



# SUNBEAM FOSTERING (NORTHWEST)

## A GUIDE TO FOSTER CARE & Becoming a foster carer

June 2025





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# What is fostering?

## Rebuilding a child's future

Fostering is a way of providing a stable family life for children and young people who are unable to live with their Parents or other relatives. This can be for many reasons including :

- Relationship problems
- Family breakdown
- When a child's welfare is threatened
- Parents' illness

Providing a foster care placement in your home, allows a child or young person the chance to thrive in a safe, secure, and caring home environment. Fostering is challenging but also rewarding at the same time. It takes time, patience and commitment to foster.

The children and young people placed with foster carers are from a number of different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds and will display different behaviours depending upon their various experiences.

All children and young people are different, making it difficult to define a 'typical child', however, what you can expect is that, as with any child or young person, they need security, stability and the chance to develop and thrive.

Fostering differs from adoption. The main difference is that with adoption you become a child's legal parent permanently, whilst fostering is usually temporary (foster carers do not have parental responsibility), until a child returns to their family.

Foster care placements can last for days, months or even several years. Many children return to their families but others may receive long term support; either through continued fostering, adoption, residential care or being helped to live independently.

# What is fostering?

## Key Facts for Foster Care

- There are around 83,000 children currently in the UK who live in foster care and thousands of foster families who work tirelessly to ensure that these children and young people experience the stability and security of a nurturing, loving home. Over 6,500 new foster families are needed across the UK over the next year (Fostering Network, 2024).
- Ofsted inspect foster care providers who are both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's).
- The National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for fostering services.
- There is a strong focus on positive outcomes and safeguarding for children and young people in our foster care.



# What is an Independent Fostering Agency

- When a child is placed in care, the LA act as the corporate parent for the child. Historically, Local Authorities have been responsible for providing fostering services through foster carers they have recruited.

- Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) came into existence to support Local Authorities services and provide greater choice for the child being placed.

- In 2002, Fostering Guidelines and Regulations were introduced for IFAs to adhere to. The private sector provision has now increased to 54% of all foster care placements. The Local Authority provision remains high but the Government is committed to expanding choice, supporting private sector growth and supporting Local Authorities.

- The market for IFAs includes a few larger national players, several regional operators and small businesses. The majority of IFA's are companies.

- When selecting a fostering agency to join, it is important that potential carers consider many areas but in particular the support they receive, allowances payable and whether they will receive a placement of a child.

## Background on Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest)

- Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) is leading independent fostering agency based in the North West.

- Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) is focused on recruiting and supporting foster carers across North West England and West Yorkshire regions.

- Our agency is owned by a professional team, who have a strong vision to bring about choice and diversity, so that children and young people have the best experience they can in foster care.

- We have a dedicated experienced staff and management team with extensive social work experience within the fostering sector, providing an innovative foster care service to children and young people.

- The agency is committed to local growth whilst maintaining its family ethos and support levels.

- Children and young persons are at the heart and focus of the agency. We have a strong commitment to achieving positive outcomes, providing the best support and helping each other.

- Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) has a therapeutic focus and will support foster carers through enhanced training and development.

# Do I want to foster ? Can I foster ?

## Do I want to foster

- Becoming a foster carer is a big decision; it will impact on your life, others around you and the child or young person in your care.
- You will however have the opportunity to change a child or young person's life.
- Before deciding whether fostering is for you, be clear in your own mind why you want to foster and ensure you have support from people around you.
- It is vital that foster carers have a strong support network in place. Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) will provide a high level of support and pay allowances for looking after the child.
- Please see Appendix 1 for the profile of what is expected from a foster carer . This is based on the Fostering Network guide.

## Shortage of Carers- North West England

- There is currently an estimated shortage of over 6,000 carers in England (Fostering Network, 2024).
- We urgently require carers across all areas of the North West and West Yorkshire.
- We also need foster carers who can care for our most troubled and traumatised children and young people.

