



PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER

Your Guide to Fostering

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- **Introduction to PACT**

“We found PACT to be the most professional, responsive, flexible and informed agency we have come across.” As stated by one of our families in our latest inspection. We strive to work to PACT’s mission to build and strengthen families.

PACT is also known as the Oxford Diocesan Council for Social Work Inc. and we is a registered charity working to improve life chances for children. We have grown over the years into a creative, flexible and happy organisation to work for. The main focus of our work is within Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and aims to build and strengthen families. Over recent years our geographical boundaries have spread and we now offer services across most of southern England including London. This can be seen in each of our main work areas;

1) Fostering

Our Fostering Services are a decade old and regularly inspected to ensure both PACT and our carers are providing sound standards of care. Recent inspections have praised the work of our carers and the support PACT social workers provide. Read on for more details about long term fostering with PACT as well as other options.

2) Adoption

PACT has worked in the field of adoption since the 1950s. In the early days we placed babies with adoptive families but as the social climate has changed, so has our task. Nowadays there are few babies requiring placement but instead we are recruiting families for children aged 3 years and over, sibling groups, children with disability or from mixed heritage families. We also assess families who wish to adopt children from another country.

3) Communities

PACT works with homeless and vulnerable families and their children by providing temporary accommodation and support. Our family support workers assist families with health and housing issues. Our Drop-Ins have continued to grow and develop and we are very excited to have been awarded Children Centre status in four of our Family Centres in Oxfordshire. We have a successful project in the Windsor and Maidenhead area that supports isolated Asian women. Many of our projects are supported by volunteers, so if you might be interested in helping out or know someone who might be, let us know.

- **What is Fostering?**

Fostering is providing a 'family life and home' for children who cannot live with their (birth) parents or families. There are approximately 50,000 children waiting for the right foster home at the present time. These children are looked after by the local authority. The task of social workers is to find the right family, with the right skills to care for a particular 'Looked After Child'. The more carers we have the greater the chance of a better match and more likely that the permanent placement is to work out for everyone.

We recognise that children who cannot permanently live at home with their parents need to be placed in an alternative placement if they are going to succeed and become happy, successful adults and parents themselves. It is likely each child will have some contact with their birth family and a number of Foster Carers are hugely generous in the care they also provide to the children's birth families. The contact plans will be carefully considered in order to meet the child's needs.

- **Adoption *and* Fostering - one process**

You may want to care for children but you are unsure if you want to adopt a child or foster a child. Usually you have to make a decision because there are different procedures to follow. However, PACT has changed all that.

We will guide you through **one** process so that once approved you can consider children who need adoption or fostering. You will become 'dual approved'. Contact us for more information.

- **Fostering with PACT**

PACT's Long Term Fostering Service, also known as Permanent Fostering, has been developed for families who are able to offer permanent homes to older children. Children will be aged between 8 and 12 years when they are placed and will need to remain with their permanent families until they are grown up and ready to live independently. For many young people today this is often not until they are in their early 20s.

PACT offers permanent foster placements to local authorities who are not able to provide homes for a particular child or children from their own pool of Foster Carers. This means that **PACT's** professional Foster Carers will be offering something exceptional in the quality of care they offer.

Many **PACT** Foster Carers will see fostering as a full time commitment of 24 hours a day as their work – that is why we pay a professional allowance which reflects the time, skills and commitment our carers make to their foster children. Caring for older foster children is time consuming and we will need you to be available for meetings, supervision and training events.

PACT knows that if Foster Carers are to provide a sound level of care they need to be well supported. That is why each Foster Carer will have their own supervising social worker and when he or she is not around there is ALWAYS another social worker available to them – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year through our Out of Hours phone service.

PACT Foster Carers need to be able to get to the Reading office for meetings. They will also be required to attend support and training workshops. The main area covered by PACT is Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire but we also receive applications from the surrounding counties in the south of England.

