

Bridge to Belonging

A foster carer's guide

Welcome to Bridge to Belonging - your enhanced support package from Team Fostering for looking after children transitioning from residential care. It's a journey with some unique challenges so we'll be here every step of the way to provide you with the tools you need to enable a child to thrive in their new environment.

What is Bridge to Belonging?

This is a specialist support package designed for carers helping children and young people to return to a family environment after spending time in a residential setting. It provides a planned transition with introductions and helps you build a relationship with the young person.

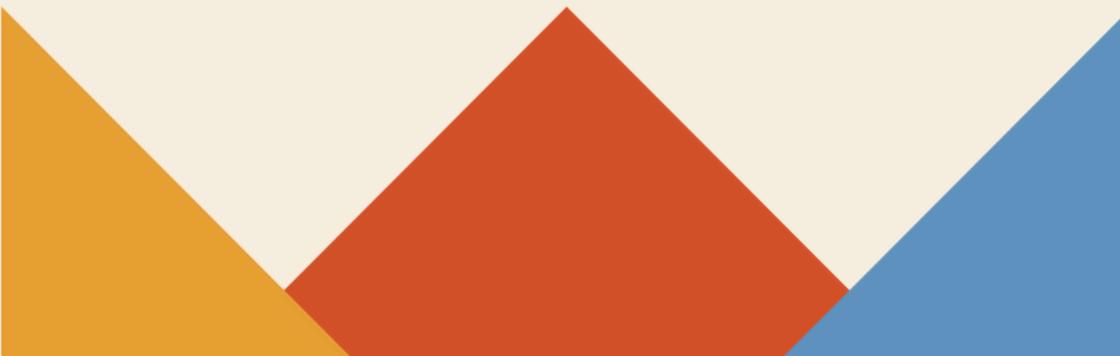
Why did we call it Bridge to Belonging?

One of our young people helped name it. They had moved from residential care and it was the bridge they needed to live with a family.

Why were the young people in residential?

On some occasions young people have had to live in a residential home because of the shortage of foster carers across our region. We are seeing a higher number of children under the aged of 12 in residential homes because of this.

Some young people have struggled in a family and have required a period with specialist support to enable them to move back to a family.



Myth Busters

If you're new to Bridge to Belonging, we know you might have questions about what to expect.

There are lots of myths out there about residential care and the young people who've been in this type of care so we've covered some of these below.

Residential care is only for "troubled" or difficult children.

Children enter residential care for many reasons. A big number of these children are in residential because of the shortage of foster carers and reasons can include family emergencies, abuse, or other difficult circumstances. It is a supportive system, not a punishment, and many children thrive in these environments, especially with proper care and support which means they can move back to a family setting.

Residential care facilities are unpleasant institutions.

Residential care homes are typically much smaller and designed to feel like a nurturing home, not a large institution. They provide a warm, secure, and supportive environment where children and young people live in small groups with trained staff who offer individual attention and emotional support.

Residential care hinders a child's education and future prospects.

It is a priority for children and young people to attend education, this is the same for young people in residential homes.

Young people in residential care have no say in their own lives.

Children and young people are encourage to participate in decisions about their care, goals and living environment. A lot of young people want to live with a family but are scared.



Bridge to Belonging support package

If you'd like to support a child to move from residential care, we'll be with you and the young person right from the initial planning stages, through the transition and the extra level of support will continue for a year after that.

We've broken down the support into four stages.

“

The support has been great from Team Fostering. We have a mentor who comes to see us and H and we know that there's somebody at the end of the phone if we need it.

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Team Fostering carer

Stage 1 – assessing readiness

This initial stage is all about getting the foundations right and ensuring you've got the right support and training in place. Meanwhile we'll ensure we're learning everything we can about the young person and their experience.

We'll:

- Explore your support network to ensure you've got all the emotional and practical support you need
- Provide specific training and development and a six-part programme focused on therapeutic foster care.
- Give you NATP (National Association of Therapeutic Parents) membership for one year

Stage 2 – matching

Matching the right foster carer to the right child is something we take really seriously at Team Fostering, and it's even more essential to get this right for these children.

They'll be heavily involved in the matching process and we'll work really closely with their residential carers to find out what their needs are and how best we – and you as a foster carer – can meet them.

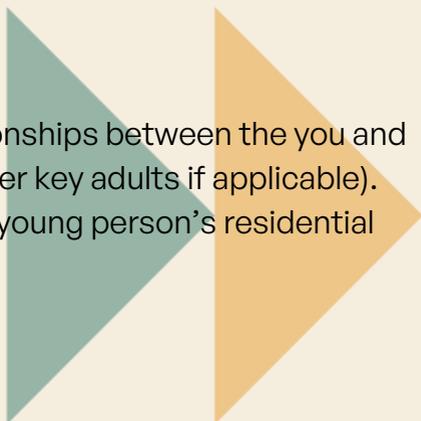
Stage 3 – making the transition

The key to a successful transition between the residential setting and a family home is ensuring a strong relationship between you and the residential carers.

You'll have plenty of opportunities which allow you to build these relationships as well as mentors to bridge the gap between their past and current environment.

We'll :

- Plan activities to build relationships between the you and the residential carers (or other key adults if applicable).
- Organise for you to visit the young person's residential home.



Stage 4 – settling in

In the early weeks we'll focus on providing support which is flexible and tailored to your needs plus maintaining a sense of continuity for the young person – from relationships to educational settings.

Whether you need a quick check in, space to share and offload or more specific, targeted support - we'll be here for you.

We'll provide:

- An intensive level of support from a Fostering Family Support Worker and Supervising Social Worker for the first nine months
- A second network meeting chaired and facilitated by a qualified therapist to review progress
- 21 nights paid short break care

Stage 5 - longer-term support

It doesn't just end there. We're dedicated to using all the tools we have to plan support needs beyond the first year.