## Can I foster

- Fostering is about being able to respond to a child and help them thrive.
- Due to our commitment to meet each child's needs fully, we are looking for people who have the following qualities:
  - Ability to provide a good standard of care to other people's children.
  - Knowledge of how a child develops with the ability to communicate well with children.
  - Experience of setting boundaries and behaviour children's managing effectively
  - Caring for children therapeutically to meet their needs.

## Practical Requirements

- Spare bedroom in rented or owned property.
- At least one carer at home full time or with reduced commitments.
- Commitment to attend training and support groups.
- Flexibility.
- Driving license, preferred but not essential.

# Who will I look after and my options

It is important that potential foster carers have an idea of the types of children they are comfortable caring for, taking into account, your own and your family's circumstances and views.

## **Children can be placed in foster care from birth to 18 years :**

- Consider the preferred age of the children you would like to support.

## **Placements can be for short periods, emergency, long term or for a respite period**

- Consider which length of placement would be preferred.

## **If a child is part of a sibling group it is common for the children to be placed together:**

- It is usually the preferred outcome to place children together.
- Consider whether you have sufficient space for one child or more.

## **What type of behaviour and experiences can you manage?**

- Children have many different experiences, challenges and abilities – how supportive can you be and where your training/development needs are.
- Would you be confident with training and support to care for children with specific needs including:
  - Children with disabilities
  - Complex needs such as autism or significant health needs
  - Children with challenging behaviour
  - Enhanced placements for children and young people who need therapeutic fostering from their carer

## **Are you able to care for children from different religions or ethnic backgrounds?**

- Do you have knowledge of other religions and ethnic backgrounds?
- All the above areas would be considered when you make your application and would be included in your "Approval Terms" when you become a carer.
- Your approval terms are then used to "match" you to the appropriate children.



# Fostering different children

Foster carers look after children through one of the following placement types which are provided by Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) to Local Authorities. When a child is accepted in a foster carer home, this is referred to as a “placement”.

## Placement Type

## Details

Emergency care placement

Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) provides a 24 hours a day emergency service. Many carers choose to specialise in short term work and are able to accept unplanned, emergency placements. An emergency placement ideally should not exceed a few days it would be anticipated that the child or young person should be moved to a more suitable placement within a week in a planned way.

Short term placement

Provision of short-term care that could be for a few days, weeks or months, whilst plans are made for the child’s future by the Local Authority. Foster carers work with children /young people and their families as appropriate to fulfill the objectives of the care plan, whether this be for reunification or another type of placement such as long term fostering.

Respite placement

Respite placements are provided to give parents a break from their children within a set time frame for the children to return home and offers additional support to the birth parent where they often do not have their own support network. In addition, respite is also offered to our foster carers and is available in order to support the foster carer with the child or young person’s level of needs and care.

Long Term Placement

These placements are where adoption is not an option, and the foster carer will care for a child / young person up to and into adult independence.

Parent and child placement

Placements are available for mothers and /or fathers and their child/baby , where foster carers can provide support and guidance to parent (s) and help them develop parenting skills. If requested , and by arrangement with the placing Local Authority , a formal assessment of parenting ability can be undertaken by Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest). Comprehensive written assessment reports , for use in child protection conferences , planning meetings, statutory reviews or court proceedings, can be prepared.

# Fostering different children

## Placement Type

Therapeutic Fostering  
Supporting Enhanced  
Placements

## Details

Local Authorities define children and young people's needs and behaviour as either core, enhanced or complex . Where a placement is determined as core the foster carer can expect the common behaviours and needs of those children and young people who have been removed from their birth family sadly because of the loss, bereavement and due to past adverse childhood experiences.

