

# Becoming a Foster Carer





# Welcome

Thank you for making an enquiry to the fostering service in Hackney. Becoming a foster carer is a huge decision, and one that you have probably been thinking about for a long time. We want to make sure that you have as much information as possible at this early stage so that you can make the decisions that are right for you. We're here to answer all of your questions and make sure you get all the help you need.

This is the first step in a hugely rewarding career in foster care, where you'll get the chance to change the course of young people's lives. Our foster carers ensure that children are supported and kept safe through what is often an extremely difficult time. There are few greater rewards than being able to provide those children who've often missed out on the things that most of us experience with a positive and secure childhood.

Over the next 6-8 months, you'll go through an extensive application and assessment process. This process can be challenging and will look into your suitability to be a foster carer. We need to learn a lot about you to make sure you're a great match for the children we have in our care in Hackney. It also helps us to understand what support you may need once approved as a foster carer.

As a foster carer, you will encounter new situations every day. At Hackney, we're proud of the innovative support and training we offer to our foster carers so that they can provide the best possible care for foster children.

We hope that this pack provides you with information that will help you on your journey to becoming a foster carer. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you want to discuss anything further.

# Why do children come into care?

Children come into foster care because they can't remain with their birth parents. This can be for a variety of reasons, including:

- Parental illness or mental health issues
- Parental drug or alcohol misuse
- Neglect or abuse
- Extreme family conflict
- Parents without support from family or friends who need help in an emergency
- Parents of children with disabilities needing a planned short break from caring for their child

Wherever we can, we try to keep families together. Where this isn't possible we rely on foster carers to provide children with a safe, happy and supportive home so that they can enjoy a stable and secure life.



# What do foster carers do?

As a foster carer, you will provide a loving and caring home for local children who cannot remain with their family. This means that you will look after a child in your own home but that child will usually remain the legal responsibility of either their birth parents or the local authority.

Leaving family can be a traumatic experience for children, which means your support will be pivotal in helping them maintain a healthy and vibrant childhood. Children need stimulation, support and a secure environment to help them understand why they are living away from home. As a Hackney foster carer, you'll have patience, resilience, compassion, empathy and an ability to communicate effectively with children and the professionals supporting you in being a foster carer. You'll support foster children with their education, health and leisure needs and be given support from our Virtual School and Looked-After Children's Health Team to do this.

Children living in Hackney come from a wide range of backgrounds and foster carers should be prepared to support foster children in their cultural and religious beliefs. As part of your assessment we'll discuss both this and the age range of children that you feel would best fit into your family.

As a foster carer you will form professional relationships with social workers, teachers, health professionals, therapeutic services and parents and family members of the child in your care. We work together to ensure that information about our looked-after children is shared, allowing their needs to be met as effectively as possible. As part of your role as a foster carer you will keep written records of your foster placements, allowing us to monitor the kind of support needed by you and the children in your care.

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**Society now sees fostering as an important job: it is a career choice and you are seen as a professional. There are very few jobs that are so rewarding, you are doing something that makes a difference in the world.**

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**Debbie**  
foster carer



## Who can become a foster carer?

Foster carers are people from all types of backgrounds. We look for patience, energy and a desire to work with children and social work professionals to achieve amazing things with the child in your care.

As a foster carer, you should:

- Enjoy spending time with children
- Be caring and considerate
- Respond to difficult situations calmly and thoughtfully
- Be able to talk openly and honestly
- Have a spare room

Foster carers should be physically able to look after the children in their care. If you smoke, this must be outside of the home and you would not be able to look after children under the age of five. We can help and support foster carers who wish to quit smoking.

Foster carers will also be expected to adhere to the council's equal opportunities policy and be willing to support children and young people regardless of their ethnic and religious background, or sexual identity.



# Types of fostering

## **Emergency Foster Care**

Children can be removed from their family in an emergency because of a sudden change in circumstances. Emergency foster carers provide emergency care for children for a period of up to 72 hours until a longer term placement can be found.

## **Respite Foster Care**

Respite foster care is set up to give parents and foster carers a break from the caring responsibilities of their child. This can last up to 14 days and will sometimes occur a few times a year. This can be to provide a break to a foster carer who is currently caring for a child or it can allow a struggling family some time to be assisted with support services so that children can return to a more supported and stable family environment.

