



Meet Ana...

Health Care Assistant & Foster Carer for children with disabilities



As my own children got older, I started to think more seriously about fostering. My main desire was to provide short breaks to families who needed support in caring for their children with additional needs.

My own children were between eleven and sixteen when we first started our journey. I wanted to ensure they were old enough to understand what fostering meant so that they could be fully involved in the process. It was a big decision for me. I needed to consider the implications of having another child in my home and the responsibility that came with that. My daughter Claire encouraged me to go for it. She said, "We have space in our house and we could help a child".

Initially, I was concerned that due to my fulltime employment and family dynamic as a single parent my application would not be accepted however, this was no barrier to becoming a Foster Carer. The Short Breaks Team were very welcoming. From the first moment I made the call it was a very positive experience. The preparation period was very informative and the assessment as a whole was very thorough. My Assessing Social Worker was always there to answer my questions and she kept me informed at every stage of the process.

I was delighted to be approved at panel. It was an immense feeling of joy when I became part of this bigger foster caring family.

Soon after my approval I was matched with Jack* a young boy diagnosed with autism,

learning difficulties, speech and fine motor delay, Cooks syndrome and epilepsy. Working as a Health Care Assistant has given me the skills and knowledge to feel more confident in caring for a child with additional needs. My Social Worker shared information about Jack before we were introduced. We had a few short meetings then he came to stay with us for the weekend. Five years later and he continues to stay with us each month. My children soon regarded Jack as part of our family. They have been able to recognise the benefits of sharing and caring. We soon realised how valuable short breaks are for families like Jack's and what a lifeline they can provide. It's a priceless feeling to be able to open up your heart and home. We've received massive satisfaction.

The idea of short breaks has worked well for our family and lifestyle. I can provide regular respite to a family in need each month and fulfil my own family life obligations in between. If my availability changes in the future I might consider providing care to another child or young person. That's the great thing about fostering – there is something to suit everyone's schedule and availability. Most of us have something to offer to a child or young person in need. As long as you have an open heart and some space in your home then that is all anyone needs to be a Foster Carer.

For anyone thinking about fostering, I would say, 'Just go for it!'. My experiences with the Short Breaks Team have been so positive. You will be supported and guided each step of the way.

*name anonymised to protect identity



Find out more

028 37 564350 shortbreaks.team@southerntrust.hscni.net