



What Our Carers Say



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All names and identifiable information has been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Robert and Mary Bruce are Fostering Xtra carers. They have been fostering for eight years now and they have cared for nine children during this time. Their son Stewart, 19, still lives at home and he's used to sharing his family and home with foster children.

Robert is a machine operator and prior to fostering, Mary worked in a local supermarket. They moved to the Fostering Xtra scheme in 2008. The scheme cares for young people aged 10 and over who've had unsettled pasts, or who have complex needs which make them more challenging to care for. Ordinarily children from this scheme would have been accommodated in a residential unit but we know that they generally have better futures if they experience life with a real family and that's where the Bruces and others like them come in.

Mary said "We've seen lots of different ages and stages of children over the years and they all come with their own personalities and difficulties. They're often frightened and frustrated and their behaviour shows this, but we just work especially hard to make the children in our care feel wanted and safe. They're just children at the end of the day and it's not their fault that they've been

removed from their families, although they often feel it is their fault."

They have cared for Chloe, 15, for the last 4 years.

"When Chloe was placed with us she found it hard to adjust to our way of life because her own family had been unable to care for her properly or keep her safe. She didn't have an understanding of things like 'stranger danger' or set times for sleeping, eating or playing. Introducing boundaries and routines like mealtimes and bedtimes was really important from the start to help her settle. Getting her involved in social activities like the Girl's Brigade and swimming have all helped her to develop her social skills and self confidence.

Since the time she arrived, Chloe has come on leaps and bounds and although it's not all been plain sailing for any of us, to see her grow and develop has been hugely rewarding."

Jackie Patterson has been a Fostering First respite carer for the last four years and she offers short breaks to children of varying ages who are already in a settled foster placement.

"I work part time as a clerical assistant at the local primary school. As it's only three hours each day I've been able to offer regular short breaks to children and young people when their foster carers need a rest, or so they can spend some quality time with their family and friends. Being a foster carer full-time is hard work and that's where I can help by taking the foster child for an overnight or weekend."

"I usually only offer two weekends a month because I like to keep the other two weekends for my own social life! As my own children have all flown the nest now, it's just good to have children in the house again from time-to-time. I think it also helps to me stay young and active because my life is very busy now!"

Eileen and John McInnes are short-break carers for the IMPACCT scheme which offers respite for children affected by disability who still live at home with their family.

They are linked to three children at present, which means they offer different amounts of respite to each of them.

Eileen explains "During the week we look after Susan aged six on a Tuesday night, which means that her mum and dad can spend some time catching up with the chores, or with the other children in the family. Then on a Thursday after school, Josh, aged 11 comes for an overnight to enable his mum to get a rest. She's a single parent and Josh has a disturbed sleep pattern which means she rarely gets a good nights rest. The weekends are busy too because we have Stuart, aged four from a Friday until Sunday evening, every other weekend. He has three siblings and his parents really appreciate the weekend respite because they can plan ahead for quality time with their other children, and each other!"

"John and I find the work we do very rewarding. It's good to know that the parents of the children we are caring for are able to get a rest with the confidence that their children are safe and happy. As IMPACCT carers we have a dual role, we offer respite for the parents and family but at the same time we offer a new experience for the child which can be fun, stimulating and confidence building".

"We just love to see the young people making progress and blossoming. It's challenging, yes, but we wouldn't do anything else!"

"I love my role and so does John. We only wished we had become carers for the IMPACCT scheme years before.....it's hard work for sure, but hugely rewarding for everyone concerned!"

Claire and Craig Carter are 'long-term' Fostering First carers to Stevie and Sarah, two young children. They also have three children of their own still at home aged 15, 12 and 10.

"Breakfast times are a bit hectic, with seven people crowded around the table fighting for the Corn Flakes. But the cuddles and delight at seeing Sarah and Stevie settle into their new home more than makes up for it," says Claire.

"Fostering was something I'd always thought about. We love kids and didn't have any more ourselves because we ran out of rooms basically. Now my eldest two are grown up and more or less look after themselves, I've far more time on my hands."

From the time that Claire and Craig first made enquiries about fostering for the Council, it took a year to get them through the assessment and approved as carers.

"There were many visits and numerous checks and references taken up, in fact our file began to look like a phone book," joked Claire. "We'd be asked questions such as 'what did we think about racism, how would we deal with additional needs' etc. It was all very thorough and in-depth but the tougher it got the more determined it made us to ensure we were successful.

"Actually having that year was great, as it meant we had lots of time to think about fostering. It meant we had time to make sure we were doing the right thing."

Before having full time responsibility for the youngsters, Claire and Craig took them on a weekend basis and for a respite week to allow everyone to adapt.

"My own children are great with Sarah and Stevie but it takes a lot of work to keep everyone in the house happy" says Claire. "To sum up, we love fostering. It's an amazing experience. The only drawback is having to go out and bulk buy food every two days or so!"

Susan and Donald Howard are relatively new 'short-term' Fostering First carers for North Ayrshire and they have been looking after two small children for the past 18 months.

The children arrived in difficult circumstances but after lots of support the plan is that they will gradually return home to live with their mum.

Susan said, "When Donald and I were first approved as short-term foster carers we were really keen to get our first child, so when two children arrived we were a bit overwhelmed initially! Jemma, age three and Kyle, aged five were very upset when they first arrived. Leaving their mum and family home was obviously really traumatic for them so we made sure that we took things slowly and tried really hard to make them feel safe and welcome".

"Jemma was a very withdrawn and quiet little girl who didn't seem able to play or laugh. Kyle on the other hand was a boisterous and energetic little boy who quickly worked out any weak points in us and used this to try and control things in the house. We had to make sure that both Donald and I worked together as a team and with the other professionals supporting the placement such as our supervising social worker Lynne and the children's social worker John".

"The children have been with us now for about 18 months but they are having regular contact with their mum, Shirley and things seem to be going quite well. Over night contact was introduced three weeks ago and the children have been away more frequently this last week as the plan is progressed for them to move back home with Shirley. We were initially a bit worried about the children being back home because we obviously have grown to care for them very much and want them to be safe. However, with the support of our worker, we have been able to work through our concerns because we know that it's the right thing for the children and their family. Fostering is all about looking after someone else's children and that's what's key here, they are 'someone else's children' and not ours! Their mum has worked really hard to get her life in order so that she is in a better place to care for Jemma and Kyle, so that's good too". "We've learnt a lot over the last couple of years since applying to foster for North Ayrshire. We feel that we have made a real difference to Jemma and Kyle's life because we have been there to offer them some stability and love. It's not all been easy though, oh no! It's been a lot of hard work, laughter and some frustrations too, but was it worth it...you bet it was!"