

Fostering for Adoption: Information for prospective adopters.

We are looking for people who can care for, and then potentially adopt, some of the children in Local Authority care in Bristol, Bath and N E Somerset, N Somerset and S Gloucestershire, as Fostering for Adoption (FFA) carers. This is a relatively new, and quicker way to enable children to be cared for in their potential adoptive family while the case is still progressing through the family courts. We want to be able to offer these placements to children here in the partnership area, as we know that children benefit from being cared for in a secure and stable permanent home as soon as this is possible.

The majority of people who are interested in adoption already recognise that most children that cannot live with their birth families need a new 'forever family' as quickly as possible. Unfortunately many children have to wait a long time for the system to enable them to live with a new permanent family. Fostering for Adoption is just one of the ways Local Authorities are trying to speed things up for children.

What is Fostering for Adoption?

Fostering for Adoption involves placing a child who is in temporary Local Authority care with special foster carers who are also approved as adopters. This means that if the court agrees with the Local Authority that the child should be adopted, and the adoption agency approves the 'match' between the carers as adopters and the child, then the placement can become the adoptive placement. Fostering to Adopt carers are approved adopters who have been prepared and assessed as suitable to undertake a temporary fostering role for a specific child and then adopt the child if the court is in agreement.

Fostering for Adoption has real benefits for the child:

- They are placed with carers who have the potential to become their adoptive family earlier in their care journey.
- FFA avoids the damage and upset caused by having to end temporary foster care relationships which for the child are likely to have been experienced as their primary parenting relationship.
- FFA allows the child to receive the very best possible care earlier in their care journey and in their life, which is likely to lead to better outcomes for them in the future.

Fostering for adoption carers can also benefit from starting their relationship with the child they may go on to adopt earlier in the child's journey. However, it is important for FFA

carers to understand that until the court decided that adoption is the right plan for the child other outcomes are possible, one of which may be that the child returns to their family of birth.

Why not place a child directly for Adoption?

If the birth parents agree and no other family member has expressed interest in to the adoption, then a child can be placed directly with adopters. However, this is unusual and in most cases the court has to decide whether or not a child can be placed for adoption. The Local Authority must not act in any way that predicts the outcome of the court's decision and that includes finding and agreeing an adoption placement. Therefore the Local Authority must place the child with 'foster carers' until the court reaches a decision.

What is the role of the Fostering for Adopt carers?

While caring for the child placed with them, the FFA carers will be required to work with the Local Authority (who are the corporate parents when a child is in care) to care for the child. This will entail attending meetings, reviews and keeping writing records. The FFA carers will be prepared and supported in these tasks. If the courts decide that the child's parents cannot provide the security and care they need, and there are no alternative carers, a full Care Order and Placement Order will be issued and the child will remain with their FFA carers, who would then become their prospective adoptive parents until the child can be formally adopted by them.

FFA placements are only appropriate in cases where the Local Authority has carried out an assessment of the parents and birth family and decided that adoption is the best plan for the child. The Local Authority must be open and transparent when it makes a FFA placement, informing the court and birth parents and all those who have a direct interest in the child's plan. The Local Authority should explain why it is making a FFA placement and acknowledge that the court may not approve the adoption plan and that the child may return to parents or elsewhere.

What arrangements are made about contact?

Contact in this context refers to enabling the child to have face-to-face time (usually supervised) with their birth parents. FFA carers would usually be expected to transport a child to and from contact and liaise with the birth parents around these sessions in regard to the care of the child.

What are the benefits of FFA for children?

The great advantage for children is that if they cannot go back to their birth family, it will avoid the stressful upheaval and trauma for the child of having to move from their foster home (where they are likely to have built up attachments) to a new adoptive family. They are also likely to have formed an attachment with their new adoptive parents from a very early stage in the care process, which will provide them with a secure foundation for emotional and behavioural development throughout their lives.

Are there any advantages for FFA carers?

The advantage for the FFA carers who go on to adopt is that they will also have got to know their children from earlier in their care journey. They will have been able to protect the child from further losses and upheavals. They are also likely to have had the opportunity to get to know the child's parents through contact and will be in a good position to understand their background and struggles, which will be helpful for them and their adopted child in the future.

Who can be a Fostering for Adoption carer?

We are looking for families who are resourceful and emotionally mature, able to put the needs of children first and who can respect and work with the children's families in the early months. We need families from different backgrounds and religions, single parents as well as couples. It is important that families have a strong support network that they can rely on.

What support will Fostering for Adoption carers receive?

FFA carers will be offered additional training to the preparation for adoption course. This will usually consist of sessions on the role and responsibilities of the fostering role and they will also have be-spoke sessions with their assessing social worker to prepare them for the task. FFA carers should expect to receive a high level of support from their social worker as well as good communication with the child's social worker. They can also expect on-going post-adoption support should the child end up being placed with them permanently.

FFA carers will be offered fostering allowances during the period the children are fostered.

What is the next step for FFA carers?

Please contact your local authority Family Placement Team directly.