

Key Messages

Why do people become foster carers?

The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford published an international literature review in September 2012 looking at reasons why people become foster carers. The report looked at all recent research in this area to see what it told us about this issue and where more research may be needed.

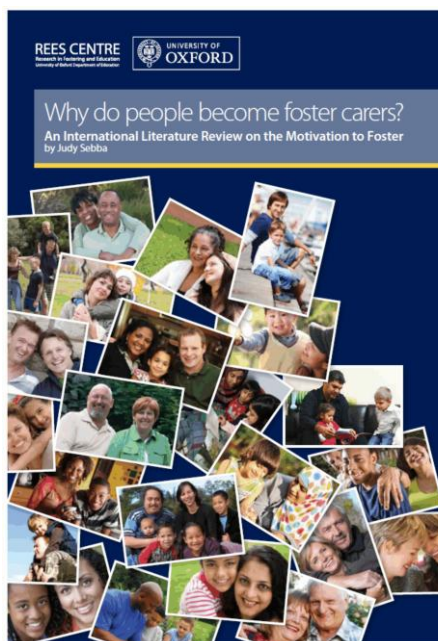
What is the issue?

More foster carers are urgently needed especially for teenagers, sibling groups and children in certain areas of the country. Encouraging people to be involved in fostering could be more effective by understanding the reasons why people become foster carers.

Also, many people who ask for information about fostering do not then apply to become foster carers. It is important to know why not. We can use this information to help increase the number of suitable people who go on to apply.

How can you attract more people to fostering?

- Use existing foster carers in your publicity. They play an important role in attracting new people to fostering.
- Educate the general public about fostering. Foster carers are best at this but factsheets can be used to challenge myths and negative pictures of fostering.
- Find ways to follow up initial enquiries about fostering more quickly and effectively.
- Go back to people who enquire about fostering but then do not apply. Find out why they stop being interested. This could be a suitable role for established foster carers.



Why do people become foster carers? An International Literature Review on the Motivation to Foster by Judy Sebba.

The full report can be read and downloaded for free:
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/>

For further information about the work of the Rees Centre or to request free hard copies of our reports, please contact the team by email to
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What did we do?

The Rees Centre searched for research studies internationally that looked at why people become foster carers. We compared the results of 32 studies from Canada, USA and Australia with 2 UK studies. The main question we asked was:

“Why do people initially consider (non-kinship) fostering and what factors determine whether they progress to application?”

What did we find out?

- Meeting or knowing other foster carers is the main reason why people consider becoming a foster carer. Less often, people become interested through contact with a fostered child or young person.
- Myths held by the general public about fostering are common. Providing information (such as myth-busting factsheets) is helpful. The best way of educating people about foster care is through contact with foster carers.
- Failing to support existing foster carers appropriately may send negative messages to those considering fostering.
- The reasons for finding out more about fostering are often expressed as ‘loving children’, and wanting to make a difference to the lives of children.
- Other motivations include extending the family/providing a sibling for an only child, putting something back into the community, personal experience of being fostered or growing up with fostered children and wanting home-based employment.
- Making money is not a key reason people look into fostering (although detail is not given in the studies about the different income groups of foster carers). Covering costs and replacing income from employment that has ceased (or been exchanged for fostering) are important considerations when deciding to apply to foster.
- When replies to initial inquiries are not quick enough and there is a long wait until approval, foster carers find this demotivating.