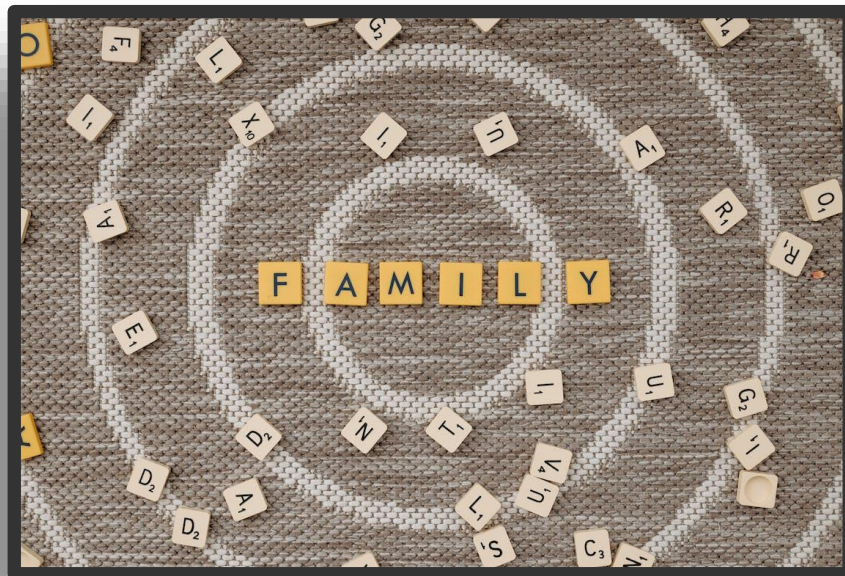


Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency Information Guide



For Prospective Foster Carers

Norwich Union House, 9 Mackenzie Street, Slough, Berkshire SL1 1XQ

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Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency would like you to join our family of Foster Carers and work with us to make a difference to the lives of many children and young people. Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency will endeavour to provide quality care and the best choice of care for the thousands of children in the UK who need a loving home.

Every child or young person we care for deserves a home that makes him/her feel comfortable and cared for - a home that's right for their age, ethnicity, religion and social needs. This is equally true for young people with learning/physical disabilities.

A child or young person may need a home for a few weeks-or until independence. We need you to help us provide the care these children and young people deserve. We've been working hard to make sure that whatever section of the community you come from, you'll get the best quality, advice, training and support that will help you to deliver all aspects of care with satisfaction and fulfilment.

We will also help you to achieve your personal and career objectives. We are already doing wonderful things to help young people and their carers, but we need more people to join us and help us provide opportunities for children and young people to live a happy and fulfilling life and secure their futures.

If you feel that you can become part of our family of Foster Carers please get in touch with us now. This information guide aims to give you all the information you'll need before deciding to take the next step in fostering.

If you are happy, please complete the **Interested to Foster form** and submit it to us; however if you have any further questions you can talk to us by ringing us on 01753 86 86 86 or emailing us on info@bgfa.co.uk or simply pop in for a cup of tea and chat with one of our recruitment staff anytime between 9am – 5pm.

Introduction

Bridging the Gap between Family and Home

Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency is an independent foster care provider, established to offer high quality family placements, to children and young people who are 'looked after' by Local Authorities. BGFA provides opportunities for 'looked after' children and young people to achieve their full potential and to live fulfilling lives in the community.

Bridging Gaps Fostering Prospective introduces an innovative approach to the recruitment of foster carers. Potential foster carers are targeted from all areas in London and surrounding Counties, including socially and economically disadvantaged areas. Working together with our highly experienced multicultural team of professionals from Education Training and Health & Social Welfare Sectors, coupled with strong links with the Community Heads and Local Partnerships, Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency offers an immediate accessible and an integrated service with a focus always on the needs of the child.

It also has great potential to benefit and engage both ethnic minorities and local British White families into the fostering sector. There are many advantages to this, including bringing regeneration to the community and keeping children in families for a better empowered community.

