

Give it a go

While out with a friend one evening she told me about the Chernobyl project she was involved with. I was intrigued the idea of caring for two young children who had left their family, homeland and everything familiar to them to come to England for a holiday. These children have little or no English, did not necessarily know the children they were coming with and would have limited contact with their mum/dad.

Our daughter would have reservations going away for a weekend let alone four weeks.

My curiosity about the Chernobyl Project got the better of me and in discussion with my family we agreed to pursue an application. The necessary checks and interviews were complete and it was now almost time to receive our guests. Prior to their arrival we prepared the bedroom, my daughter made name plates to go on the outside of their bedroom door, she sorted out the toys from the loft and moved her precious wooden dolls house, with figures into the bedroom as she thought playing with the house would help them adjust to being away from their home.

We received initial paperwork about the girls we would have to stay, which included a photograph of each child. It now became very real and the photographs of the girls at my daughter's request were framed and placed on the side with our family portraits.

Friends and family were very kind by collecting clothes we could let the girls have, when the children arrive we were told they usually only have the clothes they stand up in.

It was now time and we went off very excitedly to meet the girls. They both had a small bag with them filled with presents for us, glassware, tea-towels and vodka. While the girls lived in the same area of Belarus they had not met each other previously, they were both nine years old.

On the first evening we arranged for the interpreter to come to our house to share with us the contents of letters both girls had, giving us invaluable details about the girls likes, dislikes and family. One of the girls shared photographs with us of her family which we found very helpful.

Both girls settled very well, and phoned their family on two occasions during the fortnight, they were happy to just hear their loved one's voice and did not prolong over the calls.

Bath time was memorable; they loved the water with lots of bubbles, sometimes wearing their swimming costumes and goggles to add to the fun. They were determined to stay in the bath as long as they could.

The girls took an active part in all the activities on offer by the group; they enjoyed a trip to Drayton Manor, a fire station, swimming and most exciting for them the sea side. Despite little sleep due to talking once in bed they were always keen in the morning to check their daily schedule to see what the day would bring.

Both girls loved to put on their party clothes and eat family meals; the trampoline in the garden was a source of great fun for them. They loved to tease Larry our dog who joined in with their games. The dolls house featured everyday and yes our daughter was right the girls spent hours on end playing with the house and role playing family life.

It is hard work and yes it was sad, when the time came for the girls to move on. However for us it is rewarding to know that we have helped two children affected by a disaster long before they were born to experience the things we take for granted, breathing fresh air, playing outside, eating fresh food and receiving medical treatment.

So go on give it a go!

Mike, Bernie and Hannah O'Dwyer
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