SUNBEAM
FOSTERING AGENCY
DRIVEN BY CHILDREN'S NEEDS

Guide to Foster Care & Becoming a Carer

Sunbeam Fostering Agency

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What is fostering?

Rebuilding a child's future

Fostering is a way of **providing a stable family life** for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents or other relatives. This can be for many reasons including :

- Relationship problems
- Family breakdown
- When a child's welfare is threatened
- Parents' illness

Providing a foster care placement in your home, allows a child or young person the chance to thrive in a safe, secure, and caring home environment. Fostering is **challenging but also** rewarding at the same time. It takes time, patience and commitment to foster.

The children and young people placed with foster carers are from a **number of different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds** and will display different behaviours depending upon their various experiences.

All children and young people are different, making it difficult to define a 'typical child', however, what you can expect is that, as with any child or young person, **they need security, stability** and the chance to develop and thrive.

Fostering differs from adoption. The main difference is that with adoption you become a child's legal parent permanently, whilst fostering is usually temporary, until a child returns to their family.

Foster care placements can last for days, months or even several years. Many children return to their families but others may receive long term support; either through continued fostering, adoption, residential care or being helped to live independently.

Key facts for foster care

- Around 62,000 children (source: Fostering Network) are in care in England on any one day with around 75% in foster care.
- Ofsted inspect foster care providers who are both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's).
- Foster Care is regulated by The National Minimum Standards, and Fostering Regulations 2011 and amendment 2013.
- There is a strong focus on Positive Outcomes for children and young people in our foster care & safeguarding.

What is an Independent Fostering Agency?

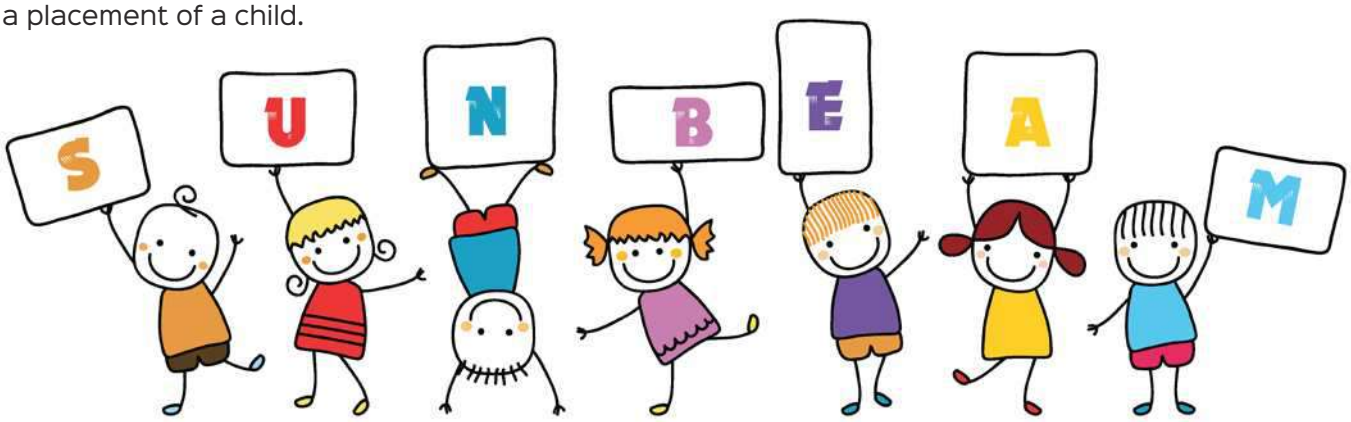
- When a child is placed in care, their welfare generally lies with their home Local Authority Social Services. Historically, Local Authorities have been responsible for providing fostering services through carers they have recruited.

- Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) came into existence to support Local Authorities services and provide greater choice for the child being placed.

- In 2002, Fostering Guidelines and Regulations were introduced for IFAs to adhere to and the private sector provision has now increased to 30% of all foster care placements. The Local Authority provision remains far higher than IFAs but the Government is committed to expanding choice and supporting private sector growth.

- The market for IFAs includes a few larger national players, several regional operators and small businesses. The majority of IFA's are companies.

