

Fostering



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**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**



**“Foster care gives
our life a purpose. We
really enjoy looking
after children and all
the activities that go
with it.”**



Introduction

This booklet tells you about fostering and in particular how we at Bath & North East Somerset Council prepare and support our foster carers. We highly value the work of our carers and aim to help them to develop their abilities so that they, and the children placed in their care, have a positive experience of fostering.

“With B&NES I always look at it as one big family. Everybody knows each other, the children know each other, whereas you don’t get this with other fostering agencies.”



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The role of a foster carer

In Children's Services we do all we can to support parents experiencing difficulties to continue to care for their children at home. When this is not possible and the children need to come into care, in most cases we arrange for them to stay with foster carers. Ideally the placement will be somewhere not too far from their own home – to allow them to continue in school and with friendships. Many children will return to their own families after a few days, weeks or months. Others will be unable to return home so we will look for a permanent family for them.

Some children are looked after under a voluntary arrangement between their parents and Children's Services. Where a court has ordered that a child is looked after, Children's Services share parental responsibility with the parents. Foster carers do not have legal parental responsibility, although they do have the day-to-day responsibility for meeting the needs of their foster children.

**“Foster care means:
being able to provide a
loving nurturing home
to a child.”**



The role of a foster carer is to work as part of a team, helping a child by providing security, stability and care during both difficult and more settled and positive times in their lives.

Children may react adversely to their previous experiences or separation from their families; foster carers need to respond with a nurturing and consistent approach, understanding the significant impact that this trauma may have on children.

We are careful to match foster carers and children, so that placements meet the needs of children and best match the skills and abilities of the carers. We offer lots of support to new carers and as their confidence and experience grows, carers can progress to work with children with more complex needs if they wish.

**“Don’t take problems personally, it is part of the job.
Time and patience are invaluable.”**

This is Emily. Emily’s mother has a long term addiction to alcohol and is not able to meet Emily’s physical or emotional needs.

Emily would often come to school tired, hungry and without warm clothes. Emily’s teachers reported that she often seemed sad and anxious and they were very worried about her.

Emily needed someone who could care for her as her mother wasn’t able to. There wasn’t anyone in Emily’s wider family able to safely care for her which is why Emily became Looked After. Emily needed foster carers who understood the impact of the neglect and trauma she had experienced, and were able to help her make sense of this alongside caring for her in a consistent and nurturing way.

There are around 139 children in foster care in Bath and North East Somerset but there are not enough approved foster carers offering different types of placements to children like Emily.



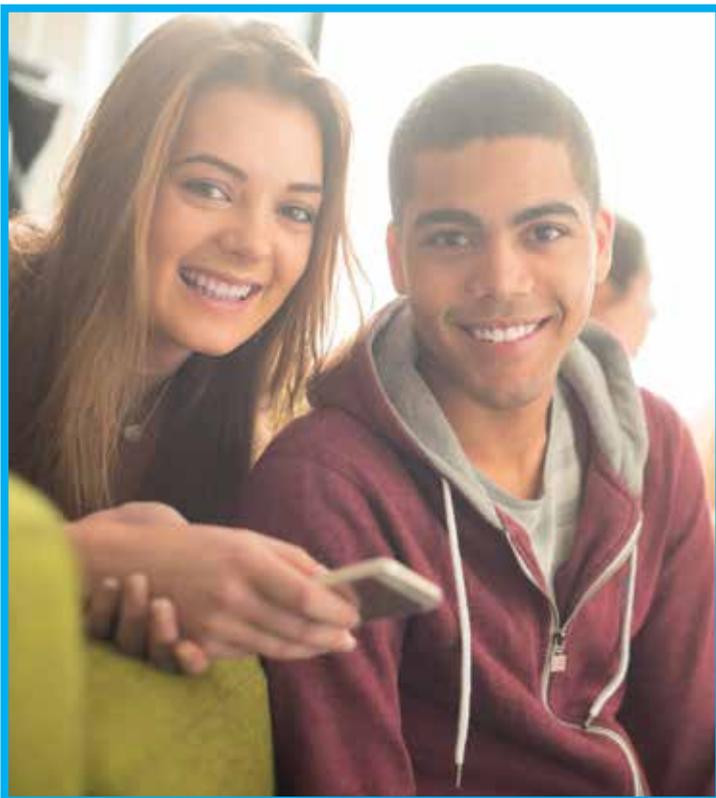
Different types of foster care

There are a number of different types of foster care. Carers may choose to specialise depending on their particular preference, experience and circumstances. The assessment process would consider the type of fostering best suited to your family.

