



FusionNews

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Book Review: An Introduction to Autism for Adoptive and Foster Families

Jill and Phil have been fostering since 2015 and live in Dorset with their three birth children and their foster son. Fostering has always been a very big part of Jill's life as she grew up with her mum being a foster carer. They have been fostering 10 year old Toby, who has autism, for 18 months. During this time they have skillfully worked with his complex needs to offer a positive and settled home environment - with long-term matching now being sought. Alongside a very busy family life with many cats, rabbits, a tortoise and new puppy, Jill is also half-way through studying for her BA Hons in Childhood & Youth. Jill has read and reviewed the book 'An Introduction to Autism' for the National Association of Fostering Providers, which can now be seen in print on the NAFP website. Well done Jill for your excellent review!

Consultant Clinical Psychologists Katie Hunt and Helen Roswell provide a very accessible guide to autism and the added issues this may bring for an adoptive or foster child. The book is divided in to two parts. The first is a general introduction to autism including signs, symptoms and information about the diagnosis process. More importantly, the central message of the entire book is that every child with autism is different and, whether diagnosed or not, the emphasis is on the parent or carer to get to know their child's autism.

Having looked after a young boy with autism for some time now I found this book a refreshing change to the others I have read. It does not blind you with technical professional language, instead it offers explanations of terms used by professionals and explains the assessment process.

While the authors point out that they offer no quick fix to the issues faced, they do offer lots of advice and strategies based on their experiences as psychologists. The second part of the book looks at the additional challenges faced by adopted or fostered children and their parents. This includes coping with transitions such as contact, moving placements, or the daily

changeover between school and home. There are lots of practical suggestions and ideas offered to help with these transitions, ranging from pictorial guides and social scripts to visual timetables.

One important chapter in the book deals with attachment and the added issues this may present for child and parent. At the end of the book there is a 'getting to know my child' check list to create an overview of your child's autism and what it means for them. This is a useful tool for children going on respite or to a new school or placement, as it gives a clear picture of the daily issues the child faces, their specific behaviours and what may help or hinder them to cope with transitions.

Although written with adoptive and foster parents in mind, I would recommend this book to any parent or carer looking after an autistic child.

An Introduction to Autism for Adoptive and Foster Families. How to Understand and Help your Child, Katie Hunt and Helen Rodwell (Jessica Kinglsey Publishers)

Review written by Jill, Foster Carer for Fusion Fostering.

Meet Ali



Hi, my name is Ali and I have been a foster carer with my husband Andy for 7 years now, although only a year with Fusion. We have two adopted daughters who are grown and independent and two sons. Our eldest son is at Uni and our 16 year old is doing his GCSE's. I was asked to write this blog so that I can share our exceptional and everyday experiences with you and I'm sure many of you will identify with the things I talk about, although every child is unique, every foster family is different and none of us will share exactly the same story.

We have two long term foster children, a teenage girl and a boy who is 8 years old – I could say they were unrelated but that wouldn't be true – they share a foster family and a very similar history of life before they came into care.

When people ask me what it's like fostering I always get that Ronan Keating song in my head 'life is a roller coaster, just gotta ride it!' For us it really is like that sometimes – we share wonderful 'family' happy times and you feel in control and positive but then... bang, crash, wallop... those behaviours that derive from early year developmental trauma crash the party and you feel like you are back to square one and that nothing you do makes a difference.

Fostering is NOT easy – I truly believe it is a vocation not a 'job'. In fact if you are thinking along those lines you would be doing the young people in your care a huge disservice – you've got to connect on an emotional level and that means dealing with your own emotions when things appear to 'go wrong' as well as trying to help your young people cope with their own inner turmoil.

We moved to Fusion because of the training – I need to continually tap into the different courses because they keep me grounded, give me strategies and most importantly help me take a step back, review our home life and understand the issues from different perspectives. It also helps remind me 'It's not ME, it's not THEM, it's the legacy of what's happened in their lives and actually we ARE making a difference even if it feels like we're at the top of the coaster and hurtling down the other side!

We are a complex family – most families probably are in reality. The great thing about fostering for a good agency is that you are not alone – there is support, respite and a sense of being part of a team. It's half term – the children are watching tv and later we're off bowling. All is calm and tranquil. I was given a huge hug and a big smile this morning – I feel blessed but I have my seatbelt on ...just in case!