PACT also recruits Foster Carers who can offer **Respite** or **Short Break** placements to children placed with other families. This might mean one weekend a month or during half term breaks for example. This service is invaluable to carers and we offer all our carers this service periodically in order to give you a break.

Please note:

PACT is aware of the medical evidence regarding the impact of passive smoking on children. Young children are particularly susceptible to the effects of second hand smoke because their lungs and airways are small and their immune systems are immature. We therefore can only place children in smoke free homes. Applicants who previously smoked will be asked when they stopped smoking given the evidence that a majority relapse within the first six months of stopping smoking. After 12 months most people will be permanent non-smokers and only after 10 years of non-smoking will a person be classed as a non-smoker for insurance purposes.

PACT aim to place all children in safe homes and so we operate a strict Safeguarding Policy which all potential carers are expected to comply with. Copies of this policy are available upon request. Key points are also shared during preparation and assessment.

▪ **The qualities we are looking for in Prospective Foster Carers**

Fostering may be the most important and rewarding work that you will ever undertake. Some of the qualities and characteristics you will need to have are:

- Really enjoying other people's children
- Being flexible in how you live your life – if something doesn't get done today you won't mind
- Knowing yourself well, what you are good at and what you need help with
- Not needing children to be grateful for what you are providing
- Accepting that all children lie and steal sometimes

- Understanding that foster children usually need to keep in contact with their birth family and you will support them in this
- Accepting the importance of education and having the skills to help your foster child with academic work and other interests they may wish to pursue
- Reflecting on what difficult behaviour is actually telling you about a child and not taking it personally
- Being prepared to talk to children about keeping themselves safe, including talking about their sexuality, drugs and a healthy lifestyle
- Accepting that we all need support sometimes and not being afraid to work with social workers or other professionals
- Understanding and valuing the real diversity in the UK and being proactive about learning what this might mean for a child and your family

- **Here are a few things you don't have to be**

You don't have to be married

You may be single, separated or divorced. If you're married, are within a Civil Partnership or have a partner, the relationship must be stable because children need security, and you must both be assessed. It is expected that couples will usually have been together for at least three years before an application is accepted. This period allows for the required 'lasting, constant and enduring' relationship to have developed.

You don't have to have children already

Some children will be happier in a large family, some need more individual attention. Whether you have your own children or not (perhaps they've grown up and left home), you can be a Foster Carer. However, if you have children they need to be involved in the process, as having another child or children in their home will affect their lives too. We are unlikely to place foster children in a home if existing children are the same age, or younger than 8 – 12 years. Children of a similar age may become competitive and many of the Looked After Children we care for need to be the youngest in the family, given many of their early needs were not well met.

You don't have to cope on your own

You will have your own social worker who will supervise and support your work. There are regular support groups with other carers which you will join and you will have ready support from other **PACT** Foster Carers. We also work closely with other organisations such as Fostering Network in order to further support carers.

You don't have to have a job

You will need to have the time to give to your foster child – caring for children and young people who have been through trauma and loss means being available for them at any time. It's also important that you know what you need, and to take care of yourself, so that when you feel depleted you can give yourself a treat and be ready to start again the next day.

▪ **EVERY CHILD MATTERS and ISHAPE**

Outcome Requirements and Indicators

PACT's Long Term Fostering service works closely to The Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework.

These outcomes are the focus of Government finance and initiatives in order to maximize the chances for every child, but particularly all those in the 'Care System'. The five points of the framework are:

- 1. Be Healthy**
- 2. Stay Safe**
- 3. Enjoy and Achieve**
- 4. Making a Positive Contribution *and***
- 5. Achieve Economic Wellbeing**

PACT Works with our Foster Carers to enable them to be clear of what is required of them in relation to the care they offer. The *indicators* are a measurement that will be monitored by **PACT** and the local authority which has placed the Looked After Child.

