

A photograph of three young children of diverse backgrounds sitting on a light-colored couch. They are all laughing heartily with their mouths wide open. The child on the left is a girl with dark hair, wearing a yellow shirt and denim overalls. The child in the middle is a girl with blonde hair and a red bow, wearing a pink shirt. The child on the right is a boy with dark skin, wearing a green shirt. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor setting.

fostering
with sefton

Sefton Council 

Fostering
with Sefton



Introduction

Thank you for taking the first steps to being part of our friendly team as a foster carer in Sefton. If you join us, we will do our utmost to ensure that fostering children is the most rewarding life choice you ever make. But before you and your family decide what to do, we want to give you all the information you need, which is where this booklet comes in.

Inside you will meet our experienced carers who will give an insight into the varied life of a foster carer, what it is like to open your home to a child/young person and bust those myths about who can and can't foster.

You will learn about the different types of fostering you can do, our fantastic training programme and payment for your expertise, which is very competitive as fees progress up a payment scale when you gain experience and complete your training.

There are 6 key steps to becoming an approved carer and we will try our best to make the process go as smooth and quickly as possible.

You might find it useful to visit seftonfostering.co.uk or give us a call on

FREEPHONE 0800 923 2777

where our team will be happy to chat all things about fostering, offer advice and help you make your decision.



What is Fostering?

Fostering provides a secure and stable family home for children and young people who are unable to live with their own families. Children may need to be looked after for only a short time until they can return home to birth family or friends, while others will stay with foster carers for the longer term or move to an adoptive family.

We truly value our foster carers for the vital role they have, helping to transform children's lives and building a better future for them.

We guarantee your kindness and warmth when welcoming children into your family will make a huge difference to them and will probably be the most rewarding thing you ever do.

Can I be a foster carer?

There is a lot of misunderstanding about who can and cannot become a foster carer.

We simply want people from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences, who are dedicated, passionate and caring.

There are lots of myths around fostering but you will find out that being LGBTQ+, from an ethnic background, being single, older, renting your home or having your own children are not barriers to becoming a foster carer with Sefton.

We want our carers to have a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. We welcome carers of all ethnicities and faiths.

You can foster children with us if you are single, older (there is no upper age limit), have your own children or rent your family home.

The main things that you need to become a foster carer are:

- Be over 21 years of age
- Have no serious convictions or convictions relating to children or young people
- Be a full-time resident in the UK

What makes a good foster carer?

There is no such thing as a perfect or typical foster carer. All you need is to have a loving, nurturing and caring nature and the ability to provide a stable, safe and caring home environment.



Derek: *“At first, I did have doubts about whether I could foster or not but after I spoke to the fostering team, I realised it’s not about being a perfect foster carer. It’s just all about having a good heart and letting the children know that you are there for them.”*

Why foster in Sefton?

If you live locally to Sefton, we encourage you to foster with us. Fostering with the local authority means you will be working with Sefton's Children's Services. It is our responsibility to safeguard and protect over 600 looked after children from the borough.

We are not for profit, and we do everything in our power to place children with our own local carers.

When children cannot be placed locally, they sometimes have to live in a residential home or with a foster family who live a long way from their home or school which can be distressing for them.

As a Sefton carer you are joining us in our commitment to giving these children the best start in life by allowing them to remain in familiar surroundings whilst providing a nurturing environment. This can really help them to transform their lives and enables them to flourish.

Matching children with our carers is very important at Sefton. The service adopts a rigorous process based on a child or young person's individual needs and the routines

and experiences of a carer. Applying this good practice means children settle well, carers receive the right support and relationships develop and flourish.

The Fostering Team

We are a warm, friendly and approachable team, and we like you to think of us as your extended family. We are always planning new ways to bring us all together and get everyone involved in fun activities.

The recruitment team will guide you through your journey to becoming a foster carer and make sure each step is carefully explained. We are there to answer any

questions you have and make sure you are happy and informed.

Once you are approved as a carer, our support team will continue to be there for you throughout your entire journey as a foster carer. The whole team will be available to support you at any time, but your Supervising Social Worker will be your main point of contact.

Angelique

"Me and my Supervising Social Worker Sinead have such a great relationship. She is always there as a listening ear, as reassurance, and to help me and my family be the best carers we can be."



Who needs your care?

In Sefton we have children and young people of all ages from 0 - 18 and from all backgrounds that come into care and really need families to look after them.

Rebecca 14

"More than anything we need you to care about us no matter what. If you don't then who else will? We only get one chance at life, we need you to make the very best of it."

Millie 9

"When I came into foster care I felt happy again because I felt like I was part of a family"

Thomas 10

"Me and my sister get to experience new things like going on holiday and I am better at school because my foster family help me."

What types of fostering are there?

There are different types of fostering, some of which may better suit your current family dynamic or lifestyle. You will learn more about this in the assessment process but here is a quick overview.

Long Term Fostering

Long term fostering means you are giving a secure family life to a child until they reach adulthood or are ready to live independently. This type of fostering provides a good alternative for permanence when adoption is not an option for them.

Short Term

Most children who enter foster care will need short term placements, ranging from a few days to over a year.

Emergency

Emergency fostering means taking a child into your home at short notice and involves children staying a few nights while a more suitable placement is found.

Short Break Foster Care

Short break foster carers look after children to give carers that respite, with breaks ranging from a few days to a couple of weeks. Short break foster care is planned and can occur at regular intervals and may offer a flexible option for carers who work full time.

Ginny has been fostering for 15 years.

"It's such an amazing thing to foster teenagers because they think people have forgotten about them. I love fostering them. You've got a definite job to do, getting them ready for independence and giving them life skills. It's just so rewarding."

Teenage Fostering

We need carers to specialise in fostering for teenagers, for whom we have the greatest need. Foster carers play a fundamental role in giving young people the knowledge, skills and self-confidence to successfully move on to adulthood.

Sibling Placements

It is important that we keep brothers and sisters together as this gives an extra sense of security. Some of our carers specialise in providing safe and secure environments for sibling groups.



Becoming a foster carer in Sefton

If you decide to become a foster carer with Sefton, we will support you every step of the way. The process takes 6 – 8 months and it's during this time that you will learn more about the role and we can get to know you. This really is a two-way process.

You are not obligated to continue with the process if at any time you would like to leave or put on hold, we will completely support your decision.

What are the steps to becoming a foster carer?

STEP 1: GET IN TOUCH

You might be nervous about speaking with us for the first time, which is normal. Don't worry, this is a very informal chat. We would love to hear from you and answer any questions.

STEP 2: HOME VISIT

By now you've had chance to think about fostering and what's involved. We're sure you'll have more questions. A member of the fostering team will visit you at your home for an in-depth chat. This will give you the opportunity to explore the options available to find out if it's right for you and your family.

STEP 3: ASSESSMENT

The assessment helps us find out more about you and the natural qualities and experience you have to become a foster carer.

We will talk about you and your family about your hobbies and interest. We will also discuss caring for looked after children and young people and the type of children and fostering that will best suit you and your family.

At this point we will also speak to your family members and support network and carry out the necessary checks

STEP 4: THE SKILLS TO FOSTER PREPARATION GROUP

At the same time as your assessment, you will attend a three-day preparation training course. This will give you an understanding of fostering in Sefton, why children come into care, as well as your role as a foster carer. During the group sessions you'll meet some of our carers who are open, friendly and eager to tell you what the role is really like. This training is key to your fostering assessment.

STEP 5: THE FOSTERING PANEL

The fostering panel is a group of professionals drawn together from a variety of backgrounds.

They will review and discuss your application with you, before making a recommendation regarding your approval as a foster carer.

Our panels are warm and welcoming. You will be fully prepared with full support from us prior to and during the meeting.

STEP 6: APPROVAL AND PLACEMENT

Once you're approved, you'll receive information about training opportunities and meet your supervising social worker. Your social worker will work with you to find a suitable match and support you in your role as a foster carer.

