

A career that changes young peoples lives

Tom was six years old when he first came into the care system with his younger brother. His parents had a turbulent relationship and so were unable to look after their children.

For many years Tom suffered cruelties and inconsistencies in the care system, however his life was turned around when he came into contact with Kasper Fostering.

Now aged 27 and a self-employed builder living in Kent, Tom has reflected on his long experience of fostering. "If I had not been found by Kasper Fostering, my life would be very different now," he says.

Tom and his brother were initially in a two-year placement. However, it was far from being a pleasant time, for a while there they both experienced physical and emotional abuse. "The slightest thing could mean we would be hit," he says.

The brothers were then regularly moved from placement to placement - and were never told why they were moving. "I always felt that I wasn't really wanted," he says.

Meetings were convened by social workers without warning with "Jus-



Happier times: Tom today (left) and (above right) Kasper's fostering team

© Gareth Arnold of KOS

tifications" for moves he felt always camouflaged in the context that "a move would be in his best interest".

But Tom's life began to change when he came into the care of Kasper Fostering. Kasper was established back in 1997 to support young people in care through the provision of high-quality well-supported foster carers. Just as with Tom, many of Kasper's young people have experienced previous placement breakdowns, with their needs often defined by limited availability. By remaining a small, not-for-profit organisation, Kasper has provided dynamic and individual care, always underpinned by its child-centred ethos.

One of Kasper's unique approaches is the emphasis put on continuity of care. For example, Tom felt that his previous experience of changing schools, infrequent family contact and the eventual separation from his brother has had a lasting effect on him, leading to Tom losing sight of his own identity. For self-preservation he also learnt to deny his own emotions and feelings. With the counselling facilitated by Kasper, Tom began to understand how his experiences had affected him and was able to move forward from their negative influence.

When Tom was first informed of a move to carers with Kasper fostering he felt at the time this would be another notch on the very long virtual ladder he had notched to date. Why should he think otherwise, why would he want his experience to be any different when he was by



now very used to deploying coping strategies to survive being in the care system?

Family, belonging, understanding, stability and being valued are the key differences Tom felt he experienced by being in Kasper's care.

Kasper's robust recruitment, excellent training and wealth of experience in supporting young people with complex needs has enabled it to be rated by OFSTED as an "outstanding" organisation.

"Everyone at Kasper was valued, knew each other and the organisation was a reflection of everyone involved. I believe that every single child in care should be provided with the same quality of foster care that I experienced at Kasper Fostering, with their individual needs and rights promoted without compromise," says Tom.

