



London Borough
of Hounslow

Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Refugee Crisis – Every Child Matters

Introduction

We are currently living in a climate where local governments are facing great challenges in responding to the current refugee crisis. For Hounslow's Fostering Services one of the key challenges is to find specialist foster carers for looked after children who have travelled on their own through many countries experiencing trauma before arriving into the UK, seeking asylum.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) have experienced and travelled along another path compared to those children who are already in care. For example, some of the children in care would be fostered because of a family illness, family breakdown and problems at home, or a situation where their welfare is not met or at risk of harm. Many of the children in care will have experienced neglect, physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

UASC have had to flee from their homelands where they have faced civil unrest, separation from their loved ones and loss. These children have been forced to leave their homeland by their friends and family who have desperately been wanting their children to seek shelter, stability and be protected. The children's journey to a new country is scary as they have had to leave their homes, their parents and siblings. They have had to leave a familiar place called home, a place where they knew their culture, their language and their social networks. When UASC enter the UK without their parents or a guardian they will then be taken into care of the Local Authority in the hope of finding placements with approved Foster Carers who can offer them stability and the support they need to adapt to their new home. Many of the UASC who are looked after by Hounslow are from

- Afghanistan
- Albania
- Eritrea
- Iraq
- Iran
- Vietnam.

What is Hounslow looking for?

Hounslow are looking for specialist foster carers who are willing to foster asylum seeking children and young people. To foster an asylum-seeking child means caring

for a child or children who, cannot live with their own family and offering them care, support and a secure home. Fostering involves meeting the day-to-day needs of children. It can be for just a few days, a few months or sometimes until they are ready to live independently. By offering your time and your care you can give children the time, space and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

In general foster carers come from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds. What they share is an interest in giving children in care the opportunity to grow and change and to build a secure future for themselves. Foster carers are one of the many professionals involved in the lives of looked after children, who work together in the best interest of the child.

Foster carers caring for UASC will need patience, compassion, and an understanding of the child's culture with the ability to nourish that culture. Foster carers will also need to support children or a young person through their immigration process and help them integrate into life in the UK, or possibly to prepare for their return if it is safe to do so. This may involve our foster carers accompanying children to the Home Office.

Many unaccompanied children seeking asylum will also have emotional, practical, language and cultural needs that their foster carers must consider. Foster carers will be given access to and will be supported by interpreters if appropriate.

Approved and prospective carers will be provided with enhanced specialist training, to help support children who are seeking asylum.

What support is offered to carers?

- If you join Hounslow's network of approved foster carers, we will work to ensure that you and your foster child are fully supported with the outcome to succeed
- A generous financial package of up to £868.60 per fortnight, per child.
- Access to regular support groups and fun social activities
- Free specialist training for foster carers, as well as ongoing training opportunities
- 24 hour support, 7 days a week, 365 days a year
- Regular visits from your very own dedicated and experienced social worker
- Free Fusion swim and Merlin passes for foster carers and their families

- Membership of the independent charity Fostering Network
- Access to an in house clinical psychologist for advice about any specialists needs for our looked after children
- Access to interpreters and Hounslow's translation services
- Hounslow foster carers will not be expected to pay any council tax for the period of time they have a placement in their care.

Who can foster?

Hounslow foster carers come from a variety of backgrounds. What is important is that you have the time, space and commitment to care and support the child you are looking after.

To become a Hounslow foster carer, we require all applicants to:

- Be over 21 years of age
- Have a spare bedroom which is vacant at all times
- Indefinite leave to remain in the UK
- Be able to speak, read and write English
- Be in good health
- Carers need to have patience and understanding and be willing to work in partnership with the child's social worker to provide a stable and caring environment for a child.

Hounslow foster carers can be:

- From any from any ethnic or religious background
- Single, married or living with a partner
- Heterosexual, lesbian or gay
- Living in rented, owned or council property
- You can be parent or you can be someone who has experience of caring for children.

Fostering can be a challenging task. You will need to be in good health and be able to understand and empathise with the difficulties faced by the children and their families.

Your Journey to becoming an approved foster carer

Becoming a foster carer is not a decision to be taken lightly. We have a duty to make sure that you will be a good match for the looked after children so there is a comprehensive process to go through before you become an approved foster carer.

On average it takes six months to become an approved foster carer for Hounslow.

Pre-stage

Express your interest in fostering

You can register your interest by:

- Completing our online enquiry form by visiting www.hounslow.gov.uk/fostering
- Calling 0800 731 8558
- Attending a fostering information event.

At this stage we will send out an information pack to you by email or post.

Once we receive your expression of interest, we will:

- Go through a telephone questionnaire which takes approx. 30 minute
- You will need to have a spare room in order to proceed to this stage.

At this stage we will make a decision whether you are successful to proceed to the next step.

Getting to know each other better, through a home visit

If you are successful, a recruitment social worker from the fostering team will contact you to arrange a date and time to visit you at home. During the home visit, we will give you information about:

- Fostering in more detail and we will look at the space you have available
- The suitability of your home
- Establish your motivation to foster
- The types of children that need to be fostered
- The support you will receive as a foster carer.

If we both decide to continue with the process, you will need to complete a fostering application form and a consent form for statutory checks to be carried out.

Stage 1

Stage 1 starts when we receive your completed application form.

You will also be required to attend a 'Skills to Foster' preparation training provided by the fostering team. This course helps you to:

- understand the commitment needed to foster
- learn about the needs of looked-after children
- develop the skills you'll need to foster.

You will get the chance to meet like-minded people who are preparing to foster or are currently fostering children and young people.

A number of key topics are covered in the training including:

- The role of foster carers
- Promoting cultural identity and life chances
- The challenges and rewards of fostering
- Child development
- Safer caring
- Moving children on to their new placement or returning to live with their birth family or relative.

During this stage the following checks are made with your consent:

- Police checks /enhanced DBS
- Medical checks
- Employment checks
- Financial checks
- Professional and personal references.

Once checks and information have been received. You will be informed of the decision to proceed to Stage 2 within 10 working days.

If during Stage 1 we decide not to proceed with your assessment, we will write to you informing you of our decision and the reasons for this.

Stage 2

In stage 2 the assessment process starts. During the assessment, the applicant will;

- Be allocated a recruitment social worker who will visit you between 6-8 times to complete a comprehensive assessment form
- A health and safety and equipment assessment is carried out
- For families who live in private rented accommodation, an agreement in writing from the landlord is required
- A start-up grant is available to applicants to purchase essential furniture/equipment to meet the foster child's needs
- Applicants will be given some written work to complete between visits to add to the assessment.
- During the assessment a Form F assessment will be compiled.

Meeting the fostering panel and approval

Towards the end of the journey you will be required to attend a fostering panel. This is made of a group of professionals who have experience of working with children, or may have been fostered themselves. We will invite you to meet the fostering panel, who will make a fostering recommendation based on:

- The information in the Form F assessment report
- Meeting you in person.

The final decision about your suitability to foster is made by a Agency Decision Maker at Hounslow Council.

Once you're a foster carer, we will match you with the right child

Once approved, your fostering journey will begin. You will receive ongoing training and support to help you promote positive outcomes for the children in your care, enabling them to achieve their full potential.

By choosing to become a foster carer you can make a huge difference in a child's life - and yours.

Contact the Fostering team:

Call us on

0800 731 8558

Send an email to

fostering@hounslow.gov.uk

Or visit our website at

www.hounslow.gov.uk/fostering