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**Thank you for taking the first step towards really making a difference to a child's life.**

Welcome from the Islington Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team. Please find enclosed an information pack that gives you details of our Fostering Service covering:

- \* Basic Information
- \* Fostering myths
- \* Allowances and fees
- \* Your fostering journey
- \* The advantages of fostering with a local authority

The next stage in your application process would be to attend one of our information sessions. Due to current restrictions we are running a monthly information session through Zoom. You will have received a link to the next session in your email response but you can also check the next dates either on our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/islingtonfostering](http://www.facebook.com/islingtonfostering) or by finding us on Eventbrite <https://bit.ly/Eventbritehome>

We also recommend you look on our Facebook page where you can watch some of our past information session we recorded: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/islington.fostering/videos/>

The recruitment team are working as usual, so can still answer your questions and help you to get the fostering process underway.

Yours sincerely,

Islington Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team

**What should I do next?**

Try to attend one of our information sessions. You will hear from the team as well as foster carers and be able to ask questions. You can also call the team on 020 7527 7933 or email us on [fostering@islington.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@islington.gov.uk) to arrange a longer conversation with one of the recruitment team.

You can also look online for more information at [www.islington.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.islington.gov.uk/fostering) and check out our social media platforms including Facebook for interesting stories, chat and articles [www.facebook.com/islingtonfostering](http://www.facebook.com/islingtonfostering)



# Becoming a Foster Carer



Call us today on **020 7527 7933**

or email **fostering@islington.gov.uk**

Learn more at **islington.gov.uk/fostering**

**Change a  
child's life:**  
*foster with us*



**ISLINGTON**



# Welcome to Islington Fostering Service

## **An Introduction from our Head of Service, Karen Gibbings**

My service and I are very proud to be part of the fostering service and the fostering community here in Islington. We encourage you to read our booklet or get in touch for a chat about fostering with us. Every fostering situation is different and there is no such thing as a “silly question” so please call us or come to one of our events

We are passionate about our children and young people and are dedicated to making a difference to their lives. We start by offering foster homes where they can develop feelings of safety and belonging. To achieve this, we support and train our carers to help children build healthy attachments/relationships, based on trust. Children need boundaries as well as love to feel safe. Our motto is, “Connection before Correction”, emphasising the need for relationships where children feel their carers are able to understand their complex emotions and related behaviour - and help them make sense of it too. We work together to develop relationships and help our children make sense of their life experiences so they can begin to heal past hurt and trauma.

We cannot do this without our amazing foster carers; we value them so highly for the care and security they provide for Islington’s children and young people. They provide something extraordinary - their skill and understanding makes a life-long difference to the outcomes for children in our care.

We are a diverse and inclusive fostering community aiming to meet the diverse needs of all children and young people in Islington, transforming their everyday lives. We are ambitious and aim to achieve more. We need more foster carers to join our fostering community able to offer child centred / reparative (healing) care for Islington children and young people who, for different reasons are unable to live with their families.

Fostering for Islington council means you are welcoming our children into your home and giving them a nurturing family environment whilst decisions are being made about their future.

The African proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” The Islington fostering community, together with our partner agencies, aims to be that village. If you think you can offer a safe, loving home and engage children in positive relationships, please join us and let’s build a brighter future for them together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Gibbings". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

**Karen Gibbings,**  
Head of Service, Children Looked After

**Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet.  
It includes information on:**

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# What is Foster Care?

When families are struggling, they may not be able to provide their children with the support and stability they need. Fostering is about opening your heart and home to vulnerable children and young people, who are unable to live with their family due to challenges such as:

- Illness in the family
- Drug or alcohol problems in the family
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Physical, sexual, emotional abuse
- Neglect
- A young parent needing guidance and support in caring safely for their baby
- A child having disabilities and the parents needing a break or finding it hard to manage

When it is not possible to support the family at home, the children may need to be cared for by a foster family to make sure they are safe and get the nurturing they need.

Foster carers provide safe, stable and nurturing homes for children. To help them, they receive on-going high quality training and dedicated support to undertake this crucial community role.

Foster carers look after children from many different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds and we welcome open-minded applicants regardless of background, ethnicity, or beliefs. All applicants are looked at for their personal qualities and the ability to keep children safe and support them to develop.

There is no upper age limit to apply and you may become a foster carer whether you have had your own children or not.

You may be in a relationship or single and be of any sexual orientation or gender identity.

You may work or be on benefits and you do not need to own your own home and may live in private or council rented accommodation.

