

Information on...

becoming a carer



West Lothian
Council



E-mail: fostercare@westlothian.gov.uk
www.wlcreources.org.uk

Thank you for expressing an interest in becoming a carer with West Lothian Council. This booklet describes the different types of care which we are seeking individuals or families for, and also tells you about the application process.

Resource Team Social Workers are happy to offer fuller information either on the telephone, by e-mail, or visiting you at home. The Duty Social Worker is always available during office hours Monday to Friday.

Our contact details are:

Tel: 01506 775959

E-mail: fostercare@westlothian.gov.uk

Address:

Children and Families Resource Team

Lomond House, Beveridge Square

Livingston, EH54 6QF

Website: www.wlcreources.org.uk

Caring for children is both challenging and rewarding, and carers work in partnership with Social Workers, other professionals and the child's family.

Here are some of the key elements of the support West Lothian Council offers carers:

- Preparation before a child is placed
- Support from your own Social Worker for you and your family
- Ongoing training on a variety of topics
- Planning and back up from the child's Social Worker and out of hours telephone support from Social Care Emergency staff
- Payments for your work as a carer, and also to cover the costs of caring for a child
- Group support and the opportunity to meet up regularly with other carers

TYPES OF CARING

Permanence and Adoption

Permanent care of a child can be arranged on a long term fostering basis, or through adoption.

For the majority of young and pre-school children adoption is the preferred option, as it transfers the parental rights and responsibilities to adoptive parents. The child is no longer in the care of the local authority, although post adoption support is offered. Financial help with practical costs related to a child settling in to a new family is given and, in certain situations, a means tested Adoption Allowance may be paid. In addition, some children may have a complex legal situation in which case the council will give assistance with legal costs.

Long term fostering can be the placement choice for older children who are not able to return to live with their birth family, and where the relationship between the child and the parents is still of importance. Long term fostering offers a child a secure and safe environment to grow up in, while still keeping in touch with family members. Carers are paid a fee in recognition of their work and an allowance for the child is also paid. The local authority continues to be involved and carers and the child would each have a social worker who would maintain regular contact.

West Lothian Council needs families who wish to look after a child of primary school age, and are willing to commit to caring for that child throughout his or her childhood. As a Council, we have no preconceived ideas about what your family should be like. Single people, as well as couples, have successfully provided permanent care for children. You may be a young family (with or without children) or you may be experienced parents whose children have grown up and you find you have some physical and emotional space to offer care to someone else's child.

If you wish to adopt or become a long term foster carer for a child of primary school age West Lothian Council would welcome your interest.

The process of matching a child with a family will involve detailed consideration of the child's needs, and also what the family has to offer the child. Applicants will be invited to attend and contribute to the matching discussion of the Adoption Panel, which considers the placement.

In many instances a child will have behavioural or emotional problems as a result of life events. You will be offered support and training to help you meet the challenges which you will face. Ongoing contact with other permanent carers may also provide invaluable support and we can help arrange this.

If you are interested in adopting a younger child, we would encourage you to contact:

Scottish Adoption Association
161 Constitution Street
Leith
Edinburgh
EH6 7DF
Tel: 0131 553 5060

OR

St Andrews Children's Society
7 John's Place
Leith
Edinburgh
EH6 7EL
Tel: 0131 454 3370

Scottish Adoption Association also offers information on Inter-County Adoption

St Andrews Children's Society also recruits foster carers

Respite Care

West Lothian's respite carers look after children for a short time to give families or carers a break. It may be that a child lives with foster carers or a child may be living at home, but for a variety of reasons they need a break from each other. This can include offering respite to families who have a child with a disability, whether physical or learning difficulties. Respite carers who are interested in offering care to children with disabilities will be offered specific training, for example to develop skills in naso-gastric feeding or administering particular medications, which would be provided during the introductory stages before a placement commences.

Providing regular respite can be a way of extending the range and quality of a child's life experience and may be more suited to people who have limited time to offer, such as weekends.

As a respite carer you will work in partnership with the child, their family and/or their full-time carers. You may also work closely with other people such as teachers, health professionals and Social Workers.

