

Q: How did you become involved in the Pioneers Programme?

It all started years ago when I first contacted the local authority about fostering. I'm a registered social worker and used to be a supervising social worker with Barnardo's, so I already knew quite a bit about fostering. When I left that job, I threw my net out and thought, Right, what is it that I know? What do I enjoy?

That's when fostering came back into my mind. I met with the head of service, and I remember talking about the Mockingbird model (foster carers supporting foster carers). He asked if that was something I'd like to lead on. I laughed and said, "Well, I'm not a foster carer yet!"

The Pioneers is similar to that. It's carers supporting carers; only now it's recognised and recorded. I suppose I was already doing it before I became a Pioneer. I was helping others anyway.

Q: Can you share an example of where you've made a difference as a Pioneer?

One that stands out is when I supported another foster carer who had a young asylum seeker. I'd had two asylum seekers myself, and because my brother-in-law is from Syria, I had a good understanding of their journey, their culture, and the language.

This carer rang me one weekend (she was new and on her own) and she was in a bit of a tizz. Her young person had said he was going to harm himself, wouldn't eat, wouldn't leave his room. She didn't know what to do or whether she could even go shopping.

I helped her break things down, talked through safeguarding, and reminded her of the out-of-hours team. Once she'd done that, she felt calmer. I also shared practical things; the translation apps I used, where to get halal food, what to cook, even explained that shouting can be normal in their culture. She later told me it really helped.

That's what being a Pioneer is for me: being there when someone needs to talk, helping them find the next step.

Q: What kind of everyday support do you give other carers?

We've got a group chat with lots of different foster carers. Sometimes someone will post, "This has happened: I don't know what to do." I'll message them and say, "You can go back to your supervising social worker, or you can ring the Fostering Network helpline, they're open until such-and-such a time." It's simple things, really. Signposting. Reassurance. Reminding people that help's there. Sometimes I'll share mindfulness apps or ideas to manage stress. Because fostering can be stressful, especially when you're dealing with trauma or behaviour. It just helps to have someone who understands.



Q: Have you seen an impact on other carers or the wider fostering community?

Definitely. I had another carer who didn't know her asylum-seeking young person should have a guardian, so I helped her with that too. It's often small bits of knowledge that make a big difference. And even before being a Pioneer, I liked connecting people. One young girl I looked after had mental health issues, and I introduced her to my sister, who's in her 70s and loves animals. The girl started walking her dogs, cleaning windows, helping round the house – and two-and-a-half years later, she still goes there. It gave her purpose and routine, and my sister gained a friend. It's those little human connections that matter.

Q: How has being a Pioneer influenced you personally?

I've been fostering for 20 years now, and I've benefited from being a Pioneer myself. My co-Pioneers put on training (like online safety sessions) and I go along because I'm always learning. It's also made me more aware of recruitment. For example, there's a lady who works as a lollipop lady and in Home Bargains. I see her every week with one of my young people, and I'll drop in little stories about fostering. I joke that I'm "grooming her for fostering," but really I'm just planting seeds. If I see someone who's caring and has the right heart, I can't help but encourage them.

Q: What's your particular focus or niche as a Pioneer?

I'd say asylum seekers. Not many carers want to take them on because of language barriers, cultural differences, and because they're often teenage boys. But I've had really positive experiences. One young man, still keeps in touch. He's passed his driving test now and calls us his "Wales family." At Eid, we send him money; it's their version of Christmas. That connection means a lot to me.

Q: Looking back, what's been the most significant change since becoming a Pioneer?

When I first started fostering, I would have loved to have had a Pioneer. I didn't even have a social worker for a while and used to get different answers from different professionals.

Now, with the Pioneers, it feels like a community. That's the biggest change. We can pick up the phone, talk things through, and know someone will understand.

We don't do it for thanks, but it's nice to be appreciated. It makes you feel part of something bigger and that's what keeps me going.

Final Reflection

The most significant change for me is that feeling of community; foster carers supporting each other, sharing what we know, being there at the end of the phone. It's knowing none of us have to do this on our own anymore.

Fostering
Wellbeing
Conference



2026



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government

The
Fostering
Network
Y
Rhwydwaith
Maethu