

What is contract care like?



We asked contract carer families and young people to tell us.

One of our contract carers says: *“We have two youngsters who have blossomed so much in the last 12 months that no matter what potentially difficult placements we may have in the future it has given us the lasting confidence to know that we can make a difference.”*

Derbyshire's contract foster care scheme aims to provide family-based long-term foster care for Derbyshire young people aged 11 to 18 years.

Our young people have complex needs, requiring a higher level of understanding, support and guidance. Young people can remain in placement after their 18th birthday, if appropriate, on a "staying put" basis. We have about 40 contract carers across Derbyshire from all walks of life – but we need more.

Being a contract carer

The young people cared for by contract carers are all unique and have diverse strengths and needs. By welcoming a young person into your home you would play a very large part in providing a secure base, promoting education, encouraging friendships, nurturing positive values and developing their confidence and abilities in social scenarios. You will inspire a young person to develop their talents and interests, setting them on the road to a better future.

Offering the one-to-one attention, developing a relationship and seeing the progress a young person makes with you is both enjoyable and rewarding.

Ongoing support and supervision is provided by our team of experienced social workers to assist you to develop a more intensive package of care for vulnerable young people who can often be at a crisis point in their life. You will be approved in the same way as other foster carers and are assessed to a high standard.

Why contract care is needed

The pressures of family life can be a challenge for us all. It can be particularly intense for young people and more so for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. They may have experienced family or placement breakdown, or been remanded into local authority care by the courts, and can be socially isolated. This can mean your role as a contract carer is essential in providing a stable and caring home environment, which can allow these young people to flourish and achieve their potential.

You could help young people start to rebuild their lives and develop trusting relationships through daily life in a caring foster home. You will play a very important role in their successful development and often care for young people who could otherwise be placed in less positive care, often at some distance from Derbyshire.



How does contract care work?

It is an opportunity for you to offer planned support to young person aged 11-18, by working as part of a team delivering an intensive package of care, support and guidance alongside social workers and social care professionals. Due to the very specific needs of young people under the umbrella of contract care we would require that one carer remains at home and has no other existing employment or commitments which are likely to create a conflict of interest, or impinge on their ability to respond on a round-the-clock basis. We require you not to have any children in your family under 16 years old living at home. In the case of existing foster carers who switch to contract care, we require you also to have no other children in placement at the time of the variation panel.

You will attend all meetings held in respect of young people and work alongside their school and other staff. You will be an advocate for the young person. Of course, some young people also have on-going contact and support from their family as well. You would be supported throughout by your personal social worker and the entire contract care team.

In most cases young people who have had difficult life experiences thrive and develop best by building a sustained and supportive relationship with you wherever possible, rather than them having to live in other types of care, such as a residential home or somewhere miles away from family, friends and school. It is this relationship which allows you to make a difference to a young person's life.

What is contract care like?

Some views from the young people in contract foster care:

'They are fair, honest and they treat me like their own son'

'They are kind and generous and caring and fun'

'I am so thankful for the support with maths and college and family life'

'I am very happy with my foster carers and I feel really settled'

'Always there if I need to talk'

'I am always given a choice about what I would like to do'

'They have time for me and have treated me like an adult. They have taught me ways of life and if they hadn't, I would struggle now'

'They sort out my schooling because I've got problems'

'She gives me a good amount of freedom. She is very easy to talk to and also give me choices of what I want to do and she helps me in how to go about things. She helps me to try and achieve my goals for my later life'



'They treat me like their son. We always do exciting activities. I am always given a choice in what I would like to do'

'All I can say is thank you because they spent a lot of time teaching me to manage money, how to do my own shopping and without out that I would be trying to teach myself now'

'They are great company to be around. We joke about and they make me laugh. They are really understanding and always there for me whenever I need them'.

The contract carer's view

'What would you say to anyone thinking about making the first step to becoming a carer?'

Talk to your family to make sure you have their support. Be realistic in your expectations.

Don't go into foster caring thinking that you can just replicate the parenting style you adopted with your own kids with young people in care. There is no initial bond or perhaps even trust with a young person when they first arrive in your home, so you cannot make assumptions that what worked with your kids will work with an often troubled and traumatised child.

Each young person is unique and your skills as a carer will be your ability to adapt your approach to caring that helps to settle, nurture and hopefully develop the young person in your care. Be prepared to develop your skills as a carer. I've learned so much in the last few years because I kept an open mind.

'Why did you decide to become a contract carer?'

Having retired early, we felt we had the time, energy, patience and life skills that we thought could be useful in helping disadvantaged young people. We liked the potential continuity of working with one child rather than the possible short-term placements that you can get in mainstream fostering.

'What are the best bits?'

Building a positive relationship with a vulnerable and often troubled young person. Seeing the changes in them once they believe they are in a safe and secure home – even if the changes are only subtle. Sometimes you are rewarded in a big way when you witness the youngster's potential being reached as a result of the support you give them, and the support we get as carers.



Going to bed every night and that feeling of satisfaction knowing you have a vulnerable young person safe and asleep in your home (not always the case however!)

Another good bit is the satisfaction of knowing that you are developing as a carer. The training is key to that.

What are the worst bits?

The small stuff sometimes. Hygiene issues. Poor table manners, not liking the same food as you. General untidiness! Verbal abuse! That's no different with your own kids sometimes. Some of the behaviour is just the fact that they are teenagers, and once you realise that, it is easier to cope with.

