

**Children's Services**

## **Inverclyde Fostering Services**

*Getting it right for every child, citizen and community*







# Inverclyde Fostering Services

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## 1. Welcome to Inverclyde's Fostering Services

The information in this folder provides details of the fostering service and schemes provided by Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) in order to meet the needs of the children and young people living locally. Information is also provided about the assessment and approval process involved in becoming a foster carer.

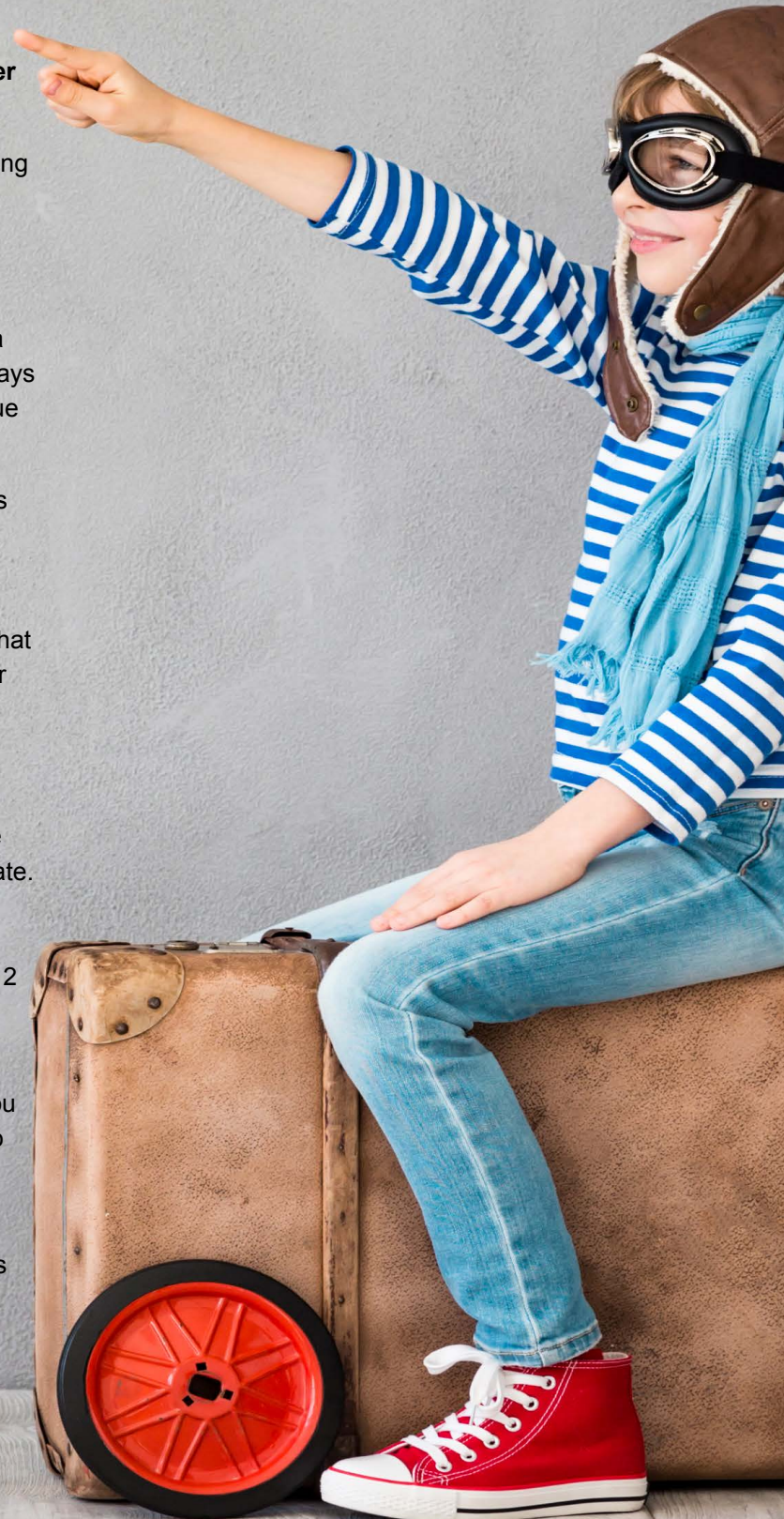
The Fostering Service is here to provide safe, caring homes for children and young people who, for various reasons, aren't able to live with their birth families. We do it by working in close partnership with our carers, the children and young people, birth families and social workers. There's always a demand for our services which means we are always ready to welcome new carers to take on this unique challenge.

