Listening To Families Project

Final Report
December 2013

Produced by Third Sector Leaders with the support of Kirklees Council

Working in partnership with:
Action For Children
Lifeline / OnTRAK
Pennine Domestic Violence Group
WomenCentre
Yorkshire Children’s Centre

Our grateful thanks to the families who shared their stories in this report.

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Foreword by Clare Mulgan  
Head of Stronger Families Programme, Kirklees Council

The Stronger Families Board welcomes this report.

It reminds us of the challenges that individuals and families face and of the importance of providing the right support at the right time, in the right way and that change takes time.

The Stronger Families programme in Kirklees is making a difference to families’ lives and is improving the coordination of services to reduce duplication, avoid gaps and make best use of the available resources.

The voluntary sector has an important role in this programme, reaching some of the most vulnerable and isolated families and providing flexible ongoing support. This project is an example of how partnership working, innovation and information sharing can produce new learning for anyone working with vulnerable families.

I recommend this report to all those working with families in Kirklees and to the Stronger Families Board.

Clare Mulgan  
December 2013
Introduction by Tom Taylor
Chair of Third Sector Leaders

The government’s ‘Troubled Families’ programme aimed to change the lives of 120,000 families across the country. Families were targeted who had children missing school, who were engaged in anti-social behaviour and who were also claiming out of work benefits.

In Kirklees, the programme was renamed ‘Stronger Families’ and a fourth criteria was added to the government’s list, reflecting local needs.

The ‘Listening to Families’ project aimed to ensure the voices of the targeted families were heard by those planning the programme and designing services and support. All those involved meet two of the four criteria.

The project gave these families the opportunity to tell their stories, reflecting on their lives and their experiences of statutory and third sector services.

This final report contains 40 stories from a wide range of families with different life experiences. Their stories are frank and revealing, both in terms of how people perceive their own situation and how they perceive interventions from service providers.

Contributors have given an honest appraisal of the challenges they faced in their lives and we hope this will help us understand how things can go wrong for a family. More importantly, they have talked about how they started to turn their lives around and the interventions from services that worked for them.

When you read these stories, patterns emerge. They are not the sort of patterns you find when you examine statistical data; the patterns from these stories tend to pick out the impact of human relationships on the effectiveness of the Stronger Families programme.

Evaluations of interventions repeatedly identify the quality of the relationship as a key success factor. But relationships are hard to measure and so may not feature in performance targets. One of the messages from the report is that it is not simply a question of what support is offered, it is also about how that support is offered.

Throughout this project, we built on existing relationships and aimed to deepen and strengthen them. Workers in local voluntary organisations, who were known and trusted by families, were the ones who listened to their stories. The experience was powerful for both workers and the families and enhanced their relationship. The project provided an experienced writer and counsellor to support workers and to ensure each story had enough detail and was presented effectively.

The Listening To Families project has carried out extensive qualitative research on the Stronger Families cohort and this report is the culmination of that research. It provides families perspectives on what works for them and why, and as such it is a valuable resource that we believe can help service managers and direct workers to shape services.

Tom Taylor
December 2013
The Stories

1004 - Lifeline
‘Sara’ is a young woman with a history of drug use, including crack and IV heroin, paid for mainly through sex working. She has two sisters and all three grew up in care, although they maintained contact with their mother. She has accessed a wide range of services, both statutory and voluntary sector. She is now turning her life around and is hoping to be off methadone in July. She has a new partner and an eight-week old baby.

1014 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre
‘Beth’ is a fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU. Recently, she became pregnant and was pressured into an abortion by her boyfriend and her family. When she was younger she used to help care for a sister - ‘Lara’ - who had multiple disabilities. Lara died aged seven, which was a traumatic experience for Beth. Two of Beth’s younger sisters have been taken into care.

1005 - Lifeline
‘Sue’ comes from a large family with a history of criminal behaviour and her brothers were often in prison when she was young. Alcohol and drugs played a large part in family life and she is recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. She is now a mother and there have been issues around her child’s welfare and school attendance.

1044 – Lifeline
‘Sally’ was neglected and abused very badly from a very young age by her step-father. She then experienced further physical abuse by her ex-partner. Her ex-partner involved her in drug use and burglary. When she had a child, social services became involved via the school. She eventually fled to a refuge with her daughter to escape her partner. She is currently overcoming drug addiction and trying to build a new life.

1010 - Pennine Domestic Violence Group
‘Sarah’ fled to Kirklees from another county and she now lives with her new partner and her baby from her previous relationship. When she became pregnant, she stayed with her ex-partner’s family and they became abusive towards her. A CAF was put in place. She does not stay in touch with her ex-partner and his family, or her own family.
1018 – Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Julie’ is fifteen. She was placed under a care order as a baby and grew up with her Gran and her Granddad. Her granddad died recently and Julie thinks the family blame her behaviour for causing his heart attack. She is now in contact with her Mother, who has been involved in consecutive violent relationships with different men. Julie is aggressive at school and her attendance levels are a cause for concern.

1027 - Pennine Domestic Violence Group

This story is about a woman called ‘Maryam’ who was a victim of domestic violence. She fled to a refuge in Kirklees and spent two years living there. Two of her children were taken into care. She is now living in her own house with her third child.

1033 - Action For Children

‘Jon’ is the father of a family of ten children with another baby on the way. On two occasions his partner has left the family home and he has taken on full responsibility for childcare. On the second occasion, in 2010, the family was referred for family support by a health visitor. He is now back with his partner but there has been further involvement with social services because one of the teenage daughters is pregnant and has been self-harming. Social care are now doing a Section 47 Assessment on the whole family.

1001 – Lifeline

‘Kia’ has two children and has had long-term problems with drug addiction, although she is now two years into treatment and hopes to stop her methadone in the near future. She has two daughters. The eldest is a teenager and Kia has asked social services to help her cope with her daughter’s behaviour.

1012 - Pennine Domestic Violence Group

‘Rose’ has two children and is now re-building her life, having been helped to escape an abusive relationship. She was physically abused by her partner, which was witnessed by her children. As well as effecting her own mental health, this abuse severely impacted on her children’s emotional well-being and education.
1002 - OnTRAK

‘John’ is a single parent with two pre-school children. He has been abstinent from alcohol for some time now and says that he had to look at his drinking because, “I wanted to protect and provide for my children”. He is separated from the children’s mother, who he says “could not look after my two children”.

1003 - OnTRAK

‘Janet’ is a single parent with two children. The eldest is at primary school and the youngest is a toddler. Janet has managed to become abstinent from alcohol this year and has achieved this through her determination and personal strength and with the help of her key worker at On TRAK.

1043 - Yorkshire Childrens’ Centre

‘Annette’ is a sixteen year-old currently attending a PRU. She suddenly moved back into the local authority to live in Chickenley with her father after her relationship with her Mum broke down.

Annette has ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) and has been cautioned by the police for anti-social behaviour. Annette’s attendance continues to be a cause for concern at 34%. There is a CAF raised to support Annette and her father.

1032 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Simpson’ is sixteen years-old and currently attending a PRU. He is part of a large family and lives with his Mum (Louise, who has mental health problems), his Step-Dad (Frank) who is long-term unemployed, four younger siblings and an older brother.

Simpsons’ attendance continues to be a cause for concern at 19%. Simpson receives 1:1 support from CRI / The Base as there are serious concerns for his safety due to the fact that in addition to his drug taking, he misuses butane gas.

1019 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘JonJo’ is a fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU and lives with both parents. He has been a young carer for his Mum since he was eight and has witnessed instances of domestic violence in the home throughout his life.

JonJo’s attendance continues to cause concern – currently at 49.2%. He has recently been experimenting with legal highs and smokes cannabis socially with his peers. When offered support from CRI / The Base, JonJo has refused to engage. There is a CAF raised for this family.
1029 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Joseph’ is a fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU. Joseph has a younger brother, John, who remains in mainstream school. Joseph takes daily medication for ADHD. Both Mum (Joan) and Dad (Paul) are challenged with a variety of Mental Health problems. Joseph feels an enormous pressure to take responsibility for the well-being of John and, as a result, his attendance at school remains a struggle at 26.6%. There is a CAF raised for this family.

1031 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Henry’ is a sixteen year-old currently attending a PRU. Henry has an older brother who was also educated within the PRU system and an older sister. He is challenged with a variety of mental health problems including depression and, as such, he has been a persistent non-attender for most of his secondary school years. His attendance for this year is 7.6%.

1022 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Kevin’ is sixteen year-old attending a PRU. Prior to attending his current school, Kevin’s attendance was a real cause for concern at 21%. This has significantly improved and stands at 68.7%.

Kevin was sexually abused by a former boyfriend of his Mum and now lives with his Gran in Batley. He is at present being supported by the Youth Offending Team (YOT) because he has been involved with a gang of local youths in his area engaging in anti-social behaviour, such as being drunk and disorderly and taking drugs.

1015 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Laurie’ is a fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU. Formerly his attendance had been a real cause for concern at 38%, but since attending his Key Stage 4 provision, it has improved to 85.7%.

Laurie has two younger siblings who attend mainstream school and who have not needed any interventions from support services. Laurie began to get into petty crime and experimenting with drugs after the death of his Grandfather two years ago.
1017 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Martin’ is a fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU. He is diagnosed to be on the Asperges Spectrum. Martin has an older brother, (19 years old) who has been physically and emotionally abusing Martin and, for this reason, there is a current CAF in place.

Martin presents as socially awkward at college but his sense of difference is accepted by his cohort. Before attending his current PRU, Martin’s attendance was a cause for concern at 48%. This has significantly improved and now stands at 74.3%.

1030 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Taylor’ is a fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU. He has a twin brother who continues to excel in mainstream school, an older sister (31), and an older brother, David, who sadly died, aged twenty-nine (within the last four years) of a drugs overdose.

Taylor’s attendance continues to be a cause for concern at 33.3% and he and his family are on a parenting contract that monitors improvement over a four week period. Taylor receives 1:1 support from CRI / The Base as he has recently increased his usage of so called ‘legal highs’.

1028 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre

‘Duncan’ is a fifteen year-old who attends a PRU. His attendance at school is just 25%. Duncan has been offered 1:1 support from CRI / The Base because he is engaged in drug taking. It was recently reported that he’d started taking cocaine.

1025 - Pennine Domestic Violence Group

This story is about a woman called Taz; a Muslim woman who has been a victim of domestic violence. Taz is bringing up her son as a single parent and she is receiving ESA benefit because of her depression.

1007 - WomenCentre

When we recorded this story, ‘Vicky’ was still recovering from the impact of alcohol addiction and was on out-of work benefits. When she was in the depths of her addiction, her child was removed from her care by social services. She is now rebuilding her life and trying to get back into employment. The story is in her own words.
1006 - WomenCentre

‘Ruksana’ is a mother of five children and is originally from Pakistan. Her eldest four children are from her first marriage, which broke down as a result of domestic violence. She suffers from mental health challenges and is on ‘out of work benefits’. One of her daughters has received support to overcome an eating disorder and her son has behaviour issues at school and a problematic attendance record.

1020 - Yorkshire Children's Centre

‘Anna’ is a sixteen year-old currently attending a PRU. She has no siblings and is a young carer, helping her Mum with the daily house needs such as hanging out washing and carrying shopping home. Her Mum was born with only one arm and she relies on Anna. Anna speaks openly at school about the fact that her Mum has a disability. Before attending her PRU, Anna’s attendance was a serious cause for concern at 38%. This has now significantly improved and stands at 77.1%.

1016 - Yorkshire Children's Centre

‘Jade’ is a sixteen year-old currently attending a PRU. Her behaviour and attitude continue to cause concern at school. She frequently verbally abuses staff and attends school intent on causing criminal damage by repeatedly kicking doors and windows. Jade’s attendance has significantly improved from 46%, when she was initially referred into the PRU, to now averaging 71.6%. Jade has a particularly low self-image and struggles with being able to keep her weight down and within a healthier measure.

1034 - WomenCentre

‘Lucy’ is part of the Listening To Families project due to a change in circumstances recently. She has been told that her son will be returned to her providing she continues to engage with services and seek the help she needs in order to keep herself well and drug free. Lucy has worked incredibly hard to achieve this and she is now seeing her son daily.
**1035 - WomenCentre**

‘Zoe’ is a mother with three children, two of them at school. She is claiming out of work benefits. One of her sons has had behaviour and attendance issues at school and is now at New Directions College, where his attendance continues to be a cause for concern.

Both Zoe and her son, ‘Lewis’, have received police cautions; Zoe for street robbery, driving with no insurance, assault and criminal damage, and ‘Lewis’ for taking a vehicle without consent.

**1048 - Yorkshire Children’s Centre**

‘Tina’ is 14 year-old currently attending a PRU. Her Father (Joseph) died when she was a toddler. Tina has an older brother (Joel) who no longer lives at home as he has his own place. It is nearly three years since Tina was raped and it was this trauma that caused her behaviour in mainstream school to become disruptive. Before attending this PRU, Tina’s attendance was a cause for concern at 29%. This has significantly improved and now stands at 86%.

**1045 - Lifeline**

‘Carly’ is a single mum of three using services for help with substance misuse and is also claiming out of work benefits. She has daily struggles which she faces on her own whilst still running a house and looking after a small baby and two daughters of school age.

The father of Carly’s children / ex partner has been involved with crime for a number of years, which has been a very large strain on the family unit.

**1041 - Lifeline**

‘Jaid’ is still recovering from drug addiction having used ‘party’ drugs when she was a teenager before going on to heroin. She has a young baby and her family are currently supported by out of work benefits. When she was using drugs, she stole from her work place to pay for her addiction and she is now finding it difficult to get back into work.

**1013 - Pennine Domestic Violence Group**

‘Aisha’ experienced domestic violence and was forced to flee with her children. She entered a refuge and eventually moved to a new home. The children did not attend school during this period. The family currently live on out of work benefits but she hopes to get work soon.
1036 - WomenCentre

‘Kathy’ is working to overcome addiction to alcohol and has a criminal record. She has accessed a wide range of support services. She was a victim of domestic violence and hate crime and also experiences depression, which has led to her attempting suicide. She has two daughters.

1047 - Action For Children

‘Afra’ had an arranged marriage in Pakistan which is now in the process of ending. She has suffered depression and attempted suicide on several occasions. The family was referred for support to help her take care of the children. DV incidents resulted in Afra making a decision to leave her husband and she is now in a refuge with her two children.

