Short breaks in a family setting; enriching the lives of disabled children.

Fostering short breaks for children and young people with disabilities
“Our vision is to be a child friendly city”

• The best city for all children and young people to grow up in. For this reason Leeds City Council is proud to have signed up to the Every Disabled Child Matters Charter to demonstrate our commitment to making sure that we provide effective support to disabled children and their families.

• In Leeds we are proud of our short breaks provision of which fostering short breaks for disabled children is a part of our local offer.

• By joining the council’s network of foster carers for disabled children you will be playing a part in creating a city where all children and young people are valued and supported.

• In a child friendly Leeds, we will all work together for the future of our children and young people.

Councillor Lucinda Yeadon
Chair of the complex needs partnership board

Nigel Richardson
Director of children’s services
Section 1

Complex Needs and Support Care: Fostering short breaks for disabled children

This booklet is for:

- **Parents/guardians** of disabled children; explaining the different ways the service can support you.
- **Potential short break carers** explaining how the service supports families and disabled children and how you can become a carer.
- **Professionals** to help make you aware of the services offered and the ways in which you can access fostering short breaks services to support disabled children and their families.

Complex needs and Support Care is a Leeds City Council service which provides short breaks services in the homes of approved short breaks foster carers supporting disabled children and their families. Our aim is to provide high quality short breaks where:

- children have fun, their needs are met and horizons expanded
- disabled children and their parent/guardians can have an enjoyable break
- the lives of short breaks carers are enriched by spending time looking after disabled children.

*There is a separate guide for children and young people using the service.*
Section 2

About short breaks

Our aim is to provide a service to disabled children and their families where we take the unique needs of the individual family and tailor a match with a family who can meet these.

We aim to make our short breaks happy and stimulating for the child. Carers are carefully matched to children reflecting their skills and interests and cultural factors which may need to be considered. As well as meeting the child’s physical and emotional needs our carers will find out what the child likes and provide enjoyable activities. They spend quality time with the children and young people building relationships. Because we are matching families the service can be tailored to meet the needs of the child.

Short breaks carers offer opportunities for children to:

- have a safe place to build relationships outside of their family and join in activities with another family,
- engage in play and stimulation and have a good time,
- have support with building independence and choice,
- enjoy activities and outings,
- try out new experiences,
- be matched to experienced carers who can meet the child’s additional needs,
- have the continuity of visiting the same short breaks carers over a period of time,
- build supportive relationships between families.

The service offers short breaks to eligible families ranging from day care through overnight stays to regular weekends, weeks or longer periods if needed. Placements are in the homes of assessed and approved foster carer families who have come forward because they are motivated to care for disabled children.

Our carers look after the child or young person in a home from home environment.

Barney is a teenager who has cerebral palsy and is a wheelchair user. He visits his carer Dawn for a week every 8 weeks. They spend time at home and go out and about on trips when he is in placement.

Barney says: “Dawn is like an auntie to me and I enjoy my stays with her. We have a good laugh and get up to all sorts. She is easy to talk to. I know my mum needs the break so it works for everyone.”

Mark is a young person who is autistic. He says of his short breaks carers: “They are kind and caring and help me. When I stay with them I like shopping, bowling and meeting their family. I like playing the drums with Joe.”

Eileen says: “I like it when we stay at home and when we go out. The best things are going to the park, going to McDonalds, baking buns and making things.”

Josh is a lively teenager with a learning disability. He has regular short stays with Emma. He says of Emma “She’s good. I like it when she takes me places like the skateboard park and the cinema”.

A parent’s perspective, Margaret says:

“It is the one time I know I can go out with my husband and forget about any caring responsibilities. We just have an evening out together and it really makes a difference. We know she is safe and happy with Angela.”
Day care

Daycare can be provided for different periods depending on the assessed needs of the child and family. It may be once a month to give the child and family a break or more frequently if required. For school aged children day care is usually arranged at weekends and school holidays. For preschool children with complex care needs day care can be during the week. The times are negotiated between the parent and carer prior to the placement beginning. Here are some examples of flexible use of daycare:

Nasreem is a teenager who has learning disabilities. Sometimes she and her carer Susan practice cooking at Susan’s home. Nasreem likes to go shopping in town and needs support to do this. Susan and Nasreem go to town on the bus to support Nasreem’s independence skills.