- When selecting an IFA to foster with, it is important that potential carers consider many areas but in particular the support they receive, allowances payable and whether they will receive a placement of a child.



Background on Sunbeam

- Sunbeam was established in 2000 by three Directors, now with combined social work experience amounting to over 65 years. The same founding directors remain at the heart of the company.

- Based in London, Sunbeam has successfully expanded to the Midlands (Sunbeam Midlands) and Home Counties (Pride Fostering Services).

- To date we have 325 foster carers available throughout the UK providing foster care to approximately 400 children across the group .

- Sunbeam has secured several contracts and is the preferred provider for the majority of London and the surrounding areas Local Authorities.

- Our London registration is rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted because we have a strong focus on quality and outcomes for children.

- We have a dedicated staff team with extensive social work experience within the fostering sector throughout the organisation right up to the Directors.

Do I want to Foster? Can I Foster?

Do I Want to Foster?

Becoming a foster carer is a big decision; it will impact on your life, others around you and the child or young person in your care.

You will however have the opportunity to change a child or young person's life.

Before deciding whether foster care is for you, be clear in your own mind why you want to foster and ensure you have support from people around you.

It is vital that foster carers have a strong support network in place. Sunbeam will provide a high level of support and pay allowances for looking after the child.

Please see Appendix 1 for the profile of what is expected from a foster carer. This is based on the Fostering Network guide.

Can I Foster?

Fostering is about being able to respond to a child and help them thrive.

Due to our desire to meet each child's needs fully, we are looking for people who have the following qualities:

- Ability to provide a good standard of care to other people's children.
- Knowledge of how a child develops with the ability to communicate well with children.
- Experience of setting boundaries and managing children's behaviour effectively

Shortage of Carers

- There is currently an estimated shortage of 9,000 carers in England (Fostering Network)
- We urgently require carers in London, surrounding areas and the Midlands.

Practical Requirements

- Spare bedroom in rented or owned property.
- At least one carer at home full time or with reduced commitments.
- Commitment to attend training and support groups.
- Flexibility.
- Driving licence, preferred but not essential.

Who will I look after and my choices?

It is important that potential foster carers have an idea of the types of children they are comfortable caring for, taking into account, your own and your family's circumstances and views.

Children can be placed in foster care from birth to 18 years :

- Consider which age range would be best suited to your family.

Placements can be for short periods, emergency, long term or for a respite period

- Consider which length of placement would be preferred.

If a child is part of a sibling group it is common for the children to be placed together:

- It is usually the preferred outcome to place children together.
- Consider whether you have sufficient space for one child or more.

What type of behaviour and experiences can you manage?

- Children have many different experiences, challenges and abilities – how supportive can you be and what would you be less confident managing.
- Would you be confident with training and support to take children with specific needs including:
  - Children with Disabilities
  - Complex needs such as autism or significant health needs
  - Children with challenging behaviour

Are you able to care for children from different religions or ethnic backgrounds?

- Do you have knowledge of other religions and ethnic backgrounds?

All the above areas would be considered when you make your application and would be included in your "Approval Terms" when you become a carer.

Your approval terms are then used to "match" you to the appropriate children.