1037 - WomenCentre

‘Uzma’ has three children and has sought asylum in the UK. She has suffered from depression and previously felt suicidal. The disruptions to normal family life led to school attendance issues for her daughter. The family are supported by out of work benefits.

1038 - WomenCentre

‘Elizabeth’ has learning difficulties and is on out of work benefits. She is a single parent but her boys have been taken into care by social services. (Although she is not currently looking after her children, we made a decision to include Elizabeth in the LTF project because of her passionate belief in her right to be allowed to be a mother to her children and because we felt there may be lessons to learn from her experience of service providers).

1039 - WomenCentre

Jess has a criminal record and the family are supported by out of work benefits. Her court case put the family unit under strain and almost destroyed her relationship with her husband and daughter.

1042 - WomenCentre

‘Marianne’ suffers from mental health problems and was a victim of domestic violence. She fled to a refuge with her son. The family has a CAF in place to support her son.
1040 - WomenCentre

‘Lilly’ has a mental health illness, problems with alcohol use, and is currently supporting herself and her son on an ESA. There are issues around her child’s school attendance and she recently received an ASBO.
Summary

‘Sara’ is a young woman with a history of drug use, including crack and IV heroin use, paid for through sex working. She has two sisters and all three grew up in care, although they maintained contact with their mother. She has accessed a wide range of services, both statutory and voluntary sector. She is now turning her life around and is hoping to be off methadone in July. She has a new partner and an eight-week old baby.

Home and School

‘At school I never got one bad report. I was so good with my studies and was really good, but it was just the kids in our area. Things just got bad. Smoking weed and not having any money, and older boys. It’s like all the girls in my area went off the rails. We were all naughty.’

‘I robbed a shop and I was really bad in my first year of High School. There was a printers... we used to ask for some pads and he would have to go downstairs for some. And when he was downstairs we would run into the office and take money from a box he had in there... After about six months we got caught and that’s when I got my first caution. We got done for shop lifting a few times and that’s when things went bad then and I went off the rails.’

‘My mum, she would walk us to school. And when we got there we would go in one door and go out of another. Most people think that when you have been in care... ‘Oh your mum put you in care’. But my mum, no… we were all buggers all three of us. My mum just couldn’t cope with us. I don’t blame my mum for nothing.’

‘I just wish I’d of stayed on at school really. I didn’t take any exams or anything and then, when I was fourteen, they kicked me out of school and I went to do a course at college. It was a bit hard cos they put us with a lot of handicapped kids, and it was a bit hard to be around ‘cos I was young and hadn’t been around that environment.’

‘My mum was really on the edge with me and said to the social worker when they came to take me, ‘If you don’t take her I will kill her today’. Honestly that’s how bad I was, really naughty. Police coming to the door all the time to tell my mum I was knocking round with older lads all the time. They are not really good lads. We were all into robbery and car crime.’

On living in care: ‘There were loads of kids. The one in Dewsbury, there were about five girls and five or six boys there. It was alright ‘cos we did loads with Save the Children fund when we were in that kids’ home. I went to a big conference in London about Children’s Rights. Some kids may be traumatised but I wasn’t.’
Addiction

“When I was fifteen I stayed at a friends in Dewsbury and somebody offered me heroin. I didn’t even know what it was then, I just tried it. I wasn’t trying to fit in but cos it was with all the lads I was like, ok I will try it. I remember being as sick as a pig. You would think I wouldn’t take it again after that, but I did.

I didn’t take it for a good six months, but then, when I came back to Huddersfield, somebody else I knew was on it and I thought, I’d tried it before. Then I remember someone saying that the first time you try it you are always sick and then when you carry on taking it you’re not sick.’

‘I didn’t even know you could get a habit from it. I didn’t know that after a few months of taking it I’d end up with a habit, and then addicted to Tamazipam. Honestly, I didn’t know anything about drugs back then ‘cos I’d not been brought up around them or anything, just cannabis. My mum never did any drugs or my sisters.’

‘I smoked for the first four years on the foil and then started digging, and that’s when my life got really bad. That’s when my life was fucked then.’

‘A few of my friends were working, sex working, and then I went to Scotland with one of them and there were a lot of girls up there doing it. And it was like when you’re that age, and there are people around you who all have money, and you’ve got nothing... you think, ‘Well I need some money myself.’ I mean no one ever forced me to do anything. It was my decision. But I remember the first time I did it, and I went home and cried my eyes out. But the next day... it was just the money really, that just made me do it over and over and over again.’

‘I’d sold everything. It was snowing and I needed to go out on the street to get some money. All my jewellery was gone, the telly, the DVD. Having nothing and just being poorly, knowing I had to go out and make money or I would get even more poorly. One thing that I did do, like some girls would go out and make £20 and go have a smoke, and then come back, and they would do that all night long. Whereas I would go out and make a lump sum so I could buy as much as I needed for that day. I never smoked when I was working. All the time I was on the streets I never smoked. I never went and smoked with no one. I always waited ‘till I’d made my money then went home and did it.’

Interventions

‘I remember going to Lifeline when it was up at Portland Street, when I was 16. I remember Social Services taking me there. And I remember getting my first ever prescription of methadone and taking it for two days and then stopping. But then I never went back until years later. ‘Cos I use to get DF’s off my doctor, so if ever I felt like I was coming off it, I would take DF’s for a bit. And then I would always go back on it.’

‘My mum was always there. I could always rely on my mum. She has never disowned me. My sisters as well, they have always been there for me. My oldest sister, we never really
had anything to do with each other ‘till I’d come off gear. I mean, she would always help me if I needed her. If I really needed her she would always be there. I have always been close to my younger sister. And if I needed money or anything, I could always borrow off her.

But my mum, oh God, I used to make her feel so bad if she couldn’t help me. I used to call her a fucking bitch if she couldn’t help me out and be really awful. I used to turn up at two o’clock in the morning and ask for some money. She would say she didn’t have any and I would scream at her that I knew she had some. Honestly, I used to get really nasty with her. And then in the end she would give me the money just to get rid of me. I didn’t really do it that often. My mum knows though, ‘cos I didn’t do it that often, so if I did turn up, I was really desperate, ‘cos I always got my money.’

‘I have always been in touch with June at the Sweet. She has been my worker at Sweet. I’ve had her for the last seven or eight years. She has always been in touch with me. She has always rung me. Even now, I’ve spoken to her yesterday. She called me and said if I need anything, or if you want a chat or anything. She has always been there.’

‘I just go to Lifeline to give a UT and get my prescription. I had a really good male worker. He is the only male worker I’ve ever had and he was really nice... He was the only one that ever really made sure I was alright and made sure things were done. I sometimes feel that things don’t get done. I can talk to my worker about anything but there is no follow up. I sometimes feel nothing gets done. And I have had to do things all myself. I just go, do my UT and get my prescription. It helps keep Social Services off my back. That’s the only reason I go now, cos I need my meth. I’m down to 38 ml a week now and next week I’m going to once a week pick ups.’

‘When I first had (my baby) I didn’t even know about some of the child benefits and didn’t apply ‘till March, and she was born in January. So I’ve lost out two months money and they won’t backdate it. Someone should have told me about the forms then I could have got them in straight away.’

The Future

‘I just want to get my house sorted out. I want to make a proper home. You know, get a proper nursery sorted out and then, once I’m settled and she is in day care, then I’m going to do some training or some voluntary work. Or just something to keep me busy, ‘cos if she is in nursery then I’m going to be bored, and I can’t do with being bored.’

‘Having a new house, I can be organised. Everything is all over the place here. Everything is upside down at the moment and nothing is where it should be. If we had a home, and everything was in its place, then I can start to think about the future. I can’t plan anything now. It’s like my mum said, once I’m settled and we have a home, and she is settled, it’s going to be alright. But what am I going to do with myself now? I don’t want to just leave it and not have anything to show for my life.'
'I don’t want her to have any shit like I’ve had. I want her to have me and my partner. We got some forms for a junior ISA so we can start to save her some money, so she has some money so at least when she is sixteen or seventeen she can have driving lessons or something. I want her to have everything. I’m not saying my mum didn’t buy us things, plus there were three of us and I’ve only got one, so its easier. But I want her to have what I didn’t. She has her dad around too, so she is lucky ‘cos we didn’t have our dad around.'
Summary

‘Beth’ is fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU. Recently she became pregnant and was pressured into an abortion by her boyfriend and her family. When she was younger she used to help care for a sister - ‘Lara’ - who had multiple disabilities. Lara died aged seven, which was a traumatic experience for Beth. Two of Beth’s younger sisters have been taken into care.

Home and School

‘Yeah, we used to get her up on a morning and ‘Katy’ (elder sister) would put Lara’s arms around her neck and then turn her round, and we’d all help to sit her up in her wheelchair. Lara was always smiling. We used to help to feed her.’

Sadly, this nurturing side of Beth’s character is rarely seen in school. Beth shows a level of volatility and frequent outbursts of anger that is at the higher level of challenging behaviour we see from students attending the school.

Mum tries her best to hold the fort. She suffered a long spate of clinical depression after the death of her daughter. She now recognises that Lara’s death had a profound and lasting negative effect on Beth. Mum explained that it was all too much for Dad and he left within one month of the birth of the youngest daughter.

‘Beth has nothing to do with her dad. She says that she hates him. She denies that she has a dad. When I got depressed, Beth helped me by caring for the two little ones, but it was Beth who found Lara. She took it really bad. While I was depressed, the elder two girls just left home as soon as they could and so Beth was left to do everything. It’s not a surprise that she got kicked out of mainstream.’

Beth has a wonderful sense of fashion and presents herself well. She has a particular flare for ‘Make-up Artistry’ that is well beyond her years. Most recent assessments in this vocational area, which she has chosen to study at school, have determined that she is working at an equivalent level to BTEC Level 3. When Beth is engaged in something she can see has value – such as being able to apply make-up well so she looks even more pretty – then she is motivated to achieve.

Recent Trauma

Unfortunately, Beth’s recent attendance at college has raised cause for concern, as it is down to 40.8%. The reason for this is that towards the end of the autumn term, Beth became pregnant to her abusive boyfriend, who is significantly older than her. (The appropriate safeguarding procedures have been followed.)
Beth described what happened:

‘I loved him and I thought he loved me, but he wanted me to have the abortion. He said that he’d try to kill me by pushing me down the stairs so he could make it look like an accident so that the baby wouldn’t survive. I was really scared...’

‘I didn’t want the abortion. I didn’t know that’s where I was going. I thought that me and my boyfriend and my sister – who lives close to us – and my mum were going shopping for the day. But then we got to the clinic and my mum and my sister just left me with my boyfriend, and he said we had an appointment at the clinic.

I was fourteen weeks pregnant and I could see my baby on the screen, and I asked for a scan picture but they wouldn’t give me one. They did ask me if it was my decision to go through with the abortion and because my boyfriend was right beside me, I was too afraid to say no. I said yes and now I feel so guilty. I think it was a boy and I had a name for him. I would have called him Riley... because I like that name... Riley.”

Interventions

When asked if any service provider offered the family bereavement counselling after Lara’s death, Mum shared that she still attends counselling occasionally and that Beth accessed help that was given over a six week period.

‘... But she seemed to be doing well at school and it was decided that she didn’t need any more help. I know that I was too weak to fight for Beth to keep getting the help and so that’s why I just let it slip.’

So some help was offered but it seems that no single professional body / agency took the time to listen to the family. The likelihood is that there was no attributable fault, other than the pressures of time constraints and the need to evidence value for money.

In response to asking Beth whether she felt anyone in particular helped her to come to terms with the death of her sister, she looked over to her mum and, with her head down, answered:

‘I was only nearly ten at the time and I didn’t know what to say. I was allowed to leave class any time I wanted, if I was sad like, and I could speak to one of the special teachers in school.’

Mum added: ‘And every Wednesday morning, I took you to see that child psychologist man.’

Beth: ‘Yeah, I got to draw pictures there but it didn’t last very long and I didn’t like to talk to him because he reminded me of my dad.’

During the week after this interview, Beth specifically made time to come and tell me: ‘You’re alright you are. I’m so sorry for my behaviour. I will try harder and I will come to school more and I will get my English and my Maths.’
The Future

Beth now has her English and Maths and has attained Level 1 in both subjects. She is now working towards Level 2 (equivalent to A* – C grades at GCSE).

The family feel she would benefit from a contribution to the uniform and double kit set that she needs for her Beauty Therapy course at college. Beth has successfully completed all the Beauty Therapy modules at her PRU and the family believes this would help motivate Beth to remain engaged in the formal aspects of education.
Summary
‘Sue’ comes from a large family with a history of criminal behaviour and her brothers were often in prison when she was young. Alcohol played a large part in family life and she has suffered from drug and alcohol addiction. She is now a mother and there have been issues around her child’s welfare.

Home and Family
Until the age of twelve, Sue had been confined to the home and was not allowed to venture out or meet up with friends to play. There were a number of reasons that this happened. Sue explained to me that her parents had not felt that it was safe for her to go out and play. Her brothers were well known in the area and often found themselves in trouble through stealing and fighting. The family worried that Sue would be targeted as a result of her connection to her brothers. Also, there was a family tradition, steeped in old fashioned values, that females in the family were treated very differently to the boys.

This confinement ate away at Sue for years and she longed to be like the other children that she knew, but the chance to explore the world and play would not come until Sue's early and mid-childhood were at an end.

As she grew, she began to develop a strong sense of identity with her brothers that led to her becoming 'tough'. Her brothers friends would pass through the family home and some of them would take the opportunity to sexually assault her when no-one was looking. She learnt to keep these encounter secret and was to find herself the victim of these assaults on a number of occasions.

For a long period of early childhood, Sue was to become familiar with her brothers serving time in prison. This was a normal part of growing up. She remembered the days when she would visit them and she grew used to knowing the signs that a brother had returned home. 'Someone is hiding in the kitchen', Mum would say. 'Go and find them', and Sue would know to expect a released brother, hiding behind the kitchen door.

She feels at home when out in nature. The joy of playing in the woods, coming home covered in mud is relived, as her eyes sparkle and she tells me of those youthful feelings of abundance and energy.

Alcohol had featured early in her life and Sue had learnt to associate alcohol with fun, friendships and freedom. Mum and Dad loved to have parties. It was here that Sue began to find opportunities to try drugs and drink alcohol, via the people that were coming into the home.

The family had resisted social services involvement. Any attempt by social workers to provide support had been rejected. Sue says that her dad had a hard childhood and had
grown up in care in Scotland before he ran away to England and distrusted services. 'Mum and Dad loved us', Sue told me. 'How things turned out for me wasn't their fault.'

