

Respite caring works for us

In North Tyneside, foster families and young people have been sharing their stories to support the campaign and highlight the importance of finding secure and loving homes for youngsters who cannot remain with their birth families.

Alison Gravely and her partner Abraham Phillip have been foster carers for North Tyneside Council for more than 10 years.

Alison said: "We have been fostering for 10 years but we both have full time jobs, so we thought that offering respite care would be the best fit for us.

"We were both teaching at primary schools in North Tyneside when we first met children who had been in the care system and the experience made us realise we were in a position to help.

"We have looked after two children; the first was a little girl who started coming to us once a month between the ages of 10 and 18 and then, at the point she no longer needed respite care, we started taking a boy who is now 16.

"Being able to provide respite care for the same child on a regular basis allows for continuity, familiarity, and a routine for the child. We are lucky to have a close relationship with the foster family as well, which is important to ensure that the needs of the child are understood and there is a strong support network in place.

"It's very rewarding and it means everyone gets to take a break every once in a while. We always find activities that we think the children would enjoy. The little girl who stayed with us enjoyed horse riding but it could be a trip to the park, the cinema, or trampolining.

"Support comes from our friends and neighbours and the council plays a really important role as well, with regular visits from our social worker as and when we need them, and it's very reassuring to know that there is somebody at the end of the phone."

"If someone is thinking about fostering, my advice is definitely to go for it and find out more about it. We had quite extensive training before we were accepted and I think if foster carers are unsure they're doing the right thing, then that might help them to decide whether or not it's something they would be willing to do.

"Being able to help a family and give them a break and also being able to support that child is very rewarding."