



Brighter Futures

Fostering Information Pack

Our foster parents tell us that fostering a child is one of the most wonderful, rewarding and amazing things you'll ever do.

Our foster parents provide a safe, nurturing family environment where **children can thrive**.

**Give a Brighter
Future. Foster.**



Brighter Futures Foster Care
- Making A Difference -

Welcome to Brighter Futures

Fostering is a rewarding, life-changing experience for everyone involved, but we know it can take several months, or even years, to take the plunge.

This brochure will tell you more about the role, and the exceptional support and training we offer here at Brighter Futures. The best way to discover whether fostering is right for you, is to meet our carers or chat with our staff.

So please, give us a call on **0800 882 4402** – we'd love to hear from you.

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Your help and support has been invaluable in helping the young man placed develop and achieve all that he has. He is a credit to all that hard work and dedication you have shown him.

Transferring Carer

About Brighter Futures

Brighter Futures is a small agency which has a positive family feel where the young people we care for always remain at the centre of our foster care services.

Brighter Futures Foster Care is an Ofsted rated 'Good' Independent Fostering Agency. We specialise in the recruitment, training and continual support of Foster Parents, so that they can not only provide children and young people placed in their care with a safe, loving and stable home, but also feel confident in their skills and knowledge to parent children who may have additional difficulties and needs.

Fostering can be challenging so, Brighter Futures have teams of social workers spread out across the regions who provide local support to our carers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We also have a system of Foster Parent Peer Mentor support for both new and experienced carers, and excellent support services from the central office team.

Why do young people need foster parents?

Currently the UK has a shortage of foster parents, however the number of children and young people that need placements is still growing. There are many reasons why children and young people may need to be 'looked after', some families may have encountered instability due to life issues such as:

- Medical conditions
- Family breakdown
- Substance dependency
- Depression

Unfortunately other reasons can be that the child or young person has come to harm from a family member. This can mean that the child's basic needs may not have been met, they have been exposed to inappropriate behaviour or neglect. Or a family member has deliberately harmed the child or young person. Some children with 'special needs' may need to be 'looked after' too, these children may have specific needs, learning difficulties or challenging behaviour.



Recruitment and Approval

Fostering with Brighter Futures is a rewarding, professional career. Discover more about the recruitment and approval process of foster parents here.

We recruit prospective foster parents very carefully starting with an initial phone screening call, progressing onto a home visit where we are careful to give applicants a positive and realistic picture of the fostering role. We answer questions and allow individuals and families time to make decisions. Applicants then progress to assessment, including a Skills to Foster training course. This course, alongside the one to one assessment continually informs applicants and allows for learning about the fostering role.

We aim to complete the assessment within 4/5 months compiling the necessary checks and references alongside.

Once completed, the assessment paperwork is overseen by our Independent Panel process with applicants attending Panel, again this is an opportunity to get to know more about Brighter Futures and ask any additional questions.

Once Panel has agreed a recommendation for Approval, the Agency Decision Maker ratifies the paperwork and confirms foster parent approval.



Support and Training

We know what counts when it comes to supporting you and your family. From a dedicated supervising social worker to regular communications, we have it covered!

Support

Once you are approved as a Foster Parent you will be allocated supervising social worker local to you who will come and meet you at least once a month to monitor alongside you as to how things are and look at if you need any further support or training. They will also keep in regular phone contact with you. It is our job to make sure you feel supported, confident and able to fulfil your role as a foster parent.

In addition you will also have access to;

- A programme of online training
- 24 hour staffed phone line
- Fostering Peer Mentor support and advice.
- Support groups in your area
- Local activities for all the family
- Events
- Access to Fostering Network's range of services

Training

Brighter Futures provides a range of training opportunities to ensure you remain up to date on legislation, issues and best practice. We ensure that you experience a range of in-house and external training courses and can also attend national courses and seminars. We encourage and support you with

learning and development, believing that this will in turn provide good adult role modelling for looked after children.

Here are some of the key topics included in your training:

- Child Protection
- Working with children who have been abused
- Attachment, separation and loss including identity and self-esteem
- Safe caring
- Recording
- First Aid
- Managing difficult behaviours, including allegations
- Education
- Contact
- Health and medical Issues
- Radicalisation
- Children at risk of child sexual exploitation
- Independence

You will be encouraged and supported to learn via e-learning, training workshops and seminars. More individual training can be provided to match skills to placement needs and personal development.

Rewards and Benefits

Our competitive benefits reward you for your hard work. From a competitive allowance and out of hours support, to peer mentors and family support events, we have you covered.

