

Seasonal Plea For More To Consider Becoming Foster Carers

National shortage of 10,000 foster carers and situation will get worse

In the run up to Christmas, there is usually a sharp decline in the number of people applying to become foster carers, as attention focuses on present buying, party planning and other provisions for the festive holiday. Yet the same Christmas period coincides with an upturn in demand for foster parents, when a rise in family breakdowns creates a need for more children to be taken into care.



This seasonal crisis is made worse by an estimated shortage of at least 10,000 foster carers in the UK. What's more, a recent report suggests that the overall shortage of foster carers is going to get worse as ageing carers choose to retire, unless the recruitment programme is stepped up sharply.

So concerned foster agency, Perpetual Fostering, is making a seasonal plea for people to remember the nation's tens of thousands of looked-after children and consider becoming a foster carer.

Accounting for around three-quarters of all placements, fostering is about caring for children, many of whom have been through traumatic experiences, in your own home and providing a stable, secure and loving family environment. According to the latest government statistics, over 51,000 children and young people live with 43,000 foster families nationwide, whilst a Fostering Network study* estimates that the average age of UK foster carers is 53 years old. With a large proportion of these carers expected to cease fostering over the next 10 to 15 years, it is crucial that more people of all ages come forward to foster, especially as the age for looked-after young people leaving care has now been raised from 16 to 18.

According to the same study, many suitable candidates are not applying because they do not appreciate that a wide range of people can foster, such as the fact that one in five carers is single, and do not understand the financial remuneration available for fostering. It is also felt that many count themselves out, by basing decisions on inaccurate information and do not take the opportunity to find out more.

Perpetual says you can become a foster carer whatever your age, whatever your marital status, your religion and whether or not you own your own home, providing you have a stable tenancy and can offer a spare room. People with a police record for violence or offences against children are understandably disqualified, although minor criminal convictions need not be a barrier. Perpetual pays a generous tax-free weekly allowance to cover the daily cost of looking after a child, so you needn't worry about having enough money to be a foster carer.

“It can be a very rewarding career and, once people have taken the plunge, many of our foster carers continue for many years and derive great satisfaction from making a difference to young people’s lives,” says Perpetual Fostering’s Clare Sutton. “Don’t let misapprehensions about fostering put you off finding out more. Christmas is a time for thinking about others and reaching out a helping hand, so please think about the tens of thousands of children who do not have a loving home, at this family-centred time of year.

Prospective carers should apply to Perpetual Fostering, 31 Chorley New Road, Bolton BL1 4QR, tel 01204 364 666, email info@perpetualfostering.co.uk

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* *The Age Of Foster Care, Helen Clarke, May 2009*