**Addiction**

Addiction didn't happen straight away. Sue recalls that it happened slowly at first and as the years rolled by she used alcohol and drugs recreationally and without noticing any real problems in her life.

Sue still remained close to her family and her brother's sister was to become her best friend. But in the mid 2000's she died from a drugs overdose. The shock of losing her best friend in this way was devastating. Sue tried to help her brother to cope with looking after the children, but could only watch as he fell apart. He died some months later.

Sue describes this time as being the catalyst for her first nervous breakdown. Addiction took hold as she drowned herself in drink and drugs and left herself wide open to abuse and victimization. At this point, Sue was a mother. She was unable to care for her daughter full time and the family support network provided care for 'Stacey'.

Sue bravely describes her lowest point. It's hard to listen as she talks about being held against her will for days as she was gang raped by strangers, unable to leave or get help. She feels that she would have died if she had continued down this destructive road, but she didn't know who to turn to. Sue's addictions now amounted to heroin, crack cocaine, and dangerously excessive amounts of alcohol.

**Interventions**

The abuse she suffered included abuse from her partner and eventually she found the strength to leave him, taking her daughter to safety in a women's refuge. The refuge provided the first port of call for Sue so that she could begin to look at her life. She stayed there for thirteen weeks.

The workers at the refuge referred Sue's daughter to Young Carers, a service that Sue says have been a great source of support over the years for Stacey. With this support, Sue's daughter has felt able to trust the mentors here; the activities that she has been on with the organisation have helped her to feel valued and supported. Here, Stacey has been able to access counselling services and of all the child services that have intervened with the family. Sue believes that the Young Carers have had the greatest impact.

At this time, Sue moved into her own home. The area that she was moved to was rife with drug taking and it wasn't long before she felt she was on the verge of breaking down again. Stacey was attacked in the street and had damage to the eye. It took weeks for her to regain her sight and, without doubt, she suffered psychological trauma as a result of the attack.

Sue began to work with Horton Housing who she says were 'full of encouragement'. She
says that her worker would always see good things in her and encourage her to see them for herself. She inspired her to believe in herself. Sue believes that these words of encouragement were the beginning of her way out of her desperate situation.

Around this time, Sue approached the school for support and a CAF was filled out for intervention. Sue was to have social services involvement for the next few years, through regular CAF meetings at the school.

She says that she has always welcomed support and been willing to work with agencies, but has felt let down on many occasions by social services. Sue says that this is because they have often failed to follow up on promises and that she did not feel that there was any difference to their life, following the interventions from social workers. Sue was left with the feeling that the meetings just led to them going round in circles and never really getting anywhere.

Sue sought help from Lifeline. She found some success with the programme and the sessions that she attended, but she was still prone to relapses and didn't feel that she had found the success she was yearning for. She continued to strive to be free of her addictions and bounced back each time she relapsed, but the addiction was still not managed. Sue wishes that there had been an after care service to help prevent relapse.

During this time, Stacey began to truant from school frequently. Sue committed herself to finally beating her addiction so that she could be fully there for Stacey’s emotional needs.

Sue found love with a new partner who was drug free. She says that he was a tower of strength and supported her through the months of withdrawal, through the many fits and the hospitalisation.

In 2012, Horton Housing again entered Sue's life and referred her to The Corner. Sue describes her first session on the pre-recovery course.

"I felt stunned. I couldn't believe what he was saying. I identified with everything he said. It was such a relief. I'd never felt relief before. Ever! Saved my life!"

Since then, Sue has accessed all the courses at The Corner and her daughter has since been taken off the Child in Need register. Sue is rebuilding her life and regularly volunteers at The Corner to help others and to be part of this therapeutic community that she identifies with so strongly.

The Future

Sue says that it will take time for her daughter to realise that the days of addiction are behind her and she recognises that she has to prove herself, but she feels more than ready to take up this challenge.

She has strived to make sure that Stacey has support for her experiences and she is presently accessing counselling support with the Young Carers. Seeing both mother and daughter together, it’s hard to imagine the journey that they have both been on. Their bond
is very strong and together they laugh and are openly affectionate.

For Sue, she is faced each day with new emotions that she has never known before. Each
day she feels stronger and in many ways, it feels like being born again.

“Everything feels new, but with the help of The Corner and knowing that I’m not alone in
this, I know that this time it’s different”.

Sue is the only member of her family who has sought help for addiction and she says that
she hopes she can be a role model for them. She hopes that one day, if she continues
down this sober path, they may follow. She sees her family once a week now and although
they still meet to drink together, she feels strong enough not to drink in their company.

Sue’s relationship with her dad has been transformed. He respects her in a way that he
never did before.

‘Dad has told me that he’s really proud of me, for everything that I’m achieving now’.

Writing this story, Sue says has been emotional and challenging. She has never shared
with anyone some of the things that she has spoken about here. But it is something that
she believes has been really worthwhile and now feels she is one step closer to being able
to accept herself and feeling proud of who she has become.
1044 - Lifeline

Summary

‘Sally’ was neglected and abused from a very young age by her step-father. She then experienced further physical abuse by her ex-partner. Her ex-partner involved her in drug use and burglary. When she had a child, social services became involved via the school. She eventually fled to a refuge with her daughter to escape her partner. She is currently overcoming drug addiction and trying to build a new life.

Home and Family

Sally was neglected and abused very badly from a very young age. She lived with her mum and step-dad, who was the main part of the problem. She felt no one believed the mistreatment that took place and she felt ‘scared’, ‘lost’ and ‘lonely’.

She ran away to her biological father’s house at the age of eight. Previous to this, she had attempted to put herself and her younger brother (aged six) into care, but her cry for help went unheard. From then on she was passed from pillar to post between parents, as her mum would regularly take Sally away from her dad, where she felt safer. Her mum did not believe her when she complained about the abuse she was suffering.

At the age of fifteen, she was forced by her mum to marry an older man who was extremely abusive and violent. Her mum told Sally it was to keep her away from her step-dad.

The marriage lasted for around a year, until Sally moved away and got a house of her own. She felt relieved to be free from that man. Sally lived alone from seventeen until twenty-five years old.

Sally spent time with her cousin, who had a partner in prison at the time. On one occasion, her cousin asked Sally to go with her to visit him inside, so she could meet up with his friend. Sally then met her ex, who was in prison. He began to harass Sally even before he was released. He forced his way into Sally’s life because she was vulnerable and easily intimidated.

When her daughter ‘Chloe’ was born, her ex was in prison at the time. She lived with his parents as she felt ‘unsafe’ in the house they had lived in together. She felt safe but also unhappy to live with his parents. Sally said she ‘hated her life’.

‘I hated everything in it. The only good thing about it was having my daughter’.

When her ex-partner came out of prison, he continued to commit crimes, asking Sally to keep guard when he burgled houses. He made her pick up drugs because he didn’t like to leave the house, and she sometimes took them with him, although she
was not dependant on them like he was. The violence she suffered never eased off, if anything it got worse each time he came out of prison. He was very paranoid and controlling. At one point Sally was threatened by him with a gun to her head.

**Interventions**

Sally remembers when social services became involved in her situation. Sally had to visit Chloe’s school and teachers were alarmed at her appearance and jumpiness. They informed social services.

Sally was grateful for the social workers involvement. However her ex was extremely aggressive and rude towards anyone who tried to become involved with the family. He would smash windows and turned up to groups Sally was invited to by social workers.

One day her ex-partner beat her up and severely hurt her ear and face. Her very young daughter had tried to stop this from happening and had also been attacked by him. This was enough for Sally to make the decision to leave. She contacted her social worker who came to the house when he was out. She helped Sally pack a bag and the same day managed to remove Sally and Chloe from the house. She hasn’t seen him since.

Social service found her a refuge for a short while. It was still too close to her ex so they moved her to another refuge. Then Sally got news he had found out where they were from his probation officer. This completely terrified her and made her feel unsafe and extremely vulnerable.

Social services moved Sally to another refuge. They then found her a nice house in a very good area and helped her decorate it. They got her in touch with a charity that helped furnish her home and even laid some carpets down. This was really a massive turn around for Sally she felt ‘cared about and listened too’.

Sally generally has had a good relationship with all the social workers involved with her and her daughter. The one exception was the first social worker that she was put in contact with when she initially arrived. Sally felt that she ‘wasn’t listened to’ by this social worker and that her sole purpose was to remove Chloe from her care. No matter how well she did at getting herself on the right track, it seemed that it ‘just wasn’t good enough’ for this particular social worker.

Fortunately for Sally, this social worker stepped down from managing Sally’s case and two new social workers came on board. Sally felt a lot happier when they became involved as they were understanding and let Sally have her say. She didn’t feel as ‘scared’ and ‘helpless’. The previous worker seemed to Sally to be ‘very controlling’ and it was a relief to finally be heard.
Social services put Sally in touch with Lifeline and she was given a keyworker to help with her substance misuse. He was also able to help Sally gain extra support and voice her opinions clearly regarding her daughter, Chloe. Sally and her Keyworker have worked closely for three years. She feels she can finally trust someone to believe her and listen to what she has been through. They put together a plan of action so she could keep her daughter safe, reduce her medication, and gain some normality, which was snatched away from her at such a young age.

Her keyworker referred her to the Outlook Structured Day Programme within Lifeline. This programme is designed to help people regain confidence, tackle problematic behaviours, and find new ways of managing troublesome emotions more positively. Sally work hard at the programme and gained a lot of tools that helped her to work on some of her ‘triggers’ and learn how to deal with stress and anxiety.

Sally found the complementary therapies and Mindfulness particularly useful for relaxation techniques. They helped ease cravings and taught her how to manage stress more positively.

Attending groups such as Living Life Without Drugs or Alcohol and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) benefited Sally a lot. She developed her interaction skills with other clients and learned how to manage her emotions.

Half way through Sally’s twenty-six week programme at Outlook, there was an opportunity for her to join a two week drama course with The LAB Project. Sally signed up for the course but was very reluctant to go on the first day. She said she felt ‘sick with nerves’, ‘scared’ and ‘worried’. She sought support from her Outlook worker who went with her to the LAB.

Sally received a very warm welcome from the group and ‘enjoyed it a lot’. Each participant on the course gained shopping vouchers and a qualification on completion. She felt a sense of achievement and learnt a lot about herself and what she is capable of. The group put on a small performance at the end of the second week and she felt proud she had done something that she thought she could never do.

**The Future**

Sally has spent a lot of time working on the negative aspects of her life and has made many big improvements. Social workers no longer have any involvement with her or her daughter. She feels she has ‘complete control’ of her situation and is looking forward to becoming prescription free. She is on a very low amount of methadone (3ml) and is continuing to reduce.

Sally also volunteers at the British Heart Foundation charity organisation for three days a week. She is studying for her NVQ in Retail and hopes to gain employment once she is qualified.
Where Sally would like to see some improvement is within her social life. She would like to join a drama group and perhaps take Chloe to some drama workshops as well. This is so Sally can continue to do the hobby she has found most helpful with her confidence and so she can meet new people who have similar interests. Sally feels very isolated in the evening and would like to have things to look forward to doing, both on her own and with her daughter.

Sally feels she is a new person now. She thanks Social Services, Lifeline and the LAB for hearing her cries and she hopes to continue in this new positive direction.
Summary

‘Sarah’ fled from an abusive relationship and now lives with her new partner and her baby from her previous relationship. She does not stay in touch with her ex-partner or his family, or her own family, as ‘it would be dangerous for me’. When she became pregnant she stayed with her ex-partner’s family and they were abusive towards her. A CAF was put in place and Sarah stated that she was told by professionals she must flee for the safety of the baby and herself.

Home and Family

‘I was unhappy with my mum, we didn’t get on. Mum would bully my dad. She was quite abusive towards him. My dad is ill, he has schizophrenia. I fled home with my dad away from my mum. From the age of ten I was his carer. I didn’t go to school much. The attendance people would hassle me and dad, but I think once they realised that I was looking after him, they eased off a bit. I was bullied at school – about my weight and I hated it.’

‘I didn’t like school, I didn’t like being where there were loads of kids. I liked the work, I liked writing stories, I always did loads of homework. But I left without any exams and I regret that now.’

Sarah states that now she feels safe. ‘No one knows where I am. I don’t keep in touch with anyone. I don’t use facebook, I’ve changed my phone and I hardly speak with family and I don’t keep in touch with friends at all… I feel quite lonely but its worth it to feel safe.’

‘My baby was born at 30 weeks so she was small, but she is healthy. My partner has been with me through the pregnancy and birth and he treats her like his own. I’m very much in love. He is so helpful with the baby.’

Interventions

Who has helped me? - ‘Definitely Staying Safe and Connexions; the PA's in the place I fled were so kind and supportive to me. They’ve all been brilliant. From basic stuff like baby clothes and furniture to helping me with benefits. They organised me a washer, straight away. They didn’t mess about. I mentioned it and they acted on it straightaway. They understand me. They get what it’s like to be someone like me. They respect me.’

‘The Connexions worker in this town has been really supportive. When I missed my appointment, she sent me a letter and called me to check I was okay. It felt good that a person from an agency was worried for me and wanted to make sure that I was okay. I like it when they are caring, like a friend, but also keep it professional.’
Who didn’t help me? - ‘The health visitor. She was ok to start with, but then was being really judgemental and disrespectful. She and other professionals have us sign agreements where we are supposed to be respectful to each other. I am to them, but they aren’t to me. I feel like they judge me all the time.

A worker brought me a bag of donated stuff and when she dropped it off I was sat on the wall outside the house.. we don’t have a garden. We were drinking orange juice with ice cubes in it and she thought it was alcohol. So she went to the HV and reported us! The HV came around within 30 minutes. We clearly weren’t drunk. She was so disrespectful. It was like she was saying I couldn’t look after my baby.

I love my baby, I will always make sure she has everything she needs. I don’t like it that she makes me feel like I can’t look after her. She makes comments about smoking; we smoke roll ups so it’s cheaper. I want to give up, but I’m not ready yet. Life is stressful. New house, new partner, new baby, fleeing DV – its all a bit much yet, although I am happier than I have been for... well, ever. Once I get sorted I want to get help to give up, but not yet.

We are good parents and the HV makes me feel like I’m not. The HV is patronising to me. She stereotypes me.