Lifestyle and Support Offer

We appreciate the ongoing hard work and dedication of our carers as they help children and young people to achieve the very best outcomes.

As a foster carer at Sefton you will never go it alone and we are committed to making sure our carers always feel supported.

To show how much we value our carers and that we are here to support, we have teamed up with services across the Council and our partners in Sefton to introduce some great opportunities for the whole family to enjoy.

We believe our amazing support and lifestyle offer will help you to create an environment for our young people to flourish and reach their full potential.

Lifestyle Benefits and Opportunities

✔ Free Leisure Pass

Foster carers and all family members living in the household receive free Activate Fitness Membership. This membership for the whole family, gives access to the use of six facilities within Sefton with over 200 classes a week, 3 pools, a 400m running track, a cycling track and a lake.

✔ Free Parking

We want to make it as easy as possible for our carers to be able to get out and about across Sefton, whether it is care related, for shopping or leisure. We will provide you with a parking pass which allows you to access to 18 car parks across Sefton completely free of charge.



✓ Free Golf Membership

All foster carers and anybody living within the fostering household can take advantage of a free membership to Bootle or Southport Golf Courses. Both courses have 18 holes, are fun and challenging, making this a great day out for the whole family.

✓ Libraries

Sefton's Library Service's carers offer includes a Sefton's Carer's ticket which covers every member of the household and has added benefits such as a longer loan period of up to 56 days instead of 21 and no fines charged for late returns.

✓ Green Sefton Summer and Autumn Programme

Green Sefton brings together teams within the Council from Coast & Countryside, Parks & Greenspaces and more. With this offer, foster carers and their families can enjoy ranger led walks or activities along Sefton's glorious coast and greenspaces.

"We are so passionate about equipping our carers with as much knowledge and background, so they feel confident and supported by us."

"Working with families who centre their lives around providing love and safety to children who need it is inspirational and I am honoured to be a part of their journey."

Angela Siteo
Training and Development Officer



✓ Refer a Friend

Our foster carers are great advocates for Sefton, and we appreciate how they encourage people to foster with us, whether it be friends or relatives. To show how valuable this is to us, we give £500 to anyone who refers someone who then goes on to be approved as a carer.

✓ Max Cards

Sefton's fostering families will receive a Max Card. Families can use their Max Card at venues across the UK to get free or discounted admission. Create those special memories at a fraction of the price with offers on days out at castles, zoos, bowling alleys, trampoline parks and much more.

✓ Sefton's Events

Sefton hosts so many amazing events all year round. The Fostering Team work closely with event organisers to gain discounts and free tickets to attractions for our fostering families. These include, Dunes Splash World, Pleasure Land Southport, The Atkinson Theatre, British Musical Fireworks Championships, The Southport Air Show and much more.

✓ £25 Contribution fee

We love to shout out about how our carers are changing lives and it's so important that we listen to their first-hand experiences. We therefore, invite our carers to take part in events and information sessions to speak to potential or new carers. Our carers also love to fly the fostering flag by taking part in campaigns. All carers receive £25 each time they make a contribution.

Support for Carers



Foster Carers Training Programme

We are dedicated to the personal development of our carers, and we understand that good quality training is crucial in supporting them in their role. We are proud to offer a comprehensive training package, which will enhance their skills and knowledge needed for them to support children and young people.

Courses are delivered by our passionate and experienced training professionals whose role it is to bring people together to share experiences and learn from other foster carers, from our team of professionals, and from each other.

Before being approved, carers complete our three-day preparation course which gives a real understanding of fostering for Sefton.

Once approved, we will offer our Fostering Skills Scheme which will give a deeper understanding of the children's needs and help them to develop an even better understanding of the role.

Website and Social Media

At Sefton Fostering we regularly use social media for many different reasons whether it's to shout out and let people know about the amazing things our foster carers are doing, to update carers about events that are happening and can get involved in, or for carers to share their own posts and pictures. If you haven't already, please follow Sefton Fostering on Facebook or Twitter.