Our Vision: Our vision is to be the leading provider of high quality care in a loving family setting for children and young people, thus, bringing stability into their lives and enabling them to become confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens in society.

Our Values: At Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency we focus all our efforts on the children and those who care for them. Our values are built upon these two groups and everything we can do to help them.

Our ethos:

- Child focused
- Work positively with the Local Authorities to help return the child/young person to his/her natural parents.
- Respect and value individuals heritage
- Keep children healthy and safe from harm
- Be positive about children and young people
- Put the needs of children and young people first.
- Raise awareness and develop strategies to prevent bullying
- People are valued, respected and listened to
- Children's innate abilities are promoted, their achievements recognised and celebrated

What is Fostering?

Fostering means caring for a child or children who for whatever reason cannot live with their families. Fostering will offer them care and a secure home. This involves meeting the day to day needs of children for a very short period of time or it could be a long term arrangement.

Fostering can be a life changing choice, the satisfaction of knowing that you have offered these children a family environment whilst their own family are experiencing a temporary crisis can be enormously rewarding and great fun too! By committing yourself to fostering you can give children the time, space, respect and opportunity to rebuild their lives.

Who needs Fostering?

Any child who cannot be cared for by their own family for a number of reasons. Some children may have been physically, emotionally or sexually abused and therefore removed from their parents by order of a court. Other families may be experiencing a temporary crisis and the children may need a short time away from their homes whilst difficulties are being resolved. Occasionally children have special needs and require extra support, some may have physical disabilities and / or learning difficulties.

The age range of children may be from birth to teenagers and young mothers, some maybe on their own and others may be with brothers and sisters who need to stay together. They may come from a wide range of difficult backgrounds and some may have special requirements like diet, which need to be met. There is also a need for some children who are seeking asylum in this country, about to become a parent, are remanded to the care of the local authority because of offending behaviours, or are moving from a children's home or secure accommodation into a family environment.



Types of Foster Care

The most common types are as follows:

- 1) Short-term placements:** Are usual for short periods of time, from one day but can be up to two years. These placements offer a holding position for the child and also give local authorities time to decide what is best, for the child.
- 2) Intermediate placements:** Are short-term placements that extend beyond the original period due to unforeseen circumstances or particular issues relating to the child's circumstances.
- 3) Long term/permanence:** Is usually for children who cannot return or be returned to live with their own families thus requiring a permanent home.
- 4) Emergency:** Some foster carers work on a duty rota to provide emergency cover for 24 hours a day, for unplanned placements during the evenings, weekends and holidays. This could last from one day to up to two years.
- 5) Bridging Placements:** A bridging placement will form part of a longer-term plan for a child or a young person and can sometimes be of two years duration. In such placements foster carers will work with children/young people and their families towards reunification, or prepare children/young people for joining adoptive or long term/permanent fostering families or for moving to a semi-independent or an independent living arrangement.
- 6) Assessment Placements:** These usually last up to three months and during this period a detailed assessment is made of the physical, emotional, educational and therapeutic needs of a child or a young person, including his or her ability to be cared for within a foster family and the specific support services that will be required. Interim and final assessment meetings provide vital information for longer term planning. Written assessment reports are included in this service.
- 7) Parent and child:** Foster carers provide guidance and support to teenage parents before and after birth of their baby.

8) Respite: Respite care involves befriending a child/young person/family group on a part time basis from a few hours a week to a whole weekend while their family take a holiday or break

9) Remand Placements: Foster carers look after young people who are remanded into care by court. The placements are usually short term and require the carers to work closely with the Youth Justice/Offending teams.

10) Placements for Asylum Seeking Children and Young People: These children are young people who are under the age of 18 and are separated from parent, family and are applying for asylum. They have often travelled long distances from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran or Iraq and may not speak English and can be frightened and confused. Often these children or young people are referred to as Unaccompanied Minors. Foster carers will provide these children or young people a safe, stable and supportive home. These placements could be short term to long term.