Sometimes our children may need to live with a foster family for only a short time, such as a few days or weeks and will return home quickly. While others may need to be looked after for longer, while plans are made for their long-term future away from home. The plans may be consideration for adoption or permanent foster care until they are 18 years old or ready to move on to independent living.

Islington foster carers work closely with our service and other professionals as part of our 'team around the child' to help children receive any additional services or help they need.

Foster care is also a career choice for some people who enjoy working with children and young people and have a passion to make a difference.

# The role of a foster carer

The care and support our foster carers provide is hugely rewarding and seeing the young people develop and achieve is a life changing experience for both the foster carers and the children themselves.

Foster carers help frightened children to feel safe. They show them support and understanding and help them feel a part of the family and to feel wanted. They ask the important questions in a kind way “What happened to you to make it hard to trust people?” and, “Who do you want to help you?” They start with “connection before correction”

Even when children or young people can't live with their birth families, foster carers appreciate the importance of these relationships for children and undertake the essential role in maintaining their relationships with their parents, friends and family.

Foster carers keep children healthy by ensuring they are meeting their developmental milestones while keeping children safe by providing boundaries and routines. They make sure they get to their school on time and help them to make good progress in their education, spending time reading, writing stories and engaging with them in homework and in other educational / recreational activities. Many children in care in Islington go on to university.

It is important foster carers help children grow and develop their life skills such cooking and learning to budget. They will also encourage hobbies and interests such as baking, arts and crafts, sports, film making, as well as meeting any special needs they may have.

Foster carers are an important part of the team that works with children and young people to make plans for their future, while working closely with social workers and other professionals to give the child the very best opportunities in life.

No matter how long they stay, our foster carers give our children the full experience of family life, becoming a building block and model for their future relationships so they grow and realise their potential.



# Ages of children you can look after

Children and young people come into the care of Islington for many reasons. They are looked after by our foster carers who have the skills and experiences to support them. The type of foster care you could provide depends on you, your lifestyle, life experiences and the needs of your own family. Which type of fostering suits you and your family best?

## Looking after a baby

Babies come into care for many reasons and may be looked after until they are able to return to their birth parents or family member or until they are found an adoptive family. Many babies will require regular family time with their birth family, sometimes daily and foster carers help the babies keep in touch with their family.

Babies placed may be new-born or have additional health needs and it is important that they are kept safe and have their medical needs met. They are vulnerable so need a foster carer to be at home full time. Foster carers interact and play with them providing a variety of experiences to stimulate all their senses and promote healthy physical and emotional growth.

### One of our carers says

“Seeing the baby who was the size of my hand catching up and now crawling is amazing”

## Looking after a child under 11

Many of our children under 11 may come from traumatic homes, which can leave them feeling sad, lonely and scared. Children can work through these strong feelings of loss through the foster carer being kind, giving them attention and listening to what they say.

Foster carers provide comfort and understanding to children who are confused and uncertain about what is happening. They bring smiles and laughter on important days such as birthdays and celebrations as well as on sad days, so a sense of humour is essential!

Foster carers help children lead a healthy lifestyle and ensure they attend any health appointments. Best of all, foster carers can help children create happy memories through simple family fun or by providing cultural outings to learn about their heritage and the world they live in.

Reading together and encouraging them to pick up and read books gives enjoyment and builds essential skills. Learning becomes fun, promoting children's education and social development.

**One of our carers says**

“When the children receive the support and confidence they need, it helps them to believe they can really achieve, from a shy loner to a star in their school play”.

## **Looking after a child over 11 and teenagers**

The teenage years can be an exciting time, but they can also be a difficult and confusing experience for young people; their behaviour may reflect this. They may be frustrated and anxious by the changes, even feel unwanted. Foster carers show patience, are able to listen, to demonstrate understanding of problems and are able to talk to young people on a level they can relate to, while enforcing clear boundaries.

Foster carers are a central figure in young people's growth, guiding them through the transition as they start developing life skills and habits that will shape their future. This is a crucial time for educational development and foster carers encourage and promote school learning and activities; they also discuss plans for further education. This requires the ability to be alongside young people and to be there for them throughout the highs and the lows of these years

**One of our carers says**

“We worked together setting up a revision timetable. It was tough but we did it, he got the grades and I got my first hug - Yeah!! Next step Uni!”

## **Fostering unaccompanied and separated children**

There are many reasons why it may not be safe for a child or young person to stay in their home country. War, oppression and civil unrest can create situations in which many children may fear for their lives and their families make the difficult decision for them to leave.