Other days Nasreem and Susan plan trips or stay at Susan’s home and enjoy a film or make-up day. In school holidays Nasreem likes to use some of her allocated days as half days so she can spend tea times with Susan having tea and playing a board game with her as she says she gets bored during the holidays and likes to see more of Susan.

Shazad is a 2 ½ year old with complex health needs and disability. He spends one weekday with his carer Teresa. Shazad comes from a large family with lots of children.

Teresa is able to give Shazad one to one time which it is difficult for him to get at home. She helps him with sensory stimulation and when the weather is good she takes him out to get new experiences. Teresa is able to meet all his health needs and offer support and advice to his mother who she has built a good relationship with.

John is a very energetic 9 year old who has autism and ADHD. He comes for Saturday once a fortnight to his carers Bernie and Richard. He is a live-wire, impulsive, and does not always recognise danger. Bernie and Richard plan lots to do in the home as well as taking John to the park and for long walks with the dog.

John’s mum knows that whatever the weather she will have a day to recharge her batteries. She is reassured because John asks when he is going to see with his carers and has lots of fun, and also because she knows that Bernie and Richard have experience in caring for children with impulsive behaviour.
Section 3

About our short breaks carers

Our carers will provide a safe secure and stimulating experience for the children.

Our short breaks carers are vetted, trained and assessed to care for disabled children. Although it is not essential many have previous experience of working with disabled children.

Many of our carers have previously been school escorts, non-teaching assistants, teachers, nurses, carers for disabled people, or had a family member who is disabled.

We carefully match the skills, experience and interests of our carers with the needs and interests of the children using the service. We aim to ensure that the children have fun and the opportunity to access new experiences.

We ensure that the needs of the child are not a barrier to receiving our service. We have carers who provide personal care including feeding, washing, bathing and toileting. If a child needs medication or any nursing procedures our carers will be trained to do this by a health professional who knows the child.

We will make sure that our carers get to know your child as an individual. Our carers also provide a service for children with a variety of communication needs including Makaton, Picture Exchange Communication (PECS) and British Sign Language (BSL). They work closely with parents to gain an understanding of how the child communicates.

Our short breaks carers enjoy looking after the children in their care. To quote Catherine a short breaks carer “He’s like a treasure box and all the treasure keeps pouring out with his achievements. It’s a nice glow to know you’ve helped”
**Section 4**

**Who are the children?**

We look after children and young people with a wide variety of disabilities. Our service is about putting the child first, and seeing the whole child rather than their disability. We will find out about their unique selves to make sure that the child enjoys the time that they spend with the short breaks carer and the child is encouraged to say what they would like to do during their stay. We will ensure that our carers have an understanding of the additional needs of the child and can meet these.

Eligible children are disabled children who have:
- A physical disability
- A Learning disability (moderate to severe)
- A sensory impairment (severe)
- Complex needs; multiple impairments which may include health needs
- Autism
- Or a combination of the above

and
- have eligible needs which have been agreed by the Resource Allocation Panel for Disabled Children (RADAR), see Section 5.

**Children with autism**

Autism is a condition that affects how a person understands, communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how the child or young person makes sense of the world around them.

It is frequently referred to as an autistic spectrum disorder as these traits can range in severity. We have many carers who enjoy working with children on the autistic spectrum and understand their needs. Our carers are offered training in issues affecting children with autism.

**Children with physical impairments**

Children with a physical disability may live in a home which is adapted to help their parent/guardian with moving and handling or to help assist with the child’s independence. This may be hoisting equipment, specialist bed and wheelchair access to the home. We have some short break carers whose homes have been adapted to enable them to care for children with physical impairments. These carers also have adapted vehicles so that they can get out and about with the child.

*Sean has been visiting Jan and Paul for a number of years for a weekend each month. He sees them as a wider part of his family and the two families are now good friends. The carer’s house has been adapted so that Sean has all the facilities he needs to be as independent as possible when he visits. His carers have the facilities to meet his personal care and health needs.

The carers have access to an adapted vehicle and Sean always plans where he would like to go when he visits. Jan and Paul enjoy the visits and look forward to finding out where Sean will take them this weekend. He has such a good time that his brother wants to know why he can’t go as well.*
Some children also have nursing and more complex care needs. We work closely with colleagues in health to ensure that children and families are able to access the right short break for them. We have an agreement with Leeds health services to train our foster carers if children need nursing interventions as part of their ongoing care and a number of our carers are comfortable to administer these interventions.

Ruby stays with Danyela one week in 8. She has complex health and physical needs including complex epilepsy. Ruby’s mum needs support and wants this to be in a family setting. Danyela’s home has the adaptations which Ruby needs. She knows Ruby well and what Ruby likes.

She plays with sensory toys with Ruby which make her smile and is very good at interacting and non-verbal communication. Ruby always turns her head towards Danyela when she enters a room. Danyela takes Ruby out and about and has a network of friends who care for disabled children. She has been trained to meet Ruby’s specific health needs around epilepsy and gastrostomy feeding. Ruby’s mum feels confident about Danyela’s care.
Section 5

How the service works

The Fostering complex needs short breaks service is known as a specialist service and is offered to families where the need for a break cannot be met in universal or targeted service (see Family Hub Website www.thefamilyhubleeds.org to find out more about universal and targeted services).

To access overnight should breaks your child must be allocated a social worker and you can speak to your social worker about the process in more detail.

If your child does not have a social worker but you would like to access day care please speak to the lead professional working with your child and request an Early Help Common Assessment Framework to assess the needs of your family.

If you do not have a lead professional you can request this support through the Integrated Processes Team on 0113 247 6830 or the family hub.
There is no cost to parents/guardians to access complex needs short breaks.

1. **Child’s social worker or lead professional refers application to RADAR**

2. Application is considered and a decision made at RADAR about the number of days your child will be allocated per year.

3. **Child’s social worker or lead professional sends referral to Fostering Complex Needs**

4. The Fostering Complex Needs service will carry out a home visit to meet the child

5. A short breaks carer is identified and an introductory visit is arranged between the short breaks carer and the child’s family.

6. If everyone feels the match is right a Placement Agreement Meeting is held where the child’s needs are discussed and an agreement made on how the short breaks carer can meet those needs.

7. Introductory visits are arranged (usually “tea visits” for a couple of hours) and if these go well, the first overnights (or day care) is organised with you.

8. If these go well the parent/carer will arrange further visits with the short breaks carer within the allocated days approved by RADAR.

9. The support package to the family is reviewed by RADAR every 6 months to look at whether the family’s needs have changed. The support package may be changed to reflect this.
Section 6

Becoming a carer

You must be over the age of 21 (if you are between 21 and 24 you will need to have relevant experience with disabled children) and you will need to have a spare room if you are considering taking a child overnight.

Following your initial enquiry we send you an information pack and will arrange to visit you at home where we can talk to you in more detail about how the short breaks services works. If you decide to proceed you will be invited to attend our preparation sessions which will be over the course of a weekend, or 6 evening sessions. If you are a couple then both are expected to attend.

Carers are not required to have qualifications but most will have some related experience and we would expect all applicants to have a genuine interest in caring for and wanting to enrich the lives of disabled children.

You will also be invited to complete an application form. When we have received this we will undertake some initial checks and references. We will undertake a number of checks including DBS, medical, and character references. A Social Worker on the service will undertake a competency based assessment with the carer before they are considered for approval. This assessment will then be presented to Leeds Fostering Panel.

