

Could you help care for a disabled child? (Oldham Family Link Scheme) Information for prospective family link carers

This fact sheet can be made available in other languages or formats on request by contacting 0161 770 6666. For further information please see our detailed fact sheet **Information for all**.

What is the Oldham Family Link Scheme?

Oldham Family Link is a scheme that supports disabled children and their families by giving them the opportunity to have a break. It works by linking families with people who can regularly care for a disabled child in their own home overnight and maybe at weekends or occasionally for a full week.

Who benefits from the Oldham Family Link Scheme?

The scheme allows families to have a short break from one another and some time for themselves. Families who have a child with a disability can often feel isolated because so much of their time and effort is taken up caring for their child. They sometimes need a 'breather' to allow them time to themselves, or to devote some time to other members of the family.

The disabled child benefits from meeting people who can give them a range of experiences such as trips to the local park, cinema, visiting friends and relatives or ordinary activities at home which they might not otherwise experience. It also gives the children the opportunity to mix with other people and enjoy relationships outside their immediate family.

What can the Oldham Family Link Scheme do for you?

Becoming a family link carer is one of the most rewarding and satisfying things you can do.

You will:

- make a real difference to the lives of disabled children and their families
- develop friendships, both with the child and their family
- gain valuable experience caring for children
- get an allowance in recognition of expenses and time involved in caring for a child
- have a dedicated family link worker who will provide ongoing training and support

Who can become a family link carer?

We are looking for enthusiastic, affectionate people who have the spare time, energy and commitment to look after a disabled child.

The disabled children who need care range from infants to teenagers. Like all children they are very much individuals, which is why we need family link carers from **all** walks of life – including people who are single, in a relationship, married or divorced, have children already or no children at all, be employed or unemployed, be from any ethnic background and regardless their of sexuality.

You don't need to have had previous experience working with children, but some experience of children would be an advantage. This can be through family and friends e.g. regularly looking after a nephew. The family link team will provide preparation, training and ongoing support.

As long as you are caring, understanding and enjoy children's company we want to hear from you!

Will I get paid?

Being a family link carer is voluntary. However, carers are paid an allowance each time they provide care for a child. This payment is to cover their expenses and does not count as an income and so will not affect tax or benefits.

How do I become a family link carer?

To become a family link carer you will undergo an approval process similar to that undertaken by foster carers. As we are entrusting the care of someone else's child to people outside their family, we do need to get to know prospective carers well and carry out certain checks.

Becoming a family link carer can take about six months, from application to approval. Although the process may seem daunting at first, the family link worker will provide help and support to you along the way.

Step one - contact us

Call 0161 770 6540/6600 or email familylink@oldham.gov.uk. Alternatively, write to: Oldham Family Link Scheme, Oldham Fostering Service, Unit 10 - Whitney Court, Southlink Business Park, Oldham, OL4 1DB.

Step two - home visit

Once we have received your initial enquiry, we will arrange for a family link worker to come and see you at home to discuss the scheme in more detail and leave you an application form.

Step three – application form

Complete the application form and return it to us in the pre-paid envelope.

Step four - checks and training

When we receive your application form we will carry out various checks, including an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check and request medical and personal references. You will also be

asked to attend preparation training, usually over four evening sessions and one day at a weekend. The training will show you how to care for a disabled child and help you find out if being a family link carer is for you.

Step five - assessment

Your family link worker will spend time getting to know you, gathering information about your skills and training needs, and discussing which child you might be able to support. A report is then compiled and presented to members of Oldham's Fostering Panel.

Step six – Oldham Fostering Panel

Members of Oldham's Fostering Panel meet to discuss your application and decide if you should become a family link carer.

Step seven – the 'link'

Once you have been approved as a family link carer, a 'link' with a family can be made. When we 'link' you with a child we consider what sort of child/disabilities suit you, what sort of carer suits the child, your availability and the support time needed by the child and their family.

When a 'link' has been made we will arrange a meeting to introduce you to the child and their family. If everyone is happy you will start by looking after the child for short sessions so you can get to know each other, progressing to the agreed care arrangements when everyone feels ready.

How do I find out more?

Write to:

Oldham Family Link Scheme
Oldham Fostering Service
Unit 10 – Whitney Court
Southlink Business Park
Oldham
OL4 1DB

Telephone: 0161 770 6540/6600

Email: familylink@oldham.gov.uk

Website: www.oldham.gov.uk/familylink

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy and want to complain you can contact the Complaints and Representations Officer. Call 0161 770 1129 or write to Freepost, Complaints and Representations Officer, Oldham Council, PO BOX 4, Civic Centre, Level 8, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1UL. Or you can email cypf.complaints@oldham.gov.uk

You can also contact the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

Write to:

Royal Exchange Buildings
St. Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Telephone: 0300 123 4666

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk
