

FOSTERING STORIES



TRACEY: SENIOR FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER, FAMILY LINK PLUS

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF

I enjoy holidays in hot countries and exploring new destinations, but am equally at home in our little caravan. I like keeping fit and healthy, and I love being outside and socialising. I'm really blessed to have some amazing, supportive friends in my life who I enjoy spending quality time with making great memories. Family is also really important to me. My son is currently travelling in Australia - it'll be my first Christmas without him this year! I have worked at GCC for over 30 years with children, families and carers, trying my best to make a positive difference in their lives.

WHAT DO YOU TELL PEOPLE ABOUT FAMILY LINK PLUS?

Our team provides short breaks for disabled children and young people in Gloucestershire. This could be daycare or overnight care, in or outside of the family home. Many of our short breaks happen at weekends and during school holidays which enable parents to focus on the rest of the family, complete tasks that are challenging as a full-time carer, and rest. We always say, give a little time and make a big difference.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE WITHIN FAMILY LINK PLUS (FLP)?

I love my role! I spend time meeting individuals and couples, and guiding them on their journey to become FLP foster carers. In addition, when children and young people are referred to FLP, I'm responsible for building a comprehensive profile of them through meeting them, their families and school, and also any professionals involved in their ongoing well-being.

I need to be clear about the needs of each child, including what support and equipment is required. I take everything into account; physical challenges, medical issues, communication needs, logistics, location and lifestyle, as well as the support being requested. And this is where the magic happens! The most rewarding part of my role is matching a child with a foster carer, and seeing that child happy. I take my time with matching, building transparent and supportive relationships as I go.

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INTRODUCING THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FOSTERING FAMILY

Visit www.goucestershire.gov.uk/fostering for more information and fostering stories.

After introductory visits at the family home and the carer's home, if everyone is content with the connection, we then plan and arrange several short visits to build up gradually to meeting the required hours. This matching process is critical to be sure we are considering the needs of all parties carefully, and to achieve a happy and long-lasting arrangement. Once all the details have been finalised and the agreements signed I then handover to one of the social workers in the team who takes the support forward.

We monitor short breaks constantly to assess whether the circumstances or requirements have changed. This might sometimes result in an extra carer being allocated, a change of hours, or perhaps gradually introducing overnight stays.

WHAT DO YOU FEEL YOU PROVIDE FOR THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

As well as the 'break' that parents and other family carers receive from their responsibilities, the 'Plus' part of our team title is as important, and is aimed more towards the children. When on short breaks with an FLP carer, they have opportunities to form new relationships, to take part in activities in the community or in the carer's home, and to have experiences that other children their age take for granted. This participation and inclusion is vital to enable our children to develop independent skills and reach their full potential.

Ensuring that the children and young people are safe, happy, listened to and respected throughout their journey with the FLP team is very important to me.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE THINKING ABOUT BECOMING AN FLP CARER?

If you have an understanding of the impact of disability, or a willingness to learn, please get in contact with us. Our team is growing and we need more carers with the capacity to offer safe and regular day or overnight short breaks within their home or in the community. If you have emotional warmth and empathy for other people, you are just who we need. If you have the time and the energy, please just go for it! You don't have to have hours and hours spare, but we provide training, development and support groups which all require a little time commitment. It will be so rewarding. Whether it's seeing a child engage independently with physical tasks for the first time, hearing from parents how much they appreciate your commitment, or simply seeing a child's smile when you open the door to them - you won't regret it.

Family Link Plus