My HV said that she was going to do a CAF with me, as I had one in the county I was in before, and I found it really helpful and useful. I think it’s really good to have all the professionals that you need working together to help families like mine. Then the HV said this last time (at baby clinic) that my ex-SW hadn’t closed my CAF properly and because of that she can’t open a new one. I don’t understand this. But having said all that, I’m glad in a way as I don’t really feel confident that she will be a person who would fight my corner in a group of professionals. I’d be worried that she would carry this judgement she has of me into her relationships with other professionals . I’d rather a new person, who I trust, would be the lead professional on the CAF. I want to be treated as a client, an adult, not a child. I have had a baby and I have a home that I run well. I deserve to be treated with respect.’

What works best? - ‘People who aren’t patronising, who speak to me like an adult, treat me like an equal, with respect. If I were a worker I’d give advice, reassurance... be helpful, respectful, not judge. Give them hope for the future.’

The Future

‘I’d like to be in a nice safe house with a little garden. Maybe with another child. A nice environment where we can be together.’

‘If I had any spare money I’d buy my baby some toys, clothes, a pushchair, loads of stair gates - as we live on three floors - baby monitors to get the baby into a routine, and then I’d get more sleep... and a highchair.’

‘One big thing. I wish I’d gone to school. It would be better for my family. I’d have more
money ‘cos I’d be working. I’d like to learn how to cook.’

‘Thinking about this more, I need an airer, ‘cos I don’t have enough clothes so I’m always washing and we’ve been using the dryer too much, so an airer would save me money. We don’t have a garden so I can’t hang out.

I’d love some money to be able to go visit my dad and be able to meet him somewhere safe and go stay with him at my nan’s so that we could see each other again and hold each other and he could see my baby.’

‘Once my partner gets training he wants to learn everything in the building trade, he wants to be in multi trades, he wants to earn for his family. He’s working with Mick Murray at Connexions and he is really helpful to him.’

What’s it been like taking part in the project?

‘It’s been good. I’ve enjoyed just taking time out talking to someone who listens, who doesn’t judge me. You’ve been great. Thank you.’
Summary

‘Julie’ is fifteen. She was placed under a care order as a baby and grew up with her gran and her granddad. Her granddad died recently and Julie thinks the family blame her behaviour for causing his heart attack. She is now in contact with her mother, who has been involved in consecutive violent relationships with different men. Julie is aggressive at school and her attendance levels are a cause for concern.

Home and Family

Julie is fifteen years old and lives in Batley with Gran. Julie was put under a Care order when she was a baby and was subsequently placed to live with Gran.

Julie’s mother, ‘Amanda’, was involved in consecutive violent relationships with different men. Amanda was subsequently left with three children (two boys and one girl – Julie) all of whom were taken into care after it emerged that one of Amanda’s ex-partners had sexually abused the boys, who were aged five and eight. It was found that Amanda was aware of the abuse and failed to seek help.

In addition to the ex-partner going to prison, Amanda was also sent to prison, although she has since been released. It was determined that any children she had in the future would be at such a risk of neglect it would be more reasonable to immediately remove the baby at birth for adoption. Amanda has had two other children since her release from prison; both were removed at birth.

Julie’s father was not involved in the sexual abuse, but he was involved in criminal activity. Gran shared:

‘It all caught up with him and he’s still inside now serving a real long stretch for attempted armed robbery.’

Julie’s level of volatility cannot easily be explained as attributable to having had a life of constant upheaval. She has always lived with Gran and, until relatively recently, Granddad. It is probable that a combination of her heightened awareness of her troubled start in life as well as the sudden death of her Grandfather, has rocked her world. Gran admits that her husband was the firm and fair one and now there seems to be very few boundaries. Julie experiences a dysfunctional life living with Gran, who is ill with her chest, and she will only comply on her own terms.

Julie remains unaware of the whole history and has recently been demanding information from Gran. As Gran is loathed to tell Julie their relationship has recently become more strained than usual. Gran cried and spoke:

‘I don’t know how long I can keep her when she’s like the way she is.’
Julie angrily replies: ‘What you fucking doing? Are you telling me you’re going to throw me out eh?’

Auntie adds: ‘Julie you’re making me mam ill. You know what happened to me dad and I don’t want to lose me mam as well. You better start changing.’

Julie: ‘That’s it. You blame me for Grand-dads death, don’t ya? He was my Grand-dad and I miss him but you don’t think how I feel do ya? Do ya? No!’

Since her Granddad’s death, there appears to be no work ethic that Julie experiences in the family home. This tallies up with what was a particularly apathetic attitude at the beginning of the academic year, which suggested she didn’t understand the point of education.

It is likely that Julie may have attachment issues, which in not surprising given that she knows something bad happened when she was little.

When asked if any service provider offered the family bereavement counselling, Gran and Auntie shook their heads. Aunty explained: ‘We like to keep thing’s in the family. We cope on our own.’

**School**

Unfortunately, in almost all communication Julie exhibits an aggressive manner. At the beginning of the academic year, she presented at college as very angry. This was displayed by her frequent verbal abuse and shouting, damage to property such as kicking doors in, and general lack of respect for authority. Frequently her attendance level also causes concern.

As the year has progressed, Julie has exhibited longer periods of predictable and stable positive behaviours, such as completing work for a wider range of subjects. It is hoped that she is beginning to learn to trust the staff team. On a ‘good’ day, the staff team will comment: ‘Julie has been lovely today. She’s come in like a reformed character and sat and completed all her work.’

The very next day the staff team might be left bewildered as to how best they can support Julie. For example, recently she arrived to school and disclosed that she was on a ‘come down’ from having been up all night and taking drugs (MCAT). The subsequent behaviours displayed on that day were frightening for all involved and a sudden deterioration in her health was of deep concern to everyone.

**Interventions**

It seems likely that efforts were made to support the family, but their own preconceptions of what it means to avail of help – whether it may be a sign of weakness in their eyes – seems to undermine the positive impact that engagement in such services could have.
In response to asking Julie whether she felt anyone in particular helped her to come to terms with the death of her Grand-dad, Julie momentarily stopped biting her nails and answered:

“No one fucking cares about me. But when I was at another PRU, I used to get on dead well with one of the teachers there. She used to really listen to me. Now all everyone does is tell me about my bad behaviours.’

When Gran was asked if she felt well-supported in her role as Julie’s guardian - particularly since her behaviours has started to spiral out of control over recent years - her response was:

‘I have had Social Care call round with concerns about me not coping but I just tell them that I am and that seems to get rid of them. They have mentioned that Julie can have some respite care – or something – but Julie just kicks off at me. I had to call the police last week because she hit me again, and she’s damaged the living room door. I think Julie thinks that if she goes into respite foster care then I won’t want her back. And she’d hate me, because she knows that her two older brothers and the two younger sisters are all in full-time care. It makes my life a bit quieter with Julie if I just don’t bother with getting help.’

During the course of this interview, it occurred to me that Gran’s refusal to engage with support services could, in part, be because she is actually afraid of Julie and what she is capable of. Gran shared:

‘I suppose I’m afraid of her really and I am relieved when she has to go and see her YOT worker, because I know that reminds her that she’s got to behave, or a criminal record could get in the way of what she wants to do – like working with nursery children. I am afraid as well that she’s going to end up in prison like her mother... and she doesn’t have much of a life does she? She’s been housed in a hostel and she still got herself pregnant again – twice – and those kids just got taken off her straight away. What hope has Julie got really, eh?’

The Future

The long-term outcome the family feel would benefit them is if a contribution could be made to support Gran, Auntie, Julie, and her teenage cousin (that she’s really close to) to go away for an extended weekend somewhere, and/or to fund Julie to access an accredited three-day course to specialise in Acrylic Nails.

Julie has successfully completed her Year 10 modules in the Beauty Therapy at school and this course would provide her with an extension to her portfolio, with the hope being that she will be motivated by this direct investment in her and therefore improve her school attendance levels and attain the Level 2 qualifications that she is predicted by the end of Year 11.
1027 - Pennine Domestic Violence Group

Summary
This story is about a woman called Maryam who has been a victim of domestic violence. She fled to a refuge in Kirklees and spent two years living there. Two of her children were taken into care. She is now living in her own house with her third child.

Home and Family
Maryam grew up in Bangladesh with her family. Her dad died when she was quite young and she was brought up by her mum. She was a happy child who went to school, had a laugh with her friends and was well dressed. She was just a normal child.

Maryam was focused on her studies and wanted to go to college. Maryam did her GCSE exams but before she got her results, she got married.

At first Maryam was very happy living with her husband. But then her husband became controlling and abusive towards her. She was receiving regular abuse from her husband. Although her husband was abusive, he provided for Maryam and their three children and gave them a good upbringing. Maryam put up with the abuse for many years and fled on a few occasions. On the last occasion Maryam fled, she spent nearly two years living in the KABWWA refuge.

Maryam’s hardest time in her life was when she was living with her husband. This is because she could not do what she wanted. She couldn’t go out when she wanted to or talk to who she wanted. She lived in a controlling environment. Maryam talks about how she would be scared to laugh because she didn’t know what the consequences would be. Even when she felt happy, she was afraid that something would happen that would upset her.

Interventions
Maryam has spent time in a few different refuges around the country but she spent the most time in KABWWA. Maryam talks about her experiences of when she first came in to the refuge. Maryam says she found it very hard when she came to the refuge because she had no money or food.

Maryam talks about how money problems were a big problem when she fled from her husband. Although there are benefits available for women who are in her situation, it can take time to set up benefits therefore it takes time for the women to get money. Maryam thinks it would be ideal if there were money available straight away for the women who came to the refuge. This is because money problems add to the problems that the women are already going through. Maryam was given £20 by her social worker when she left
home but it did not last her very long.

When Maryam came to the refuge she also did not have any food. However, food parcels were provided. The quality of the food in the food parcels was not very good. The food that was in the parcel is not the kind of foods that Maryam would normally eat due to the cultural differences. Maryam thinks it would be ideal if the food parcels were more customised and suitable for the women from different backgrounds and religions.

Maryam believes that these little things to help with money and food problems could help women feel more comfortable when they come to the refuge.

Maryam came to the refuge without her children which made her feel depressed. However, Maryam talks about the staff at KABWWA being very friendly, understanding, supportive and she believes they respected her wishes. Maryam says KABWWA was the best place she has ever lived in.

After some time, Maryam’s eldest daughter came to stay with her in the refuge which made Maryam feel happy. Maryam hopes that one day all her children can live with her as she misses them which makes her depressed. Maryam does get to see her two children who are in care but she feels like she does not get to see them enough.

In the KABWWA refuge they have now set up English classes for the women every Thursday in the refuge... Maryam is very happy with this as she is eager to develop her language skills but finds it difficult to attend classes in the local community.

Maryam is upset about the fact that she does not get to see her children very often. They live in care and she feels that the social workers are not helping her. Maryam finds it hard to live without having all her children with her and she feels like her social workers could be more supportive and help her get her children back. Maryam spoke about wanting her children back in her own care before she moved out of the refuge. However, she has now moved out of the refuge but she does not have her children with her.

**The Future**

Maryam has good days and bad days, when she fears what tomorrow will bring. Money problems did not get better for Maryam. While living at the refuge her benefits were sorted and she managed to live her life. But now that she has left the refuge, she has got more bills to pay, which she is struggling with. Maryam gets very upset thinking about how she is going to pay the bills.

Maryam’s wishes are to educate her children, but now that her children are in care she is unable to keep up to date on her children’s progress. Maryam does get told that her children are going to school but she feels this does not help her much.

Maryam thought her eldest daughter was attending college, but when her daughter came
to live with her, she found out that her daughter was not attending college. This made Maryam feel like people were not being honest with her and her children’s education might not be going well, which is a concern for Maryam.

Maryam’s wishes are to educate her children because she sees education as very important for a good future and she wants her children to have a good future. Maryam is worried that her eldest daughter might not get into college next year. However her daughter is now attending a part-time course at college.
Summary
Jon is the father of a large family of ten children with another baby on the way. On two occasions his partner has left the family home and he has taken on full responsibility for childcare. On the second occasion, in 2010, the family was referred for family support by a health visitor. He is now back with his partner but there has been further involvement with social services because one of the teenage daughters is pregnant and has also been self-harming. Social care are now doing a Section 47 Assessment on the whole family.

Home and Family
‘As a child I never really had any loving parents. I felt like the black sheep of the family. I was kicked out at 13 and then ended up living with my older brother. I would never do that to my family. I think that’s why I get so frustrated when people never see what we are doing, just what we’re not.’

How was school for you Jon? ‘Oooo, I was a bad lad at school. Always in fights and getting into trouble. I was bullied for ages and then I became the bully. I used to go to the teachers, who did nothing, so I ended up sorting it out myself. Strange how no one listened but then they were interested when I was getting in trouble! Bit like now.’

‘I started work at sixteen, woodwork ‘n stuff. But I seem to remember that I got in a lot of trouble with the police for driving offences. Don’t do that now though. I pay my debts and I owe no one.’

Jon has now moved from the Dewsbury area and is living in Cleckheaton with his partner. Jon told me that the reason for the move was that he was unable to secure a long-term tenancy agreement in Dewsbury and he felt he needed to find a base where the family felt more settled and where the children would be able to make new friends and relationships without the upheaval of changing location.

Interventions
With respect to the family support referral, on visiting Jon at home I saw there were some parenting issues but, on the whole, his parenting ability was ok. When the initial family support was put in place, Jon’s children’s ages ranged from fifteen years to four months, so the support that was delivered was varied, ranging from advice and support for teenagers to nursery and school support.

Jon engaged well with the support and attended several groups that were offered and made great progress in supporting his family. Eventually the case was closed, but I contacted Jon again for this Listening To Families project.
Jon told me that ‘Sophia’ (14) has a support youth worker but she has not seen her in over a month. So even though Sophia wants to find out what activities she can get involved in, there is little or no support, which then leaves her in the house and usually helping with the younger children.

At this point, Jon got a little upset, saying; ‘There are loads of people who want to tell you that you are doing something wrong but when you ask for help no one comes.’

Jon said the hardest time was when ‘Julie’ left for the first time in 2008, which left him at home with seven children. Jon said that this was only short term, but again he had asked for help and none had been offered.

I asked Jon if any support had ever been offered that he had found beneficial to the family. Jon said the best time he and the family felt supported was when he used to attend a local Dads and Children group in Dewsbury (which I used to run in the area). Jon said that this was the only time when he could go with all the children and socialise with other dads.