Looking after vulnerable, confused and sometimes angry children and young people is not the easiest thing in the world but the rewards can be immeasurable. Knowing that you're making a difference to a young life is very fulfilling. That's what keeps our carers dedicated to fostering – some for more than twenty years.

There is information about the Fostering Service on our website [www.inverclyde.gov.uk/fostering-and-adopting](http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/fostering-and-adopting) including Inspection Reports from the former Care Commission now the Care Inspectorate. Please read this information pack and, if you are interested in finding out more about fostering, complete and return the enclosed form (Appendix 2 Reply form) to the address on this pack.

Alternatively you may e-mail the service at: [adoptionandfostering@inverclyde.gov.uk](mailto:adoptionandfostering@inverclyde.gov.uk) or you may telephone **01475 715367** or **01475 715020** to request a visit to gain further information.

We would appreciate if you will complete our Information pack feedback, Appendix 1. This helps us to ensure the information



## 2. Who can foster?

Children who need to be placed with foster carers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and so we welcome enquiries and applications from people from all walks of life.

Our criteria are as follows:

- A single person can apply
- A married or co-habiting couple can apply
- A same gender couple can apply
- Applicant/s must be at least 21 years of age
- Transgender

In addition to these formal criteria we have the following expectations:

- You must be prepared to work with birth family members and with a range of professionals, including social workers, and education staff.
- You are expected to follow a healthy lifestyle and consideration will be given during the assessment process to smoking and dietary habits. Applicants will be expected to undergo a health assessment.
- We are looking for foster carers who live in the Inverclyde area so children can, where possible, maintain their links with friends and attend local clubs. We will consider applications from outwith Inverclyde if you are able to travel to Inverclyde for training, meetings and other activities.
- You will be expected to take up training opportunities provided, including attendance at the monthly carers' support group.
- You must never use any form of physical punishment to discipline a child/young person.
- As part of the assessment of your suitability to be a foster carer you will be expected to undergo a range of checks including joining the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme (which is a check of any record of convictions or involvement with the police).
- If you have been convicted of offences against children you will not be assessed as prospective foster carers. Other offences or involvement with

the police will be considered on an individual basis.

- There are additional criteria to be met if you are applying to be approved as a Level 4 carer.
- We welcome enquiries from all ethnic and religious groups and from diverse cultural backgrounds.

There are lots of myths about what may prevent you from fostering. Here are the myths and facts:

- You don't need to own your own house. As long as you are in a secure tenancy we will consider you.
- You must have a spare bedroom for the child.
- You can't have other children in the house. There is no bar against you having other children living at home and we will always consider the needs of these children. How they will cope with foster children will be part of the assessment.
- You can't foster if you have health problems. We will consider enquiries and applications from people with health problems. However, our priority is the needs of the children who require to be fostered and so you have to be fit, active and sufficiently healthy to run around, to attend the range of appointments that children may have and to introduce them to new pastimes.
- You can't work and foster. We will accept applications from people who are in employment. However your work commitments have to fit round the needs of the child. Children who are placed with foster carers often have extra appointments and input because of what they have missed earlier and you have to be available to be involved in this.



### 3. Types of fostering

#### Short break carers

May care for a child or young person with a disability or for a child or young person whose full time carer needs a break. This could be from the occasional overnight stay to regular weekends or holiday periods. The aim of the scheme is to be flexible in order to meet the needs of the children and families.

#### Temporary foster carers

Care for children within the categories (age, gender and number) for which they have been registered as a foster carer. Children may be placed at short notice or on a planned basis. They will stay until they can either safely return home or move onto a long term placement. The eligibility criteria for becoming a foster carer, as already described, apply to applicants wishing to become temporary carers.

#### Interim foster carers

Care for a child or sibling group who cannot return to their birth family and for whom adoption would not be an appropriate plan. The children are likely to be in late primary or early secondary school years and will need care until they can move onto an independent living situation. They will have experienced considerable disruption in their lives and their behaviour and development may show signs of this adversity. The eligibility criteria for becoming a foster carer, already described, apply to applicants wishing to become interim foster carers.

#### Long term carers

A placement which has been in place for longer than 24 months not secured by a Permanence Order. (This should be an exceptional situation and an indicator that the placement requires close scrutiny). Agencies must differentiate between long-term placements where:

- A Permanence Order without ancillary provisions is being sought
- Child's care plan indicates that the placement will be maintained into adulthood (18+ years of age) without a Permanence Order being sought
- Child's care plan indicates that alternative placements are being sought (including with birth family)
- The child's care plan gives no indication of the placement's objective or expected duration and therefore requires close scrutiny.

