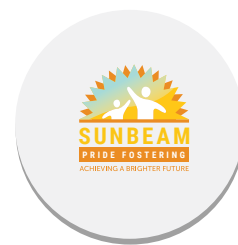




# A GUIDE TO **FOSTER CARE** & BECOMING **A CARER**

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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.

# What is fostering ?

## Key facts for foster care

- Around 52,000 children (Source: Fostering Network) are placed with foster families in England. This is nearly 79% of the 66,000 children in care on any one day.
- 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 & safeguarding for children and young people in our foster care.



# What is an Independent Fostering Agency?

- When a child is placed in care, the LA are their corporate parent. Historically, Local Authorities have been responsible for providing fostering services through foster 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 Pride

- Sunbeam Pride was established in 2009 by four Directors, now with combined social work experience amounting to over 60 years.
- Based in Luton, Sunbeam Pride has successfully established itself in Luton, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire, Milton Keynes and surrounding areas.
- To date along with our parent company (Sunbeam Fostering Agency) we have in excess of 270 foster carers available throughout the UK providing foster care to approximately 400 children.
- Sunbeam is well established as they have been practicing as an independent agency for over 15 years and have secured several contracts and are the preferred provider for the majority of London and the surrounding areas Local Authorities.
- 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 fostering 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 Pride 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 commitment 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.
  - Caring for children therapeutically to meet their needs.

### Shortage of Carers

- There is currently an estimated shortage of 7,600 carers in England (Fostering Network)
- We urgently require carers in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and East Anglia
- We also need foster carers who can care for our most troubled and traumatised children and young people.

### 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 license, preferred but not essential.

# Who will I look after and my options?

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 where your training/development needs are.
- Would you be confident with training and support to care for children with specific needs including:
  - Children with Disabilities
  - Complex needs such as autism or significant health needs
  - Children with challenging behaviour
  - Enhanced placements for children and young people who need therapeutic fostering from their carer