11) Placements for disabled children: Short to long term placements for children or young people. This service also provides a welcoming break for both the child and their family.

12) Short term breaks: Providing an opportunity for regular short breaks for disabled children or young people with disabilities or learning needs. This service also provides a welcoming break for both the child and their family.

13) Single/Solo Placements: This may involve looking after children and young people who may have considerable demands, occasionally these children will have very specific and complex needs which, initially at least, require a higher level of support and supervision. Because of his/her needs, a child or young person may require constant individual attention and supervision that precludes the placement of any other fostered children/young people or prohibits the use of any remaining placement vacancies within the foster home.

14) Enhanced Placements: These placements are intended for children and young people with care histories that include previous foster placements disruptions, previously unsuccessful residential care placements or the imminent prospect of residential care, the risk of being placed in secure accommodation or discharge from secure accommodation.

15) Treatment Foster Care: Intensive one to one support with skilled foster carer(s) with time limited therapeutic and social work support in a multi-disciplinary setting. The focus is on behaviour modification and reinforcing of new learning and positive change.



Who can Foster?

Fostering may be the greatest challenge one ever undertakes. It could also be the most rewarding at the same time. There is no 'typical' or 'ideal' foster parent. We need people from all walks of life, cultures, religions and backgrounds so that we can place children, where possible, with foster parents that reflect and understand their life needs.

All we ask from you is your commitment, time, adequate space and most importantly, a genuine desire to understand and support the children. Sometimes it can take time to build a relationship with a foster child, particularly if they feel let down by the other adults in their lives. There will be times when they are angry, withdrawn, or simply misbehave and times when they need your affection and encouragement to cope with painful memories.

You'll need to be patient and very resilient. Often fostered children want and need the same experience as any other child. The Foster Carers role is to bring stability and continuity of care to these children's lives. What Type of Accommodation do you need to have? Foster children over two years of age need to have their own room (although siblings can sometimes share a room).

You can have any type of accommodation; you can be renting, living in private accommodation or your own home. All you need to have is your spare room. Do you have to be married? No. We welcome

enquiries from people who are single, married, living with a family, divorced or widowed, and regardless of sexuality.

What about your own children? Becoming a foster family will change your family and the way you do things. This of course affects your own children. You will be busier than you used to be. You will meet families with a variety of lifestyles and different values. Family routines may need to change for carers and their children to ensure everyone is kept safe. Your children will be included as part of the assessment. Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency offers support and advice to foster carers regarding this and offers support to carers' children as well.



Can you work in addition to being a foster carer?

Foster care is considered as a full time job, we therefore advice that at least one adult has very flexible availability. Potential carers should consider how they will care for a child after school, during school holidays, or if a child is not in school, or has been excluded for a few days or just 'unwell'. A good support network will benefit Foster carers who are in employment.

Part time work could be a good option during school hours but it must not intervene with the need of the foster children. Do you need to be healthy? All enquiries will be considered on an individual basis, but as long as your condition is not life threatening and will not impact on your capacity to be an effective foster carer.

However, your fitness will be determined by on independent medical examination Are there any age restrictions? Legally foster carers have to be at least 18 years of age, although we prefer foster carers to be over 23 years of age. How many children can you care for at any one time? The Children Act 1989

states that 3 foster children is maximum occupancy, Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency requires that foster homes must have a separate bedroom for each child place.

Unless they are siblings and this has been agreed with the Local Authority. In very special circumstances exceptions to the fostering regulations 'maximum occupancy' limit can be approved for a limited short period as required only.

What Experiences should you have?

- An understanding of children and their needs. It will be helpful if you have experience of caring for either your own children or other people's children.
- An ability to reflect on life experiences and mature from them
- To be child focused and work with us to bring stability and continuity of care to the lives of foster children.
- Most of all it is important that you are committed, are prepared to give time, space and have plenty of physical and emotional stamina.
- Willingness to understand and complete all the statutory checks and medical examinations. Details will be provided at the point of application to Foster.



