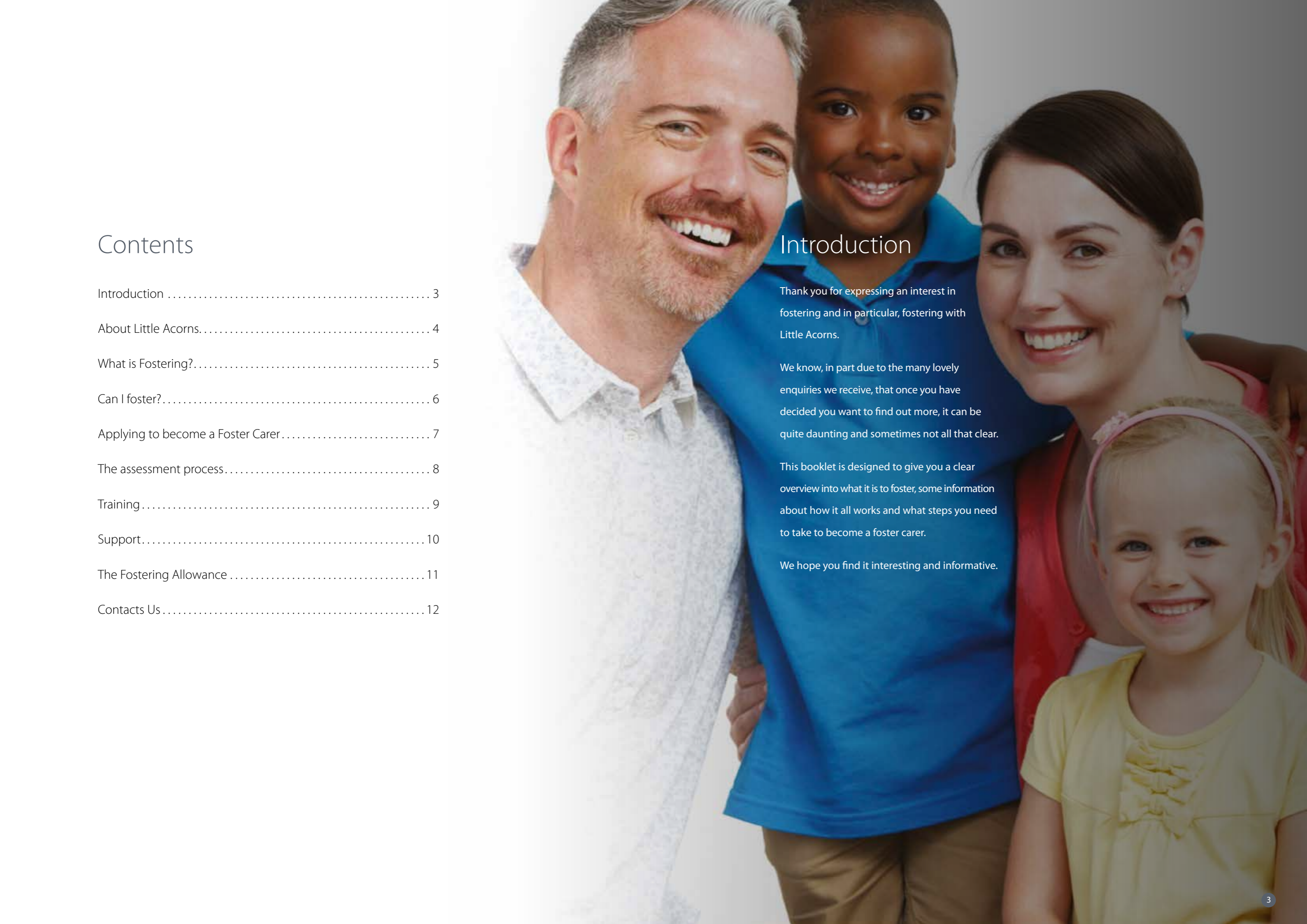


A Guide to Becoming a Foster Carer at Little Acorns Fostering

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Introduction

Thank you for expressing an interest in fostering and in particular, fostering with Little Acorns.

We know, in part due to the many lovely enquiries we receive, that once you have decided you want to find out more, it can be quite daunting and sometimes not all that clear.

This booklet is designed to give you a clear overview into what it is to foster, some information about how it all works and what steps you need to take to become a foster carer.

We hope you find it interesting and informative.



About Little Acorns

Little Acorns Fostering was officially registered with Ofsted on 6th February 2013 and achieved an "Outstanding" rating in August 2017.

Everyone at Little Acorns dedicates their combined knowledge and skills to the recruitment, training and support of foster carers and through this, achieve long term, stable placements for children in care.

We are a family run business with many years experience in Social Work, Residential Care, Judicial and Fostering Services.

We strive to offer best in class services to children who enter the care system and those fostering families who are committed to nurturing and caring for some of our most disadvantaged children.

What is fostering?

Foster care is when a child or young person is cared for by a person or people who are not members of their own birth family. In most cases the foster child lives with you full time, but the length of their stay depends on their individual needs and every case is different.

Foster care is not like adoption, it is not a permanent arrangement and you will be paid an allowance to look after the child.

