



The hug that says you've  
made a difference

Could you care for a child with disabilities?

[www.essex.gov.uk/specialfamilies](http://www.essex.gov.uk/specialfamilies)

or call 0800 801 530



Essex County Council

**We are looking for people throughout Essex who can provide loving homes for children with disabilities. We need people with a wide range of experience to provide a variety of care including short breaks, fostering and adoption.**

**Whatever your circumstances, if you could support a child with a disability in your home, then we'd like to hear from you.**

## What is short breaks?

Short breaks is a respite and friendship scheme for children with disabilities aged between 0 and 18. Whether they have learning disabilities, autism or a physical disability, all children can benefit from the chance to try new activities and become more independent.

If you have some time to spare, would enjoy building a warm relationship with a child and working with their parents to provide regular short breaks (day care, overnight stays or weekends), then short breaks might be the right choice for you. It allows children to enjoy new activities outside their family circle and become more independent. Short breaks are kept very flexible to suit your individual circumstances and to allow friendships to grow.

## Who can become a short break carer?

Short break carers come from all walks of life. You can be single, with a partner, retired, working or unemployed, with or without children of your own. No specific qualifications are required but some experience or understanding of disabilities is helpful.

Following your approval as a short break carer, you will be carefully matched with a child and the introduction process will begin and will be taken at the child and carer's pace.

## What support is available?

All carers receive specialist training relating to the child and continuous support from a supervising social worker. We aim to offer training at weekends or during evenings to suit carers who work. All our short breaks carers receive an hourly or overnight fee.

## Fee paid short break scheme

We have a short breaks scheme for children and young people who may present with challenging behaviour and/or other disabilities such as autism and complex medical conditions. Carers who join this scheme will be able and willing to provide short breaks for a minimum of 5 nights a week for 48 weeks of

the year. There is a generous fee available for this scheme which reflects the complex needs of the children and young people. This scheme is attractive to those with experience of caring for children with disabilities and carers would receive considerable support to manage any children they are caring for.

## 2 FOSTERING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

### **What is fostering?**

Fostering involves caring for a child in your home. Fostering can be for a few days or months or sometimes longer. In the majority of cases the children will return to their own families, although in a minority of cases children may need fostering until they grow up. Foster carers share responsibility for the child they look after with the local authority and the child's parents.

### **Who can become a foster carer?**

You can foster if you are over 21, you are single, married or living with a partner of either gender. You do not need to have had children of your own but you will need to have some experience of children or young people. For fostering children with disabilities, some understanding of disabilities is helpful.

You will need the time to care for a child before or after school and in the school holidays and to be available to attend training and to meet with social workers. Unless fostering babies under the age of two, you will need sufficient space in your home to provide a bedroom for the child or children you foster.

### **What support is available?**

All of our foster carers are recognised as vital members of the professional team caring for a young person. We will help develop your skills as a foster carer and offer extensive training. We provide a range of support including support group meetings with other carers and a supervising social worker who will visit you regularly at home to support you with caring for a child or young person.

If children need special medication or care routines then specialist training will be provided. As with all foster

carers, you will receive a fostering allowance to cover the cost of looking after the children in your care as well as a fee which varies with experience. If you have time and space in your family to care for a child and would enjoy being part of a team supporting them, then fostering a child with a disability could be for you.

## ADOPTING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES 3

### **What is adoption?**

Adoption is a way of providing a permanent family for a child who cannot be brought up by their birth family. It's a way for you to become the legal parents of a child and for the child to become a permanent member of the adoptive family.

Once an adoption order has been granted it can't be reversed except in extremely rare circumstances. An adopted child loses all legal ties with their birth mother and father and becomes a full member of the new family. A new birth certificate is issued.

### **Who can adopt?**

You can adopt if you are over 21 (there is no upper age limit) and can make the time and space in your life and home for a child. You can be single, married or living with a partner of either gender. We are looking for adopters who can provide a safe, loving home for a disabled child and can provide a lifetime of commitment.

### **What support is available?**

As well as child benefit, most adopters are entitled to adoption pay and leave.

In some circumstances ongoing financial support may be available to assist with the additional costs associated with parenting a disabled child.

## 4 INFORMATION

Essex County Council is committed to providing excellent support during the adoption process and throughout the child's childhood. We will continue to support you during the first few months of becoming an adoptive parent and longer term whenever you need it, whether it is help to strengthen attachments or help to meet the particular medical needs of the child.

### **How can I find out more?**

If you are interested in finding out more about caring for a child with a disability please contact us and we can talk through your options and get you started on the road to helping care for a child.

We hold regular events for both fostering and adoption. They are an ideal place for prospective carers to meet other foster carers or adopters and to ask your basic questions.

You can also telephone our Freephone number on 0800 801 530 or search our website where you will find out lots of information about fostering and adoption.

[www.essex.gov.uk/specialfamilies](http://www.essex.gov.uk/specialfamilies)

*“Short breaks have been absolutely fantastic for us. It’s like a second home for our son Thomas and he loves Mandy and her family. The two nights he spends with Mandy give our other two children a chance to do the things they want to do and myself and my husband a couple of nights’ sleep. **It makes all the difference to all of us.**”*

*Parents benefiting from short breaks.*

*“The **positive impact** on our family has been huge. The little boy we do short breaks for has brought so much to our lives and our children’s lives.”*

*Short break carer*

*“We don’t do anything special other than provide **a normal family life** to some unique and individual children.”*

*Essex foster carer*

*Making the decision to adopt a child was huge, making the decision to adopt a child **with a disability was the right one.**”*

*Essex adopter*



This information is issued by **Essex County Council, Adoption and Fostering.**

You can contact us in the following ways:

By email: **[adoptionandfostering@essex.gov.uk](mailto:adoptionandfostering@essex.gov.uk)**

Visit our website: **[essex.gov.uk/specialfamilies](http://essex.gov.uk/specialfamilies)**

By telephone: **0800 801 530**

By post: **Essex County Council, Adoption and Fostering,  
PO Box 11, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1QH**

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