

Royal rewards

"I must be doing something right," laughed a local **foster carer** who has been awarded an MBE for her services to fostering. However, she did not believe it was true to begin with.

Shakuntla Gittins was Ealing Council's Foster Carer of the Year in 2018 and has now fostered for 12 years. When she received a call from an unusual place, she did not take it seriously at first.

"I was driving to school one day and the phone rang," she remembered. "They said they were calling on behalf of Her Majesty and I put the phone down because I didn't believe it. But I then got a letter and my family were jumping for joy."

Unfortunately, because of the coronavirus restrictions, Shakuntla has not yet been able to collect her well-deserved MBE. But it could happen next year.

She has looked after children of all ages – from five-month-old babies to 15-year-olds; and has had up to four girls at the same time before. She currently has two children with her – a 14-year-old girl and an 11-year-old boy. Home schooling during the lockdown presented an extra challenge

all parents in the borough will be able to relate to.

'FOSTERING IS SO REWARDING'

Shakuntla said: "I've always loved children and fostering is so rewarding. And I recommend it to anyone – but you have to put a lot into it. You need to make the children feel settled, wanted and cared for. So, you have to do it wholeheartedly. It's a family – you can't treat them any differently.

"It becomes easier as you go along. And you speak to other carers. In fact, I have become very good friends with other carers and we meet each other and chat on the phone all the time. That way, you draw on your own parenting experience but also others'.

"And Ealing's foster care team is really, really good and everyone there is so helpful."

Shakuntla has two children of her own, who are now grown up; but who still take a keen interest. And family plays a huge part in the way she

approaches her fostering.

She said: "My mum was a foster carer for Ealing for 22 years and I still take some advice from her.

"Because of her I always wanted to be a foster carer. I think with the MBE I've made my mum proud."

i Read more about Shakuntla's fostering experiences at ealingnewsextra.co.uk/features/big-family

MORE INFO

Could you follow in Shakuntla's footsteps? To find out more about fostering, call freephone 0800 731 6550, email fosteradopt@ealing.gov.uk or visit www.ealingfosteradopt.co.uk – where you can also take part in virtual information sessions each month with advisers at www.ealingfosteradopt.co.uk/events