What Support will you get?

The most rewarding jobs are often those that place the greatest demands on our energy and attention. We know that this can sometimes be the case with fostering; therefore we are committed to helping you every step of the way.

We will provide you with full training and a generous financial allowance to cover all the expenses of raising a child, and to recognise the skilled and dedicated work you are doing. We will continue to concentrate our efforts on resources so that we can offer meaningful support to our children and Foster carers.

Your supervising social worker will be in touch every week, to make sure that you're content and to give you the opportunity to address any issues as they arise. They will also make regular visits every few weeks to spend some quality time with you and the children. In between times, we're always just a phone call away, twenty four hours a day. If there are any difficulties, you won't be left to cope alone. We value the work foster carers do and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people.

Appropriate support for the families who foster is vitally important to a successful placement. BGFA will provide creative and flexible support arrangements for children/young people and their foster carers. Identifying and arranging the necessary level of support occurs when a child/young person and foster family are 'matched' at the placement planning stage. This support will then be monitored and adjusted throughout the placement.

BGFA will offer the following support to all foster carers:

- Access to BGFA Support Services 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, 365 days of the year, including a daily confidential chat line service in community languages
- Supervision and support from a qualified and suitably experienced BGFA Supervising Social Worker
- Frequent visits and regular telephone contact from the Supervising Social Worker
- Mentoring service for newly approved carers, linking them with more experienced carers to offer support or guidance
- Support workers who will help the foster carers with poor reading and writing skills to complete reports on daily issues relating to children in their care and with their self-development and training
- Opportunities for self-development and provision to improve English language adult literacy and numeracy skills through our existing 'skills to learn' programmes
- Bilingual interpreting and translating services in relevant mother tongue languages
- 14 days respite (Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency Policy applies)
- Regular support group meetings enabling an opportunity to network and share good practice/concerns • Celebrate annual recognitions and reward staff and children.
- Resource workers to work with children and young people, especially if they are not attending school
- A regular young person's forum which will give the young people an opportunity to speak about their experience and needs in Foster care and how they would like to see their future.
- An Educational Liaison Officer to support foster carers in negotiating with schools and promoting children and young people's educational needs
- Homework and reading club to support children with homework, extra activities and exam work.
- Therapists who provide expert guidance and support to foster carers of children/young people who are experiencing serious emotional difficulties. Individual therapy is offered to children and young people for whom it is appropriate and where necessary consent is given

- A comprehensive post-approval/appointment training programme, linked to NVQ Health and Social Care (Children and Young People) Level 3
- Financial support and opportunities that value the skills of foster carer(s) to deliver AQA services that enable to prepare young people for semi-independent lives 10
- Membership of The Foster network Block membership scheme Carers. The scheme will offer free legal advice, legal expenses insurance, advice on tax and personal finance issues in the event of an allegation.

BGFA views this package as a positive way of ensuring that foster carers are fully supported and that placements are successful. Children and young people referred to the agency may have experienced many rejections, BGFA attempts to minimise this happening again. Foster carers joining BGFA are expected to be resilient and be prepared to work hard in what can be difficult circumstances. It is for these reasons that we recognise the value of good, high quality, relevant and responsive support.



What Financial Support will you get?

As a foster carer you will be classified as 'Self Employed', you will receive an allowance for each child placed. This may be taxable, depending on the amount work you undertake in one financial year (i.e. number of child placements within a year).

However BGFA has access to accountants and financial advisors who are able to give guidance to Foster carers on these matters. Rates of these allowances vary depending on the nature of care and are intended to care all aspects of the child's care including clothing, pocket money, birthdays and festival gifts. Payments will be paid by BACS on the 10th day of each month.

Will this allowance affect you if you are on benefits?

You can claim benefits such as income support, child tax credit and/or housing benefits whilst you are fostering. However, you will be required to inform the benefit office of any changes in your circumstances and we will support you with any information the benefit office may require.

What training will you receive?

