

Your guide to fostering in the Wigan and Leigh Borough

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www.wigan.gov.uk/fostering

Foster 
For Wigan





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What is fostering?

Fostering is an arrangement in which adults care for a child or children whose birthparents are unable to care for them. Children come into care for a variety of reasons and may have suffered abuse or neglect. Living with a foster carer offers children a chance to regain stability and security in their lives in a family home.

Fostering can be challenging and demanding, but it is also extremely rewarding, and you can change a child's life.



Who can foster?

There is no “typical foster carer”.

Wigan Council welcomes applications from people who are:

- Single, married or living together
- Any gender
- Heterosexual, gay or lesbian
- Working, unemployed or retired
- Homeowner or renting

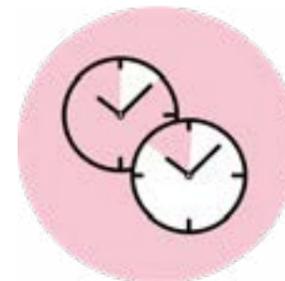
However, there are also a few minimum requirements to become a foster carer:

- Having a spare bedroom for the child to sleep. Foster children cannot share with birth children
- Being over 21 (there is no upper age limit)
- Willing to have a medical and be able to look after a foster child.
- Having experience of caring for, or working with children
- Having a good support network of family and friends
- Possessing a caring nature and a commitment to providing a loving and stable home

Types of foster placements

There are different types of fostering for you to consider. From caring for a child or children for one day, a week, to every day for the remainder of their childhood and everything in between. It's important to choose the option which works best for you and your family.

Foster carers play an important role working with children and young people to help make sure they get the care and support they need. From attending school and health appointments to taking part in extra curricular activities, foster carers look after the children in their care on a day-to-day basis.



General foster care falls into two categories - short term and long term.

Short term fostering means providing a child or young person with a place to stay until they can return to their own family, it becomes evident that they need a more permanent foster placement or possibly adoptive parents. A short term foster placement can last from a few days to several months depending on the situation. A short term foster carer will need to be available to respond to urgent or short notice requirements for foster placements.

Long term foster placements give a child or young person somewhere to live and grow for a number of years if they cannot return to the care of their own families. This can last for many years, usually until the child reaches 18, or until the young person becomes ready for adult life.

Other types of placements



Parent and Child

Specially trained foster carers will take parents and their babies into their home, providing them with care and support, and teaching them how to care for their baby. Becoming a parent at any age is a challenging time in life, but doing this whilst being away from home is extremely difficult. Carers are needed to help both the parents and the child through this journey. They will need to provide support, advice and reassurance, making both parent and baby feel comfortable in their new surroundings.



Supported Lodgings

Supported lodgings are for young people aged 16-25 years old who are unable to live with their families for various reasons. These young people will still need additional practical and emotional support to develop their independent living skills.

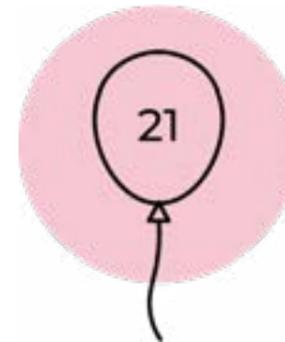
This type of accommodation is needed to enable young people to make a successful transition to adulthood with additional support.

A high percentage of care leavers can be disadvantaged in terms of education, employment, poorer health and in some circumstances housing. This is often because these young people are trying to live independently a lot earlier than their peers. A supported lodgings placements allows them the time to build their confidence so they can take the next step to adulthood.



Short Break (Respite)

Foster carers offer part-time care to provide both the children and their family or regular foster carer with a break. Children may have disabilities or have behavioural difficulties. Arrangements are made to suit the needs of the child. This scheme is often attractive to people looking to build up their experience of fostering, or when your current work patterns restrict your ability to offer full time care.



Staying Put

Staying Put is when a young person continues to stay with their current foster carer after their 18th birthday, up to the age of 21. This arrangement aims to allow the young person a period of stability to help them adjust to the new and challenging transition to adulthood. The foster carer is no longer acting in the capacity of foster carer for the young person and is not governed by fostering regulations. Also the young person is no longer classed as a looked after child.

However, the carer continues to receive regular support and financial allowances to enable the young person to stay in their family environment longer. The young person and carer are supported to prepare practical knowledge and experience to make living independently a successful transition. Some young people access work, or training and some will continue with their education. Many of our young people enjoy the opportunity to maintain their family setting experience and gain confidence, which helps them decide what they want in the future.