### 4. The family placement team

The Family Placement Team is part of the wider Children and Families Team. The team consists of two managers, one of whom is responsible for adoption and permanence and the other for fostering and kinship placements and five family placement social workers who undertake assessments of prospective foster carers within the HSCP area. You will be assessed on your ability to promote health, education, personal and social development of children and young people who may be placed with you.



### 5. Training and support

#### Support

If you are approved as a foster carer for Inverclyde HSCP you will have your own family placement social worker. He or she is your main point of contact with social work services. This worker will visit you regularly as well as keeping in touch by phone and email. She will answer any questions you may have and will be there to help you and your family deal with any difficulties you may encounter.

You will be issued with a Foster Carers' Handbook which will outline the responsibilities of the foster carer and of the various professional staff who are involved with children in foster care.

In addition to support from professional staff a foster carers' support group meets regularly which you will be encouraged to attend. This group is well attended by new foster carers as well as by more experienced carers. Lots of friendly advice and guidance is available at the meeting. We may link you up with another carer who will support and assist you particularly in the first few months after you are approved. All foster carers have their registration reviewed every year where your progress is discussed and your support and training needs for the forthcoming year are identified.

Inverclyde HSCP pays an allowance for each child who is placed with you. The rates vary with the age of the child or the young person - getting larger as they grow older. The allowance is designed to cover the cost of caring - including things like clothes, pocket money, activities and use of the telephone. Additional allowances are paid at birthdays, Christmas and holidays. These payments do not normally exceed the tax threshold and should not affect benefits, although you should take advice about this from the local tax and benefits offices.

As well as an allowance for the child a weekly fee is paid to level 2, 3 and 4 carers. Our new Payment for Skills Scheme, which is explained in more detail later in the pack, offers foster carers the chance to receive additional payment by attending training

and being able to demonstrate how they have put their learning into practice. This provides a career path within fostering. Details of current allowances and fees are included at Appendix 3.

Financial assistance is also available to purchase items such as furniture and baby equipment that you may need to make your home ready to receive a child.

Inverclyde HSCP recognises the responsibility that fostering entails and we are committed to providing high quality support to foster carers. This support is available locally 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

#### Training

We place a particular emphasis on training. We believe that fostering is a demanding task which requires carers to be properly trained if they are to offer the highest standard of care to our children. Accordingly, before you decide to apply, we offer an introductory course to give you basic information and knowledge. This course is run either in the evenings or at weekends in order to allow people to attend without having to take time off work. The course is delivered by the family placement team along with experienced foster carers.

Following approval, you can choose from a programme of specific courses that we run throughout the year so you can build up your expertise in particular areas. Examples of training we have offered are; child development, secure base parenting, first aid, child protection awareness, recording and report writing and managing allegations.

Inverclyde HSCP aims to thoroughly prepare and effectively support our foster carers in order that we can offer the best opportunities to the children and young people who are looked after in foster care. This also gives foster carers the opportunity to develop into experienced, well trained care professionals in their own right.



## 6. Fostering schemes

**In order to meet the needs of the children and young people for whom Inverclyde has responsibility, we have developed a Payment for Skills scheme.**

The scheme has four levels.

### Level 1

The majority of new foster carers will be placed on level 1 and will be paid a basic allowance to meet the needs of caring for a child. This placing recognises that, although carers may have been involved in caring for their own children or the children of friends and relatives, they will not have experience of looking after children who have been exposed to adversity in the way that children in foster care have. In this initial period, carers will receive a high level of support from a family placement social worker and will be offered and expected to attend training courses to extend their knowledge. Once carers have satisfactorily attended training and shown that they are developing skills appropriate to the fostering task there is a formal process whereby they can progress to level 2 if they wish.

### Level 2

Level 2 carers will have completed the process described above. They are paid the basic allowance and also a weekly fee in recognition of the skills that they have acquired. To progress further, they will continue to attend training and to expand their skills through reading, research and other methods such as attendance at support groups and other informal learning. They should be able to demonstrate that they have developed their practice as a result of this. It is expected that carers on this level will be undertaking some external training. This may be online.

It is possible to enter the fostering service at level 2 with relevant qualifications, skills and/or experience with children who are looked after away from home.

### Level 3

It is expected that carers at this level will continue to attend training and to expand their skills through reading, research and other methods such as attendance at support groups and other informal learning and to demonstrate that they have developed their practice as a result of this. It is also expected that they will complete formal training eg SVQ 3 or equivalent. These foster carers are paid a higher fee.

### Level 4

Level 4 carers have specific skills, experience and formal qualifications and care for children and young people with complex needs. More information about level 4 care is contained in Section 10.

