

David and Michelle's fostering journey

Why be a foster carer?

We'd both considered becoming foster carers for a long time for our own reasons. We had exactly the same idea that fostering would be an amazing way to make a difference to the lives of individual children in care and perhaps would also give us the feeling that we'd been able to participate and possibly help at an important time in the life of a child.

Since the very first time of having a child placed in our care, we have realised that although it isn't always easy going, there are big rewards. Being able to connect with the child then seeing that child happy in our care gives us such a combined feeling of satisfaction, wellbeing and completeness that is so valuable money couldn't buy it.

What was the initial visit like?

The initial visit was a little bit nerve racking because we had no idea if we were good candidates by social services standards or not. Like most people we did fear rejection as this was such an important thing for us to achieve and we'd thought about it for so long.

A minute into the first visit we were put at ease and reassured that wasn't going to be the case and that subject to the application, assessment and approval process we had every chance of achieving our ambition to become foster carers.

What about the application process?

We were told upfront that the application process would be comprehensive and thorough and may at times feel intrusive. It was a long process and it was thorough but we had been well informed from the start by our assessing social worker about the length of time required and the level of personal detail about each of us that was needed.

How did you find the preparation training (Skills to Foster)?

We attended the preparation training with other potential foster carers who were just ordinary people like us in exactly the same position so that was reassuring as there was a sense of group support of like-minded people.

We found the preparation training was interesting and informative and gave us a real in-depth look into the role that foster carers play and what is expected of them by social services and the children themselves. The preparation training was over three days. It really was interesting and motivating and both myself and my wife looked forward to attending each day - it certainly wasn't a chore.

What about support from your social worker?

No matter how worldly-wise we are and how experienced we have been with our own family, being a foster carer sometimes throws curve balls at you. When this has happened we've found that our social worker has always been on hand to lean on - even just words of support at times has really made a difference.

How did you find the experience of Foster Panel?

It was nerve wracking, not because we were being judged but because we'd both invested so much in the idea of becoming foster carers and it was such a huge deal in our lives that it would've been a blow not to be approved. Luckily we were approved and each member of the Panel presented themselves as a genuine and kind person who had an understanding of us.

Tell us about your first placement

Our first placement was offering respite care over the Christmas period. The child was high dependency and the first two days were quite intense for us as we hadn't learned what she liked and disliked in terms of everything from food to bed time routine. By the second night we had started to understand her communication and what she really needed and although still intense we had lost the apprehension and started to enjoy her being with us.

After three to four days a sense of exhilaration set in when we realised that she was happy and settled and were able to cautiously tell ourselves that as a family we were doing it finally, and were, ourselves happy.

So, you are now 3 months on from becoming a foster carer, how does that feel? Where do you see yourself in 3-5 years?

Neither of us believe in fate but it feels like it was meant to be so we will hopefully continue to be allowed the privilege to care for children who need us. We would like to have a house with more rooms and a larger garden to even better accommodate our future as foster carers.

What would you say to someone thinking about fostering?

We always harboured an ambition to become foster carers but were realistic enough to know that the idea could be different from the reality. We were aware that once the application and training was over and a child was placed with us, then we would know.

After our first child was placed we now know that we'll never regret that we applied and went through the process. Not only do we have the chance to make a difference to the children placed with us but each child enriches our own lives a little bit more.

For more information about fostering with Herefordshire Council, call 01432 383240, email fostering@herefordshire.gov.uk or visit <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/fostering>

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