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BY MARIA CROCE

AFTER spending part of his childhood in care, Austin Coyle was determined to do as much as he could to help youngsters.

Austin and his wife Anne-Marie have fostered eight young people, as well as providing respite and emergency foster care for others.

The couple, from Cambuslang, near Glasgow, turned to fostering after raising their own children, Joanne, 33 and Kevin, 28.

Anne-Marie feels it has also benefited Joanne and Kevin. She said: "They can see life doesn't always work out for everybody. They're better people for it."

Austin and Anne-Marie are foster carers for Kibble, who provide intensive fostering placements for young people aged five to 25 across Scotland with complex social, emotional and educational needs.

It was his own experience that led Austin to want to help others. He had to go into residential care between the ages of six and 11 for health reasons.

He said: "The climate in our area was industrial with lots of fumes and I had asthma.

"I had a good upbringing there and positive people behind me trying to help me with illnesses and give me an education and a positive experience."

Austin visited his family during holidays and returned home at 11. He said: "I knew how it felt to be away from home and when I came back I always said maybe later on I would consider trying to look at something to help other kids."

Austin, 58, and Anne-Marie, 60, waited until their own kids were 16 and 21 before fostering.

About 12 years ago, Austin spotted an advert for foster carers and applied. He had worked as a joiner and Anne-Marie worked in admin before switching careers to fostering too, seven years ago.

Austin explained: "All the kids who come in here are accepted as part of the family. There's no difference between my kids and the foster kids. They're all treated and respected the same way and all get the same things.

"I see the kids growing up and maturing and flourishing and starting to make decisions for themselves and being able to become young adults who are well-balanced and grounded."

Austin admitted being a foster carer is very different to previous jobs. "This is more rewarding and

GENEROUS
Austin and Anne-Marie treat their foster children as their own. Pic: Tony Nicoletti



RETURN HOME Austin with his dad, above, and, top, enjoying a trip to the park in his Scout uniform

We're raising expectations

Austin Coyle tells how his childhood in care made him want to become a foster parent giving kids a better chance in life

it's life-changing because you have to dedicate yourself to these kids rather than doing a 9-5 job."

Anne-Marie admitted fostering has challenges, but added: "We get good training and support and external support from friends and family to help us."

Kay Gibson, operations manager at Kibble Education and Care Centre, said: "It's Foster Care Fortnight and the theme is, 'Foster care transforms lives,' which is what fostering achieves." Foster

carers come from all walks of life. Kay said: "Whether you are gay or straight, single or married, under 30 or over 50, a home owner or renter - you could still be eligible to foster a child."

The Fostering Network say more than 7500 foster families are needed across Scotland and England alone within the next 12 months, with thousands of children requiring foster families each year.

● VISIT www.kibble.org for more.