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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Covid-19 will separate Foster Care Workers and Children and force them into poverty without urgent action - IWGB

- Foster care workers demand urgent measures to protect Britain's most vulnerable children and their carers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The government's continuing denial of Statutory Sick Pay for foster care workers threatens to plunge thousands of fostering families into poverty if they become too ill to care for children who are then relocated.
- Emergency funds must be made available by Local Authorities and Fostering Agencies to cover lost income and retain foster care workers temporarily unable to work.
- Foster carers who have been [campaigning for worker status](#) and a central register say these demands are now essential to save lives in the face of the pandemic.

24 March: The Foster Care Workers Branch of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) is calling on the government to introduce urgent measures to ensure Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies respect the right of foster care workers to keep their families and the children in their care as safe as possible during the Covid-19 pandemic, and to provide the financial support necessary for them to do this. The branch has appealed directly to the Secretary of State for Education, Health Minister and the Minister for Children and Young People (letters attached.)

The government's continuing denial of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) to foster care workers nationwide now stands to have devastating consequences for them, their families and the children in their care. As things stand, any foster care worker who develops symptoms will, if the children in their care are relocated, lose all their income. This is already the situation facing hundreds of respite foster care workers, whose shifts have all been cancelled. This will likely drive still more people out of the profession at a time when the foster care system is already facing [a severe shortage of at least 8,600 people](#).

Foster care workers also report that despite government guidelines, many Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies have yet to cancel face-to-face contact meetings outside the household, creating a chaotic situation that is confusing self-isolation requirements and endangering foster care workers and their families. In this context, the branch is demanding that foster care workers must be enabled to be able to make decisions around the care of children that keep them and their families safe.

The branch is also demanding that foster care workers be granted [worker status for which they have long campaigned](#) and immediate SSP as a bare minimum, allowing them to meet priority bills when they are unwell. Without this they will be unable to provide a home and continuity of care for young people. In the meantime, Local Authorities and Fostering Agencies should take immediate steps to cover lost wages and retain foster care workers temporarily unable to work or forced to self-isolate.

Jane Wright, chair, Foster Care Workers Branch of the IWGB says: *“During a time of crisis, those caring for the most vulnerable must be treated with respect. Foster care workers are under immense pressure. We are still being asked to take children out of self-isolation and with no rights and no government support, many face destitution if we develop symptoms and self-isolate. If Covid-19 separates a child from their foster parent who then can’t pay their bills, where is that child going to go home to? The additional, unnecessary trauma being forced on care-experienced young people and their carers is barbaric and it’s putting lives at risk.”*

The branch is also calling for [a Central Register](#) to improve coordination, communication and distribution of resources.

Over 42%* of the 55,000 strong fostering workforce, is aged over 55, putting many of them in a high risk group in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, despite the fact they provide essential 24/7 care to some of Britain’s most vulnerable children, the government has failed to classify them as key workers.

*State of the Nation Report 2019, The Fostering Network

-ENDS-

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