

Teenager 'taught what love is' by her foster family

Girl inspires others to turn lives around

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AGED 13 and carrying the emotional scars of a traumatic childhood, Amy Mook was sent to live with a foster family in York, who have dedicated their lives to looking after some of the region's most vulnerable children.

Now four years later, the teenager, who hopes to study law at university, is urging people to think about fostering after her carers inspired her to "realise what love is" and turn her life around.

Amy's foster mother Karen Wortley 51, has looked after around 70 children over 11 years, from babies to young adults.

She said: "We had always wanted a large family but sadly that didn't work out, so we thought we'd adopt. But we tried fostering first and enjoyed it so much that we've never stopped.

"I've given a home to babies, teenagers and emergency placements from a few hours to seven years, and regularly give short breaks for a disabled child, alongside caring for three teenagers, including Amy.

"It's the difference you can make to the children's lives and the benefits you get when you see them change and blossom into a different person. No day is ever the same and no child is ever the same. I would recommend it to anyone. It's definitely life-changing."

Amy has been living with the

Region's foster care shortage

IN YORKSHIRE more than 600 new foster families are needed, according to The Fostering Network, the charity behind Foster Care Fortnight.

And while there are children of all ages and backgrounds who urgently need secure homes, local authorities particularly need to recruit families who are willing to take on teenagers and siblings.

York foster carer Karen Wortley said: "Everyone should think about fostering. If you have a spare room and can offer a child a home you should do it."

family since she was 13 and has blossomed into a confident and ambitious young woman.

She has had articles published in the *Big Issue* and recently won a national poetry competition with a piece she had written about her experience of living in care and how her foster mother helped her to overcome her de-

“ Since living with Karen I realised what love is and you can be loved. ”

Amy Mook, 17, who has spent four years living with a foster family in York

mons. "I did cry when I read it," said Mrs Wortley.

Amy, 17, who is currently in the middle of her A-levels at York College, now plans to go to university and hopes to inspire others to consider fostering.

She said: "Since living with Karen I realised what love is and you can be loved and things can work out.

"People who foster are making a huge difference. It's a chance to make someone's life better, who through no fault of their own have been disadvantaged.

"I wouldn't be doing anything I'm doing if it wasn't for Karen.

"I have a lot of beliefs I want to stand up for. I have been to the Houses of Parliament and spoken there to show the world we are not a stereotype, that we can achieve our dreams."

And while Amy is a shining example of how fostering can transform the lives of young people, Mrs Wortley said there are times when it can be challenging, particularly when learning about the ordeals some of the children have been through.

She said: "It's totally different to what you expect. It really opens your eyes to real life and problems. Nothing shocks me anymore. Everyone that comes has a different story. You think 'this child has gone through this and I have got to help them'."

But one of the hardest parts of being a foster carer is letting go, said Mrs Wortley. "But if they are going back to their family, you know you are doing your job well."



FOSTERING HOPE: Karen Wortley with Amy Mook in York's Museum Gardens. Karen has fostered around 70 young people over 11 years and wants to encourage others to do the same. PICTURE: SCOTT MERRYLEES.

Tests show school play equipment is hot spot for germs

SCHOOL PLAY equipment poses a potential infection hazard for young children, a study suggests.

Testing for germ "hot spots" at two typical UK schools revealed high levels of bacteria in unexpected places.

Play equipment had more bugs on its surfaces than did door handles, radiators, stationery items and chairs.

At one school a "play" dinosaur registered a contamination reading 41 times higher than that obtained from a toilet door.

Experts from pest controllers Rentokil swabbed 130 locations at an infant and primary school in the south of England and tested the samples using a hi-tech microbe detector.

From the results, they produced contamination "heat maps" showing the dirtiest areas where cleansing was most needed to prevent outbreaks of infection.

Luke Rutterford, technical manager at Rentokil Specialist Hygiene, said: "These findings may surprise many, as it is not necessarily the objects and areas they would associate with being unhygienic such as toilets, but instead items that are shared and used by multiple children which appear to be harbouring the most germs.

"Play equipment and shared items such as pens and pencils, are used regularly throughout the day but rarely cleaned, providing lots of opportunity for cross-contamination."

Bacterial contamination was measured as units, with the normal range falling between 200 and 500. A reading of 500 units or above is considered "high".

Across the two schools, the top five hot spots hosting the most bugs were play equipment, with an average of 2,857 units, door handles (985 units), radiators (743 units), stationery (675 units) and chairs (669 units).

The dinosaur registered 7,760 units, a reading more than 15 times the top of the normal range.

One especially affected infant school reception classroom contained a mascot teddy bear that registered 2,492 units. A reading of 3,885 units was obtained from a sink in the same room, and 2,271 units from a door handle.