Foster Carers' Support Group in the North of the Borough

Sefton's Foster Carers support group not only gives the chance for carers to meet and chat to other carers but it provides a safe space for them to share experiences. This groups is run by foster carers, for foster carers.

Foster Carers' Support Group in the South of the Borough

This is a very friendly, relaxed support group run by foster carers for foster carers. The aim is to provide a safe space to come together, offer support, advice, share experiences and be a listening ear to each other.

Fostering Service Virtual Support Group

This is run on a monthly basis by the fostering service. It provides information on the service, it allows carers to hear from guest speakers and enables carers to ask questions.

Our Network of Foster Carers

When you join us, you become part of one big fostering family where you will be supported by the team and also by our

amazing network of Foster Carers. Our carers are always there for each other at the end of the phone or in person. To help you stay in communication you will be able to join the foster carers' social media groups including Facebook and WhatsApp and there are also coffee mornings and social events.

Foster Talk

As a Foster Carer for Sefton Council, you will receive membership to Foster Talk. As a member you will receive the support and training in your role, from pre-approval stages through to retirement. Membership packages also include helplines to give advice and guidance, savings on family days out or holidays and more.

Foster Carers' Newsletter

The newsletter is a great way to get important information to carers, give the platform to tell positive stories and let people know about activities and support available. Our carers also have lots of input sharing their experiences and telling us what's going on in their lives.



Digital Champions

Our 'Digital Champions' are foster carers who offer some of their time to help carers with any issues they have with technology such as computers or phones. They are happy to be contacted and also have a regular section within the Foster Carers' Newsletter, where they give helpful hints and tips.

Celebrations

We are always finding ways to say thank you to our foster carers and their families at special times throughout the year. This includes events such as Teddy Bears Picnics in the Spring/Summer, raffles, group trips to the cinema and Christmas parties.

During October we say thank you to our foster carers' birth sons and daughters for everything they do. Children are treated to days out doing fun activities and they all receive a special certificate of thanks.

Fostering Duty

The Fostering Service provides a duty service during office hours. A member of staff will be available to respond to any immediate support issues you may have in the absence of your supervising social worker.

Peer Mentors

We have a pool of experienced and skilled foster carers who are available to provide peer mentoring to newly approved foster carers. Peer mentors provide one-to-one support to foster carers and the mentoring takes the form of guiding, supporting and empowering. Sefton Fostering Mentor scheme was set up with the initiative of Sefton Foster Carers who wished to help other Foster Carers starting out on their journey

Amanda shares why she mentors new carers:

"I remember it was a little daunting when we first became foster carers and I would have appreciated having someone experienced to chat to. I hope that by being on the end of the phone, or available for a coffee, that I can help new carers navigate their way through the early days and help to make it even more fun."



Support for Foster Carers and our Children and Young People

Virtual School

Statistics show that children with stable foster homes generally do better in education. Our foster carers get children to school, support learning and help to build aspirations for their future. The Virtual School is there to champion the education of all children in the care of the Local Authority, and offer support, advice, and training to all carers.

Placement Support Workers

Placement Support Workers work closely with foster children, their carers, and children's social work teams, to provide support which will increase placement stability. They provide a wealth of activities such as events, trips and parties throughout the year which promote the social and emotional well-being of children and young people.

Kids Club

'Kids Club' allows foster children to come together in a safe environment to take part in activities such as artwork, playing games or sports and days out. The activities help children to build confidence and friendships.

Stable Lives

An exciting partnership with a local charity, Stable Lives (Equestrian Centre) means children and young people can benefit from a 6-week bespoke programme for foster children to attend throughout the year. This therapeutic experience includes grooming, feeding, bonding and nurturing relationships with the horses.

Participation Officer

Sefton's Participation Officer supports and engages with children and young people through group meetings and activities, to ensure their voices are heard and that they play an active role in shaping the way our services are delivered.



