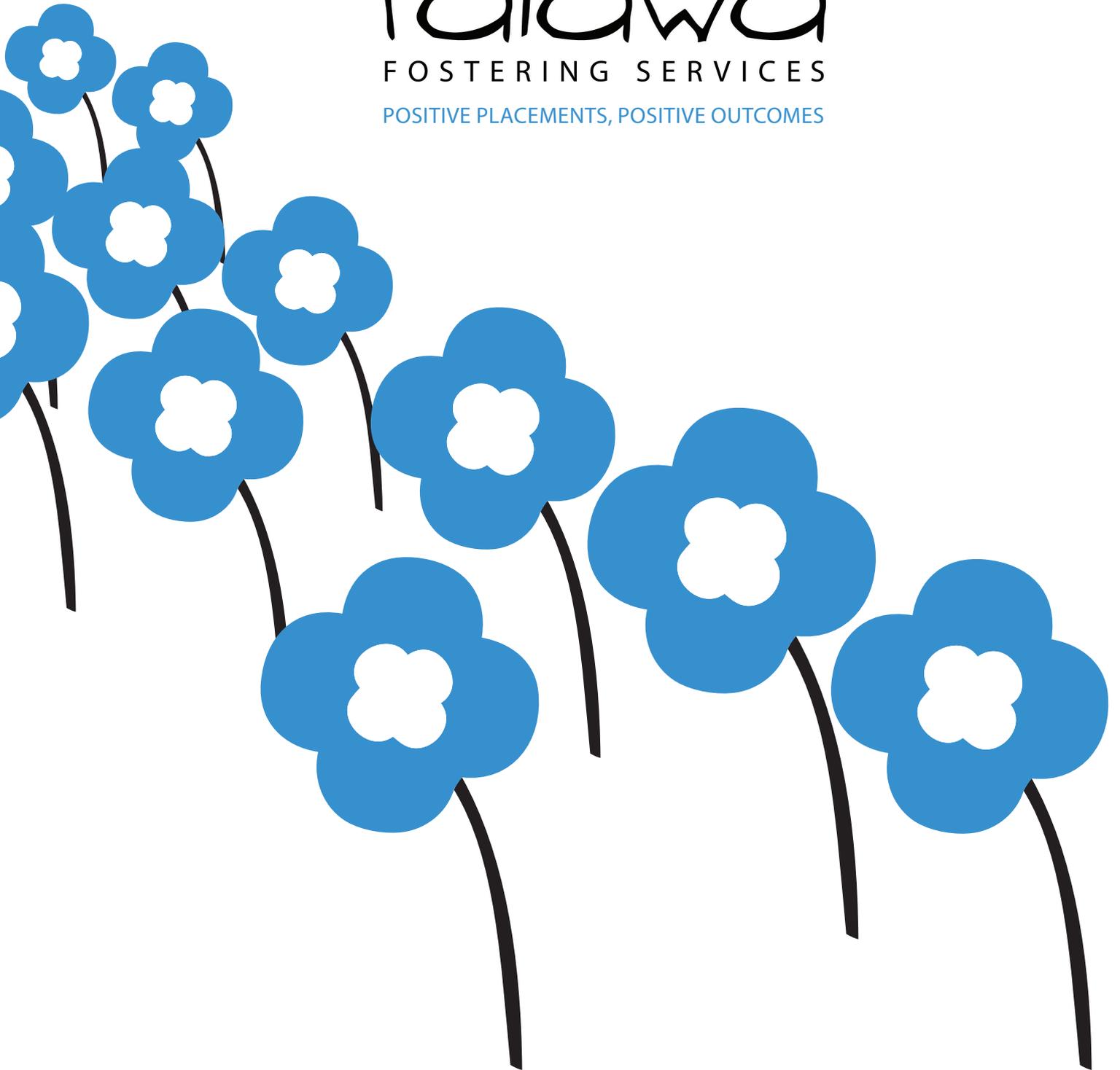


Talawa

FOSTERING SERVICES

POSITIVE PLACEMENTS, POSITIVE OUTCOMES



WORKING WITH TALAWA TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Welcome to Talawa Fostering Services and thank you very much for your interest in fostering with us.

We are a forward thinking fostering Agency based in Enfield, North London. Our team of social workers, support workers and foster carers are very committed to improving the lives of children who are unable to live with their birth family on a permanent or temporary basis and we work hard to maintain high standards and deliver best foster care practice.

As can be seen from our last Ofsted Inspection, we are very serious about the quality of the service we provide; not only for the children we care for, but also to our foster carers. We are a small and very reputable agency with good links to several local authorities who choose us as their first option when looking for foster placements. If you go on to be approved, you will be guaranteed excellent support 24:7; instant access to therapeutic support services from qualified and experienced therapists and high quality training to support your work as a foster carer.



