

# Making the right decisions for children growing up in long-term foster-care

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The essential role of long-term foster carers in helping to transform the lives of vulnerable children in care is highlighted in a new study published today.

Government data shows that 40% of [children](#) in foster care are in long-term foster care—over 20,000 children at the time of the study in 2019. The [research](#) was led by the Centre for Research on Children and Families (CRCF) at the University of East Anglia (UEA) working with colleagues from the University of Manchester and funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The study investigated whether and how the first regulations and guidance on long-term foster care (Department for Education 2015) have been implemented by local authorities across the country.

The new framework required all local authorities to undertake a full assessment of a child's current and future needs and the foster carers' capacity to meet those needs through to adulthood, and provide a package of support. These processes were already established as good practice in some authorities, but the aim of the guidance was to bring all local authorities up to the same high standard.

In the study, local authorities reported a positive impact of the regulations and guidance in raising the profile of long-term foster care as a legitimate permanence option, and promoting more robust procedures for care planning, matching and support.

As one local authority manager explained: "The regulations and guidance gave a clear route for legitimately accepting long-term foster care as a route to permanence, but making sure that it is not taken lightly."

Most local authority staff considered long-term foster care to be a positive permanence option that could provide a secure family for children who had experienced trauma, separation and loss. However, there were some concerns related to the availability of long-term carers, the stability of placements in adolescence and the potential stigma for children growing up in care.

Prof Gillian Schofield OBE, one of the authors of the new report, said: "The introduction of these regulations and guidance was a welcome move by the government to support long-term foster care as a positive permanence option, with the aim of providing each child with love, security and stability as part of a foster family through to adulthood.

"This study has found that there have been benefits from the introduction of the long-term foster care regulations and guidance, with good examples of local authorities working hard to make the right permanence decision for each child and a range of positive approaches to long-term foster care.

"However, these are [difficult decisions](#) and there was variation in local authority procedure and practice. The study has provided a range of recommendations for good practice in long-term foster care which we hope will be helpful in achieving stable placements and enabling children to fulfil their potential."

Ash Patel, Programme Head, Justice at the Nuffield Foundation, said: "Long-term foster carers have a critical role in improving the outcomes of vulnerable children by offering a stable and safe family environment, while retaining contact with birth families.

"This new study demonstrates how official recognition of long-term foster carers and [guidance](#) for [local authorities](#) has helped to transform the culture around long-term [foster care](#) and improved care planning, assessment, matching and support."

Provided by University of East Anglia

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