For enhanced placements , this would be where the child or young person is suffering from trauma related behaviours to a greater level After recognising the growing need for therapeutic foster placements, "Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) Therapeutic" provides extra training for carers, access to therapists, other professionals and increased social worker contact. The therapeutic level intervention provides overarching support to assist carers with therapeutic parenting and supervision in order to fully support the child's and young person' s emotional well-being. Such placements can vary in time from emergency , short term and long term however we are often looking for carers who will provide a permanent foster placement. Complex placements would also include those young people who are stepping down from a residential placement. Please see our Therapeutic Fostering booklet for further information. Other complex placements may involve caring for a child or young person with significant health needs or disabilities such as autism, profound global developmental delay and palliative care. Therapeutic training for foster carers is to be delivered successfully across the North West region to help foster carers with these needs.

## Solo Placements

We also care for children and young people who can only be placed in a household where there are no other Foster children. This maybe be due to a number of reasons such as level of risk they pose to other children, the level of need and support they require and as a result the Local Authority request from the onset that the child/ young person needs to be placed on their own.

# How do I become a Foster Carer?

Applying to become a foster carer is an in-depth process, however we will provide guidance and full support at every step of the way. All we asks that before you proceed you ensure you are **fully committed** to the fostering assessment process . Please ask all the questions you need upfront which we will help with.

## The Assessment Process



## Steps Explained

**Enquiry Form** – Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest) will contact you for an initial discussion and arrange for an enquiry form to be completed over the phone or online. If the enquiry is positive a member of the team will contact yourself for a telephone screening and arrange a visit.

**Initial Home Visit** - A team member from Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest) will visit or arrange a video call to discuss fostering with you further, to gather some background information about you and your family, to check you have appropriate bedroom space in your home and discuss any other Health & Safety related issues. If the visit is positive and you wish to proceed, an application form can be completed following the home visit or alternatively this can be completed later and sent to us by post or online.

**Completed Application Form** - Once this is completed and your application is accepted, a formal assessment will begin.

# How do I become a Foster Carer?

**Fostering Assessment** - The assessment process, sometimes called a 'home study' or 'Form F' essentially involves a review of your suitability to provide foster care. This will be undertaken by a skilled member of your Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) team and you will receive full support at all stages. As part of the process, you will be required to:

1. Narrate and explore your own childhood, past relationships, family history and life experiences.
2. Provide references – both personal and employment.
3. Undertake a medical check with your GP (paid for by us).
4. Consent to other checks with Local Authorities, schools or other agencies.
5. Undertake a criminal record check known as DBS for all household members over the age of 18 years old. For more information, please visit ([www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service))
6. At any point you may decide that you would like to become an enhanced carer and if this is the case the assessor will review different competencies to assess your suitability to care for children and young people with greater needs.

**Invitation to Preparation Training** - You will receive specific training through a dedicated training course (up to 3 days) to prepare you to foster known as "Skills to Foster". Attending this course will also allow you to meet other applicants, share experiences and learn more about foster care. For applicants wishing to look after children with disabilities or complex needs additional training will be provided.

We have a range of enhanced training courses such as learning how to become a Therapeutic foster carer, caring and supporting parent and child placements and caring for children with disabilities (see next page).

**Panel** - Following completion of your training and fostering assessment, the report will be submitted to an Independent Panel who will decide whether to recommend your approval to the agency decision maker to become a foster carer. Panel will also consider the terms of approval such as the numbers and ages of children that can be placed with you and also the types of placements. You will be asked to attend the Panel with the social worker who completed your assessment.

**Approved** - The Agency decision maker holds the final decision regarding your approval and will review all the paperwork presented to panel as well as the panel minutes to make the decision. Once approved you will then be a registered foster carer with Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) and be able to care for looked after children and young people in your home. You will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker to help and support you. The path to becoming a Foster Carer requires commitment to the assessment process and our current foster carers would be happy to share their experiences of the assessment process.

# Become a Sunbeam (Northwest) Therapeutic Foster Carer

Our Enhanced Fostering Service has been developed for our most traumatised children who require a therapeutic foster placement with an Enhanced Foster Carer. We have developed a specific service to meet the needs of children and young people with enhanced or complex needs providing a higher degree of support, supervision, education and fostering allowance to foster carers.

