



WHY DO MUSLIM CHILDREN IN CARE NEED MUSLIM FOSTER HOMES?

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This document was created to assist social workers in Local Authority fostering teams to understand the importance of placing Muslim children in Muslim foster homes. Often, but not always, a child or young person's Islamic heritage spanning back almost 1500 years comes to an end simply because professionals here in the UK are unaware of exactly what it means to be a Muslim. In many cases a child will receive a prayer mat and a copy of the Quran, and maybe *Halal* food (although even the definition of this is misunderstood), but from our experience the majority of children or young people placed will not be assisted to understand the complexity of the faith. This in turn often results in future identity crisis and problems with integration and assimilation into the wider Muslim community when coming out of the care system and moving on to independence.

After reading this 3-page document, social workers should have a deeper understanding of why Muslim children within the care system should be placed within Muslim homes, and why this is almost always in the best interest of the child – even if the child has not developed enough understanding of the faith to express themselves or understand the importance of preserving Islamic cultural and religious heritage. We ask that social workers forward this on to other social workers and relevant contacts that they have (especially via email), and always welcome queries in areas where we can help and offer advice and guidance (see contact details above).

Also within this document are details about why Foster Care Link offers the Islamic Fostering Service, and what makes this service different to other providers.

Q. Why is it important to place Muslim children with Muslim families?

A. Islam encompasses many spheres of day-to-day life. Although Muslims vary on their level of practise, almost all adhere to basic rules. This often includes:

Dietary requirements for Halal meat and ingredients – many understand this to be Halal meat from a Muslim butcher, but in fact Muslim families check the ingredients of all products from bread to sweets to ensure that no animal-based ingredients or additives are present. Most Muslim families also require that the meat they purchase has been approved and certified by the Halal Food Authority (HFA) or Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) to ensure that producers have adhered to Islamic rules. The same applies when

¹ A Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) Registered Independent Fostering Agency No 49096
Providers of the Islamic Fostering Service
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they eat at a restaurant or takeaway. Meat is made Halal basically through slaughtering the animal in a specific way and through offering a prayer at the time.

Salaah is the specific prayer that Muslim offer. Many offer these prayers five times a day, but as a minimum most Muslims attend the Friday prayer and the Eid prayers, which also act as important social functions as entire local communities get together and often offer peace and greetings to each other at conclusion. Muslim parents start teaching children how to offer *Salaah* from around the age of 8, but often, even toddlers join in for parts of the prayer out of enthusiasm. The understanding of prayers and the function it serves as a connection to God for Muslims is developed from a very early age as children watch adults offer *Salaah*.

Sawm (fasting) in the month of *Ramadhan* is undertaken by young Muslims from around the age of 12 or 13 years. Fasting begins with a *Suhoor* meal at early dawn, which is followed by the morning prayer, and ends with the *Iftar* meal, which begins after the sunset prayer. *Ramadhan* is a very special month for Muslims, which again acts as an important social occasion. During evenings men attend the *Tarawih* prayer in community venues and Mosques, and often take the opportunity to enjoy meals together afterwards. Scholars from across the World including South Africa, Asia and the Middle East also attend UK Mosques to give educational talks of Islamic heritage, history and ethics. *Ramadhan* ends with *Eid-ul-Fitr*, one of two Eids of the year (*Eid-ul-Adha* follows 2 months and 10 days later). The day is the most special, especially for children, in the Islamic calendar. They will receive gifts and money and enjoy special family feasts throughout the day. Often large family get-togethers take place.

Other factors that Muslim children in their own family setting will often experience as a matter of certainly are after-school Islamic ethics and classical Arabic lessons, preparation for adulthood in understanding dealing with finance and distributing Zakaah - giving 2.5% of wealth to charity, another fundamental pillar of Islam – understanding *Tahirah* (purity), which includes *Wudhu* (Islamic ablution).

These are just some basic areas covered by Islam. To Muslim carers this comes as second nature, and they impart this knowledge and practice to children on an ongoing basis. It is often understandably difficult, if not impossible, for non-Muslim carers to teach the Islamic way-of-life when they do not actually practice it themselves.

AREAS RELATED TO FOSTER CARE LINK (ISLAMIC FOSTERING SERVICE)

Q. How will you meet the needs for Muslim children differently from existing providers?

A. All of our carers are Muslim. The home environment for children will therefore strongly reflect existing religious practice. Our carers also come from a range of ethnic backgrounds providing appropriate cultural care, though Muslims from diverse backgrounds often share similar cultural practises. One of our Social Workers is also an

Aalim (qualified Islamic scholar). He therefore has a level of respect from parents of looked after children, carers and within the Muslim community in general. This is unique in the sector. Our practices are also geared towards addressing the very specific needs of the Muslim community.

Q. How do you ensure that the children are not uncomfortably forced into fully practising Islamic rules when they are not used to this?

A. An important part of our training for carers is to understand how to precisely meet the needs of children. This includes never forcing Islamic practice on children, but instead catering for their needs and level of understanding. We educate them on suitably tailoring Islamic education and environment. Our carers vary in their level of practise. Sometimes they need to improve their own practise to 'keep up' with what the child is used to, and sometimes they need to remain flexible and understanding when a child understands only the very basics. We follow the Quranic advice that 'there is no compulsion in religion'. Fundamentally, we ensure that a child feels comfortable within the environment of the carers home as much as possible, and this is closely monitored by our social workers.

Q. How do we know that the best interests of the child in all areas are promoted?

A. Our carers must undergo stringent checks and assessments prior to approval. They are fully trained on an ongoing basis on promoting the interests of children placed. Many of our carers are UK born, and are passionate about providing a home to a Muslim child as an act of brother/sisterhood with fellow Muslims. We attract high calibre carers from a wide range of backgrounds and professions. The agency as a whole follows comprehensive policies and procedures governing all areas using best practise as the base. We manage many successful placements, and have had positive outcomes as can be confirmed through written references, which can be provided on request.