We need foster carers for siblings, parents and their children, teenagers, children with disabilities and children of all ages (0-18). We seek carers from all sections of the community to support children through difficult times in their lives and to provide them with a safe and nurturing home.

We believe that positive placements will aid positive outcomes for children and young people. Everyone involved at Talawa will:

- Promote the highest standards of child care at all times.
- Maintain the integrity of a child-centred approach.
- Work collaboratively and in partnership with Local Authorities and other professionals.

The information in our booklet aims to answer some of the questions you may have including:

- Why foster for Talawa?
- What do people say about Talawa?
- What is fostering?
- What are the different types of placements?
- Who can foster?
- What are the rewards and allowances?
- What is the process to become a foster carer?

Once you have had a chance to read our information booklet we will be in touch with you to discuss the next steps. In the meantime we are always available to discuss fostering with you and we can be contacted on: **020 8367 6555**, in person at our office: **319 Baker Street, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 3LF** or by email: **admin@talawafostering.com**.

WHY FOSTER FOR TALAWA?

With an 'outstanding quality of service provision' (Ofsted), the agency aims to recruit carers who can look after groups of children, ensuring that significant family ties are not broken at the same time that children are being separated from their parents. We aim to provide placements which meet the holistic needs of children. We believe that it is imperative that each child is cared for in an environment which ensures respect, dignity, safety and security. It is essential that looked after children are given a voice and encouraged to comment on the services they receive. We aim to work in a respectful way with children, their birth families, our carers and other professionals to make sure that their voice is heard.

In addition to our excellent Ofsted report, which can be found on our website www.talawafostering.com, Talawa is a registered provider with London Care Services and positioned in the top tiers for general, disabled, parent and child and complex needs in the North London Efficiency Group which is a consortium of Local Authorities in North and East London. This results in a high level of referrals and all our available carers consistently having placements. We consider our foster carers to be our most valuable asset and we aim to provide all our carers with a high level of support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The quality of our services can only be provided by having dedicated, dynamic and quality foster carers who are well supported and trained.



As a Talawa carer you will receive a package of support and services which includes:

- Regular support from your own qualified social worker.
- Being treated with respect and being part of a professional team.
- A annual programme of training with everyone having their own individual development plan.
- Consultation on the function and operation of our organisation.
- At least monthly visits.
- Peer support from existing Talawa carers.
- Individual membership to Fostering Network.
- Access to additional resources to support any child and you in a placement including therapy.
- Talawa social events.
- Newsletters.
- Support from supervising social worker in obtaining and sustaining education provision.
- Generous fostering allowances.

The support and services we provide to our carers ensures:

- Skilled and experienced carers.
- High quality placements.
- Positive outcomes for children.
- Placement stability with few disruptions.
- High retention of carers.
- High level of referrals from Local Authorities.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT TALAWA

Children have very positive experience of being fostered. They enjoy having a good family life. They form close relationships and appropriate attachments. Children experience stability and develop a sense of belonging (they feel heard, valued and helped). In the protective and positive family environment, they thrive and blossom, making good and in some instances, excellent progress across different aspects of their welfare and development. *Ofsted 2016*

'I am proud to be a foster carer for Talawa Fostering Agency. During the years I have worked with them, they have given me the opportunity to care and share my life with a number of very interesting children/young people. The ongoing training has increased my knowledge base. They offer hands on support, communication is ongoing and a great deal of thought and consideration is given to appropriately matching the needs of the child with the skills and abilities of carers.' *Jennifer, Talawa Foster Carer*

'Talawa has been consistent in their professionalism, approach and engagement with our service. Individual managers and supervising social workers including students have responded to issues and concerns and worked together to progress positive placements. I have been impressed with the attention to the needs of the children and keeping the focus on the children in care.' *Team Manager, Children and Young Peoples Services, Haringey*

The leaders and managers carry out their roles with great integrity and professional expertise. They set high standards and closely monitor the service. The agency's insightful, emotionally intelligent and robust fostering practice underpins children's good outcomes. *Ofsted 2016*

'I think my social worker and my agency have been excellent. They have been extremely supportive and adaptable to my changing circumstances. They are very professional whilst also being friendly and helpful; I have nothing but admiration and gratitude for the help.' *Julie, Talawa Foster Carer*

'I have been really impressed with Talawa as an Agency. They have been thorough in any work completed and have provided excellent support to the foster carer which has supported this placement. Any issues have been addressed efficiently and I would not hesitate to recommend them.' *Senior Social Worker, Chevriots Children with Disabilities Team, Enfield*

