



## **A PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARER'S THOUGHTS ABOUT ASSESSMENT**

**By Karen (49), Ingleby Barwick**

“Making a difference to a child’s life is my sole reason for becoming a foster carer, and the assessment process helped me realise it. That’s why I’m seeking approval for a child or siblings 0-10 years, on long-term placement. I want to be there for someone every step-of-the-way during their formative years, to encourage and help them. I believe in the power of education and want to pass this on. I want to be there for a child’s development at primary school and spend lots of one-to-one time with them. The assessment made me see this clearly.

“At first I was nervous about the process because I didn’t know what to expect. I’d heard it would be ‘very intrusive’. This naturally worried me. However, I found my Supervising Social Worker easy to talk to, and we had an easy rapport. She was interested in what I had to say, and I actually enjoyed talking at length about my experiences – including the times I’ve found challenging. She listened to me. And to be honest, at the outset, I hadn’t really anticipated benefiting from it!

“There are areas of the assessment I imagine some people may find sensitive, for example discussing finances. However, having owned a business and been used to discussing personal information with my bank over many years, I found the detail wanted by the Local Authority easy in comparison. It’s simply a case of showing you can budget – what’s your income, what’s your expenditure and what’s your level of debt. They need to prove you are financially responsible. It was no more complicated than that.

“The assessment process made things seem more real. Up until then, for example at the preparation group, things seemed theoretical, and it was all about reading notes and having discussions about fostering. What would you do in situation A? How would you react in situation B? What’s the child protection law about situation C? Now however, I feel things are happening swiftly. I’m closer to realising my long term ambition of helping children.

“The most challenging part of the assessment? I’m not very patient, so I wanted things to progress quickly from the start. But you need to go through each stage as it arises, and some things just can’t be rushed. For example, the DBS check took 14 weeks. It was something I couldn’t do anything about, and it was unusually long. I guess it gave me time to get you used to the idea of sharing my life with someone new – to come to terms with the massive changes ahead.

“Before starting the journey, I did a lot of research. I decided I wanted to work with the Local Authority to foster, and I know I’ve made the right choice. Other providers could offer me ‘fast-track’ routes, but the support and guidance from Stockton-on-Tees has been crucial to my peace of mind. It’s given me the confidence to know I can offer a child in care a good home. The assessment has helped me see how to play to my strengths. And without the discussion and deliberation this insight just wouldn’t have been possible.”