Level 4 carers receive an enhanced financial package.

Full details of the financial package including allowances and fees for all the levels are included at Appendix 3.



## 7. What is supported care?

### What do supported carers do?

Supported Carers offer help and support to a vulnerable young person aged 16 years and over.

### Who are the children and young people?

Young people who require support may include those leaving care (they may have been living in a foster placement or in a residential unit) or those who find themselves homeless due to family difficulties. They may need help with budgeting, caring for themselves, how to get into work - the kind of support that most young people get from their families. What they have in common is that they need support, guidance and commitment from a supportive caring adult.

### What qualities does a supported carer require?

Supported carers come from various backgrounds. They may be single, a married couple either living on their own or with a family still living at home. They may be unemployed, working or retired. We are looking for people who enjoy spending time with young people.

The primary requirement is a concern for young people. Vulnerable young people benefit most from a secure, caring environment, along with adults who can support and encourage them towards independence. This can be achieved by offering the young person a place in your home and sharing your life experiences, preparing them for a future in the community and a chance to stand on their own two feet.

It is important that supported carers can offer the young person a room of their own and that they have time to help them with practical skills, such as, cooking, budgeting and home management. They also need to encourage the young person to develop an active social life as well as being there for them when they just need to talk.

### What does becoming a supported carer involve?

There is a thorough process, including home visits, personal references as well as comprehensive medical and other checks on you and all adults living within your home. A detailed report is prepared and presented along with these checks to the Fostering Resources Panel who make a recommendation to the Head of Social Work Services as to whether or not you should be accepted as a supported carer for Inverclyde. You will see a copy of the report that is presented to Panel and also be invited to attend.

### What support does Inverclyde offer?

All Supported Carers receive a weekly allowance for the young person in their care. The rates for Supported Carers are detailed at Appendix 3.

Supported Carers receive advice and support in respect of the young person placed from the young person's social worker who will be in regular contact. You will also have a family placement social worker who will visit you regularly, offering support and advice and whom you can contact to discuss any concerns you may have. Training and support group meetings are also provided.

### What next?

If you are interested in finding out more we would be glad to hear from you. We are happy to receive enquiries and to answer any questions you may have without any commitment from you.

To progress your enquiry please fill out the Reply form at Appendix 2 or contact us as on page 22.



## 8. What is interim foster care?

### What do interim foster carers do?

Interim foster carers provide a placement for children while plans are made for their future. These plans might involve a return home, in which case carers work closely with the child's family often supporting and helping parents to resume care of their children. Plans might also involve supporting children to understand that they cannot safely return to the care of their families and helping them to move into new permanent living arrangements such as permanent fostering or adoptive placements.

### Who are the children and young people?

Children and young people of all ages can require this type of care. The reasons that they cannot live with their families include:

- Parental abuse of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Parental physical or mental health problems.
- Physical, sexual or emotional abuse and/or neglect.
- Family relationship difficulties.
- Bereavement.

Many of the children are in family groups and would like to stay together in foster care. All have experienced disruption and distress which sometimes makes them unhappy and causes them to behave in ways that are difficult to understand and manage.

Sometimes placements need to be arranged at very short notice. Other situations may allow for a period of introductions before a child moves into your home.

### What qualities do interim foster carers need?

Interim fostering is a demanding, challenging task that requires energy, commitment and stamina. The rewards are, however, immense. Foster carers help children who have experienced adversity to grow and develop positively, thus contributing to their long term happiness and security.

Interim foster carers need to be interested in helping children. Most have some experience with children, although that is not essential. They need to be flexible and able to enjoy every day being different. Accepting a child's background and not judging their family is also important. Most children in temporary care move on either back to their own families or onto other permanent care arrangements and so another vital quality is to be able to care for children and then to support them to move on.

Caring for the child is just one aspect of fostering. Of equal importance is the ability to work in partnership with the members of the team supporting the child and their family. This may include social work staff, health staff, teachers, psychologists and doctors. Supporting a child in school is really important as many of the children have suffered disruption to their education and have often fallen behind with their schoolwork. Helping them to catch up is a practical way to assist them that will make a real difference to their future.

Working with the child's family is another aspect of fostering. Foster carers can be involved with the child's family in a number of ways. They may help when the child sees his parents, brothers and sisters and other family members. They may help a parent by supporting them with parenting tasks. For example, they may spend time with young parents showing them how they care for the child and supporting them develop their own skills. Even if there is no direct contact with the family, foster carers have to speak positively of the family and understand the conflict that children often feel when they are separated from their birth family.

