

Spend a little time and make a big difference



Care for children with disabilities

Dear

Thank you for contacting Blackpool Council about Family Link Fostering. I hope that this information will give you a better understanding about the service that we offer and help you to decide whether family link fostering is right for you.

Family Link offers an invaluable service to children with a disability and their families. The scheme has been running for the past 15 years and has proved very positive for children and their families. It allows children to experience new things, develop skills and make new friendships. It also offers children's families the chance to have a short-break, recharge their batteries and in some cases, spend time with their other children.

We understand that choosing to care for a disabled child is quite a big step to take. The Fostering Service will support and guide you through every aspect of your application.

If after reading this information you would like to discuss fostering children and young people who have a disability in greater detail, please complete and return the enclosed slip 'Request for further information' to myself and I will make contact with you within 7 working days.

Thank you for your interest and I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely,



David Innes
Family Link Scheme Co-ordinator

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Section 1

What is the Family Link scheme?

The Family Link scheme offers families who have a child with physical or learning disabilities a short break from continuous caring. The scheme also provides opportunities for children with disabilities (0-18 years) to enjoy stimulating experiences by visiting another family and widens their circle of friends.

The scheme provides short-breaks for children within carers' homes. It gives the child's parents' choice, supporting them without taking away their responsibilities. The short-breaks are flexible enough to meet the needs of each individual child.

There are many benefits of the Family Link scheme for families and carers. Children benefit from making new friends, taking part on social activities and increasing independence. Brothers and sisters of the child with special needs also benefit by having a little time to themselves and also time to spend on their own with their parents.

You can get much enjoyment and satisfaction from your involvement and know that you are providing valuable support to the child and their family.

Some children may visit for just a few hours each week, while others might have an overnight stay once a fortnight or a weekend once a month. You decide how much time you can offer.

Once a link is set up between you, the child and their family, there are regular reviews involving the child, parents, carer and social worker to make sure that there are no problems and that the child is happy.

You will receive regular support from the Fostering Service:

- Practical assistance
- Financial support
- Training and support
- Family Link Support Group

Section 2

Can I become a Family Link foster carer?

What sort of people become family link foster carers?

Whilst there is a criteria for all applicants, there is no “ideal type” of foster carer. Each foster carer is unique and comes to fostering with their own experiences, abilities and skills. We welcome applications from people from a wide variety of backgrounds. You can be single, married, divorced. We do not discriminate on the grounds of sexuality. You can live in your own home, rented or council accommodation. We welcome applications from people from all races and religions.

We are looking for people who:

- are at least 21 years old. There is no upper age limit, even if you are retired
- are active and in general good health (please note that disability and medical reasons may not be a barrier to fostering a child - each case is looked at individually)
- enjoy looking after children and have a great amount of patience
- can offer a secure family environment
- have a suitable spare bedroom for a child
- can help promote a child’s health, development and education
- can assist in carrying out a child’s individual care plan, for example, promoting contact between children and their birth parents
- can keep a child safe from harm
- can help a child to build trusting, healthy relationships
- are willing to take part in meetings, keep written records and respect confidentiality.

Section 3

Profiles of Children & Families

Children's Views

“Hi, my name is Jordan, I am 10 years old. I have a mum, dad and two brothers. We have been fostering since I was 10 months old. I like fostering because I like helping my family and disabled children. I also enjoy making new friends and helping my parents look after children. We have a big house for children to play. We also live very near to a big park so we can go and play at the park. I like playing football and I like reading.”

Jordan, aged 10

“My name is Luke, my family look after children. We have fostered a lot of children for a long time and we adopted Sophie. I enjoy fostering and helping my mum and dad look after them. It is fun playing with different children. Please help the children that need a home and family.

Luke, aged 7

“Looking after children is great because they can be part of our family and they will get love and care. They get a nice warm home and they get to have fun. It is nice when they go to their new family so they can have a happy life.”

Charlene, daughter of a foster carer

Profile of a family who are Family Link Foster Carers

“We are Sam and Phil, we are a young family with young children, 3 boys of our own aged 10, 7 and 2. We have been fostering children with disabilities for the past 10 years, providing respite for families as well as long and short term placements. When we first started, it all seemed very daunting and we were not sure if we could do it or if we had the time, but with the support of our social worker and the Family Placement Team who guided and supported us through the early years, we found that it was not as scary as we had imagined. They were always at the end of the phone, as too were other foster carers. Our own children have benefited greatly through the experience of interacting with children with special needs, it has helped them to be more patient, caring and understanding of others. The whole family really enjoy fostering and the rewards gained are unlimited. We have, over the years, fostered 13 different children, some of them short and long term placements, some just for a day and some years. It has given us great pleasure and satisfaction to know that we have helped and made a difference in their lives. We are nothing special, just your average family, you do not need a lot to be a foster carer, just a little bit of time and love to give.