YOU'RE A STAR

Celebrating Success Stories and Good News

All children's names have been changed for confidentiality and safeguarding reasons



A Rewarding Mug

A previous Fusion looked after child sent her carers a set of special mugs as a thank you for all of their hard work. She went to stay with them when she was 14 as a weekend respite placement but remained until after her 18th birthday! She says that they did a fantastic job of caring for her under very difficult circumstances. As a result of their dedication they are still in contact now and have been invited to her upcoming wedding. We are very proud of Trish, Dave and their family.



Big Thank You

Tanya is 16 years old and joined the Eades family last year. She is now studying Hairdressing at her local college and has been described as a kind, considerate and hard-working student who takes the initiative to study at home whenever she can. More recently, she has attended work experience as part of her training, and has had glowing feedback from the salon who supervised her, who described her as a 'team player' and 'one of the best work experience students we've ever had'. This is brilliant to hear...keep up the fantastic work Tanya!



Ready2Climb

A group of South West Fusion carers and their young people went to Ready2Climb in Yeovil. First of all everyone got into a harness and listened to a safety talk. The children then spent a fun-filled hour on the various climbing walls. Everyone got involved straight away and had a brilliant time, especially on the double-sided racing wall! The carers enjoyed watching and taking photos. After the session, some of the group went to a nearby Pizza Hut for lunch. A great day was had by all.



New School

Ellie has settled in to her new school and is making good progress.



100% Attendance

Kian, who lives in Exeter, has been awarded a 100% attendance certificate from school. He has also earned his yellow stripe belt in Taekwondo.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Kirsty Marshall and Stephen Harrison who have been granted a SGO (Special Guardianship Order) for a sibling group of two girls. Although it means they have left Fusion as foster carers, it is a fantastic outcome for the two children who have been with them for 4 years.



Fantastic Progress

Jill is 17 years old and is placed with Jayne and Richard in Bristol. She is making excellent progress in Jayne and Richard's care and they are very proud of her achievements. She has been attending a Health and Social Care course and recently received a distinction for an essay that she wrote. She has also started a new part time job in a care home and will soon be starting driving lessons. Well done Jill, we are all very proud of you.



Graffiti Workshop

A group of Fusion staff, 21 young people and some of their carers, took part in the Miss C Graffiti Academy workshop. This involved each child spray painting an individual canvas in their choice of colours. They were then taught how to draw graffiti writing to decorate their canvas with. Lunch was served in between the workshops, which everyone sat down and enjoyed together. This also gave the young people a chance to engage with one another. At the end of the day each child took their masterpiece home as a keepsake. All the young people had a brilliant time being creative with the spray paints and they demonstrated excellent team work to achieve this.



A thankful carer:

We joined fusion just under 2 years ago and what a journey it has been. We have had ups and downs but to find out our little man can stay put is fantastic news. We couldn't have done this on our own and the one person we would like to say a huge thank you to is our social worker, Julie Murphy, who has been with us every step of the way from being on the end of the phone to coming to see us. Sometimes she must have thought we were crackers but at all times she has listened, given her opinions if we are not sure and made us feel we are doing great. Even D feels comfortable around her and that is a huge thing. Colin and myself appreciate everything and can't wait to embrace the next leg of the journey. SO from the bottom of our hearts we say thank you.



Fusion Fest was brilliant last year. With so much to see and do we received some wonderful reviews:

'The event was a celebration of the role of foster carers and the young people we support within Fusion. It was a well-organised and eventful weekend with a variety of activities for all ages. It was lovely to see everyone helping each other out, whether it was putting up tents, making teas and coffees or spending time with children and young people from different areas of the organisation. The activities such as the nature walk, games of football and rounders and meal times were brought together nicely by a dance and celebration with a band on Saturday evening. There was opportunity to meet people from all areas of the organisation and to share our thoughts and feelings as we watched the fire in the evening. The food was very good, as were the people who ran the camp site and supported the event. The band that came on Saturday was also very good and engaged with everyone present. The music brought everyone together in this celebration of fostering. I'm already looking forward to next year's festival!' Roger (Care Partner)



'Attending the Fusion Fest was an amazing experience. It was great meeting other carers and chatting to Gary, the director of Fusion. I cannot point out one single thing that I liked the most as I think it was the general uplifting vibe and atmosphere I enjoyed the most.

