

Fostering unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Caroline*

Caroline and her husband are currently foster parents to three Afghan unaccompanied children, two boys and a girl who arrived in the UK at different times but who all currently live with them. Their eldest foster son will continue to live with them under 'Staying Put' arrangements once he turns 18.

Why did Caroline become a foster carer for unaccompanied children?

Having spent six years fostering UK children, an extremely challenging placement led Caroline to consider whether she wanted to continue fostering. However, with her experience as a nurse and of different cultures through work and travel, she and her husband decided to look into fostering unaccompanied children. From the arrival of her first unaccompanied child they haven't looked back.

Settling into the UK

Little was known about the first unaccompanied child they fostered – only that he was Afghan and that his age was disputed. Obviously, they had concerns caused by uncertainty over his age – but he was later accepted to be a child. Like many foster carers, they had concerns about the unknowns that come with fostering a child from a different country and culture – Caroline and her husband spent time online to try to find out as much as they could about Afghanistan. They had initial concerns about whether they would be able to understand their foster son or make themselves understood, however, once he arrived they discovered that he spoke good English and was able to communicate amazingly well with them!

They have found that fears around access to services and support have been groundless. The Local Authority has been supportive and accessing services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), has been without issue.

Caroline also hasn't experienced any issues getting the children into school. The first two unaccompanied children were able to enter straight into local schools, although the school system here is very different to what they were used to. Education in Afghanistan is very science and maths focused, so there were some struggles in getting used to a different system. However, persistence has paid off and both are doing very well. Caroline emphasises that for many unaccompanied children, school and education are a welcome distraction to the other things going on in their lives

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and their experiences before arrival in the UK. She has found her unaccompanied children to be very education focused with a brilliant attitude towards school and learning. She also noticed that all three children show an interest in politics and are very engaged in what is going on in the world around them.



The latest unaccompanied child who came to live with her has a lower level of English and has had to do an ESOL course at college. Again, Caroline has found the support excellent and access to this service has been much easier than expected.

Although the unaccompanied children that Caroline has fostered are very resilient, unsurprising given the experiences they have been through, they need reassurance in other areas. She has found that their lives in Afghanistan revolved around family and school so they can be quite uncertain about doing other tasks for themselves, which can make them more vulnerable than other children their own age.

Advice to potential foster carers

Caroline says she hasn't looked back since she started to foster unaccompanied children and would encourage other foster parents to look into it. She says that potential carers need to have an open mind and be open to sharing cultures and experiences. She added that if you spend enough time with people from completely different backgrounds, you learn that we are pretty much all the same, and learning and embracing new cultures is good for your soul – it enriches and enhances your own outlook on life.

One of the most enjoyable parts of fostering unaccompanied young children is the bits that get lost in translation – communication can be hilarious with mispronunciations being just priceless. Smiling, laughing and sign language resembling charades are international languages that need no explanations.

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