Day Care

Day Carers are registered childminders who care for young children in the age range 0-8 years, and who choose to work with West Lothian Council to support families who are experiencing stress in their lives. Being a parent of young children can be very demanding - other factors, such as health worries, relationship difficulties or lack of support can mean there are times when families cannot cope. Day Carers provide an invaluable service for such families. It is also possible that children who receive Day Care may have experienced neglect or abuse. Day Carers provide a safe and stimulating environment for the child with appropriate play opportunities and consistent limit-setting on behaviour.

Becoming a Day Carer

- You will be required to register as a childminder with the Care Commission (contact number 0131 653 4100). We can offer advice on this approval process.
- Your childminder registration will set a limit on the number of children you can care for (including your own).
- In addition to registering as a childminder you will be assessed, and reviewed, by the Resource Team in the same way as all other carers.

Outreach Services

Befriending

As a Befriender, you will establish a relationship with a child/young person who is currently living at home or with foster carers. This may involve social outings with the young person once or twice a week, during evenings or weekends. As a Befriender, you may become a significant person who can help to guide and assist young people through difficult or troubled times. Befrienders receive payment on a sessional basis, plus reimbursement of expenses.

Daytime Care

This short-term service is provided in your own home or out with your home to older children and young people aged 8-16 years. As a Daytime Carer, you may be asked, from time to time, to provide after-school care or to look after a child who is excluded from school. You will work in partnership with other people such as Social Workers, foster carers and parents. Daytime Carers receive payment on a sessional basis and are reimbursed for any meals provided.

Family Support

As a Family Support Carer, you will work directly with parents and children in their own homes. Your work may include assisting parents with budgeting, household tasks, managing difficult behaviour or establishing routines for children. Your support will be significant in helping to keep families together and you may be called upon to offer extra help at times of crisis. Family Support Carers receive an hourly rate of pay.

Financial Considerations

The money paid to carers varies depending on the registration of the carer and the type of care offered. Carers are self employed and are therefore responsible for their own tax and insurance payments.

Details of the rates paid are issued in April each year to all carers. The current rates payable are attached on a separate sheet.

Foster Care

Foster carers receive a fee for their work, plus an allowance for the cost of caring for a child. The fostering fee is your payment for the job you are doing. In addition to this you will receive a weekly allowance to cover the cost of looking after the child who is living with you. The allowance is broken down into maintenance, clothing and pocket money and will vary dependant on the age of the child. There are two different rates of fees paid to carers.

Level one is paid to newly approved carers with less experience. Level two is a higher rate paid to carers once they have satisfactorily completed six months as carers and have undertaken mandatory training.

Respite Care

Payments to Respite carers are similar to those paid to Foster carers, but are only made for the days a child is in placement. The respite carer may also not be paid clothing or pocket money for the child as this may be provided by the parent or full time carer.

Day Care Payments

Day Care payments are calculated according to the length of time, and also the time of day that a child spends with the Day Carer.

Hours of Day Care are 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Appropriate rates are paid as per contract for each child but no more than three fees can be paid per week.

Adoption Allowances

Means tested adoption allowances may be payable dependent on the circumstances of the adoptive parents and the child to be placed. Settling in payments can also be made.

Full details of the West Lothian Council Adoption Allowance Scheme and payments can be given by Resource Team staff.

All Payments

Payments are made four weekly directly into your bank account and carers will receive a detailed statement of how the payments have been made.

Carers will not usually be paid if they do not have a child in placement. Applicants are therefore strongly advised to consider this when taking on financial commitments.



Application Process For All Carers fostering; respite; day-care; outreach; permanent care and adoption.

There are three stages to the application process.

- 1. Checks**
 - 2. Preparation Group**
 - 3. Home Study Assessment**
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1. Checks

When you decide you want to become a carer we start the process by checking your suitability.

By law the Council is required to carry out checks on people who apply to be carers. We will give you an application form which includes giving your consent to checks. Below, are listed the range of checks we have to carry out: Disclosure Scotland, Health and Local Authority. All checks are reviewed on you and household members on an ongoing basis once you are an approved carer. Checks are also undertaken on anyone else in your household aged sixteen or over, and their consent to these checks is sought separately.

- **Disclosure Scotland Check**

With your consent, we will ask Disclosure Scotland to carry out an Enhanced Disclosure Check. This will inform us of any convictions you have had in Scotland or elsewhere. If you have a criminal conviction, it does not necessarily mean that you may not care for other people's children, but it will mean that we will have to discuss your convictions with you. If you have any convictions, it would be best if you mentioned them to us when you begin the application process.