Arriving alone in a new country is scary. Without a trusted adult to look out for them, child refugees may be manipulated into forced labour, criminal groups or sexual exploitation. Our foster carers care and work with children and young people who have no one. Alongside caring for our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on a day-to-day basis, they meet their emotional, practical, language and cultural needs. Foster carers play a crucial role in supporting the children through the process of applying for permission to stay in the UK, and possibly to prepare for the return back to their country of origin.

## **Parent and Baby Placements**

These placements involve a parent and child living together in a foster carer's home. It may be that the parent is young and needs the opportunity to develop their parenting skills as they learn to care for their baby in a nurturing family environment. The foster carer helps young parents develop their confidence by sensitively providing support to take on the responsibility of caring for their children. They offer young families the best chance of staying together and going on to live independently.

## **Long-term Permanent Foster Care**

Foster carers care for children who are unable to return to their family or family member until they become independent. It is a way of offering a permanent home to a child or young person until they are ready to make the transition to adult life.

## **Specialist Fostering**

The children or young people who need specialist foster carers will have complex needs and may struggle with routines, developing relationships and managing their emotions or social situations. In addition, to providing a safe, stable and supportive environment, these carers are able to help children overcome past hurt and trauma. Childhood trauma usually happens in primary relationships with parents or family members and

leaves a legacy of huge mistrust, as well as some key developments being delayed.

Healing from relational trauma requires experiences of healthy relationships with people who don't give up and eventually build trust. To do this our foster carers look at what the behaviour is telling them, think about the child or young person's early life experiences and what happened to them, and are curious about what may be going on for the child or young person at the time. They help children find words to express their feelings as an alternative to communicating through behaviour.

The specialist foster carer will need to be available full time for these children and young people. Their availability enables them to build a relationship by fostering a connection, which is crucial. This will take time for children and young people, who have repeatedly had their hearts and trust broken by adults in their lives, to learn to trust again.

Our specialist foster carers usually come to us with some experience of working with children and an understanding of a range of behaviours and the struggles children experience due to what has happened to them. We also develop our current foster carers to become specialist foster carers.

Our specialist carers receive enhanced rewards, bespoke support packages, support groups with a child and adolescent mental health specialist and high-quality training.

## **Respite Care**

Respite care is when foster carers look after children for specific short periods of time to support the child or young person and foster carer they are living with. Some foster children benefit from a shared care arrangement to support their usual foster placement or for holidays from residential care.

## **Family Based Short Breaks**

This care is offered when a foster carer helps a family cope with the wide-ranging needs of a child with learning difficulties or disabilities. They will provide care on an occasional or regular basis perhaps for a day, overnight, weekend or longer at the foster carer's home.

It gives children an opportunity to have fun while giving the family valuable time to recharge their batteries.

Our carers provide care for children with a range of disabilities: physical disability, sensory impairment, learning difficulties, autism or complex health needs.

## **Supported Lodgings**

Our supported lodgings carers offer a home to young people aged 16 -21 years old, helping them with their transition onto adulthood. These young people cannot live with their own parents and are preparing for the steps towards independent living.

Our carers will provide the young person with their own room and offer them a listening ear, advice and guidance on careers and job or college applications, teach them how to budget, shop and cook and generally help them to become fully independent by the time they move on.

## **Reunification**

Islington has launched a new Reunification Project recently, and as the name suggests it involves reunifying children with their birth families. The project won't be right for everyone but for some it will.

Research tells us that about half the children that come into care will go home to their families at some point, even if this is in adulthood. Families who manage this successfully usually do it in a planned way with support from friends, family and professionals. In Islington, we are aware that for some children and young people returning home to their families after a period of time in care is a viable option. This is because we recognise that for some birth parents, they have a capacity to change and although it was unsafe historically, their circumstances have now changed.

Children and young people would only return home following a comprehensive assessment to assess the parent's (or family members) capacity to change and to identify what support they would need to look after their son or daughter. As a foster carer, you will be central to this process, either by telling your Supervising Social Worker, when you have noticed a positive change in a parent's presentation when you have seen or spoken to them or the child has raised the conversation with you. Your

views will also be sought during any assessment process and ongoing training and support will be provided.

**One of our foster carers says:**

“I had a good relationship with the children’s mother and I was part of the transition plan for the children returning home to her care. For example, I was able to advise the mother about routines and strategies I used when the siblings had arguments. I am still in touch with the children and their mother and speak to them around their birthdays and festive periods... I am very proud of my time as their foster carer and the part I played in supporting their return home” This foster carer also appeared in little video we made where the network reflected on this piece of work.

