



A New Beginning

Your guide to becoming a foster carer



Hello,

I'm Ildiko and I'm a foster carer with Active Care Solutions (ACS).

My husband Daniel and I have fostered with ACS since 2015. We started to get referrals shortly after we were approved, but none felt like the right fit for our family. Five months after being approved, we heard about a 14-year-old boy who had had a really rough start in life. Something about his story made us decide he was the right placement for us.

Fostering a young person is incredibly rewarding but equally challenging. It wasn't easy for him to settle in at first. In the first few weeks, he only left his room to eat. He always wore his coat – not because he was cold, but because he felt as though he was going to have to leave at any moment. Slowly, he began to trust that we wanted to help him and our house rules were there for his safety.

Nearly a year and a half later, he has settled into being a very real part of our family. We have good days and bad days, but we are so happy we invited him into our home. Even our family and friends have accepted him as part of our family. Now, he is a happy young man – always cheerful, courteous and respectful – and he has many friends. He is open, confident and loves to be with us.

Over the years, ACS has given our whole family a lot of support. They offer training opportunities to improve our skills and we go to foster carer support groups for fellowship and to share important insight that helps us be better foster parents.

Our supervising social worker is great, too. He keeps in regular contact with us and is always there when we need him to answer questions or reassure us about something. Even in the middle of the night, the ACS out-of-hours team is available to give advice.

I would encourage others to foster because there are so many children who are desperate for someone to stand by them and support them. We have never regretted picking up the phone and saying we want to foster.

I hope this booklet will encourage you to take the first step on this incredible journey. You too can share, like I have, the sense of joy and fulfilment that comes from changing a child's life.



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Fostering with ACS

Who are we?

We're a bespoke faith-based fostering agency. This means we specialise in supporting children from multi-faith backgrounds whilst providing our foster carers with the support they need to make a difference.

It's not always easy knowing what to do, as children come from so many different cultures and religions. Here at ACS we ensure we support every carer with all aspects of looking after a child including support on languages, world foods, festivals, celebrations, as well as personal care. This is vital to ensure every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential both mentally, physically and spiritually.

We offer fostering services in Birmingham and Manchester, as well as the wider West Midlands and East Lancashire areas.

How we work

We believe every child deserves to grow up in a loving, nurturing family home – somewhere they can feel valued and have their own identity.

Our goal is simple – to give every child we care for the best start in life by placing them with foster carers who can meet their individual needs.

But this doesn't mean we only match children with carers who share their religious beliefs or cultural identity; far from it. We welcome carers from all cultures and faiths, especially those with strong family values.

Why choose us?

We're a different kind of fostering agency – one that puts cultural diversity at the heart of its services.

Run by people with first-hand experience of fostering, we pride ourselves on our personal approach. Our team come from a diverse range of backgrounds – many of them have even been foster carers themselves. So we're able to tailor our support and training to ensure you get the most from your fostering experience.

As an agency, we speak over seven languages, including those spoken by Indian and Pakistani communities, as well as many European languages.

At ACS, we're more than a fostering agency; we're a community of close-knit foster carers, staff and friends working together to give every child the best start in life.



Our values

Our values are at the heart of everything we do.

1. People first
Everything we do is for our foster carers, children and young people.

2. Celebrating diversity
Everyone is different but should be treated with the same respect.

3. Freeing potential
Every person has the right to make the most of his or her life.

4. Close communities
A loving, nurturing home builds respect and safer communities.

5. Living and working with integrity
We will always go out of our way to do the right thing.



Can I foster?

What makes a great foster carer? At ACS, we believe it's your personal qualities.

You don't need to be married or in a couple to foster. You don't need qualifications or experience in childcare either. But you will need patience, enthusiasm and bags of energy.

Most importantly of all, you'll be able to provide a child with a stable, nurturing family home. Somewhere they can feel safe and secure. Somewhere they can just be themselves.

Here's a few other things you'll need to foster with us:

- Be at least 21 years old.
- Have a spare bedroom (but you don't have to own your own house).
- Be able to foster full time – there are a few exceptions, so please talk to us about your personal situation.
- Have British citizenship or permanent leave to stay in the UK.
- Have the resilience and commitment to stick with a child through tough times.
- A good sense of humour will come in handy too!

Supporting you

We believe that by passing on our knowledge and experience to you, you'll be able to make an even bigger difference to the lives of the children in your care.

That's why we offer an excellent package of support – available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

When you foster with us, you'll receive:

- A generous financial package.
- Paid respite.
- A comprehensive training programme.
- Regular support group meetings.
- A calendar of events, activities and days out for you, your family and the children you care for.
- Access to key local community groups and further support resources.
- Regular home support visits from your personal Link Worker.

“ACS are brilliant – there's always someone available on the phone whenever I need it. The level of support and training they've provided me with is great and I have a wonderful relationship with my supervising social worker, who has guided me through some demanding times with empathy, encouragement and understanding.”

Megan, ACS foster carer from West Bromwich

“The support from my supervising social worker is excellent. ACS always support carers' needs and ensure we have the training, advice and guidance we need, so that we can provide the best care we can.”

