

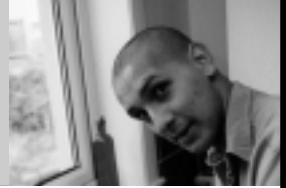
Sharing
the caring
p2



Love-an
occupational
hazard
p3



Making the
difference
p4



Foster carers - Scotland's unsung heroes



Have you got what it takes to be a hero?

Foster carers are some of Scotland's unsung heroes. Just ordinary people - doing something very special.

All kinds of children need foster carers for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes there's illness or a marriage breakdown in their own families. Sometimes they're neglected or abused. Sometimes their behaviour becomes hard to manage.

Foster carers offer a home to a child - or children - for just a few days or for years.

All kinds of people become foster carers. They're couples or single people. They're in or out of work. They're from all ethnic backgrounds. They're tenants and house owners.

To be a foster carer, your personal qualities are more important than your age. Or your qualifications and experience.

You'll need to really like children or teenagers. You'll need a good sense of humour. You'll need tolerance and patience. You'll need lots of experience.

Maybe most of all, you'll need lots of common sense.

Be a hero.

One big happy family

It isn't easy to keep count of Neil and Flora's extended family.

"There are usually about eight children in the house," says Flora, "although at the moment, it's nine."

The nine include the couple's three adopted daughters Alex (16), Lisa (14) and Anne (12), who came to them for fostering and stayed. The couple also have five grown-up sons and daughters - three of them were long-term foster children and are now "just part of our own family, they even changed their name to ours".

Today, the family farmhouse near Killin is filled with nine children of all ages. "We are lucky to have a lot of space. It's a big house and that helps.

"The kids love being out in the country too, we have sheep and cattle and horses and all the usual farmyard animals. But the best thing is that when

they get here the pressure is off, you can see them blossom in every way. They can shout and there's nobody to hear them but the sheep.

"There's a lot of sadness, too. Some kids are in an awful state when they first come to us, but the bonus is to see how they improve.

"We have been fostering for nearly 30 years and things are much worse now than in the past. We see children who are really damaged, the drugs problem and the sexual abuse is much worse. A lot of children need a lot of help.

"We never expected to be fostering for all this time, but I still get a buzz when a new child is coming to us.

"You need a sense of humour and you don't need to be too house-proud. If they have problems, you just have to down tools and let them take all the time they need.

"Some days you don't get a lot else done!"

Inside

- Foster carers' real life stories
- How foster care helped me
- The challenge of caring
- How to apply
- Who to contact



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Working together for Scotland's children

Sharing the caring

When Shug and Liz celebrated their Silver Wedding with a trip to Florida in June, they took the family with them - their two daughters, their son and their five foster children aged from 2 to 15 years.

"It was brilliant," says Shug. "It's great to have a lot of weans around, especially on holiday."

Shug and Liz, who live in Airdrie, both come from big families. They started fostering almost seven years ago because "the house was dead quiet with our kids grown up."

They converted the loft and opened their house to children of all ages, for short term respite as well as long term foster children.

"We share the caring equally. We both love having a lot of kids around and

seeing the difference we can make to them by bringing them into a real family home.

"Some of the weans are very disconnected and withdrawn when they arrive. Some others can be very disruptive or hyperactive. The secret of it is patience. You need to give them time and attention and love - often, they've never experienced that before.

"You have to compromise, and come and go with them. They have their own personalities and you have to let them be themselves.

"But you have to make it fun too. I've got a fish pond out the back and every kid gets their own fish.

"One wee boy just would not get out of his bed in the morning, so I said to him that he was responsible for his fish. He had to feed it every morning or it would

starve to death. In no time he was up and dressed every morning to look after his fish.

"With other kids it takes longer, some of them are very damaged. But with love and patience you can bring them round. And when you see the change in them that's all the reward you need."



Now I can make a go of life

Since he was four, James had been shuttled around from care institution to residential school all over Scotland.

He was 15 and could not even tell the time when he first lived in a family home, with foster carers, Sheila and Ken in Bathgate.

Today James is 19 and can reel off his qualifications and job experiences - computer studies certificates, multimedia skills, security work, bar trades and shop assistant.

And he is working as a trainer with other youngsters about to leave foster care. He has come a long way in four years.



"They did a lot for me, Sheila and Ken. They got me reading and writing, and I helped Ken with car mechanics.

"It was really good to be in a family. They gave me pocket money and I went shopping with them. Ordinary things, but these were things I'd never done before.

"I feel I can make a go of life now, thanks to them."