**Another foster carer told us:**

“It is always really sad for me when children return home because I have become so attached to them but I know that it’s always better for children if they can live with their birth families... It is always so nice to get text or a photo from their mother at significant milestones such as their first day of school... I am proud of to be part of their lives and for my own children to be part of theirs too.”

# Why foster with Islington?

Ofsted have rated Islington Children's Services as outstanding.

- When you foster with Islington you have the expertise and resources from a wide range of professionals who work alongside you and the children you care for to support you every step of the way.
- We will provide training and support groups for Islington's practice model of therapeutic parenting that enables social workers and carers develop a greater understanding of the children and young people we work with. We believe that trying to control children and young people's behaviour is not effective. Children and young people change when they feel deeply understood, develop trust and start to believe different life opportunities are open to them. They need understanding adults to help them find words to make sense of their experience.
- We are a fostering community and work closely together supporting you and young people living with you.
- We give round the clock support - our foster carers have a dedicated social worker and supervising team with 24-hour expert advice and support
- You will have generous financial support and rewards to help you give children an excellent start in life or to help them to catch up on what they may have missed out on
- You also are given additional financial allowances for the children or young person's summer holidays, birthdays, religious and winter festivals
- We provide tailored support packages putting you and our children and young people at the centre
- You will receive recognition for your experience and commitment
- We have built in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) with on-site clinicians
- We will give access to the on-site Virtual school, promoting the educational needs of our looked after children and young people with close working relationships with all schools at all levels
- There is an induction programme for extra support for newly approved foster carers



- Via our Foster Carer Mentoring Scheme – you will have a foster carer mentor alongside you to help in your first year of fostering
- Every month throughout the year there is a wide range of foster carer support groups that you can attend.
- We have Circles of Support, providing local, dedicated support from a central experienced foster carer and a surrounding circle of foster carers. The central carer can provide respite, be a listening ear and offer support and advice. The surrounding circle of carers along with the central carer will undertake fun activities and day trips for all the family.
- Some carers might be eligible for our Housing and Home adaptation scheme to enable you to care for more than one child by creating more room in your own home or helping you to move to a larger property.
- In Islington, we help our foster carers grow and develop to be the best possible carers they can be by providing high quality training and support.

We have the latest training in subjects related to caring for children to continue your professional development. Our training includes courses such as:

- Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness
- Emergency First Aid
- Attachment and Learning
- Making Sense of Contact
  - All foster carers have legal protection insurance and public liability cover
  - Our active foster carers group, Islington Foster Carers Association offers representation and peer support. They run events and activities and is a great place to meet other foster carers and get support and advice.
  - There is independent nationwide support for all foster carers through our Membership with Fostering Network

# Who are we looking for?

## We have a few requirements to become an Islington foster carer:

- ✓ Be over 21 (There is no upper age limit)
- ✓ Have a spare bedroom if fostering children over 2 years
- ✓ Live in or within commuting distance to Islington
- ✓ Be able to take children to and from school
- ✓ Be able to take children to and from family time contact with their birth family
- ✓ Be in good general health
- ✓ Be able to speak, read and write English. Other languages are always helpful too
- ✓ Will be there for a child whenever they need you
- ✓ Be available to take a child to health appointments and promote healthy living
- ✓ Be able to meet a child's educational needs and support their development
- ✓ Be able to engage emotionally with children and help them find words to express themselves
- ✓ Have tenacity and patience

# What are you good at?

## Other skills and qualities that help make a good foster carer:

- Have a good sense of humour

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- Compassion

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- You like learning

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- Are a good listener

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- Feel full of energy

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- Are interested in different cultures

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- Don't mind asking for help

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- Are organised

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- You get on and work well with others

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- Enjoy problem solving

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- Have good understanding of other's feelings

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We all have many skills we may not even realise are useful. Islington foster carers come from many different walks of life and have had various experiences, lifestyles and adventures that bring a range of skills to the care they give. Don't count yourself out, you may have more to offer than you think.





## Fostering stories



Zinze is a foster carer looking after babies and young children.

Fostering is a life-transforming and rewarding experience. The Skills to Foster course equips potential carers with the knowledge and skills to face the challenges and commitments that fostering requires. I have been fortunate to have great support from my own mother, my son's dad and my supervising social worker.

I became an approved foster carer when my son had just started reception class. He has told me how much he loves having children in the home because he likes to 'cuddle' and 'take care of them'. He has had a unique opportunity to be around children from a rich variety of backgrounds which has moulded him into a cultured, emotionally intelligent and appreciative young lad.

