

Fostering children with disabilities

Worcestershire County Council looks after many children, some of whom have disabilities. They may have learning or physical disabilities, a combination of these, or a complex medical condition. Some may have life limiting conditions.

The main thing to be aware of is that these children are children first, but with additional needs. As such they need the same life chances and experiences as any other child, with the additional requirement of extra care and attention.

Why do disabled children need foster placements?

- Parents unable to care for the child – this could be due to family circumstances such as ill health of parents or siblings, lack of facilities within the family home.
- Sometimes, the parents need time to grieve for the child they did not have and to come to terms with their child's disability or special needs. In order for them to have a bit of breathing space and the opportunity to get to know the child and understand their needs, short-term foster carers are needed.
- Parents unwilling to care for the child – sometimes a parent is unable to come to terms with the child's disability and despite being given support, they make the very difficult decision to have their child fostered with a view to the child being found a permanent home.
- Child Protection – some disabled children who require foster placements will have experienced neglect or abuse.



"We do it because you can't change the world but you can sometimes make a difference to individuals".

helping you, help them.

What does a foster carer need to be able to care for a disabled child?

As stated earlier, children with disabilities are children first, but with additional needs. As such, the foster carer needs the same attributes to care for a disabled child as with any other child. However, a few additional considerations may be needed.

- **Space** – Due to the nature of the child's disability, they may need extra equipment or facilities. Children with mobility difficulties may not be able to use stairs and would therefore require a downstairs bedroom and bathroom. This is of course dependant on the age of the child. Additional equipment such as specialist chairs, wheelchairs, standing frames, nappies or pads etc may be needed, which the child may require within the foster home.

- **Time** – In order for the child to reach their full potential, there may be a number of health or education staff who are working with them. It is expected that the foster carer will work closely with these professionals, who will also be able to offer valuable advice and support.

- **Patience** – Due to the nature of many of the children's difficulties, they may need to be shown how to do something, over and over again. Seeing a child achieve something, however tiny, after many months of trying is very rewarding.

- **Organisation** – When caring for a disabled child, foster carers need to be organised as many children cannot be rushed and certain tasks need to be carried out at specific times.

In addition to the above, the foster carer needs to help the child develop a positive self-image, whilst challenging negative attitudes from others.

What support can a foster carer expect?

- **Information** – If a child has ongoing physical or medical needs, these will be explained to the foster carer before the placement is made and training given wherever necessary.

- **Respite care** – Depending on the complexities of the child's disability, respite care may be available in one of our short breaks units, Acorns Hospice (if the child has life limiting or life threatening condition) or with a trained carer from Barnardo's Short Breaks Scheme who manage the service on behalf of Worcestershire County Council.

- **Social Worker support** – as in any other aspect of fostering, support is provided from the child's social worker as well as from the fostering social worker. Other professionals are on hand to offer support such as health and education professionals.

Caring for a child with a disability or complex health needs is not always easy and in fact can be very challenging at times. However, it is also very rewarding.

If you feel that you have what it takes to foster a disabled child then contact us to find out more.



helping you, help them.