

Additional rewards there for all to see

WE spoke to a Carmarthenshire foster carer who cares for children with additional needs about why they foster and the rewards they get from it...

Why did you choose to care for children with additional needs?

We started fostering approx 14 years ago and initially we chose to look after babies and young children (pre-adoption) which were similar in age to our own three children. I have various qualifications in childcare and have always worked with children since leaving college, most of these posts were with children with additional needs therefore I have gained a lot of knowledge and confidence along the years with various conditions and needs. One day our supervising social worker approached us and asked us if we would consider a long term placement for two brothers, both with additional needs. We had always been open to a long term placement and

had discussed this with our supervising social worker previously but it needed to be the right placement for our family. We discussed the possibility of taking the boys on with our own children in great lengths and it was important that they understood what long term meant and what additional needs the boys had and what support/care they would need from us as a family. We (the whole family) met the boys in a fostering Halloween party and I can honestly say there was no going back, we fell in love instantly.

We had introductions over the next couple of weeks, including tea visits and visits to their placement just to familiarise us with their needs and routines and for them to familiarise themselves with our home and family. **How have your family adapted to caring for children with additional needs?**

Our children have grown up with children coming to stay with us from vari-



Julie and Lee Strudwick are encouraging others to foster.

ous backgrounds. They have an understanding that every child has his/her own needs and we have always taught them about inclusion and treating everyone equally. I honestly think that fostering has taught them empathy and patience towards others and this has put them in good

stead for welcoming the boys to our family. They now help look after the boys on a daily basis and they have grown in confidence to meet their needs independently. They're so proud of the boys and the achievements they have made since coming to live with us.

What challenges, if any,

have you faced when caring for a child with additional needs?

It is daunting at first getting to grips with their routines and needs and we had double that as both boys have very different additional needs. We were very grateful that we had fantastic support from their previous Foster Carers

who provided us with all the information we needed and even when the boys moved to us she was only a phone call away.

The support we also received from the boys social worker and our supervising social worker was also vital in ensuring that it was a smooth transition and that the placement was and continues to be a success. I will say that hospital appointments along with other agency appointments are tough going at times especially with two children with additional needs but when the boys came to live with us I decided to give up my work and concentrate on fostering and its the best thing I have done.

What is the most rewarding part of providing this type of foster care?

I used to love fostering babies and young children (pre adoption) but I found it very difficult seeing the children moving on to new families. I know the boys are here to stay and that gives me a sense of

security. There are daily challenges but to see a child grow and flourish in your care is the best feeling ever. We have seen so much progress in the boys since they came to live here and that's due to the love, security and sense of belonging they must feel being a part of our family.

What advice would you give to someone thinking of becoming a foster carer for children with additional needs?

I would say to think carefully, learn everything you can about the child before making any decisions but if you think you can manage his/her needs then go for it. You will not regret it as it will give you such a sense of achievement and fulfilment. There is so much support out there in the form of the child's social worker, your supervising social worker, teachers, occupational therapists etc. We have never looked back and don't regret having the boys and we can honestly say it's the best decision we ever made welcoming them to our family.

Ydych chi wedi ystyried maethu?

Os yw COVID 19 wedi newid y ffordd rydych yn ystyried eich dyfodol, ac wedi'ch helpu i ystyried yr hyn sy'n bwysig mewn bywyd, **dewch atom i gael sgwrs am faethu yn yr awdurdod lleol.**



Have you considered fostering?

If COVID 19 has altered the way you see your future and helped you consider what's important in life - **come to us to talk about local authority fostering.**

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