Their childhood cannot wait as UK needs 6000 more foster families

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TLC Fostering calls for children with disabilities to be at the heart of the national recruitment drive as it marks 25 years and prepares to expand across England.

Children with disabilities and complex medical needs must be at the heart of the drive to recruit more foster families, a specialist agency is urging as it prepares to expand from Wales across England.

TLC Fostering, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, is calling for more people to consider specialist fostering, including caring for children with life-limiting conditions and those who need palliative or end-of-life care.

The appeal follows the Government's launch on 14 October of England's first national foster-carer recruitment campaign, supporting its ambition to create 10,000 additional fostering places by the end of this Parliament.[1]

The Fostering Network estimates that 6,000 more foster families are needed across the UK in 2026. Around 67,000 children already live with foster families, within a care population of more than 100,000 children living away from home.[2][3]

TLC says meeting that need requires carers with the skills, training and continuing support to care for each individual child.

Anthony Boggis, Head of Disability Services for TLC, said:

"Their childhood cannot wait. A child who needs help to communicate, specialist medical support or care at the end of life deserves the chance to experience the warmth and belonging of family life.

"People may picture fostering as a spare bedroom, a school run and a fresh start. For some children, it also means learning a different way to communicate, managing complex care routines and working closely with health professionals. Love and commitment need to be backed by specialist training and dependable support.

"Our expansion into England is an opportunity to bring 25 years of experience to more children and families. We want people with relevant experience, or the willingness and capacity to develop those skills, to have a conversation with us."

The need for targeted recruitment has been recognised for years. In 2017, the House of Commons Education Committee called for a national campaign that would recruit carers with specific skills, including experience of supporting children with disabilities or special educational needs.[4]

Founded in South Wales in 2001, TLC specialises in fostering for children and young people with disabilities and complex medical needs. Its work includes short-term and long-term care, short breaks and palliative care.[5]

Children enter care through no fault of their own. Many have experienced trauma, loss or disruption. For children who also have disabilities, a carefully matched foster family can provide stability alongside support tailored to their communication, health and daily life.

TLC provides training tailored to individual children and ongoing support for carers. Its planned expansion aims to give more children the opportunity to live in a family where that is the right setting for their needs.[6]

Patricia Jarrett, Managing Director of the CareTech fostering division, said:

"Twenty-five years of TLC is a tribute to the foster carers and staff who have made children feel safe, understood and part of a family.

"Their work is there in everyday moments: a child finding a way to express what they want, enjoying a family outing or feeling reassured by someone who knows them well. Those moments matter

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enormously.

“I am immensely proud of this remarkable team. As we prepare to expand into England, our ambition is to make that specialist care and sense of belonging possible for more children.”

People interested in specialist fostering can contact TLC on 01269 846 371 or visit tlcwales.org.uk.

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