Your assessment will begin when we have received these references. This will cover your family life, your skills and competencies in caring for children, and your reasons for becoming a short breaks carer.

If you are interested in becoming a Short breaks foster carer in your own home contact us though the fostering web-site (www.foster4leeds.co.uk) or telephone our recruitment team (0113 247 7443).

You can also contact the complex needs fostering service direct at 0113 378 3536. Email: complexneedsfostering@leeds.co.uk

Section 7

Allowances, training and support

There is an expectation that short breaks carers attend a range of mandatory training which is to help in the short break role, these are first aid and safeguarding. Other training is available to meet specific children’s needs such as communicating with disabled children, moving and handling, epilepsy and autism. Carers may also be trained to care for specific children.

Each carer is supported by a fostering complex needs social worker who will meet with you on a regular basis to discuss the children placed with you.

Short breaks foster carer allowances.

We have 3 different allowance levels based on your skills and competencies and experience: Levels 2, 3 and 4 of Leeds Payment for Skills

For details of the allowances please visit the Leeds City Council website: www.leeds.gov.uk/foster4leeds

I look forward to Archie’s visits. It is very satisfying when he beams at me as his escort pushes his chair up the drive. He can’t talk but he can certainly let you know how he is feeling. I know we have a great bond. We’ll have a great time and that his parents will have a rest without worrying if he is OK.
Section 8
Frequently asked questions

How many children can I be matched to?
Your social worker will discuss with you your time commitments and personal circumstances and the number of children matched will be by agreement. We welcome families coming forward for a match to one child as well as busy short breaks carers matched to a number of children.

Do I need any special experience or qualifications?
The most important thing is a love of children and a desire to enrich the lives of disabled children and their families. Most carers on the service do have some prior experience of disabled children being in their working or family lives.

What checks are needed?
As part of the application process we will ask for your consent to take up Disclosure Barring Service and other required checks. If a conviction is disclosed, we will need to discuss this with you. We recognise that people have a variety of life experiences and this may not preclude you from becoming a carer. Certain convictions, such as offences against children and offences of violence, will prevent us proceeding with an application. If you have any questions about this, please contact us. We will also need to check your health and will send your GP a medical questionnaire. If there are any health issues that could affect an ability to be a short breaks foster carer, we will discuss this with you.

How long will it take before I am approved as a carer?
We need time to get to know you and you need to be sure that short breaks are right for you. From start to finish, the whole assessment and preparation process is likely to take between four and six months for short breaks foster carers. At the end of this process, you will be approved by a fostering panel. You are then ready to start fostering.
What is involved in assessment and preparation?

You will be expected to attend the preparation sessions which are over a weekend or for 6 evenings over a 6 week period. Alongside this and following us receiving positive checks, we will arrange to visit you at home do your assessment report. This usually takes about 5 visits. Once complete the report will be presented to the fostering panel for approval.

Do I have to live in Leeds?

We need our carers to live in Leeds as it is Leeds children who we are offering a service to. However if you live just outside the Leeds boundary we would still like to hear from you.

Is this a job?

Foster carers are self employed and generally short breaks carers will not receive an income from fostering although you do receive a pro-rata fee and allowance each time a child comes to stay. We have a small number of Level 4 professional short breaks carers who offer care 48 weeks a year five days out of 7. These carers have a high level of skill and do not have other employment outside of fostering. For other carers the service could not guarantee enough matches with children to substitute for an income.

Do I need any particular type of accommodation?

You will need to have a spare room to take a child overnight. If your home has steps or is more difficult to access we will match you to a child who can manage this. Your home need not be owned by you, you could be renting from the local authority or privately.
Frequently asked questions from parents

Will my child be safe?
All carers are checked and assessed before they are approved to look after children. They have continued support and training. At the Placement Planning Meeting we will look at your child’s specific needs and discuss with you how we are going to safely meet these.

What happens to the allocated days I don’t use?
Days are allocated on an annual basis and cannot be carried over.