‘I think I looked forward to it more than the kids. No matter what sort of week you’d had I knew there would always be someone who I could talk to and get advice. I think I even gave some young dads some advice once. Me? Can you believe it?’

Jon said that he had recently asked for help and support for his older children from Social Services and unfortunately none was offered. Jon said that his older daughter, ‘Patricia’, was pregnant and was also self-harming, so a support worker was put in place. She then referred to Social Care who are now doing a Section 47 Assessment on the whole family.

‘All they want to do is come and tell me what I’m doing wrong, offer no support, then leave. I hate it.’

Jon said that he would never again ask Social Care for help.

‘It’s like they never listen to anything anyone says. I think they have a list of questions they ask and if you don’t have the answer that’s written down, you’re knackered. It’s not like when you worked with me, Craig. At least you listened and were straight and honest, and offered some support that was tailored for me and the family. You knew we came as a family not individuals.’

What if you were a worker, Jon, what would you do differently? ‘Mmmm... I would listen to what people said and try to understand their situation, rather than asking them to do things that they would probably not do themselves. I mean look at us. All the children are happy, they all attend school, three meals a day... there has got to be worse families than us who mistreat their kids and nothing is done. It’s crazy!’

The Future

I asked Jon what he likes to do. ‘I love to drive and play snooker but most of the time is
spent with the children on days out and holidays... or saving for days out and holidays.’

What’s your wish? ‘A big house, with bedrooms for all the kids, near to a park. I just want them to be happy and safe. We really all get on brilliantly but we do sometimes feel isolated. If I could do anything for them, I would like to afford to take them away all of the time. We love to go out and away for trips - it’s just ace!!’

Would you make anything better for you? ‘I’m happy, the kids are more important than me, as long as they are smiling I don’t matter.’
Summary

‘Kia’ has two children and has had long-term problems with drug addiction, although she is now two years into treatment and hopes to stop her methadone in the near future. She has two daughters; the eldest is a teenager and Kia has asked social services to help her cope with her daughter’s behaviour.

Home and Family

I have an Asian Pakistani father and an English mother. I am one of six children, all of them girls. My parents both worked hard and we always had a nice, clean, warm home and there was always food on the table. But when I was three my mother and father split up.

When my second oldest sister moved out of our family home I was eight years old. I soon took over her role running the house, looking after my younger sister, cooking and cleaning and doing most of the housework.

My day began at 5:30 in the morning to clean the coal fire, refill the coal and relight the fire. After doing this I would get myself dressed and clean the ground floor of the house before getting breakfast for my sister and getting her ready for school, which was a nightmare. After I finished those chores, I would iron my mum some clothes for the day ahead, make her a cup of tea and light her a cigarette before I set off for school. Then my mother started keeping us off school to do more chores, as well as looking after the garden and looking after my sister’s children while she was at work.

Things were tough and my mum started beating us up with chains, leads and other things. Life was tough for quite some time for both my younger sister and I. All we had to turn to for comfort was our pet dog.

In 1987, my mum met her new partner, who later became her second husband. He was okay. He tried setting us bed times and insisting we went to school. For the first few years of the relationship things went well. He stopped my mum from hitting us.

When things were good in their relationship, family life was brilliant. We used to go on days out, bake cakes and did normal family things. But it never lasted long. My mother always found fault in everything my sister and I did. There was always something done wrong, or not done how she wanted it to be done.

But after five years together with her new husband things went down hill again. I believe this was due to my mum spending money on things that weren’t needed and lending money against his wishes and their marriage started breaking down.

At the age of eleven, I started hanging around with friends that were a bit older than me. I
started smoking cannabis with them. Things were getting worse at home, so I would run away just to be with my friends. Then I started taking acid tabs and drinking. Soon after this I started on other drugs such as amphetamines and ecstasy and going out to all nighters. Then I progressed to harder drugs like heroin and crack cocaine.

In 1995, aged seventeen, I got my flat in Batley Carr and in 1998 I had my daughter. In 2001, still on heroin, I moved to West Town in Dewsbury with my three year-old daughter to be closer to where my mum lived. My daughter’s father was in prison serving two years for heroin dealing, so my mum wanted us to be near her. A month later she passed away in hospital. This affected my daughter a lot and that event made me realise how close my mum and my daughter were. I have never hated my mum for my upbringing but I was very determined that I would be a better parent to my own child.

In 2003 my daughter’s father came out of prison. He turned up at my house the morning he came out of prison. My daughter, who was seven at the time, was pleased to see him and she persuaded me to let him stay.

In early 2004, the police bust my house for drugs. I knew my ex was up to no good but I wasn’t sure what. It became apparent that he had been dealing again and he was given another prison sentence.

In late 2004, I was diagnosed with Lupus. My eyes and chest hurt and I had a migraine. I was taken to hospital to be checked over. The doctor diagnosed me with Systematic Lupus Syndrome.

In 2008, I became pregnant with my second child. It was very unexpected news because of the number of illnesses I have. When the baby was born in 2009, my partner went with me to the hospital, but as soon as I went into the operating theatre he left to go and score drugs. This was a real turning point in our relationship. I realised that at times when I was feeling vulnerable, he was not there.

I asked my partner to leave the family home and find somewhere else to live. I felt from this point I wanted more for my children and I wanted to create a stable upbringing without their father drifting in and out of their lives. I also knew I wanted to start reducing my drug use, as I did not want to be seen as a junkie parent for the rest of my children’s lives. But I was scared about entering a life of being clean without the comforts of drugs to turn to when things got tough.

In 2011, I began to take treatment seriously and stopped taking all illegal drugs, including cannabis, and began to reduce my methadone. I am now prescribed 30ml and hope that soon I will be completely off my prescription after reducing down to zero. Due to my stability in not taking illegal substances my treatment is in the process of being moved to Shared Care, so I can go for drug treatment sessions at my own doctor’s surgery.
Interventions

My sisters are always there for me. Rachel my worker at Lifeline also helps and supports me. I try not to ask for help because I’ve always been independent. My sisters and my friends are also important to me.

The best place I have lived is where we live now. I have lived in my house in a quiet cul-de-sac for the past eleven years. My neighbours are nice and both elderly and young and we get on well. I originally moved here to be near my mum, but a month later she passed away. I have to say this is the best place I have lived.

It was good being close to my mum, and now being close to my sister and nieces and nephews, as they are only a two-minute walk away. I am also known by lots of people in the area because I spent a lot of my childhood in Dewsbury. My family and I visit the library, park and swimming pool in Dewsbury, as well as visiting other family members and going on family days out.

The worst thing about living in my current address is the large amount of groups of teenagers hanging around on the streets and in the park using bad language. There is also a large amount of drugs and drug dealers in the area.

There needs to be places for toddlers, juniors and teenagers to hang out that do not cost a lot of money. Children and young people need to do things that are right for their age group.

My eldest daughter has started hanging around with a bad crowd. This causes arguments and tension if I don’t let her go out. My daughter has been very argumentative and I asked Social Services for extra support, although I feel this has been an unhelpful exercise as they have offered me very little support. The help that works best for me is having someone to talk to, like Rachel at Lifeline.

About eight months ago, late in 2012, Social Services rang me out of the blue after an allegation was made that I had thrown an ashtray at my daughter, who was then fourteen. The allegation came from my daughter herself. I understood that my daughter’s school and the social worker needed to investigate this, but I was still very distressed by them saying that I would hurt my OWN daughter.

A few hours later I received a phone call and they said they were satisfied that my daughter’s allegations were unfounded. However, those few hours were some of the most difficult of my adult life and brought back memories of my own experiences when my mother used to hit me. I also had flashbacks to my own teenage years, as it was around the age of fourteen of fifteen when I started using drugs and drinking with my friends.

My youngest daughter has become upset about the incidents with my older daughter. She has told my older daughter to behave and “treat mummy nicely”. I feel particularly sad about this, as at times my three year-old seems old beyond her years.
As of April 2013, my oldest daughter is still kicking off on a regular basis. I try and keep my house running normally and tell both my daughters on a regular basis that I love them lots – the positive reinforcement I sadly lacked as a child.
Summary

‘Rose’ has two children and is now re-building her life, having been helped to escape an abusive relationship. She was physically abused by her partner, which was witnessed by her children. As well as effecting her own mental health, this abuse severely impacted on her children’s emotional well-being and education.

Home and Family

“It's a bit quiet here, a bit posh. But it's nice to be in a calm place. My family are away in the town where I live, but I stay in touch with them. It's nice that it's quiet for the kids, but the downside is that there’s not much going on here for them to do.”

“Things that make life hard is the new-ness of my life – I’m so not used to doing things for myself. I feel so overwhelmed by how much there is to do.” (We discussed strategies for prioritising and planning.)

When asked to scale her happiness 1-10, she stated: “I’m a 6.” I asked if she would describe herself as a happy person - she said: “No. I worry about everything. I can’t function properly and can’t get my head around what I should do next. I feel lost'.

“I've always been in a controlling relationship, so now I’m free to do what I want and I can’t make any decisions. I’m floundering. But I do like being free of him and that life.”

“As a child, a little child - I cant remember any details. My Mum told me that at two I was taken from the family and put briefly into care. My Mum has told me a few times that this was because I was diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease - this was at two. I don’t remember it, but I don’t know what happened at the time.”

“My Dad and Mum separated when I was very small and my mum had a new partner. He began doing stuff to me. I asked for help and in the end he left.”

“My Mum is very promiscuous and confessed to me when I was 17 that she had slept with my partner. But we are friends now.”

Interventions

“I just wish I could have done it earlier. One thing that professionals could have done differently would have been to let me know what my choices were. I never felt like I had a choice. When things were bad and the social services got involved, they told me I had to get out to my sisters and take the kids, if I stayed with him they would take them off me. I stayed there for 4 months and they never contacted me or involved me in anything. I contacted them and they said that the case had been closed. But I had to contact them.
They never said, ‘these are your options’ - they never said that there were refuges for women like me. They made it difficult. I thought if I told professionals that he was abusing me that they would take the kids off me, so I kept quiet for 12 years.

**I could have been safe. My kids could have been safe.**

**I could be happier earlier. We could have got out earlier.**

The midwife didn’t ask, but I think she knew what was going on. A&E didn’t chase anything up when I went with injuries. They didn’t give me a chance to talk on my own.

My partner was only ever nice to me on payday; payday love. Once he had my money, he would go back to hurting me.

When I finally had had enough I just walked out with one bag, the clothes on my back and the kids. I told the police, they came to see me. The male officer wanted to arrest him. But the female officer knew I was so scared that he would take revenge on me if I got him arrested. So she was trying to explain to the male officer to just get me out, focus on me and the kids, not him. The police helped me.

They called safeguarding and within an hour, some people came to take me to stay at somewhere safe whilst they found me a refuge. The next day they found Huddersfield women’s aid Refuge. The safeguarding people helped me.

When I got there at the refuge I was so scared. But the staff made me really welcome. They slowly built my confidence. They helped me to sort my benefits and basic stuff like dentists. They got me a counsellor. I felt so safe. For the first time ever in my life. They helped me get applying for housing benefits and bid for properties. When I was offered a property, they helped me move in and get stuff. When I was at the refuge I would go for “power talks” with Tracey. When I left her office I felt like ten women. I could do anything. So I’m grateful to them. It broke my heart to leave them.”

**Hardest Time**

“The hardest time was with my partner, the father of my two children, would beat me, constantly. The kids weren’t always there in the room, but I think they could hear. We all slept together, to be safe. He would sleep downstairs on the sofa. We felt safe together. My partner made it difficult for me to stay in touch with my friends, I began to rely on him completely. I felt so isolated.

He used to fake suicides after a row. I used to have to cut him down when he tried to hang himself. Then when he came too he would be angry, saying I’d driven him to it. He would beat me a lot. Throw things at me. I used to resent the fact that people could hear the beatings but never did anything. I wanted to be rescued. But no one did.

(Who got you out this last time?)

“I did”
(So who rescued you?)
"I did." (Smiles, then grins)

But now that we are ok, the kids still want to sleep with me. Even now, we sleep together, the kids don’t want to be alone. But I’m ready now to sleep alone. I really want to look at how I can support them in feeling safer and being able to sleep in their own beds. They are getting older and they need their space too. (Discussed ways that she could do this)

**Happiest and Healthiest**

I can’t remember when – me ever being happy. I know that I worry all the time, about everything and anything. (Rose was quiet for a time…)

**Children**

“I have two children, a boy aged 10 and a girl aged 12.

They have gone through a lot. They have heard a lot. They can’t sleep properly. They need me near them. They are settled in their new school, but they have had a lot of changes to cope with.

When I was with him, they often missed school ‘cos the beatings went on till late and I was injured and the kids were scared to leave me, and they had had a disturbed night and didn’t want to go to school, so they missed a lot of school. I think that their attendance was at 82%. Now, we are safe, the kids are getting to school and on time, the last report I think said 96% - so its really come on. They are low though, low on self-esteem. They have no belief in themselves. But staff are good at building them up.”

**The Future**

“I would love to buy the kids new outfits. We fled with no clothes other than those on our back. And take them to Alton towers, or any theme park, for the day. A day to remember, a good day - that they wont forget.

I want to make them happier memories. I don’t want them to think back on their young lives with all bad memories. I remember once the fair coming to town and taking the kids without him. But they looked scared and didn’t enjoy it as they were frightened about what would be waiting for them when they came back. They couldn’t, wouldn’t enjoy it. I want them to have a happy day. A day to remember.

I feel so guilty with what has happened. I know it’s not my fault and I know that I got myself out and the kids out and that we are safe, but so much of their lives has not been happy. They deserve to have a normal life with special days and happy memories. Just simple things like getting dressed up for a day out at the pictures, going to MacDonalds. Or going to a theme park.”
Summary

‘John’ is a single parent with two pre-school children. He has been abstinent from alcohol for some time now and says that he had to look at his drinking because “I wanted to protect and provide for my children”. He is separated from the children’s mother, who he says “could not look after my two children”. He has lived in his current home for the past 2 or so years. Before his children were born, he lived in many different locations around this country because of his work. He was born in Eastern Europe and in his childhood the biggest feeling he had was of being quite scared at times, which he feels was due to his father’s alcoholism.

Home and Family

As a younger man before he had children, John played ice hockey as a professional for ten years. He also told me he loves to play the guitar and has managed to find a cheap second-hand guitar. He says “the children sit down and I play guitar to them, and they really like it”.

