



Re - Evaluation for Investing in Children membership:

Tow Law Children's Home

Tow Law Children's home has a new manager - Kim Lawther, an old friend of Investing in Children from Paediatric Home Care.. As with last years evaluation a key piece of evidence put forward to Investing in Children is the work that Alex has undertaken for his reparation agreement. Alongside other project work which Joanne has been involved in. Ashleigh was at home on my first visit and was included in the conversation. On my second visit I also chatted to Samantha, who didn't really want to say too much apart from it things were "ok" and yes she agrees with my report and does feel listened to. Rebecca was also around but decided she didn't want to join in.

Evidence of dialogue and change continues to happen on a daily basis, and has not stopped due to management change it is an ethos and principle of good practice embedded within Tow Law Children's Home. Alex, Joanne and Ashleigh are still resident at Tow Law, all of whom I met with last year.

I mostly talked with Joanne for this evaluation; we talked about life in general at Tow Law as well as Joanne's life with her family. Joanne's main project work for the year has been an Art Project. Joanne said, "I was a bit bored and I wanted the home to look nice, I would rather be doing something." Project Joanne had great fun with the project, taking pictures of staff, messing about with the images and designing...all with the purpose of decorating Tow Law Children's Home. I have attached Joanne's full report so far...so far as Nicola has gone off on maternity leave and as the main artist in the house they have been struggling to finish. However Joanne has worked with the staff team on this project for a good chunk of time and has typed up her 'Art Project.' Joanne told me that her and Nicola worked out what they wanted to write up in the file. Please see attached.

Life Story Work is a new dimension to life in Tow Law and the young residents have been encouraged to create their own 'Life Story.' The reasoning behind life story work and the benefits for young people have been researched; papers are available in the IIC file, alongside the very personal stories that Joanne and Alex have completed so far.

I was able to talk to Joanne about her story and what it had meant to her to put it together, Joanne has been able to time line her 'care' story and remember happy occasions with family through photographs. Joanne also included a photograph of two friends who survived a horrendous crash. It was her story and Joanne told me it included things and times that were important to her. Joanne also talked quite freely about the review meeting that she had just had. Joanne told me that she "goes to all reviews because I don't like people talking behind my back, if they have got something to say they can say it to my face." Joanne also said "I think I get listened to when I ask for something, I always get it, well apart from when I ask to go home to my Mam, they say NO!" Joanne did explain that she knew why they said no because they had talked to her about it and she can't go until she has independence at 16.

Joanne might not agree with their view but did agree that they did explain stuff. Joanne was supported in her review by Kevin her key worker. Another life changing moment for Joanne happened earlier this year in April. Joanne went to Spain. Joanne had never been on a plane, never been abroad and wanted to. She asked if she could go, and was told to do some research. Joanne priced a short break and worked with Sam to get a good deal. Once Joanne got agreement for it all she asked Sam to go with her, to which she kindly agreed. Off they went and Joanne said she had a great time.

By talking to Joanne I have been able to highlight the continued commitment to dialogue with young people and demonstrate changes that happen for the benefit of all and those that have a profound effect on the lives of individuals.

Ashleigh was also at home on the morning of my first visit. Ashleigh is quiet, at times, and sometimes doesn't really want to tell me about what has been happening for her during the year. Ashleigh had had quite a troubled morning but was hanging around. I talked 'at' Ashleigh rather than with Ashleigh but she did nod and agree that the 'Young People's Meetings' still happen. Paul said to me that **'staff bring their issues and young people bring theirs.'** Again Ashleigh nodded with a big smile too.

I didn't have the opportunity to meet with Alex on my first visit, but did catch up with him when I took my re-evaluation to Tow Law to read through with the young people. However Alex had left plenty of reading for me about his involvement in life at Tow Law over the last year.

Alex has also begun his life story. Alex got to go much farther a field when looking into his history. Alex worked with his keyworker to put the pieces of his life into some order. Out of this Alex, Darren and Nichola went on a road trip! Alex got to check the van and later on sleep in the van! Please see photographic evidence attached.

Alex's main project for the year has been redecorating the phone room. This work has served two purposes, improving Tow Law Children's Home for the residents, as well as supporting Alex in completing his reparation agreement. Alex and Paul, moved all the furniture out of the room, stripped the room back and prepared it for redecoration, redecorated the room and voila! Please see photographs attached. At different points in time other staff were able to assist Alex and Paul with their specialist skills, for example ironing curtains, cleaning carpets and providing refreshments.

Alex said that he is happy with the comments I have written and that he doesn't mind that the work supports the Investing in Children membership for the home.

I have visited most of the homes in Co. Durham and I have to say that Tow Law were the first to provide evidence in files as individual project work with individual young people. This is a piece of good practice, which is now happening in other homes throughout the county. I have also heard it said 'we don't need to do projects to prove we talk to our young people.' Perhaps you don't but I think that the positive affect this has on the young people and their relationships with staff can not be under estimated. Both Alex and Joanne have a sense of ownership of their work and their home and a closer working relationship with the staff who are there to care for them.

Ashleigh, Joanne, Alex and Samantha, all agreed with my report and it is on their behalf I would like to recommend that Tow Law Children's Home remains an Investing in Children member.

Helen Mulhearn
Investing in Children
Membership Co-ordinator

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