about their experiences and read their blogs. Those interested in becoming foster carers can also contact their local fostering service or call Fosterline on 0800 040 7675 [Fosterline Scotland 0141 204 1400; Fosterline Wales 0800 316 7664; Northern Ireland 0800 316 7664].

Why do we need more foster carers?

Since the tragic death of baby Peter Connelly in August 2007, more and more children have been coming into care. In fact, a child comes into care in the UK needing a foster family every 22 minutes.

As the vast majority of children in care live with foster families, thousands of new foster carers are needed now – at least 8,750 in 2012 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.

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.

“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.”

_Rosella Potts, foster carer_

Contact the Fostering Network media team on [media@fostering.net](mailto:media@fostering.net) or 020 7620 6425
Fostering FAQs

What is fostering?

Fostering is a way of offering children and young people who need to be in care a stable family environment while their own parents are unable to look after them. On any one day, around 59,000 children live with 45,000 foster families across the UK.

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.

What is the difference between fostering and adoption?

Fostering is usually a temporary way of offering children a home until they can return to their family, although many live with foster carers for years, 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 provides a new family for a child and their legal relationship with their birth family ends. About 4,000 out of the 75,000 children in care away from home in the UK are awaiting adoptive families. See www.nationaladoptionweek.org.uk for more information.

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.

“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.”

Alan Torry, foster carer
**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.

**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 can apply to foster regardless of marital status, sexuality or residential status. Foster carers come from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds which reflect the children and young people who are in care.

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.

Prospective foster carers should ask their local fostering services about the financial support that they offer.

“I’m now at university doing really well for myself and I’m so much happier than before. I feel this is due to the support I received from my foster carers when I was a teenager. They are the reason for a major turning point in my life and for my success today.”

Andrew Mulley, care leaver
Fostering stats – the need for more foster families

Around 59,000 children are living with foster families today. Foster care provides children with a safe, secure and nurturing family environment, and allows them to keep in contact with their own families if they wish.

In the UK there are at least 45,000 foster families. The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need a further 8,750 foster families in 2012 alone.

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"Foster carers come from all walks of life, from teachers to factory workers and builders to nurses.

"If you want to work with children and have the right skills to foster, then you can help make a real difference to the lives of children and young people in your area."

Vicki Swain, the Fostering Network
Celebrity support

Samantha Morton

Oscar nominee Samantha Morton is the latest big name to throw her support behind this year’s Foster Care Fortnight campaign.

The film star, who spent time in the care system as a youngster, feels passionately that no child should be without a safe and secure environment in which to grow and develop.

Samantha said: “As a foster child myself I would not be where I am today without the people that were kind enough to help and care for me when others were unable.

“Please please consider fostering a child.”

Gareth Gates

Gareth Gates, star of stage and screen, is supporting Foster Care Fortnight 2012.

The singer has thrown his support behind this year’s campaign because he feels, as the son of a foster carer, that more people need to take up the mantle of caring for children in our communities.

Gareth said of his experiences: “When I was growing up, I was always surrounded by lots of other children. In addition to my three sisters my Mum and Dad fostered children. Over the years around 50 boys and girls of all ages, from different backgrounds have been a part of our family.

“My parents wanted to give other children some of the security and love that we had. Many of the kids who came into our family didn’t have a great start in life and I know my Mum and Dad made a huge difference.

“I have seen first-hand, what a difference a foster carer can make on a child’s life. That’s why I’m supporting the Fostering Network with this year’s Foster Care Fortnight.”
**Jacqueline Wilson**

Award-winning author Jacqueline Wilson has supported Foster Care Fortnight and the Fostering Network’s wider work for many years.

Jacqueline said: “I am proud to be associated with the Fostering Network, and know that many real-life Tracy Beakers have been helped towards a much brighter future through foster care.

“There are tens of thousands of children living with foster families across the country, but many more foster carers are needed. Foster Care Fortnight is a great opportunity to show you have the time to care.”

