



Re-evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Park House

Park House residential children's home is in Sherburn village near Durham. It offers short term respite care to young people with disabilities and behaviour difficulties. To help me write this re-evaluation I visited Park House several times to talk to Helen the manger and some of the young people who stay at Park House. Every time I visited it was clear to see that the young people who were staying were enjoying there time there. Park House has a happy and friendly atmosphere, I saw young people and staff chatting about home and their pets whilst having their tea, and telling jokes and laughing together.

When I visited I had the pleasure of talking to Jamie, Andrea, Stephanie, Ryan and Alan.

Evidence of Dialogue and Change

DVD

When I spoke to Helen, the manager at Park House she told me about a DVD that young people from Park House have been involved in making. In previous years a pack has been developed to tell people about Park House and what it's like to stay there. There have been photographs of young people included and young people were involved in producing it, however it was felt that it had become more of a parents or professionals guide, than one for a young person who may be coming to stay at Park House. Staff asked the young people who would like to be involved in it and some said that they would. They have worked with Rob Watson in making it and it is a short tour of Park House showing the different rooms and what happens in them. Mark has recorded the voice over and other young people are shown in different rooms like the sensory room and the soft play room enjoying themselves. Along with the DVD there will be a set of around 8 cards with Widgit symbols to explain about Park House.

The following piece is taken from the Widgit website:

“The Widgit Literacy symbols (previously know as Rebus),have developed over the past 20 years and used in many countries worldwide.

The symbols are clean concise and suitable for all ages. They have been carefully designed to illustrate a single concept without adding unnecessary information such as gender.

They follow a schematic structure facilitating independent vocabulary development.

There are over 7000 images in both colour and black & white covering a vocabulary of over 20,000 words. This vocabulary is continually being extended and gives you access to a wide range of topics and curricular areas.”

Some example of Widgit symbols.



Furniture

Helen explained that recently the young people who come to Park House have come with different problems. Now there are more young people who have challenging behaviour being referred to Park House and the staff team have been working hard to find ways to enable these young people to get the most out of coming to Park House. Changes made to Park House have been the creation of a second living room upstairs so that groups can split up and have time to themselves. Some young people with challenging behaviour have dismantled furniture in the past during times when they are having difficulties. New furniture has been purchased which is more robust and safer for these young people to be able to have the same opportunities to enjoy Park House.

Trampoline

In the past Park House has had a bouncy castle to use in the garden, and when it became damaged some fundraising took place to try to replace it. Durham Ladies Auxiliary donated £500 and more money was raised by staff and parents. However when the time came to purchase a new bouncy castle the young people said that they wanted a trampoline instead. Initially staff were unsure about this due to a number of health and safety reasons, however the young people were determined that they wanted a trampoline, so all of the risks were assessed and eventually it was agreed that a trampoline could be purchased. Alan told me about his involvement, **“I asked for it, I thought about it and mentioned it to the staff. It’s good.”** Ryan said the trampoline was **“cool.”** Jamie talked to me and said, **“Trampoline like going on.”** When I spoke to Andrea the first thing she wanted to tell me was, **“I’ve been on the trampoline. I chose the trampoline. It’s bouncy.”** She went on to tell me, **“I’ve done 66 jumps on the trampoline. Tonight I might do back flips. I can’t do cartwheels. I can do forward rolls. I can do one hand down and turn.”** I also spoke to Stephanie and she told me, **“I said yes for a trampoline, it’s bouncy.”**

Trips and Activities

I spoke to Alan about coming to Park House and what he enjoyed. He told me about trips. **“The staff and me decide where to go. We went to Bowes museum. I made a special request to go. The old fashioned cars were great.”** Helen told me about organising this trip for Alan during the school holidays when he stayed as he has a huge interest in old cars. The staff are already looking ahead to next summer when a military vehicle rally is held at the DLI and they will ensure Alan is staying at Park House at that time so that he can go to the rally. Alan said about the trips out, **“We get asked if we want to go.”**

If he doesn’t go out Alan likes to find things to do at Park House. **“I enjoy tidying the garden; I get paid when I’m finished. I could be the next handy man!”** When I spoke to Alan last year he told me about enjoying washing Park House’s vehicle, he has now

expanded his business. **“I like to give the cars a good valet. I charge £3 or £5 to staff; I put a lot of elbow grease into it. I spoke to Nick about it.”**

Ryan told me that he preferred to stay at Park House rather than go out on trips. **“I choose to stay here. I like the soft play where they have the ball pool. I can just go when I want to. I like watching the telly and films, there are some good ones.”**

When I talked to Jamie he told me, **“Like soft play. Like sensory room. Out with Judith in the bus. Like going to the park, all of us.”**

Andrea enjoys lots of things during her time at Park House. **“I like the soft play and the sensory room. I like trips out. I go shopping – Tesco’s, Matalan. I like Next. I like Claire’s Accessories. I like Primark.”** Andrea showed me a lovely red heart ring she had bought from Primark.

Andrea also enjoys going out to eat. **“For meals like McDonald’s, and ice creams and fish and chips.”**

When I asked about how she gets to go places and do things, Andrea told me, **“I tell somebody what I want, they take me.”**

Andrea went on to say, **“I go in my room to be on my own. I like music; I can listen to it in my room. I like bath times, I get my hair washed and I relax in there. I get my hair blow dried and I bring my straighteners from home and get it done.”**

Stephanie talked to me about what she likes about spending time at Park House. **“Going upstairs, to soft play, the ball pool, I like the sensory room. I like going out shopping, to Tesco’s and look at the magazines.”**

Stephanie told me about her friend Deborah. **“We go to my room together and play games, listen to music, a girly night.”**

It was very clear when meeting these young people with very different needs and abilities that they all enjoyed coming to Park House. Staff work hard to involve all of the young people in meaningful decision making on a day to day basis, and allow them to be as independent as possible. When I explained about why Park House already has an Investing in Children certificate and that it was up to them to decide whether they should receive it again for another year I was greeted with smiles and nods and everyone I spoke to agreed that Park House deserve another year of membership. Alan told me, **“I can always sit and have a chat and that, they listen to what I’ve got to say. When you don’t get listened to it makes you feel alone doesn’t it? There’s always someone to talk to.”**

And so along with Alan, Ryan, Andrea, Jamie and Stephanie I would like to recommend that Park House once again receives Investing in Children membership.

**Lisa Lines
Investing in Children
October 2007**