



## Information Pack

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**Contact us to chat through any of your questions.....**

Soundly Fostering, Charles Burrell Centre, Staniforth Road, Thetford, IP24, 3LH  
Based Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex and beyond



## What is Fostering?

Fostering is a way of providing a safe, stable and nurturing family home for a child or young person who is unable to live with their birth family. This can be for a variety of reasons and when arrangements are made by the Local Authority for children to be cared for in this way.

Local authorities have a duty to offer help and support to children and their families, enabling them to live safely and happily within their own family. However, if it remains unsafe or there are considerable worries for a child's welfare if they stayed living with their families, the Local Authority must make alternative arrangements, such as foster care. In these instances, the aim is always to provide family placements, that afford the same love, encouragement, and stability any caring family offers a child. Being in foster care can enable children and young people to recover from trauma or other challenges and give them a positive experience of family life. Children and young people under the age of 18, might live as part of a fostering family for a short or a longer time, depending on their individual circumstances.

Foster carers are special individuals. They parent professionally and are there for children as an additional family. They are responsible for the day-to-day care of the children they look after, whilst the overall responsibility is held by their parents and the Local Authority. Foster carers work as part of their fostering Agency and in partnership with the team of professionals involved in making sure each child receives the help and support they need to thrive.

Foster carers will guide and support children in their health appointments, educational needs, as well as seeing and spending time with their birth families and lots of other daily activities.

Being a foster carer can be fun, exhilarating, challenging, hard work and most of all, extremely rewarding. The relationships you forge with children often last a lifetime. This is more than a job, it is a way of living, with the aim of positively changing lives for the better.

## What types of fostering are there?

### Emergency

Some carers can accept unplanned fostering arrangements, in order to provide a place of safety and meet the immediate needs of the child.

### Short term

A child or young person will be with you for a relatively short time, the longest being 2 years. During this time, social workers and courts will determine how best to support the child or young person. These interim arrangements allow time to return a child or young person to their own family, or to agree a suitable long-term fostering arrangement. During the court process, children will be supported to see their families as often as possible. Foster carers understand the uncertainty experienced by children and their families during the assessment and court process and are able to support children to feel safe and cared for during this time.

### Bridging arrangements

Carers will work with children and birth families towards preparing for adoption, long-term fostering, future placements, or, work to plans aimed at supporting children in care into independence.

### Respite fostering

Sometimes carers will provide a break or respite for another foster family or birth families, offering a child or young person a mini holiday or stay. This could be an overnight stay, a weekend, or a week or two.

### Siblings

Whenever possible siblings should live together. As a carer for siblings, you will have enough space, lots of time and understanding of siblings. When it is not possible for siblings to live together, carers will help facilitate siblings seeing each other. Sometimes this is arranged as a day out, or by spending time with other fostering families.

### Disability

Children or young people may come and live with you, who have additional needs or a disability. Appropriate training will be provided to help you understand and meet any additional needs. Usually, the help of specialist professionals is sought to support carers to fulfil this role.

### Long term- matched

It is agreed by the Local Authority that children or young people are able to live with their fostering family for the longer term. In the event they cannot return to their birth family, they may stay with you until they're 18 or older. The Agency will continue to support you to meet the long-term needs of each child in a way that allows you to be part of their family and them to be settled and safe with you, while keeping connections with their own family.

### Teenagers and preparation for independence

Performing the role of a parent, foster carers are there for teenagers, whilst preparing for and helping young people make the transition to independence and adulthood.

### Parent and Child

In this situation, foster carers offer support and guidance to help develop parenting skills, as you will be offering a child and their birth parent/s a home. These arrangements usually last around 12 weeks, whilst a parenting assessment is completed by the Local Authority. You will be trained to contribute skilled observations towards Parenting Assessments, which may help to keep families together.



## How will children come to live with Soundly Fostering carers?

Local Authority's across the country approach us when they require a fostering family for a child. They provide us with as many details of the circumstances, surrounding a child or young person, as they can. In turn, we will tell them a little about you, in order to find a good match between your skills and the child or young person's needs.

As part of our referrals process, we always consider your family and whether the child coming to live with you would fit with your developing abilities, alongside the support we can offer you.

Every child who comes to live with our families, has different circumstances which have shaped their experiences. They come from a diverse range of backgrounds and have varied characters and developmental needs. Sometimes social workers will only know recent details and that the child needs a place of safety, rather than all of the things that might have occurred in their lives.

Often it will take time for the trauma or events that children have experienced, prior to living with you, to be known. Once they are living with you, you and your family will be key to learning about and supporting the child.