**Fern Britton**

TV presenter Fern Britton has joined a range of celebrities in supporting this year’s Foster Care Fortnight campaign.

Fern said: “Some children in the UK do not have the basics that every child should be able to expect from their parents. Foster carers give the love, support, guidance and encouragement that children need to develop and have the best chance of a positive future.

“Foster Care Fortnight is a fantastic celebration of the dedication foster carers give to the most vulnerable children around the UK.

“With a child coming into care and needing a foster home every 22 minutes, find out if you have the skills needed to foster today.”

**Gabby Logan**

Television personality Gabby Logan is a long-term supporter of Foster Care Fortnight.

Gabby said: “Every child deserves to grow up in a safe and nurturing home and foster carers throughout the UK devote their time and energy all year round to providing this for some of our most vulnerable children.

“I am supporting the Fostering Network’s Foster Care Fortnight again this year to celebrate foster carers’ hard work and to encourage others to find out if they have the skills needed to foster.

“With a child coming into care and needing a foster home every 22 minutes, now is the time to care.”
Case studies

Foster carers

People come into fostering from lots of different backgrounds and with a huge range of experiences. Many come from previous careers in teaching, child care and health, and others have child care experience with children in their own families and communities.

Foster carers are as diverse as the children they look after, but they share a commitment to helping vulnerable children transform their lives. Here are a few examples of foster carers who have found the time to care.

Marion Corr – foster carer, Northern Ireland

Marion and her husband Hugh have been fostering for almost 20 years, and have looked after 17 children. They are the Foster Carers of the Year in Northern Ireland.

“We feel so proud of what we’ve achieved. When children first come to stay with us they are often fearful and uncertain. By listening, loving and putting our faith in them over time we see their confidence grow, they begin to trust us and they find their voice. That’s the real reward for us.”

Louise Groves – care leaver and foster carer, England

When Louise was 11, her mother suffered a brain tumour and passed away two years later. This experience hit her family hard, with her father and brother also dying.

Louise was placed in foster care where she received the stability, support and love she needed at this incredibly difficult time. It was around this time Louise also found out that she could not have children of her own.

During her time living with a foster family Louise realised that she would one day become a foster carer. She has now been fostering for five years, specialising in looking after teenagers and younger children on a long-term and short-term basis.

“People are often amazed that I spend my time looking after teenagers who aren’t even mine, but it’s the best job I’ve ever had. So often we focus on the stereotype of teenagers being hard work, but in my experience they are fun and fascinating individuals.

“Fostering isn’t for everyone, and not all foster carers will specialise in teenagers. But if you’re patient, have got good communication skills, don’t give up easily and enjoy the company of young people, then fostering teenagers could be right up your street.”
Richard Iles – foster carer, England

Richard and his partner Michael are foster carers in Southampton. Richard was 19 when he was approved as a foster carer and Michael was approved three years ago.

“I had been working with children with disabilities when a child I was working with needed a foster carer. Although I was only 19 when I was approved, and it was a lot of responsibility at that age, I knew I was doing the right thing.

“It was great when Michael was approved three years ago and now we have a nine-year-old who comes to us for two weekends a month for a short break. We often also care for groups of siblings on the weekend too.

“We’ve never come up against any problems or prejudice for being a same sex couple that foster. I think everyone that knows us realises how happy we are fostering, and how happy the children we care for are when they come to stay with us. I would encourage anyone thinking of fostering not to wait, just to pick up the phone and find out more.”

Elaine Medford – foster carer, England

Elaine has fostered with her partner Junior for the past 13 years. Elaine and Junior have fostered children and young people of all ages and have also looked after young mothers and their babies.

“With fostering you’re providing a child with security they may not have had, and it can make a big difference. It is very satisfying when a child who has previously had problems comes back to you and you can see you’ve made a long-term difference.

“Our own children are very involved in the fostering and help the children that come to stay with us to settle in. Fostering as a family is wonderful. It can be extremely challenging and demanding, but it has great rewards.”