Fostering Different Children

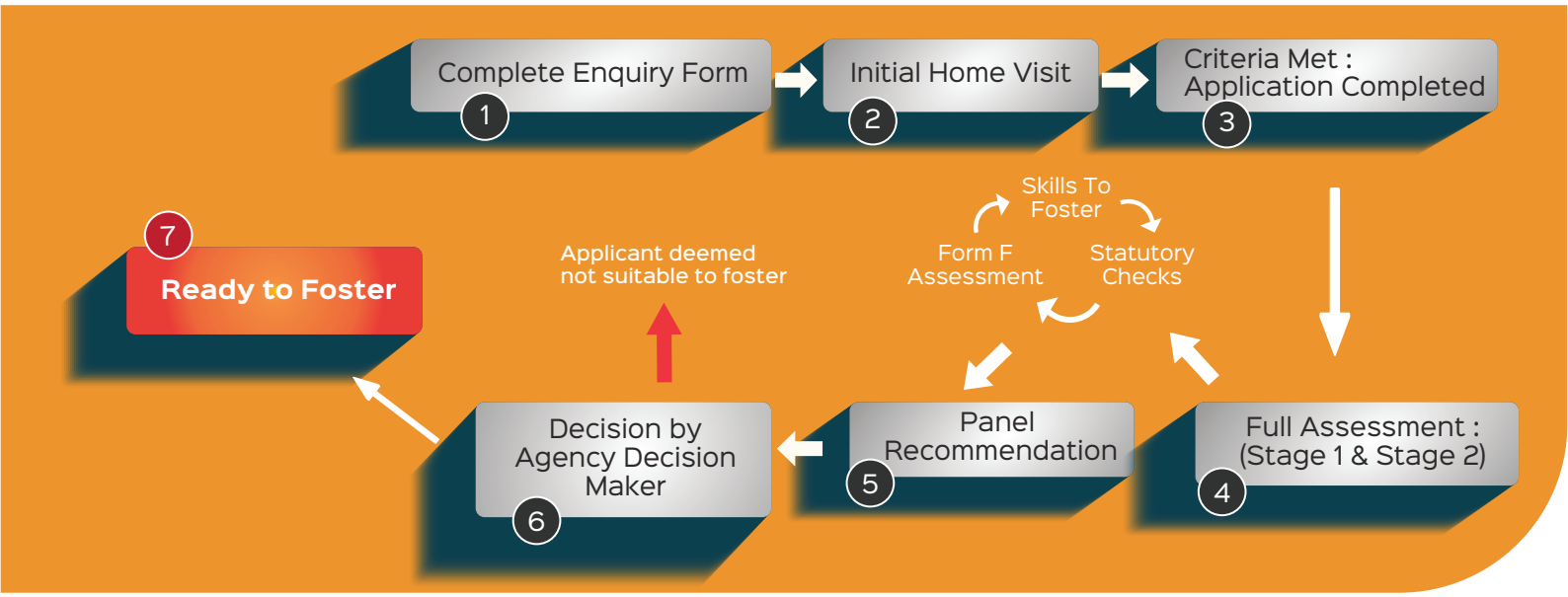
You can become a foster carer by looking after children through one of the following placement types which are provided by Sunbeam to Local Authorities. When a child is accepted into their home by a foster carer, this is referred to as a **"placement".**

Placement Type	Details
Emergency care	Involves caring for children who need somewhere safe to stay immediately, it may be for one night or possibly longer depending on the needs of the child. Emergency care is always arranged at short notice and flexibility is needed.
Short term	Temporary place for a child until they can return to their own family, move to a long term placement or an adoptive family is found.
Long term	Careful planning is needed for long term placements to focus on the child or young person's long term needs. For many reasons, long term foster care is needed when children can not return to their birth family and adoption is not considered appropriate.
Respite care	A child is placed with you for a few days or weeks to give a short break to another foster carer.
Parent and child	Provided to a mother and/or father of their child or children where the foster carer can provide parenting support and guidance. These placements can be short term or long term.
Unaccompanied child or young person	An unaccompanied child or young person is under 18 and is separated from parents/family and is usually applying for asylum in his/her own right. These young people are from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Iran and Nigeria. Often they may not speak English, can be frightened and therefore need stable and safe support.
Specialist placements	There are many disabled and challenging children who require foster care. This can include children with physical disabilities, learning difficulties or sensory impairments.
Sibling placements	Sibling placements are for brothers and sisters who are all placed together into a foster care household. Sunbeam believes in keeping siblings together, unless it is deemed inappropriate by the placing Authority.

How do I become a foster carer ?

Step By Step

Applying to become a foster carer is an in depth process but we will provide guidance at every step and full support. All we ask is that before you proceed you ensure you are **fully committed** to save yourself the time if fostering is not for you. Please ask all the questions you need upfront which we will help with.



Steps Explained

Enquiry Form - Sunbeam will contact you for an initial discussion and arrange for an enquiry form to be completed over the phone or online. If the enquiry is positive a worker will call you to book an appointment to come out and see you if you wish to proceed further with your enquiry.