Consequently, when Local Authorities approach us, we will discuss the circumstances as far as they are known directly with you. Together, we will consider the likely needs of the child, so that you can make an informed decision about your capacity to care for them as part of your family. Meetings are then held and all of the arrangements are put in place. Children will only come to live with you with your full agreement and prior consultation.

When planning and making arrangements, the Local Authority will usually try and give us an idea as to whether a short-term or long-term home might be needed. However, often this will only become clear over time. Once you are a child or young person's foster carer, your views and input will become an important part of any plans made for them.

As an Agency, Soundly Fostering provides homes for children and young people of all ages up to 18 years. This includes individuals and sibling groups.

## Who are Soundly Fostering?

Soundly Fostering is an Independent Fostering Agency, established by Joy O'Brien-Miller and Katharina (Kat) Carter in 2021.

Joy and Kat have created a family-focused Agency, with a commitment to offering a bespoke and carefully tailored service, working therapeutically, valuing and knowing our families and staff individually.

Kat and Joy started to develop our ethos for the Agency during the early months of the pandemic, when we, like many other people, reassessed our personal and working values. It quickly became clear, that we both wanted to continue supporting children and families, whilst working ethically, in an environment which values people for who they are. Since then, we have been driven by our wish to create an Agency, which is personal and equally supportive and nurturing for children, families and staff.

We know that we would like carers working with us to feel understood and to be well supported. When thinking about what this means, we agree that sound practice entails being committed to wellbeing across the Agency, honouring our ethos of open communication and therapeutic collaboration, whilst actively safeguarding the children in our care. We believe that when carers and staff feel valued and part of a team, they can provide better care for children and young people.

We would like all children and young people living with our families, to fully be part of the fostering family and our Agency. We will work hard to make sure they can experience respectful and loving relationships, are listened to and able to join in with making decisions about their life.

Soundly Fostering is committed to being there for children and young people. Giving them opportunities to experience life in their fostering home in a way that accepts and allows them to develop at their own pace and that encourages their aspirations and identity to strengthen family connections.

We aim to work as a team with our families and Local Authorities, to soundly provide stable, nurturing homes for children and young people, for as long as they need them.

Kat and Joy firmly believe that by remaining small, family friendly, ethical and focused on you, we can achieve great outcomes for children.

Soundly Fostering is based in Thetford and aims to work with hubs of carers, across Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex and beyond.

### **Joy O'Brien-Miller – Responsible Individual and Service Manager**

Joy has worked with children for throughout her social work career, either in a residential setting, child protection or fostering. While in the residential sector, she completed her Diploma in Social Work and a Diploma in Therapeutic Child Care. She was working with children who had experienced significant trauma and presented with significant issues around their emotional wellbeing and behavioral responses. She has worked in the independent fostering sector since 2007. Joy gained her vast experience of fostering in various roles, including that of senior supervising social worker and most recently prior to setting up Soundly Fostering, Joy was the registered manager for a small fostering Agency.

As a child, her parents were also foster parents, so she grew up in a fostering household, which has afforded her good insight into the challenges of being part of a fostering household.

Joy intends to work with the Soundly Fostering team to ensure that children placed with us are safe, happy and well cared for, embracing therapeutic models to support children and assist in their healing. With the overall objective being to create an agency which is inclusive, supportive, and nurturing for all of those who are part of the Soundly Fostering journey.

### **Katharina Carter – Registered Manager.**

Kat started her working life, in a family setting with children and adults living with disabilities and different needs, later developing her interest in therapeutic work as a physical therapist, followed by roles in older residential settings as activities coordinator and in children's nurseries, as an early year's practitioner. Through her work, Kat became aware of the importance of safeguarding in all settings, as well as getting to know and value people for their unique qualities, facilitating and supporting self-efficacy and supporting family connections for children and families across their life course.

Over the last 10 years, Kat has worked with children and families, both in Local Authority and in the private sector. As a social worker, she has focused on the relational and therapeutic work of supporting children, their families and the professional teams involved in corporate parenting.

Kat has held social work roles in child protection, children in care, leaving care and fostering teams. Most recently, she worked as a senior supervising social worker in a small independent fostering Agency. She has a solid understanding of the work fostering families commit to, the importance of respectful teamwork and open communication between the Agency, fostering staff, Local Authority, and children in care.

Kat intends to offer a management style of respectful coproduction between staff and families. She is committed to providing a dedicated and bespoke fostering service.



## How will you support me?

Joy and Kat agree that understanding and knowing every individual and family in the organisation personally, is an important part of creating a positive work and home environment, which recognises and celebrates everyone's abilities.

