Andrea

'In terms of fulfilment, I don’t think there’s anything better' - Andrea's story

Three years ago, Andrea left her career as a front line social worker to become a special kind of foster carer.

Offering supported lodgings - a scheme originally designed for British youngsters at risk of homelessness - Andrea and her husband have now been caring a young refugee for over two years.

> ‘When I left my career I was looking for new things to do’, explains Andrea. ‘I just couldn’t leave the idea of fostering alone, as I still wanted a way of supporting people. So we enquired with our local authority and signed up for the appropriate course.
>
> ‘Our expectation was that we’d be looking after a British young person aged between 16 and 20, who would come to us as a steppingstone before eventually going on to get their own place, or something like that.’

Over time however, events throughout the world - particularly in areas such as Syria and North Africa - led to a shift in Andrea's expectations.

> 'As we were going through the process there were a lot of political issues surrounding the camps in Calais, where people were ending up because of war and events happening across the globe', Andrea explains. 'On a personal note I was really interested, and thought to myself, wouldn't it be fab if we could support a young person that was fleeing Syria or some other country.'

As things turned out, during her next meeting with the social worker, Andrea was told about a new government policy, instructing local councils to find more carers for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) because children were going to be moved away from the most over-stretched areas, such as Kent.

> 'Immediately I said yes, we'll do it', explains Andrea, 'and that's how we ended up getting the young person we did.'

In the years that followed, Andrea recounts a number of milestones that have led to feelings of enormous pride. 'His academic achievement is just one of the things that sticks out', Andrea tells us. 'He arrived with us having had no formal

education whatsoever, so at 16 he started at college to try some ESOL courses.

> ‘Against all odds he managed to get some GCSE grades, which is absolutely astounding. We’re so proud of him and how he got stuck into the work. It’s a great feel-good factor for us all to have been a part of that journey.’

In addition to his academic achievements, Andrea is equally excited to recount another memorable moment shared between her family and the young person.

> ‘On a recent trip to Manchester, he started networking with the Sudanese community to find out information about his family’, Andrea recalls. ‘It took a long time, but eventually he reconnected with his mum, which was another huge moment and emotional rush for all of us.’

Andrea is in no doubt when it comes to celebrating the foster care system.

> ‘I’d urge anyone to become a foster carer’ she tells us. ‘In terms of life fulfilment, I don’t think there’s anything better. You give a young person the tools, just as you would with your own children – and for them to become independent, it’s just fantastic. To

make a difference like this is just fantastic.’

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