Section 4

Frequently asked questions

I am retired, can I still apply?

Yes, Blackpool Council has several foster carers who are retired.

Can I apply if I want to look after a certain age group?

Yes, we need people who will look after children from all age groups, 0-18 years.

Do I get a say in the children that I will care for?

Your social worker will approach you to care for a child. You will be given all of the information that you need and with your supervising social worker, you will be able to make an informed decision about the children you choose to foster.

How long does it take to become a foster carer?

This can vary as it depends how long checks with the Criminal Records Bureau and your doctor take and the home study assessment, which involves a social worker coming to your home. We ask people to allow six to eight months from making the first enquiry, although this can vary both ways.

What is the application process?

- 1 Express an interest
- 2 The home visit
- 3 Making an application
- 4 Preparation, assessment and training. Police and health checks.
- 5 The home study report
- 6 The Fostering Panel
- 7 Matching you to a child
- 8 Placement

Will I receive a payment?

All foster carers receive an allowance for each child they look after. For further details please contact David Innes Tel: (01253) 477649.

I am in receipt of state benefits. Can I still apply and will my benefits be affected?

We welcome applications from people who are not in employment and are getting welfare benefits. A fostering allowance should not affect your benefits. However, if you have concerns about this, you should check with the Welfare Rights Service (Tel: 477770) or the Benefits Agency (Tel: 0800 882200).

Will I have to buy equipment?

No, we provide essential equipment such as cots, beds, car seats.

What sort of checks are made?

References are taken from the Criminal Records Bureau, your doctor, Education Department, Social Services and Health Department. This will be explained to you and your written permission is needed. Personal references will also be sought. References are also sought from ex-partners if you have been previously married and we request your permission to speak to any of your children.

Will I be visited by a social worker?

Yes, after asking you a few questions on the telephone, a social worker will visit you at home. You can ask them questions and the social worker will ask to look around your home.

Is training available?

You will need to attend foster care preparation groups, which are part of your assessment. Post approval training is regularly available and some foster carers have undertaken and NVQ Level 3 award in Caring for Children and Young People. Post approval training is optional.

What will the assessment involve?

This is a detailed assessment undertaken by a social worker about you and your family. It takes place after references have been returned and you attend foster care preparation groups. When complete, this assessment is presented by your social worker to the Fostering Panel, who will make a decision about approval. You will also be expected to work with social services in a spirit of co-operation.

Eligibility Criteria

Certain types of criminal offences, such as convictions for violence or any offence against children will prevent you from applying. Any domestic violence incidents between applicants would be likely to cause the application to be turned down. Some health problems may preclude some applicants. However we would ask you to telephone us to enquire about this.

Section 5

What do I do next?

If you want to know more about fostering you can:

- Complete the expression of interest form and return it to:
David Innes
Family Link Scheme Co-Ordinator
Blackpool Council
Progress House
Clifton Road
Blackpool FY4 4US

or

- You can telephone Blackpool Council's Family Placement Team on 01253 477888/477649.

Section 6

Request for further information

For the attention of David Innes

Family Link Scheme Co-ordinator
Blackpool Council
Social Services
Progress House
Clifton Road
Blackpool FY4 4US

We have received a Family Link Scheme application pack. I/we are interested in finding out more about Family Link Fostering further and would like a Social Worker to make contact.

Name(s):

Address:

.....

.....

Tel. Home:

Tel. Work/Mobile:

Ode to Foster Carers

Ring, Ring Ring goes the phone,
There's another child needs a home,
Have you room for one more child,
Your other kids are running wild.

There is no pressure that you know,
But think, where this child is going to go,
To a kids home or Hospice bed,
The thought of this fills you with dread.

All this child needs is a loving home,
A space in your house they can call their own,
The fact is you care, sometimes too much,
Very few have your special touch.

Through good times and bad you're always there,
To show them they're loved and how much you care,
So when you're tired or feeling blue,
Just remember there's a happy child because of you.

By Phil Smith
(Foster Carer)