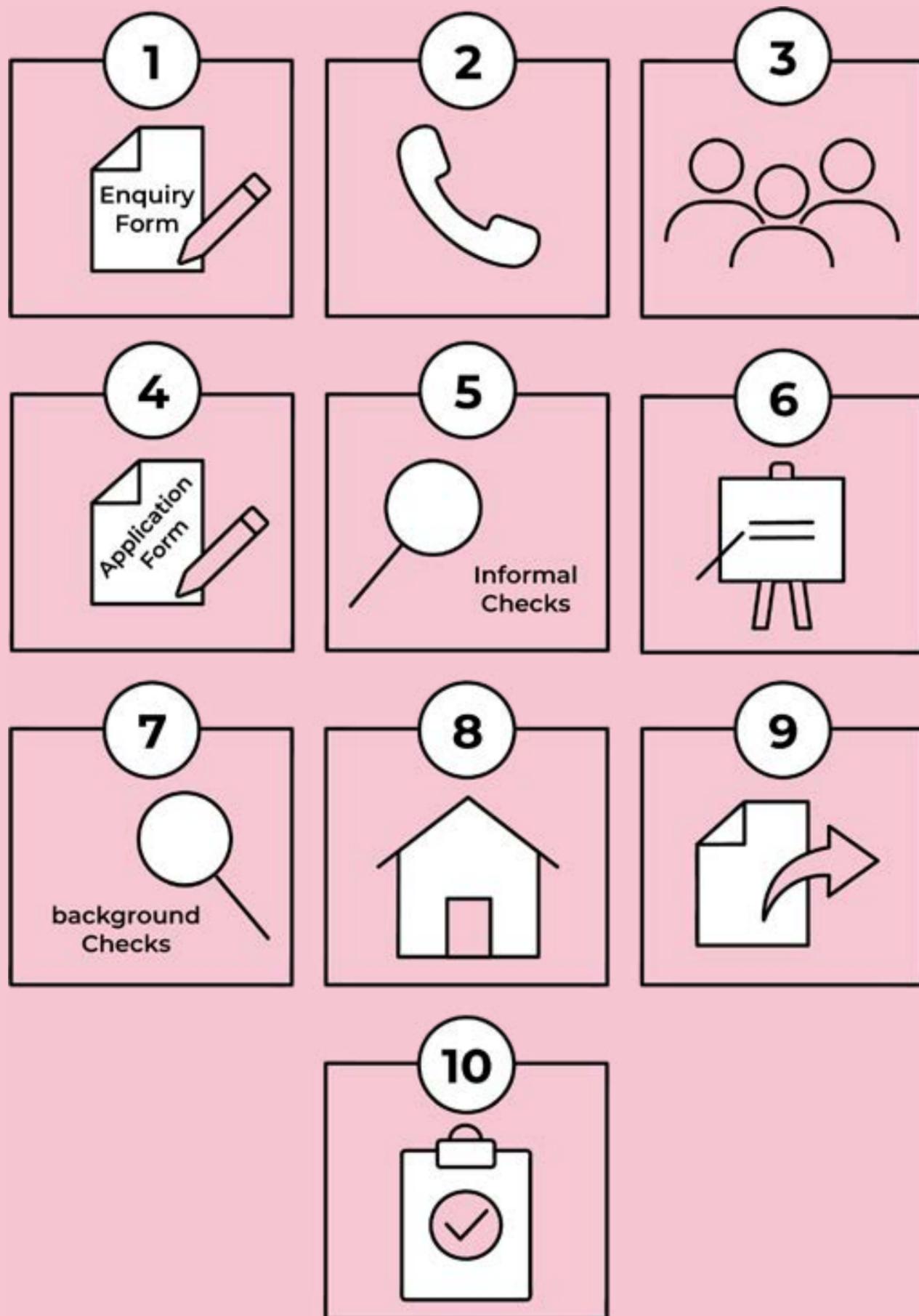
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Foster placements are needed for children and young people seeking asylum so they can feel safe and begin to build a new life for themselves. Young people and children seeking asylum are most often motivated learners, who make a positive contribution.



Step down

Children and young people living in residential care are looking for foster homes offering a loving and stable family environment. These children will have experienced a lot of difficulties such as severe neglect and abuse, experienced multiple moves and will be coming from a residential setting. This transition between residential and returning to a family setting can be extremely difficult, and young people need someone who can understand and empathise with them. Step down fostering requires patience, understanding, and the ability to allow the young people to express their emotions without being judged.