**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.



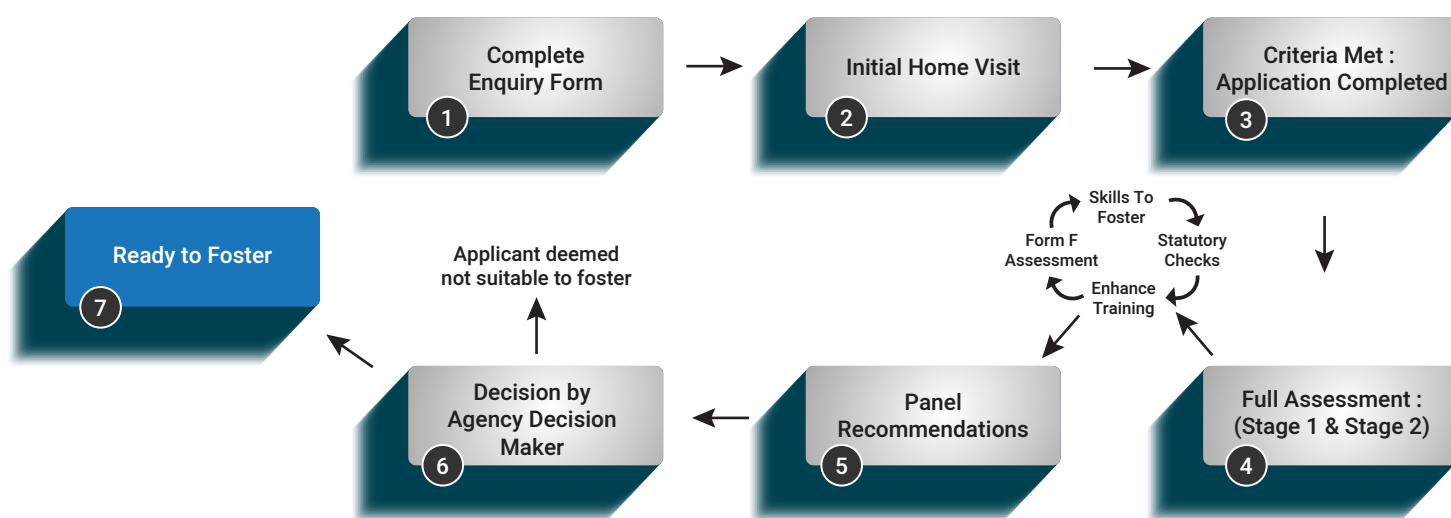
# Fostering Different Children

You can become a foster carer by looking after children through one of the following placement types which are provided by Sunbeam Pride 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 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. This also include regular respite to our children and young people who is placed within our Enhanced Fostering Service to support their main full time placement.
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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
Enhanced & Complex Placements	This is a service for our most traumatised children and young people whereby we have developed a therapeutic parenting programme for our foster carers to fully and best support the child's and young person needs. Placements can vary from emergency, short term to long term. This also includes caring for a young person stepping down from a residential placement. Please see our Enhanced Fostering with ARC® booklet for further information.
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 Pride believes in keeping siblings together, unless it is deemed inappropriate by the placing Authority.

# How do I become a foster carer ?

Applying to become a foster carer is an indepth process however we will provide guidance at every step and our 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 Pride 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 member of the team will contact yourself for a telephone screening and arrange a visit.

**Initial Home Visit** - A worker from Pride 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. If the visit is positive and you wish to proceed an application form can be completed following the home visit or alternatively this can be completed later and sent to us by post.

**Complete The Application Form** - Once this is completed and your application is accepted, a formal assessment will begin.

# How do I become a foster carer ?

**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 team and you will receive full support at all stages. As part of the process, you will be required to :

1. Narrate and explore your own childhood, past relationships, family history and life experiences.
2. Provide references – both personal and employment
3. Undertake a medical check with your GP (paid for by us)
4. Consent to other checks with Local Authorities, schools or other agencies
5. Undertake a police check known as DBS for all household members over the age of 10 years old. At any point you may decide that you would like to become an enhanced carer and if this is the case the assessor will review difference competencies to assess your suitability to care for children and young people with greater needs.

**Invitation to Preparation Training** - You will receive specific training through a three day training course to prepare you to foster known as "Skills to Foster". Attending this course 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.

We have an arrangement of enhance training such as learning how to become a therapeutic foster carer, caring and supporting parent and child placements and caring for children with disabilities.

**Panel** - Following completion of your training and fostering assessment, the report will be submitted to an Independent Panel who will decide whether to recommend your approval to the agency decision maker to become a foster carer. Panel will also consider the terms of approval such as the numbers and ages of children that can be placed with you and also the types of placements. You will be asked to attend the Panel with the social worker who completed your assessment.

**Approved** - The Agency decision maker holds the final decision regarding your approval and will review all the paperwork presented to panel as well as the panel minutes to make the decision. Once approved you will then be a registered carer with Sunbeam Pride Fostering Service, and be able to care for "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.

# Become an Enhanced Foster Carer

## Become an Enhanced Foster Carer

- Our Enhanced Fostering Service has been developed for our most traumatised children who require a therapeutic foster placement with an Enhanced Foster Carer. We have developed a specific service to meet the needs of children and young people with enhanced or complex needs providing a higher degree of support, supervision, education and fostering allowance to foster carers.
- Our therapeutic parenting model is based on the ARC® model of caring for children and young people who have been traumatised. The ARC® model has been developed by a psychologist and social worker in the United States who have pulled together all of their vast experience to develop an evidence-based approach to caring for traumatised children. Please see our booklet Enhanced Fostering with ARC® for further information.
- The ARC® model is easy to understand and we believe those individuals who have a keen interest in the psychology of parenting will do well to put themselves forward. We ask that our Enhanced Foster Carers are full time at home or have limited competing demands and that there are no other younger children living in the household. It is also important that we seek applicants who are able to offer a long-term commitment to children and young people as we know long-term security for children increases positive outcomes.
- The assessment process to becoming an Enhanced Foster Carer is the same as becoming a foster carer (see page 9) with additional competencies to evidence the skills, knowledge and experience that is required to become an Enhanced Foster Carer. Our enhanced training may take place prior to approval or during the first year of approval.