Enhanced Disclosure checks are also required for anyone else in the household aged sixteen or over.

- **Health Checks**

You will be asked to have a medical examination from your G.P. We will send you the relevant forms and ask you to make an appointment for the medical examination.

If you have been seeing a Health Visitor recently, we will also get in touch with them.

Please let us know at the outset if you have a history of medical problems.

Anyone else in your household aged 16 or over will also be asked to agree to a Medical Records check with their GP.

- **Local Authority Check**

We will check if you have had contact with social work agencies in the past, and whether this is relevant to your application.

This check will also be undertaken in relation to anyone else aged sixteen or over in your household.

- **Employment History and Employer's Reference**

We will talk to you about your employment history since you left school. A written reference from your employer will be sought, if you are working. If you are not working now, we will ask for a reference from a previous employer.

- **Previous Partners and Older and Adult Children**

If you have been married before or were in a long-term relationship, we have to contact your former partner and any adult children of the relationship. We understand that this might feel intrusive. If you're worried about this, please talk to the Social Worker when he or she visits you at home to discuss your application.

- **Personal References**

Six references from people who know you (and your family) will be requested. We will visit at least one of these referees to discuss your application, and all will be contacted to request a written reference.

2. Preparation Group

This is a six session group for people who are interested in becoming carers, and is led by two Resource Team Social Workers and an experienced carer. Attending the group is essential and is an opportunity to learn more about all aspects of caring, and to decide if it is right for you and your family.

The topics covered are:

1. What do Foster Carers do?
 2. Who are the Children and Young People?
 3. Working together
 4. Safer Caring
 5. Understanding Behaviour
 6. Moving on
-

3. Home Study Assessment

It is important to remember that caring for children on behalf of the council is a shared responsibility, and the assessment is a two-way process. The Council has a legal responsibility to be satisfied that you are suitable to offer care, but you too will want to assess, on the basis of the information shared with you, whether or not caring for a child is for you. Please note Council carers are self-employed.

Every applicant has to take part in a Home Study, which means that a Social Worker will visit you at home regularly over a period of several months. This helps us to assess how suitable you and your family are for caring. All members of the household will be involved in this process, and therefore it is essential that you discuss your interest in caring with everyone in the household, as they will all be interviewed.

While the Home Study is going on, you and your Social Worker will look at the relevant skills, knowledge and experiences you have to be a carer. We call these competencies. We assess your competencies by gathering information about you from a wide range of sources (checks and references) and from the evidence you give yourself about your skills. This will help us to establish your suitability.

The competencies we need you to be able to demonstrate are:

- Caring for children
- Providing a safe and caring environment
- Working as part of a team
- Your own personal development.

At the end of the assessment period, we will draw all the evidence together in a report, with supporting documentation, which is presented to a Panel. You will see and contribute to the report. You will be invited to attend part of the Panel, and to take part in the discussion. We would aim to complete the Home study within six months.

The Panel will recommend whether your application to be a carer can be accepted. You will receive a written notice of your approval, which will detail the terms of your approval and ages and number of children that you may care for.

Appeal

In the event that your application is unsuccessful you can ask that your application is reconsidered, and appeal against the decision of the Senior Manager (Children and Families). You can also ask to discuss your appeal with the Senior Manager (Children and Families) in the first instance. Formal appeals in writing should be sent to the **Head of Social Policy at Strathbrock Partnership Centre, 189a West Main Street, Broxburn, EH52 5LH**, and this should outline in detail the reasons and basis of your appeal.

“In line with West Lothian Council policy, you will not be discriminated against by reason of gender, age, employment status, race, religious belief, marital status, health.”



Applying to become a carer

STAGE 1

You're thinking of caring and contact the agency

The agency sends you information about becoming a carer

You have a first discussion with the agency, either on the phone or in person, about your interest in becoming a carer. You have an initial meeting with a Social Worker - then you complete an application form

The agency carries out checks (not personal and employer references at this stage)

STAGE 2

You are invited to attend preparation sessions. Usually, during these sessions, you will meet the Social Worker who will be carrying out your assessment.