The agency has built excellent links with partner agencies and has a good reputation within the sector. It works well together with others to address any obstacles to children's progress and promote positive outcomes. The manager appropriately challenges other services to always do what is best for children and is open to being challenged in that way herself. *Ofsted 2016*

'I value the support I receive from my supervising social worker and recognise that without the support of the agency I would have given up this challenging placement a long time ago. I have been able to get support at the end of the phone, advice and practical help when things got very difficult to manage.' *Nellie, Talawa Foster Carer*

'There are so many children who are in need of foster parents. If you like children and have a lot of patience, then you really should consider fostering. You get so much fulfilment to see the dramatic changes in children, often over a short space of time. It is great to see your hard work and dedication pay off.' *Susan, Talawa Foster Carer*

WHAT IS FOSTERING?

Fostering is giving a child a stable and caring home when their own parents or families are unable to look after them.

Children are looked after by local authorities for a variety of reasons. They may have been physically or sexually abused; there may have been a family break-up or tragedy; or the young person may have severe behavioural problems or a disability which a parent no longer feels able to cope with. Our foster carers provide a safe place and nurturing environment for these children and young people need to thrive, whatever background they have come from.



When children are first looked after, the authority will normally try to return them to their families as soon as possible. However, where this is not possible, this can result in children being looked after in a foster home until they can return home or move on to an alternative permanent placement.

Although we cannot always be sure when placing children how long they will remain with you, we will expect you to care for them for the duration of their stay to prevent them from facing any more moves or disruption.

Children, when placed, may initially be distressed, confused and anxious. This is fairly normal. Being separated from their family and friends, for whatever reason, is going to be potentially a very frightening experience, even when the children have come from damaging situations.

The parent/s will usually want to see their children. It is generally recognised, except in the extreme cases where it is considered harmful, that contact between birth parents and their children is important and should be maintained. Contact will usually take place at a contact centre and carers will be required to take children to and from contact. Following contact visits, children can once again become bewildered and upset. In addition to not understanding what is happening to them, they may not understand why they cannot go home. The foster carer has an important role in helping the child/ren manage the varying emotions which contact may trigger for them.

'Fostering is very rewarding. It is amazing to see even small changes like a child smiling. Seeing the turnaround in a child is astounding from the day they are placed with you, to the day that they leave. Fostering allows you to give children a new start and help them to move on. When a child leaves your home, they can be a completely different person.' *Nellie, Talawa Foster Carer*

Young people aged 11 to 16 come into care, or are 'accommodated', for the same reasons as younger children. Some adolescents will present particular problems, so we need foster carers for young people who will have the resilience and maturity to cope with difficult behaviour. Young people being looked after will need to feel accepted in their foster families. Foster carers need to gain the skills to support a young person either returning to their family or preparing to live independently.

Young people in foster care will have experienced difficulties and problems simply because they have been away from home and in care. They may be moody, lack self-confidence and experience difficulties in making relationships. Some may have got into the habit of truanting from school, whilst others will have become involved in illegal activity.

The young people will often find it difficult to accept that there is someone around them that they can trust. Foster carers need to encourage each young person to safely make their own decisions, take responsibility for their own actions and to take pride in themselves. Each young person is different and sensitivity is needed to judge how this can be achieved for each individual.



'Within the past 2 years I have been placed with a Talawa foster carer, and have been encouraged to speak out and participate in training as well as having my overall needs met. This experience has enabled me to become more confident in who I am and working towards a place in university. As a teenager placed with a Talawa foster carer, my experience with them has been that they are a helping hand for children of all ages.'

Naomi, Staying Put Placement



DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLACEMENTS

Talawa works closely with Local Authorities to provide high quality child centred placements. Our core business is the recruitment, retention, support and training of skilled and experienced foster carers. The Agency specialises in providing placements for parents and their children, sibling groups and for children with disabilities and complex needs.

Our ethos and expectation is that all our carers provide a therapeutic environment that meets the child's holistic needs and where children can develop and grow. Carers must accept all aspects of the child, working positively to develop attachment and achieve appropriate milestones in line with their developmental and chronological age.

There are a number of different kinds of placements, all of which are supported by the Agency's therapeutic and support workers to ensure that we are not only supporting our carers but also meeting the children's needs through providing stable placements.

Short Term / Task Centred Fostering

Foster carers provide a temporary home for children until they are either rehabilitated home or permanency or adoption is achieved.

Our foster carers are able to meet the complex needs of the children placed with them and they play an important role in helping the child/ren manage their varying emotions.

They encourage each young person to safely make their own decisions, take responsibility for their own actions and to take pride in themselves.

We and our carers recognise the importance of positive endings and transitions for children. As such carers are very involved in planning endings and working with adopters and birth families to make the move seamless and positive.