*James is one of 12 young people working with the National Foster Care Association helping young people about to leave care to adjust to adult life.

Helping youngsters achieve

An advertisement for foster carers struck a chord with Marjory and Keith more than 20 years ago.

"I had spent three months in hospital and we suddenly realised how lucky we were that my parents had been able to look after the children. That was what made us decide to offer to help families who might not be so fortunate."

Since then, more than 60 foster children have been welcomed into the family home in Aberdeenshire. Keith and Marjory always ask for children around the same age as their own family, so over the past few years they have had teenagers to look after.

"Children have different demands at different ages. Babies and small children are physically demanding, but teenagers are more emotionally demanding. It can be tricky - fostering is nothing like bringing up your own children.

"Some of the youngsters who come to us have been in and out of care all their lives. Other children were in a crisis with their own family and needed to get away. With all of them,



we try to give them skills that will help them to cope and make a go of life.

"You don't always see the results straight away. Then you get a card on Mother's Day or a phone call on your birthday and they tell you how much you mean to them.

"A lot of our young people come back to visit or they phone regularly. You have to be there for them, they still turn to us at the good times and the bad times.

"A couple of weeks ago we were invited to the 21st party of a boy who came to us at 14 and literally could not smile. He stayed with us for four years. Now he has a job, a mortgage and a lovely girlfriend.

"That's what it's all about really, just helping young people to achieve their individual potential."

Love -

an occupational hazard

Jane had been working as a child minder for many years before going into fostering.

"The social work people were always asking me to think about fostering, but I was always frightened I would get too attached to the kids.

"Well of course you do get too attached. You would have to be a machine not to, it's an occupational hazard! And frankly you would not be doing a very good job if you didn't love the kids who come to you."

Jane and Mark live in East Lothian. They take one child at a time, always younger than their younger daughter, who is seven and shares in the family decisions about the foster children.



"We involve her right from the beginning, and she'll say 'okay, she can share my bedroom'. It's important that your own children have their place in the family.

"The rewards of fostering are fantastic and often out of the blue. Kids will come in just blank and with no emotions and then something - some wee thing - makes them smile.

"Just going into a bed with clean sheets, or putting on talcum after their bath, or sitting round the table at teatime. Some children have never had these things in their lives. They appreciate everything you do for them."

Jane says the support and training of the social work department is extremely important to her. "You know that there is someone there to give you help and advice when you have a problem.

"I will never regret fostering, it's the best thing I have ever done."

Interested?

Contact your local council or Barnados Scotland, which provides fostering services in central Scotland.

They will give you further information and advise you about what happens next.

You might be asked to attend a general information meeting, or a social worker or foster care worker may make an appointment to meet you.

If you decide to apply to be a carer:

- a social worker will start to visit you at home to find out more about what you have to offer to a foster child or children
- you will get training to help you decide if you are ready to become a foster carer - this means learning a lot about foster children and young people and their backgrounds
- you will find out about working as part of a caring team - and the impact that fostering can have on your family.

I want to thank existing foster carers and encourage readers to consider joining the ranks of the unsung heroes.



Jack McConnell MSP

In our communities, foster carers look after children and young people who need love and support. They sometimes have to balance difficult tensions, but they see the great benefits for the children themselves. It is not an easy option, but the satisfaction of helping young people grow in a safe and happy setting is obvious from the experiences relayed in these pages.

We need more foster carers and I hope this supplement persuades you to consider coming forward.

It's a challenge

Looking after someone else's child is a challenge. Children least likely to be fostered - or who are not carers' first choice -

- are from ethnic minority communities
- need long-term placements
- are offenders
- have disabilities
- have behavioural and emotional problems
- are older

Did you know ?

Almost 1 in every 1000 households in Scotland foster children.

Most carers are over 40. They start fostering when their own families grow up.

Most carers come into fostering because of their commitment to disadvantaged children. They strongly believe they have something to offer them.

Some carers have been fostering for more than 20 years. On average, people foster for 7 years.

Just over 50% of children fostered are over 10. About 20% are under 5.

Most carers start fostering because they wanted to help children - and because it fits their own domestic and personal circumstances.

Almost 70 per cent of carers are satisfied with the fostering service and praised the work of link workers.

But every year, about 9% of carers give up fostering because their own circumstances have changed. That's why Scotland needs people to become heroes every year.

They made all the difference to my life

"If it hadn't been for Arthur and Jenny, I'd be in prison by now," says Aaron.

These days, Aaron is busy decorating his own flat, working as a builder - but he is trained as a tree surgeon - and enjoying a good social life in Elgin.