There is no requirement for interim carers to be at home full time but this type of care does involve taking children to appointments, attending meetings and being available when the children need you. For these reasons, it probably fits best with people who are working part time during school hours or not working at all outwith the home. Parenting experience or other experience of children, while not essential, is desirable. This is a challenging task with great rewards as you see children settle and begin to thrive in your care while plans are made for a more permanent solution.

Foster carers may either own or rent their homes. They may live in a flat or house. The child must have their own room.

### What support does Inverclyde HSCP offer to interim foster carers?

All foster carers have their own family placement social worker who will visit on a regular basis and keep in touch in between by phone and email. This worker is there for you and your family to help you with the task of fostering, to answer any queries you may have and to support you in your contacts with all those involved with the child. If you need help or advice at any time, your family placement social worker or other members of the team can be contacted by telephone. Help and advice is also available outwith normal working hours.

Foster carers are encouraged to take part in post approval training to increase their knowledge and skills and your family placement social worker will support you to undertake the 'core' training programme.

Temporary foster carers receive an age related allowance for the child, which covers the cost of caring for the child in your own home. Additional payments will be made at Christmas, birthdays, holidays and in September. Appendix 3 contains information on the current payments. Fostering allowances are not normally considered as income for the purpose of state benefits or income tax but

fees may be. You should seek advice regarding this from your local tax office and/or benefits agency.

### What next?

If you are interested in finding out more we would be glad to hear from you. We are happy to receive enquiries and to answer any questions you may have without any commitment from you.

To progress your enquiry please fill out the Reply form at Appendix 3 or contact us as on page 22.





## 9. What is permanent foster care?

### What do permanent foster carers do?

Permanent foster carers care for the child usually throughout childhood providing a safe and stable environment to enable him or her to grow both physically and emotionally and to reach his/her full potential.

When a child is placed with a family on a permanent fostering basis it is anticipated the child will grow up with the foster carers and remain there until the time is right to move on to independence.

### Who are the children and young people?

Children who require permanent foster care have usually been in a temporary foster placement for some time. Attempts to return the child to the care of his family will usually have been tried and have failed. Most of the children are older, usually over 8 years old, many have brothers and sisters who they would like to live with and most have experienced disruption and adversity which may affect their behaviour. All will understand why they cannot live at home and, although some will be confused and uncertain, many will be keen to be settled in a family where they know they can put down roots and grow up in similar situations to their friends.

### What qualities do permanent foster carers need?

Many of the qualities that interim foster carers need also apply to permanent caring. Energy, commitment, stickability, stamina and a sense of humour are all helpful, as is an understanding of and concern for young people. It is important that the child feels part of the carers' family and so we encourage permanent carers to take on many of the responsibilities that parents do in so far as the law allows. Equally, it helps a child to feel that he belongs if he becomes part of the community where he lives and so we encourage carers to support a child to join local clubs and take part in activities. This helps to build self esteem and give a child a sense of accomplishment.

Permanent foster carers, like other foster carers, require to work alongside professional staff in order to further the plan for the child. For example, they need to work closely with the school in order to try and enhance the child's educational opportunities.

Permanent carers may be expected to work with the birth family. They may be asked to facilitate ongoing contact between the child and the birth family. Many older children have strong bonds with their birth families and, even if they cannot live with them, they are keen to keep in touch and to meet up with them from time to time. This reassures the child that mum and dad are ok and also often confirms for them that the foster placement is best for them. Supporting contact between a child and their birth family can be a difficult task to undertake but it is most important for the child that this is managed in a sensitive and caring manner.

There is no requirement for permanent carers to be at home full time but we do expect that carers will have some time off work to help a child settle into a new family, school and community. As with all parenting, it is expected that carers will be available to take children to appointments, to attend meetings and to be on hand when the child or children need them. Once a child is settled, carers can work outwith the home but permanent caring probably fits best with people who are working part time during school hours. Parenting experience or other experience of children, while not essential, is desirable. This is a challenging task with great rewards as you see children settle, begin to thrive in your care and grow into mature and well rounded young people.

Foster carers may either own or rent their homes. They may live in a flat or house.

For children placed with permanent carers it is recognised that they are likely to move school and community and, therefore, we will accept applications from prospective carers who live outwith Inverclyde.

The most important quality for a permanent carer is the ability to persevere through hard times. Children need to know that permanent carers will be there for them especially through the difficult teenage years.

### What support does Inverclyde HSCP offer to permanent foster carers?

Inverclyde HSCP will normally remain involved in the lives of children and young people placed with permanent foster carers and so every carer will have a family placement social worker who will visit regularly to provide whatever support is needed. The child will also have a social worker whose role it is to help plan for the future. Permanent foster carers are encouraged to take part in continued training to increase their knowledge and skills. There are also local support groups where carers can meet and talk together.