Our foster parents are professionals undertaking at times a challenging role. We strive to make sure our rewards and benefits structure reflects the work they do. Foster parents receive:

- A 5 year Loyalty award of £500
- Minimum of 14 days respite which can be used to support holidays with the children
- A competitive foster allowance
- Introduction Fee for recruiting new Foster Parents - £1000 upon approval at panel

- Mileage payment at 0.25p per mile for attending training
- Out of hours service
- Designated Supervising Social Worker
- Family support events
- Peer mentors

You will be encouraged and supported to learn via e-learning, training workshops and seminars. More individual training can be provided to match skills to placement needs and personal development.



“Our social worker is both professional and approachable at all times and she is an absolute dream to work with.”

Brighter Futures Foster Parent

Your journey to becoming a foster parent

If you think you'd enjoy fostering with Brighter Futures, the next step is understanding our process and arranging a home visit. Give us a call on 0800 882 4402.

Step 1: Contact Us

We're sure you've got lots of questions and we'll have a few for you too, so let's get to know each other.

Step 2: Home Visit

If we both decide to proceed, we'll arrange to come and see you at home for a chat, it's nothing to worry about, we just want to find out a more about you and see you in your home setting. Please do have questions to ask us.

Step 3: References and Checks

Following that we will undertake various checks and references. You will need to complete safeguarding and first aid training and a 3 day skills to foster course followed by a pre induction half day. A social worker will come and complete a 'Form F' report which will outline your life history and their recommendations for what children you should foster.

Step 4: Panel

After this stage, which takes about 4-6 months your social worker will present your report to panel. Panel is an independent body of professionals from a variety of backgrounds who will ask you relevant questions about your application.

Panel will make your recommendation and the Agency Decision Maker will then review the paperwork and make their decision. Once you are approved we will call you with information about children and young people who need homes.





The one thing I love about our Brighter Futures social worker is that she really cares about the foster parents and the children

Brighter Futures Foster Parent

Types of Fostering

There are a number of different kinds of foster care and we work tirelessly to find exactly the right foster placement for every child and every carer.

Brighter Futures provide placements for all children/young people from birth to 21 years of age. We provide emergency, short-term, long-term, permanent and bridging placements. Foster parents are provided with a high level of training and support throughout their journey.

Fostering siblings

We don't want to see siblings separated who need to stay together. A lot of our children are siblings and some of our carers have sibling groups of four children. They say they are never bored.

Young parents

Young parents often grew up in the foster care system themselves. Lacking the support of their birth family they need a foster parent who can provide them with support to look after their baby.

Teenagers

Fostering a teenager can be a challenging but rewarding experience. Teenagers have often had very traumatic childhoods and need stable loving homes with resilient carers to enable them to reach their potential.

LGBT fostering

An increasing number of the LGBT community in the UK have been rightly helped by changes within the UK legal system and we have a real appreciation of the unique strengths, and qualities which such individuals process and bring to the fostering role.



Criteria of Foster Parents

Almost anyone can foster, as long as you have the love to give, the patience to work through difficulties and a desire for making a positive and lasting difference to the lives of children.

We are looking for foster parents who genuinely want to make a difference to the lives of young people. People who can provide loving homes. It does not matter whether you are a single carer or in a relationship with someone of either gender (although we do ask you have lived together for two years).

We look for diversity in our carers and are very careful with our 'matching' processes. It's very important that we place young people in your families who are going to be supported and encouraged to achieve their potential. You need to be able to provide a nurturing, kind home and to have clear boundaries but you won't be alone and we will provide training for you on all aspects of fostering.

If you have brought up your own children and have experience of working with children that is very helpful but it is not essential. We are looking for people with resilience who can work as part of a team. A good sense of humour helps as well. Your home needs to be welcoming and you need to have a spare bedroom.



Transferring to Brighter Futures

Moving agencies is a big decision but if you're an experienced carer looking for new opportunities, we'd love to hear from you.

We recognise that moving agencies is a big decision and any enquiry you make with us will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Like any good working relationship there has to be high levels of trust between a foster parent and their agency.

At Brighter Futures we strive to ensure relationships are positive and we receive great feedback from our carers. Several of our Foster Parents have transferred from other agencies or Local Authorities and are glad that they made the switch. We aim to ensure that the transfer process is as straightforward as possible.

Here's some basic things to think about:

- Foster parents are self-employed and as such can work for any agency they chose to. At Brighter Futures about 20% of our parents have transferred from other agencies. The main reasons are not feeling valued, a lack of support and poor matching with children at their previous agency.
- We help make the process as easy as possible for you to transfer with no disruption to you, your family or any young person in placement. We will ensure that we liaise closely with your current agency and the local authority to make sure that your transfer is handled in a timely and professional manner so that your care of any children is not affected.
- The Fostering Network transfer protocol ensures that, as a minimum, foster parents packages of support and remuneration are not reduced through the transfer process. Given our experience at managing transfers we ensure there is a seamless transition to Brighter Futures. We are so confident in our abilities we're happy for you to speak to foster parents who have previously transferred from other agencies so that you can find out from them directly what they think about us which such individuals process and bring to the fostering role.