Initial Home Visit - A worker from Sunbeam will visit to discuss fostering with you further, to gather some background information about you and your family and to check you have appropriate bedroom space in your home and discuss any other Health & Safety related issues. At this point you will be asked to provide photocopies of ID and some other documents and to sign a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check consent form. If the visit is positive application form can be completed following the home visit or alternatively this can be completed later and send to us by post.

Complete The Application Form - Once this is completed formal assessment will begin.

Fostering Assessment - The assessment process, sometimes called a 'home study' or 'Form F' essentially involves a review of your suitability to provide foster care. This will be undertaken by a skilled member of our staff and you will receive full support at all stages.
As part of the process, you will be required to:

Steps Explained Continues

1. Provide references – both personal and employment
2. Undertake a medical check with your GP (paid for by us)
3. Consent to other checks with Local Authorities, schools or other agencies

Invitation to Preparation Training - You will receive specific training through a three day You will receive specific training through a three day training course to prepare you to foster and to achieve "Skills to Foster". Attending courses will also allow you to meet other carers, share experiences and learn more about foster care. For carers wishing to look after disabled or challenging children, additional training will be provided at this stage.

Panel - Following completion of your training and fostering assessment, the report will be submitted to an Independent Panel for approval recommendations to be made in terms of the numbers and ages of children that can be placed with you. You will be asked to attend the Panel with the social worker who completed your assessment.

Approved - The Agency decision maker will have the final decision regarding your approval. Once approved you will then be a registered carer with Sunbeam Fostering Agency, and be able to take "looked after children" and young people into your home and care for them. You will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker to help and support you.

The path to becoming a Foster Carer requires commitment to the assessment process and our current foster carers would be happy to share their experiences of the assessment process.

Initial Home Visit

Purpose and Importance

You will be visited by a member of our recruitment team to discuss your enquiry. This meeting will last around two hours and is critical in your approval process. At this stage, you try to decide if foster care is the right decision for you. We will explore many areas including :

- Your background and interest in foster care
- What is fostering in more detail
- Background on Sunbeam and support you will receive

Please ask all the questions you need and take your time before deciding to proceed to the next stage. Our staff will be able to deal with all your questions at any stage both over the telephone and during the visit.

A partnership is formed between you and ourselves and we will be open on the challenges you may face. If there any concerns you wish to raise, please do so at this stage.
Possible questions you may wish to ask include:

- Ask if you can speak to an existing carer about fostering.
- Is my spare room of a sufficient size?
- What allowances will I be paid?
- What is the position on the child or young person's education?
- How will this effect my job (if applicable)?
- How will the child or young person travel to school?
- Which Local Authorities near me do you work with?

After the initial home visit, we will assess your suitability and check if you wish to proceed, onto the next stage. If at any time you feel that you do not wish to continue with your enquiry or feel things are moving too fast, then please let us know. We will be happy to discuss your options further.

Support you will receive from Sunbeam

As an approved foster carer you will receive the following support :

24 hours support

We always have a staff member available 24 hours for 365 days throughout the year to help with any issues you may have.

Full training

You will receive tailored training programmes to enhance your skills and experiences. This will help you take more challenging placements if you wish to in the future and support your development as a carer. Training is free and provided by Sunbeam. We operate a financial incentive for the completion of a full years training linked to a child in placement.

Allocated Social Worker

A social worker will work with you on a one to one basis to ensure you receive full support. They will meet with you regularly and work closely with the Local Authority's social worker.

Membership of The Fostering Network

All our approved carers receive full membership automatically, giving you carer insurance and support.

Regular support groups

We hold support groups for you to meet with other carers and share experiences.

Access to our support workers

If you need help with a child or young person, we can provide extra support.

Respite care

If you wish, we will provide short term breaks from fostering for you during the year.

Children's activities

We run events for children such as day trips and also an annual Sunbeam Fun Day.

Access to a therapist

For consultation and specialist training.

Financial remuneration

You will receive full allowances to cover the child or young person's needs and a "reward element". Our rates are benchmarked against other IFAs and local authorities to ensure they are comprehensive. Please see Appendix 2.

Problem solving support

Practical advice on issues such as finance, equipment and transport.

