

Thinking of becoming a foster carer?

Barbara Collins tells Haringey People how becoming a foster carer has changed her life.

Barbara Collins has been a foster carer for Haringey Council for 10 years.

She explained: "My mother bought up my cousins, so I was always used to lots of people in our home. When my youngest daughter became 13 or 14, I felt I still had skills I wanted to share.

"I did have some worries about becoming a foster carer. I'd be a stranger coming into their lives. Was I qualified enough to do the role and the various things expected of me? But it's so much better than I expected. There's a very good support network and you learn and develop from each child placed.

"I've changed and evolved a lot. I was shy and timid. But you are always advocating on the behalf of the person you are looking after, whether with their school, social worker or parent. It makes you more confident."

And how does it feel knowing you are giving a home and opportunities to children?

"I feel absolutely brilliant," she said. No wonder her sister and niece followed her into foster caring and are helping children too.

Barbara is full of stories of the children she's shared her home with over the years. Like a teenage girl who was pregnant and had been removed from school for health and safety reasons. Barbara managed to get her back into school, where she was able to study in a spare office – and achieved eight GCSEs as a result.

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Or the girl with dyslexia who struggled at school and with calculating how much change she should get when buying something from the shops.

Barbara explained: "We used Monopoly money and coins to help her understand the value of money. You set small steps, and when you achieve that, you feel as though you've done something. It's not about me. We're a team and work together.

"The school had exhausted the support they could offer her, therefore I needed to step in and support her, and as a result she got her GCSEs. She always wanted to be an

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actress but the school was not hopeful that she would get a place in college. But her dream has been realised. She's finished her foundation course and is in Year One of her performing arts course and is doing really well.

Barbara said "It's about building their self esteem. You are making a way, making a path, and staying with them as they follow that path."

Not only does she have an ongoing relationship with many of the children who have lived with her, she speaks proudly of her five foster grandchildren.

So what does it take to be a foster carer?

Barbara said: "You've got to have staying power, patience, be able to defend your corner. You need to prepare yourself for change. You have strangers coming into your home. It's not always easy. And it certainly can't be about the money. But if you come in with the skills, you will be given the support to help you develop."

Foster carers get a supervising social worker and have people they can call on 24 hours a day. There are also lots of training opportunities, from computer courses to help with completing any paperwork, through to professional qualifications in caring for young people.

There are monthly support groups so you can meet other foster carers in the same area, newsletters and also trips out to places like Legoland and Thorpe Park.

Barbara said: "For a long time, foster care wasn't recognised, but things have moved on. The support is there now. We also have a voice. It's understood that this is a professional role."

Just as there is no such thing as a typical family there is no such thing as a typical foster carer:

- You don't have to be married – you can be single or part of a couple, gay, lesbian or heterosexual.
- You don't need special qualifications.

We provide all our foster carers with:

- A named supervising social worker who will offer support
- Many great training opportunities to help develop carer's skills
- Computers and internet access
- Emergency 24 hour support
- Regular opportunities to meet with other foster carers
- A very generous weekly allowance

If you would like to find out more about fostering, please attend our fostering information session:

24 August, 10am – 12
at the Raglan Hotel,
8-12 Queens Avenue,
Muswell Hill N10 3NR

For more information or to reserve your place, please call

020 8489 3754 or email :
FosteringRecruit@haringey.gov.uk