“We wanted to help keep children together and although having four siblings is tiring, it is so rewarding.

Brighter Futures Foster Parent

Charitable Work and Awards

Brighter Futures supports the events and activities of several charities through which we aim to make a real difference to the lives of children.

Brighter Futures work with Book Aid, a UK based library development charity working in sub-Saharan Africa to help more people discover the joy and value of reading. Book Aid supply around one millions books to the public, community libraries, schools, refugee camps, hospitals, prisons and universities. This charity fits with our ethos of encouraging reading skills for children who are looked after; they very rarely own their own books and our foster parents enjoy developing children's reading skills and love of books.

Brighter Futures also take part in regular fund-raising Macmillan coffee mornings, you can see how our events go by keeping up to date with our Facebook and Twitter pages.

Awards

Investors in People is a standard for people management, offering accreditation to organisations that adhere to the Investors in People Standard.



Needs of the Children

Read our case studies on 'Managing Challenging Behaviour' and 'Meeting the Priorities of Essex Young People' to learn more about what we do and how we support our foster parents.

Managing Challenging Behaviour

As a fostering agency we emphasise the importance of understanding trauma, attachment theory and the impact of neglect and abuse in children looked after (CLA). Our foster parents are encouraged to provide an environment and culture that promotes and supports positive behaviour. They are therefore supported to understand how to de-escalate problems, disputes and stressful situations that aggravate challenging behaviour. These challenging behaviours are described as aggressive, controlling and of violent nature, self-harming, running away, anxiety-based behaviours, sexual or risky or destructive behaviours. Foster parents are supported to stay calm and manage their own responses, set limits, be able to manage challenging questions and learn techniques to avoid confrontations.

Our foster parents understand that good quality fostering not only helps children develop physically but also helps in improving their brain function. Relevant to individual foster parents, we help develop their ability to offer a person-centred approach in supervision and understand the needs of the individual child they are looking after. Regular supervision, support, and care planning

offers our foster parents understanding in how to manage and deal with young people's behaviour, including encouraging children and young people to take responsibility for their behaviour but also teach them conflict resolving techniques. They learn that employing PACE (patience/ acceptance/ curiosity and empathy) is vital in understanding attachment disorder and employ the ethos of including, the rights, needs and views of looked after children at the centre of all their practice and provision. We also encourage foster parents to understand that rewarding and praising desired behaviour often go a long way than giving sanctions.

Our foster parents understand that as an agency, our social workers are there to support and encourage them daily as well as on out of hours. We also have an underlying ethos that is known amongst all our employees, that even if 'a foster parents' Supporting Social Worker (SSW) or a peer mentor is not available to take your call, there is always someone else prepared to listen and help in difficult situations.' We understand that fostering is a multifaceted task, where you try and meet everyone else's needs whilst possibly ignoring yours. This can take its toll on you. We therefore ensure that this burden is shared by all of us at the agency.



Meeting the Priorities of Essex Young People

Meeting young people's needs with warm and resilient foster parents is at the heart of what we do at Brighter Futures. The Essex Young people's 'It's my Life' study and findings are central to our expectations of our fostering families.

The fact that all our current Essex children are either in stable long-term linked placements or in the process of being permanently linked evidences the quality of stability and consistency that children receive from Brighter Futures foster parents, to enable them to reach their full potential. Brighter Futures offers Essex young people a range of different types of placements from standard to therapeutic, disabilities, and parent and child.

Brighter Futures' prospective foster parents are expected to maintain and practice Brighter Futures' ethos and values which we deem are fundamental to our vision for children. Mindful of this, the 'Form F' process is undertaken in a transparent way with a focus on the ability of the assessor to determine whether candidates are robust and have the potential to enhance their skills to be able to provide a high standard of

holistic care which is required to meet the complex and different needs of Essex children.

All Brighter Futures' staff are familiar with and available to support foster parents and children, with Brighter Futures' experienced, dedicated and skilled SSW's supporting the carers and monitoring the children. We ensure that the minimum monthly supervision takes place with the foster parents at varying times. This ensures that the foster children are seen and consulted, with information provided regarding resources and how to make a complaint. Two unannounced visits are made annually with additional supervision to new foster parents and where children appear to be fragile. We pride ourselves in offering a seamless 24 hours service by providing an OOH service staffed by SSW's. We are small enough that all staff know each foster parent and the young person they care for.