## **Short Break Foster Care**

Short break foster care gives families who have a child with a disability a break from caring for their child. This can be a very positive experience for the child as they are able to form new and ongoing relationships with their short breaks carers and be involved in new experiences and activities with their foster family. This care can be varied and includes day care, overnight and weekend care on an agreed basis.

## **Short-Term Foster Care**

Short-term foster carers look after children who have been taken into care at short notice. They stay until their family situation has been resolved, or until more suitable permanent care can be arranged for them. This period can range from a few days to a year or more.

## **Long-Term Foster Care**

Long-term foster care means committing to look after a child for an extended period of time, usually up until they are 18 (or 21 under a Staying Put arrangement). Children in long-term foster care are carefully matched to foster carers to ensure that their transition to foster care is as smooth as possible. Foster carers should be willing to provide the commitment and support to this child until they reach adulthood.

## **Parent and Child Foster Care**

Parent and Child fostering is when a foster carer welcomes a parent and child into their home and supports the parent with the practical and emotional care of their child. In most cases the child is under the age of 1 year old. The parent is supported by the foster carer to develop their parenting skills and ensure that the child is safely cared for. Foster carers will need understanding and knowledge of child development, as well as the ability to create a positive and secure relationship between the parent and child.

## **Specialist Teenage Fostering**

Specialist Teenage Fostering supports young people with challenging behaviours and complex needs. They may be out of school, have little routine in their lives and may feel rejected, unhappy or rebellious. These placements usually last for up to 2 years, during which time you will have access to training and support from a team of specialised professionals. Foster carers will work to achieve positive change that enables the young person to move on to a long term foster placement, return home or live independently.

# Who needs fostering?

## Babies and toddlers

Babies and toddlers usually need short-term homes while they're at their most vulnerable. They may return to their birth family or live with you while they're waiting to be adopted.

## Young children aged 4-12

This is a crucial time in a child's life. They need stability and routine, as well as help settling into school and building friendships.

## Teenagers

Teenagers need stability, as well as clear boundaries and advice. They need the space to learn and make mistakes as they prepare for independent living. You'll play a significant part in their educational achievement, sharing in their success.

## Sibling groups

Where possible, we try to keep brothers and sisters together. We therefore need foster carers who are able to look after siblings. We can offer extensive additional support to help you with this.

## Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities can be harder to place, as they often will need specific care and more attention. Carers with a background of looking after children with similar needs is an advantage, but by no means a necessity.





# How we'll support you as a foster carer

## Regular supervision

At Hackney, we are proud of the support we offer our foster carers. Each foster carer is allocated a dedicated Fostering Social Worker, whom you will meet with regularly providing day-to-day support if you have any queries or issues. This support includes regular support visits (every 4-6 weeks), quarterly supervision as well as a minimum of one unannounced home visit.

There is an out of hours emergency duty team (EDT) line where you can get support with any immediate issues or concerns about the child or young person in your care.

## Training

We provide an extensive array of training for our foster carers, ranging from 'Safeguarding and Understanding Risk' to 'Understanding Attachment' and 'Preparing Young People for Independence'.

As members of the North London Fostering Consortium, our foster carers also have access to training hosted by Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington.

## Fees and allowances

At Hackney, the development of our foster carers is extremely important to us. This is why we have introduced allowance levels that reflect the experience and training our foster carers have. Each foster carer has a personal development plan, agreed with their Fostering Social Worker, which allows you to access the variety of training that we offer. As a newly approved foster carer, you'll usually begin at skills level one, progressing to level two and three once you have the requisite experience and have completed the necessary training.

The allowances we pay at Hackney comprise of a payment that covers the costs of having a child in your care, and a professional fee that increases as you gain more experience and complete more training. We also provide allowances for the cost of taking looked after children away on holiday, birthdays, festive holidays and for the cost of furniture and bedding in advance of a new foster placement.

## The Virtual School for Looked After Children

The Hackney Virtual School provides direct educational support to all of our Looked After Children. It is responsible for ensuring that looked after children, and care leavers, achieve the best possible educational outcomes.