John describes where he lives as a nice quiet area and says he is happy that he feels his children are growing up in a safe place. In the locality where they live there are many walks to go on and a few parks to visit; it is pleasant place to bring children up.

In the town where his family live there are no play gyms near to take the children to and he would enjoy taking them to play in a play gym. When his daughter watches programmes on TV that show a play gym, she says that she wants to go to one.

The home John has now is the best place that he has lived, as it is peaceful and he feels settled and happy with his children. Things are positive for him at the moment, and what makes life good for him, is his children; how well they are doing. But he finds it hard work as a single parent and is always busy looking after them. John tells me, “my friends are in other parts of the country, and my sister lives in London and so I do not see many people.” He hopes this will change when his daughter starts school.

One of the big things that worries him is future benefit changes that may affect him and his family. He watches the news and is aware of how the benefit system is undergoing major changes.

Interventions

In the future he says he would ask social services if he needed help as he trusts them. He says of his social worker; “I felt like my social worker believed in me”. The help he received from social services when he needed it has been so beneficial to him and he is
really grateful to them for it. They helped to get nursery places so that his children could play with other children, which also meant he could get to appointments at OnTrak and other places that have assisted in his recovery.

The help he feels has benefitted him most is the professional advice he was given by his OnTrak key worker whilst recovering from alcohol dependency. He says that she has been a big support to him; “With On Trak I felt supported and I was given opportunities”.

**Future**

Living on benefits has been very hard for him; money is very tight and he explains that he has to watch every bit of money and be careful to make it last. John has been disappointed recently to find that he cannot get help with childcare costs, which would have enabled him to enroll on an access course to hopefully go on to university, so he will have to wait another year until his youngest starts school.

When considering what would make life better for him, it is a bit difficult as John comes across as a humble man. He is feeling very positive and so much happier that life is settled for himself and his children. It would, he says, be nice to look forward to enjoying days out, now and again, with his children to the seaside or a theme park, and even perhaps a holiday in maybe a caravan in the future. Although managing his finances, there is nothing left to help him make his house a home.
Summary
‘Janet’ is a single parent with two children. The eldest is at primary school and the youngest is a toddler. Janet has managed to become abstinent from alcohol this year and has achieved this through her determination and personal strength and with the help of her key worker at On TRAK.

The family life was suffering when she was alcohol dependent and social care had some input into their lives. Janet asked her health visitor for help and says that she, “helped and supported me... she didn’t judge me”. Their circumstances mean that as a family they live on benefits.

“I can’t pin point any certain memory or upset in my life when drinking became a problem, but it was. It became a daily problem when I met my oldest child’s father.”

Home and Family
Janet’s childhood was mixed in that the first thirteen years of her life were happy and good. She grew up in Huddersfield and spent a lot of time with her grandparents and has good memories; “I can remember baking biscuits with my grandma”.

At thirteen she became aware that both parents drank and on one occasion she was left alone in her five bedroom home for a week with no money. When she was fourteen she went to live with her grandma, but she was bullied and played truant from school. Janet says, “I have suffered a lot of losses, my parents and other things. Traveling was an escape after my father died and a release after my car accident and being so ill... I needed that break”.

Janet had a few years of traveling and living abroad before she had her first child. She had a range of experiences and some were traumatic. In her travels, she was involved in accidents, was mugged, subject to an attempted rape, was drugged, and a partner who she was trying to part from died from a drug overdose.

Janet now has two children who are aged nine years and one and a half. They have few family members living near them so support is not freely available. Janet says she feels quite isolated where she lives; she has no friends on the estate and says the other people who live there are loud and swear a lot. This does make her feel vulnerable at times.

Janet has suffered some anti-social behavior in the past, in which her windows have been smashed, and she has been burgled. She describes the estate as ‘open plan’ in that there are open metal fences separating gardens. She feels that she has no privacy.
Interventions

A Horton housing worker was, “the most helpful professional that helped me”. Janet says that the Horton housing worker visited her at home, which was easier for Janet with her small child. “She did not judge me and gave me good advice and I felt understood and helped”.

The Future

Janet was open in sharing her personal story and spent a lot of time writing down parts of her life, which she says she has found therapeutic.

Janet does manage to get away and goes back to Guernsey for the summer to escape from her neighborhood. She says, “I love being a mum and I hope that I am building a happy childhood for my two children.”

For the future, Janet is working towards remaining sober, building a social life and networks, becoming a volunteer, and then hopefully finding paid work. Most of all she would like to be able to give her children a happy and secure future. Ultimately she would like to move from the area she lives in, but the benefit of living where she does is that there is countryside near and the school that her daughter attends is great.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light in the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via YCC.

Summary
‘Annette’ is 16 year-old currently attending a PRU. Annette suddenly moved back into the local authority to live in Chickenley with her father (Pete), after her relationship with her Mum broke down. She has two younger siblings who remain living with mum in East Yorkshire. Annette has ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) and has been cautioned by the police for anti-social behaviour. Annette’s attendance continues to be a cause for concern at 34%. There is a CAF raised to support Annette and Pete.

Home and Family
Pete, Teresa (Pete’s mum) and Annette were all present for this interview. Pete explained that he loves his daughter but that it was totally unexpected when she rang him to ask if she could live with him because Her mum didn’t want her.

“What could I do? I couldn’t turn her away or have her taken by Social Services so I said yes. The only problem is that I only live in a little one bed flat so now we’re on the housing list for a bigger place to live.”

In response to delving deeper into the practicalities of living in a one bed flat, Pete shared: “I moved out of my bedroom and gave that to Annette and I sleep on the couch in the living room.”

Teresa added: “I offered for her to live with me but she didn’t want that.”

At first Annette appeared giddy in the interview and when asked how she was feeling, she said: “It’s better here than living with her, the rat!”

Pete prompted Annette not to speak like that about her mother but Teresa said: “No Pete – if that’s how she feels, let her say it.”

Annette spent the next twenty minutes crying off and on.

School
Annette’s ADHD is not medicated. This sometimes poses immense challenges for tutors to ensure effective teaching and learning takes place, as so much of their time is taken up in classroom management.

When Annette initially started at school, she frequently would fall into a state of ‘crisis’ if
she felt under any pressure – either to conform to do work or, to fit in to doing whatever her peers would opt for. Unfortunately these episodes would end up with Annette self harming; banging her head off walls or scratching herself to draw blood.

In response to asking Annette herself what support she finds most helpful in school, she said: “I like it when I don’t have to keep getting to know different people.”

“She doesn’t like change.” Teresa said:

Annette: “I don’t like it when I think someone has understood my problem and then they leave my life and someone else tells me that they’re taking over that person’s job.”

When asked if she could give an example, she added:

“Like last year, we had a lot of teachers at college and now I think why bother trusting any of them if you’re all just going to leave?”

Reassurance was given to Annette that sometimes different people come in and out of our lives but that doesn’t mean they don’t care at that point. It was also explained that although the staff team at her school had changed a lot in the past, it is now more stable.

When asked about her aspirations and hopes for the future, Annette continued to cry: “I don’t want to leave college and have to go somewhere else again.” Teresa and Pete both reached out to Annette to comfort her.

Annette is attaining especially well in Beauty Therapy and with this knowledge, Pete asked her: “What about doing Hairdressing or something like that when you leave? You’d be good at that.”

“Yes love and you could do your old Nan’s hair!” Teresa said hopefully. This comment was helpful to lighten the tone and Annette raised her head, moved her hair out of her eyes and laughed in acknowledgement.

**Interventions**

Pete is very appreciative and engaged with support services such as CAMHS, the Youth Offending Team, Targeted Youth Support, the Pupil Referral Service and the Attendance and Pupil Support Officer. Pete shared that before Annette came to live with him he wasn’t used to parenting, so he is happy to access as much help as is given to him.

“I want to do the best I can. I don’t want to let her down but I know I can’t do it on my own. I am glad that I have my Mum around the corner to help me.”

In light of realising the seriousness of the episodes of crisis that Annette can fall into, I enquired as to whether there are any other supportive strategies that are proving to be helpful. Annette replied:

“There is a key word that I know I can say to people and they know that I’m heading to that
point in my mind. The word is *Cracker*.”

Teresa added, “It was a *Cracker* point last night love wasn’t it?” Teresa explained that where Pete and Annette live is directly over a food take away shop and, on the previous evening, the noise was too much for Annette. She started getting very stressed to the point that Pete rang his Mum to come round to help to calm her down.

Annette shared: “I am learning from talking to the man at CAMHS, how to try to help myself calm down. I know that my behaviour doesn’t mean that I am bad and that the more I can let other people know how I feel – maybe my behaviour will be better. I think it’s working because I know that man has time to listen to only me when I see him.”

**The Future**

Annette is engaged with CAMHS in seeking help to support her deep sense of rejection from her mother. She is slowly growing in confidence to the point that she now has accepted an offer of a place at college to study Hair and Beauty. Pete has asked if we could fund him and his Mum to take Annette to Bridlington for a break away. He feels that they need to spend time together to consolidate the other Interventions that are beginning to help Annette manage situations when she might feel vulnerable to rejection.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light in the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via the school.

Summary

‘Simpson’ is 16 years-old and currently attending a PRU. He is part of a large family and lives with his Mum (Louise, who has mental health problems), his Step-Dad (Frank) who is long-term unemployed, four younger siblings and an older brother. The older brother also had difficulty completing his compulsory education within mainstream school.

Simpsons’ attendance continues to be a cause for concern at 19%. Simpson receives 1:1 support from CRI / The Base as there are serious concerns for his safety due to the fact that in addition to his drug taking, he misuses butane gas. Simpson displays a lot of anger in his body language but is extremely quiet at school. He lacks the respect of the other students as they call him a ‘dealer’ – though there is no evidence to support their allegations.

Home and Family

Prior to this interview, Simpson had been accused of sexually abusing the seven year old daughter of a neighbour and one of his bail conditions was that he had to be residing at a different address, so only Simpson’s Mum and Step-Dad were present for the interview.

Some of Simpson’s responses are taken from 1:1 conversations with him at school. When asked about life in general; likes and dislikes Simpson would frequently respond negatively:

“Fuck all.”

At the start of the interview, Frank shared that the family don’t know what to do with him.

“We’re so sorry for what he’s done. I’ve been to see him and he’s ok but we just don’t know what to do with him. He’s a problem for the police now.”

Louise sat – sobbing quietly. Louise had not long been released from hospital after another episode of ill health.

School

When specifically asked for his view of why he has ended up in the PRU system, Simpson replied: “School’s shit.”

When asked about how he feels about needing to get qualifications for a job when he
leaves school, he said: “I’m not bothered.”

When asked about whether or not there has been a particular person (or people) who had done something that stands out as influencing him positively, he initially said nothing and then said; “That man who comes in about drugs, listens to me without judging me. I like him but it’s too late. I’m just going to keep doing stuff.”

Interventions

Frank and Louise seemed appreciative of the involvement of a range of support services who have been helping their older son; the Youth Offending Team, Targeted Youth Support and Social Care. Frank particularly acknowledged his relief that through school, Simpson is accessing help with his substance misuse.

“It frightens us to think that he’s sniffing gas and doing drugs. He’s going to kill himself if he doesn’t stop. I’m glad he’s got a drugs worker now. I know he likes him who comes to school to talk to him.”

The Future

Simpson’s immediate future will be effected by the current investigation into the alleged sexual assault of a minor. But there is still the matter of how the family unit can continue to feel supported. On behalf of the family, Frank requested if the mini-plan funding could be used to enable them to spend time together and have a week / weekend break away. He feels that the short-term future for Simpson is not something he can control but he wants to try to ensure that the younger children have positive experiences that they can hold on to. The hope is that this will help them grow up with happier aspirations.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light throughout the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available.

**Summary**

‘JonJo’ is fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU and lives with both parents. He has been a young carer for his Mum since he was eight and has witnessed instances of domestic violence in the home throughout his life. JonJo has an older sister (Rachel) who lives locally and he often stays with her for respite from the volatility of the home environment. Rachel is twenty seven and has a young family of her own.

JonJo’s attendance continues to cause concern – currently at 49.2%. He has recently been experimenting with legal highs and smokes cannabis socially with his peers. When offered support from CRI / The Base, JonJo has refused to engage. There is a CAF raised for this family.

**Home and Family**

JonJo and his Mum (Judy) were present for this interview. When asked about life in general; likes and dislikes JonJo replied:

“Bikes. I like doing up bikes. I don’t like school and I don’t like when there’s a lot of shouting and fighting at home.”

Judy added: “He works with his dad (Jonny) on the field doing up old bikes. He’s always done that since he was a kid. They get on well most of the time but recently there’s been a problem with Jonny – he just seems to be angry again all the time and he takes his bad feelings out on me and JonJo. You’ve been staying with your sister this last week haven’t ya son just to get out the way.”

JonJo nodded in agreement.

In an increasingly agitated tone, Judy continued:

“I know his attendance isn’t good but I don’t know what else I can do. I give him a lift every morning and I drop him off at the side and then I get phone calls to say he’s not in school and later I find out that he hasn’t walked into the school building.”

When asked if there are any particular reasons why he runs off instead of attending school, JonJo revealed that it’s boring.

“I do sometimes come to school but I prefer to be with my mates. I don’t like all the noise in class. It doesn’t help me concentrate on doing my work and I get bored.”
Judy shared how she feels that it has been especially difficult for JonJo growing up with an angry dad and that she feels her medical problems (that include a tumour on the spine) have contributed to JonJo feeling particularly vulnerable.

“He will never hand his mobile phone in because one time in his old school when I ended up in hospital, Jonny left a message for JonJo and the reception didn’t pass it on. JonJo was really upset when he found out and now he has his mobile phone. We have this agreement that if I’m not well, I’ll text him or someone will ring him on his own phone and then no-one else can be responsible for letting him down.”

“I don’t trust anyone to pass messages on. I just want to be told myself.” Added JonJo.

In response to being asked about if / how the family spend time relaxing, Judy explained:

“We have a load of horses and JonJo helps to muck them out don’t ya? It seems to help to keep him out of trouble (for some of the time) by keeping him off the street – as much as I can do.”

JonJo nodded agreeably.

School

When specifically asked for his view of why he has ended up in the PRU system, JonJo replied:

“I got kicked out of the other schools for messing about.”

When asked about his aspirations and hopes for the future, JonJo was apathetic. He shrugged his shoulders and replied:

“I want to work with motorbikes but I don’t have a lot of qualifications to go to college so I probably won’t be able to.”