Short Term Foster Care: providing placements for a few days, weeks or months (up to about 2 years) until difficulties at home are addressed or alternative plans are made for the child's future.

Long Term Foster Care: providing a permanent home to children who are unable to return to their birth families, but usually have some form of ongoing contact.

“Foster care is demanding, fun and fulfilling... It does mean certain sacrifices but given our family support, it's really worth it.”



Emergency/Crisis Care: providing short placements at short notice, including at night or at weekends.

Respite Care: offering a short stay (a few days to up to two weeks) to provide a break to the child's family or another foster family - either on a planned basis or as a result of unforeseen circumstances.



Parent and Children Fostering: both parent and child (or pregnant mother) live with the foster carer, and part of the task is to help social workers in their assessments, working closely with other professionals. One carer must be available on a full-time basis.

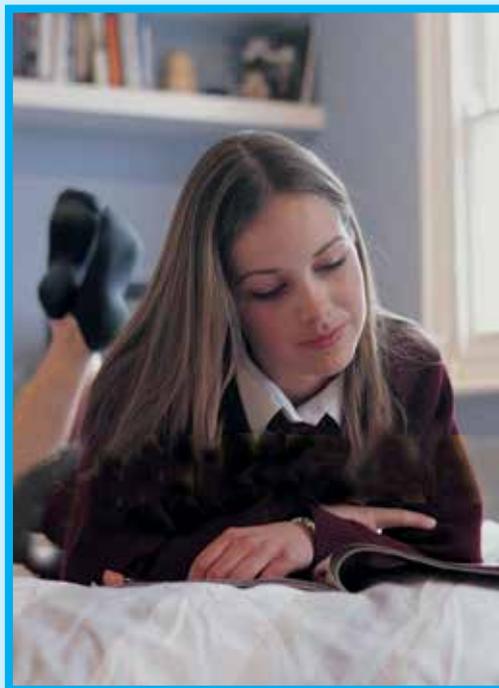
“When a child comes to stay; take a step back, watch and listen, don’t be judgemental, use humour to encourage them to be themselves.”

Family Link: A service for children who have a disability and their families. Carers are matched with a particular child or young person, and provide regular short periods of care. This is for overnight stays and is usually agreed in advance.

Katie has lived with the same foster carer, Diana, for eight years. She came into care at age seven after she was removed from her parent’s care due to physical and emotional abuse. Her first placement was an emergency placement, her second placement was short term.

When Katie came to her long-term placement she was in a difficult place and would often express her feelings by rejecting her carer or throwing tantrums. Katie’s foster carer was supported through training and supervision to understand and respond to Katie’s behaviour.

It took a long time for Katie and her foster carer to get to where they are now, but Katie is settled and about to sit her GCSEs.



Who can be a foster carer?

People with a variety of life experiences and backgrounds can become successful foster carers: the ability to help children is not determined by race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation or marital status. It may be possible for you to work outside the home, although children in foster care will have experienced separation and loss and need stability and consistent care. You don't have to own your own home, but you do need to be in secure accommodation and a child would need their own bedroom. We need carers from a diverse range of backgrounds and circumstances in order to make the best possible match for every child.

You would need:

- Experience of looking after children (not necessarily your own) and understanding their needs
- To be able to listen to children
- Time, energy and practical space
- Patience, stability and a sense of humour
- To enjoy the company of children
- To be able to take a positive and non-judgemental approach
- To be able to work as a member of a team with a range of professionals
- To have a reasonable level of health and fitness
- To be over 21
- To be a non smoking household if you wish to foster a child under the age of 5



Anyone with an interest in and a commitment to helping children and young people could have something to offer as a foster carer. In return, fostering provides a range of diverse benefits including all the rewards that come from caring for a particular child or young person, and making a difference to their future. Fostering with Bath & North East Somerset Council also provides a means of giving something back to children and the community.

