Foster Care Fortnight™ 2013 press pack

Fostering: get in the frame

_Foster Care Fortnight_, which runs from Monday 13 to Sunday 26 May, is the UK’s annual awareness campaign, run by charity the Fostering Network to highlight the urgent need for more foster carers.

In 2013, we’re asking the public to _get in the frame_ and consider becoming a foster carer, or show their support for fostering. This year alone fostering services need at least 9,000 new foster families to offer children in care the safe and stable homes they need.

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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.

Getting involved in _Foster Care Fortnight_ gives you the opportunity to tell unique stories of kindness, love, skill and devotion to supporting some of Britain’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, put themselves in the frame, 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 **9,000** in 2013 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.
**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 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 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.”

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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](http://www.fostering.net/media), on [Twitter](http://Twitter) and on [Facebook](http://Facebook).
**ten steps to becoming a foster carer**

Being a foster carer is demanding and needs the best people to come forward and care for some of Britain’s most vulnerable children. If you think you can put yourself in the frame and become a foster carer during 2013, 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 at least six months.

1. **Starting point** – see [www.couldyoufoster.org.uk](http://www.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. **Getting 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. **Becoming a foster carer** – the fostering service then makes the final decision about approval.
10. **Looking 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.”
fostering stats – the need for more foster families

Around 62,000 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 at least 50,000 foster families. The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need a further 9,000 foster families in 2013 alone.

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## fostering stats by nation

### England
- More than 50,000 children live with foster families on any one day;
- This is four-fifths of the 63,500 children in care who are looked after away from home;
- There are around 41,000 foster families;
- A further 7,350 foster families are needed in 2013.

### Northern Ireland
- Nearly 2,000 children live with foster families on any one day;
- This is more than four-fifths of the 2,350 children in care who are looked after away from home;
- There are approximately 1,950 foster families, including 450 family and friends carers;
- A further 200 foster families are needed in 2013.

### Scotland
- 5,000 children live with foster families on any one day;
- This is nearly three-quarters of 6,800 children in care who are looked after away from home and family;
- There are approximately 4,300 foster families;
- A further 850 foster families are needed in 2013.

### Wales
- 4,430 children were living with foster families on 31 March 2012;
- This is over four-fifths of the 5,200 children in care looked after away from home;
- There are approximately 3,350 foster families in Wales;
- A further 600 foster families are needed in 2013.
**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, 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 4,000 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.

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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.

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

The real heroes of fostering are the foster carers. They devote their lives and careers to helping some of the UK’s most vulnerable children and young people. Foster carers are as diverse as the children they look after, but they share a commitment to helping vulnerable children transform their lives.

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. Here are a few examples of foster carers who have put themselves in the frame.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FOSTERING SERVICES FOR CASE STUDIES

Brid Featherstone – foster carer

Brid combines fostering with being a university professor, specialising in social care.

"Being a foster carer has been the most rewarding experience for me and ranks right up there at the top when I consider what I've done in my life. I have learned a lot, laughed a lot and yes, sometimes cried! It's clearly not for everyone but if you want to make a difference to children’s lives, it can provide a wonderful opportunity."

Louise Groves – care leaver and foster carer

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.”
young people with experience of fostering

Young people who have lived with foster families have some strong stories to tell. These stories are the reason that we are asking people to put themselves in the frame and to consider becoming a foster carer.

Many care leavers have fascinating stories to tell of triumph in the face of adversary.

Clare Marshall – fashion designer

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.”

We know more foster carers and care leavers 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.
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 2013.

"With so many real-life Tracy Beakers out there needing the love and support of dedicated foster carers, I am proud to be supporting Foster Care Fortnight 2013.

"Tens of thousands of children across the country live with foster carers. Why not make 2013 the year that you get in the frame and consider becoming a foster carer?"

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’m putting myself in the frame during 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. So if you think you can be there for some of the UK’s most vulnerable children then go on, I urge you, put yourself in the frame today and consider being a foster carer."

Gareth Gates

Gareth Gates, star of stage and screen, is supporting Foster Care Fortnight 2013.

