Rachel

Rachael has worked as a single supported lodging host for three years. During that time, she has hosted three unaccompanied asylum seeking children; two boys from Iraq, aged 16 and 17, and a girl also 17, from Eritrea. One young man left after nine months, but the other two have been living with Rachel for the past year.

Why did Rachael become a supported lodgings host?

Rachael was drawn to providing supported lodgings as a chance to help vulnerable young people when they are most in need. She found introducing them to British culture particularly rewarding. She also valued the opportunity to learn about their cultures, as they were often happy to talk about their home countries, although they rarely spoke about their journey to the UK. One of the most rewarding parts was discovering new cuisines and the young people were always very appreciative of her culinary efforts.

How did Rachael feel about living with unaccompanied asylum seeking children?

Rachael knew very little about her young people before they arrived to stay with her, which is often the case with unaccompanied asylum seeking children, but this didn’t faze her. She said that it is always important to keep a sense of perspective and not believe everything you hear in the media. These children and young people have fled their home countries alone and quickly have to adjust to different customs and a different culture and language. She mentioned that some media outlets often negatively portrayed these children, notably with regard to radicalisation, but in her experience these reports have always been unfounded. If you are concerned about any issues regarding supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children, her advice is to attend as much training as possible and learn as much as you can so that you can be confident in opening up your home and recognising that these children are often here for traumatic reasons. Learning about their cultures will also help hosts understand the significant culture shock their children may be facing and sympathise with what they are going through.

Were there any particular challenges?

Like all teenagers, Rachael found that her young people try to push boundaries. As with any other child or young person, she recommends setting out key rules and expectations, although carers have to understand that these children have very different cultural perceptions and are often used to greater levels of freedom in their home countries. They will need some

time to understand what is expected of them, so she found that allowing a degree of flexibility with some rules was important to help them adapt to their new surroundings. For instance, some cultures place less emphasis on punctuality and notions of fixed meal times can be alien to them.

Living with unaccompanied asylum seeking children can come with a few additional challenges. For instance, Rachael found that the two young men could be disrespectful towards women. She has been firm in teaching them that in the UK women and men are treated with equal respect. The language barrier could be a problem at times but luckily they had a basic level of English, and with the help of modern technology and a sense of humour, it was an obstacle which they learnt to overcome.

One characteristic often associated with hosting these young people is helping with asylum applications, which can be an anxiety inducing experience, particularly depending on the outcome. Rachael already has experience helping young people through this process, although she was grateful for the help received from their solicitor. The asylum system has been very different for each of her young people, with each of them experiencing different outcomes. The application process can be quite traumatic, so Rachael makes sure she is there to support the young person through the process.

Support network

Rachael received support from a local support group for families that were seeking asylum. The group also allowed her young people to connect and make friends with people going through the same process. Rachael would like to see more opportunities for asylum seeking children and young people to meet. The young people enjoyed attending the National Citizenship Service (NCS) which allowed them to take part in social action projects and to build invaluable work and life skills, although unfortunately it is no longer running in their area.

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