Having looked after six beautiful babies from different cultures and backgrounds, it makes me smile when I am sent a video and pictures of the sibling group I cared for. It brings me immense joy knowing that I was part of their life and now realise fostering is the best decision I could have ever made.



Tia is a mainstream foster carer who also takes respite and emergency placements

I began as a carer for children aged 0-8 years as I had a previous background in childcare, mainly with children 0-5 years. My experience and confidence developed over the years and I am now my approval has increased for children 0-18 years.

Like many people I had a couple of reservations when I first began fostering. One was the impact on my two birth children. There certainly have been challenges but my children have really embraced being part of a fostering family. They have developed a greater maturity and empathy for others. One has further gone on to become a children's Social Worker in a Fostering Department!

I've had a 15 year-old in a permanent placement for the past 10 years. She has developed into a confident, amazing teenager who is achieving well at school and is part of my family and was recently a bridesmaid to my daughter. I was so proud when the previously 'shy little girl' gave a speech to 100 guests!

Friends and family often say to me about fostering "I don't know how you do it... I could never foster?" I didn't think that I could in the beginning, but 16 years later I'm still here, loving it and learning all the time.



### Hatice is a foster carer for teenagers

I became a foster carer because I wanted to work and make a difference, fostering has allowed me to do both but with the advantage of being at home for my own children. Fostering has brought us closer together as a family as well as making my own children mature and grow into caring teenagers who have gained a good understanding of the needs of others and the importance of tolerance.

I was approved to foster children and young people aged 0-18 years old and can remember when we were first accepted as foster carers, we were so excited and at the same time scared. We got a call the day we were approved asking if we could look after sibling girls and we said yes straight away! They were the first foster children who moved into our home and four and a half years later, they're still with us.

Things haven't always been easy but when we have needed it the support has been available from our supervising social worker, the children's social worker and from many of the other support agencies. Fostering has been difficult at times but incredibly rewarding. If I had a chance to do it all again, I wouldn't change a thing.



### Elizabeth is a young care leaver

Living at home with my parents was becoming very problematic. Social services got involved and a decision was made that it was no longer safe

for my sisters and I to continue living at home. A few weeks later I was collected from school by a social worker and was told my sister's and I were going to live with a foster family.

When we arrived at the house for the first time, we met our foster carers, this middle-aged couple and their granddaughter, fortunately they were all very welcoming, friendly and accommodating. I can remember feeling scared and being the eldest I worried for my sister's, not knowing if we would remain together and not really knowing what to expect.

At first, I made things difficult for my foster carers, not listening to what they had to say, returning late, and being quite challenging without any thought or regards to how my behaviour was impacting on my carers but my foster carers continued to stick by me and showed that they were not going to give up on me.

# Our placement policy

Islington prefers to place children and young people with families or individuals of a similar background to their own. However, the service is currently short of families for children of all backgrounds so we may ask you to look after a child with a heritage culturally different from your own family.

Islington carers can be;

- Single, married or living with a partner
- Of any sexual orientation
- Living in their own home or in council or privately rented property
- With or without their own children
- From many different ethnic backgrounds
- We consider applicants from all religious backgrounds or if you do not practice a religion.

What matters to us is that you care about children in need and want to learn new skills to help them and want to keep children safe.

Research has shown that children might be affected by passive smoking and carers for babies must be non-smokers. If you are a smoker, we are happy to have a discussion with you around this issue.

# How to apply to become a foster carer with Islington



Contact us on **0207 527 7933** for a chat or to find out the details of our next information session. You can also watch our past sessions on our Facebook page.

Our information sessions are run by the fostering team and foster carers, so it is good to attend and get some first-hand information from those in the role. It is where you can also get help making your formal application. Sessions alternate between morning and evening and we suggest if you are a couple that you both try to attend.

Successful applicants will be visited at home and then invited to a 4-day training course providing in-depth information on fostering.

Full references on all applicants will be taken up. The process for becoming a foster carer may take up to 6 months from your formal application date so please be patient.



If you have any questions about the process, contact the team on **020 7527 7933** or email **fostering@islington.gov.uk**

We have a lot of information on our website **[www.islington.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.islington.gov.uk/fostering)** giving more detail and you can also fill out an initial enquiry form.

You can also find us on social media at:



**[www.facebook.com/islingtonfostering](https://www.facebook.com/islingtonfostering)**



**[twitter.com/Isfostering](https://twitter.com/Isfostering)**



**[www.instagram.com/islingtonfostering/](https://www.instagram.com/islingtonfostering/)**

# An overview of the recruitment process

Initial contact made with Islington fostering service. An information pack and an invite to an information session or arrangement for a meeting with a social worker for an initial visit are sent to you.