The singer has thrown his support behind the campaign because he feels, as the son of a foster carer, that more people need to take up caring for children.

"I am proud to be from a fostering family. My parents put themselves in the frame to care for some of the UK’s most vulnerable children. They offered a home, security, stability and love to children because they wanted to make a difference to their lives.

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some famous faces who grew up in care

Actor, Neil Morrisey
Actor, Kathy Burke
Baker, Lorraine Pascale
Actor, Samantha Morton
Actor, Paul Barber
Poet, Lemn Sissay
Businessman, John Madejski
Footballer, Mario Balotelli

famous sons and daughters of foster carers

Fashion designer, Coleen Rooney
Madness frontman, Suggs
Singer and actor, Gareth Gates
Children’s minister, Edward Timpson MP
"Fostering had a positive effect on my family, it helped me learn more about myself and develop a better understanding of others. I hope that this Foster Care Fortnight, you and your family consider putting yourselves in the frame and becoming foster carers."

Cathy Glass

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

"Fostering is about making a difference, big and small. It is very demanding but the rewards are never ending. Neither your child’s life nor your own will ever be the same again. Would I do it all again? Absolutely!"

Dani Harmer

Dani Harmer, star of Strictly Come Dancing, is better known to those involved in foster care as Tracy Beaker. The star of the TV adaptation of Jacqueline Wilson’s most famous series of books is supporting Foster Care Fortnight 2013.

"I grew up playing Tracy Beaker, a girl who lived in a children’s home and then with a foster carer, and I have met many children with similar experiences. I have seen the positive affected that living with foster carers who have the right skills, commitment and big hearts can have on children.

"I hope that this Foster Care Fortnight you consider putting yourself in the frame and becoming a foster carer so you can help give one of the real-life Tracy Beakers the stability, love and support that they long for.”

Gabby Logan

Gabby Logan, television presenter and long-term supporter of the Fostering Network, is asking people to get in the frame this Foster Care Fortnight.

"I believe that every child deserves to grow up in a safe, nurturing and loving environment. As a parent myself I know what a positive difference this can make. To know that the number of children who will spend tonight in care would fill the Olympic stadium, and that foster carers will care for the vast majority of these children, shows how vital good foster carers are to our society.

"If you think you could be one of those incredible carers then please consider getting in the frame and to find out whether they have the skills need to foster so that they can provide a loving, nurturing home to a children in care at their time of greatest need.”

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further reading

Motivations to Foster – This report contains key information about who fosters and why they foster. With increasing numbers of children coming into care and an ongoing shortage of foster carers, the toolkit looks at what is working well already and how to build on that success.

Bursting at the Seams - The care system has seen a recent unprecedented rise in the number, particularly those needing foster placements. This report investigates the effects of this increase on fostering services and examines the challenges fostering services are experiencing in their efforts to find the right foster families for all children who need them.

Fostering: 10 years on (bi-lingual English/Welsh) - To mark its 10th anniversary, the Fostering Network Wales published Fostering: 10 years on, a new report looking at what has changed over the last decade and the challenges that lie ahead for foster care in Wales.

Like Everyone Else (executive summary) - This report is based on the findings of a survey of foster carers in the summer of 2012 looking at whether foster carers are able to take day-to-day decisions about caring for their fostered child or young person, and whether the level of authority delegated to foster carers has increased over the past two years.

Love Fostering, Need Pay - This report gives the results of the Fostering Network’s 2009 pay survey of foster carers.

Update to the Cost of Foster Care report - Undertaken by Lisa Holmes and Jean Soper of the Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University and released in June 2010, this supplement to The Cost of Foster Care updates the estimates of the investment needed to provide a properly resourced foster care service throughout the UK.
contact the media team and ask the experts

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Jackie Sanders – head of media and campaigns

Matt Cooper – communications manager

Dominic Stevenson – senior media officer

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

Robert Tapsfield, chief executive – Expertise includes the current state of foster care and the future of foster care, the Government’s approach to foster care and foster care across the UK’s four nations.

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.

Freda Lewis, 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.

Jackie Sanders, head of media and campaigns – 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.

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.