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Inside the life of a professional organiser and declutterer

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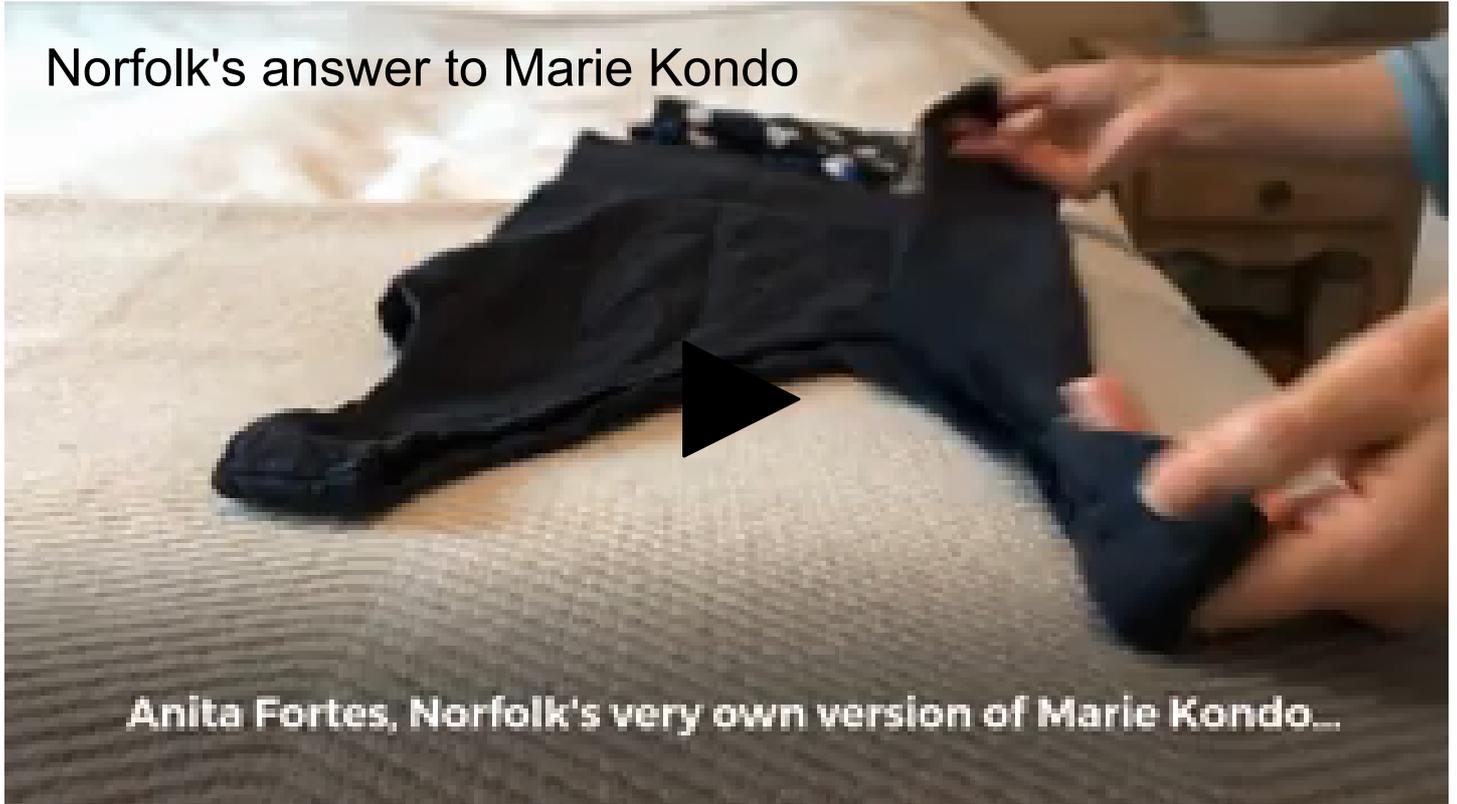
Anita Fortes could be Norfolk's most organised woman. Picture: Ella Wilkinson

There are two types of people.



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 Anita Fortes will help your organise your home. Picture: Ella Wilkinson

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Those who delight in the thought of an afternoon clearing out cupboards and rearranging shelves, and those who squeeze clutter into drawers, shoving them shut and hoping for the best.

Anita Fortes, from Overstrand, falls firmly into the first category. Her love of organisation has been life-long, and around a decade ago decluttering tasks for friends and family turned into a part-time job.

In January last year she took the plunge, leaving a career in education and starting A Neater Life, joining the growing ranks of professional organisers around the country.

Jobs vary, she said, but include keeping on top of paperwork, decluttering wardrobes and cupboards, bringing order to chaotic utility rooms, finding stray items a home and helping for-sale houses look their best.

 Marie Kondo, star of Tidying Up with Marie Kondo (C) Netflix

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"It varies such a lot," she said, "but nearly every job involves an element of clutter, usually people who have amassed a lot of stuff over time and for whatever reason have not managed to get on top of it."

And she said the benefits went far beyond being able to find your keys in a hurry.

"It's very stressful to keep living in a cluttered environment," she said. "It builds up slowly and can be quite an insidious stress. I've worked with families where they are falling out with each other because they can't find things."

While it's still a fledgling industry in the UK, 57-year-old Mrs Fortes - who is registered with the Association of Professional Declutterers and Organisers - said it was beginning to take off.

"In America it's already huge," she said. "It's a bit like having a cleaner was here a few years ago - you had to be very well off and there was a stigma, but that's changed."

"There's been a few reasons for the growth here. One is there has been a move towards a less consumer-led lifestyle and being more minimalist. Marie Kondo [a Japanese organiser who hosted a popular Netflix series in 2018] has also helped."

"It surprises me that sometimes people don't know what a professional organiser is but know who she is. Her popularity has made a difference."

"Another thing is social media - people see things on Pinterest and think 'mine doesn't look like that!'"

10 easy ways to start decluttering

Mrs Fortes has listed 10 items you can remove or rehome to create a tidier house.

- Plastic bags - keep to a number that you know you'll need for shopping.
- Old mobile phones and chargers - these can be easily recycled or sold.
- Outdated electronics - such as cassette players, remote controls and VCRs.
- Old laptops, computers and hard drivers - remove and destroy hard drives, then take to a recycling centre.
- Magazines - take them to a local doctor's surgery or recycle them.
- Excess pens - a few are handy, too many are not.
- Out of date paperwork - tackle bit by bit, and shred or recycle.
- Manuals - make a note of serial numbers for quick identification.
- Unwanted gifts - you can regift them to someone who would get more from them.
- Old towels, tea towels and linens - animal shelters often welcome these as donations.

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