**ABOUT FOSTERING**

**Change children’s lives for the better and join the growing community of Highland Foster Carers.**

Here is some basic information about fostering and a brief outline of the assessment process itself. The information is intended to allow you to think about the implications for yourself and your family of becoming a Foster Carer.

# WHY ARE CHILDREN and TEENAGERS LOOKED AFTER BY FOSTER CARERS?

Children of all ages and a variety of backgrounds find themselves being looked after by the Local Authority and placed with Foster Carers. There are many reasons why children and young people are unable to live with their own families, these may include:

* Abuse of alcohol or drugs by a parent
* Domestic Violence
* Neglect
* Emotional, sexual or physical abuse
* Poor mental or physical health of a parent.

The reality is that the children and young people who live with Foster Carers will have had a lot to cope with and experienced trauma in their young lives. Foster Carers will see these experiences reflected in the child’s emotions and behaviour and are there to help them to recover and heal.

What we do know is that with care, stability and hard work, most children and young people will thrive in Foster Care.

# TEMPORARY CARERS (provide Emergency, Short Breaks & Interim Placements)

Some carers are asked to look after children and young people on a temporary basis. The length of the placement could be from an overnight, a weekend, a month or longer. The children who go to live with temporary carers normally come from their parents’ home at a time of an emergency or crisis. Whatever the reason for them leaving their parents, children are themselves upset, distressed and confused. Initially the carers may have little background information if the family was not known to the Children & Families Team previously. Most children in temporary care return home to the care of their parents or move to stay with relatives. Foster Carers are crucial in making this possible. It is important that the children have as much safe contact with their parents in order for this to happen. These visits may not always be easy but it is vital that they happen if the family is to be reunited once their problems have been resolved.

For a small number of children it is not safe for them to return to the care of their parents and in these situations temporary carers look after the children until permanence plans are made for the remainder of their childhood. Relatives will be considered to care for the child permanently and if no one suitable is identified then depending on the child or young person’s age permanent foster care or adoption will be the plan for the child. In these situations temporary carers can play an important role in helping the child prepare for a new family.

You will need many skills as temporary foster carers some of which include:

* An ability to care for an unhappy distressed child
* An ability to be involved with the child’s parents
* An ability to help them get the best out of education
* An ability to make sure they are well and healthy.
* An ability to help the child move on, back to their parents, Kinship care or to permanent carers

Temporary fostering can be rewarding for carers. They can see the child become more settled and begin to grow and develop. Fostering is a vital and valued service to children and their families.

**PERMANENT FOSTER CARERS**

Permanent carers are asked to look after children and teenagers who cannot live with their parents. Prior to moving to permanent carers the child will have been living with temporary carers or a relative. They will have had difficulties in their early life and may have involved emotional, physical neglect or abuse.

Attempts to reunite the children with their parents will have been made and will have failed. Many of the children and young people may have had several periods of being looked after during their childhood either by Foster Carers or by relatives. All this means that they may not be easy to look after. They may have feelings of confusion, anger and hurt which is shown through difficult behaviour and a lack of trust in adults.

For many of these children and teenagers it is very important that they remain in contact with their family even though they cannot live with them.

Permanent carers provide a home for children and young people who are unable to live with their families for the rest of their childhood until they reach the age of independence or as long as they are needed.

Occasionally, some young people have been successfully returned to their parents after several years of support from Foster Carers.

As Permanent carers you need many skills, some of which involve:

* An ability to provide a stable home for as long as the child needs to be looked after
* An ability to accept the child’s past
* An ability to include the child’s parents in their future
* An ability to cope with unhappy children
* An ability to keep going even when things are difficult
* An ability to get the best out of education
* An ability to make sure they are well and healthy.

The rewards for permanent fostering are many but the main one is knowing that you have provided a secure home for a child to grow and develop and help them overcome the effects of their past.

**PAYMENT**

Foster Carers receive payments on a sliding scale according to the age of the child to cover the cost of looking after the child. In addition they receive a fee which is also according to the age of the child. Extra payments are made for birthdays, holidays and for the festive seasons. These are detailed in the (link to Fees & Allowances).

**WORKING WITH SOCIAL WORK, HEALTH & EDUCATION**

If you are approved as a Foster Carer you will have a Social Worker who specialises in Fostering and Adoption work. Their job is to support you and help you be a good foster carer. They are there to give advice, ideas, and make sure you are coping. As Foster Carers you will be expected to share information about the child, attend meetings on a regular basis so that good plans can be made about how best to help them. Many children in foster care need help to settle and do well at school. An active interest in their learning is essential. Working with health is also important, as some children/teenagers will have missed out on basic health provision.

**WHO CAN APPLY TO BE A FOSTER CARER?**

All carers must have a genuine concern for children and young people. Those children and young people who find themselves in foster care come from different backgrounds and have a variety of needs. To meet these needs different family settings are required, therefore there is no such thing as a typical foster family. You do need to have a spare room, and if you have children yourself you will have spoken to them about your interest in helping another child or teenager.

In Highland there are carers living in urban and rural areas. We accept applications from people who are single, married, living together or in a civil partnership; have different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds; employed or unemployed; have children of their own or have no children or have children who are now grown up and still live at home or live independently. You must be at least 21 years of age to apply.