You attend one of our information sessions or talk further to a social worker to get a deeper understanding of fostering.

You will complete an Expression of Interest form to explore if fostering is an option for you & your family.

Those not meeting criteria are informed in writing. You can still contact us again in the future if things change.

A member of our team comes to your home or virtually does an initial visit. (You may be asked if you would like to complete an application form Stage 1 Assessment of Suitability to allow us to start your checks and references)

You attend the four day Skills to Foster course in our training rooms.

If you decide fostering is right for you and your family you can formally apply to be assessed by completing an application for Stage 1 Assessment of Suitability.

**Stage 1 Assessment of Suitability** – A dedicated worker supports your learning and completes checks and references. Once all the information has been received a decision will be made within 10 working days whether to proceed to Stage 2.

**Stage 2 Full Assessment** – A dedicated social worker begins full fostering assessment (three to four months). This includes an assessment review to see how the assessment is progressing.

You and your assessor work together to produce an assessment report. You will then have 10 working days to read, discuss and comment.

You attend a fostering panel with your social worker where your assessment report is presented with a recommendation of approval.

Each applicant is assessed on their individual situation and circumstances and Islington Fostering Service has the authority to discontinue the assessment at any time during the process. In these instances applicants will be given clear reasons.





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## Fostering Allowances

When you become a foster carer for Islington, you will receive a weekly allowance for each child placed in your care. These allowances exceed the Governments national minimum fostering allowance for London.

Age range	Maintenance allowance	Training and placement allowance	Reward for professional carers	Weekly total
0-4	£158.00	£75.17	£139.29	£372.46
5-10	£177.00	£66.06	£139.29	£382.35
11-15	£203.40	£103.54	£139.29	£446.23
16-17	£236.00	£99.54	£139.29	£474.83

- Professional fee is £108.99 per week for second and subsequent children
- The total specialist carer rate is £787.40 (11-15 year-olds) & £815 (16/17) per week

**Maintenance allowance** – is paid to all carers and covers the costs of caring for a child including food, clothing, transport, pocket money, hobbies, savings etc. This element will not affect any benefits you may currently be receiving and will only be paid when a child is in your home.

**Training & placement allowance** – is paid to those carers who complete their own Training, Support and Development portfolio to a high standard and have shown commitment to attend:

- the Skills to Foster preparation group
- the required number of training courses
- the induction group
- monthly foster carers support groups
- fostering changes group

**Reward** - is paid to professionally recruited carers who are available to foster a wide range of children. This is a payment for your services as a foster carer and may be paid for you to keep a vacancy for up to 12 weeks. The reward may affect any means tested benefits you may receive during that vacancy but not when there is a foster child in your home.

### Extra payments

All foster carers will receive one payment for the child's birthday, one payment for the religious holiday celebrated by the child, and one payment for a holiday for the child, including for summer holiday outings and towards school trips.

	0-4 years	5-10 years	11-15 years	16-17 years	18
<b>Religious Festival</b>	£96.43	£116.73	£180.67	£212.14	£50.00
<b>Birthday Payment</b>	£99.34	£120.20	£186.14	£218.56	£216.40
<b>Holiday Allowance</b>	£289.00	£350.00	£350.00	£350.00	N/A

An additional fee of £186 per week will be paid to foster carers for working with the more challenging adolescents, while they are involved in a specialist program called (AMASS) Adolescent Multi-Agency Support Service.

These payments will be made for 6 months, with £93 being paid for the second 6 month period if AMASS remains involved.

## Foster Care Payments (Frequently Asked Questions)

1. **Benefits.** How does my foster care payment affect:
  - 1.1. **Income Support.** You can claim income support if you are looking after a foster child and/or your own children who are under 16 years old. You do not need to sign on if you are single but you may need to do so for Jobseekers Allowance if you are one of a couple. Foster allowances including any “reward” element are disregarded as income, but no personal allowances may be claimed for foster children. However, if you receive a fee payment when you have no children in care, these payments will be treated as income. You should inform Income Support of this payment.
  - 1.2. **Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit.** You can continue to claim Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and your fostering allowance will be disregarded in full as income. If you have no children in care, however, then fee payments you receive may affect your Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.
  - 1.3. **Children’s Tax Credit.** You can only claim for your own children.
  - 1.4. **Child Benefit.** You cannot receive this for any child for whom you are receiving a foster care allowance.
  - 1.5. **Disability Living Allowance.** You can claim this for yourself if you have a disability and for any disabled foster child you are looking after. It is payable to meet the additional needs arising from the child’s disability and is not deducted from fostering allowances for children under the age of 18.
  - 1.6. **Incapacity Benefit.** You can claim this if you are fostering, but the Department of Works and Pensions may regard fostering as an indication that you are able to work. You should seek advice regarding this, and consider appealing if it becomes a problem.
  - 1.7. **Working Tax Credit.** You can claim this even if you are one of a couple or a single person with no children of your own as long as you are over 25 and work at least 30 hours a week. Fostering allowances are ignored as income.
  - 1.8. **Carers Allowance.** If you receive at least the middle rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance for a foster child, then you may be able to receive Carers Allowance. You will need to be regularly and substantially caring for the child (that is, caring for the child at least 35 hours per week); and also you must not be gainfully employed (that is, not having an income of more than £77 per week). Foster care allowances are ignored.
  - 1.9. **Pension Credit.** You can claim under the same rules as Income Support. However between April 2010 and March 2020 the pension age of women will be increasing so check what qualifies as ‘pension age’ at time of claim.
  - 1.10. **Contribution based Job Seekers Allowance.** This is not generally affected by fostering allowances. However, you would need to be working less than 16 hours per week and, in addition to having a current Jobseeker’s Agreement, you would need to show that you are still available for and actively seeking full time work. The Department of Works and Pensions could find that your fostering duties prevent you from meeting the qualifying conditions and you may lose entitlement to JSA.
  - 1.11. **Income based Job Seekers Allowance.** You can claim this, but would need to be available for work, capable of work and actively seeking work. Otherwise the rules are the same as for claiming Income Support.
  - 1.12. **Foster Care Tax Relief.** Foster care tax relief allows tax exemption for the first £10, 000 per year plus £200 per week for a child under 11 and £250 for a child over 11. This is in addition to your personal tax free allowance of £9440 if you are not already a tax payer and you of working age. Foster carers may be entitled to benefit but still be liable for tax.

# Dispelling the myths of **fostering**

**I'm single, can I still foster?**

**Do I need to have a spare room?**

**Will fostering affect my benefits?**

**I do not own my own house, is this a problem?**

**Can I foster and still work full-time?**

**Do I need any formal qualifications?**

**Can I foster if I have a disability?**

**Will having a criminal record rule me out?**

**Can I foster if I smoke?**



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[www.islington.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.islington.gov.uk/fostering)



**ISLINGTON**

# Dispelling the myths of **fostering**

## **I'm single, can I still foster?**

Yes – Islington welcomes applications from single people of both sexes, those in a relationship or married couples.

## **Do I need to have a spare room?**

No – however, this would limit the ages you can care for. Children under three may be able to have a cot in the bedroom but older children would require a room of their own.

## **Will fostering affect my benefits?**

You can continue to claim Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as your fostering allowance will be disregarded in full as income. You can also claim income support if you are looking after a foster child under 16. We recommend however, you check with your local benefits agency when you apply in case of legislation changes.

## **I do not own my own house, is this a problem?**

No – Islington foster carers live in owned or rented accommodation, and are private or council tenants.

## **Can I foster and still work full-time?**

Yes – however, this would limit what kind of fostering you would be able to do. To foster preschool-age children, you would need to be available all day, but you can combine fostering older children with employment.

## **Do I need any formal qualifications?**

No – you don't need any formal qualifications to foster with Islington. In fact you will have the opportunity gain qualifications through attending training

## **Can I foster if I have a disability?**

Yes – Islington welcomes disabled applicants. Every person who applies to Islington will have a medical to check health or disability issues.

## **Will having a criminal record rule me out?**

We try to get a balanced picture of where people are now in their lives but violent or child-related convictions would rule you out. Many people who have a criminal record, or who have been cautioned, can still apply to be a foster carer.

## **Can I foster if I smoke?**

Yes, although you would not be able to foster children under the age of five years. We would encourage you to stop smoking for your own health and for the effect of passive smoking on a young person as well as presenting a positive role model for any child you look after.

**'Now you know the facts, what's stopping you?'**

## **Putting Children before Profit**

There are many myths around fostering for a local authority and fostering for an independent fostering agency (called an IFA) causing prospective carers confusion. Local authority fostering is with the children's services of the local council. They are allocated a budget by the council and cannot make a profit. IFAs may be charitable or non-profit but are more often set up like a business and will look to make a profit. However, both often work together to find the best possible placement for a young person. But what does this really mean day-to-day in practical terms for the foster carers involved?