Our therapeutic parenting model is based on the ARC model of caring for children and young people who have been traumatised. The ARC model has been developed by a psychologist and social worker in the United States who have pulled together all of their vast experience to develop an evidence-based approach to caring for traumatised children. Please see our booklet Enhanced Fostering with ARC for further information.

The ARC model is easy to understand and we believe those individuals who have a keen interest in the psychology of parenting will do well to put themselves forward. We ask that our Enhanced Foster Carers are full time at home or have limited competing demands and that there are no other younger children living in the household. It is also important that we seek applicants who are able to offer a long-term commitment to children and young people as we know long-term security for children increases positive outcomes.

The assessment process to becoming a Therapeutic Foster Carer is the same as becoming a foster carer (see page 9) with additional competencies to evidence the skills, knowledge and experience that is required to become an Enhanced Foster Carer. Our enhanced and therapeutic training may take place prior to approval or during the first year of approval.



# Initial Home Visit

## Purpose and Importance

You will be visited by a member of our recruitment team to discuss your enquiry. This meeting will last around 1 to 2 hours and is an important part of the enquiry process. At this stage, you try to decide if foster care is the right decision for you.

We will explore many areas including:

- Your background and interest in foster care
- What is fostering in more detail
- Background on Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) and support you will receive

Please ask all the questions you need and take your time before deciding to proceed to the next stage. Our staff will be able to deal with all your questions at any stage both over the telephone and during the visit.

A partnership is formed between you and ourselves and we will be open on the challenges you may face. If there is any concerns you wish to raise, please do so at this stage. Possible questions you may wish to ask include:

- Ask if you can speak to an existing carer about fostering.
- Is my spare room of a sufficient size?
- What allowances will I be paid?
- What is the position on the child or young person's education?
- How will this affect my job (if applicable)?
- How will the child or young person travel to school?
- Which Local Authorities near me do you work with?

After the initial home visit, we will assess your suitability and check if you wish to proceed and make a formal application. If at any time you feel that you do not wish to continue with your enquiry or feel things are moving too fast, then please let us know. We will be happy to discuss your options further.



# Support you will receive from Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest)

- **24 hours support-** We always have a staff member available 24 hours for 365 days throughout the year to help with any issues you may have.
- **Full training** - You will receive tailored training programmes to enhance your skills and experiences. This will support your development as a foster carer. Training is free and provided by Sunbeam. We operate a financial incentive for the completion of a full years training linked to a child in placement.
- **Allocated Social Worker** - A social worker will work with you on a one to one basis to ensure you receive full support. They will meet with you regularly and work closely with the Local Authority's social worker.
- **Membership of Foster Talk** - All our approved carers receive full membership automatically, giving you carer insurance and support.
- **Regular support groups** - We hold support groups for you to meet with other carer sand share experiences.
- **Access to our support workers** - If you need help with a child or young person, we can provide extra support.
- **Respite care** - If you wish, we will provide short term breaks from fostering for you during the year.
- **Children's activities** - We run events for children such as day trips and also an annual Fun Day.
- **Financial remuneration** - You will receive full allowances to cover the child or young person's needs and a "reward element". Our rates are benchmarked against other fostering agencies and local authorities to ensure they are comprehensive. Please see Appendix 2
- **Problem solving support** - Practical advice on issues such as finance, equipment and transport.
- **Dedicated Placement Matching** - All placements will be discussed with you before you are put forward as a potential carer.
- Participation in "Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) Voice" to share your feedback to develop the service, agency and your support.
- For Enhanced Foster Carers we have designed a service to provide the best possible support and care for our foster carers in order to ensure that they are able to undertake the role of caring for our most traumatised children and placements where the needs of the child or young person is higher than the expected needs of foster children. For this service the enhanced foster carer will receive:
  - Higher Fostering Allowances
  - Specialist Training
  - Therapeutic Support Groups for carers
  - Access to therapists and other family support from an outreach worker
  - Optional Respite
  - Increased Supervision and support visits from your Supervising Social Worker