Before you can foster a child you must attend a programme of training called the **"Skills to Foster Course."** If you have applied with a partner, you will both be required to attend this three day course. These training sessions usually occur before the formal approval as a foster carer. Once you are approved as a foster carer, you will be expected to attend a one day, regular programme of short courses that have been developed in line with the new **TSD training and development standards.**

We also offer foster carers the opportunity to attend a local college for more bespoke training and in particular the NVQ level 3 (Health & Social Care, Children). Other training programmes will be arranged as and when necessary.

What Happens Next?

Please take time to carefully consider what you have to offer children and the implications of fostering for you and your family. Talk to your children, family and friends and see what you think. We recommend that people interested in fostering talk to existing carers to find out what it's really like from people who actually do it. If it will help, you can call us and we may be able to put you in touch with other carers from the agency in your area.

If you are still interested, please fill in the **'Interested to Foster Form'** at the back and post it to us. The whole process of becoming a foster carer can take approximately 3-8 months. This time gives potential carers the opportunity to discuss the situation fully with family, friends, members of social services and experienced foster carers.

The impact fostering will have on your home life and work life needs to be thoroughly thought through.

An information session with a member of the Recruitment Team at BGFA will help you examine your thoughts, feelings and any concerns before you proceed with the following process;

1) Application: We receive a completed 'Interested in Fostering Form' from you and contact you.



2) Home Visit: An appointment is made for your allocated assessor to visit you at home for a very informal discussion. This will give you the opportunity to ask any further questions you may have.

- We can arrange the meeting during the day or evening any day of the week to meet your needs.

- At this stage you will be asked to complete an 'Initial Enquiry Form' and consent form for us to be able to carry out the statutory checks

3) References: We will ask your permission to carry out statutory checks with the local authority, Disclosure and Baring Service, School references (where your children attend). We will also ask for the names of three people who would be willing to give you a reference.

We will personally interview at least two of your referees. A medical reference will also be required from your doctor.

4) Training: You will be invited to attend “**The Skills to Foster**” training with other prospective foster carers. Experienced carers and children of foster carers may also be involved in the training session to give you their honest experiences!

5) Assessment Process: Your allocated assessor will undertake a home-study report to which you will be required to contribute. The home-study assessment is completed during a number of visits, at least 8 appointments or more over an approximate of a 3-8 months period.

6) Fostering Panel: The completed report which is known as ‘**Form F**’ is presented to our independent Fostering Panel who will give a recommendation to your approval. You will also be required to attend. A decision will be made on the age range, number of children and type of fostering you are being approved for.

7) Approval: If approved, a child, or children will be placed with you and you will be given on-going support and training

