

Councillors Briefing Note No. 350

Service: Families and Children's Services
Further Enquiries to: Matthew Turner – Fostering Service Manager
Date Prepared: 20 April 2018
Direct Line: 01225 712541

Recruitment of foster carers

Wiltshire needs more local authority foster carers; do you know of anyone who may wish to become a foster carer? Please read this briefing note, and share this information with anyone you think may be a suitable carer.

Who can foster?

It is important to engage with local communities when recruiting foster carers to look after children, who are unable to remain living with their parents or wider family. Foster carers are ordinary people and so they are likely to be living in any part of the county, in any community. To become an approved Wiltshire foster carer the person needs to:

- Be at least 21 years old (although they can apply from the age of 18)
- Have a spare bedroom big enough for a child or young person to use
- Be a full-time resident in the UK or have leave to remain
- Be able to give the time to care for a child or young person on a full or part-time basis

There are some myths about fostering and so it is important to know that:

- A person can be single and foster although there will need to be a support network in place
- It isn't necessary for a carer to own their own home - they will need to be able to show stability of accommodation
- Sexual orientation or identity will not prevent someone from fostering
- Religion will not prevent someone from fostering however they will need to demonstrate how they would support a child from a different faith or religion or who is questioning their faith
- It isn't necessary to have a formal qualification – we will provide training
- It is possible to continue to work and foster – we will talk to an applicant about how this can work
- There is no upper age limit to fostering.

What do we need?

Wiltshire is a large county and foster carers are needed **in all areas**, although it is recognised that the main priority is to recruit in the main towns to the north and west of the county (Chippenham and Trowbridge) and to the south (Salisbury). Most looked after children come from these areas and so generally local foster carers are needed to support children continuing at school and college and to facilitate family contact more easily.

Broadly speaking, Wiltshire Council needs to recruit foster carers of all types, including specialisms. There is a need to recruit and assess carers who can care for challenging children (both younger children and adolescents) showing considerable skill and resilience.

There is a need to develop a pool of parent and child foster carers. These are foster carers who can look after a parent with their child, in the carer's own home for an agreed time. There are two sorts of arrangement: support placements where the parent is more capable of looking after their child but needs some help, and assessment placements where concerns are higher and an assessment is needed for court.

There is a need to have a pool of STEPS (Short Term Emergency Placements Scheme) carers, ideally across the county who can look after children on a short term, emergency basis before helping to move them on to longer term placements or supporting their return home.

There is a need for specialist carers for children with disabilities or additional needs, requiring short break care as part of a wider support plan, and for people who can provide Supported Lodgings placements for older young people moving towards independence, care leavers and young people who are unaccompanied.

Wiltshire Council has approximately **440** children in care at any one time. In December 2017, there were approximately 165 fostering households of all types and 185 children were living with foster carers.

Not all approved fostering places are available at any one time; carers may be unavailable because of ill health, changes in their family or they may be on holiday. We need to recruit another 120 households in the next three years to meet the need. This will ensure there are enough foster carers to look after children and meet our target of having **75%** of children living with foster carers, to provide choice and flexibility about location and type of family and to provide long term placements that will support children to age 18 and beyond.

What are we doing and how can you help?

To help meet the three-year recruitment target, we have a refreshed "branding" aligned with the headline slogan: "Fostering makes a positive difference to a child's life". There are a series of messages that will help those who may be interested in fostering to understand what it means to them. For example:

- Could you give a child love, warmth and a positive home life?
- Do you have the time and space to offer a child a loving home?
- Fostering can transform a child's life and help them achieve their full potential.
- Do you have room in your family for a child in need of a stable loving home? You can combine fostering with caring for your own children or working.
- We need 36 new foster carers this year. Could you be one of them?
- Could you care for a child in a crisis? We need short term, emergency foster carers
- Could you guide and support a new mum? Foster carers are needed for new mother and babies that have no family support.
- No other job loves you back the way fostering does.
- Want a job that enables you to change the life of a young person?

In summary, the key aims and objectives for 2018-21 are as follows:

- Recruit sufficient foster carers by 2021 (target approximately 120), so children who require foster placements can be placed locally and where possible, there is a choice of suitable placements for children
- Ensure the timeliness of fostering recruitment, assessment and approval work
- Recruit foster carers who can meet the individual needs of a child and provide placements that reflect or respect the child's identity, ethnicity, culture, religion and language
- Improve the retention of foster carers by supporting them in their role by making sure they are fully prepared, trained and supervised by an allocated qualified supervising social worker
- Continue to reward foster carers in line with their skills and experience, recognising the

importance of other members of the household, including carers' own children and the support they require

- Improve outcomes for children in care including the identification of permanence, placement stability, health and education outcomes

We encourage Wiltshire Council to help by talking to friends, work colleagues, members of community groups and organisations about fostering. This can happen as you go about your usual day to day business or at specific meetings and events – you can say how important it is and what a difference it can make to the lives of vulnerable children and young people in the county. Recent research carried out at Bristol University with children in care shows how important it is that children have someone they can trust, who is interested in them and that:

“Living with someone that you have a good and trustful relationship with is the key to a happy and effective placement”

To find out more about fostering for Wiltshire please visit:

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/fostering>

Or phone 01225 716510 (office hours) or 0845 6070888 (out of hours)

Our next information evenings are:

29 May, 7pm - 8pm, County Hall, Trowbridge

26 June, 7pm – 8pm, County Hall, Trowbridge

24 July, 7pm – 8pm, County Hall, Trowbridge

25 September, 7pm – 8pm, County Hall, Trowbridge

30 October, 7pm – 8pm, Five Rivers Health and Wellbeing Centre, Salisbury

Matthew Turner

Fostering Service Manager

Matthew.turner@wiltshire.gov.uk