A foster carer's journey

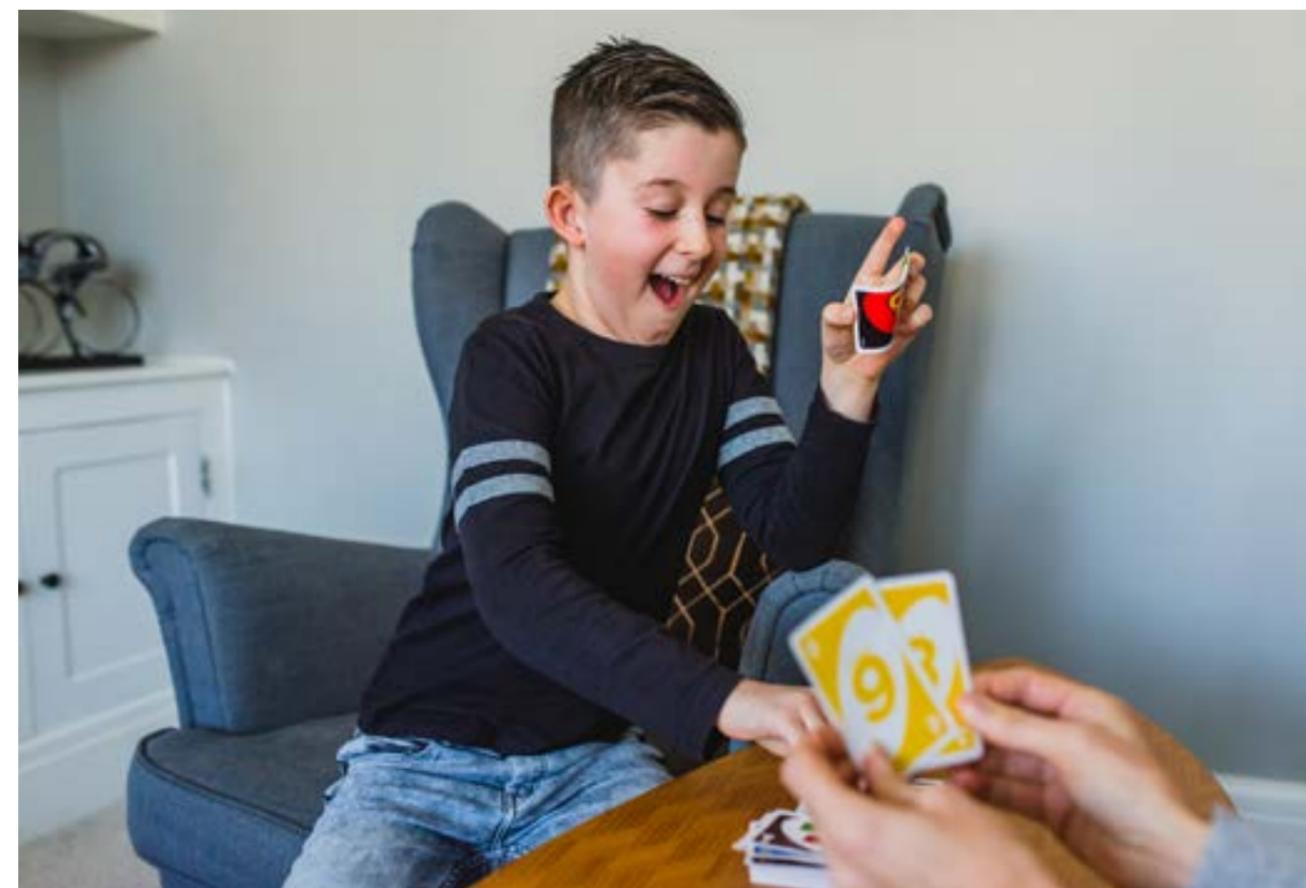
On average it takes around 6 months from making an application to becoming foster carer with Wigan Council. However, length of time depends on each individual case.

We continuously strive to shorten the time it takes to approve foster carers in accordance with Government statutory guidance.

However, our main priority is ensuring the wellbeing of children who are being fostered.