When a child is placed with you, you will form part of the team around the child, working with social workers and other professionals to make sure the child gets the care they need. You may also have contact with the birth parents and families of the child to support their ongoing relationship and help them return home.

There are a wide range of foster care placements ranging from Short Term to Long Term, Parent and Child and Disability.

Children come into care at all ages up to 18 and in some cases remain in "staying put" placements beyond.

"The best advice I have, as one foster child to another, is that you never give up. Never think that you are worthless."

Jane Aged 10



"Like a mighty oak, we want our children and young people to be strong in their words and deeds, to be able to withstand life's storms, grow and reach their potential and become people that others can lean on and trust"

Can I foster?

Almost anyone can apply to foster:

- You can be a parent already, or have no children of your own
- You can be single, married or have a partner
- You can be claiming benefits or in work
- You can own your house or rent (as long as it's stable)
- You can apply to foster whatever your cultural background and religious beliefs
- Your sexuality won't prevent you from fostering
- You can continue fostering past retirement age, as long as your health is good
- You don't need any formal qualifications
- **You DO need a spare bedroom**

A criminal conviction under the Children Act 1989 will automatically preclude you however other lesser crimes may not. It is important that you disclose any convictions at the outset of your assessment.

Anything that comes to light that wasn't disclosed is likely to halt your assessment immediately.



Applying to Become a Foster Carer?

So you've taken that first step and found us. Where do you go from here?

Once you have contacted us, a member of our team will have an informal chat with you about yourself, your home, family, environment and expectations. From there, you have a chance to think on what you've learned and decide whether you want to go forward to the next stage.

Assuming you do, an Assessing Social Worker will visit you in your home to talk in more depth about your background and provide you with a lot more insight into what it's like to be a foster parent.

From here we begin what is called a Form F Assessment. More about this in the next section.

During this time you will attend our "Skills to Foster" course. The Skills to Foster is a pre-approval training programme that focuses on the practical day-to-day skills required of foster carers.

Upon completion of the Form F Assessment, an Independent Fostering Panel will review the assessment and approve you or make recommendations for approval.

Once you are approved, we will then let the local authorities know all about you and your approval criteria and work with them to place a child or young person with you.





The Assessment Process

This is the longest part of the process which we aim to complete in 3 months.

Little Acorns will allocate a fully qualified independent social worker to carry out the assessment. Our social worker will visit you at least 6 times during this process.

Everyone living in the fostering household will be included in the assessment, including your own children.

We will carry out a DBS check and a local authority check, as well as a medical examination by your doctor. Additionally we will seek a variety of references including employers and previous partners.

All expenses relating to the assessment will all be covered financially by Little Acorns.



Training

During the Form F assessment and before you can be approved as a foster carer, you'll need to attend the Skills to Foster training programme, which is compulsory for all applicants. The stage at which you're asked to attend this training may vary, for example it might be before or after the start of the Form F assessment. The training usually runs over two to three days and covers all you need to know before you start to foster.

Once you are an approved Foster Carer, you will be expected to attend regular training sessions run by Little Acorns that cover subjects such as Child Protection, Working with Children Who have Been Abused and Managing Difficult Behaviour... to name but a few.

Training is all part of the ongoing career for a Foster Carer.



Support

Little Acorns values the work foster carers do and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people. The very best support for the families who foster is vitally important to a successful placement.

Little Acorns offers the following support to all our foster carers;

- Supervision and support from a dedicated, qualified and suitably experienced LAFL Supervising Social Worker
- Support line 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, 365 days of the year
- Frequent visits and regular telephone contact from the Supervising Social Worker
- Paid Respite
- Dedicated Foster Carer Support Group
- Regular focus group meetings
- Family Support workers to work with children and young people and children who foster
- A level of financial support that values the skills of foster carer(s)

The Fostering Allowance

Being a foster carer is no longer seen as a voluntary service. Carers need to be sufficiently funded to ensure the young person in care gets all the opportunities they would otherwise.

The fostering allowance enables foster carers to care for children and young people on a full-time basis.

New foster carers generally start at a basic weekly fostering allowance of £360 per week per placement. Upon completion of the Training and Development Standards (TDS), the basic allowance rises to £380 per week. Depending on the needs of the child, the allowance can be increased up to 50% of the basic rate. The allowance covers household costs, food, clothes, travel, school dinners and any other things required to look after a foster child.

Foster carers are largely protected from paying tax on fostering allowances. The tax rules change from time to time but at the moment, households receive a fixed £10,000 basic allowance and then an additional tax allowance of £200 per week per child for under 11's and £250 for 11 and over.

It is important to note that Foster Carers are classified as self-employed and are responsible for paying their own tax. We can recommend specialist accountants to assist you.



Little Acorns prides itself on it's market leading support and whilst we strive to ensure you are well equipped for the fostering task, we are always there for you if you need us.



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Contact Us


If you would like to find out more about Fostering with Little Acorns you can call us on 01440 732010 for a friendly informal chat. Alternatively, email us at: enquiries@littleacornsfostering.co.uk

Little Acorns Fostering
Rook Tree Barn
Withersfield Road
Great Wratting
Haverhill
Suffolk CB9 7HD

01440 732010
enquiries@littleacornsfostering.co.uk
www.littleacornsfostering.co.uk



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