The school consists of a multi-disciplinary team that works with young people, schools, colleges, social workers and foster carers to support young people through school and onto further or higher education, employment or training. They provide specific training for foster carers on educational issues.

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Joining Hackney didn't take much persuading. They offer just what I was looking for; excellent support and the opportunity to go on different courses.

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**Caren**  
foster carer



**Training in Hackney is second to none. We use a social pedagogical approach, that looks at supporting children in a holistic way and recognises foster carers as a key element of support.**



**Chidi**  
Social worker

### **Social pedagogy**

At Hackney we're proud to pioneer the use of social pedagogy for our foster carers and looked-after children.

Social pedagogy is a relatively new discipline in the UK but is used commonly all over Europe. It involves viewing education, care and child development as a whole, and is used in foster care to develop the relationships between our foster carers and looked-after children. Putting foster carers at the heart of the team, this approach supports them in helping children in care build positive relationships that lead to stability, improved child development and long-term well-being. It builds on a variety of disciplines and allows children to open up and form sustainable relationships with their foster carers. It improves conflict resolution and helps to prevent placement breakdown.

Hackney's social pedagogues work regularly with both foster carers and looked-after children. As a foster carer you'll get regular training that helps promote the importance of your role as part of the network of professionals supporting the child in your care. Social pedagogues work with looked-after children to encourage them to take control of their care and educational development. This approach has been extremely well received by Hackney foster carers who have reported being more confident in their practice. Looked-after children are better able to resolve conflicts, more able to reflect on situations and more able to voice their opinions.

### **Our Foster Carer Community**

As a foster carer at Hackney you'll be part of a close foster carer community. As well as the many training and support sessions we offer to our foster carers, you'll also be able to play an active role in the Hackney Foster Carers' Council, Foster Care Forums and in the twice yearly Open Space events we hold for everyone involved in the fostering service.

The Hackney Foster Carers' Council is a committee of foster carers who organise social events, training, trips away and holidays for foster carers and Hackney looked after children. The Foster Carers' Council meets throughout the year and ensures that Hackney's foster carer community are able to meet to catch-up, share advice and have fun!

The Foster Carers' Forum is a quarterly meeting jointly planned with the Hackney Foster Carers' Council. This platform allows foster carers a chance to discuss important topics and for social workers to update foster carers on developments within the fostering service.

Our Open Space events bring together everyone involved in the fostering service; foster carers, social workers, social pedagogues, clinicians, support workers and senior managers, allowing them to collectively make suggestions for the development and improvement of the service.

### **Membership with the Fostering Network**

All Hackney foster carers get complementary membership to the Fostering Network, a charity providing advice, support and information to foster carers and agencies. The Fostering Network runs regular campaigns and training events to help foster carers in their role.

More information can be found at: [www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)

## **Mockingbird**

In partnership with the Fostering Network, Hackney have introduced the Mockingbird model to enhance the peer support among Hackney approved foster carers.

The Mockingbird Programme is based on work developed by foster carers in America and has proven to create better stability on fostering placements; stronger relationships; increased confidence and skills of foster carers, as well as out of hours and peer support.



# The Application Process



Here is an outline of the application and assessment process to becoming a foster carer. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any further information.

## Registration of Interest

Further to making contact with us either via email, online or telephone, a formal registration of interest needs to be completed to commence the fostering assessment process.

This conversation will take between 10 to 20 minutes and will end with a decision of what action to take next: a home visit, no further action or an invitation to our next information session.

## Initial Visit

A social worker will meet you at home to learn more about you and discuss your ability to provide a nurturing environment for foster children.

It is an excellent opportunity for you to ask any questions you have about fostering, and allows us to check that your home meets the needs of children in foster care. We don't expect a luxury home, but a clean, safe and comfortable environment in which a foster child can thrive.

## Statutory Checks

As part of your fostering assessment, you will complete a police Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) check, a medical check, Ofsted and Local authority checks. You'll also be asked to provide personal and work references. A health and safety check will be completed too on your accommodation.





