

Somebodyelse'schild

National Private Fostering Campaign

Podcast for carers

Welcome to the Somebody Else's Child podcast, the first ever podcast for people involved in private fostering. My name is David Holmes, and I'm the Chief Executive of the British Association for Adoption & Fostering. In this podcast you're going to be hearing true, real life stories from a range of people involved in private fostering.

Private fostering is an arrangement for 28 days or more where a child, under 16, is cared for by someone who isn't a close relative. The chances are you are listening to this podcast either because you are privately fostering a child yourself, or perhaps because your child is being privately fostered by someone else. You may also know of a child in a private fostering situation and are unsure about what to do about it.

What you need to be aware of is that it is a criminal offence not to notify you local council of such arrangements. However doing so isn't necessarily as daunting as you might think. The council will be able to support you and will make regular visits to check that everything is ok. The council will want to look at a range of issues such as how the child feels about the arrangement, their health an education needs, contact with their parents and your suitability as a carer.

Rebecca has been privately fostering Yu-Ling for 6 months now and found social services were really supportive. Here's her story.

Rebecca

Mai came to this country with her mother and step father about 5 years ago with very little English. I offered her extra English lessons after school as I was doing a fair bit of private tutoring for children from overseas. There began my friendship with Mai. Once I week I collected her from school and we would go to the bakers and chose a cake and get a hot chocolate and we would do an hours English together.

It wasn't a very unhappy time for Mai. There was a lot of agro between Mai parents, and she was left on her own a lot of the time. Then her mum decided to move to London leaving Mai with her step dad. She started repeatedly asking if she could come and live with me. I said, if it was just you and me in the world then perhaps we could sort something out but the thing about each of us is that we both have other people who are affected by what we do. If you came to live with me what would your mum think about it, for example. I had one week when I had two very distressed phone calls. She said she just couldn't carry on living at home because she said she didn't exist there. I thought that was a real cry from the heart for an 11 year old. So after that point I said ok. I didn't know what was possible, but I promised her I would start investigating whether she could live with me.

So I got in touch with the social worker and asked how could it be arranged. I was told about the private fostering arrangement and I was advised if Mai's parents were happy for this arrangement that Mai could come and stay with me. So I approached her parents and they were more than happy about it. So without further ado Mai came and joined me, and has been with me for 6 months.

It's wonderful and incredibly challenging. I'm 52, I'm single. I've had no children before so I've entered motherhood at 52. But Yu Ling has a social worker who comes out and sees her regularly, and I have a social worker appointed, and they're very supportive. The paper work's all gone through so really it's just a question of having people there if I'm not sure of something.

There are times I feel such a failure and I worry I will mess up her life more than it has already been messed up, and then something will happen that will make me want to carry on. I'll come to bed and find a note that says here's a thousand hugs for you, or something like that. They keep me going and help me through the mornings when I think, is she ever going to get out of bed? or am I ever going to get her to school on time today? I'm sure parents of teenagers know all about that.

David Holmes

We know that most private foster carers do an excellent job, often stepping in when there has been a conflict or problem within a child's birth family. They might even provide essential stop-gap support. That was the case with Jessica, who was privately fostered by her school friend's family when she was having problems at home. Here's her story:

Jessica

"On bonfire night a rocket hit our garage and did a lot of damage. My mum used to have depression problems and she couldn't really handle the pressure of the situation. We were running out of money because of the accident and we were all getting upset and losing our temper. We couldn't take it any more and we were letting our anger out on each other. I couldn't take the pressure of always getting told off and I was always chucking things back at them."

"So I just packed my stuff and turned up at my friends door saying can I just stay here for a few nights and it happened from there really."

"I was privately fostered for about a year. It was a nice experience but I had to get used to the changes. But it changed my opinion about how I should treat people, instead of losing my temper."

"My parents were a bit upset at first but finally understood I needed some space to calm down."

"After the first year it I still felt the same about my mum, but a social worker asked me if I wanted to see her again. It took me a few weeks to build up the courage to do it but eventually I did. And after a few weeks I was back living with my family."

"Being privately fostered definitely helped my relationship with my parents."

David Holmes

Sadly, not all private fostering arrangements work as well as this. When Hope was sent over from Nigeria to live with her cousin in London she thought she would get the opportunity to study. Instead she was put to work as a domestic servant, and endured terrible treatment at the hands of her private foster carers.

Hope

“I had to wake up between 5 and 7, clean the house, wake up the kids and bath the young one before she goes to nursery. I had to cook food for the other ones, and my cousin and her husband.

“She used to beat me almost every day. She said I wasn’t allowed to sleep next to her babies because they are like a princess and I’m her slave. So I had to sleep downstairs on the floor and it was so cold. If I went upstairs I would get beaten. I was only 12 and it was like hell to me”

“When I was going to school one girl used to ask me why I came in with scratches and bruises. I started crying and told her what was happening. She told me I had to tell someone or my cousin would kill me. Then one day after a really bad beating I packed my stuff. My cousin asked me what I was doing and I told her I was going to wash my clothes. I went out the back and started running and running.

“I’m much happier now I don’t have to sleep on the floor, and go in and out when I like but I feel my cousin and her husband spoiled my childhood.”

David Holmes

In order to ensure that all children are being properly cared for local councils must be notified of all private fostering arrangements. If you are a private foster carer or parent and wish to do this now then you can go to the section on this website called Notify Your Council and find details of the private fostering team at your local council.

If you know of a child being privately fostered, please don’t ignore it. Either speak to the carer and talk to them about notification, or if appropriate, call your local council and tell them.