1. **Contact our team** by completing our online enquiry form or call 01942 487200
2. **Find out more** – You will have a telephone discussion with a team member to share information, receive written information and have a home visit
3. **Fostering Events** – Attend information sessions, meet the team and our foster carers
4. **Attend training** – All foster carers need to complete our “skills to foster” pre-approval training course. This course covers several areas across 6 weeks
5. **Apply** – Fill out the application foster form
6. **Informal checks** – Start of your background checks on our system, have you received services from us in the past.
7. **Background checks** – Checks including references, medical and police checks will be carried out, which will be included in your report for panel
8. **Family visits/assessments** – A social worker will be assigned to you and will visit you in your home. They will prepare a report on you and your family which includes your background experience and skills in caring for children
9. **Fostering Panel** – Your full report is submitted to an independent fostering panel
10. **Approval** – The panel will make a recommendation to the “agency decision maker” who will make a decision on your approval

*Please be aware our fostering process continues to be adapted to protect the health of our fostering applicants.





Training, allowances and support

If you foster in Wigan, you will have access to a fantastic support package designed to ensure that you're fully prepared to become a foster carer and ready to meet the needs of different children.

Through the 'Deal for Foster Carers' we'll provide:

- Extensive training opportunities to support carers with their fostering placements
- Competitive weekly allowances and exclusive rewards
- Around the clock emergency support.
- Wide support package including home visits, Support groups and mentoring.
- Mockingbird Family Model which has satellite family homes that are supported by a central hub home. The hub home and satellite homes are supported by the fostering service.

A breakdown of our support package includes:

- Financial allowances and rewards
- A generous weekly allowance ranging from £224 - £686 per child per week, depending on the age and needs of the child, and the skills and experience of the foster carer(s)
- Additional allowances for birthdays and Christmas
- Annual celebration event to honour your commitment and hard work
- Max Card discounts - Offering discounted admission to venues across the UK
- Grand Arcade vouchers for long serving carers - you'll receive £250 after 5 years, £500 after 10 years, £750 after 15 years and up to £1000 after 20 years (alternative local voucher options may be available to carers that do not access Wigan town centre)
- Carers receive £250 if they recommend someone who goes on to be approved, and a further £250 when that person takes their first placement
- Discounted leisure membership
- A range of exclusive benefits and discounts for high street shops, savings schemes and discounted products with the Council's My Rewards scheme, where you can save up to £1000 per year on practically everything. As a foster carer with us you will receive a personal number via post or email, enabling you to register for the benefits
- Transfer bonus for IFA carers - They will receive a one off lump sum of £500 per household once they're approved as Wigan Council foster carers.
- Comprehensive support including Wigan's fostering team, The Fostering Network, Wigan's Advocate Forum, Foster Carers Support Group as well as a host of other groups
- Links and support from other foster carers
- Priority attention in respect of housing – eligible for additional priority on the housing register
- Consultation events
- Access to the Employee Assistance Programme which gives you access to counselling services and additional support
- Wigan also offers a unique partnership between services from CAMHS, our Atom outreach support services, specialist CLA nurses and the Virtual Schools Team to provide a team around each placement, ensuring foster carers and children feel supported and have their needs met in an individual tailored way. This enhances the support available from your Supervising Social Worker.

Training

Training before and after you've been approved - Our extensive training programme is renowned across the North West and includes:

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Dealing with challenging behaviours
- Caring for children with attachment difficulties
- Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent WRAP (Radicalisation)
- Celebrating Differences: Newly Arrived
- Refugees and those seeking Asylum (NARA)
- Practical Attachment Strategy for Carers (PASC)
- Behaviour and de-escalation
- ADHD Awareness and workshops
- Autism awareness
- Sensory processing difficulties
- Therapeutic parenting
- Health and wellbeing
- Promoting children and young people's positive mental health
- Self harm
- Understanding and managing challenging behaviour
- Child sexual development
- Education, health and care plan process and signposting to additional services
- Health issues faced by looked after children
- Overview of safe sleep, infant feeding and introducing solid foods
- Paediatric first aid
- Emotional validation
- Loss, bereavement and unwanted change
- Emergency first aid
- A range of e-learning
- Adolescence
- Drug and alcohol training
- Restorative approach training
- Supporting and preparing for independence
- LGBT
- RSPCA – breaking the chain training
- LADO training
- Education for children looked after
- Parenting for a child who has experienced trauma
- Pathway planning
- Staying Put



Myth busting

There are lots of misconceptions in terms of who can and cannot become a foster carer.

We do not exclude anyone from considerations on the ground of sexuality, race, marital status, gender, disability or employment status.

Here are some common myths, which often stop people from applying to become a foster carer:

I'm single so can't foster

You can foster if you're single, with a partner of the same sex or different sex, married, divorced or widowed.

I can't continue working if I foster

You must consider the demands of looking after a child and whether your hours are flexible enough to fit around this for school runs, meetings and appointments. You would also need to be available during holidays and when they're ill (check your employer's foster carer policy).