Permanent/Long Term Fostering

Long term placements for children and young people are an option where adoption may not be appropriate and a permanent foster home is necessary.



As an Agency we recognise that some, if not most of the children needing permanent foster care will have had some difficult life experiences and may present a challenge to any family who cares for them. Overall, they need stability and commitment so that they can experience that sense of belonging that permanence gives. What we require our permanent carers to have is tolerance, patience and an ability to remain with a challenge. It is envisaged that permanent foster carers will be committed to children into adulthood and beyond.

Disability or Complex Health Needs

Many children require specialist foster carers who have skills and experience of caring for children with the following disabilities:

- Physical disabilities (Cerebral Palsy, Spina bifida, etc.).
- Various forms of autism.
- Severe learning difficulties.
- Complex health needs (requiring specialist equipment, monitoring, medication or feeding etc.).

These carers will need to have had previous experience and knowledge of working with children with disability and complex needs. They will need to be patient, resilient and committed to investing the extra time, mental and physical effort often required managing the additional challenges of the placement. The Agency provides on-going training in caring for disabled children, covering such topics as feeding, sleep, behaviour and coping techniques and paediatric first aid.

Short Breaks / Respite

Short breaks carers are approved foster carers who offer a break away from home for children with physical and learning disabilities and children and young people with challenging behaviour. This is designed to support parents and foster carers. It provides them with the opportunity to have time for themselves and the other members of their household. The aim is to do this through the provision of regular short breaks.

A short break link for a child with a disability is designed to be a one to one link with the child and her/his family, which is on-going. It is a long commitment to a relationship with a child and is not something short break carers can dip in and out of. There is a careful process of matching the child/young person to the short break carer. Similarly with children and young people with challenging behaviour, we would aim to provide continuity of care by placing them with carers who they will be familiar with.

Respite care arrangements cannot exceed more than 120 days in any year for an individual child.

NB It must be noted that we do not often receive requests for respite unless it is for children with disabilities or complex needs.

Emotional, Behavioural, Social, Difficulties (EBSD) Placements

Fostering placements are required for children and young people who display challenging behaviour and who require a high level of support and supervision. Our experienced carers are able to set appropriate boundaries for young people with complex needs and manage challenging behaviour, including physical or aggressive behaviour, sexualised behaviour, social or attachment disorders and emotional and mental health difficulties.

When necessary, we provide the carer with therapeutic support from qualified therapists. Supervising social workers and therapists work with our carers to gain insight and develop skills to understand and address the difficult behaviour children exhibit, whilst providing a stable, consistent, nurturing and safe environment that enables the children to also understand the root of their difficulties and work with the carer to modify and change their behaviour.

Emergency Placements

Talawa operates a 24 hour service so local authorities can contact the Agency if they need to place a child in an emergency. Emergency carers could be called any hour of the day or night with a placement request. These are usually short term placements until a suitably matched placement can be found.

Parent and Child Placement

Our parent and child foster carers provide a home for parents and their child/ren. These carers take both young and/or adult parents and their children into their home and provide care, offer advice, guidance and support in the daily parenting tasks and ensure the safety of the children and that their parent is meeting their holistic needs.

These placements are usually mothers and their babies, but in some cases it can also be fathers. Such placements offer these families the best chance of staying together. Many placements require high levels of supervision and observation. If the parent is not able to meet the needs of the children appropriately then our carers are required to keep the child/ren after the parent has left the placement while plans are reviewed. All parent and child carers are expected to keep detailed records on the parents' progress in the placement and in some cases, carers will also be required to contribute to any on-going assessment.



WHO CAN FOSTER?

Foster carers are ordinary people from all walks of life who have decided to do something extraordinary by caring for a child or children who cannot live with their own parents. Our carers are from diverse backgrounds and have very different skills and experiences.

To foster you need to be somebody who can provide children with stability and security in a nurturing environment. You must be willing to work with a child's birth family, have suitable space in your home and some childcare experience. You must be patient and tolerant and able to make time available to be there when a child needs you, as well as for attending child-related meetings.