“You need patience, energy, sense of humour, tolerance, to be able to be firm but kind. If you’re in a relationship it needs to be strong to withstand the stresses.”

“This is hard work... but along with the hard work comes the reward, seeing that little step forward the foster child has made, seeing them smile, its all worth it.”



About the children

There are many different reasons why a child may come into care;

- Many children will have experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse and neglect.
- There may be a breakdown of relationships between parents and teenagers.
- Parents are unable to care for their children because of issues such as mental health needs, or drug/alcohol misuse.
- Children in care may have been exposed to domestic abuse which can have a significant impact on their development and wellbeing.
- The early experiences of children who come into care often mean they have significant needs regarding their development and attachment and need therapeutic, understanding care.



Every child is unique and their needs will depend on their age, background and life experiences. However many of the children who need to be looked after by foster carers have already lived through difficult experiences, or witnessed frightening and confusing situations. These experiences are likely to affect a child's understanding of the world, how they behave and show their emotions and needs. They may also be delayed in terms of their emotional, educational and social development and some will have learning difficulties or health problems. But with your help, they can build their confidence, learn new skills and achieve their dreams.

A foster carer will bring much needed stability and continuity to children's lives. The secret is simply to offer what every child wants and needs - family life, understanding, love and respect. Through fulfilling these basic needs foster carers give children, and often whole families, the time and space to rebuild their lives.

The assessment process

At Bath & North East Somerset Council we work to complete assessments within four to six months. The assessing social worker produces a report, with contributions from the applicant, which is presented to the fostering panel. Prospective foster carers attend panel with their social worker.

Bath & North East Somerset Council aims to work with prospective and approved carers in a respectful, open and transparent way. We value the work of our foster carers and aim to provide the highest quality service to them in all aspects.

The process for assessing prospective carers is necessarily robust, in the interests of ensuring children receive high quality care and parenting. To ensure fostering is the right path for you we will ask about your own history, experience and lifestyle.



“Socialising and communicating with other carers is a very good idea, it helps enormously and makes large problems become smaller.”

“When a child comes to stay; be patient, it takes time to take on such a change of life experience. Use your support worker as they are extremely supportive and try to meet other foster carers.”

In Bath & North East Somerset we are committed to making the assessment an open and collaborative process, with the aim of reaching agreement with prospective carers about what kind of fostering is best for you.

The assessment involves:

- All adults within a household being assessed as carers (unless being assessed for Family Link daycare with one partner involved).
- A series of discussions with a Family Placement worker, usually taking place in your home, covering topics such as motivation, parenting experience, safe care and working as part of a team.
- Seeking the views of all household members, including children.
- Statutory checks, including medical and a DBS check for anyone in the household 16 and over. A criminal conviction will not automatically mean that someone cannot foster, unless it was a serious offence or involving children, but should be mentioned at an early stage so advice can be given.
- Visits to at least two people who have known you well for a minimum of two years, to gain their opinion on your suitability to foster.



“When a child comes to stay; let them have their own space but let them know that you’re there for all their needs.”

Preparation and training



“B&NES provides excellent training and meets all the needs of a foster carer.”

All prospective carers attend a preparation course. The aim is to help you gain a wider understanding of fostering and how it will impact upon your family as well as to prepare you for some of the issues you might face.

“The preparation course was immensely helpful and using case studies really made you think and work out what you might do in specific situations.”

The preparation course usually takes place around the same time as your assessment is being undertaken. The preparation course can be spread over several weeks; it is usually a mixture of weekday evening and weekend time. The sessions cover a variety of topics and include speakers, videos and discussion within the group. A wide variety of topics will be covered.

After approval you will be encouraged to take an active role in your ongoing development, with an expectation that you attend at least four training events each year. There is an extensive range of courses on offer to carers with Bath & North East Somerset Council. This includes access to courses across the council and those offered by partner agencies. An annual review process helps to identify priorities for individual carers.

Examples of training offered by Bath & North East Somerset Council:

- Understanding attachment
- Child development
- Safe caring
- Working with diversity
- Child protection
- Managing behaviour

“The training courses I have attended have been very informative, very beneficial and well worth completing.”



“I feel lucky to have a good relationship with my supporting social worker, I have had the same one for years and she knows me well.”