Permanent foster carers receive an age related allowance for the child, which covers the cost of caring for the child in your own home. Additional payments will be made at Christmas, birthdays, holidays and in September. Appendix 1 contains information on the current payments. Fostering allowances are not normally considered as income for the purpose of state benefits or income tax but fees you may be you should seek advice regarding this from your local tax office and/or benefits agency.

### What happens if I am approved as a permanent foster carer?

If you are approved as a permanent foster carer your family placement social worker will tell you about the children and young people who are waiting for permanent foster placements and discuss with you whether or not you might be able to meet their needs. It is important that you have all the information you require to help you decide if you are right for a child or young person and you should ask about anything about which you are not sure. If you and the social workers think the child may be right for you, you will be linked with that child and then matched via the Fostering Resources Panel.

Following, that there will be a period of introductions and, if everyone is in agreement that matters are progressing well, the child will move into your home.

### What next?

If you are interested in finding out more we would be glad to hear from you. We are happy to receive enquiries and to answer any questions you may have without any commitment from you.

To progress your enquiry please fill out the Reply form at Appendix 2 or contact us as on page 22.





## 10. What is Level 4 Care?

**Level 4 fostering is a specialised scheme designed to meet the needs of children and young people who have highly complex needs.**

### What do level 4 carers do?

Level 4 carers look after children and young people who have a particularly high level of need providing a therapeutic environment that will foster growth and development. Level 4 carers are viewed as professionals in their own right working alongside social workers, teachers, psychologists and other staff to support a child or young person to overcome their difficulties.

The length of placement is determined by the needs of the child. Some children and young people will live with a level 4 carer for a set period while particular issues are addressed while other children and young people will require an extended placement. Level 4 carers are actively involved in contributing to the planning process for the child in their care.

### Who are the children and young people?

The children and young people placed with level 4 carers are generally over 10 years of age although a younger child may be considered for the scheme if his/her needs would be met in this type of specialist placement.

The children and young people present particularly difficult behaviour at home and school. This behaviour is different for each child but the child may:

- Be depressed and withdrawn
- Be over-active or aggressive
- Soil or wet the bed
- Be unable to respond appropriately to events
- Be unable to make relationships
- Have no concern for his own safety and or for that of others

Their behaviour often means that they are not able to successfully attend mainstream school and they may be at home while alternative arrangements are made. They may have complex physical needs. They may have complex emotional needs often because of a lack of appropriate care in their early years and may find it hard to trust adults and make relationships with them. The children placed with level 4 carers would, in other circumstances, be considered for placement in a specialist residential establishment.

They may have contact with their birth families but these relationships are often distorted and the children may need additional support to understand their situations.

The children and young people may have contact with specialist services to help them address their specific needs and a stable, secure home base will help them to take advantage of this support.

### What qualities do level 4 carers need?

The qualities mentioned in relation to interim and permanent care also apply to level 4 carers. Energy, commitment, stickability, stamina and a sense of humour are all essential as is an understanding of and concern for young people. In addition, level 4 carers are expected to have extra skills and resources in order to meet the complex needs of the children and young people who will be placed with them. The role of a level 4 carer is to provide a therapeutic environment within which a child or young person can learn to trust adults and modify his/her behaviour so as he/she can function at home, in school and in the community. As a level 4 carer you will be expected to work in partnership with social workers, health workers, teachers and others involved in the child's care plan to promote the child's social, emotional, educational and physical well being. As a level 4 carer you will need the qualities and skills to provide and maintain a stable and secure environment for the child. This will be challenging at times and we provide intensive support to level 4 carers but you will need

commitment, resilience and energy as well as a good network of people around you who will be able to help and assist you on a personal level.

The criteria outlined below give details of the requirements that have to be met before an application can be accepted.

- The applicant (or one of them if the application is from a couple) has two years previous experience in caring for other people's children and young people with complex needs. This includes children and young people who have physical and/or learning difficulties; who present distressed behaviour; who have significant emotional and/or mental health issues. This could be as a foster carer, teacher, residential worker, social worker or other related professional.
- The applicant (or one of them if the application is from a couple) has a qualification in childcare or social care and experience of working with children. This could be as a teacher, social worker, residential worker, foster carer or psychologist. The qualification level is SVQ 4, HND or degree in a relevant discipline.
- Applications will be considered from single individuals where they fulfil the above and are prepared to undertake the role on a full time basis.
- One of the applicants, or the applicant if the application is from a single carer, is not working outwith the home. This criterion applies for the initial stage of a placement and may be reviewed if the needs of the child in placement would allow the foster carer to work part time. However the employment would need to allow for considerable flexibility in order that the carer could be available at short notice.

