



“Compassion is key”

Rachel and Nigel aren't your typical foster carers. Having worked overseas in relief and development for many years, Rachel and Nigel now welcome all the newly arrived young refugees in the city to their home while they recover and adapt to their new life in the UK.



“We approached our local authority to ask what they were doing to help asylum-seeking children”, explains Rachel. “With our experience in social care, we were asked to become the city’s Welcome Centre - so our story really is quite unusual.”

By offering their house as a Welcome Centre, Rachel provides a safe place where all young refugees entering the foster care system can settle for a short period of a few months - or at least that’s the theory. In reality, due to a shortage of carers, Rachel often finds herself looking after young people for much longer periods of time. “Anything from a few months up to a couple of years is normal” she says, before telling us about some of the teenagers currently residing with her. “Where people go wrong is that they think they have to be this perfect person to become a foster carer - and they don’t. It’s compassion that’s key.”

At the time of writing, Rachel and Nigel are currently living with two of their own younger children and three young refugees. Whilst conducting our interview, Rachel tells us that she’s had to move to the end of the garden to chat, due to the fits of laughter coming from the youngsters in the kitchen - a scene that Rachel describes as “lovely”, considering the journey that many have undertaken on their way to the UK.

“We care for children who have slept rough all over Europe. They’ve often been beaten, tear-gassed and bitten by dogs on their way to us”, Rachel explains. “But now they’re getting on at school and laughing in our home. It’s a real joy to be a part of that.”

When asked what advice Rachel would offer to anyone thinking of becoming a foster carer themselves, she explains how local authorities will provide all the information that’s needed and more. Rachel also encourages would-be carers to find out more about the children in need of care - something she believes would help to address often ill-informed preconceptions about young refugees. As for those looking to find out what life is really like as a carer, Rachel suggests speaking to someone who’s already caring for a young refugees. “The reason I say this is because I know it really helps to be able to talk over whatever reservations you may have with someone who’s already doing it.”

Discover more about caring for a young refugee by contacting a member of the team on **0113 5351048** or wyr@migrationyorkshire.org.uk, or by visiting www.welcomingyoungrefugees.org.uk today.