Stewart Duncan – foster carer, Scotland

Stewart has fostered with his wife Sharon in Edinburgh for the past 15 years. Along with their son Nathan, the Duncans are experienced in a range of different forms of care, including short break, long term and specialist.

“It’s really rewarding when you see the day-by-day improvement in a child. You see them build up self-esteem and come out of their shell. Then you know you are really making a difference, you see their confidence grow and they start to make friends.

“To have Nathan’s support and involvement has been integral to our fostering placements being a success. He helps the young people who come to stay with us to settle in and make them feel at home. Fostering is one of the most important things we have done as a family.”
Alan Torry – foster carer, Wales

Alan has been fostering with his partner Norma in Carmarthenshire for 20 years. They have cared for over 70 children, from the age of four upwards.

"Becoming a foster carer is the best thing I’ve ever done. Every day I’m helping young people to turn their lives around. As well as providing a caring, nurturing home and supportive family life to these children, I consider myself a professional child care expert and a crucial part of the team that works with children in care.

"Being a foster carer is one of the most challenging roles of my career, but by far the most rewarding. It’s a true vocation and I wouldn’t change it for the world."

We know lots more foster carers who are willing to tell their stories to the media. If you would like to speak to one, please get in touch with the Fostering Network’s media team, or your local fostering service for local media work.

Young people with experience of fostering

Young people who have lived with foster families have some strong stories to tell. Here are the experiences of two young people who grew up in care, as well as the son of a foster carer talking from his perspective.

Clare Marshall – care leaver

Clare was two when she went into care. After being moved around a lot of different homes during the first five years, Clare went to live with a foster carer who she now considers to be her mum. She has just completed her degree in fashion design at Northumbria University.

“I’ve had a stable home since I was about eight years old when I was placed with my foster family, who are amazing. I think foster care is an excellent service that provides children with vital help and support.

“I had some tough experiences at the start, but in a way I think it gave me the determination, inspiration and ambition I needed. My foster carer, who I now see as my mum, always instilled good values in me and she’s why I’ve been successful and gone on to university. She’s encouraged me to go for everything I want to achieve and has been the biggest inspiration in my whole life.

“My proudest moment was definitely getting into university. I’ve been told not many young people in foster care go on to further education so it was a huge achievement for me to get my place at university.”
Curtis Moore – care leaver

Curtis went into care when he was 11 years old. Two years ago he was placed with his foster carers Elaine and Junior who have encouraged and supported Curtis’s dream of becoming a singer.

“I’ve been in and out of care since I was 11 years old. I would be in care for a year then go home to my mum for a few months, and then go back in again. I was in a children’s home at one point and then came to live with Elaine and Junior two years ago.

“This placement has been by far the best. I think I’ve really grown up. I was getting into a lot of trouble before, but I have realised that being away from the area I was living in is probably the best thing for me.

“Elaine pushes me to do well and before I came to stay with her my placements hadn’t lasted two days let alone two years! I am really proud of my music career so far, and for staying out of trouble.”

George Goodfellow – son of a foster carer

George’s parents, Rachel and Phillip, have been fostering for six and a half years and have specialised in emergency and short term care.

They live in a farmhouse, which they share with lots of animals including piglets, chickens, cockerels, two dogs and a family cat. Playing with and caring for the animals is a great way for the children to bond and really helps fostered children to settle in.

“I really enjoy fostering as it is a fantastic way of making new friends, even though sometimes for only a short time.

“When a new child arrives in our home me and my brothers show them around the house explaining how things work and helping them to settle in. Fostering is great fun as you never know who may be here from one moment to the next. It is very exciting.”

Further information

The following fostering media factsheets are also available. To download, just click on the link below.

- The road to fostering – the approval process for new foster carers
- Skills and myths – a checklist of foster care skills and a fostering mythbuster
- Types of fostering – a handy summary of the different types of foster care