

“I SEE MY HUSBAND IN A NEW LIGHT!”

Sometimes reading and writing the stories about our wonderful Life Without Barriers foster carers leaves me in a sobbing mess. Not because I am sad, but because I am moved, proud and overjoyed by how wonderful and generous our foster care family is.

I love at LWB that we bust all myths about fostering. The below story is one of true love, new love and the simple message that loving a child has nothing to do with gender roles.

Meet Chris & Sophiaan

“I see my husband in a new light and have a deepened respect and admiration for him, not only as my partner, but as an amazing parent,” starts an emotional Chris.

“In my own parenting role, I have found a willing partner in random silliness, someone with whom to share my passion for everyday adventure and a focus for the outpourings of unconditional love and nurture that I thought would never find full expression.”

Oh no – I’m crying already! You?

The couple has been together for 10 years and married in Queenstown, New Zealand, in 2015. After years of on-and-off consideration of fostering, Chris and Sophiaan began the process by attending a Life Without Barriers information evening.

“We came away from that feeling very positive, and we began the registration process,” Chris says. “It moved forward fairly quickly after the assessments began and then we became accredited.”

“While we were doing (Life Without Barriers) training we met with other same-sex couples,” Sophiaan adds, “so we’re not the only gays in the village.”

Why did you both become a foster carers?

“As a same sex male couple our opportunities were limited, but we both always felt the desire to nurture and support children and young people and did this in various ways through our work. Fostering eventually felt like a natural development, but it was important for us that we waited until we felt we were in the right place in life to be able to prioritise the care of a young person, before we jumped in,” says Chris.

“We took our time building a home environment that was safe, supportive and nurturing. We try to instil structure as much as possible and above all model loving, affectionate and respectful behaviours at all times,” echoes Sophiaan.

“Family has always been really important to us,” says Sophiaan. “I really love children and I do know that, being in a same-sex relationship, our options – when it comes to having children – are very limited. My idea of my role is much clearer now. It’s not about adoption, it’s not about having a surrogate child, it’s about providing stability for the child.”

As foster carers do you think it is important to be agile and responsive?

“Absolutely. A child with a background of trauma will gradually unfold and grow in the right environment and we know that being flexible and prepared for whatever comes, as part of that process, is essential. The child we care for has gradually become more comfortable sharing his emotions and vulnerabilities. It is all just about time and building trust,” expresses Chris.

“It is vital for us to show respect to the child we care for, as well as model it in our own partnership. We always try to respect privacy, personal preferences and the need for time and space, when indicated. Above all, we respect him as a human being with complex needs and wants, fears and vulnerabilities,” says Sophiaan.

Chris and Sophiaan acknowledge that challenging behaviours tend to surface a couple of days leading up to a major event.

“We don’t always know what is going to be major, but we have begun to recognise the behaviours and use them as invitation into carefully scaffolded conversations, to support the child we care for towards an increased ability to name and articulate some of the difficult emotions he struggles with,” shares Chris.

But they both agree that the joys far outweigh any challenges.

“Just watching him in moments of unfettered joy is all the reward we need. We love introducing him to new and exciting experiences and observing his hesitation give way to excitement and then enjoyment. It’s an absolute privilege to play a role in helping him reshape his relationship with the world in a positive way,” says Sophiaan.

What would you say to people who are interested in becoming foster carers?

“Everyone’s path is unique, but for us it was important to take the time to assess and explore our motivations and expectations and feel as sure as possible that we were ready to give our all to this process. We knew how unsettling and changeable the lives of so many children in care are and we knew we would only take the leap once we were sure that any child who became a part of our family would be a welcome part of our family for as long as they needed to be, not as long as we could manage,” says Chris.

Ok – if you are not crying already you surely are now!

“I would advise anyone considering this path to have lots of conversations, with the people they value and respect in their lives; to expose themselves to stories of children in care and the potential challenges of the fostering role. I’d say listen to both your head and your heart and if you decide you have room in your life, your home, your family, your heart...you’ll be in for an amazing adventure,” gently advises Sophiaan.

“It continues to be a great privilege being foster carers. And we thank Life Without Barriers for the opportunity,” chorus this wonderful couple.

Chris and Sophiaan – we feel the same way, the privilege is ours!

This story and campaign was a part of a broader campaign funded by the Queensland Government to attract foster carers.

“I was extremely honoured to meet some of our wonderful carers in April when I launched the first stage of a four year \$2.6 million campaign to recruit more foster carers in Queensland. The campaign is all about encouraging more wonderful people like these foster carers to open their hearts and their homes to provide love and support for kids in care. We will continue our efforts to recruit more foster carers throughout the year,” said The Hon. Shannon Fentiman - Member for Waterford (ALP) and Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.

Note: Video and original interview were funded by Queensland Government.