

# Fostering: Meet ...Care Leavers

## Meet Ricky

"Being listened to, having boundaries set for you, knowing people care about you – all that makes you feel safe, secure and loved. That's what a good foster placement is all about," says Ricky Harding and he should know. Ricky spent ten years in the care of Hampshire County Council and for eight of those he lived with foster carers Wendy and Peter Richardson.

He credits the care he received from the entire Richardson family as making him the young man he is now and says he cannot thank them enough. "They've been there for me, " he said." From the moment I arrived in their home they made me feel part of the family. I was never made to feel different. They helped me become who I am now."

"Before I lived with them I wasn't paying attention at school, I wasn't doing very well, I was all over the place. Wendy helped and supported me, she did my homework with me, she was there for me. I became more interested in my school work. They helped me improve as a person."

Ricky regarded Wendy as Mum –

he knew he had a mum, a dad and brothers but for him the stability that Wendy and Peter provided was what he says he needed to help him thrive and grow into the confident young man he is now.

Without that he says he doesn't know where he would be now. "Children need boundaries, for me routine was important it helped make me feel safe. If you don't have boundaries you get more and more out of control. Good foster carers are people who can bond with children, can give them that security, structure, that care and support. I'm not saying it's easy - children who come into care can be difficult, it can be challenging but all children have a good side and good foster carers can bring that side out, allowing children to develop and gain in confidence," said Ricky."

Ricky, who is at college now, wants to go to university to train to be a social worker. He's applied for a place at university. First he needs to take A levels in Sociology, Psychology and Health and Social care which he plans to do next year. He has just been made a Care Ambassador with Hampshire County Council, providing an important link between children in care and the authority, mentoring young people in care

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as someone who understands their situation. "After the care I received I want to be able to give something back, help others to change their lives for the better," he said.

Ricky lives independently in supported lodgings now but he's still very much a part of Wendy's family. "I play cricket with her nephew and her grandson and I see Wendy and Peter every weekend. I love her Sunday roasts, her roast lamb is my favourite – it's the best and I wouldn't miss it for the world!

"I would urge anyone who can open their home and their heart to a child in need to come forward and find out about being a foster carer – it's a chance to make a real difference to someone's life – it's the most important job anyone could do," he added

## Meet Joao

Hampshire care-leaver Joao Crisman is a changed man because of the efforts of his foster carers. "I came into foster care mostly because I could not live with my mum, there was a lot of friction there ... for the first time in my life I was able to stay in one place for a continued period of time. Make friends, go to school - all the things that a normal kid could do" he said during the filming of the fostering DVD. "I was going to drop out of college and school many a time and I didn't"

## Meet Stacey

Stacey, another care leaver feels the same appreciation for her carers "I was in and out of care from a young age. Both my parents were very sick and I was fifteen when I was orphaned. To gain a new family has been lovely, for the moments in your life that you can share. Having hugs when you're upset or having a board game night. They sound quite small but they're quite big in my eyes. To be part of someone's life, to change someone's life so dramatically is such a wonderful thing"

## Meet Christine

*Christine was looked after by the same foster carer as Ricky (above) - and felt compelled to write and tell us of her own experiences when she read what Ricky had written!*

"I am 27 and was once one of Wendy's girls' but still am Wendy's girl after being in 11 foster placements. I was 15 years old when I came, I had a daughter at 14 and she was one when I came. My time with Wendy was the best placement I ever had and I feel like I have never left home yet as I still come minimum once a week as of the holiday I am here nearly every day. I have learnt a lot about being in care, that you are not alone and that there are people that do care.

I am married now and have been for the past five years and my "mum" was my witness. I have now a 12 year old daughter and from my marriage a 2 year old boy.

My family includes my sister, Wendy's daughter, and we have such fun together and are now even doing ballet classes!

My daughter had a lot to do with my foster family too and classes Wendy as her nan. Its also the same for my son. My two year old has a day on a Monday and we call it messy play as they do painting, drawing, play sand and even make mud pies!

I feel Wendy is my mum and I was so thrilled when she asked me to represent the foster children when she was selected to be awarded an MBE. I had to wear a dress too that was difficult as I always wear trousers. It took me ages to find the right dress but also it was good because we got to meet a very special lady called the

Queen of England.

When we finished mum got our drivers to take us out for a three course meal which was very good because I love my food.

I did well in my education when I was at Wendy's I did have some time out of school but I did return too a special school designed to accommodate young teenage girls and people with school phobias. I passed 11 GCSE exams thanks to Wendy who used to sit next to me reading Of Mice and Men.

If anyone reads this and wonders if being in care, and do I want to be a foster carer, my advice would be to spend time with a foster child or speak to an experienced foster carer.

Without being with my mum (Wendy) today I would still be with the child sitting on a doorstep with my carrier bags wondering will anybody else love me. Would I be where I am today and the funny thing is that my mum (Wendy) also says she wouldn't have enjoyed her life as much as she has without her special children in her life."

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