



Testimonial: Rita

FALL 2018

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VISION**

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children and
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As CCAS of Hamilton's longest-serving foster parent, Rita knows a thing or two about adaptability. She's been caring for foster children in the area for more than 50 years – more children than she can count. Over the decades, in addition to her own four children (some of whom were adopted) she has cared for babies and small children, as well as older children and youth. Some stayed for a few weeks, and others for a longer period. Each one, she says, is different. And the key to success is being adaptable enough to respond to their needs.

You have to have a sense of the child

"I fostered babies for many, many years," Rita says. "A newborn is very different than a young child. You have to get a sense of the child. Some of them need a little comforting, a hug sometimes – and for others, no way."

Rita says it's important that they see where they'll be sleeping. She often tells them a little bit about her family, and what they can expect while they're with her. Her own children, when they were at home, were also welcoming, and would often be quite happy to show them their toys and where to play.

For older children and youth, Rita says it can be traumatic to leave their family and friends behind. They're scared, and it's important to make them feel at home. Though she makes a point of not setting rules right away, establishing a routine – such as sitting together for meals at the table – is important.

"Children are adaptable, and as a foster parent you have to be adaptable too," she says. "I just make them feel very welcome. The first night or two is very hard on them and you have to be prepared to spend some time with them. They seem to settle in eventually."



Everyone gets homesick

Rita notes no matter what situation a foster child is coming from, in most cases they are sad to leave their parents, and they want to go back. For most children, the agency is working to that end as well. "We never run the parents or the family down, and we have to appreciate that they are attached to their family," says Rita. "Children really miss their families and their neighbourhoods. They're coming from somewhere they've known to somewhere very unknown."

Saying goodbye

While Rita and her husband did adopt one of her foster children, she says it was important to be realistic. "Lots of times when we had babies that had been with us for a while, the thought went through my mind to adopt them, but we were getting older, and we decided babies needed a younger family. It's a good feeling to help a family become a family," she says.

So what's it really like when a foster child's placement is up, and it's time to say goodbye?

"I put a smile on my face and I let them go," says Rita. "It's not always the easiest thing to do, but it works. And you do miss them. But then you have another one who needs you, and it starts all over again."