- It is expected that carers on this level will be attending all meetings about a child, prepare reports for these meetings as required and be able to contribute confidently about the needs of the child.
- The applicant(s) is able to offer the young person a bedroom for their sole use.
- There are no dependent children resident in the home at the time of application.
- Level 4 carers are expected to work as full members of the professional team supporting a child or young person. This involves taking an active part in assessing and planning for young people including contributing to meetings both verbally and writing reports.

Level 4 carers receive an age related allowance for the child which covers the cost of caring for the child in your own home. Additional payments are made at Christmas, birthdays, holidays and in September. Level 4 carers receive a substantial allowance in recognition of the complexity of the task. Regular respite is included as part of the support package.

Appendix 3 contains information on the current payments. Fostering allowances are not normally considered as income for the purpose of state benefits or income tax but fees may be. You should seek advice regarding this from your local tax office and/ benefits agency or fostering network.

### What next?

If you are interested in finding out more we would be glad to hear from you. We are happy to receive enquiries and to answer any questions you may have without any commitment from you.

To progress your enquiry please fill out the Reply form at Appendix 2 or contact us as on page 22.



## 11. What happens next?

**If you are interested in taking the next step then you need to phone or email the family placement team asking for a visit to be arranged. The manager of the team will arrange for one of the social workers to visit you and discuss your personal circumstances as they relate to fostering in more detail.**

**Phone:**  
**01475 715367 or 01475 715020**

**Email:**  
**adoptionandfostering@inverclyde.gov.uk**

**Address:**  
Please find the address on the folder

If there are issues identified at this stage that may be a barrier to a fostering application for example, a medical condition or previous convictions, then you and the family placement social worker may agree to further enquiries being made before you move onto the next step. In certain circumstances, these enquiries may provide a bar to an application in which case you will be advised of this.

A social worker from the family placement team will visit you at home, discuss your personal circumstances and answer any questions you may have. You and the social worker will then decide if you should proceed to the next step. Sometimes it becomes clear during this discussion that this is not the right time for you to be thinking about fostering. Your own children may be at a vulnerable stage or there may be things happening in your life that would interfere with fostering. You mustn't feel obliged to go ahead if it is not right for you; neither should you be worried that you have wasted our time.

The next step is to attend group preparation sessions. The preparatory groups are part of the assessment process in two respects. Firstly, we share a lot more detailed information with you about fostering and hope that, in doing this, we help you to make an informed decision about whether fostering is right for you. Secondly, the social workers presenting the groups will pick up any issues that arise and this will form part of the work that they do with you during the assessment.

The preparatory groups are run either over two Saturdays or an evening a week over four or five weeks. They are an essential part of the process and attendance is mandatory. The purpose is to help you better understand the task of fostering by sharing information about a range of issues including why children need foster placements, child development, diversity and equality, safer caring and managing behaviour. The material is presented in a lively and interesting way and most people thoroughly enjoy the groups, although most are apprehensive before they come. A foster carer is part of the training team and attends all the sessions. Often the carer's contribution is what participants find most helpful.

## 12. The assessment process

After the preparatory groups one of the family placement social workers will contact you and arrange to visit to talk about how you found the sessions, to answer any further questions you may have and to discuss any issues that have arisen from our point of view.

This will normally take place within four weeks from the end of the groups. At the end of this visit you and the worker will normally agree whether you are ready and able to proceed and the worker will give you an application form to complete and return. This signifies the start of the formal assessment process. Within it, the applicants give permission for a range of checks to be carried out the details of which are outlined below.

A family placement social worker will be allocated the assessment and that person will be responsible for completing the paperwork and working with you through the assessment process. The aim of the assessment is threefold. Firstly, it is a continuation of the preparation process which commenced with the group sessions. The applicants and the worker will identify areas about which you require further information and will identify how to fill in these gaps. This may involve you in reading, watching tv programmes or DVDs about relevant topics, speaking to professional staff about particular subjects and/or speaking to approved foster carers. Secondly, it is an opportunity for the applicants to ensure, as far as they are able, that fostering is right for them and that this is the right time for them to be undertaking it. It is much better to explore any doubts or anxieties at this stage than when a child has been placed. Thirdly, it is the family placement social worker's responsibility to assess the applicants' ability and capacity to undertake the fostering task and to prepare a report that makes a recommendation to the Fostering Resources Panel.

