

Hackney is one of the most diverse places in the UK. In this regular feature, we profile the borough's great & good or just plain interesting

hackneypeople

'I try to put myself in their shoes and remember who I was at their age'



Brenda Campbell has been fostering Hackney children for 24 years, and has no intention of retiring from the job any time soon

By **Harriet Worsley**

WHEN the Council held a masquerade party earlier this year to celebrate the amazing work done by its foster carers, there were awards for those who had been in the job for five, 10, 15 and 20 years. And then there was Brenda Campbell.

"I've been fostering Hackney children for 24 years," she says with a smile. Adding: "I suppose that is a long time, but it's flown by."

It is a particularly long time, however, when you consider that she had a whole other career before setting out on that path.

"I was born and raised in Barbados," says Brenda. But at the age of 19 she took the brave decision to

move across the world to Yorkshire in pursuit of a career in nursing.

She explains: "I had a cousin there, but when I arrived I wanted to go straight home again, it was so foreign and so cold!"

Instead, she gritted her teeth, applied to a hospital and became a nurse.

Decades later, she was to show the same resolve in her first weeks as a foster carer. Brenda recalls: "It was 1991 and I was living in Haringey. A woman I knew asked me whether I would be interested in fostering. She worked for Hackney Council and had seen the way I used to play with all the kids on my estate. They called me 'Aunty Brenda'."

Interested by the idea, Brenda agreed. Six months later, the first child was placed in her care. She says: "The child had been badly

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abused and was so sadly damaged. It was hard work, but it was a challenge. I dealt with it, with the support of my social worker."

It certainly didn't put her off. Some 24 years on, and aged 70, she is still fostering children from Hackney.

"I have now fostered 15 children in all," she reflects. Adding: "Some come just for respite. Others come for four weeks and end up

staying for years. One little girl came to me at two-and-a-half and left at 19. She still comes home to visit me, and now she brings her own little girl. That makes me so very happy."

Other children, now grown up, come back to visit her too. "I am cooking lunch for one of my boys this Sunday," she chuckles. Adding: "He always finds time to visit when he's in

the area, and it's usually timed about right for a Sunday lunch."

In the two-and-a-half decades in which she has been fostering in the borough, the job has changed considerably.

Brenda reflects: "New standards have been brought in, new training introduced. But it's for the good. You learn so much in this job. I've had a lot of good training and it makes you feel really valued."

These days, it is no longer young children who are placed with her but teenagers. Brenda continues: "They often come with their own issues and challenges, but I try to put myself in their shoes and remember who I was at their age and what I wanted from life then. I get a lot of support from social workers and my fellow foster carers."

Still, caring for teenagers requires energy. "The kids keep me going as I get older. I have to keep going to the gym so that I can keep up with them!" she laughs.

Brenda has no intention of retiring from the job soon. "I'll stop when I'm ready," she says. Adding: "Right now, it is still rewarding. My favourite thing is being there for the children when they come home from school.

"I love watching them do well at their studies. Even if they go back to their parents shortly after, it's great being part of it as they grow up into good people."

Curriculum Vitae: Brenda Campbell

1946	Born in Barbados
1965	Comes to the UK and embarks on a career as a nurse
1992	Begins fostering children through Hackney Council
2016	Honoured by the Council for her long service

MORE INFO

For more info on fostering in Hackney, visit: www.hackney.gov.uk/fostering; call: **0800 0730 418**; or e-mail: fostering.recruitment@hackney.gov.uk