'Fostering is something I always wanted to do, but I had my own children quite young and then embarked on a career. When I retired, at the age of 60, I needed to do something and decided it was the right time to go into fostering. I'd worked in the field of fostering and adoption for nearly 30 years, I'd been a Sunday school teacher and a bereavement counsellor, so it was a case of pooling all my skills together. I'd also been a young, single mum myself, so I had personal experience, too.' [Jennifer, Talawa Foster Carer](#)

'Fostering provides children with love, care and stability. It's wonderful to see children feeling at home in my house, and part of our family. I think that children in foster care feel a sense of belonging often for the first time in their lives, which is amazing!' [Susan, Talawa Foster Carer](#)



There are certain requirements, some of which are legal, needed to become a foster carer and we have put together an eligibility to foster checklist:

ELIGIBILITY TO FOSTER – CHECKLIST	
Age	Usually between ages 21 – 65 Life experiences and in particular experience with children is taken into account when considering applications.
Gender/Marital Status	You do not have to be married to foster. There is no restriction due to gender or sexuality. Single and co-habiting couples are eligible to foster.
Race/Ethnicity	Children need placements that reflect their race/ethnicity, culture, religion and language. Talawa Fostering Services welcomes carers from a diversity of backgrounds to enable us to place children and young people in families appropriate to their needs.
Space	It is important for a fostered child to have access to sufficient private space as is appropriate for their age and gender. All foster children need their own room. Babies up to the age of two years may share a bedroom with a carer. The foster carer's own children need to have their needs taken into account. Children may not share beds or a bedroom.
Time	As with your own children carers need to be available to spend time with foster children but in addition they will also need to attend reviews, case conferences, parental contact and occasionally court.
Health and Safety	Carers will need to ensure that their home environment does not place a child at risk. Potential areas that may need attention include; gardens, stairs, wiring and storage of alcohol/toxic substances.
Animals	All animals will need to be shown to be properly cared for. Some animals may be unsuitable in the fostering environment.
Health	Fostering is a demanding job. It is therefore important that you are well enough to undertake the tasks involved. As part of the foster carer assessment process you will be asked to have a medical, the results of which will be taken into account when considering your application.
Communication skills and Record Keeping	Foster carers are part of a team. As a carer you will spend more time with a child than others involved in the child's care. It is important that you are able to keep an accurate record of a child's behaviour, development and also keep an organised account of their time with you.
Statutory Checks	All applicants have to undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and other statutory checks e.g. local authority checks, employer and housing checks. Any offences against children will disqualify you. Other offences will have to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Please get in touch to discuss this if you think this may apply to you.
Discipline and Boundaries	All foster carers are required to set clear boundaries but must not physically chastise a child in their care.
Partnership	Foster carers need to be prepared to work in partnership with many agencies including health, education and social work teams. Local Authorities will often be working towards returning a child to their own family and foster carers will need to be sensitive to the importance to a child of their family ties.

If you have any questions on eligibility please contact us on 020 8367 6555 and we will be happy to discuss this with you further.

REWARDS AND ALLOWANCES

We offer competitive allowances in recognition of the work our foster carers do and to cover the costs of caring for children or young people.

The allowances vary according to the type of fostering you do, the age of the child and their individual needs. You will receive good weekly pay for each foster child while they are living with you which will enable you to commit to fostering as a full time career.

Standard Placement	0-12 years	£365 per week
Standard Placement	13-16 years	£395 per week
Standard Placement	16-18 years	£425 per week
Enhanced Placement	0-12 years	£425 per week
Enhanced Placement	13-16 years	£455 per week
Enhanced Placement	16-18 years	£485 per week
Parent and Baby Placement • Additional Baby/Toddler		£800 per week £325 per week
Christmas and Birthday Payments		£50
Support Work and Introductions		£10-£15 per hour

Respite placements are charged at the same rate as placements.

We offer carers with challenging children in placement a respite break and during this period you will receive 50% of your placement allowance. Respite will be based on the needs of the child placed with you and this will need to be discussed with your supervising social worker.

* Enhanced Placements: These are charged for children with severe behavioural, emotional and learning difficulties which require additional support from very experienced and skilled foster carers and Agency social workers and therapists. Examples of this include violent behaviour, absconding criminal activity, alcohol and drug abuse, mental ill health and sexualised behaviour. This also includes placements that may require the carer to submit detailed reports for assessments and appear in court.

Loyalty bonus - Once you have been fostering for Talawa Fostering Services for a year you will receive a loyalty bonus payment of £100.00 for every full year you remain with us from the date of your approval.

Recruiting Foster Carers - Talawa Fostering Services operate an incentive scheme for the recruitment of foster carers. If as an approved carer you introduce someone to our agency who goes on to be approved by us, we will pay you a one-off fee of £500.00 once they have their first placement.



THE PROCESS TO BECOME A FOSTER CARER

The purpose of assessing you and other people who are significant to you is to ensure you would be suitable to provide care for other people's children. It is a lengthy and personal piece of work, and will impact on you and involve everyone who lives in your home or might provide you with a lot of support. The idea is that the assessing social worker will work together with you to try and establish whether you will meet the requirements to care for a child and whether it is the right time for you and your household to be fostering.