Dedicated Placement Team

All placements will be discussed with you before you are put forward as a potential carer.

Training

Skills to Foster (Pre Approval)

As applicants you will be invited to attend the Skills to Foster Training Course.

This is a three day course designed to provide as much information about foster care as possible to assist you in your decision to become a foster carer.We hold the course on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday at a local venue near you.

It is also a chance to meet other people applying and existing Sunbeam carers to share experiences of fostering.

The training will also cover:

- Child protection / safeguarding issues
- Managing challenging behaviour
- Safe caring
- Health and safety
- Working in partnership

Specialist Carers (Pre Approval Training)

For applicants being approved for specialist placements, in addition to Skills to Foster, a further two days training will be provided.

On - Going Training

Training is a mandatory requirement for all foster carers and Sunbeam encourages attendance by holding training at different venues, and on weekends, to assist applicant's ability to attend.

We seek to be flexible for our foster carers given the demands on your time and we also ensure training is focused and relevant.

All carers are required to complete TSD (Training, Support and Development standards for foster care) training within 12 months of approval. TSD are responsible for providing guidelines for required foster care training.

What happens after approval?

Social Worker

After approval, you will be allocated a social worker to work with you and provide guidance. They will also help you with your first placement, all future placements and progress your development as a carer. We perceive fostering as a career and hence it is important that you have a skilled and experienced person who can support your learning and developmental needs.

First Placement

- If you decide to foster with an IFA, you should ensure that they can offer you placements otherwise you might be approved and wait for an extended period of time for your first placement. Increasingly Local Authorities are moving to preferred providers or contracts to only work with selected agencies. Sunbeam have a strong track record with Local Authorities and hold several contracts in London and the Midlands. We are also applying for further tenders currently.

- When your first placement is made, this of course can be a challenging time and at Sunbeam we recognise this. We will therefore make sure you receive additional support at the onset. We will also ensure the placement is discussed at length beforehand so you can be comfortable with the process and expected care requirements of the child or young person.

- We will ensure this happens not just for your first placement but for all future placements.

Reasons to Join the Sunbeam Family

- London registration is rated Outstanding by Ofsted.
- Extensive information will be provided on fostering to help your approval process.
- Our strong focus on quality and better outcomes for children.
- Full support will be provided to you including a comprehensive induction to fostering once approved.
- The organisation has been in operation for over 10 years, we have developed an excellent reputation.
- We have strong Local Authority relationships to secure placements for you.
- We have a family ethos and you will be welcomed into Sunbeam through regular events, your supervising social worker and support groups.
- Competitive fostering allowances.
- Comprehensive insurance to cover any wilful damage by foster children.
- Management and staff that share the values you work to and that care about welfare, not only the child's but also your own.
- 24 hour access to staff and support which is not just a promise but delivered 365 days per year.
- You will have a Career Path into social work and working with young people.
- A dedicated service around the needs of looked after children to ensure placement stability.
- Promotion of equal opportunities for all.

Foster Carer Testimonials

"When children come into my home scared and upset, making them comfortable, providing them stability and seeing a change in their lives gives me immense pleasure. I have cared with Sunbeam Fostering Agency for the last 10 years and have found the support provided to me excellent. I find fostering very rewarding." - Ruth Pickering

"Would we recommend people to become foster carers with Sunbeam? - Undoubtedly 'YES', I have felt supported, appreciated and valued for my work. The ongoing training that we have been given by Sunbeam was the tool that we needed to fix the most bizarre of situations. The droplets of verbal thank you's or 'mum' have always brightened many days and the occasional knock on my door from ex placements who still view us as their family have touched our lives in many indescribable ways.

Being Foster Carer's for Sunbeam was the best life choice that we have made." - Angela Samoy

Contacts and Next Steps

We hope you have found this guide useful and it has given you further information on foster care and also importantly our organisation, which we are very proud of.

We would be delighted to help you on your journey to becoming a foster carer and please let us know if you have any further questions.

Thank you for considering to help vulnerable children and ultimately make a difference. Without foster carers willing to do this, we can not achieve the outcomes we all want for children and young people.

