

Appeal to fill in foster care gap

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MORE foster parents are needed in Oxfordshire to prevent a "mounting crisis" after the number of children in care rose to more than 600.

Lee Mackie, from Bampton, whose son Jason was killed in Afghanistan in 2009 while serving with the Royal Marines, said fostering three babies in the past three years was the best thing she had ever done and urged others to do the same.

She is backing an appeal by Oxfordshire County Council, which wants more people to foster so more children can be placed in loving homes close to where they are originally from.

In 2011, there were 427 children in care and last year there were 527, but the figure had risen to 609 by March this year.

The county has 343 foster carers - up from 315 on last year - but this means 113 children are placed with foster carers from

outside agencies while another 186 have no foster placement.

Mrs Mackie, 60, said: "It makes me really sad to think there are more children in care. We need people out there who have a caring nature to come forward.

"It is the best thing that I have ever done in my life.

"To see these little broken-winged children coming into care and moving on to better things is so amazing."

Ms Mackie said she felt the spirit of her late son Jason - who died aged 21 when the vehicle he was travelling in was hit by an explosive device in Helmand Province - had guided her and added she had also been supported by her other sons, Richard and Alistair.

She said: "I still feel very strongly that the whole thing was under the guidance of Jason. He has had a hand in the children that have been placed with me.

"My other sons were worried at the beginning that I might be the mad woman on the corner with

40 kids. But I know my limitations and I know there are wonderful people out there who need to adopt children.

"It has done my confidence a lot of good because the first two babies I fostered have moved on to amazing adoptive families."

County council cabinet member for children, education and families, Melinda Tilley, said: "We need to increase the number of Oxfordshire foster carers so we can provide greater choice of placement for vulnerable children within the county and enable more of our children to stay closer to home.

"Anyone can potentially become a foster carer - you just need a big heart and a safe and loving home to offer.

"There are huge rewards in being able to make a difference to a young person's life.

"The council also offers excellent training and support, as well as financial allowances."

To find out more about fostering see oxfordshire.gov.uk/fostering or call 0800 7835724.



Lee Mackie has fostered three babies since 2013 and is urging other people to become fosterers. Mrs Mackie, whose son was killed in Afghanistan, said it had been the "best thing she has done in her life"