The assessment is also a learning process, which helps the assessor to identify your family's skills, strengths and any areas that you will need to gain more experience of and help to decide what other support and training you may need to help you be the most effective. The assessing social worker will gain a picture of your family and lifestyle, which should demonstrate what it would be like for a child to live in your household. The assessing social worker will produce a written report, which will be shared with you and you will be given an opportunity to read and comment on it. This report will then go to the Fostering Panel for recommendation for your approval to foster. The assessing social worker will be expected to present the report to the Fostering Panel. The report needs to demonstrate and evidence that your family is suitable to care for a child and that your home could provide an appropriate environment for a foster child's or young person's emotional, physical and intellectual growth and development.



The assessment process starts from the first discussion that you will have with Talawa Fostering Services and is divided into a number of stages:

Step 1 - Initial Enquiry: Basic Information

At this stage we will take some basic information from you about yourself and your family. If you meet the required recruitment objectives, the agency will send you an information pack and an application form.

Following on from the initial enquiry there are two stages of assessment; both Stage 1 and Stage 2 can be carried out in conjunction with one another.

Step 2 - Initial Home Visit

You will be visited in your home by one or two members of our team to discuss your interest in fostering. It is an important visit which gives you an opportunity to exchange information. It also provides the opportunity for Talawa and you to decide whether it is appropriate for you to move to the next stage of the assessment process. At this stage information will be obtained on what you and your family feel you have to offer a child and general information about your situation. It also gives the opportunity to see whether your home has the space necessary for fostering. At this stage, it is usual to meet the other people living in the household.

All initial home visits are arranged in advance and you need to be aware that this will be a lengthy meeting, usually taking about 2 hours. Following the visit a report is written and a discussion of the meeting will be shared with the Registered Manager and team at Talawa.



Once we have received all the Stage 1 information (please see the list below), you will be informed within a ten day period (following receipt of all the information) as to whether you have successfully or unsuccessfully completed Stage 1. If however, you are not notified within this ten day period you effectively go into Stage 2 of the assessment and the agency then has to follow the Stage 2 procedure.

NB: As some of the checks and references are outside of our control, you will be notified if there is any delay in receiving the required information.

Step 3 - Stage 1: Information Gathering

At this stage we will gather a substantial amount of information relating to you and your family. Most of this information will be collected from the application form and the initial visit undertaken in your home by one of our social workers.

Information obtained in Stage 1 will include:

- Your full name, address and date of birth.
- The details of you and your partner's (where applicable) health, supported by a medical report on both of you.
- Details of other adult household members.
- Details of children in the prospective carer's family whether they are living at home or in their own accommodation elsewhere.
- Details of the household's accommodation and what space there might be available for a foster child or young person.
- The outcome of any request or application made by the prospective carer or any members of your household, to foster children and details of any previous approval or refusal of approval.
- Names and addresses of three people who know you and your family really well and therefore will be able to provide personal references for you.
- In relation to you and each member of your household aged 18 or over, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Certificate. This check will ensure that you have no criminal offences which would make you ineligible to work with children and that you have not been involved with activities that would debar you from working with vulnerable adults and children.
- Details of any current or previous marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship. Please note we are required to interview previous significant partners.



- Consultation with the local authority in the area where you live and if you have moved local authority districts within the last 5 years, the previous local authority where you resided.
- Interviews with at least three personal referees. We will prepare written reports of the interview which each referee; they will be required to sign and date the report to show they agree that it is a true and accurate record of the interview.
- If you have been an approved foster carer for another fostering service, a written reference will be requested from that agency. If your approval was within the last 12 months, it may not be necessary to repeat all of the checks.
- The name address of any fostering service that you have been an approved carer for in the preceding 12 months and made an application to (even if this did not continue).



Step 4 - Stage 2: More detailed information gathered from the prospective carer

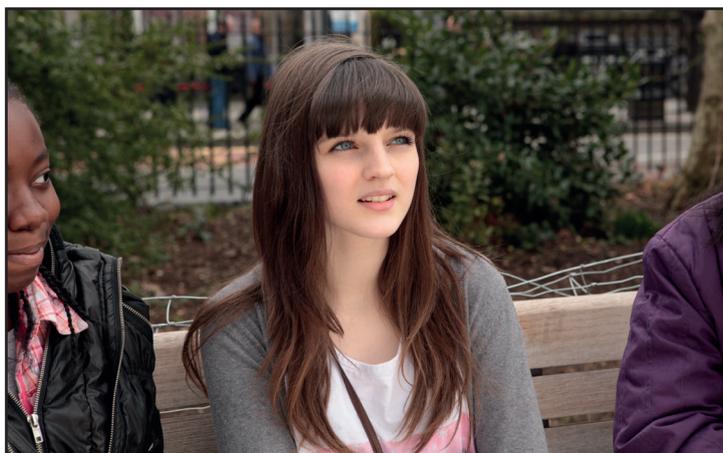
If you are considered unsuitable, the Stage 2 procedure requires the assessing social worker to write a brief report to present at the Fostering Panel, detailing the work that has been undertaken with you and why it is considered that you might be unsuitable to foster at this stage. You will receive a copy of this report and can also be invited to attend the panel.

