

# Fostering unaccompanied asylum seeking children

## Debbie\*

Debbie has worked as a foster carer for 27 years and during that time she has fostered two 14 year old asylum seeking children from Eritrea and Sudan. One boy only stayed with her for seven months, but the other has been in her care for the past four years. She also has two children of her own.

### Why did Debbie become a foster carer?

Debbie's decision to become a foster carer all started when she attended a fostering event with a friend. As a stay at home mum with extra space in the house, she was sure that she could provide the care to make a difference to a child's life. Having married an Iranian and having lived in several countries, Debbie was familiar with negotiating cultural differences and, whilst she is not a Muslim, she had an affinity and good understanding of the Islamic faith. As such, she felt comfortable fostering asylum seeking children from all backgrounds.

### How does Debbie feel about fostering these children?

Debbie has no problem fostering these vulnerable children, as she feels reassured by the thorough health screenings and immunisation processes in place and knows that they pose no risk to her family. She explained that they are just children who want a chance at life.

### Were there any particular challenges?

There were language and cultural barriers as you would expect, Debbie explained that the children were traumatised by their journey and have had to learn to trust again and become comfortable in their surroundings. Many of these children don't understand the concept of fostering so it is important to build a relationship. Debbie researched where her boys had come from and took an interest in their cultures, cuisines and the political systems of their countries.

Many of these children don't understand the concept of fostering so it is important to build a relationship



The asylum process presented another obstacle, as the long interviews could leave the children in a vulnerable state due to having to relive some of their most traumatic memories. It was important to provide support after these interviews, but Debbie emphasised that foster carers can also need support while their child is going through this traumatic process. She highlighted the importance of drawing on local networks as they provided crucial support for her and her family during these times.

Debbie found that, despite the challenges the children had to overcome, they were always grateful and respectful, and really tried to make the most of every opportunity. They worked hard on improving their English and were always keen to study.

### Support network

Drawing on local groups, support networks and fellow foster carers helped immensely, as they were places where the children could socialise, and the foster carers could support each other. They often went on trips to London and went to festivals as a group. It's important to remember that they are just children who also need to have fun.

### Advice to potential foster carers

**Do your research and contact people who have first hand experience of looking after asylum seeking children. Carers have to be open minded and adaptable, but it can be an exciting experience which will enrich your life. Fostering is an incredible experience and Debbie would encourage anyone to do it.**

Carers have to be open minded and adaptable, but it can be an exciting experience which will enrich your life