My children enjoyed the freeness of exploring the beautiful countryside with its lake and farm shop. Every minute of the day was packed with activities including sports, arts, glitter tattoos, Reiki, and an Orchard trip where we got to go fruit picking.

We even got to pet the hunting hounds! It was all rounded up nicely with tasty homemade food and an uplifting show from the live band, Bud Sugar. The whole weekend was fantastic... roll on Fusion Fest 2019 but make it longer next year!' Claire (Foster Carer)

Fusion Fest is happening again this year, so why not come along and join in on all the fun. Contact kdawkins@fusionfostering.co.uk for further enquiries.

Happy Easter from everyone at Fusion Fostering



Moonwalk



A small group of staff at Fusion Fostering are taking part in the MoonWalk in London during 2019 to help make a difference and to raise some money for a great charity. The work that is completed through the charity is inspirational and the MoonWalk is certainly a challenge that they wanted to take part in.

Most of us at some point in our lives have had a family member or friend who has been affected by cancer and have seen the devastating effect it can have on people's lives. Breast Cancer is the most common type of Cancer in the UK accounting for almost 15% of all cases in Males and Females combined.

The support that the ladies have received from Fusion has been fantastic. They have started their training for the big event, walking during their lunch breaks and completing lots of

additional training at the weekends too.

The ladies taking part in the event are:

Billie Billington

Regional Operations Manager

Heather Jackson

South West Regional Manager

Helen Hine

Referrals and Placements Manager

Jan Ashcroft

Finance Assistant

Gail Shepherd

PA and Head Office Administration Supervisor

Kayley Croom

Head Office Administrator

Chloe Lawrence

Head Office Administrator

Karen Bailey

Regional Administration Supervisor

Louisa Turvey

South West Administrator

We would like to thank all those who have already sponsored the Fusion ladies for their generosity and also say thank you to everyone else in advance. It means a lot!

If you would like to donate to their page, please click the link below:

<https://moonwalklondon2019.everydayhero.com/uk/fusion-fostering>

Good luck ladies, we know you can do it!



Everyone at Fusion will be celebrating our wonderful carers on the 2nd June 2019 Please join us by giving any foster carer you know a little extra love on the 2nd June.

Welcome New Staff

Lynsey Mirfield
Panel Member
Midlands

Ruth Taylor
Regional Administrator
North West

Nadine Kelly
Supervising Social Worker
North West

Tunmike Lanade
Support Worker
East Midlands

Angela Stacey
Supervising Social Worker
South West

Jacqui Garner
Senior Resource Worker
South West

Fiona Hutchison
Regional Manager
London

Amardeep Kaur Patel
Deputy Regional Manager
East Midlands

Welcome New Carers

South West
Sara-Jane and John
Rebecca and David

South East
Chris and Russell

East Midlands
Alison
Maureen

Hot Cross Buns Recipe



Ingredients

- 625g/1.3lb strong white flour, plus extra for dusting
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tsp ground mixed spice
- 45g/1.5oz unsalted butter, cut into cubes, plus extra for greasing
- 85g/3oz caster sugar
- 1 unwaxed lemon, finely grated zest only
- 1½ tsp fast-action yeast
- 1 free-range egg
- 275ml/10fl oz tepid milk
- 125g/4oz mixed dried fruit
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- vegetable oil, for greasing
- 1 tbsp golden syrup, gently heated, for glazing

Method

1. For the buns, sieve the flour, salt and ground mixed spice into a large mixing bowl, then rub in the butter using your fingertips. Make a well in the centre of the mixture, then add the sugar and lemon zest and yeast.
2. Beat the egg and add to the flour with the tepid milk. Mix together to form a soft, pliable dough.

3. Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured work surface. Carefully work the mixed dried fruit into the dough until well combined. Knead lightly for 5 minutes, or until smooth and elastic.

4. Grease a large, warm mixing bowl with butter. Shape the dough into a ball and place it into the prepared bowl, then cover with a clean tea towel and set aside in a warm place for 1 hour to prove.

5. Turn out the proved dough onto a lightly floured work surface and knock back the dough. Shape it into a ball again and return it to the bowl, then cover again with the tea towel and set aside for a further 30 minutes to rise.

6. Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and divide it into 12 equal pieces. Roll each piece into a ball, then flatten slightly into a bun shape using the palms of your hands. Cover the buns again with the tea towel and set aside to rest for 5–10 minutes.

7. Grease a baking tray with butter and transfer the buns to the tray. Wrap the tray with the buns on it loosely in greaseproof paper, then place inside a large polythene bag. Tie the end of the bag tightly so that no air can get in and set aside in a warm place for a further 40 minutes to rise.

8. Preheat the oven to 240C/220C Fan/Gas 8.

9. Meanwhile, for the topping, mix the plain flour to a smooth paste with 2 tablespoons of cold water.

10. When the buns have risen, remove the polythene bag and the greaseproof paper. Spoon the flour mixture into a piping bag and pipe a cross on each bun.

11. Transfer the buns to the oven and bake for 8–12 minutes, or until pale golden-brown. As soon as you remove the buns from the oven, brush them with the hot golden syrup, then set aside to cool on a wire rack.

Permanency

Permanency is when a child is granted by court to stay in the same placement permanently. It is a difficult decision for carers to make, it has to be a child centred decision and sometimes the best decision for all concerned is for the child to find permanency in another home. Below is a truthful account of one of our carers making the many decisions surrounded by permanency.

Andy and Katie were approved as foster carers in May 2017. Shortly afterwards, they had two little boys placed with them, who were aged 5 and 6. Court proceedings were going to take place but these were not finalised until January 2019. During this time, the children have posed many challenges and difficult behaviours, including soiling and sexualised behaviours, which both carers have managed incredibly well.

As of March 2019, the children are now 7 and 8 years old Andy and Katie were asked if they would consider having the children remain with them on a long-term fostering basis. As you will see from Andy's account, they gave this considerable thought. I also discussed it with them over the months prior to being asked, as well as in great detail once they had been approached by the Local Authority. However, they felt it was not going to be the right placement for the boys, or them, on an ongoing basis. There were many reasons for this, not least because we felt the children needed to be separated, so that they could have the very best opportunities going forward as they both have very high emotional needs. The proximity to their birth family was also a large factor in the decision.

Permanency, or long-term fostering in this case, is a huge undertaking for any foster carer. The children will need a stable foster placement to see them through to adulthood, so with young children, this can be many years. However, it has to be said, that in a very high number of instances, the foster carers do go on to provide this. We have several long-term placements in our area, and it is lovely to see the children grow and develop over the years.

For some though, the right decision is for them to move on to new foster families. We asked Andy and Katie to do their blog, through the course of this family finding process, so that other carers may gain an understanding of the process and how it can impact foster carers, the children and those around them. I am sure it will be a difficult process, but ultimately very rewarding once you see the children move on successfully, and with the confidence they have gained during their time with their short-term foster carers.

We have had our first foster placement, 2 brothers, since June 2017. In July 2018 we were asked if we would consider being their long-term carers, should a Full Care Order be given in court in January 2019. After much deliberation and tears - are we making the right decision, and the right decision for who, the boys or us? Anguish and worry as to what people will say, or think, especially as we have been given praise for our care and support of the boys. As well as more tears, as we thought we are being selfish and thinking of us more than the boys, and how will they feel about us and how the decision we make can affect them for the rest of their lives.

After meetings with our Supervising Social Worker and support worker, we both decided in August 2018 that we could not offer them the long-term home they will need. This was certainly not an easy decision, nor was it taken lightly. The long-term needs of the boys for the next 10 years were at the forefront of this decision.

In November 2018, after our Supervising Social Worker had already informed the Local Authority of our decision, we had a call from the Children's Court Guardian. At the end of a routine, 10-minute telephone call, she suddenly asked me if we had any regrets in our decision. She went on to ask what could be done to make us change our minds, and asked how the Local Authority could help us to move house, in order to take the boys on. I was taken aback by this and said that due to the proximity of their family and our town being relatively small, we would not consider it, or indeed change

our mind from the decision that we had made 3 months earlier. She asked again and got the reply of "the Highlands of Scotland", due to the fact that there are so many people they know close by to us. We had already changed our shopping and socialising patterns, to avoid our local town centre due to the huge adverse effect seeing any family members had on the boys. It is far easier for us, we feel, to reduce this risk and problems by going elsewhere for a calmer, more relaxed event.