At Talawa, Stage 1 and 2 of the process is undertaken jointly. The information that needs to be collected at Stage 2 of the assessment will include:

- Details of your personality.
- Information about your religious persuasion and capacity to care for a child from any particular racial origin or cultural or religious background.
- Your past and present employment or occupation, standard of living, leisure activities and interests.
- Your previous experience (if any) of caring for your own and other children.
- Any skills, competence and potential that might help you to care effectively for a child placed with you.
- Your own experience of being raised.
- Any experience of caring for children born to somebody else.
- How you would be able to maintain contact between fostered children and their families.
- Your ability to help children make sense of their past.
- The sexual boundaries and attitudes you were raised with and those that you currently have.



- Your awareness of issues around child abuse and how will you manage to care for children who have been abused.
- Your approaches to discipline and how you might manage difficult behaviour from foster children.
- Your awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults.
- Your awareness of your own motivation for fostering and how your own needs will be met through the fostering process.
- How you will communicate with children.
- Your standard of living and lifestyle and how this would fit with fostering.
- Your health history.
- Your own experience of parenting and being parented.
- Your own experiences in relation to disability and/or attitudes to disability.
- Your attitudes to sex and sexuality.



In order to ensure the safety of children in our foster homes, everyone who is involved in caring for children must be carefully vetted.

The following checks and references are required on everyone in the household. Most of the following will be undertaken in Stage 1.

- The local education authority if you have children of school age.
- Your child's school or nursery (if applicable).
- Details of any criminal offences (also any spent convictions within the meaning of Section 1 of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (d) and any cautions which the applicant may have accepted or denied at the time).
- The DOH Consultancy Service Index and List 99.
- The local social services department in the area where you are resident.
- If you have children under 5, a reference must be obtained from the local health visitor.
- A reference from your most current employer.
- If you have worked in a job with children a reference will be requested from that employer and verification must be sought as to why the employment ended.
- A full employment history, together with satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment.
- Proof of your identity (passport, national insurance details).



- Proof of marriage or divorce.
- Documentary evidence of any relevant qualification/s.
- Interviews with the children from previous relationships.

Training of Applicants

If it is agreed to progress your assessment, you will be expected to attend the Skills to Foster preparation course. This is a preparation group which will give you information about what fostering is about; who else is involved; the legislation; working with birth families and how it might affect you and your family and moving children on to adoption or back home to their parents.

The preparation group training will form part of the assessment and the group leaders who do the training are expected to comment on the participation of all involved on each training day. The preparation groups are run during the week and at weekends to try and include as many people as possible.

The Assessment

The aim of the Agency is to start an assessment alongside the preparation group, but this is not always possible. The majority of the home study is expected to be carried out in your home. It is important to remember that fostering involves all members of the household and will impact on everyone and therefore the assessment needs to involve the views of the whole family.



Expectations of the assessing social worker:

You have the right to expect the following from your assessor:

- To conduct the assessment in a way that promotes anti-discriminatory practice.
- To agree at the start, a plan of appointments and set a timescale for the assessment.
- To ensure that you are fully prepared for attending the Fostering Panel and that they receive a copy of the leaflet for people attending Panel.
- To feedback to the Agency any comments about the assessment process you might have which could improve our assessment practice.
- To keep written records of your assessment, which will be shared regularly with the Registered Manager.
- To maintain the Agency's confidentiality agreement at all times.



Proposed format for the Assessor's report:

We carry out our assessments and use the BAAF Form F. You will be given a copy of this to help you prepare for each time you meet with your assessing social worker.

After your assessment has been completed, a copy of the report will be shared with you and you will be asked for your comments on the report. Following this, the Fostering Panel will meet to discuss your application to foster. You will also be invited to attend this meeting.

You will also be sent a copy of information on what to expect when you attend the Fostering Panel which your assessor will discuss and prepare you for.

You will also be required to complete an evaluation form about your experience of attending the Fostering Panel meeting.

Stage 5 - The Fostering Panel

Attending the Panel is something which should be discussed with you from the beginning of the assessment process. The assessing social worker will discuss the whole Panel process with you and give you a copy of the 'Leaflet for People Attending the Fostering Panel', which explains the process in more detail.

In brief, the final assessment report is presented to the Fostering Panel. Prior to this you will have had an opportunity to read the report and add your comments and sign it. The Panel will make a recommendation as to whether you are suitable to become a foster carer.