The assessment itself comprises two main elements:

### Checks

These fall into two broad categories:

- 1 Record checks - principally police and local authority checks. These are required by legislation and regulation and are designed to ensure the safety of children. As is explained earlier in this pack, certain information may require further exploration during the assessment and some may prove a bar to application and for approval.
- 2 Information from people or organisations who know the applicants personally or professionally. This includes medicals and other references.
  - The medicals will be carried out by your own GP and will then be scrutinised by the HSCP's medical adviser who gives a view about applicants' medical suitability to foster.
  - We ask you to identify three personal references. These should be people who know you well and who can comment on your ability to be foster carers. As well as asking for a written references the family placement social worker is likely to meet up with the referee.
  - If you have been married before or were in a long term relationship we will contact your previous partner/s and ask them to provide information. This is primarily regarding their view of your ability to care safely for children. If your previous partner may be a threat to you or your children, it may be possible to gather this information in another way eg by speaking to friends or relatives who knew you at this time.
  - We may ask your employer for a reference. If you work in the care sector we will always seek a reference from your employer.
  - If you have children who attend school we will ask the school for a reference.
  - If you have young children we will ask your health visitor for a reference.



- Although we will not usually ask your family for a reference the assessing worker will speak to family members who you think will support you.

These checks will be carried out during the assessment and any issues will be discussed with you as they arise. Alongside this, the assessing social worker will visit you a number of times - probably six or eight interviews in all - to talk in detail about the qualities you have and the skills you'll need to develop if you are going to undertake the fostering task. You will be fully involved in this process providing evidence of your capacity and helping to identify where you may need further input. You may be asked to do some written work and you will be required to prepare a portfolio which will include your statement about why you want to be a foster carer as well as any evidence you wish to submit in support of your application.

In undertaking this part of the assessment, your assessing social worker will build up a detailed picture of your strengths and abilities, your home life, your relationship (if you are applying as a couple) and the commitment you could give to a child. You will have the opportunity to find out more about the rewards and reality of fostering. During this, the social worker should be discussing her assessment with you and giving you the opportunity to address any concerns that are arising.

If you have children living within your household the assessing social worker will meet with them to discuss their views about the application and also to gain an idea from them about what kind of parents you are. If your children are very young you may prefer to be present during this session and that is normally acceptable. If you have children living elsewhere (perhaps from another relationship) the worker will want to meet with them.

As part of the assessment, you and the social worker will think and talk about what type of fostering is most suitable for you. This will include deciding what age range of children you will take, what gender and

how many. There will also be consideration of the types of behaviour you can manage and of any other limitations to placements.

Finally, the assessing social worker brings all this information together into a report on your potential as a foster carer. Once the assessing social worker has completed a report you will receive a visit from the manager responsible for Fostering Services who will complete a further brief report for the Fostering Resources Panel. You will have the opportunity to read these reports and either to add your own comments or to provide additional information if you feel that the report does not fully reflect your circumstances.

### Fostering Resources Panel

The last stage in the approval process is for the assessing social worker to present his/her assessment to the Fostering Resources Panel along with any other relevant information that may assist the Panel in making a decision. You will also be invited to attend for part of the discussion.

The Panel is chaired by an independent chair person with a background in child care and fostering. The Panel members all have a great deal of relevant experience. It is their job to consider all the information, to talk to you and your assessing social worker, and then decide whether to recommend you for approval to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision. You will be advised as soon as possible what recommendations the Panel have made to the Agency Decision Maker.

The Agency Decision Maker will write to you within 21 days of the decision. If you are not approved, there is a process of appeal, details of which will be given to you when you receive your invitation to attend the Panel. If there is an issue that might preclude your approval, you should know about this in advance and have discussed it fully with the assessing social worker and the manager. However, most people who have reached this stage are approved as foster carers.

## 13. Suggestions, comments or complaints

**If you would like to make a suggestion, comment or complaint about Social Work Services please do so in writing to:**

**Inverclyde HSCP,  
Hector McNeil House  
7-8 Clyde Square  
Greenock PA15 1NB**

**Phone 01475 715367**

Alternatively you can make a complaint to Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS) about the quality of service provided by a registered care service. Please refer the matter to:

**The Care Inspectorate  
Compass House  
11 Riverside Drive  
Dundee, DD1 4NY**

**Phone 0345 600 9527**

If we are unable to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, you will then have the right to refer the matter to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman by writing to:

**Scottish Public Services Ombudsman  
4 Melville Street  
Edinburgh, EH3 7NS**

**Phone 0800 377 7330**

You must do this within 12 months of first being notified of the matter you are complaining about.