### Skills to Foster

This is the first training course on your journey to becoming a foster carer. It lasts for three days and covers issues and scenarios that you may encounter as a foster carer. Skills to Foster is a great opportunity to meet other people on their foster care journey, as well as to think about and develop strategies that you use when looking after children.

### Form F Assessment

This is the most in-depth part of the application process. An assessing social worker will visit you at home between six and eight times to discuss all aspects of your life: family background and childhood (including education); adult life including employment, finances, previous and current relationships; parenting capacity and skills, caring for and supporting children and young people and meeting their various needs; household composition; support network and your motivation to foster.

An assessment report will be written up with the information gathered through the statutory checks and with information you have provided. This will be presented to the Hackney Fostering Panel. A copy will be shared with you.

### Fostering Panel

You and your assessing social worker will attend a Fostering Panel, made up of independent professionals with experience of foster care, who will have read and discussed the report written during the Form F Assessment.

You and your social worker will answer questions that have arisen from the report. The fostering panel may seem daunting, but it is designed to get a full picture of your potential as a foster carer. The panel will then recommend whether you are approved.

### Approval

Following a positive recommendation at panel you will receive an official letter of approval signed by the Agency Decision Maker.

You will be allocated a fostering social worker and invited to an induction session. Once you are approved you will be encouraged and expected to attend trainings and based on your preferences and recommendations a matching officer will start looking at possible children to be placed with you.

# What is it like to foster?



Joy Harris has been a Hackney foster carer since 2010. In that time she has several children, teenagers, a mother with two babies as well as an unaccompanied minor. She also became a special guardian for one of the children she fostered.



**The reward is to see that they trust you and that they feel safe with you.**



**Joy**  
foster carer

## **How did you feel when you first became a foster carer?**

I was excited. I already knew what my first placement was going to be – Hackney had already found a placement that matched. Within three days I had a placement and it was all new. When you start, you feel a bit isolated but that soon changes once you start meeting your social worker and attend coffee mornings and events. Getting involved in the Foster Carers' Council got me more aware and involved as well. I met more carers and became part of a large group and we all realised that we were going through the same experiences.

Fostering also helps to bring out the child in you. You can do all of the things you wanted to do that you could never do - silly things like jumping from frames, riding your bikes to your wits end, laughing endlessly – because you get to do that with the child. You see the joy on their faces because some of these things they've never actually done themselves – they've never had that happiness or somebody taking them out. So that is really nice – lots of activities and someone to make them really happy.

A little one I had loved to read, and at 8:30 he knew it was reading time. He always asks for another 10 minutes reading and you want to say no but you can't really say no because it's reading! He really loves to read and to be honest when he first came to me, his reading age was delayed and now he's come on leaps and bounds – he's marvellous, he really is great. A brilliant little boy. He lives with me now – I became his special guardian. We spent Friday with his mum – we had a really long day with his mum from 1-7 which he really enjoyed as well so he gets the best of both worlds.

## **What do you find most rewarding about fostering?**

Everyone asks that question – I suppose the rewards in fostering are making a change – that's the great reward – providing security for somebody, seeing a child happy, giving that love that somebody may never had, seeing them receive and embrace it. Making the changes to their lives is the most rewarding because what you put in, you get so much back out.

I always say to carers that the first few months are going to be quite difficult and you've sort of got to go through that difficulty for that change to come. If you don't put that work in, you're going to constantly be going through the same battles all the time. It's a boundary testing stage: one; to see whether you're going to stay with them, whether you're going to tolerate a lot of their stuff or if you're going to give up at the post just like everybody else does and that's the children's greatest test: are you going to give up on me? The reward is to see that they trust you and that they feel safe with you.

### **What aspects do you find most challenging?**

Challenging aspects you may face are contact with a foster child's parents or relatives, or after contact, because the emotions are going to be high or behaviours may change after contact and it's about how you manage that and not take it personally. Hackney offers training – social pedagogy – which, if you don't know a lot, is a good way to actually let you understand people a little bit more. We call it a holistic approach.

I think I've been pretty fortunate in my placements – I say I've been fortunate but maybe it's how I manage it – other people say "I don't know how you do it". And how do I do it? I just persevere, because I like good end results - positive end results.