The Panel is made up of a combination of independent people and Agency staff who are experienced in matters of fostering. The Panel will make a recommendation about your approval and will specify the number of children you can foster and the age and gender. You will be informed in writing, within 7 working days, of the final decision of the Agency Decision Maker.

If your application is not successful, you will be given clear reasons in writing from the Fostering Panel as to why you were not recommended for approval and you will also have the right to complain or appeal the decision.

Representations/Complaints

If you do not agree with any part of the assessment process (Stage 1 or 2); the recommendation of the Panel; the decision of the Agency, or feel you were treated unfairly; you have the right to appeal. You should write to the Agency Decision Maker at Talawa Fostering Services in the first instance within 28 days from receipt of the decision of informing you that you have not been approved, outlining your complaint.



Your complaint should be responded to in writing within 2 weeks of receipt of your letter. The Fostering Panel would then re-consider your case and any new information that you may present and make a recommendation to either confirm or reverse the original recommendation.

The Agency may appoint an independent person to investigate the complaint.

You may decide also to appeal directly to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM). Their contact details for making a complaint are:

Complaints should be addressed to:

**IRM Contract Manager
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)
Unit 4
Pavilion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
Wortley
LEEDS LS12 6AJ**

Tel: 0845 450 3956

Fax: 0845 450 3957

(Charged at local rates)

Stage 6 - Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

After a recommendation of approval at the Fostering Panel, the Panel's recommendation and the minutes of the meeting will be sent to the ADM. The ADM will then make a decision (this is called the Qualifying Determination) whether or not to accept the Panel's recommendation.

After you are approved by the ADM, you will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker and will receive a Foster Carers' Handbook, which is a guide to the processes and procedures of the Agency.

Foster Care Agreement/Reviews

Foster carers must sign a written agreement. This agreement sets out your key responsibilities as a foster carer and our duties to support you. The Foster Carer Agreement is our contract with you. Your approval as a foster carer is reviewed every year to take into account of any changes in your circumstances.



The agency conducts every aspect of the fostering service with thoroughness, rigour and a sharp focus on children. The professional practice exceeds the characteristics of a good judgement and results in consistently positive outcomes for children.

Excellent preparation to foster, highly analytical assessments of prospective foster families and a strong fostering panel mean that only high quality carers are approved. Once approved, foster carers continue to receive excellent support and comprehensive training. This includes having access to enhanced psychological support and advice from psychotherapists who work for the agency.

This is an emotionally intelligent agency that consistently promotes emotional awareness, self-regulation and resilience, on all its levels of functioning. Linked with this, is the agency's culture of promoting non-judgemental attitudes and celebrating equality and diversity in all its forms.

Educational and social care professionals commented that foster carers treated looked after children as if they were their own sons and daughters. Regardless of children's complex needs and at times, challenging behaviours and presentations, foster carers see the uniqueness and potential of each child. They have high aspirations for children. They are excellent advocates and make sure that the child's voice is always heard. They talk about the looked after children with genuine affection. In addition to having a great capacity to understand and love children, they also have comprehensive skills and fostering competences to help children to move their lives forward.

Foster families highly value the support they receive from their supervising social workers. They described the agency as absolutely brilliant, fantastic and fabulous. They said that the agency was always there for them and that they could have not hoped for a better support. A foster carer said: 'The agency values us as people. There is no great divide: it is all about us working together for the positive outcomes of the children.'

The feedback that Ofsted received from a wide range of professionals through our online survey and conversations during the inspection was also unanimously very positive. The professionals said that the agency was always going the extra mile to enable the carers to improve children's life-chances. They described the agency as an impressive and outstanding service. An educational professional said that the carers and children received phenomenal amount of support from the agency.

One of the things that the agency excels in is the stability of the placements. The agency reported no unplanned endings for the year 2014/15, which is well below the national average figure. Specific approval criteria and excellent matching decisions make significant contributions to the high effectiveness of the placements. Foster carers said that the agency knew them very well on a very deep level and were able to predict which placements would work well for everybody involved. One foster carer noted that matching took into account the carer's personal emotional histories, attachment styles and family dynamics.

The agency views foster family life holistically. While emphasising the outcomes for foster children, the agency makes sure that each family member receives the support they need in order to continue to successfully carry out their roles and to continue to enjoy a good family life. Foster carers described the agency as being respectful and deeply human. They said that fostering has been a positive journey for the whole family and has enriched their lives.

The meticulous records of regular monthly supervisory visits and the comprehensive annual reviews demonstrate that the agency's social work practice is insightful and reflective. The robust fostering panel's considerations of the assessments and reviews contribute to the exceptionally high standard of professional practice being maintained.

