

Andy Taylor – Family First Volunteer

What made you volunteer with Family First? I have always had a heart for getting alongside people, and supporting them and encouraging them, so that they can gain confidence in themselves. After spending over 8 years visiting ex offenders, I felt that I would like to see if my skills could be used in helping families. I heard about Family First from my daughter in law, so I made enquiries. The time commitment required of being able to visit a family for 1 hour per week, for up to a year, suited me fine. After attending the training, and praying about it, I felt that this is a role that would suit me. So I applied, was accepted and eagerly awaited my first family.

What about the training? It was comprehensive and gave you a complete overview of what role you will be expected to play, as well as the roles played by the various social care agencies. All cases have been referred to Family First, who will then match you with a suitable family. Two things stood out from the training. Family First is not a befriending agency as your contact with a family is restricted to the weekly home visit. Your role is not to solve a family's problems, but to encourage, help and empower families to try and solve problems themselves.

What was your first experience of visiting like? My first three weeks visiting the family was with my Family Coordinator. As she filled out the paperwork, I was able to gain an insight into the family, and what the problems were that they were encountering. I also learnt about what, or what not to say Do not say "I know how you must feel", but rather ask "How does that make you feel?" Instead of saying "I would do..." I say "What would like to see happen?" But the main thing was to listen to what they were really saying. I quickly got to know my family, and looked forward to getting alongside. It was then up to me to make the visiting arrangements and give the feedback to my coordinator.

How do you know what to discuss? I do not go in with a fixed agenda, although I have in mind what we discussed at the previous weekly meeting. The visit starts with me asking him how things have gone since our previous weekly meeting. We then look at the action plan from last week, and discuss how I would then find out how the things that were raised at the previous meeting have progressed during the week .Each week is different. Something that was a problem last week now seems less of a problem, and vice versa. We then look at how to maintain what is going well, and discuss strategies for dealing with issues that need resolving. We agree on an action plan for the coming week

What do you enjoy about the role? I really enjoy getting alongside people, supporting and encouraging them to move on in their lives. With my present family, it is great to see that the relationship between father and son has improved. It is a real blessing to see people grow in confidence and start to make plans/decisions on their own.

What would you say to someone thinking about volunteering?

Do you have a heart for people?

Would you like to get alongside people, listen to their problems and offer them support and encouragement to help resolve them?

Would you like to help them grow in confidence to move on in their lives?

Can you spare an hour a week, visiting a family or individual on a regular basis?

If the answers to the above are yes, then volunteering for Family First may be just the role for you. The training given will help you decide if volunteering with Family First is for you.

So why not give it a try by contacting Family First today? As with me, it could be the start of a new adventure.