It was explained to JonJo that good attendance is directly related to performing well at school. Despite this, he showed little interest in wanting to alter his behaviour by increasing his attendance in order to be able to access even the vocational side of the curriculum such as motor bike maintenance.

To date, JonJo has attained Level 1 in English. He lacks self confidence and doesn’t believe that he is capable of achieving Level 2 by the end of Year 11. However, this would be possible for him if his attendance and attitude to work improves.

Interventions

Judy displayed mixed emotions about the various interventions that the family have received over the years – some supportive in her view and some not. With anger and frustration clearly evident in her voice, Judy shared:

“CAMHS were a load of rubbish. We were seeing the doctor there since JonJo was six
years old and nothing has come of it. There’s not even a diagnosis for ADHD. They told us that he just needs help with anger management. I do feel really let down by them. As a family, we are really frustrated. I think somewhere, sometimes there are too many loop holes in the system.

I just think the help we are told we can have starts off making us feel like this or that, or something else is going to happen – like the ADHD diagnosis we expected for JonJo – and then you’re told that the person or the people you’ve been going to speak with for weeks and months, isn’t the right person and we’re having to be passed on again and then finally, you get to see the next person and you have to go back to basics to explain the problem all over again.

After all our effort to attend all these appointments and to speak to all these people, all they want to ask and look into is an answer to their question ‘Is there any violence in the family?’ What’s that got to do with it because I don’t know? It feels to me that the wrong angle is looked at. Everyone who thinks they know how to help, just judge and make you feel unfit as a parent.”

When asked if anyone other than CAMHS had been involved, Judy spoke with warmth about the support she feels the Pupil Referral Service has provided to the family in trying to engage JonJo in education. Judy also shared that her own GP had been a constant anchor of support ‘when Jonny has been going through a bad patch with his anger’.

“My GP did offer counselling to me but I said ‘no’ because I was afraid that if Jonny found out, it would make life worse.”

Judy cried and JonJo looked down to the floor. Judy was advised at this point that there are people and agencies who can help support families who experience domestic abuse.

“I know but I don’t need that. I just need to get away from him but I don’t think I can. You do, don’t ya son? You go to Rachel’s but I’m just waiting for the right time and then it’ll be better.”

Whilst Judy excused herself and went to the ladies room, JonJo spoke up:

“I hate the way he makes her cry. I don’t like to be away from her and that’s why I don’t always come to school because I want to stay at home and make sure she’s ok. I want to protect her from him. I know he lets me help him in the bike garage and I do like that, but I just don’t understand why he turns so horrible sometimes.”

In response to being asked “Do you think you have trouble managing your feelings of anger?” JonJo looked at the door as the handle turned for his mum to return and responded ‘Yes’, before putting his head down again.

**The Future**

JonJo asked (and Judy agreed) if funding can be given to help JonJo learn to drive a motorbike and get his license and also to purchase a riding helmet. Judy feels that this
level of independence would help to alleviate his sense of frustration when he wants to escape the volatility of his home environment. JonJo’s body language completely changed. From slouch and rocking on his chair, he sat up straight and smiled at the thought of being able to legally drive his own scooter.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light throughout the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via Yorkshire Children's Centre.

Summary

‘Joseph’ is 15 year-old currently attending a PRU. Joseph has a younger brother, John (aged 12) who remains in mainstream school. Joseph takes daily medication for ADHD. He is very independent and can recognise the need for the dose to be increased and takes responsibility to inform his doctor. Both Mum (Joan) and Dad (Paul) are challenged with a variety of Mental Health problems.

Joseph feels an enormous pressure to be responsible for the well-being of John and as such, his attendance at school remains a struggle at 26.6%. There is a CAF raised for this family.

Home and Family

For this interview, Joseph was present along with his Mum (Joan) and Dad (Paul) – though Dad made no verbal contribution.

It was clear from the home visit that the family struggles with socio-economic problems. It was notable that the house is small for four persons and due to the nature of the mental health challenges that Joan and Paul face, the house is especially unclean and untidy. For example, the family don’t put old take-away wrappers and drinks cans in the bin but leave them on the floor in the living room.

When asked about life in general; likes and dislikes, Joseph said:

“I don’t like having no room to spend time by myself.”

“You’ve got your bedroom.” Mum replied.

“Yes but I let John go in there when he wants.” Joseph explained.

He went on to say “I don’t like the neighbours.”

Mum agreed. “They always ring the police on us and he just can’t ignore the trouble that the neighbours want to cause and he ends up fighting.”

Joseph then blurted: “And I don’t like thinking that me and John are going to be taken into Care.”

In response to being asked by Joan: “What did you say Joseph?”

“Yes I heard you talking to that lazy shit last week about you two getting done for fraud.”
know that if that happens we'll be taken away because this is the second time you've done it.”

No one said anything for a while. Joan then said that Joseph had heard wrong and went on to try to reassure him:

“You and your brother won’t be going anywhere. I do what I can but it’s been hard with your ADHD and then John has problems with his bowels and that causes him to be laughed at in school and then he (pointing to Paul) just sits in that chair all day, I want to get money by having a job but how can I when I don’t feel like I have the energy?”

**School**

In an attempt to lift the mood of the conversation, I posed the question: “Is there anything you do like Joseph?”

“T am beginning to like school to get away from here. I like doing the furniture restoration in the afternoons at ‘Pass It On’."

In response to being asked for any other reason he likes school, Joseph shared: “I like being trusted. I like it when people listen to what I have to say instead of always blaming me for things that are kicking off.”

When asked about his aspirations and hopes for the future, Joseph shrugged his shoulders and then shouted with passion:

“I don’t want to end up like that lazy shit over there! I want to get a job and have my own money.”

In a calmer tone he went on to share: “I want to be in the army but my Mum won't let me ‘cos she doesn’t want me dead. I want to make my life mean something. So what if I was in the army and I die? At least I’d be fighting for my country.”

**Interventions**

It was explained to Joseph that at school, we want to support him to help him to break his perceptions of what his future holds based on the daily family cycle that he lives in. Joseph seemed to warm with understanding that we want to help. He said:

“I like working with the people at the ‘Pass It On’ shop.”

When it was explained to Joseph that the school organises career days out to places of interest and that he could attend an information day with personnel from the armed forces, he was very happy. In response to asking how he felt about these opportunities he replied:

“Would ya? I’d like that!”

Joan seemed to feel that rather than support, strangers who said they wanted to help the family were actually judging them and causing her added stress due to their general
“Those social workers just interfere, and the housing people who come round, they told us last week that we have to clean the house by the next visit otherwise we could lose it. How is that helping us if they throw us out and make us homeless?”

In response to being asked if there’s was anyone else to help clean and tidy the house, both Joan and Joseph said that Nan helps a bit.

“Me Nan is good to us. That’s his Mum. She’s kind. I’d live with her if we have to go.”

Joan added:

“That doctor from CAMHS has always been good but when she changes the medication for his ADHD, there always seems to be a long time before the GP does anything about it. And when he’s run out, the GP won’t prescribe anymore until he’s seen Joseph. Last time that happened, he went a whole week without his medicine. I don’t know why he’s like that because he’s supportive to us two when we need anti-depressants.”

In response to being asked about any other support - counselling / Cognitive Behaviour Therapy - that’s been offered to the family, Joan shared that they now have a family support worker.

“I’m better just talking to close friends. I’ve got a few from where we used to live. I don’t feel as though they’re being nosy and I know that at least they care. These people that come round, they’re just doing their job. Our life doesn’t really mean anything to them. I want people to treat me more than a number.”

The Future

Joan has asked if the mini-plan could fund a new washing machine and tumble dryer as she feels it would help her begin to keep on top of the house work. She explained that they now rely on the launderette and this is one reason that the house is messy because the clothes just get dropped wherever they’re taken off and, in their mind, there’s no incentive to pick them up before the day they go to the launderette.

In the conversation, the cost of running a tumble dryer was acknowledged. Joan seemed fully aware and seemed able to factor this into her weekly budget.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light in the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via Yorkshire Children's Centre.

Summary

'Henry' is a 16 year-old currently attending a PRU. Henry has an older brother, Jed (aged 18) who was also educated within the PRU system and an older sister, Kate (aged 21). Henry is challenged with a variety of mental health problems including depression and, as such, he has been a persistent non-attender for most of his secondary school years. His attendance for this year is 7.6%.

Henry and his siblings were chronically neglected as very young children and this was the reason they went to live with their Nan. Henry has Dyslexia.

Home and Family

Henry and Jed live with their Nan (Cynthia). Kate has recently moved into her own accommodation as she is a single parent of two young children.

Kate takes on much of the responsibility of both her own house-keeping and her Nan’s affairs; remembering medical appointments, shopping, paying the bills etc. During this interview, Henry remained in bed but Jed, Kate and Nan were present.

When asked about life in general; likes and dislikes Nan and Kate shared that Henry rarely leaves the house anymore. Nan said:

“It’s like he’s lost interest in everything. He doesn’t even go outside to play football anymore. He just sleeps all day and then during the night he’s up.”

Jed added:

“He’s like the way I was when I was his age, I couldn’t be bothered with school because I thought no-one understood me and I know they definitely didn’t care. The teachers just told me I was a nuisance. There was only one teacher I got on with and he was my PE teacher and every lunchtime he used to let me go to the hall with one friend and sometimes he’d join us to kick the football around. I was good for him because he took the time to be with us.”

Nan explained that she has felt the strain of managing her extended family even more so in recent years – since her husband died.

“There’s a picture of Harry up there. He died of cancer.”

Kate explained: “I try to do as much as I can – don’t I Nan? I’ve even tried helping Jed to
find a job – like last week I took you to that interview didn’t I?”

Jed acknowledged Kate and then left the room.

Nan shared: “He’s off to go and look after his Ferrets. He’s got cages full of them. At least it keeps him out of trouble.”

School
As is often the case with students referred to the PRU system, it was shared that Henry was always happy as a young boy, when he was getting mucky or when he was with animals.

“He never liked school. He used to cry every morning but one day they had a visiting farm in and he loved that.”

When asked about his aspirations and hopes for the future, both Nan and Kate simultaneously said: “He doesn’t have none.”

The reality is that, due to his poor attendance, Henry has attained no qualifications. It is acknowledged that until Henry is stable in terms of his mental health, interventions to help him access education will need to remain ‘on hold’.

Interventions
Nan and Kate shared that they feel that they have received a lot of support from some service providers. Kate answered:

“We’ve always had nice Social Workers, haven’t we Nan?”

“Yes we have but we could have done with more help for Henry from his primary school.”

When asked for more detail, Nan shared that she tried to get the school nurse to refer Henry to get specialist help, such as from CAMHS, because she knew he was turning in on himself. But because he wasn’t a badly behaved boy, the school didn’t think he needed the referral. Nan went on to share:

“When I got no luck from school, I went to the doctors and the GP agreed with the school and he didn’t think there was need to worry. Well, he’s upstairs now causing us all a great need to worry.” Nan cried. “If they’d helped when I asked them to help, Henry wouldn’t be in this state would he?”

Kate explained that Henry is on anti-depressants and sees the GP every two weeks. The family now also has a family support worker and there is CAMHS involvement.

When asked if any service provider offered the family bereavement counselling after the death of Harry, Nan said:

“No but even if they had said about counselling or something, I know I wouldn’t have gone. I just like to talk to my friends. I have always had a lot of friends.”
The Future

It is encouraging to see and hear how much family support Henry gets, but it remains alarming that he has been plagued with depressive illness from such a young age and so many people ignored the signs. The sadness is that these challenges have been overlooked by professionals for such a long time that his state of depression is now so serious that it affects Henry’s ability to function on a daily basis.

On a more positive note, there are now a lot more service providers involved in helping the family and Henry in particular.

Nan has asked if the project could fund a new washing machine because she’s struggling to keep up using the little one she has which only has capacity of 6KG. The machine is almost nine years old and and is in need of repairs.

Nan shared that Henry would also like some new clothes and wondered if there would be any money that would then help to motivate Henry to leave the house to buy something for himself?
1022 – Yorkshire Children’s Centre

Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light throughout the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via Yorkshire Children's Centre.

Summary

'Kevin' is 16 year-old currently attending a PRU. He has an older brother (John) who is homeless and challenged with depression. Kevin also has a younger brother (Peter) who continues to live with Mum in North Yorkshire. Peter is doing well at mainstream school. Prior to attending his current school, Kevin's attendance was a real cause for concern at 21%. This has significantly improved and stands at 68.7%.

Kevin was sexually abused by a former boyfriend of his Mum and now lives with his Gran in Batley. He is at present being supported by the Youth Offending Team (YOT) as he has been involved with a gang of local youths in his area and has engaged in anti-social behaviours such as being drunk and disorderly and taking drugs.

Home and Family

Gran and Kevin were present for this interview but just before the end, Kevin received a text and then asked his Gran for money before leaving to meet his friends.

While he was present, Kevin was very engaged. When asked about life in general; likes and dislikes, Kevin presented as very trusting with the information he shared.

“I don’t have a lot of family who live in Batley but I do have a lot of friends – nearly half of Batley. My neighbours are cool. I spend most time with friends. There’s not really that much in Batley so there’s nothing ‘best’ except to play football and that’s about it. The worst thing about where I live is that there’s not a lot to do and there are too many gangs walking around and this is frightening to little kids.”

Though there are obvious socio-economic challenges for the family in terms of the area in which they live, Gran keeps a clean, tidy, homely environment that feels very welcoming. On the face of it, life seems positive for Kevin. He himself seemed happy when he said:

“There’s not really anything that makes life hard at the moment. It is really important to me to have good friends and knowing and feeling that people are looking after you and are always there for you.”

Kevin went on to say how he started getting into trouble after his Great-grandma died.

“I found it hard when my Great-grandma passed away. She died in her sleep of heart failure. She was always one of those people who was always going to church and no
matter what was up, she could make me smile. When my Great-grandma was alive I never got into trouble. I was happy because she used to always lead me in the right way. I started smoking when my Great-grandma died and so I was healthier before then. If ever I needed help, I would always go to my Great-gran if she was here, but now there isn’t anyone like her. I know people say I can speak to them but it’s about having someone I can learn to trust over a long period of time for me to feel able to open up.”

Kevin went on to share that he feels home life is now good:

“It’s a lot better than it was when I lived with my Mum. I had to give evidence in court three years ago about what that Paedo did to me and he went to prison and my Mum didn’t want to have anything to do with me – but now she sometimes lets me go over to visit.”