In December 2018, we received an "All About Me" document for each boy for us to complete to help with the family finding process. This is very in-depth and covered everything from daily routines, behaviours, medication, support at school and any activities and hobbies the boys do. We answered everything in full, trying to give as much information and detail as possible, so that a clear and full picture of each boy could be given.

Completing this document made us revisit the full range of emotions and feelings we had in July and August 2018, as well as guilt and worry as to how this would make us look and people thinking we were turning our backs on the boys. We kept our composure and made sure that we put every last detail down, to give a full, clear and frank view of both of the boys and what makes them them. We got the news of the judge's decision in January 2019 and the boys were told by their Social Worker that they would not be going home. After the social worker had left, and the boys were in bed, we did feel a sense of relief for the boys, who had voiced that they were so worried about returning home.

As we were told more details of the ruling - that the boys do need to be in separate placements due to their current behaviours and future needs - we did feel a slight relief and justification of our decision. Not only that, but also how on earth could you then make a decision on which one to keep and to tell the child who would be leaving, how you made that decision, not now maybe, but when at 18 he knocks on your door and asks you!

A family finder was in place, who is not the social worker, but a social worker from the family placement team whose focus was to compile a profile of the boys and match them with potential families. The family finder said she needed an urgent meeting with us. However, she cancelled by text on the day of the meeting, due to a social commitment. This did really surprise us, but we do appreciate her full honesty!

Two weeks later after she forgot to turn up to the rearranged meeting, we did eventually meet her in late January. We spent lots of time talking all about the boys and adding depth to the details we put in the "All About Me" documents. Talking about the boys gave us immense pride, as we were starting to see what progress has been made in 18 months. The focus now is to make sure that a full picture of the boys is given of them, so that the right placement can be found.

Nothing further happened until mid-February when our Supervising Social Worker forwarded us an initial profile referral which had been received that day for the boys. So we will wait to see what the next month or so bring...

Thank you Andy and Katie for sharing your experience of permanency. We recognise that sometimes things do not work out in the way that we want them to, but we are glad that you have made a decision that is right for you.

Charity Cycle

I'm Darren Kelly, Team Manager in the North West region. I am a keen cyclist and enjoy doing sportive/endurance rides which usually mean you spend a full day in the saddle and usual cycle in excess of 80 miles.

For the past 2 years I have been part of a group of cyclists made up from supporters of Burnley FC in undertaking charity bike rides raising money for a Prostate Cancer Charity (BKPCA). This charity was founded by the previous chairman and current vice chairman of Burnley FC, Mr Barry Kilby, who himself is a Prostate Cancer survivor. The main purpose in raising money for the charity is to pay for 'screening days' to be held with an aim of saving men's lives with simple PSA blood testing events at local sports grounds. There are no national screening events for prostate cancer, and this is why the charity is so important. Men don't always go to their doctor, but many will visit a football ground and that's why the charity base their events in these locations. So far, screening days have been held since 2015 at the following football clubs, Burnley, Blackburn, Oldham Athletic, Ipswich, Wolverhampton, Charlton and Portsmouth. There are planned events in April 2019 in Oldham and Ipswich and further to be announced later this year.

The last 2 bike rides have seen us cycle from Burnley to Bournemouth in 2017 and the reverse journey last year, Bournemouth to Burnley. These rides took place over 3 days and we cycled approximately 100 miles per day raising in excess of £20,000 on each ride. This year, we will set off from Burnley on 17th April for day one cycling to Hull, day two will see us cycle from Zeebrugge to Dunkirk (after a night crossing on the ferry) and day three is from Dunkirk to Dover (on the ferry) then cycle from Dover to London, finishing at Stamford Bridge home of Chelsea FC. This 3 day ride is also 300 miles in total and as group of 28 cyclists our aim is to try and raise £30,000 to provide as many screening days as possible to take place during 2019. All cyclists have to fund themselves on the trip paying for accommodation, meals etc, therefore all monies raised is 100% for the charity. Please see below links to the Barry Kilby Prostate Cancer Appeal website and also my Just Giving page where I am looking to try and raise £1000 towards the grand total of £30,000.

www.justgiving.com/ashandarren

www.the-bkpc.com

There is a need for over 7000 new foster families in the UK. Can you help?



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