“We feel there is always someone available to help with advice, relaying messages and information, as well as in an emergency.”

“There are many aspects of support provided that is very beneficial for carers. I particularly like R2K, it provides so many benefits to both the children and carer.”

Supporting carers

We give high priority to supporting foster carers:

- All carers have an allocated supervising social worker who will visit you regularly
- Other team members and managers are available if needed
- A dedicated out-of-hours support phone line for foster carers, as well as the Emergency Duty Team
- Regular support groups with other foster carers
- Advice in relation to issues including health and education issues from professionals with expertise in the needs of looked after children
- Specialist services providing expertise in relation to emotional and behavioural issues
- Close liaison between the Family Placement Team and social workers for the children placed, being part of the same organisation with shared senior management
- Respite arrangements and a school holiday activity programme (R2K). Your own children will also be able to attend some of the R2K activities
- Insurance scheme to cover damage where carers' own insurance is not applicable
- Club for children of foster carers (CFC)
- A psychologist specifically to support foster carers



Fees & allowances

Fostering allowance

All foster carers receive a weekly allowance to cover the cost of caring for a child or young person. The allowance is designed to meet all the day-to-day costs including food, clothing, transport, additional household costs, pocket money and activities. The weekly allowance varies according to the age of the child.

Enhanced Fee

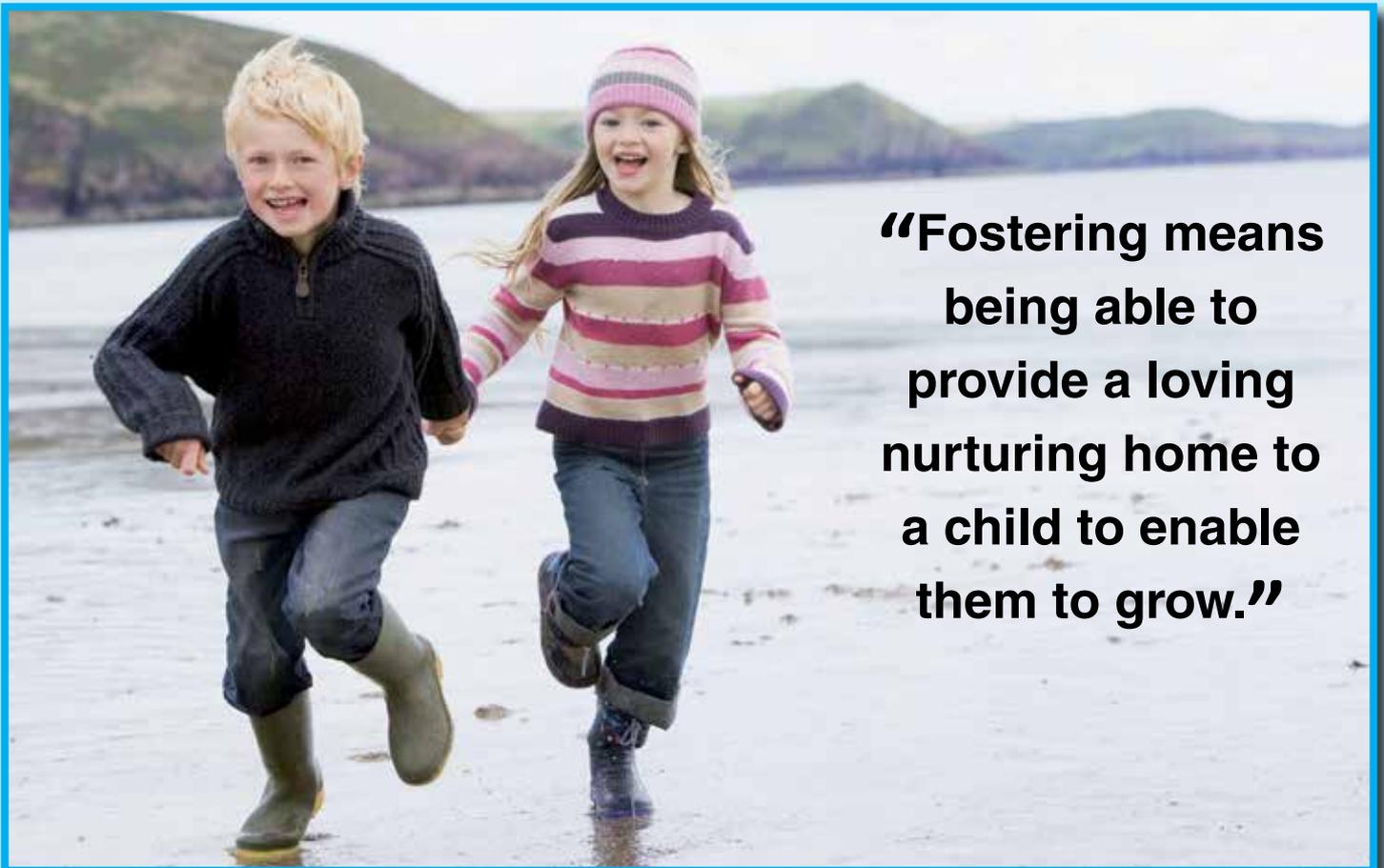
For some placements which are particularly challenging, usually because of the child's behaviour, an enhanced fee is payable in addition to the basic fee. Most children attracting the enhanced fee (though not all) will be in the 11-17 yrs age bracket.

