

PRESS RELEASE

Billericay carers speak up for fostering in Foster Care Fortnight

Billericay foster parents Debbie and Victor Finch, who are both in their sixties, are urging empty nesters of a similar age to make a massive difference to children's lives by fostering.

They are the latest couple to support Essex County Council's drive to find 100 new foster carers. It launched its campaign during Foster Care Fortnight, the annual awareness event run by UK charity the Fostering Network.

Essex County Council is staging several information events where foster carers like Debbie and Victor will be present to speak to anyone who is interested in finding out more information.

The council is focusing on couples and single parents who love children and want to fill their empty nests.

The Finches, who have two grown-up children, have fostered over 100 children over the past 20 years. They foster through the council's Fostering Service, which is seeing the number of children requiring a home growing steadily.

"I didn't think I'd be fostering for this amount of time, but we are as passionate about it now as we were 20 years ago. It took us two years from thinking about fostering to posting a letter to the council, but I wish we had done it earlier," said Debbie, 62.

"We love it. If you are in your 60s please don't think you are too old. It's easier for us to do it now. We have got the time and the patience, and we do it together. Anyone can foster. It's the best thing we've ever done."

Husband Victor, 65, said: "We started fostering when our daughter was 15 and more independent, so we could give more time to the children coming into our care. Looking back on it, we could have started much earlier because it turned out it wasn't a big deal for us in the end."

There are now around 750 children in foster care in Essex and this number has been increasing for the past two years. In addition, the rate of children leaving care has slowed down, bringing into sharp focus the need to recruit more foster carers for children of all ages, siblings and children with disabilities.

Cllr Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, said: "More mature parents are a key focus for us. They come with so much knowledge and we want to ensure people

like them don't rule themselves out because they feel they would be rejected on grounds of age. This is not the case."

Corrie Castleman, Fostering Team Manager at Essex County Council, said: "Older foster parents have a wealth of experience to offer. Don't just think that you are too old. People foster into their seventies and you could, too."

"Vulnerable children desperately need you. Please contact our friendly team to answer any concerns you may have."

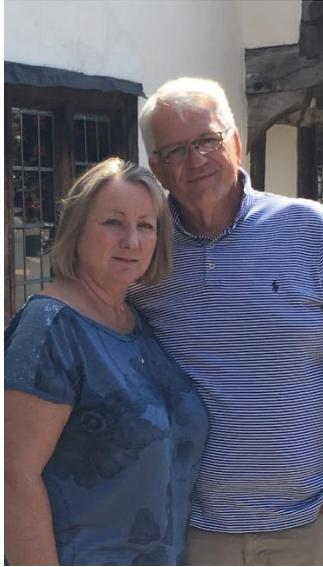
To talk to people like the Finches and find out about some of the children you could help, call 0800 801 530, visit www.essexadoptionandfostering.co.uk/fostering or attend a Drop-In Fostering Information Event in Basildon Holiday Inn, SS14 3DG on 29th June 11am – 1pm and 14th September 11am -1pm.

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Caption: Cllr Louise McKinlay, Cabinet Member for Children and Families was at the launch of Essex County Council's fostering campaign at County Hall in Chelmsford, flanked by experienced foster carers

Photo credit: Paul Starr for Essex County Council



Caption: Billericay foster parents Debbie and Victor Finch

Notes to editors:

- For more information about fostering and to see the range of events taking place across the county visit www.essexadoptionandfostering.co.uk/fostering or call 0800 801 530.
- Over 7,000 new foster families are needed in the next 12 months in the UK to care for a range of children.
- A high proportion of children who come into care in Essex are aged ten and over so there is also a particular need for foster carers who can provide homes for older children, as well as those who can accommodate sibling groups and children with disabilities.