### **What made you choose Hackney?**

For me it wasn't a choice. I wanted to work for a local authority and I knew it was going to be Hackney. I was already living in the borough and I knew there were children in my local community that needed help. It wasn't about how much they could pay me. I wanted it to fit in with my lifestyle. I had this idea that I was going to look after children – I was tired of a 9 to 5 and fostering fit in with what I wanted to do.

I've got an elderly father who I wanted to spend more time with, so I wanted to foster as a balance. I still wanted to work because I am quite an entrepreneurial kind of person, so I sell clothes online. I used to do a lot of travelling to source the clothes but I've stopped doing it now because as a foster carer you need to be around to go to meetings, schools and other appointments. Over time I've got more involved in fostering and been approved for more children and for Parent and Child fostering and supported lodgings. I now do some facilitating, attend different conferences and have supported the Hackney Foster Carers' Council.

### **How do you think people perceive foster care?**

That's a good question. For people considering fostering, they may perceive it as being able to have a nice little child that can come shopping and that they can take out without understanding that this child may have traumas.

Foster children may have been abused, may have been sexually exploited, neglected, exposed to gangs or drugs, you know, all this sort of stuff that they've experienced. So, let's say you've taken your sunglasses off now and you can actually see what's going on behind the scenes. When you see a child, you see a child. With no experience of a bad life, you're just going to see a child, but once you start to pull the layers away you'll see that there's so much more that you could never even dream of that

could have happened to this child. Fostering is about how you're going to make this a better life for this child that has been exposed to too much.

You go through foster care and you find things that you would never expected to have found. And why would you? Some people have never had those experiences in life. If you've never had it, and you've still got the fairies flying around your head, you're going to think that you've just got a cute little child, but that same cute little child could have been abused. That's the reality of the world we live in, the things that go on in the world we live in, that most of us were fortunate enough to be protected from but they haven't been.

It's a real eye-opener if you've had a protected life. If you come into fostering, come into it to make a change, remember they are children, look at them even as your own child so that you give them the best opportunity in the same way that you'd give your own child.

### **What would you tell new foster carers is worth getting involved in?**

The Foster Carers' Council and the Foster Care Forum definitely. Training, social pedagogy, activities, days out. Skills to foster as well. A lot of the stuff takes time to get involved in. Get involved in buddying. My old social worker used to say 'oh there's a new carer that's come on, can you give them a call?' So I've got a couple of buddies that I do call and they still do that. They still say 'there's a new carer, welcome them on board'.

Make sure you gain lots of experience of the wider social spectrum. For example, we went to the Minister's reception for foster carers and children at St James' Palace. I took my children as well. My little one was going around touching the fireplace saying "cor is this gold?" He was all over the chimney breast. He got to meet Lydia from TOWIE and walked up to the Minister asking him for a picture. The minister said 'Oh, you're looking very smart today'. So it's good for them as well. It's an eye opener. It opens a new world to children, opens new horizons for a child. It gives them better social skills.

## Foster carer job description

Foster carers' roles are extremely varied and encompass the supervision of many aspects of a child's life. Our foster carers are part of a team of professionals who are dedicated to helping the children in our care succeed in life. There are three key documents that outline the role of foster carers: the Hackney Foster Carer Job Description; the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the national Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care.

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**It's nice to be able to look back and see the positive impact that you had on a foster child's life.**

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**Corinne**  
foster carer

At Hackney, we encourage our foster carers in their professional development. Foster carers progress through three levels of experience as they build their skills. As a newly qualified foster carer, you'll begin at level one. The job description below outlines what we expect from our foster carers.

1. To provide a safe, secure, stable and stimulating environment and a flexible response to the varied needs of individual children/young people taking into account their families, background and experience;
2. To ensure the health and safety of children/young people within the home;
3. To help children/young people cope with separation and loss and to come to terms with past life experience;
4. To work with children/young people by providing consistent boundaries to behaviour and by managing that behaviour appropriately and helping the children/young people to change and improve;
5. To help children/young people maintain a positive view of their family as far as possible. To support and facilitate contact;
6. To help children/young people to go to school or college to reach their potential and to support their educational progress by active involvement in their school. To support the development of independent living skills;
7. To help and encourage children/young people to grow in confidence, self-esteem and to develop a positive identity;
8. To provide the opportunity for a child/young person to develop meaningful relationships and the opportunity to enhance and learn new relationship skills;
9. To keep the child/young person's social worker fully informed;
10. To contribute to Child Care Reviews and other meetings about a child or young person;
11. To work within agreed plans for the children/young people and their families. To follow guidance from the Social Worker and other departmental staff and to work closely with all professionals involved;
12. To attend foster carer reviews, support groups, training and to identify one's own training and development needs.



# Eligibility

## **Can I foster if I'm single?**

Yes, single people can foster, as well as those who are married, co-habiting or in a civil partnership.

## **Can I foster if I am gay or lesbian?**

Yes, your sexuality is not a barrier to fostering. We already have individuals and same sex couples who foster very successfully.

## **Can I foster if I work?**

Yes, and we will explore with you, if and how you will manage to combine your work commitments with fostering needs and responsibilities.

## **Can I foster if I don't work?**

Yes, but you will need to consider how your fostering allowance may affect any state allowance or benefits you may already receive.

## **Can I foster with Hackney if I live outside of the Borough of Hackney?**

Yes, although you will need to attend meetings and training in Hackney and, depending on the age of the child in your care, support them in their journey to school. This is something we can discuss further.

## **Can I foster if I have children of my own?**

Yes, fostering can be a great experience for your children and can help to make children coming to live with you feel at home. Your whole family will be included in the assessment.

## **Can I foster if I have never been a parent?**

Yes, we all have experience of living in a family, and we will support you in your caring role.

## **Can I foster if I don't own my home?**

Yes. As long as you have a secure tenancy, it doesn't matter whether you rent privately, through the council, housing association or own your home.

## **Can I foster if I'm past retirement age?**

Yes, we welcome applications from retired candidates who have experience of working with children. As long as you have the energy and are in good health to care for a child, we want to hear from you.

## **Can I foster if I'm overweight?**

Yes, as long as you're healthy enough to look after a child, we want to hear from you.

## **Can I foster if I have a criminal conviction?**

It depends on the conviction. A Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) check will be made on all applicants.

## **Can I foster if I've had previous social services involvement?**

It depends on the reason and extent of the involvement. This is something that will be discussed with an assessing social worker.

## **Can I foster if I don't have a spare bedroom?**

All children over the age of 2 years old are required by law to have their own bedroom and are not able to share with your birth children.

## **Can I foster if I smoke?**

You are able to smoke if you are a foster carer although we have certain restrictions in relation to you being required to smoke outside at all times and you would not be able to care for a child under the age of 5 years.

## Further information

### **National Minimum Standards**

The National Minimum Standards for fostering services are designed to provide a basis for the minimum level of care local authorities and foster carers are obliged to provide for children in care.

More information can be found at: [www.minimumstandards.org](http://www.minimumstandards.org)

### **Annual Review**

The National Minimum Standards state that “a review is to be conducted with each carer at least once a year.” This review must satisfy the fostering service of the continuing capacity of the carer to carry out the fostering task; provide the carer with an opportunity to give feedback; contribute to essential information on the quality and range of service provided by the fostering service and inform recruitment, assessment and training strategies.

### **Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care**

When you first start your new role as a foster carer you’ll be given a Training, Support and Development Standards workbook to complete within your first 12 months as a foster carer. The guide itself gives an interesting snapshot of what you can expect in your first year.

More information can be found at:  
[www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-foster-carers](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-foster-carers)

## Thank you for taking the time to find out more about fostering with Hackney

Fostering is undoubtedly a challenging vocation. However, these challenges are heavily outweighed by the opportunity you’ll have to change the course of a young person’s life.

You’ll provide love and support to children who often haven’t had the chance to experience a vibrant childhood, and in doing so, give them the opportunity to do things that other children take for granted.

We hope you can join us in changing young people’s lives. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.



Call: **0800 0730 418**

Email: **[fostering.recruitment@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:fostering.recruitment@hackney.gov.uk)**

Web: **[www.hackney.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.hackney.gov.uk/fostering)**