We hope you decide to join the Sunbeam Family, and take the first steps to making a difference, in doing so please:

1. Contact our recruitment team and ask any further questions.

2. You will then be contacted by a member of our recruitment team to discuss your application and arrange an initial visit.

3. Complete the enclosed application pack and return a copy to us.

Contact Information

TELEPHONE

London 0208 799 0930

Midlands 0247 642 0390

EMAIL

info@sunbeamfostering.com

Foster Carer Role - Summary

Summary of Overall Responsibilities

"To be responsible for the care in one's own home of a child or children placed by a Local Authority, and to work with the foster care agency (IFA) and all those involved in helping children fulfil their potential."

Specific Responsibilities

Caring For Children

- To provide day-to-day care for the children being looked after, having regard to the particular demands on children separated from their families.
- To take part in implementing the childcare plan, this would include specific tasks and, often, contact with parents and others who are important to the child.
- To promote the health, growth and development of the child or children, with particular emphasis on health and on educational achievement.
- To ensure that the children being looked after are encouraged in a positive understanding of their origins, religion and culture.
- To assist and support parents and other people who are significant in a child's life to sustain and develop relations with them.
- To enable children and young people who are moving on, to do so in a positive manner.

Providing a safe and caring environment

- To ensure that children are kept safe from harm and abuse and that they are taught how to get help should anything untoward occur.
- To promote the secure attachment of children to adults capable of providing safe and effective care.
- To act as an advocate for each child.

Working as a part of team

- To be part of Sunbeam and work with our staff and professionals within our guidelines, policies and procedures.
- To attend and actively participate in all reviews, family meetings, case conferences and court hearings as required, and to keep written records of placements and contribute to reports.
- To take up appropriate training opportunities and recognise the benefit of continued training.
- To deal responsibly with confidential information.

Fostering Allowances

Allowances to Cover Living Costs and Provide a Reward

You will receive a carer payment from Sunbeam to cover living costs, children's allowances and also a reward element in recognition of the important contribution of a foster carer.

Sunbeam considers that a foster carer is undertaking a career in working with children and therefore should be rewarded accordingly. Sunbeam's carer payments and fees are at a competitive rate to reflect this.

The amount of carer payment you will receive depends on the type of placement and other factors such as the age of the child and other possible challenges with their behaviour.

The payment also reflects living costs and allowances for children incurred including:

- Food
- Travel costs
- Household bills
- Clothing
- Activities
- Personal costs for children

Please get in touch with our team for a full breakdown and fact sheet of our weekly rates of **up to £650 per child per week.**

Tax Position

For your relationship with us you will be treated as self employed and you should receive favourable tax treatment on the payments received depending on your own circumstances.

In 2003, a tax relief was introduced to exempt gross foster care payments from tax provided an individual limit is not exceeded. This is currently £10,000 per household per annum and up to £200 per week for a child under 11 and £250 over 11. There are other reliefs for specialist placements.

You should seek your own tax advice regarding foster care payments which is available from HMRC's website under "foster care relief" or please ask us for a factsheet.

The HMRC have also recently introduced a new helpline for foster carers regarding tax credits, the number for the helpline is 0845 300 3900.

Training

You will receive full training with Sunbeam at no cost and we will also support additional care qualifications if you wish to pursue these.

Support is what keeps fostering working, and we're dedicated to encouraging our amazing foster carers to grow with us. We support them totally so they can make real differences to a child's life. Our unrivalled support and training are shaped by our carers and tailored to meet the needs of the children.

We are delighted that so many other dedicated individuals, couples and families have joined us throughout the years to make Sunbeam Fostering the outstanding agency is today.

If you need any additional information on the assessment process and what is involved, please let us know.

Our recruitment team is also on hand to answer any questions you may have and we look forward to hearing from you.

Guide to Foster Care & Becoming a Carer

By Sunbeam Fostering Agency

For complete information on fostering and to apply online please visit SunbeamFostering.com

Sunbeam Fostering Agency

We have local offices around the country, and we continue to develop and maintain close, personal relationships with our carers and the local communities we support. We do our very best to make sure that every fostering experience inspires confidence and creates wonderful opportunities for the looked after children and the fostering families.

Ofsted Outstanding Fostering service 2014|2015

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