Karen, ACS foster carer

Our training

Cultural-specific training is at the core of what we do.

After all, the more you know, the bigger the impact you'll have on the lives of the children in your care.

From the day you're approved with us, you'll be invited to attend specialist training and support groups where you can improve your knowledge of different faiths and religions, and share your cultural insights and experiences with other foster carers.

“I always feel supported as a foster parent. ACS staff are available for support and advice at any time of the day or night. We feel very much a part of a tight-knit and diverse fostering family.”

Marva, ACS foster carer

Becoming a foster carer

There are six stages to becoming a foster carer and, as a small agency we're there for you every step of the way.



1. Enquiry

Your fostering journey starts when you pick up the phone to chat to us. We'll answer your questions and tell you more about us.

2. Home visit

Ready to take the next step? We'll visit you at home to find out more about you and your family. We'll give you more information and answer any further questions you may have about fostering and also help you complete a simple application form.



3. Training

You'll attend a pre-approval training course to equip you with everything you need to become a great foster carer.

You'll meet social workers and current foster carers, and gain a better understanding of fostering and some of the situations you may find yourself in – and there's not an exam in sight!



4. Fostering assessment

Your dedicated social worker will complete your assessment. They'll visit you at home to get to know you and your family, and talk about your skills and experience.

They'll use this information to put together a report called a Form F. Your Form F is not forwarded to the panel without your full approval first.



5. Fostering panel

After your Form F and relevant checks are completed, you'll attend a fostering panel with your social worker. The panel will make a recommendation to our registered manager, who will make the final decision about your approval as a foster carer.

6. Start fostering

We'll start the process of matching you with a foster child as soon as you're approved as a foster carer with us. This normally takes no more than 1 – 2 months.



Chat to us

Becoming a foster carer is just the beginning of your fostering journey. At ACS, we'll be there to support you – from the minute you pick up the phone to chat to us, to the day you're approved as an ACS carer and throughout your career. To find out more about fostering with us, call us on **0800 917 7937** to chat to our friendly team.



Types of placement

We offer a range of fostering placements, so we can tailor our care to meet the specific needs of each child or young person.

You'll be able to choose the type of fostering that suits you and your family, and many of our foster carers offer more than one type.

Emergency

Emergency placements involve caring for a child or young person who needs a safe place to stay immediately, usually for a few nights.

Short term

Short term fostering can last for weeks or months, and involves looking after a child or young person while plans are made for their future.

Long term

These placements offer long term stability to children and young people who are unable to return home and need a permanent foster home until they reach adulthood.

Respite

Respite usually takes place during weekends or holidays, and involves caring for a child or young person while their own family or foster carers have a break.

Step down

This is a specialist type of fostering that helps young people make the move from residential care into a foster home.

Sanctuary seeking

These are placements for children and young people seeking sanctuary and asylum in the UK. They'll have travelled a long way, been separated from their family and often speak little or no English.

Parent and baby

We also take parent and baby placements, this is usually a young mum and her baby but can sometimes be a young couple and their baby, or father and baby. They will require a placement whilst they are being assessed to have suitable parenting skills by the local authority.

"I have learnt through my fostering career that there are so many children who need special people to provide them with care, but they are just not in abundance, so many children are losing out on being able to lead happy and fulfilling lives."

Sabbir, ACS foster carer

Thinking of fostering?

You've probably got plenty of questions. Here are the answers to some of the most common things we're asked by potential foster carers.

Q: What is fostering?

A: Fostering is providing a safe and stable home for children and young people who are unable to live with their own families.

We work with our carers to reunite these children with their families, or help them to move onto adoption or independent living.

Q: Can I work and foster?

A: We prefer at least one foster carer to be available for fostering on a full-time basis, so that we can ensure that the child or young person in your care is receiving the best possible care. However this can be discussed further as every foster family is unique. We understand that flexibility is important wherever possible.

Q: How is fostering with ACS different to fostering for a local authority?

A: We're an independent fostering agency (IFA). This means we work closely with local authorities to find the right foster homes for children and young people.

What makes us stand apart is the specialist training and support we offer our foster carers to help them meet the unique religious and cultural needs of the children in their care.

Q: What's the difference between fostering and adoption?

A: Fostering and adoption are very different. Fostering involves caring for a child on a temporary basis and offering them the support they need to move on in life.

Adoption, on the other hand, is a permanent arrangement that involves taking on full legal responsibility for a child until they reach adulthood.

Q: Will I get paid to foster?

A: When you foster, you'll receive an excellent package of financial support – between £315 and £515 a week. This will more than cover the cost of everyday living for you and the child in your care. If you offer specialist placements, you'll receive an enhanced allowance.

Thanks to generous tax relief, you'll pay very little, if any, tax or national insurance on your earnings.




Q: Why do children need foster care?

A: Children come into care for all sorts of reasons including abuse, neglect, and family illness or breakdown.

As a foster carer, you'll be helping these children put back their life back together – and provide the extra pieces, like love, respect and understanding, that will help to complete the picture.

Thoughts and questions

If you think of anything you want to ask us, make a note of it here and get in touch today.

-  0800 917 7937 or 0121 667 1391
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“Where embracing diversity is our success.”