

## Nicola: My Fostering Experience

*Nicola age 27 from Belfast came into care at the age of 14. She lived full time in a Children's Home but spent regular weekends with her Foster Carer. What began as one weekend a month progressed quickly to more time over the school holidays.*

My relationship with my Foster Carer developed in such a way that I quickly felt part of her family. When we were out for the day and bumped into someone she knew, she would introduce me with pride and confidence reinforcing for me that I had nothing to be ashamed of because I was in care.

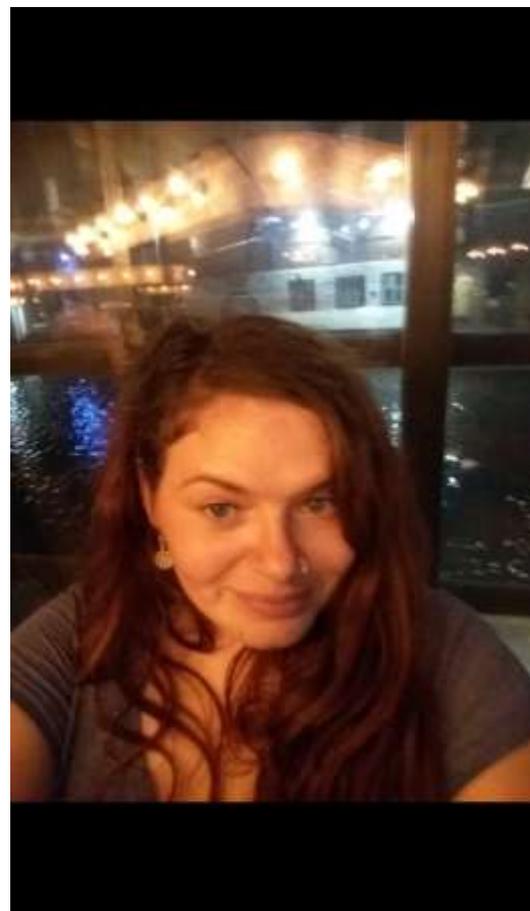
Some of my favourite things that we did were having fashion shows in the house after shopping, watching X Factor with the dogs, cooking dinner together or going for long drives singing away in the car.

She instilled confidence in me in so many ways. She helped me to believe in myself and saw my potential before I did. She reminded me that I was worthy. She assured me that I was wanted and that I was enough just by being me.

Initially in care I was shy, frightened and very wary of everyone around me. I was constantly trying to suss out different people and Social Workers as I had a natural mistrust of professionals within me ingrained from my childhood. My Foster Carer empathised with me feeling that way. She understood that the whole process was confusing, intimidating and at times clinical. She made me feel that I had a safety net with her that no matter what I did there was still someone to tell me it was going to be okay.

I appreciated how much she went out of her way to assure me that she wasn't going anywhere and that she only had my best interest at heart; she helped to break down some of the barriers I had built around myself for protection.

My Foster Carer showed me her vulnerability when she told me she was unwell. This was a huge moment for me because I knew that she didn't have to tell me but wanted to because



she trusted me and I was important to her. She opened up to me which showed me how much she trusted me and in turn how much I could trust her.

She taught me how short life can be and that I shouldn't waste time with things that didn't make me happy whether it was choosing my A Level subjects or applying to University; she was always encouraging me to strive to give my best and take the risk to follow my dreams. My Foster Carer was so inspiring and very stubborn in her belief that hard work and perseverance makes all the difference in your life no matter what start you had or what the circumstances you CAN succeed. She didn't believe in waiting for your life to happen, you had to go out and work towards what you wanted your future to be.

The advice I would offer to those considering fostering would be: Do it! People at times can be unsure of how much they can offer a Young Person or whether they would be suitable for it. All I can say is that being Fostered was the best thing that could have happened to me.

I know that I wouldn't be the person I am today without my Foster Carer and her influence. You don't need to have all the money or time in the world to foster. Giving a Young Person a safe, comfortable and caring place to stay is the most important thing. If you can spare a weekend a month to share your life and home with a Young person I assure it will change you both for the better.

Knowing that I had someone like her who was there for me enabled me to do my best at school throughout my GCSE's, A Levels and Degree. Knowing that I was valued and that I mattered to her gave me such encouragement. That is a feeling that you cannot put a price on and one which can be very rare for those in care.

Be yourself, be patient and most of all be kind. These are the things that matter; they may be small but they make all of the difference in these Young peoples lives.