SMOKING

If anyone in your household smokes you will not be approved to care for children under 5 years, who have complex health needs or breathing problems as they cannot be placed with you due to the potential impact on their health and development.

# WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

**PREPARATION & ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS**

The first step is to attend a preparation course. You will learn more about fostering and if it is right for you and your family. They are usually held over 2 days, or may be held on several evening sessions, if there are two applicants both must attend all the sessions.

Following your attendance at the Preparation Course you should complete the online application form if you wish to proceed to the next stage.

Once the service has received your application your assessment will be allocated to a Fostering & Adoption social worker to complete. The purpose of the assessment process is to identify your skills, competencies and experience of parenting and how you can use these to help children reach their potential. The assessment process is very thorough and as an agency, we must ensure that there is no reason why you cannot be entrusted with the care of someone else’s child.

We carry out assessments in a variety of ways and normally they should be completed within a 6 month period.

### THE ASSESSMENT MUST INCLUDE:

### PVG Membership & Enhanced Disclosure

### An application for membership to the PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) Scheme will be carried out for all applicants. If you have a criminal record it does not necessarily mean that you cannot foster a child, it depends on the offence and when it happened. There are some types of offence which would prevent you from being approved as a foster carer.

### All other adults in the household age 16+ years will require to have an Enhanced Disclosure. This will be updated every two years.

### Local Authority Checks

### In your application form you will be asked to give a list of your previous addresses. Checks will be made with the Local Authorities where you have lived since the age of 16 years. These checks are carried out to find out if you have had any previous contact with Social Work Services, which might suggest you should not foster a child.

### Medical Reports

Your GP will be required to give you a medical examination to determine if you are medically fit to have the full-time care of a child. Disability or illness does not necessarily mean that you cannot be a foster carer. However, your ability to look after a child will be assessed by the Medical Adviser to the Fostering Panel.

### References

### You will be asked to give the names of 3 people who can give you a personal reference. One of them should be a member of your own family and the other 2 should know you in your personal life rather than professionally in the way a Doctor or Minister might do. Your Social Worker will also be asked to interview two of your referees. Referees who can comment on you skills with children are particularly welcomed.

We will also be in contact, where appropriate, with previous partners and any children of your own or from previous relationships, to seek their views.

Employers References

We will request a reference from your current or last employer. We may also ask a previous employer for a reference where your job has involved caring for or working with children.

Health Visitors Report

A Health Visitor’s report will be requested if you have recently cared for a child under the age of 5 years.

### Educational Reference

We will contact the school of any child under the age of 18 years who was or is in your care, for a reference of your involvement with the school or nursery.

Other Adults

Other adults living in your household will be asked to consent to Police and medical reports. An enhanced disclosure will be required.

We will also ask for consent to contact previous partners of the applicants, where appropriate and/or adult children, for references or information.

### Documentation

You will be asked to produce your birth certificate, marriage certificate and any other relevant certificates, e.g. Extract Decrees of Divorce, gun licence.

**HOME STUDY/ASSESSMENT**

You and your allocated Social Worker will work together to provide evidence of your skills and abilities. You must show that you are competent to care for children in the following ways:

*Understanding the role of a foster carer*

* 1. *Child care experience and skills*
  2. *Support networks*
  3. *Involving a fostered child’s family*
  4. *Confidentiality*
  5. *Working as part of a team*
  6. *Organised, reliable, dependable*
  7. *Promotion of equality and diversity*
  8. *Communication skills*
  9. *Literacy skills*

*Understanding health, safety and health care*

* 1. *Providing a suitable environment*
  2. *Fire safety*
  3. *Health care*
  4. *Medical treatment*
  5. *Safer caring*
  6. *Additional safety concerns e.g. animals, guns, ponds and B&B etc.*

*Understanding children and young people*

* 1. *Understanding development*
  2. *Play and activities*
  3. *Attachment and Resilience*
  4. *Understanding and managing behaviour*
  5. *Supporting Education*
  6. *An ability to provide long term care and support to a young person until adulthood*

*Develop yourself*

* 1. *Understanding the impact of fostering*
  2. *Providing a positive role model*
  3. *Dealing with stress*
  4. *Professional development*

# FOSTERING PANEL

# All the information gathered during your assessment is presented to the Highland Council’s Fostering Panel. The Panel is made up of representatives from the Highland Council’s Health, Social Work, Education and Legal Services as well as a lay member with experience of fostering. You will be asked to attend part of the meeting, to discuss your application and assessment. Your Social Worker will be there. The Panel makes a recommendation about your suitability.

# DECISION

# You will receive a letter within 28 days from attending the Fostering Panel to tell you whether your application to become an approved foster carer has been successful. This decision is made by the Agency Decision Maker and will be based on the information provided and the recommendation of the Fostering Panel.

If you disagree with the decision, you can appeal within 28 days to the Director of Care & Learning, who will arrange for an alternative panel out with Highland Council to reconsider the decision. If this meeting endorses the original decision there is no further appeals process within the Agency.

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PROCEEDING PLEASE COMPLETE THE ONLINE ENQUIRY FORM.**