

Fostering unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Peter* and Anita

For two and a half years, Peter and Anita have been fostering a 16 year old boy from Iran. Their foster son spent five months in temporary care before coming to live with them.

Why did Peter and Anita become foster carers?

When Peter and Anita retired from teaching and with their own children having grown up and moved out, they decided to look into becoming foster carers. Their introductory course covered a wide variety of foster care; but with a joint experience of languages, a love of travel within Africa and Asia and watching news footage showing children within the camps at Calais and fleeing conflict across the world they decided to look further into fostering unaccompanied asylum seeking children.



Initial fears and reservations

Initial fears for Peter and Anita were only those that naturally come with sharing your home with someone you do not know and have very little information about. Trust was quickly built between them all, and their foster son has fast become a member of the family sharing his culture with them and theirs with him.

Support network

Peter and Anita have praised the support they received from their social workers who they say, have been brilliant. With shared understanding and experiences, other foster carers provide help and support for one another and their foster son has got to know other Iranian boys in the local area who all support one another.

Settling into life in the UK

Throughout the asylum process, Peter and Anita's foster son received excellent legal advice; he was granted refugee status and the right to remain in the UK on his first application. Their foster son has settled well into life in the UK since his arrival – life is very different here to the small village in Iran which he comes from so it did take a short time for him to fully settle. He is a very amenable and charming boy who gets on well with everyone and has made friends at school and through his sporting activities.

Despite having little access to technology he has quickly found new skills and they have found YouTube an excellent tool for learning. Peter and Anita worked hard with the school to assist their foster son to settle into education. They are all very proud of his progress; he has taken his GCSEs this year, which with no formal early education and after just two years in the UK is an enormous achievement.

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Advice to potential foster carers

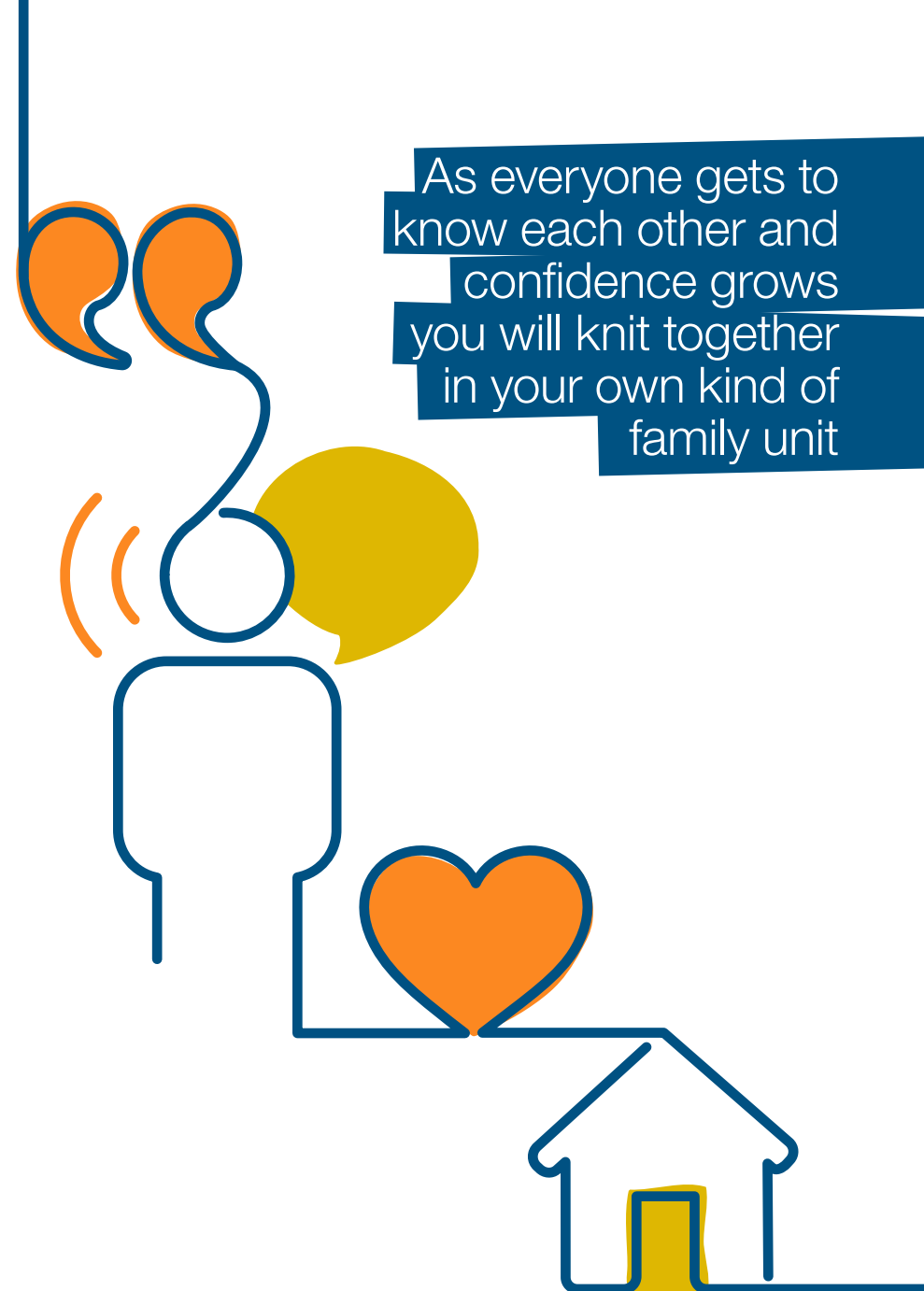
Peter and Anita have supported their foster son through the asylum process and would advise that a good interpreter is essential. Accompanying their foster son to meetings, reading all the documentation carefully and taking detailed notes at meetings is also advised and has been essential to helping their foster son through the process. They also say that foster parents will need to be generally supportive throughout and aware of concerns that their children may have.

They would advise foster carers to remain open minded – and not to ask too many questions but allow time for the relationship to develop and gradually questions will be answered. Peter and Anita say that being a foster parent is a different type of parenting compared to bringing up their own children and is often a joint learning curve; however as everyone gets to know each other and confidence grows you will knit together in your own kind of family unit.

Finding a good halal butcher and international food shop is useful and Peter and Anita suggest looking out for open days at the local mosque. They found the Iman and elders welcoming and pleased to talk.

They also advise not to be disappointed if your child does not behave like your own children as soon as they enter your house; it will take time. Because of the experiences they have been through they need a different type of parenting, in some ways they are wise beyond their years and in other ways they can be very naïve.

Unaccompanied children come with all sorts of trauma but in general they know when they have reached a safe place.



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