Ecuador voices concerns over 'lack of progress' in Assange's case

THE GOVERNMENT of Ecuador has voiced concerns about the "serious lack of progress" by the Swedish authorities in dealing with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

A letter has been sent to the Swedish government saying

there has been a "serious failure" by the country's prosecutor, including a "lack of initiative" to complete inquiries.

Mr Assange has been living inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London for almost five years and has been granted political

asylum. He was questioned six months ago in the presence of Swedish officials over a sex allegation, which he has always denied.

Mr Assange faces extradition to the United States for questioning over the activities of WikiLe-

aks if he ever leaves the embassy building.

The letter raises developments in the United States since the election of Donald Trump as president, including a speech by CIA director Mike Pompeo describing WikiLeaks as a

"hostile intelligence service". Recent public declarations such as this constitute an "obvious risk" for Mr Assange, said the letter.

The Ecuadorian government reiterated that Mr Assange was under international protection

inside the embassy. The letter expresses "great concern" that six months after being questioned, the Swedish prosecutor has not issued any declaration.

The Swedish government declined to comment on the letter.

Briefing

Toddler bitten by prison sniffer dog

ATTACK: A toddler was injured by a sniffer dog while visiting a relative at a high-security London jail.

The young girl is understood to have been bitten by a drug patrol dog at Belmarsh prison in Woolwich, in the south east of the capital. The dog was withdrawn from service after the incident.

A source said: "The dog went crazy and just went for the little girl."

Call for feedback on job interviews

JOBS: Employers should be required to share feedback with candidates after a job interview, a group is urging.

Most jobseekers who attend an interview never receive any information back from the managers who question them, said graduate careers app Debut. Preparing for another interview is difficult if people don't know how they performed, it added.

Boy rescued after falling from cliff

BRADFORD: A teenage boy was rescued after falling from a cliff. Firefighters were called to Chellow Dene Reservoir in Allerton, Bradford at 9.10pm on Friday. The boy, 14, had fallen from a cliff into Devils Cave.

Specialist crews used a line rescue system to lower the boy to the bottom of the quarry. Calder Valley Search and Rescue Team were also involved in the rescue effort.

Three arrests in murder probe

SHEFFIELD: Police investigating the fatal shooting of 23-year-old Sheffield man Aseel Al-Essaie in Walkley on February 18 have made three arrests.

On Saturday night, a 29-year-old man from Sheffield was arrested on suspicion of murder and two other men, aged 25 and 35, both from Nottinghamshire, were arrested on suspicion of assisting an offender.



PIECES OF ANCIENT ROME

A group of four larger-than-life ancient Roman statues are going under the hammer at Sotheby's in London next month. The female figures, which have a combined estimate of £1m, are thought to be to date from the 2nd century.

PICTURE: SOTHEBYS/PA WIRE.

Potholes lead to increase in breakdowns

POTHOLE-RELATED BREAKDOWNS surged in the first three months of 2017, new figures show.

The RAC said the condition of local roads is on a knife-edge and one season of cold and wet weather could make it worse than ever.

It dealt with more than 6,500 breakdowns between January and March likely to be attributable to poor road surfaces, up 63 per cent on the same period last year. This included broken suspension springs, damaged shock absorbers and distorted wheels.

The last time the firm recorded as many pothole-related defects was in the first quarter of 2015.

It described the figures as a major concern because it expected the mild and comparatively dry winter to lead to a reduction in incidents.

RAC chief engineer David Bizley said: "Our figures sadly show a surprising and unwelcome first quarter rise in the number of breakdowns where the poor quality of the road surface was a major factor. We had expected a figure no worse than that recorded in the first quarter of 2016 (4,026) and it is very concerning that the roads, strangely, appear to have deteriorated in a mild, comparatively dry winter."

A recent study found councils need more than £12bn to bring the road network up to scratch.

Hate-filled cartoons and letters to conscientious objectors go on display

HATE MAIL and a cartoon depicting a person as "lazy" for refusing to fight are among documents and images released to mark International Conscientious Objectors Day.

The Imperial War Museums (IWM) has revealed letters, photographs, cartoons and posters which explore the harsh treatment of conscientious objectors in the two world wars as they took a stand against conscription into the armed forces.

Some 16,000 men became conscientious objectors in the First World War for religious, political

or moral reasons after conscription was introduced in 1916, while 62,000 men and 1,000 women took a stand against fighting in the Second World War.

In the First World War, conscientious objectors were assessed by a local tribunal, which rarely granted absolute exemption, instead enlisting them in the Army, including the Non-Combatant Corps, where many disobeyed orders and ended up in prison.

Soon a system was introduced in which imprisoned conscientious objectors had the chance to swap prison for work centres,

where they would be employed doing work not directly related to the war, though absolutists remained in prison.

There was a fairer system in the Second World War with more impartial local tribunals and more effort to find them alternative work, though some absolutists rejected the move.

Details of their experiences are on display at IWM London, as part of the current exhibition People Power: Fighting for Peace, which charts the anti-war movement from the First World War to the present day.



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