Essex young people can feel assured that Brighter Futures acknowledges the importance of providing young people with a placement that is stable and safe, warm and loving, with listening and kind foster parents who are respectful and responsive so that children can feel safe and secure. Brighter Futures

provides the children with placements where our foster parents can establish positive relationships and secure attachments with trusting adults who can hold children's anxieties, anger and fears without being judged or mirrored. By providing our foster parents with a wide range of specialist training and other resources, they are up-skilled to gain a deeper insight into children's behaviour which they understand is 'communication'. Brighter Futures foster parents learn that by supporting children's physical, psychological, emotional and educational development, alongside building resilience, it will contribute to help children and young people repair the impact and damage of early life trauma. Brighter Futures SSWs are trained to deliver the intensive Fostering Changes Course aimed at helping foster parents with empathy and get in touch with their own feelings, besides providing strategies for managing unwanted behaviours and teaching the ABC model. We have carers who are BSL and Makaton trained.

Essex children placed with our committed and excellent foster parents are encouraged and supported in all areas of their well-being. Besides adhering to the necessary statutory health and education requirements, our foster parents are conscious that they need to be aware of outside issues pressure as well as early life experiences which can lead to a range of mental and physical health issues. Brighter Futures foster parents are very aware of the lack of services for children with mental health issues. They are taught to recognise children's body

language and changes in behaviour and will refer children for assessment. Brighter Futures works closely with Essex external organisations like SERRIC and NELFT who have counselled Essex children and who are currently working with other LA children and their foster parents.

Brighter Futures understands and supports the views expressed by Essex young people in relation to problems in being able to talk to others about healthy relationships. To address this and other relevant issues for young people, Brighter Futures provides appropriate members of our Family Support Service to work with Essex young people.

In line with Essex young people's expectations, the 'voice of the child' is encouraged by foster parents through participation in the LAC and foster parents review process, as well as child friendly surveys, events and contributing to Brighter Futures' age-related Children's Handbook. Brighter Futures carers involve children in day to day decision making within the foster family through their participation and contribution during regular family meetings where discussions look at sanctions, house rules, chores and family events and holidays. Delegated authority is welcomed by Brighter Futures carers as it provides for foster parents to undertake day to day decisions on behalf of the children. Encouragement and opportunities to participate in chosen activities is supported by Brighter Futures, but where children choose to undertake risky activities, carers undertake risk assessments and will consult with the children's social worker.

Education is a strong area for Brighter Futures with 100% of our school aged fostered children in formal education with an emphasis on ensuring appropriate education is provided. This was recently evidenced when an Essex child with special needs secured a residential educational setting after her carers had tirelessly advocated on her behalf. By forging communication links with schools, children are supported to receive a seamless service with support provided for them to contribute to their PEP, EHCP and education meetings. Our foster parents support children with their homework by providing a quiet area for homework, the right equipment, lots of encouragement and helping with projects which they know helps to build confidence and self-esteem thus contributing to becoming resilient. Outcome trackers charting children's progress are completed by SSW's to chart children's progress for LAC reviews with monthly logs undertaken using ECM agenda. Brighter Futures will also provide additional tuition funded via existing support packages to help children achieve or exceed identified targets. Brighter Futures adopts the principles of the Essex YP care leavers charter, by supporting them with preparation into independence through budgeting, life skills, reducing anxieties about homelessness through our Staying Put policy. Many of our foster children have permanent placements so we see Staying Put as a natural progression of a child's journey in foster care. Brighter Futures saves £20 a month for each child until they reach 18.

Brighter Futures supports and understands the importance for

children to maintain links with family and friends. Our foster parents help children to manage their feelings before and after contact by making themselves available to listen and comfort them. Many of our carers facilitate sibling contact in informal settings and by developing relationships with the siblings carers are able to spend over-nights together. It is acknowledged that making and sustaining friendships with peers is very important to children, so Brighter Futures foster parents encourage children to have play dates in the foster home with older children being encouraged to make good choices about friendships.

Brighter Futures encourages an extended family model to our young people, both within the fostering family and between foster parents themselves usually facilitated by the agency. Our foster parents support each other and the children we care for extremely well. We know that foster parents value support from their colleagues, so we have appointed a number of highly skilled and experienced foster parents as mentors to provide practical and emotional support to maintain placements. Our foster parents are good at availing themselves of the support groups, workshops and social events facilitated by Brighter Futures. A testament to Brighter Futures is the positive relationships which have developed between carer's children and where care leavers still visit and go on holidays with their former foster parent families.



“

Our young person is thriving in this placement and obviously feels safe and secure. I just wanted to make sure that they receive positive recognition of how much they have supported her.

Local Authority Social Worker

“
**Couldn't have asked for
a better agency!**
Brighter Futures Foster Parent

Interested?
Get in touch today!



0800 882 4402



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