Children and young people referred to the Agency may have experienced many rejections and Soundly Fostering attempts to minimise this happening again. Foster carers joining Soundly Fostering, will be supported to develop their resilience and build sound relationships with children, enabling them to offer nurturing and loving homes. It is for these reasons that we recognise the value of good, high quality, relevant and responsive support. We will ensure that there is always someone who knows you, at the end of the phone, or ready to come and visit if needed. In this way, we would like you to know that we are by your side and there for you.

We will tailor our support to you, your family and to the children who come and live with you and will always check in as to what you need and would like from us in order to be fully supported.

As a foster carer you are part of the professional team around the child and therefore will received a professional's allowance which should cover all the expenses incurred in caring for a child plus a reward element for your hard work and commitment.

### You will receive –

- A dedicated Supervising Social Worker
- At least Monthly Supervision
- A generous allowance
- 14 nights paid respite
- 24/7 support
- Excellent training opportunities
- Support groups
- Peer mentoring
- Family days out
- Therapeutic support
- Additional support as needed
- Clinical supervision as required
- Counselling service's if required
- Open door management policy
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- YOU WILL BE PART OF A FAMILY-FOCUSED TEAM, WHO HAVE YOUR BACK AND ARE WILLING TO SUPPORT YOU FULLY, BOTH IN TIMES OF CHALLENGE AND TIMES OF ACHIEVEMENT

## Who can foster with us and what do I need to do?



Applications to foster will be considered regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, race, disability, religion and culture or employment status, from the age of 21 upwards.

If you are committed to children's wellbeing and you would like to actively do something which will make a difference by welcoming children and young people into your family, we would love to hear from you.

Our aim is to recruit individuals and couples who share our ethos and values of working soundly as a team. People who are patient and kind, playful and curious, slow to anger and quick to forgive. You will need to have a spare bedroom, suitable for a foster child and, be emotionally available and the time to devote to them.

It doesn't matter if you have wanted to foster for a long time, or if it is a new idea and all part of reevaluating your feeling of purpose or working life, either way, we would be happy to talk it through and help you discover whether fostering could be right for you at this time.

We will arrange a time, without any obligation on your part, to discuss your options.

### Other questions you might have

**Do I need to be a parent to foster?** No, you don't need to be a parent but it is helpful if you already have experience of caring for children.

**Do I have to have a partner to foster?** No, you can be single, married or have a partner (as long as your status has not recently changed).

**Does it matter if I am working?** No, as long as you can evidence that either you or your partner will have the time to devote to a foster child.

**Can I claim benefits while I am fostering?** Yes, more information about benefits can be found at [www.fostertalk.org](http://www.fostertalk.org).

**Do I have to own my own house?** No, you can be in a rented property as long as your tenancy is secure and your landlord is in agreement.

**Are you looking for foster carers with particular cultural backgrounds or beliefs?** No, you can apply to foster whatever your cultural background and religious beliefs. We will ask you to be anti-discriminatory in your views towards others.

**Does it matter if I am in a same sex relationship?** No, we welcome applicants from same sex couples as well as heterosexual couples.

**Can I foster if I already have children?** Yes, your children will be part of the fostering household, their views will be heard and they will be fully considered and supported.

**Is there an age restriction to fostering?** You can be considered from the age of 21 and can continue fostering past retirement age, as long as your health is good.

**Do I need any formal qualifications?** No, you don't need any formal qualifications.

### What do I need to do to apply?

All agencies and Local Authorities follow a process for becoming a foster carer, which involves an assessment and various suitability checks.

The assessment process for those who are new to fostering, usually takes between 3 and 6 months from the time of the application to foster being accepted by Soundly Fostering.

Soundly Fostering has created a bespoke family fostering assessment. The completion of this will involve us meeting with you virtually and in your home and speaking about your motivation to foster, your past and your experiences as an adult, as well as using some reflective learning and case studies to increase your knowledge.

During the assessment you will be invited to attend our foster carer preparation training, which will further equip you with knowledge about fostering. Feedback from the trainer of the course is usually included in your assessment.

We firmly believe in getting to know and understand each other and will treat all initial conversations as the beginning of a possible working relationship, which will be based on honesty, support and respect.

In order to foster with us, the first step is to have a full conversation and make a decision as to whether you and the Agency might be a good fit.

We would then arrange to come and see you, meet your family, look at your home and talk more about fostering and the requirements. This is called an initial visit and will inform decisions as to whether you would like to apply and whether we would welcome your formal application.

The application form will ask your consent for us to make medical and statutory checks. Once your application and consent for checks is completed, received and agreed, your assessment can begin.

You can withdraw your application to foster at any time, if you feel it is not right for you. Similarly, we will always be open and transparent with you and will tell you if there are reasons why we cannot proceed with an application or assessment.