Your Social Worker will explain what caring entails, and the skills (competencies) and qualities required. Together, you plan what information you need to collect to show what you can offer. He or she arranges regular appointments to meet you.

With the Social Worker, you review what information you have collected, discuss how the assessment is going and what information is still needed.

Personal and employer references are taken up by the agency.

STAGE 3

The Social Worker writes a report outlining your skills, training needs and areas of vulnerability. You contribute to the report. S/he recommends the number and age of children you could care for.

You see the report. If you disagree with it, you can make your own comments in writing.

The report is presented to the adoption or fostering panel. You are expected to attend.

The panel either approve or do not approve you to be a carer.

If you are approved, you receive more information and training opportunities.

A child/young person will be placed with you.

Your approval is reviewed annually, or when there is any significant change in your circumstances.

If you are not approved, discuss the reasons with the Social Worker. Sometimes it may be possible to re-apply in the future. You can appeal against the decision, and your Social Worker will ensure that you are given information on the appeal procedures.

Things to Consider

- **Your age**

Normally, we accept applications from people between the ages of 21 and 60.

- **Marital status**

We accept applications from couples who are married or living together, and from single people. In adoption cases, only married couples can apply to adopt jointly. If you are an unmarried couple, only one of you can apply to adopt. The law in relation to applications from unmarried and same gender couples is changing, and we would welcome enquiries.

- **Availability**

If you want to be a full-time foster carer, we usually expect at least one carer to be at home for the child full-time.

If you are applying as a couple, it is essential that both of you attend the training course and are both involved in the Home Study.

- **House condition**

We expect households to be comfortable, reasonably clean and provide a safe environment for children. We undertake a Health and Safety Check of the home annually.

- **Smoking**

There is now persuasive evidence that passive smoking can damage the health of children. We do not place children under the age of 2 with carers who smoke. We expect carers to refrain from smoking in communal areas that are used by children.

- **Dangerous Pets**

Dangerous or potentially dangerous animals are not kept as pets. A risk assessment will take place of any potential carer where there is one or more dogs included in the household.

- **Alcohol**

If you drink alcohol, we need to know that you drink moderately and responsibly.

- **Anti-discrimination**

It is important that carers show an awareness of the need to avoid discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

- **Holidays**

Full time foster carers can negotiate up to fourteen days time out in advance annually, for each child they are approved for. This is time when you do not need to be available for placement but will continue to receive your fee.

- **Insurance**

All foster carers must have adequate house, buildings and contents insurance and comprehensive insurance for their car. As a carer you are therefore expected to ensure that appropriate insurance cover is in place.

- **Tax and Benefits**

Carers are classed as self employed by the Inland Revenue and are therefore responsible for their own tax payments. Only the fee element of your income would be considered in any calculations, not the child's allowance.

- **Travel and Expenses**

Costs are met for journeys which would not be considered to be part of normal family activities. This may be reimbursement of bus or train travel for approved journeys or a set mileage rate for car journeys. Expenses which may be considered extraordinary, but necessary to promote a child's welfare, may also be considered.

- **Equipment**

West Lothian Council will provide you with the essential equipment you might need for the child you look after. This may include bedroom furniture, bedding and baby equipment for example.

WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL
 Social Policy • Note of Interest in caring: Basic Details
 PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE

Applicant 1

Applicant 2

Name(s):

Name(s):

D.O.B

D.O.B

Address:

Address:

Telephone No:

Telephone No:

Household Members:

D.O.B

Relationship

Current Employment 1:

Current Employment 2:

Hours of work:

Hours of work:

Particular area/s of interest please tick:

Fostering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respite	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day Care	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outreach	<input type="checkbox"/>
Permanent Care	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adoption	<input type="checkbox"/>

Particular area/s of interest please tick:

Fostering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respite	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day Care	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outreach	<input type="checkbox"/>
Permanent Care	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adoption	<input type="checkbox"/>

Any relevant experience:

Any relevant experience:

Proposed sleeping arrangements if applicable:

Pets:

(Council Policy excludes applications from owners of certain breeds of dogs as defined by the Dangerous Dogs Act)

Anyone who smokes in the household?

When available for a visit?

(In the case of an enquiry from a couple, both should ensure they are available).

PLEASE CUT HERE

Signed: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____



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www.wlcreources.org.uk