# 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 an important part of the enquiry 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 Pride 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 are 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 and make a formal application. 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 Pride

- **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 Pride. 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 Pride Fun Day.

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.
- For Enhanced Foster Carers we have designed a service to provide the best possible support and care for our foster carers in order to ensure that they are able to undertake the role of caring for our most traumatised children and placements where the needs of the child or young person is higher than the expected needs of looked after children. For this service the enhanced foster carer will receive
  - Higher Fostering Allowances
  - Specialist Training
  - Therapeutic Support Groups for carers
  - Family Support from our outreach worker
  - Optional Respite
  - Increased Supervision and support visits from Supervising Social Worker

# 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 Pride 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 there is a further training that will either take place during the assessment phase or shortly afterwards. For enhanced carers learning to become therapeutic foster carers the following is a summary of the carer covered.
  - Understanding attachment and how trauma impacts on children and young people
  - How to parent therapeutically using the ARC® model to parenting
  - learn to implement and develop treatment targets using ARC®
  - Develop resources that enables a no drama approach to parenting

## On - Going Training

- Training is a mandatory requirement for all foster carers and Sunbeam Pride 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 Pride have a strong track record with Local Authorities and hold several contracts in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and East Anglia. 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 Pride 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 Pride Family

- Our very latest 2015 Ofsted report was rated good with no recommendations & improvements.
- Around 1000 placement offered and 260 new placements made in the last 3 years.
- 24-hour access to staff and support which is not just a promise but delivered 365 days per year.
- Offer a career path into social work and further national qualifications of fostering if you so wish to pursue this.
- Currently we offer over 100 different trainings to our foster carers.
- 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 the support from our parent company, Sunbeam Fostering Agency, who have a proven track record and have again been recently rated as outstanding by Ofsted.
- We have strong Local Authority relationships to secure placements for you.
- We have a family ethos and you will be welcomed into Sunbeam Pride through regular events, your supervising social worker and support groups.
- Competitive fostering allowances.
- Comprehensive insurance to cover any willful damage by foster children.
- Management and staff share positive values and care about welfare, not only the child's but also your own.
- A dedicated service around the needs of looked after children to ensure placement stability.
- Practice steeped in research theories and evidence based of successful outcomes for children and young people.
- Promotion of equal opportunities for all.
- A thriving children support group for looked after children and your own birth children.

## Foster Carer Testimonials

"I have been fostering for 6 years. My fostering experience has been a challenge but rewarding at the same time, especially when the young person achieves. It's been quite inspirational seeing that child develop where they can reach their full potential, personal and educational goals. The social workers from Sunbeam Pride always supported me and have given me clear guidelines in making me perform my duties to the satisfactory standards. I feel I have made a real effort. Support groups are always helpful and positive. It gave me the opportunity to meet other foster carers. Also, the training has helped me to think outside the box, it is always applicable". -

**Lavern**

"Working together is very important. We have been with Pride for 6 years. We have not been with any other agency. We have always been supported and we get plenty of training. Reflecting back about fostering – it is hard work, but rewarding. The best moment is when we see the children improving and when they say they are lucky here. It's really difficult when they go. We would like to see them beyond eighteen". - **David and Mei.**

# 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 Pride and Sunbeam Family, and take the first steps to making a difference, in doing so please:

## 1

**Make Enquiry - Online, Telephone, Post**

## 2

**You will then be contacted by a member of our recruitment team to discuss your enquiry in more detail and arrange an initial visit.**

## 3

**Complete the application pack and return a copy to us.**

**One phone call makes all the difference...**

### Contact Information

#### TELEPHONE

**Luton** ▶ **01582 433 775**

#### EMAIL

**info@pridefostering.com**

#### WEBSITE

**www.pridefostering.com**



# Appendix 1 - Outline of a foster carer's role

## Foster Carer Role - Summary

**"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 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."
- 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 Pride 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.

# Appendix 2 - Fostering Allowances

## Allowances to Cover Living Costs and Provide a Reward

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

Sunbeam Pride considers that a foster carer is undertaking a career in working with children and therefore should be rewarded accordingly. Sunbeam Pride'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.

## Training

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

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