Therefore we are looking for Foster Carers to work with us in being proactive in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of any children in their care. **PACT** are inspected against these outcomes by Ofsted and we assess carers against them before you are approved and review this on an annual basis.

PACT's own corporate values are known as **ISHAPE** and demonstrate who we are. They were formulated to tie in with the Every Child Matters agenda as children are at the centre of everything that we do. Our **ISHAPE** values are:

- Independent
- Safe
- Healthy
- Aspirational
- Positive
- Ecological & Economical

▪ **The Application and Assessment Process Requirements**

You will be asked to complete an electronic application form, which asks for information about yourselves and also requires your signatures of consent for relevant statutory enquiries/checks to be made.

a) Statutory References/Relevant Checks

PACT will seek your permission to obtain a range of checks including the Criminal Records Bureau and will contact your Local Authority Social Care Services Department, asking for checks to be sought including the child protection register.

The law requires these enquiries/checks be made to ensure there are no known reasons why the applicants should not be considered for fostering. Please note that all our checks are enhanced as we work with vulnerable children so any contact you have had with Police, Courts, Social Care Services needs to be declared in advance as it will show up on checks. It will not automatically mean you are ineligible to foster but each case will have to be considered individually.

If you have lived abroad for periods as an adult we may need to undertake checks overseas.

Sometimes we need to undertake the checks described above prior to us being able to formally offer you an application in which case we shall seek consent to checks from you.

Personal References

The agency will ask you to provide the names of three personal references each, one of whom should be a relative. These referees should know you well, preferably over a number of years and ideally span your life time. For joint applications at least one referee should know you both as a couple. They will be asked to give a written reference and will also be interviewed by your social worker. Other relatives may also be approached, although they will not be asked for a formal written reference.

We will approach any previous partners with whom you lived for a reference, although this will only be done after discussing this matter with you first. We understand that relationships that break down can leave negative feeling and we take this into consideration, alongside your complete assessment, when evaluating such references.

Employer's Reference

Employers will be asked to give a written reference about you. This reference will ask for verification of employment dates, your role and whether there have been any relevant disputes or disciplinary proceedings. Your social worker will agree with you when an approach may be made. If previous employment was with children, or you have been unemployed for fewer than 6 months, your former employer will also be contacted.

If you are engaged in voluntary work with children you will be asked to provide a named referee from the organization who can comment on your work with the children.

CAFCASS

Where families have been involved in family court proceedings, private law matters etc. The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) will be contacted.

School/ Nursery/ Local Authority

If you have children at school, the head teacher will be asked to provide a written reference about them. If a Nursery is attended a similar request will be made. If your children are educated at home, the local authority will be contacted for a reference.

Medicals / Health Visitor

A health assessment / medical examination by your G.P will be necessary so that an assessment of your fitness to foster can be made. **PACT** will meet the cost of this examination. The Agency Medical Adviser will then see your medical report and will advise the panel. Under the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988, you have a right to see your medical report. However please note applicants should ask to see a copy of the completed form in their Surgery/Medical Clinic as the Agency is not in a position to share this information otherwise. Your GP will also be asked to comment on any health issues for your children.

If you have pre-school children a reference will be sought from their Health Visitor.

If there are any concerns that could affect your approval or being linked with a child your social worker will need to explore these with you.

b) Assessment and Preparation

The aim is to get to know you whilst assessing your suitability to foster one or more children long term, aged 8 -12 when first placed. The children may have been in several other foster homes, and may exhibit some very challenging behaviour. You will be offered the opportunity to work with the **PACT** social workers in completing a Home Study Report. This report will consider issues, which need to be addressed by all foster carers, and will include a description of your lifestyle, and how a child might fit into your family.