### **Why should I foster with Islington rather than an independent fostering agency?**

- You will be helping local children remain near their friends and family
- You work directly with experienced multi-disciplined professionals in a single children's service department rated Outstanding by Ofsted
- Benefit from a 24/7 duty phone line with experienced staff
- Islington pays you more than local IFAs or matches your weekly allowance for Islington child placements
- Choose from more training courses to improve your skills and build your career
- Receive peer and social worker support in ten different regular support groups
- Often more regular placements with shorter waiting times between placements
- Continual support from a dedicated social worker with regular visits
- Strong foster carer association, run by foster carers for foster carers offering peer support, weekly coffee mornings and regular outings
- The council is a non-profit organisation that puts children's welfare before profit

All children nationally entering the fostering system come under the care of their local authority who legally acts as a corporate parent. IFAs do not have children in their care. They only have placements once they are approached by a local authority. IFAs are asked to help find a carer if the local authority does not have what they feel is the right foster carer to best care for a child. Often this is for a more challenging young person.

As IFAs may take referrals from a wide area a young person may be placed with a carer far away from their friends and family making their transition into care more traumatic. By becoming a foster carer with Islington you would provide a home local to their established networks including their school and social networks. If you do not live in Islington but are planning on being a long-term foster carer it may still be better for both you and the young person for you to foster directly with Islington.

It is a myth IFAs always pay their foster carers a higher allowance. With Islington you receive the same fee as through an IFA but would save money for the council in the fees they pay for the agencies service. As local authorities are non-profit this saving is then reinvested in supporting foster carers and improving the young person's fostering experience.

By fostering with a local authority you will be working with a recognised and stable organisation providing all the training and support services you need under one roof including mental health and education teams and a 24-hour duty service. This means a holistic approach to care with quicker and smoother access to services benefitting both the young people and foster carers.

# YOUR FOSTERING JOURNEY



## COME TO AN INFO SESSION

### Hear from our experienced carers

Attend one of our information sessions at a venue or online. Existing foster carers share their experiences and take questions and if you like what you hear you can fill in an application.



## ATTEND SKILLS TO FOSTER

### A mandatory training course

Join other prospective foster carers for this 3 day training presented by the team and foster carers, covering practical fostering skills and the challenges of everyday fostering.



## ATTEND FOSTERING PANEL

### Presenting your assessment

A panel of fostering professionals read your assessment. They will talk to you about your suitability to become a foster carer and make their recommendation. Congratulations!

## CALL THE FOSTERING TEAM

### Taking that first step!

Call the team and chat to a social worker. They will talk to you about the fostering basics and answer any questions. We will post or email you a pack and direct you to online info.



## HAVE A HOME VISIT

### One of the team will pop in

We will visit your home or meet virtually to see the living space and talk about how fostering will impact your family. If all agree that fostering is for you we will invite you to attend training.



## START YOUR ASSESSMENT

### Build your story

You will work with a dedicated social worker to build your assessment story showing your suitability to foster. This will also include a medical, DBS (police) check and references.



## **Why do I need an initial visit?**

Once you have attended an information session and decided you want to take the next step towards fostering a social worker from the team will book you in for an initial visit. But what is this and why do we do one?

An initial visit is in your own home with one of the recruitment and assessment team's social workers. We would like to meet as many of the household as possible on the visit such as partners and children currently living at the house but this is not essential. The visits usually take between one and two hours.

These visits are required by national regulations and all prospective foster carers will have one.

## **Why have an initial visit?**

A visit gives the team a picture of what experience you have in caring for children and young people. This experience could be through a past or current job or through looking after your own children, siblings or other family and shows us how you would be able to care for the child or young person needing a family.

It is an opportunity to have a look at the space in your home and assess whether it is suitable, with enough space for you and your family to live comfortably together with a young person.

It is another chance for us to ensure you have all the information you need to decide if fostering is for you and your family. It is a chance for all of the family to ask any questions they may have about fostering and the impact it would make on the household.

During the visit we would discuss your current lifestyle and how a child or young person would fit into your family life and work commitments. Sometimes this identifies changes that your family may need to consider.

## **What happens next?**

The visit will be discussed with the team manager and you will be contacted within a week to inform you of the outcome. This could mean:

- A further home visit to talk more about fostering
- An invite to the office for a further discussion
- An invitation to the Skills to Foster training
- The decision that it may not be the right time for you to foster at this time

Any decision will be explained to you in full and put into writing for your reference.