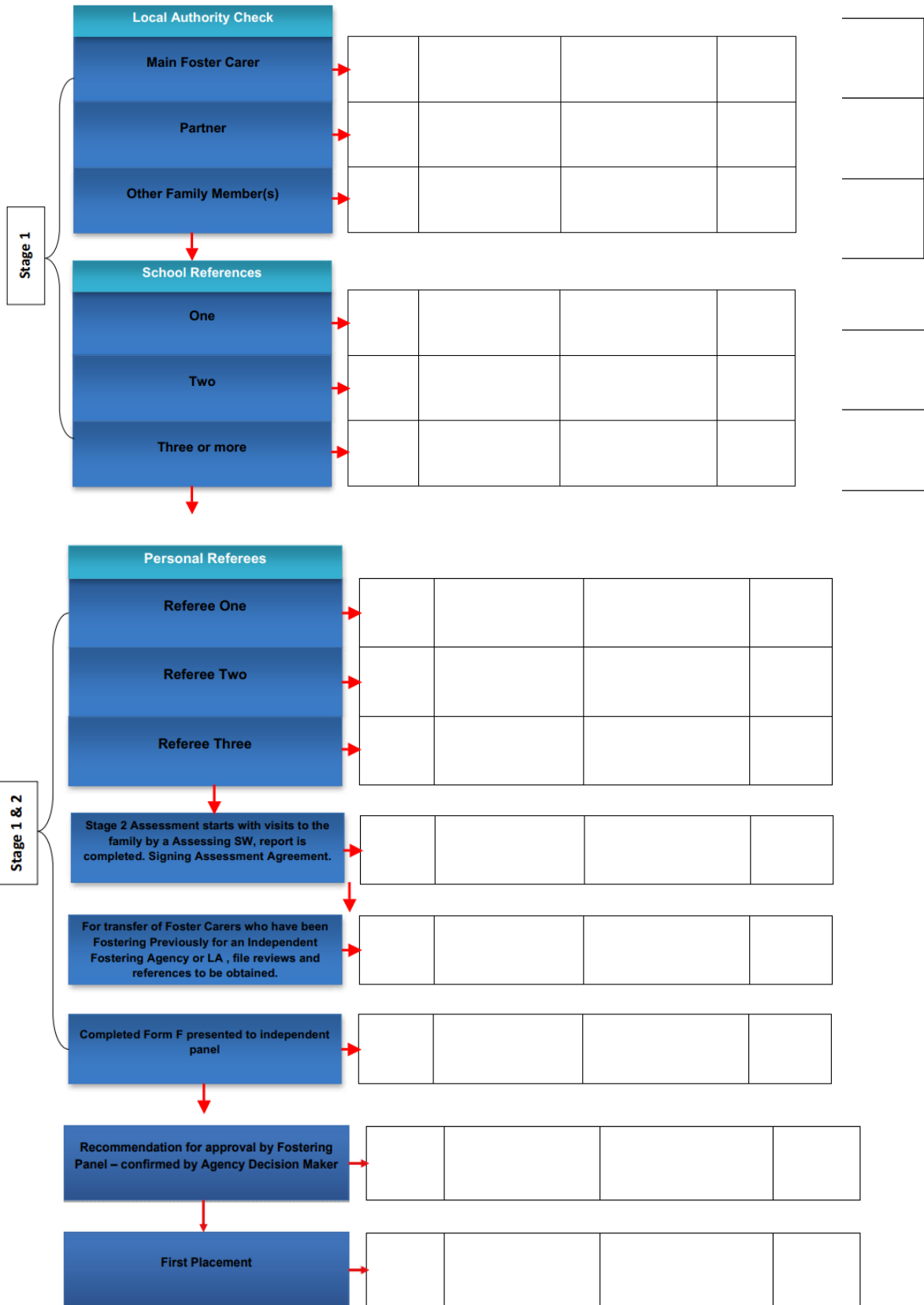
What if you change your mind?

Some people make great parents but may not be suited for fostering. If at any stage during the assessment you have reservations you can talk to your Assessing Social Worker or a Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency Manager if we stop the assessment at any time, we will be clear around our reasoning. We would prefer you to be honest with us and we will also be honest with you. If you decide fostering is not for you or your family at this time, then this decision will be respected by Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency.

Keeping track of your progress

Below is a Flowchart which will assist you to understand the assessment process. Please use the tick boxes to track your progress through the process.

Process		DATE	By Whom	Comment On going issues	Complete Date
Stage 1	Telephone Enquiry or Complete Interested in Fostering Form				
	Information Pack				
	Home Visit				



What if you would like to transfer from another Agency?

If you are already registered as a foster carer with an agency or local authority within the United Kingdom and are planning to relocate to another area we would be happy to discuss arranging a transfer to Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency.

As with all jobs sometimes you just need a change or maybe you are looking for a new challenge, whatever your reason, be assured that as a foster carer you have a right to change agencies. This basic right is enshrined within the Fostering Network 'Protocol for The Transfer of carers between Agencies' document, which has been adopted as the accepted process for managing the transfer of carers who wish to be assessed to foster by another agency.

