



Eight years ago, life changed for Adrian and I when we moved into a five bedroom house in Rhondda Cynon Taff, with a swimming pool which became popular with our neighbours' children.

The neighbours happened to be foster carers with TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust) and got us thinking about fostering. After all, we had no children of our own – just two rescue donkeys and plenty of room to spare. But we were worried about our eligibility. Surely two men can't foster children together?

Our neighbour spoke to her TACT social worker and it turned out that we would be very welcome to apply. The application form was intrusive, but we knew that was for a good reason. The process was intensive, but seemed to go very quickly.

Soon after approval we got our first placement – we were both nervous and excited. D, a 14-year-old boy, settled in to home life with us really well and left to move in with his girlfriend at the age of 18. He's nearly 22 now and has two boys of his own. He often comes to visit.

Next came Ma, who came to us after he left his alcoholic mother and took himself to his local authority on his 16th birthday. He stayed with us until he was 18 and then moved into a flat with his girlfriend around the corner from us. He's constantly back and forth to our house for food! He works for the health service as an administrator and every time he comes around he loves the smell as we open the door to him, because it reminds him of the safe haven we gave him when he went into care.

Gary and Adrian

"How fostering filled a gap in our lives."

Following Ma was perhaps one of our greatest fostering successes, Mb. He was not happy living with his previous foster carer and had his bags packed for four months waiting to be moved to a new foster home. The problem for Mb was that as a gay 14-year-old, he felt very repressed about his identity and unable to truly express himself. Within just days of moving in with us he was a transformed person. His school's head of year rang us to say how he couldn't believe the positive change in him. He really came out of his shell and grew in confidence. It's breakthroughs like that which are so rewarding about fostering. He's really happy living with us and he has no intention of leaving until he's at least 25, he says.

Mb is a big Doctor Who fan and we restored the original bus that was used in the Doctor Who film Planet of the Dead. We often go to rallies with it – that's great fun.

Sixteen months ago, 14-year-old C joined the family. Initially, C was a very angry young man – he thought he was staying with us on a respite basis but he was actually a long-term placement. When he arrived he had literally nothing except

an old guitar. It was so sad to see.

He has learning difficulties and started going to a class at his school for young people with special needs. The teacher is a musician and, with his encouragement, C has discovered that he's musically gifted. Now he has his own band, they play in our garage and he's going to record an album with his teacher. The difference in him now is so fantastic. He's much happier and more confident. He's probably going to stay with us under the When I am Ready scheme, which in Wales gives young people the right to stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18.

Although we have busy lives with me working and both of us volunteering as community first responders for the Welsh Ambulance Service, fostering has filled a gap in our lives. It's so great having kids around – well, Adrian and I are big kids at heart ourselves to be honest. For us, the downside of fostering is when we hear the horrible things that the boys have been through before they came into our lives. One of our lads often says, "Well you know what it's like," and I have to remind him that actually I don't know what it's like. Neither Adrian or I can imagine how it must feel to be uprooted from your home and taken into care.

I'd recommend fostering to anybody. But be aware that it's not easy, you will need to be prepared for tears and tantrums, as well as fun and laughter. However, at the end of the day, it's so very rewarding. ●

For more information on TACT and how to become a foster carer visit tactcare.org.uk, @tactcare