# Training

## Skills to Foster (Pre - Approval)

- As applicants, you will be invited to attend the Skills to Foster Training Course.
- This is up to a three day course designed to provide as much information about foster care as possible to assist you in your decision to become a foster carer. We hold the course on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday at a local venue near you or virtually for selected elements of the course.
- It is also a chance to meet other people applying and existing carers to share experiences of fostering.
- The training will also cover:
  - Child protection / safeguarding issues
  - Managing challenging behavior
  - Safer caring
  - Health and safety
  - Working in partnership

## Enhanced Carers (Pre-Approval Training)

For applicants being assessed to care for children with enhanced and complex needs in addition to Skills to Foster, there is a further training that will either take place during the assessment phase or shortly after the approval. The following is a summary of the areas covered.

- Understanding attachment and how trauma impacts on children and young people
- How to parent therapeutically and to benefit from support from therapists and other professionals
- Learn to implement and develop treatment targets
- Develop resources that enables a no drama approach to parenting

## Post Approval Training

Training is a mandatory requirement for all foster carers and Sunbeam encourages attendance by holding training at different venues and on weekends, to assist applicant's ability to attend.

We seek to be flexible for our foster carers given the demands on your time and we also ensure training is focused and relevant.

All carers are required to complete TSDs (Training, Support and Development standards for foster care) training within 12 months of approval. TSDs are responsible for providing guidelines for required foster care training.

# What happens after Approval?

## Social Worker

After approval, you will be allocated a social worker to work with you and provide guidance. They will also help you with your first placement, all future placements and progress your development as a carer. We perceive fostering as a career and hence it is important that you have skilled and experienced professionals who can support your learning and developmental needs.



## First Placement

If you decide to foster with an IFA, you should ensure that they can offer you placements otherwise you might be approved and wait for an extended period of time for your first placement. Increasingly Local Authorities are moving to preferred providers or contracts to only work with selected agencies. Sunbeam have a strong track record with Local Authorities and hold the key contracts where we provide services.

When your first placement is made, this of course can be a challenging time and at Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) we recognise this. We will therefore make sure you receive additional support from the onset. We will ensure that placement is discussed at length beforehand so you can be comfortable with the process and expected care requirements of the child or young person.

We will ensure this happens not just for your first placement but for all the future placements.

# Reasons to join Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest)



There are many reasons to join Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest) and key reasons are summarised below, for further reasons to join us please visit our website [sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com](http://sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com) or call us on 01254 311 322 or email us at [info@sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com](mailto:info@sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com)

- All our foster carers have 24-hour access to staff and support which is not just a promise but delivered 365 days per year.
- Access to Therapeutic Training.
- We offer career path into social work and further national qualifications of fostering.
- Currently we offer over 100 different trainings to our foster carers.
- Extensive information will be provided on fostering to help your approval process.
- Our strong focus on quality and better outcomes for children.
- Full support will be provided to you including a comprehensive induction to fostering once approved.
- We have strong Local Authority relationships in the North West and secure many contracts to secure placements for you. We have a family ethos and you will be welcomed through regular events , your supervising social worker and support groups.
- Competitive fostering allowances with many other benefits.
- Comprehensive insurance to cover any willful damage by foster children.

# Contacts and next steps

We hope you have found this guide useful and it has given you further information on foster care and also importantly our organisation, which we are very proud of.

We would be delighted to help you on your journey to becoming foster carer and please let us know if you have any further questions.

Thank you for considering to help vulnerable children and ultimately make a difference. Without foster carers willing to do this, we can not achieve the outcomes we all want for children and young people.

We hope you decide to join the Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest) Family, and take the first steps to making a difference, in doing so please :

**1** Make an Enquiry - Online, Telephone, Post, In person

**2** You will then be contacted by a member of our recruitment team to discuss your enquiry in more detail and arrange an initial visit.