The protocol states:

'The transfer of carers protocol is based on the assumption that carers have the right to freedom of movement between fostering services; and the principle that, in all circumstances, the welfare of any child in placement must be paramount'. (Fostering Network 2004)

At Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency, we know that as a Foster Carer, your first consideration is to the stability for any children or young people you have in your care. So is ours. That's why our first consideration must always be not to disrupt the children's placement and continuing the positive work you have achieved. In the majority of cases, following a protocol meeting with the placing Local Authority, agreement can be reached for the children to transfer to Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency with you.

Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency always gives a commitment to maintain the current terms of the placement to you and the placing local authority. This means that you will continue to receive the same level of payment, expenses and services to support the child for the duration of the placement, where these exceed those provided by Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency.

If you are considering transferring to another agency and currently do not have any children in placement, then the process is far simpler.

What are the differences between Fostering and Adoption?

- Fostering means you look after a child on behalf of Local Authority from a few days to a number of years.
- Adopting a child means you become the child's legal parent.

Agencies you may get further information from

There are a number of national agencies that can be contacted for advice and support.

Fostering Network British Association for Fostering & Adoption (BAAF)

87 Blackfriars Road Skyline House, 200 Union Street London SE1 8HA

London SE1 0OLX

Tel: 020 7620 6400 Tel: 020 7593 2000



Contact us:

Head Office: Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency

Norwich Union House

First Floor

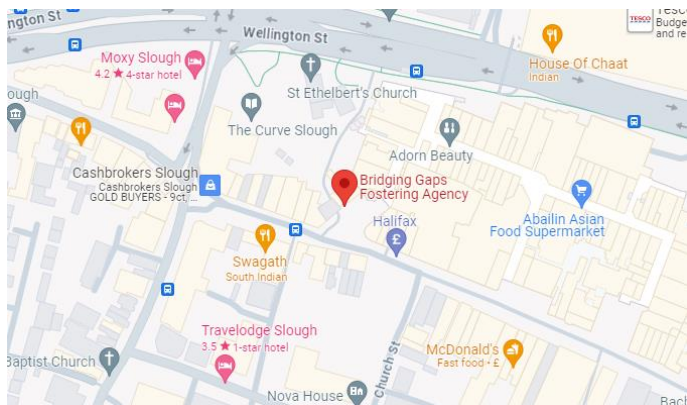
9 Mackenzie Street

Slough Berkshire

SL1 1XQ

Tel: 01753 86 86 86

Fax 01753 578 176



Interested in becoming a foster carer?

Please complete the following:-

Name of applicant _____ Date of Birth _____

Marital status

(Please tick) Single Married Divorced Cohabiting

Name of partner/spouse

(If applicable) _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____ Telephone Number _____

_____ Mobile _____

_____ Email _____

How many other people live with you in your current home address over the age of 18?

How many children do you have?

How old are your children (Please list the date of births in order)

gender _____ age _____ gender _____ age _____

gender _____ age _____ gender _____ age _____

How many rooms do you have in your home? _____ Do you have a spare bedroom? _____

Have you ever applied to foster? _____ If yes when? _____

Please submit this form to Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency's Admin Department who will contact you with a visit appointment.

For office use	
Information recorded by _____	Date _____
Please pass this form on to the acting manager who will assess and allocate this form for further assessments.	
Outcome:	<input type="checkbox"/> Allocated <input type="checkbox"/> Application not taken further
Allocated to _____	By _____ Date _____
<u>Action required:</u>	
<u>Managers Decision:</u>	
Name: _____	Date: _____

Please either:

1. Hand in form in person to the reception at:

Norwich Union House

First Floor

9 Mackenzie Street

Slough Berkshire

SL1 1XQ

2. Post this form to:

Norwich Union House

First Floor

9 Mackenzie Street

Slough Berkshire

SL1 1XQ 3.

Email to:

info@bgfa.co.uk

4. Hand in to the Centre where you picked up the form from who will post it back to us.

You may also telephone us on: 01753 86 86.

Once we receive this form one of our Assessors will call you to arrange an appointment to discuss your application.

Thank you