TRANSFERRABLE JOB SKILLS AND FOSTERING

Shine a light | 08.04.20

Foster Carer Gill Discusses the Benefits of Part-Time Residential Work alongside Fostering

Throughout April, we will be 'Shining a Light' on fostering and employment.

Specifically, we want to get across how it is completely possible to foster a child or young person even if you or your partner are currently still working, as well as emphasise that there are many job roles out there that you may be doing right now which include highly relevant transferable skills for entering the rewarding world of fostering.

We sat down with National Fostering Agency carer Gill, who has been fostering for over five years, and also works part-time in a residential unit and a school attended by children with behavioural and emotional problems.

Discover more about what Gill had to say about the positive impact these roles have had on her ability to meet the specific needs of vulnerable children in her care in the Q+A with accompanying videos found below.

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What made you decide to start fostering?

"I did find that I had more time on my hands and fostering was always something that I thought I would like to do. My birth children were older and we had room in the house, as well as time."

"We have a busy house, but we have a happy house, and I just thought that the time was right to share that with some other young people and help other children out which is something that has always been a passion of mine".

"We have a sign on the door that says 'welcome to our happy house', and I just wanted to share that with some of these children and hopefully make a difference".

How has working as a residential carer helped you with fostering?

"I initially fostered first, so with all the training and experience that you get through fostering, I decided that I could branch out and utilise the training that I'd had to try and find a position in a residential unit to further work with children".

"Working in a residential has really helped with fostering, as it teaches you techniques including de-escalation, as well as opening your eyes completely to specific children's problems and behaviour".

"De-escalation is something that I have to practice every day at work, but also I bring that home, which has massively impacted on one of the placements that we have at the moment, who is an 11-year old ex-residential young man".

"He was a long-term residential child and classed as not being suitable to be fostered. They decided to give him a chance and we have had him for a year and a half, even though they didn't expect it to last more than a week".

"I think that the things I have learnt in terms of coping mechanisms and strategies is the reason why we have managed to keep him for as long as we have".

"He also had a 95% non-attendance at school. He has missed one day of school in the last year and a half, so you know, it is possible, they can live in a family, it just takes a lot of work. I think that working in a residential, and also in the SEN school, has given me the tools to make it work with this particular young person".

Gill tells us about how the skills she learned as a residential carer helped her with fostering

"From working in a residential unit and then transferring those skills to fostering, I have learnt that de-escalation is always your first port of call".

"De-escalation is definitely my main tool, which involves giving them choices. The thing that I've found with looked after children is that the consequences you would normally put in place for your own birth children, such as losing Xbox or TV for an hour, isn't going to work, because these children have lost everything".

"They have lost their families, they've lost their mum, dad and siblings, so if you take a PlayStation away from them for an hour, it's really not going to cause them any issues. They have nothing to lose. We have had children who have smashed Xbox's and tablets that they've been given that you would expect them to cherish".

"You think, well, 'They haven't had anything, so they will look after things they are given' – they don't because it doesn't really matter to them as it's material. It's very much about giving them choices around their behaviour and letting them try and manage that themselves".

"I think that consequences are a big thing, especially in residential, as children have to learn that there is consequences. They do get taken out all the time, and they are asked to do certain things, so when they come into fostering, it's meeting their expectations in a different way".

"I think resilience is a massive thing, as is patience".

Do the skills you learned as a residential carer cross over to fostering?

"Because I wouldn't have gone into residential had I not done all the training as a foster carer, I don't think I would've been able to do residential as effectively".

"Fostering is such a shock to the system when you come from 'normal life,' such as having your own business, which is definitely possible to do at the same time by the way, it was everything that I did to train as a foster carer that made me think 'I could do this in residential'".

*"I think the skills go backwards and forwards, as when you have a foster child in place, it's very much about **family, nurturing** and **compassion**, and I think you do need to take that into residential as it's not just an 8 hour shift and you leave work, you have to be all the same things to that child when you are on shift".*

"You are learning different things from the two different roles".

Gill tells us the difference between residential care and fostering

"Obviously, you care about the children in residential, otherwise you couldn't do the job, but when it's a foster child in your home 24/7, you really have to care about that child".

"The difference in residential is that if you've got any issues or really challenging behaviour, you get to go home at the end of your shift and somebody else will take over".

"When you come home and you are faced with challenging behaviour, it's very different because it's in your personal space. My residential hat is completely different to my fostering hat, as you want the child to feel part of the family, which is why you would choose to be a foster carer".

"In residential, the staff and children form a family, but it's not such a tight unit as if they are in your home, as it's a lot more personal to you then".

Do you have to change your approach with foster children and children in residential?

"I think your personality has to shine through in residential and fostering, because it is your personality, your perseverance, your patience and resilience that enables you to do both jobs".

"If you couldn't be your normal self then it would be very difficult. I work in a residential with staff of all different ages and subcultures. What I can bring to residential is that I'm the mother, the carer, the ironer, the washer of clothes, and the person making sure there is enough toiletries".

"I think in foster care that it's very much the same. You have to be yourself, as if you're not yourself in either job, you really would fall down quite quickly".

"With residential, you obviously have more paperwork, and there are differences in issues with confidentiality, as you have access to information for several children".

"The roles are also slightly different in the fact that with residential you are at a place of work and then come home, but the actual roles themselves are quite similar really".

Do you currently work in the care sector or a comparable role? Employment isn't necessarily a barrier to caring for children and young people.

If you are a single person working part-time, or have a partner that works full-time and you are part-time or able to work from home, speak to a member of our friendly team today to enquire about next steps in becoming a foster carer!

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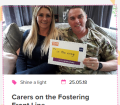

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