I don't own my own home so can't foster

You can rent or be a homeowner. If you rent your home your tenancy will need to be secure. You also need to have a spare bedroom. This helps ensure that your foster child and any children of your own have their own space and privacy.

I'm too old to foster

There is no upper age limit. As long as you feel you are healthy enough to look after a child.

I can't afford to foster

We offer a generous weekly allowance ranging from £224 - £686 per child per week, depending on the age and needs of the child, and the skills and experience of the foster carer(s). We also offer additional allowances for birthdays and Christmas.

I don't have childcare experience

You do need some childcare experience to be a foster carer. This could be from raising your own or your partner's children, through your work or volunteering. If you don't have any experience, or very little experience, we can advise you on how to get it.

My children live at home so can't foster

We encourage people with parenting experience to foster. It doesn't matter if your children have grown up and left the family home or if they're still living with you. If your own children are very young, we may suggest that you wait until they are a little older before you start fostering. Your children, their ages and their needs will be included in the assessment process.



Foster carer Q&A
Chaz and Mark's story

Why did you decide to start fostering?

I've always wanted to make a difference to a child's life, and really expected to have my own biological children. However, after many years of trying, my brother, who is also a foster carer, encouraged us to apply to become foster carers. I had seen the positive impact on the children who came to be cared for by my brother and it had really inspired me. I had also seen the challenges that fostering can bring, but I knew with the right support and skills these could be worked through. I personally never thought we would be accepted to be foster parents, but I was so determined to make a difference to children's lives that I moved forward with the process. I soon realised that all the challenges I had faced in my own life were actually my strengths, and would help me to support the children we would go on to care for.

How did the fostering process work?

We originally started our fostering journey back in 2009 with an independent fostering agency in Scotland. The process was long as we had so much to work through due to our own personal experience, and rightly so they didn't leave any stone uncovered. It was hard to discuss some of our painful history, but we knew fostering was something we really wanted to do. We have actually gone through the process a further 3 times and even though it was tough at the time, it was so rewarding at the end of it. I also found that my experiences through childhood and young adult life were my strengths to help vulnerable children. After fostering with independent agencies, in 2019 we transferred to Wigan Council, and I can honestly say that fostering through the local authority was the best decision we ever made.

What has your experience of fostering been like?

We have had various types of placements through our fostering journey. We have had children who have been removed from home and come straight into care, children who have had many placements previously, and 2 sibling groups of 3 children. We have particularly enjoyed caring for siblings, and although we have found it exhausting at times, it has been the most rewarding.

One of the sibling groups are currently with us, and we are hoping to go long term with them. We have also been foster carers for 9 years to another child with additional needs. Looking after a child with additional need isn't easy, but to help a child grow and thrive encouraged me. I have broadened my own knowledge on the needs of the child, and this has helped me to help other professionals

learn more about how to help our child, and I have supported other foster carers who are going through similar experiences. Being a foster carer for a child with additional needs not only helps the child grow as a person, but you do too. You must be an advocate, because without you they don't have a voice.

We have also looked after teenagers before, with all of them being different but similar in many ways. I can honestly say teenagers get very bad press, but I have an amazing young person who is soon to be a teenager who is an incredible person, and is a pleasure to have in my home and be a part of our family.

What support is available?

The support we have had available to us has been outstanding. We have regular supervision and phone calls to check in on us. Our supervising social worker has supported us as a family through some difficult personal circumstances and has gone the extra mile to ensure we are supported, even though it wasn't part of their role.

We became part of the second Mockingbird project which is an extended network of family support. We felt extremely supported and like we had a second family around us. We utilise WhatsApp, attend constellation meetings, and social events. We have been offered places for the children to attend activities at Wigan Youth Zone, and we even had a support worker take a couple of the children out for a walk and talk, so we could have a bit of time to catch up on things.

What would you say to someone who is considering fostering?

What are you waiting for! It will be the best decision you will ever make. Just seeing the sparkle return to the children you care for is all the reward you need. It is a unique experience and totally different to caring for your own children, but with the right skills and knowledge you will wonder why it took you so long to make the decision.

I have cared for children that I never really thought I would be able to care for. You will be surprised how many different children, with or without additional needs, that you will make a difference to. It isn't an easy journey at the beginning, but the rewards totally outweigh the challenges you will face. I can honestly say I have found my vocation in life. Seeing the children smiling and loving every experience you give them is all the reward I need. I am looking forward to the next 10 years of my fostering journey...are you joining me?

