

Wanting To Care For a Child Over Christmas

Fosterline
0800 040 7675
your fostering advice service

#ChristmasInCare

Leading up to Christmas, many families will often think what they can do for others or how they can support children who are not able to spend Christmas with their own families. Within the fostering arena, children come into foster care for many different reasons.

At Fosterline we will often receive calls from very well meaning families to offer care to children over the Christmas period. However it is very rare that a foster child would only need care over the Christmas period.

When a child comes into care Children's Services will look for a full time foster family to care for the child until decisions about their future is decided. Full time foster carers would be expected to care for their foster children throughout the Christmas period in order for the child to feel part of this family, particularly as Christmas is an emotive time of year for any child. This would be the same expectation for any child living with their birth families who were being monitored by Children's Services.

When a child comes into the care of Children's Services the process is governed by legislation and there are stringent duties of any fostering service to recruit foster carers under strict guidelines and what is considered best practice, working within National Minimum Standards for England. These guidelines and laws include each fostering service providing training to prospective foster carers, undertaking a lengthy vetting and fostering assessment process which can take anywhere between 6-8 months and this being quality assured through a fostering panel and Agency Decision Maker. There will also be ongoing monitoring of the

fostering household once the foster carer is approved to ensure the foster carer is supported and vulnerable children are given the appropriate care working within the child's care plan.

If families are interested in offering short periods of care they may consider Respite or Short break foster care which involves providing a few weeks a year to a child whilst their full time foster carer has a break.

Children with disabilities also need respite, often referred to as short breaks and need 'short break' fosters who can offer a regular short break, maybe once a month for a weekend to a disabled child who may live with foster carers or live at home with their parents.

Under fostering legislation this would still require the prospective respite/short break foster carer to undergo the same recruitment, vetting and assessment as any other fosters carers and this is also regulated by fostering legislation. The respite or short break foster carer would need to be available to attend regular training, meetings concerning the child and meet regularly with their fostering service social worker to meet the fostering legislative framework on approval of foster carers.

Anyone interested in becoming a respite/short break foster carer would need to be directed by any fostering service they approach to ask if respite services were required as some fostering services recruit respite foster carers from their full time foster carer extended families.

If you are limited in the time that you can offer and full time fostering or respite fostering is not for you, you may like to consider volunteering for an

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organisation who work with children or vulnerable young adults over Christmas within the area you live. You may also wish to consider others ways of offering support by donating toys or food to a local food bank or volunteering for other local charitable organisations, churches, mosques or other places of worship.

Organisations who may need volunteers over Christmas:

Crisis – It's a national charity for single homeless people. It is dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change. www.crisis.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/

The Salvation Army – It's a worldwide Christian church and registered charity dedicated to caring for people who are vulnerable or in need. It works with some of the most disadvantaged people in communities including homeless people, older people and victims of modern slavery. www.salvationarmy.org.uk/map-page

UNICEF – It's the world's leading organisation helping children in danger, providing kids across the globe with education, life-saving food and nutrition, clean water, vaccines, relief in emergencies and protection from violence. www.unicef.org.uk/donate/huffpost/ or www.unicef.org.uk/donate/huffpost/

The Trussell Trust – It provides emergency food to people in crisis through a network of UK foodbanks and partners with churches and communities to open new foodbanks nationwide. www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/ or become a volunteer www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/volunteer/

Alice Charity – It supports vulnerable families from low income backgrounds within Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

To sign up, email info@alicecharity.co.uk.

FoodCycle – It combines surplus food, spare kitchen space and volunteers to create nutritious, community meals for people who are hungry and lonely. You can sign up here: volunteer.foodcycle.org.uk.

Royal Air Forces Association – It provides support to RAF families.

Take a look at the volunteering roles available in your area this Christmas by visiting rafa.org.uk/volunteer.

By Shelley Clarke
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