Just five years ago he was a runaway, picked up sleeping rough in London and taken into care. He was sent to a small village in Speyside where he was welcomed by foster carers Arthur and Jenny.

"I remember the first night, I couldn't believe how much food Jenny was giving me, I'd never been allowed that much to eat.

"I was very lucky to be taken in by them. They're a fantastic couple and they made all the difference to my life.



"Arthur and Jenny disciplined me when I needed it - which was often. I was trouble, and I was also at that pain in the arse age. But they did it right. Before I just got beaten up.



"We did things together, as a family. Arthur took me fishing and shooting. We went on holiday - I'd never been on holiday before.

"Jenny was very loving and interested in me, that was something new for me as well. I'd always been stuck in a room on my own, nobody ever talked to me or listened to me before. They taught me to socialise, they taught me everything really.



"They gave me memories I'll never forget. They made a real impact on my life. I love them to bits."

Your questions answered

Why do we need foster carers?

Every year, local councils across Scotland have to look after children and young people because their own families are not able to look after them.

All kinds of children need foster carers for all sorts of reasons. Maybe there is a sudden illness, or disability or changing circumstances in their own families. Sometimes children are neglected or abused. Sometimes their behaviour becomes hard to manage.

When families are struggling with all sorts of problems, they may need a breathing space from each other. Some families may have difficulty coping with teenage children. Other families may struggle with the demands and needs of younger children, or children with disabilities.

It is normally better for children to stay with a family than in a residential home. So all councils rely on foster carers.

Foster carers can be asked to look after a child at short notice, when there is a crisis in the child's life. It can be for a few days, a few months or it can be for years.

Who needs fostering?

Children who need foster carers can be any age - from birth to 17. Sometimes they are brothers and sisters who want to stay together.

Foster carers offer time and space to a child, or children. Often, children can return to their families, but sometimes this does not work out.

It is the foster carer's job to help them through their feelings of hurt and loss. Some children who cannot go back home move to live with adopters or go into residential care. Others stay in foster care.

Who can be a foster carer?

Foster carers come from all walks of life. They can be young couples, older parents and single people. They come from all ethnic backgrounds. They can be waged or out of work. They can be a tenant or a house owner.

Councils pay fees and weekly allowances for as long as the child or young person is in foster care.

If you become a foster carer, you will not be on your own. All carers attend training and support groups. You will have regular support from your own social worker, and there is a 24-hour a day emergency service

Can I be a foster carer?

Your personal qualities are more important than your age, or your qualifications and experience.

You will need to have a keen interest in children or teenagers. You will need a lively sense of humour, tolerance, flexibility, patience, lots of energy and lots of common sense.

You do not have to have children of your own, but you will need to talk about fostering with your family and friends. Their support will be vital - fostering will have a big impact on your life.

Fostering is not easy. Children may be upset by moving and by what has happened to them in the past. Young people can be moody, angry or withdrawn. Some children may be constantly active. Children with disabilities can provide extra challenges.

You may need to help children you have grown attached to move on from your care. You will often be working with the children's parents as well.

There will be times when your stamina, emotions and patience will be tested to the limits. It is certainly a challenge, but it is a challenge with a great reward. The reward of knowing you have made a difference to a child in need.

contacts

LOCAL AUTHORITY CONTACTS FOR FOSTERING ENQUIRIES

Aberdeen City Council
01224 646491

Aberdeenshire Council
01467 625555

Angus Council
01241 435095

Argyll and Bute Council
01436 658750

City of Edinburgh Council
0800 174833

Clackmannanshire Council
01259 225000

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
01851 703773

Dumfries and Galloway Council
01387 260302

Dundee City Council
01382 436060

East Ayrshire Council
01563 576905

East Dumbartonshire Council
0141 578 1010

East Lothian Council
01620 826 600

East Renfrewshire Council
0141 577 3378

Falkirk Council
01324 506400

Fife Council
01592 412402

Glasgow City Council
0141 287 6044

Highland Council
01463 703456

Inverclyde Council
01475 714038

Midlothian Council
0131 271 3992

Moray Council
01343 541669

North Ayrshire Council
01294 317700

North Lanarkshire Council
01698 332000

Orkney Islands Council
01856 870193

Perth & Kinross Council
01738 626940

Renfrewshire Council
0141 842 5960

Scottish Borders Council
01750 21926

Shetland Islands Council
01595 744485

South Ayrshire Council
01292 281993

South Lanarkshire Council
01698 455530

Stirling Council
01786 443606

West Dumbartonshire Council
01389 737738

West Lothian Council
01506 775959