All potential foster carers will have to agree to the following checks and references:

- A Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS check) for every adult living in your household (previously known as a police check or CRB).
- A Local Authority Check. If you have previously been approved as a child minder, foster carer or a prospective adopter, a reference will be sought from the Agency you were registered with and the records they hold about you will be checked.
- Where you have previously lived abroad, a Protecting Children and Uniting Families across Borders Check will be required.
- If your birth children are still at school, an Education Check will be requested.
- A minimum of 3 Personal References are required.
- An Employment Reference is required.
- A reference from previous partner/s where appropriate.
- A health medical by your GP.

Your information received back from your checks and references will be strictly confidential and we have a clear policy on how long we hold the information. You can request to see any information we are holding.

The main part of your assessment and report is completed by an experienced, qualified and registered social worker (known as the assessing social worker). For the report to be completed properly, your assessing social worker will need to interview you, your partner, your children, other members of your household/support network and your referees. You will be seen individually and together with your family several times to enable the assessing social worker to gain a good insight into each of you individually and how you are as a family. They may also contact your adult birth children who no longer live in the family home.

Once completed, the report will give a picture of you as a family and will cover your current understanding of caring for children, your values, beliefs and attitudes towards disability and equal opportunities, education, health, identity, spending time with birth families and ideas on how you might resolve conflict. It will hope to elucidate your skills, competence and potential, relevant to your capacity to care effectively for a child or young person placed with you.

You will be given a copy of your completed assessment report to check through and add your comments. You will be invited to attend the fostering panel, where your report will

be presented for recommendation of your becoming a foster carer with Soundly Fostering.

Please do not worry. The panel members are all aware that this is the beginning of your fostering journey and that as a foster carer, you will always be fully supported by your Agency. Your report will highlight your strengths and will be comprehensive enough for panel members to make a recommendation. The panel meeting will not ask you any unexpected questions. Rather, it will be an opportunity for panel members to meet you and put a face to the paperwork and perhaps ask you how you feel about becoming a foster carer, or to tell them a little about how the process has felt. Panel will make their recommendation and our Agency decision maker will contact you within 2 working days to confirm your fostering approval status.



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Based Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex and Beyond

Email: [info@soundlyfostering.co.uk](mailto:info@soundlyfostering.co.uk)

Tel: 01342 818793

If you are considering changing your Fostering Agency, or moving from the Local Authority you are with, then we would love to talk to you. You might be thinking about this for several reasons. We understand that this is a big decision, we are happy to talk through your options and assist you in making an informed decision.

As a self-employed foster carer, you have the right to change agencies and work with whoever you feel is the best fit for you. This right is enshrined within the Fostering Network's, Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England (2014), which can be found on their website and is the protocol used by all agencies when carers make the decision to change.

If you are looking to transfer and don't currently have children in placement, then the process is extremely straight forward. If you do have children currently placed with you, a Protocol Meeting will be arranged early in the process, to discuss the needs of the children in your care and what services Soundly Fostering needs to continue to deliver

Don't worry. Children already placed into your care are placed with you the carer, not the Agency you are coming from, and should move with you. You can be assured that throughout the transfer process, we will ensure any children you currently have in placement are not disrupted or distressed by the transfer to us

Soundly Fostering has a very competitive allowance scheme, and in many cases, you will be financially better off moving on to our allowances and benefits.

If this is a concern for you, feel free to have a confidential conversation with one of our team to ascertain what you will be paid before you decide to transfer.

We believe that if you have been willing to devote your time to caring for young people in your home, then we should ensure that you receive the very best support from us. This starts from day one, with us working as quickly as possible to transfer you to our Agency, so you can continue to do the job you love.

Once you have decided that we are the right Agency for you, we aim to complete the process within 2-4 months

[Here is some guidance about what to expect...](#)

1. Speak to, or contact us, in confidence. We will then tell you all about us and you decide if you want to proceed. It is always your decision.
2. If you decide a move is right for you, you will need to tell your current Agency that you are thinking about moving. Once we know you have done that, we will then make contact with them.
3. Next will be the 'protocol transfer' meeting, this will include yourselves, Soundly Fostering, your current Agency and any placing Local Authorities. Here we will agree the terms of the transfer.
4. You will then be contacted by us and we will get your assessment started and agree a panel date.
5. Once your assessment and checks are complete, we will present you to panel and they will make their recommendation. The Agency decision maker will make their decision the same day as panel whenever possible.

6. We will then confirm your transfer is complete and inform the appropriate people.

Do not worry, we will be here to walk you through the process and will be available to discuss any questions or concerns you may have. You will be supported and made fully welcome straight away.



**Tel: 01842 818793**

**[info@soundlyfostering.co.uk](mailto:info@soundlyfostering.co.uk)**