Usually this assessment, or Home Study, will be achieved through a combination of home visits, attending a group preparation workshop and visiting carers already undertaking the task. If at any time during the Home Study your circumstances change and you need time to resolve the problem, or you decide that fostering is not right for you and your family, it is important to share this with your social worker as soon as possible. You will have the opportunity to read your Assessment Report (Form F Part 2) and make relevant comments before it is presented to our Adoption and Permanence Panel for consideration. Panel would usually be within six months of your original application being received.

There is a clearly set out assessment process for Foster Carers which defines:

- The task to be undertaken
- The experience, competences or aptitudes being sought or to be achieved
- The standards to be applied in the assessment
- The stages and content of the selection process and the timescales involved
- The information to be given to applicants.

In assessing qualities, competences and aptitudes for Fostering, **PACT's** Fostering Service considers these in relation to the following:

- Child rearing
- Caring for children born to somebody else
- Contact between fostered children and their birth families
- Helping children make sense of their past
- Sexual boundaries and attitudes
- Awareness of issues around child abuse
- Approaches to discipline
- Awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults
- Awareness of own motivation for fostering/own needs to be met through the fostering process
- Religion
- Ethnicity/cultural/traditional/heritage and linguistic issues
- Identity, including sexuality
- Standard of living and lifestyle
- Health and safety, working towards independence and achieving
- Own experience of parenting and being parented
- Own experience in relation to disability and/or attitudes to disability

c) Panel Recommendation and Agency Decision

You will have the opportunity to contribute your own comments to the assessment report and your application will be presented to Panel by your social worker. You will be invited to attend the panel meeting.

The Panel will give its recommendation as to whether or not you and your household are suitable to act as long term Foster Carers and to advise on the number of children, age range and gender. Your social worker will inform you of the Panel's recommendation after the meeting.

The Agency's Chief Executive who is the Agency Decision Maker has 7 working days to consider the recommendation and reach a formal decision.

When applications are not accepted, every effort will be made to explain the reason behind the decisions. You will have an opportunity to make representations if the decision maker is minded not to approve your application.

In the unfortunate event that you feel the process of how the agency achieved its decision is reason for concern there is the right of complaint. All service users of **PACT** have a right to complain or make representation to the agency if they are unhappy about the way they have been treated, or about any decision made which affects them. Most complaints are resolved informally by making a direct approach to the Director of Adoption & Permanence Services. Written information about the agency's complaints procedure is available on page 15.

d) After Approval

With your agreement, a profile containing summary information about you will be circulated to relevant local authorities with regards to a possible linking/matching with one or more of the children waiting to be placed. The child's social worker will want to come and see you at home with your social worker and discuss in detail what you feel to have to offer and also answer questions you might have about the child.

Before any placement proceeds, a careful matching consultation will be made between your social worker and the child/ren's social worker and information about a specific child will be fully discussed with you.

Fostering approval is for a duration of one year and reviewed on an annual basis, except the first one which is after 6 months. This can be done within your home or at another mutually agreed venue if more appropriate. We ask an Independent Reviewing Officer to conduct these reviews on our behalf.

You will be supplied with a comprehensive Foster Carers Handbook which covers policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details.

▪ The Support and Training we provide

Foster Care is a constantly evolving sphere of childcare. Therefore PACT always works to keep its Foster Carers informed about the latest developments in research and practice.

Support

PACT provides each Foster Carer with a named supervising social worker. This is usually the worker who completed your assessment but not always. The social worker will visit you each month in your own home to supervise the work you are doing and to offer you support. They will get to know you well and understand how best to help you with any problems or questions you may have. The meetings you have together will be called supervision, and you will draw up an agreed agenda and the social worker will record your discussion and decisions.

Out of Hours

There is also an Out of Hours support mobile telephone number, which contacts you directly to a team member who is there to offer you advice and support. You will be supplied with this number on approval and we encourage all carers to use it as appropriate. Please note in an emergency you should call 999 first.

Groups

PACT Foster Carers used to run a six weekly support group. This group met in Reading and all carers were required to join. The group is currently under review and we aim to re-launch it soon. The group offers a great support to each other via discussion and social group activities. Due to the greater spread of carers across England there may be a need for more local groups.

Training

PACT recognises that fostering is a challenging task and requires all Foster Carers to attend regular training on basic areas such as Health and Safety, First Aid, Managing Difficult Behaviours, and any other areas that foster carers and their supervising social worker have identified as required.

Fostering Network

PACT will pay the membership subscription to Fostering Network for all of its Foster Carers. This agency provides regular magazines with topical fostering articles. It also provides an advice line if you have queries about any issues relating to fostering and you may want to know how **PACT** fits into the national picture. The organisation leads on developing initiatives in fostering and holds an annual conference.

▪ **PACT's Professional Fostering Allowances**

The amount **PACT** pays for a fostered young person is £335.70 a week. For two children the amount **PACT** pays is £604.35. This allowance is reviewed each financial year.

This sum is made up of two elements:

1. Personal Allowance for the young person's care and personal expenses - £183 a week.
2. A fee for payment for expertise, training and time commitment which are over and above the level of skill needed for 'ordinary' parenting and paid in recognition of the fact that fostering is a complex and specialised work - £152.70 a week.

▪ **Statement of Purpose**

Aims and Objectives, Principles and Standards of Care

- To provide high quality permanent placements through long-term Fostering
- To make every endeavour to keep children safe from harm with Foster Carers who are competent to meet their needs and promote their interests
- To produce good support for Foster Carers and children
- To keep the child at the centre of all decisions
- To provide stability in the lives of looked after children and to help them reach their potential

- To promote and enhance the identity, self-worth and future opportunities of all our children, with families who reflect similar origins and within communities which are culturally diverse.
 - To respect and focus on the needs of carers and children in activities concerned with recruitment, training, assessment and support
 - To reflect best practice in permanent placements, incorporating theory, practice and research evidence relating to both adoption and long term fostering as appropriate
 - To work in partnership with carers and placing agencies and to operate within a multi agency context
 - To ensure that the views of children are heard and taken into account
 - To ensure that children's needs relating to ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender, disability, sexuality are identified and addressed
 - To work within the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the National Minimum Fostering Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and associated regulations and guidance
 - To promote contact between children and significant people in their lives
- **Feedback & If things go wrong**

PACT wishes to improve and develop its services and welcomes feedback, verbally or in writing, at all times. PACT is particularly grateful for observations and criticisms by those who consider that our services could be improved, and any suggestions on how improvements might be made at any stage. Positive and constructive observations are welcome. Feedback evaluation forms are used by all services.

Sometimes things do go wrong. You may experience a service that is not of an excellent standard or you may not be happy about decisions we make as a result of your assessment.

If you wish to make a formal complaint about PACT's services, or you are a child or person on behalf of a child, we have set out the framework for this. If you have any queries about this process, please do not hesitate to let us know.

The Independent Review mechanism is operated by BAAF and exists to allow applicants to make a formal representation to an independent body should Panel or the Agency Decision Maker decide not to approve you on presentation of your assessment or re-approve you following a review. Further information is available from **PACT**.

Complaints Process

Stage	Procedure	Time for response
Stage 1	Raise the complaint with the person concerned who will try to resolve the issue	Initial Acknowledgement letter within 24 hours Formal response within 14 days
Stage 2	Make the complaint verbally or in writing to the *Line Manager of the person concerned	Initial Acknowledgement letter within 24 hours Formal response within 28 days
Stage 3	Send complaint in writing to the Chief Executive. (Or, if the complaint concerns the Chief Executive to the Chair). The complaint will then be looked into and a response provided	Initial Acknowledgement letter within 24 hours Formal response within 28 days
Stage 4	If the complainant is still not satisfied s/he should write formally to the Chief Executive requesting that an Independent Investigating Officer examine the complaint. The officer's written report should then be sent to the complainant, who will then have the opportunity of responding in writing to a panel of 3 PACT Trustees, none of whom will have had any involvement with the issues raised. The decision of these Trustees will be final	Initial Acknowledgement letter within 24 hours Independent Investigating Officer will be given 6 weeks to provide a report (reasons for delay will be provided) Decision of Trustees within 28 days
Further	On points of law, complainants should consult a solicitor	