Can you think of any really positive highlights?

We once looked after a 17 year old mum-to-be. I was at the birth, and working with her after the baby was born was a wonderful experience. You never know if it will be a happy outcome in those circumstances but at least we were able to ensure that after 12 months of having the baby in our home, she turned into a happy, thriving, well-socialised infant with no attachment problems.

With another youngster, we had a placement breakdown, but even something positive came out of that. We have a fabulous relationship with that young person now and she is very much part of our lives. While she could not live with a family, she certainly wants and needs the support we can now give her now that she is post-18 and lives on her own. She even sent me a text the other day saying "sorry, I know I was a nightmare, love you. Don't move house as I always need to know where you are"!



The birth child's view

Katie is 16 years old and is part of a contract foster care family:

'It is unusual having someone else living in your home at first, but at the same time it is good because it gives another chance to a young person who has had a difficult life so far. It is like having another brother, although they are a different age from what you are used to. The young person living with us can be friendlier at times! I feel the good points of being in a foster family are that you can have similar interests, they may be a similar age and I enjoy talking to the young person and you can try to make a difference. The bad points are that the young person can get away with more things than me and they eat all my crisps!

When a young person moves in, the first day is like my brother moving back in, they are normally quiet but I try to make conversation with them and make a joke. I always ask if they want to come out with me if I am going out, so they feel welcome and part of the family. The first placement we had, I slept well on the first night he moved in!

The first young person living with us told me he was being bullied and had been beaten up. I talked to him about this and said I would tell Mum and Dad as they would be able to help. I wanted to support him and was very protective over him! I enjoy helping others, people think young people in care are different and they are not! They are just like you and me. I have never felt like I am sharing my Mum and Dad, I have been taught to share things and realise they can help another young person.

There are day-to-day changes which have to be made and sometimes more things to think about, for example not forgetting my towel when I go into the bathroom, but is quite easy when you get used to it! I can't argue as much, but this is good thing, as it sets a good example. My mum and dad can't argue as much as well! We had a young person move on from our family, it was not as upsetting as I thought it would be. I still miss him, but realise it is a good thing he is back with his family.

The young people don't come into my room much at all and they always ask to borrow rather than take my belongings. I have a lock on the door which was put on after the assessment, but I never use it. I always feel comfortable and we respect each other's rooms. Sometimes I do get out of the house, when there are meetings being held, as this gives the young person privacy and also when times are difficult I will stay in my room or go out with friends.

The assessment is a long process, but I did find out more about myself and I felt involved in the process. I thought I would not be able to have as much time with my friends during the assessment, however this is not the case and my friends can still come round. There is a lot of support and you do feel part of the DCC fostering family. I feel I have learnt a lot from being in foster family, it is what I thought it would be like and I knew what I was letting myself in for. It has given me better opportunities and I meet new people. I enjoy it, I get new experiences and a gained a new understanding of life.'



What do I need to offer?

There is no typical carer. We positively welcome applicants from all walks of life. In this way, we are better able to match and meet individual young people's needs. We do not discriminate on grounds of disability, age, gender, sexuality, race or religion.

You will be at least 21 years of age. We welcome contract carers from all backgrounds and ethnicities and you can be single, co-habiting, married, in a civil partnership or a same sex relationship.

You will have previous experience of working directly with or caring for young people especially those with varied additional needs. You will have patience, time and commitment which will help the young person progress and support their individual circumstances.

You are able to dedicate your full time care and skills to the young person. You have suitable accommodation with a spare bedroom.

You do not have children under the age of 16 already living in your home (although we consider those with older post-16 teenagers at home) and the primary carer should not have any other employment.

You have access to transport. This can be public transport - car ownership is not a prerequisite.

You are willing to take part in ongoing training and development. For example, you would undertake a training and development standards booklet within the first year of your approval.

You can offer mutual support to other contract carers and can offer short-break care while the carer takes a break. Your approval can be for one intermediate and one short-term/ short-break placement. Of course, as it is mutual you would receive the same support from other contract carers.



Why choose contract foster care with Derbyshire County Council?

You are valued and in safe hands

Our dedicated and established contract care team has been successfully working with contract carers for 15 years to enable some of the most vulnerable young people in the county to live in a supportive and loving home environment and turn around their lives.

We do not make a profit from contract foster care

You can expect a weekly fee of £468.62 when you have a young person in placement plus the fostering allowances applicable to the young person's age. In addition, you will receive further fostering allowances and an additional half-fee for providing short break care for another young person while their contract carer takes a break. As we are a council we do not make any profit from contract care.

As a contract carer you can expect experienced support and supervision from the contract care team.

For example:

We offer 24 hour support from the contract care team and the out-of-hours support at both evenings and weekends from the out-of-hours team.

We run bi-monthly support groups for our contract carers and reflective practice groups where you will meet and talk with other contract carers.

We offer paid breaks of up to 24 days a year, pro rata at £66.95 a day, while you have a young person in placement.

We believe in the abilities of our contract carers. As such we offer ongoing training, development.



Could you be the one to inspire and make a difference?

If this sounds like an opportunity you would be interested in we can be contacted on **01629 532370**,

Or you can visit www.derbyshire.gov.uk/contractcare.

We would love to hear from you.