Youth Ambassadors

Young people aged 11-15 years who meet every two weeks to discuss the issues that matter to young people in care. The group have been involved in a number of exciting projects including the design of Young People's Guides, Sefton Pledge and Monthly Awards.

Making A Difference (MAD) Group

Young people aged 16+ meet regularly and have been involved in a number of exciting projects and consultations. Representatives from the group sit on the Corporate Parenting Board and are involved in interviewing new staff. Group members receive payment for their contributions.

Fostering Allowance and Skills Payments



We believe in treating our carers as childcare professionals, valuing their skills and paying them accordingly. Payments are divided into two parts:

- An allowance to cover the daily cost of looking after a child or young person. This is intended to cover the costs of things such as food, clothing, and everyday living expenses.
- A payment that recognises your skills, knowledge and hard work as a foster carer

The scheme allows you to progress through higher fee levels as your experience and personal development as a carer grows.

Allowances

Weekly fostering allowance payment per child based on age:

Ages	Maintenance*	Clothing	Total*
	£	£	£
0 – 2	£113-00	£24.00	£137-00
3 – 4	£117-00	£24.00	£141-00
5 – 10	£125-00	£31.00	£156-00
11 – 15	£140-00	£37.00	£177-00
16 – 17	£158-00	£49.00	£207-00

Skills Payments and Enhancements

The weekly rates for Skills Payments / Enhancements:

Skills Level	1 Child Placed	Each Additional Child
	£	£
1	£58-00	£29-00
2	£146-00	£73-00
Enhancement	£272-00	£136-00

To find the most up to date information about the support and benefits of Fostering with Sefton please visit [Seftonfostering.co.uk/fostering-support/](https://seftonfostering.co.uk/fostering-support/)

Frequently Asked Questions

We understand that there are so many different people wanting to foster with various home/life situations. We have therefore tried to answer as many of the questions we think you may have. If you have any other questions, please contact us to speak to one of our team.

Would a criminal record stop me from fostering?

Not necessarily, it would depend on the nature of the offence. However most minor offences would not exclude you; the important thing is to discuss this with us at the earliest opportunity.

Will I wait long for a child to be placed with me?

No; currently we have children waiting for loving homes. Following your approval your social worker will support and advise you in finding a suitable match.

Can I foster if I smoke or vape?

Yes. However, there will be limitations with the children you are able to foster as we are not able to place babies and children under the age of 5 years with carers who smoke or vape.

Will I have to give up work to foster?

You do not have to give up work to foster and many of our carers are working. You will need to consider if your work is flexible. For example, do your working hours allow you to drop off and pick up a child from school. Would it be possible to take time off due to a child's illness, school holidays or to attend occasional meetings or training?

Do I need a support network?

Yes. You will need to give consideration as to who is in your life who will be able to support you in your fostering role. We ask all new carers to identify at least one person who is able to support you if you are not available for any reason, for example if you are attending training and need a foster child collected from school.

Do I need to have any special qualifications to foster?

No, particular qualifications are not necessary, it is your personal attributes and skills which are most important. We provide a comprehensive training package which will develop your skills as you continue your career in fostering.

I already have children of my own, can I still foster?

Yes. We value the skills and experiences you can offer as a parent. For your children, living with foster children can be very positive and benefit them through companionship, friendship and a sense of self-worth in sharing their homes and themselves with children who need them. We value the children of foster carers and recognise the role that they play in fostering. We always ensure that they are consulted and involved in the assessment process.

How much will I be told about a young person before they're placed with me?

We will provide you with as much information about the young person and their background as possible, before you decide whether to accept the placement. Sometimes we have to place children in an emergency; in this circumstance we may have very little information. But a planning meeting will follow very shortly and we would hope that by that stage more would be known about the child's circumstances.

Do I have to drive?

Driving is not an essential requirement to be a foster carer. You will need to consider how you will transport children to school, family time and activities.

Do I have to live in Sefton?

No, however the vast majority of children attend Sefton schools and have their family links in the borough so you will need to think about the practicalities of travelling to Sefton.

Can I take a child on holiday?

