

RUTH & WAYNE

CARER GOOD NEWS STORY 2



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Let me tell you about myself : my name is Ruth, originally from England, middle-aged, married to Wayne for 35 years and we have 9 children. I've given birth to five children and have four additional children in our family. I see myself as a mother first and foremost, not a 'carer'.

I've completed extra training, with my children's wellbeing in mind. I know mothers don't have to complete extra training, but when you have a child in your family that needs extra assistance you do what you can to support their needs. We are always learning new skills and techniques to benefit our family. Hurdles are present in biological and foster children.

I began thinking of becoming a foster mother when i was a little girl in England. I had a close friend, Yolanda, in my fourth-grade class. One day, Yolanda told me that she lived with her foster family, not her birth family. I thought it was a wonderful thing for Yolanda to share this personal story with me. I was in awe, that a family opened their home to assist with raising this girl. Yolanda told me the family treated her like she was their real daughter. Yolanda loved them as if they were her real mum and dad.

I thought to myself, I could do that. I could love another person's child as my own and how brilliant it would be to show someone in need what family life is really like.

Surprises are around everywhere. This sounds naïve, but I was surprised how damaged these children really are. I can't understand how someone could harm this little person. I thought that my love, my family's love could be enough to heal a child. It's not enough.

Having a child come into your home is not like parenting your biological child. It's the same but different. You can show this little person love, nurturing environment, and provide a safe place for this child to grow. But the child can react in unexpected ways.

We have challenges with the children and will continue to have challenges, but we just adapt to the issue on the day. During school holidays challenges can change per hour, but we get through them. Three of my children have a disability :attachment disorder, autism, and language disorder.

RUTH & WAYNE (continued)

My child that has the language disorder is very bright and delightful. However, if you tell her “we are going out, please put shoes on and wait for me in the lounge room”, she might understand one or two steps. In the past, I’ve arrived at the destination only to discover my daughter didn’t put on shoes. All I could do was just smile at her.

Miss 13 came into our lives when she was 10-months-old on a long-term care arrangement. When she was about three she had an access visit with her biological parent. Upon her return she began to have a meltdown. This meltdown continued and we took her to hospital. Her reaction to the stress of the visit presented in a physical reaction and the doctor informed DCP that access visits were not suitable and needed to stop immediately. We are grateful to that doctor. He took her best interests into consideration and protected her. Then when she was about four or five she refused to attend access visits with the other parent. Now she states she has only 1 mum and 1 dad.

When she was about six we discovered that she was on the autism spectrum. Wayne and I completed some training around autism to enable us as a family to manage and recognise her needs. When you surround yourself with people that understand autism life gets better. You can appreciate some of the challenges she’s dealing with and offer guidance.

One morning we were eating breakfast when miss 13 yelled at miss 15 to ‘stop making so much noise eating’ as her metal spoon kept hitting the side of the cereal bowl. We understand that noises are magnified, stressful and can be difficult to manage at times. We try to reduce some of the noise in the house but we can’t stop every noise.

Teenage years are difficult due to social media, which is a nightmare for any parent. Bullying was an issue at primary school for my daughter. Miss 13 began to have problems with a bully, becoming non-verbal and refusing to attend school. Last year she was home for about three months and in 2016 for almost five months. As the stress increased, she refused to leave the house. To overcome this challenge ,along with the support of DCP, we were able to change schools. We enrolled her in a small private school. Recently she read out a poem at assembly, in front of the whole school. We knew, at that moment, we made the right decision for her future.

RUTH & WAYNE (continued)

The knowledge I wish we'd had at the beginning of fostering is more information about her background. When a foster child arrives in your home, only basic information is provided : a 10-month-old female from a violent home. Tell us like it is. If a child has had brain damage we need to understand the consequences of trauma and abuse, and to have appropriate training. But the longer you have the child the more you fall in love with him or her, and you can't imagine your life without them.

The children have taught me several things :resilience, happiness and confidence. These children are resilient and keep smiling through the bad things that have happened. It's wonderful to watch their self-confidence grow. It's a wonderful feeling to watch them grow. I applaud their growth but i'm mindful that some of their behaviour might be a distraction from something that's bothering them.

Once my now 21-yr daughter didn't turn in her homework at school. She was 14 and in year 9 at the time. The teacher had recently discovered that we were a foster family and asked my daughter if it was because of the *foster kids* that her homework wasn't completed. My daughter replied : "if you're referring to my brothers and sisters, yes. It was my brother's birthday, so the family went out to dinner and I didn't have time."

My children are defensive and protective of one another. All the children get along well. Sure, they have their differences, but they love each other.

The special thing about our family is we 'get each other'. We're together with our ups and downs in life and always there for one another. The kids range from 13 to 31. The older children have a group chat on social media and see each other daily. The older children are approved to care for the younger kids, so my husband and I can get some respite.

The children have shown me how much personal strength I have. The strength of the family is that we've bonded together.



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The children have taught me love. No matter how much abuse they've experienced, they still have love.