**3** Complete the application pack and return a copy to us.

One phone call makes all the difference...

## Contact Information

Telephone  
01254 311 322

EMAIL:  
[info@sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com](mailto:info@sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com)

WEBSITE  
[sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com](http://sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com)



# Appendix 1 - Outline of a foster carer's role

## Foster Carer Role - Summary

Below are some of the responsibilities of being a foster carer. Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest)'s professional team will be with you at every step to help and support you.

## Specific Responsibilities

### Caring For Children

- "To be responsible for the care in one's own home of a child or children placed by a Local Authority and to work with the foster care agency (IFA) and all those involved in helping children fulfill their potential."
- To provide day-to-day care for the children being looked after, having regard to the particular demands on children separated from their families.
- To take part in implementing the childcare plan, this would include specific tasks and, often, contact with parents and others who are important to the child.
- To promote the health, growth and development of the child or children, with particular emphasis on health and on educational achievement.
- To ensure that the children being looked after are encouraged in a positive understanding of their origins, religion and culture.
- To assist and support parents and other people who are significant in a child's life to sustain and develop relations with them.
- To enable children and young people who are moving on, to do so in a positive manner.

### Providing a safe and caring environment

- To ensure that children are kept safe from harm and abuse and that they are taught how to get help should anything untoward occur.
- To promote the secure attachment of children to adults capable of providing safe and effective care.
- To act as an advocate for each child.

### Working as a part of team

- To be part of the Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest) family and work with our staff and professionals within our guidelines, policies and procedures.
- To attend and actively participate in all reviews, family meetings, case conferences and court hearings as required, and to keep written records of placements and contribute to reports.
- To take up appropriate training opportunities and recognise the benefit of continued training.
- To deal responsibly with confidential information.

# Appendix 2 - Fostering Allowances

## Allowances to Cover Living Costs and Provide a Reward

You will receive a carer payment from Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest) to cover living costs, children's allowances and also a reward element in recognition of the important contribution of a foster carer.

Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest) considers that a foster carer is undertaking a career in working with children and therefore should be rewarded accordingly. Sunbeam Fostering (Northwest)'s carer payments and fees are at a competitive rate to effect this.

The amount of carer payment you will receive depends on the type of placement and other factors such as the age of the child and other possible challenges with their behaviour.

The payment also reflects living costs and allowances for children incurred including:

- Food
- Travel costs
- Household bills
- Clothing
- Activities
- Personal costs for children

*Please get in touch with our team for a full breakdown and fact sheet of our weekly rates of up to £730 per child per week.*

## Tax Position

For your relationship with us you will be treated as self employed and you should receive favourable tax treatment on the payments received depending on your own circumstances.

In 2003, a tax relief was introduced to exempt gross foster care payments from tax provided an individual limit is not exceeded.

This is currently £19,690 per household per annum. On top of the £19,690 exemption, you also get tax relief for every week (or part week) that a child is in your care. This means you do not usually pay tax on your earnings from foster care, even if they go over £19,690. There are other reliefs for specialist placements.

You should seek your own tax advice regarding foster care payments which is available from HMRC's website under "foster care relief" or please ask us for a fact sheet.

## HMRC Help

The HMRC have also recently introduced a new helpline for foster carers regarding tax credits, the number for the helpline is **0845 300 3900**.

# Contact Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest)



## Registered/Head Office address

Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest)  
The Beehive centre, Shadworth Business park,  
Blackburn BB1 2QS  
Tel: 01254 311 322  
Email:info@sunbeamfosteringnorthwest.com



**Registered Office**  
**01254 311 322**

# A Guide to Foster Care & Becoming a Carer



## Registered Office

Sunbeam Fostering(Northwest)  
The Beehive centre, Shadworth Business park,  
Blackburn BB1 2QS  
Tel: 01254 311 322