Parent and Child placements

Carers provide specialist foster placements and are paid a weekly fee as well as an allowance.

Other payments

We support carers through additional payments where they incur significant expenditure as a result of fostering, for example the purchase of specialist equipment. Mileage for agreed journeys is also paid.



“Fostering means being able to provide a loving nurturing home to a child to enable them to grow.”



Placements

Foster carers are approved for a type of fostering and a particular number and age group of children. When a placement is needed, carers are contacted and given full details (as known) about the child needing placement.

Foster carers work to achieve the best possible future for the child placed with them. This could be returning home or moving on to other care arrangements. Sometimes it can be hard to see a child move on, but foster carers are given plenty of support.

A key role for foster carers is to support the child's contact with their family and friends. Foster carers often develop good relationships with birth parents and this can be a very satisfying aspect of the work. The Family Placement Team are very mindful of any potential risk to carers and will take all necessary precautions in the rare cases where there is a concern in relation to the child's family.

Occasionally placements may run into difficulties. Children's Services will do their best to resolve problems with foster carers and offer any additional support to both carers and the young person they are caring for. This is to help stabilise the placement and avoid a breakdown if possible.

This is Frankie. Frankie has been looked after since the age of four as his parents were unable to continue caring for him. Frankie's parents both had significant drug addictions and Frankie witnessed a lot of domestic violence during his early years. This had a considerable impact on his ability to trust adults. Frankie needed foster carers who could understand the impact that Frankie's experiences had on his ability to form trusting attachments. He needed carers who would be creative and therapeutic in the way they looked after him.