NOTES

- A** Complaints can be started at Stage 1, Stage 2 or Stage 3. If the complaint first reaches the Chief Executive in writing, the complainant may be given the opportunity of consideration being given in Stages 1 or 2.
- B** Please indicate with any complaint if your first language is other than English.
- C** At any stage a complainant may be accompanied by a friend but not a legal representative
- D** Confidentiality agreements for agency work will be maintained.
- E** *If you are unsure who the line manager is please contact PACT's offices 7 Southern Court, South Street, Reading, RG1 4QS Telephone 0118 9387600 - **E-mail:** info@pactcharity.org
- F** You can contact Ofsted, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- G** You can contact the office of the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted. 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE on Freephone 0800 5280731 – **website www.rights4me.org**

- **How to contact us:**

We are here to provide you with all the information you need and answer your questions honestly and clearly. There will be no obligation on you to continue the process.

⇒ If you are interested in Fostering do contact us for a friendly and informal chat on: Freephone (0800) 731 1845.

⇒ Or visit our website: www.pactcharity.org

⇒ Or write to us (no stamp required) at:

**Parents and Children Together,
FREEPOST (SCE6005).
Reading,
RG1 4ZR**

⇒ Or if you prefer you can e-mail your details to us at:
fostering@pactcharity.org

PACT is regularly inspected by OFSTED (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). Please see below for contact details:



Address: Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Telephone: 08456 404040

E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

▪ **Recommended Reading**

Book	Author/Publisher
Fostering a Child: A guide for people interested in fostering	Henrietta Bond: BAAF, 2004
Fostering Attachments	Brian Cairns, BAAF
Providing a secure base in Long-Term Foster Care	Mary Beek and Gillian Scholfield: BAAF, 2004
Lesbian and Gay Fostering and Adoption: Extraordinary yet ordinary	Ed. Stephen Hicks and Janet McDermott: Jessica Kingsley, 1999
Part of the Family: Pathways through Foster Care	Gillian Scholfield: BAAF, 2002
If You Don't Stick With Me Who Will? -	Henrietta Bond, BAAF
Fostering Now: Messages for Foster Carers	Steve Flood, Department for Education and Skills Free leaflet available to download from: www.dfes.gov.uk/choice projects
Fostering: What it is and what it means	Shaila Shah, BAAF 2003

▪ **Useful addresses and contact details**

 <p>(British Association for Adoption and Fostering)</p> <p>200 Union Street London SE1 OLX</p> <p>Tel: 0207 593 2000 www.baaf.org.uk</p>	  <p>204 Stockport Road Altrincham WA15 7UA.</p> <p>Freephone: 0800 783 4086 www.fostering.org.uk</p>
<p>Every Child Matters Change For Children</p> <p>Website: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/fostercare/</p> <p>E-Mail: everychildmatters.mailbox@dfes.gsi.gov.uk</p>	<p>LAGFAPN (Lesbian and Gay Foster and Adoptive Parents Network) c/o Stonewall Parenting Group, Stonewall 46 – 48 Grosvenor Gardens London SW1W 0EB Tel: 020 7881 9440 E-mail: lagfapn@hotmail.com</p>
<p>www.foster-net.co.uk</p> <p>Nicola Yoemans Northcliffe Electronic Publishing East Point Cardinal Square 10 Nottingham Road Derby DE1 3QT E-mail: nyeomans@nep.co.uk</p>	 <p>87 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8HA</p> <p>020 7620 6400</p> <p>Info@fostering.net www.fostering.net</p>

Your Notes:



PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER