



Jane and Martin's fostering journey*

Why did you decide to foster teenagers?

We'd thought about it for about 6 years. We had friends who started doing it about 12 years ago and we liked the idea of getting involved. We were both bored after taking early retirement and we felt that we could offer young people the time and space to make a difference. We'd done a little bit of respite fostering for different age groups, and we found that we really appreciated the teenagers.

How long have you been fostering teenagers for?

For 3 and a half years, including therapeutic fostering of young people with complex emotional needs for 15 months. We've also provided Supported Lodgings placements for over 16s as they move towards independence.

What does fostering teenagers entail?

It's about gaining their trust, they've had no reason to trust adults before so you need to build that slowly. It's important to set the right expectations, consequences and boundaries that will allow them to grow and develop. Sometimes you're the only stability they have and you get really invested in helping to shape their futures.

What does a typical day fostering teenagers look like?

In the week, the day is generally taken up with school. When he comes home the first question is normally what's for dinner! We'll have food together and chat about his school day. On weekends we'll have Sunday lunch as a family and we go out for food once a week which he really enjoys. We've got multiple young people on placement so we involve all of them with our day to day, including seeing friends, celebrating birthdays and Christmases.

On the weekend most teenagers don't get out of bed before midday and there's also a lot of video gaming from the boys, so you do get a lot of time to yourself!

How long have you had your current young people in place for?

We've got two with us at the moment. One has been with us for two and a half years and is looking to stay for another seven. The other has been with us for 18 months, which should have been 3 weeks but we wanted to continue to support him.

What does fostering teens bring to your life?

We've both thoroughly enjoyed it. It does come with its challenges, but their previous experiences aren't their fault and you have the chance to make a real difference. There's

so many huge positives to it. It gives you so much joy, so much satisfaction, especially when you start to have a real impact on their lives.

It certainly stops you from being bored! Silly things like taking them out to restaurants and showing them new experiences just gives you so much. We can't explain it, it's just a great feeling inside.

Why should people consider fostering teenagers?

There's a great misconception about teenagers in care. It's not how people think it's going to be. You do get time to yourself and you can have really great conversations with them as they become more independent. The young people are interesting and good company.

It takes time, but once you build the relationship, it's really rewarding. They are young adults you can really help to shape their lives. You can do it at any age as well - Martin is nearly 80!

What has fostering teenagers taught you?

A lot of patience, tolerance, empathy. You become more patient as it goes on. It's very eye opening, you learn a lot. Through the training, we re-looked at our parenting style and how we communicated with our children and others.

You are always aware of how the young people will perceive what you're saying and you need to be mindful. You have to recognise their reactions to you aren't always personal.

What qualities do you need to foster teenagers?

You've got to have humour, fun and patience. It's about doing things slowly and expanding their worlds to provide them with new experiences. You need to be able to set boundaries as well, which they may not have had before. Be open and honest and try to stay relaxed.

What keeps you motivated to foster teenagers?

The relationships. Once you start to make a difference, it just keeps you going. During some of our placements, we've had compliments about how our young people have developed. That just keeps you going.

We didn't go into it for the money, which frees you up to do your best. The reward is when you get to change their experiences and path in life and you start to make a real difference. There's a lot of camaraderie between all the foster carers which is really helpful as well.

How would you describe fostering teenagers in 3 words?

We love it.

*The names have been changed to protect the identities of those involved

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