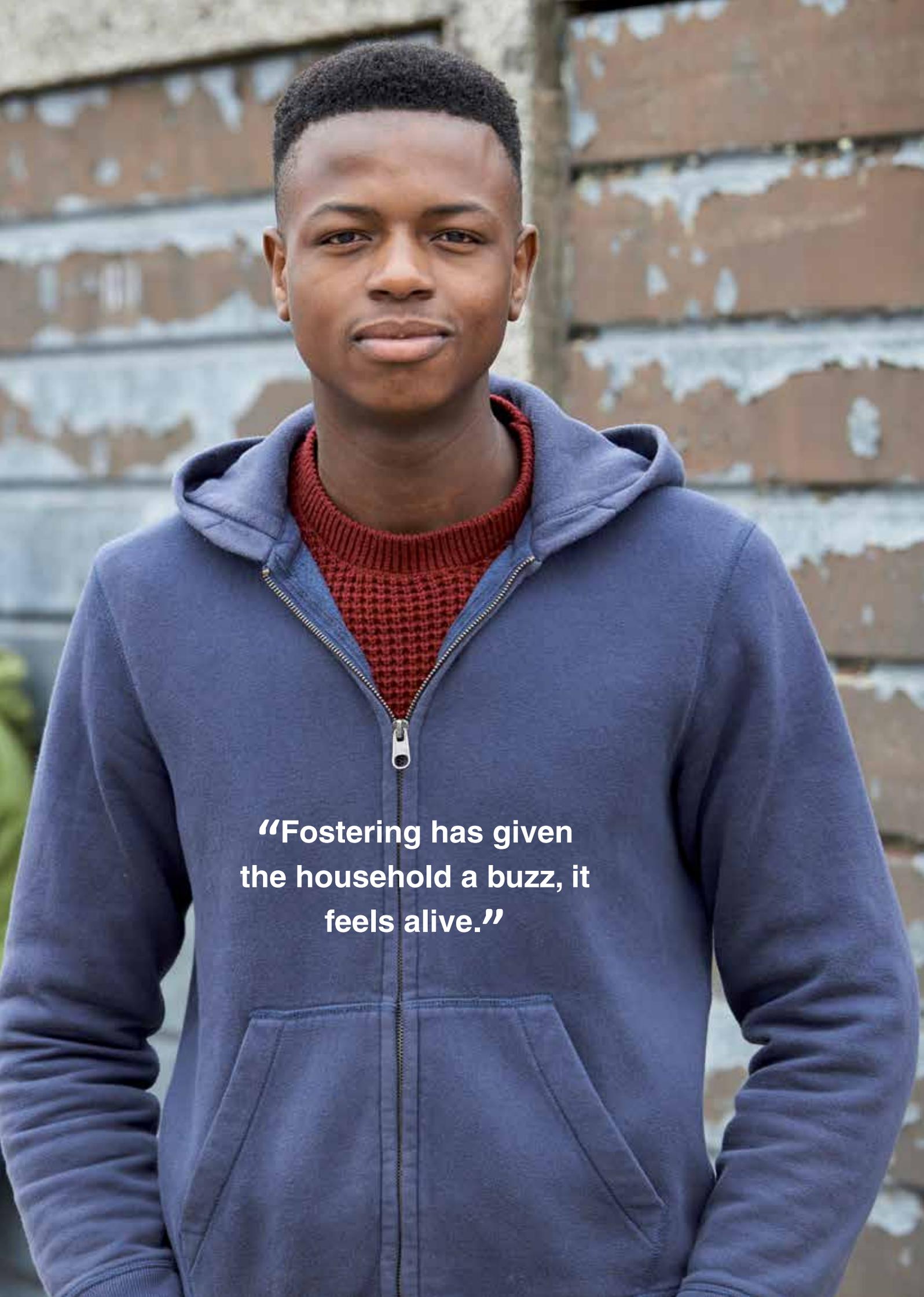
Frankie was fostered for five years by Pam. Pam's own children had grown up and moved out. Frankie left his placement with Pam when he was ten and he returned to live with his birth family. Frankie's mother was much better and for three years everything seemed to be going well for Frankie at home, other than the occasional argument. Then Frankie's mother got a new boyfriend, he had a very short temper and was physically and verbally abusive to Frankie and his mother. Frankie's mother was not able to protect him at this time.

Frankie needed to be looked after again by someone who was able to protect him. Frankie's experience made him angry and defensive, making it hard for him to know how to communicate his feelings. At fourteen it was much harder to find a foster family for Frankie, even though he desperately needed one.

Darren was new to fostering, but had been a secondary school teacher for many years. He was experienced in dealing with difficult situations in the school environment when children's home lives had affected their behaviour. This is what had made Darren think about fostering.

Frankie was Darren's first placement. At first things were not easy; Darren was still finding his feet as a carer and Frankie was finding it difficult to settle in. Darren spoke to his supervising social worker regularly for advice and was able to attend training in managing difficult behaviours. Darren also started speaking to other carers for support and advice which has helped Darren to feel more confident in his ability to care for Frankie.

Frankie is now approaching his eighteenth birthday. Darren, Frankie and their social workers have agreed that Frankie will stay living with Darren until he is twenty one as part of the Staying Put scheme so that Darren can continue to help Frankie be ready to live independently.



**“Fostering has given
the household a buzz, it
feels alive.”**

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Our aim is to maximise the number of children in care who are enabled to realise their potential within a safe and nurturing family environment, and to help prepare them for adult life and independent living. We aim to achieve this by recruiting, supporting and valuing our own foster carers.

If you feel you have the drive and commitment to become a foster carer please contact us.



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Fostering, Bath and North East Somerset



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