

Kent County Council

Step Across to Fostering

Kent Fostering Service



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Introduction

A small number of our children and young people in care, are placed within a residential children's home due to the complexity of their needs during a specific period in their childhood. For some, past trauma and their family experiences may lead to poor emotional and mental health expressed through their behaviour. They are often highly vulnerable children who may exhibit behaviours that carers will require additional support with, such as placing themselves or others at risk. Our ethos is that wherever possible, and if it is safe to do so, children should be cared for within a family environment. Therapeutic care provided by the residential setting, should form the basis of a care plan that works towards preparing the child to transition to a family home. Once a child is ready to be cared for within a family then a referral for an in house foster carer or a kinship foster carer can be made to care for the child. This includes where appropriate, a referral for a new assessment of a connected person to become a Kinship Foster Carer for the child. In Kent we call this **Step Across to Fostering**.

Eligibility

The child must be under the age of 16 with agreement from the professional network that their needs can be met safely within a family home. There must be an updated detailed referral and positive profile completed for the child. For young people over the age of 16 who continue to have care needs that need to be met within a family, a referral will be made for a Kent Supported Homes Host.

Care and Support Plan

Carers will need to be resilient, patient and child centred but above all, will need to understand the importance of stability and permanence and be willing to stick with the child to achieve this. We recognise that the transition for these children and the families who care for them is important if the long-term ambition of a permanent family home is to be achieved. The suggested stages for a 4-6 week transition plan, which can be extended or reduced according to the child's needs, and elements of the support that will need to be available are:

Matching: Effective matching is crucial. This will be initiated through the sharing of a comprehensive referral and a positive profile of the child. This will be followed by discussion with those in the professional network to obtain a wide range of information before proceeding with the match. A profile of the foster family must be shared with the child/young person as part of the transition planning.

Joint Planning with the residential setting: This will include discussion and observation of the child prior to proceeding with meeting the child and staff. The foster carer will be able to observe the child's relationships with both staff and other children. This will support the carer to understand routines, sharing of behaviour management techniques, getting to know the child's triggers to behaviours, what makes them happy, sad, angry and what they like to eat etc. This will require an ability by the foster carer to travel to the residential setting.

Planned move: It is anticipated that there will be several visits to and from the child prior to the child moving home. This should include overnight visits and possibly contact with their birth family or those that they have significant relationships with. The liaison between the residential staff and the carer(s) will enable a positive ending, to lead on to a new beginning and maximise stability going forward.

Payments: Mainstream & Disabled Children's foster carers will be paid the retainer payment once the match with the child is confirmed. If the carer has any vacant beds once the child is placed, the retainer payment will be made for one bed only for a four-week period to help support the child settle into the home and avoid another child being placed at the same time. Mileage/travel costs will be paid during the liaison with the residential setting at 45p per mile or the cost of public transport. From the date the child moves into the home, the carer(s) will be paid the age-related maintenance, reward (including their payment for skills level) and complex payment for the first 18 months. The complex payment will then be reviewed by the area Access to Resources Panel or the Strengthening Independence Service Decision Making Panel every three months. In addition, the carers will receive a settling in fee of £5000 after one month of the child living in the family and further retention payments of £2500 on month 4, 8, 12 and 18 if the child remains living with the family.

Kinship foster carers approved temporarily under Regulation 24 / 25 of The Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations will be paid the age-related maintenance and complex payment from the date the child moves into their home. Upon completion of the Skills to Foster training for kinship foster carers and a commitment to ongoing training and development, carers will then also receive the age-related reward payment. The settling in fee of £5000 will be paid to kinship foster carers at the point of full approval by the Agency Decision Maker and further retention payments of £2500 on month 4, 8, 12 and 18 if the child remains living with the family. Once the complex payment has been in place for 18 months it will be reviewed by the area Access to Resources Panel or the Strengthening Independence Service Decision Making Panel every three months. Mileage/travel costs will be the same for kinship foster carers (temporarily or fully approved) as they are for mainstream and disabled childrens foster carers.

Professional Network: All mainstream and kinship foster carer(s) on the scheme will be valued members of the professional team and will be required to work with all partners within the network; Social Workers, Children's & Adolescent Mental Health services, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Education, Therapeutic Fostering Support, and the Virtual School Kent (VSK). We recognise the importance of ensuring education for our children both in terms of learning, socialisation and routine. Where education is not in place, VSK will support to prioritise identifying an appropriate educational setting which must be included in the early transition planning and to include liaising with SEND for children with an EHCP. If a change of school will be required due to the location of the foster carer, consideration must be given around the timing of this for the child.

Summary of Support

- For the first 8 weeks, the carer(s) will have regular minimum two weekly visits or contact from the Child's Social Worker and/or the allocated Fostering Social Worker (FSW) or Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). A Social Work Assistant will be linked to the foster carers to provide additional support and advice at key times.
- A therapist from the Special Guardianship and Therapeutic Support Team will be available to support the carers to better understand the young person's behaviour, what drives it and to think about how to best manage the presenting behaviour. Therapeutic Fostering will also provide the carers with a chronology to fully understand the child's lived experiences to date and support in reflection as to how this could impact on their behaviour and / or presentation. Where a child requires direct therapy sessions, there will need to be a referral made to Children's Mental Health Services.
- Carers can attend a specific support group for Step Across to Fostering facilitated by therapists from the Therapeutic Fostering Support Team.
- Training in working with teenagers, understanding trauma and positive behaviour management are available for the carer(s) to attend and access to these courses are strongly advised, particularly Reflective Fostering and NVR training.
- An experienced Foster Carer Sessional Worker can be identified to offer up to 15 hours a week support to work with the child and support the main carer if this is assessed as appropriate. There will need to be flexibility regarding when this support is accessed, dependent on the education offer to the child.
- Kent Fostering Out of Hours and County Out of Hours are available to support foster carers as required.
- The child and foster carer(s) will be able to access three days respite support per month via an identified Kent County Council foster carer. The respite carer will be matched to the child, and this search should start at the point of matching with the primary carer.
- The fostering family will be given priority for consideration on The Fostering Network Mockingbird Program.
- For disabled children, dependent on their needs, there will be agreement that three days respite support per month will be available. This could include overnight stays where appropriate for the child at a Short Breaks Unit or with a designated in house foster carer and will need to be part of the child's transition planning to ensure this respite offer can be achieved.
- All respite support offered via the Step Across to Fostering Scheme is additional to the standard holiday entitlement offered to all KCC Foster Carers.
- The role of all KCC staff within the child's network is to work together to support the carer(s) in providing security and stability for the child to enable them to live within a family home. To manage this effectively it is expected that all members of the child's network meet fortnightly from the point of matching with a family, the schedule of meetings can be reduced or increased by mutual agreement of all parties, including the foster carer (s).

Tax Implications for Foster Carers

As the scheme offers foster carers retention payments alongside their reward fee and maintenance, carers will be required to seek advice on any tax implications this may have.

What happens if a child moves from the foster carer(s) during the 18 months?

The scheme is based on an 18-month commitment from the foster carer to care for the child and if appropriate that this will then be extended to offer them a longer-term home. It is acknowledged that in exceptional circumstances a child may have to be moved, where they can no longer be safely cared for within a family home. In these circumstances, payments to the carer will be ended on the date of moving on. No further retention payments will be made. Foster carers are requested to give 28 days' notice to end the child's care in order to facilitate a planned move. A Placement Stability meeting should be convened if there is any suggestion that the child's placement is becoming fragile.

There will be no expectation for foster carers to repay any of the retention payments that they have already received for the care of the child.