We always encourage foster carers to include children in their family holidays. There will be some instances where this is not possible however this will be fully discussed with you and alternative arrangements made.

Can I foster if I have pets?

Yes, we think pets are great! Pets can really enhance the experience for fostered children and are a great ice breaker. We will take your pets into consideration through your assessment.

How would I get paid?

The scheduled payments are paid fortnightly, directly into the bank account details you have provided.

Do I have to become self-employed?

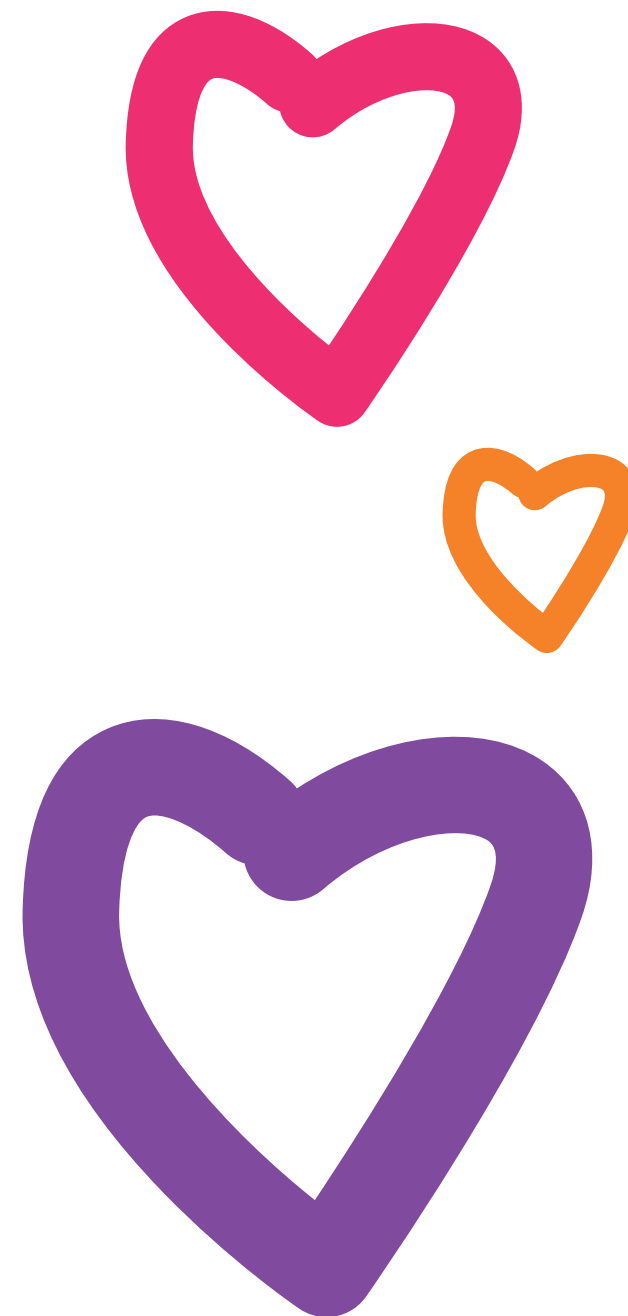
Foster Carers are classed as self-employed and thanks to a generous foster carer tax relief it means that for most foster carers, they will pay no tax on their fostering income.

What support do I get in working out tax?

The latest information from HMRC on tax arrangements for Foster Carers (<https://www.gov.uk/support-for-foster-parents/tax-arrangements>)

Information, support, and 1-2-1 advice including a free Tax and Benefits Q&A Session, is available via your membership to FosterTalk (<https://fostertalk.org/tax-national-insurance-and-benefits-for-foster-carers/>)

Call Fostertalk today for help and support 0121 794 228



Contact us

If you want to find out more, or tell us that you want to begin your fostering career,

contact us on

FREEPHONE: 0800 923 2777

or by email:

fostering@sefton.gov.uk

You can also visit our website:

seftonfostering.co.uk

Alternatively, you can write to us at:

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