With an endearing cheeky smile Kevin proudly announced:

“I am young, wild and free!”

School

Gran explained that Kevin was always happiest as a young boy when he was getting mucky and building stuff.

“He never seemed interested to sit down to read. He always had to be doing something. My mother was brilliant with him. He was the light of her life.”

Kevin feels that he was just bored at school when he was younger.

“I could never seem to be able to concentrate for long periods of time. For as long as I can remember, I have always hated school. One time I had home tutoring and I preferred that. 1:1 helps me get a lot more work done. Now at school, I am doing well. I know that the teachers care for me and I am committed to attend to sit my exams and get my Level 2 English and Mathematics. I have already passed my Level 1s in both and I feel really good.”

It felt appropriate to delve deeper into the reasons (from Kevin’s perspective) why he had reformed himself since attending his new PRU.

“I think I have got better because, well, I know I grunt every morning when you say ‘hello’ but it’s just that I am not used to feeling welcomed. I know you care Miss and I like the smaller classes. I know I have sometimes messed about but then I began to trust the tutors more as they helped me with my UCAS application. And you have stayed all this time as well. That helped me because last year there was a lot of new staff and when you arrived I thought you’d just leave after a while.”

When asked about his aspirations and hopes for the future, Kevin remained extremely upbeat and articulately expressed his awareness of having good football and social skills and his ability to have a sensible conversation.

“I have always had a wish or dream of becoming a professional footballer. Either that or, I
want to coach other people in football. If I ever have children, I would want to be a good parent and encourage kids to respect themselves and others especially old people.”

**Interventions**

Both Gran and Kevin shared that they feel that they have received a lot of support from service providers. Kevin answered:

“I have had help from other members of my family, Social Workers when I lived in Grimsby and The Young People’s Service. I still get support from the Youth Offending Team. If I was a worker, trying to help someone like me, I would take the kids out on trips as a reward. I know that if I start to behave, things would be better for my family. I would like to be better and stop smoking and smoking weed, but there’s nothing else to do. Kids need more things to do in their area.”

**The Future**

It is encouraging that Kevin has been offered a place to study a Diploma in Sport. His Gran is concerned about whether or not he will have the intrinsic motivation to remain engaged or whether he will become another ‘drop out’ - as happened with his brother, John.

Gran loves her Grandsons and really wants to try to reinforce this by taking them for a family break away. Gran is hoping that if the mini-plan could fund this and enable them to spend time together, Kevin will be able to keep these positive memories of belonging with him and this will give him strength to keep focussed on succeeding at college from September 2013.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light throughout the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via Yorkshire Children's Centre.

Summary

'Laurie' is a 15 year-old currently attending a PRU. Formerly his attendance had been a real cause for concern at 38%, but since attending his Key Stage 4 provision, it has improved to 85.7%.

Laurie has two younger siblings who attend mainstream school and who have not needed any interventions from support services. Laurie began to get into petty crime and experimenting with drugs after the sudden death of his Grandfather two years ago.

Home and Family:

Laurie lives in Chickenley with his Mum, step-dad, younger sister and younger brother.

Laurie explained: “We have always lived there and we have a lot of family and friends. We know most of the neighbours. I spend most of my time with friends. I just doss about really playing football. I like just doing what I want.”

Both Mum (Kate) and Laurie were present for this interview. Kate works as an auxiliary nurse in a nursing home.

Kate shared: “I enjoy my job. I like working with the elderly. I like living where we live. The best things about the area are the people in our community. They’re kind. The worst thing is that there’s not a lot for the older kids like Laurie’s age to do near where we live.”

Both Kate and Laurie expressed their contentment at feeling safe where they live. The measure of this was summed up by Laurie as directly correlated to the level of respect he feels he experiences:

“I have respect given to me by all the people on the street.”

Despite the pleasing sense of acceptance within his neighbourhood, when asked about the difficulties that he has in life, Laurie conveyed a sense of exasperation:

“The worst thing about where I live is getting stopped by the police all the time. They just are a pain in the arse because they just stop you and check you to see what you’ve been up to and whether you’ve been in trouble. This happens about three times a week and this gets me mad because they just suspect us of doing stuff wrong all the time.”

Despite his resentment towards the police, Laurie was quick to acknowledge the positive things in his area.
"The best things for younger children are the couple of parks near us. One of them has been re-done recently and it keeps kids safe so they’re not hanging around the street... We need a motorbike track or something because if we go out on our bikes, we just get chased by the police."

“Yes, traffic calming would help to change the area to make it more safe.” Kate agreed.

Laurie nods “Yes definitely, the worst things for children near where I live is you get some dick-head drivers who drive too fast and it’s dangerous.”

**School**

Fortunately, Laurie’s recent attendance at college has improved and although he had initially been excluded on a couple of occasions, he now presents as particularly focussed and determined to gain good qualifications.

Kate shared: “When Laurie gets into trouble, that makes life hard for me but he’s been quite good recently. Life isn’t as hard now as when I didn’t have a job.”

In light of his Mothers’ depth of sharing, Laurie was probed a bit more about whether or not he could think of any other reasons of what he finds challenging in his life. He answered:

“Society makes life hard for me because there’s so much boredom that most people are turning to drugs and drink like probably weed and Mcat. This is because there’s never anything to do and when you find something to do, like there’s an old people’s home near us that’s been closed and we just like to mess about by kicking the football about the car-park, but the police come and move us on all the time and there’s nowhere else to go for a proper game of football.”

Laurie continued: “I still hate the fact that I have no choice in having to come to school. I don’t want to upset my Mum and so I just started coming more. I think it helps because I get to do work experience every Wednesday at a car garage.”

In terms of the forecast of academic outcomes for Laurie, he has been successful in gaining Level 1 English and Level 1 Mathematics. It is hoped that he will leave next year with Level 2 (equivalent GCSE A* – C grades) in all subjects. Laurie is very popular and has a wide peer group at school. He is especially interested in Mechanical Engineering.

**Interventions**

When asked if any service provider offered the family bereavement counselling after the death of Laurie’s Grandfather, Kate said that nothing had been offered. She also admitted that she prefers just to talk to family and friends.

“I don’t like to talk to strangers about my feelings.”

It is likely therefore that even if the service had been offered, engagement would have been difficult.
In terms of ensuring that Laurie is well educated in his decision to experiment with drugs, Kate shared her relief that Laurie has gained a better understanding from the weekly drugs awareness programme that is currently happening at his school in conjunction with CRI / The Base.

“He tells me what he’s been told about the dangers of drugs. I am relieved because I think he is realising that it’s not good.”

In response to asking Laurie any reason(s) he could think of why his school has felt positive to him and yet involvement with the police always feels negative to him, he said:

“The people at college don’t judge me. They give me a chance and if I get in trouble, they take the time to ask me for reasons why something has happened. But the police they don’t even take time to talk to us... instead of chasing us from playing football somewhere, that’s what they should do. They need to take time to get to know us because we’re not bad. Me and my mates are just bored.”

The Future

The long-term outcome that the family feel would benefit them is if a contribution could be made to Laurie learning to drive a motorbike and getting his license. They believe that it would mean that he could travel independently to future places of work, instead of always having to depend on a family member dropping him off. They feel that this would help to nurture a greater sense of trust that would help to firm up their relationship with Laurie.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light in the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via Yorkshire Children's Centre.

Summary

'Martin' is a fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU. He is diagnosed to be on the Asperges Spectrum. Martin has an older brother, (19 years old) who has been physically and emotionally abusing Martin and, for this reason, there is a current CAF in place.

One of the conditions that was agreed to make it possible for Martin to stay at home is that Joe should leave the family home and be accommodated elsewhere. Joe was also educated in the PRU system and, since leaving a different place of education, has remained; unemployed, in and out of trouble with the police, and in danger of becoming homeless as he is in arrears with his rent and struggles to manage his fortnightly pay out of benefits.

Martin presents as socially awkward at college but his sense of difference is accepted by his cohort. Before attending his current PRU, Martin’s attendance was a cause for concern at 48%. This has significantly improved and now stands at 74.3%.

Home and Family

Martin and his Mum (Lorraine) were present for this interview. When asked about life in general, likes and dislikes, Martin was noticeably quiet and Lorraine answered:

“He doesn’t like to go out. He never goes out. He just sits in his bedroom and plays on his computer games all day.”

Martin contributed and looked very pleased with him-self:

“... and all night.”

Martin continued: “I don’t like it when Joe comes round to the house. I hate him. He’s always picking on me.”

When Lorraine was asked why Joe had been at the house when Martin was there, it emerged that Joe had been staying with them for a variety of reasons:

“I know he shouldn’t be at the house but his council flat is cold and I’m helping him out because he can’t afford to pay the bills... and he’s still my son as well.”

Lorraine went on to share that the father of Martin and Joe hasn’t been involved in their lives since they were toddlers. She outlined her experience as a single parent as an immense struggle.
“I know that I haven’t been able to give my sons the best of everything but I have tried my best.”

The family lives in an area that has many socio-economic challenges. Lorraine works part-time in a fast food restaurant. With help from her Mum, she has managed to keep Martin and Joe away from getting involved in local gangs. She admits that there have been many times when Joe has been abusive to Martin, but she thought it was just normal sibling rivalry.

“It was only when Martin told teachers at his old school that his brother was beating him up, that I was forced to realise there was a problem.”

School

Martin explained that he never liked school because he doesn’t like lots of people and lots of noise. Martin is very settled now at his new PRU and this is encouraging in comparison to how insular Martin was at the beginning of the academic year 2012/13. When asked what he felt helped him feel happier in school he said:

“It’s not so noisy since you came. I like that Inclusion room that’s been put in because it keeps the ones away who used to disrupt the lessons and I can concentrate and get my work done.”

When asked about what subject(s) interests him, Martin shared:

“English because I like making up horror stories and I like it because I get to use a laptop.”

Martin is proving academically competent in the subject areas that he is motivated to apply himself in. He has attained Level 1 in both English and Mathematics and is targeted to achieve Level 2 by the end of Year 11. He frequently refuses to engage in Physical Education due to his struggles with Dyspraxia.

Lorraine reflected back to when Martin was in primary school and told of how he never seemed to have a lot of friends.

“He always acted to keep himself on his own. It wasn’t because the other children didn’t like him. For a long time we didn’t understand his behaviour but now we do know that it is part of his Asperges.”

When asked about his aspirations and hopes for the future, Martin spoke passionately about his desire to work as a computer games tester: “I’m going to test computer games and get paid for it!”

Interventions

Lorraine is engaged with, and very appreciative of, support services such as CAMHS, Youth Offending Team, Targeted Youth Support, the Pupil Referral Service and Social Care. She has prior experience of services with her other son, Joe, whose behaviour
caused him to be permanently excluded from school.

“Everyone we’ve been to see has helped us. CAMHS helped with diagnosing Asperges for Martin and YOT have helped me by supporting Joe. I’ve seen Martin improve more since he started at (his new PRU). He seems to like fewer people around.

It has annoyed me that it took so long for me to feel like anyone was listening to me about my concerns for Martin. For years I kept going to the doctors and asking them for help but I always felt like they thought I was another paranoid Mum. I am feeling very angry because Martin was four when I first took him to the GP to ask for help and now, over ten years later, he’s only just received his diagnosis. And that’s only because he’s been coming to this school and, through having the CAF in place here, you and the school nurse was able to make sure he was seen by someone.

My anger is because... it’s not really for me, it’s because I feel that everyone else ignored Martin and let him down when he could have been getting a lot more help a lot sooner.”

When asked about whether the family have received additional support from a network of family or friends, Lorraine said:

“We don’t mix in our area so I don’t have a lot of friends who are neighbours, but we do have friends near where my Mum lives. My Mum has helped me look after the boys since I’ve been on my own.

I still find it hard now and the boys are nearly adults. Well Joe is an adult really, but I still need the help to be able to support Joe better. The housing people help me with Joe a lot. I know I couldn’t cope on my own.

I am very thankful to the people who have actually understood us and helped us. It took time to listen – nearly a year of CAF meetings, but it worked in the end and I know who I can trust and turn to for support.”

The Future

When thinking about the future, Martin and Lorraine both agreed that it would help if a new PC Tower could be purchased because his old one was taken by his brother. Martin misses it and since the computer used to keep Martin positively focused and provide him with an ongoing interest in ICT, Martin would begin to feel more relaxed again at home.

Lorraine finished by saying:

“His Asperges keeps him on his own, so if that’s the way he is, I’m happier knowing that when he’s in his world, that he is doing something that he really enjoys and I know that anything to do with computers keeps him focussed.”
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light throughout the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via Yorkshire Children's Centre.

Summary

‘Daniel’ is a fifteen year-old currently attending a PRU. He has a twin brother who continues to excel in mainstream school, an older sister (31), and an older brother, David, who sadly died, aged twenty-nine (within the last four years) of a drugs overdose.

Daniel’s attendance continues to be a cause for concern at 33.3% and he and his family are on a parenting contract that monitors improvement over a four week period. Daniel receives 1:1 support from CRI / The Base as he has recently increased his usage of so called ‘legal highs’. Daniel is intelligent and very popular with all other students.

Home and Family

Daniel, his Mum (Joanne) and his sister (Elaine) were present for this interview.

When asked about life in general, likes and dislikes, Daniel shrugged his shoulders. Joanne prompted him: “Don’t be rude Daniel.”

“I like everything.” He replied. “I love my girlfriend – she’s sound and clever.”

“She’s a year older than Daniel.” Joanne explained.

Elaine expressed her frustration with Daniel. “She should tell you to come to school more instead of letting you spend whole days at her house. You want to watch yourself, Daniel. Look at what we’ve gone through with our David and now you think it’s a laugh being involved in drugs and not coming to school. It’s not funny.”

“I do come to school.” Daniel said.

Mum shared her frustration. “Yes when it’s nearly lunch time and I’ve received telephones calls to my work, asking where you are.”

Mum explained that she is the Manager of a Nursery school and as much as she would like to be able to bring Daniel to college each day, she is unable to. She also expressed her thoughts that as he is nearly sixteen, she should be able to trust him to get to college himself.

Daniel’s family have a positive work ethic that they have tried to communicate this to all the children. His older sister works for a firm of local solicitors, has two young children, and lives close to her Mum and twin brothers. She is keen to relieve her Mum of the worry that Daniel's attitude of disaffection is causing the family.
“If Daniel can be bothered to walk to the corner of our street - that isn’t far from where he lives - I’d be happy to give him a lift in to college each morning to try to encourage him to keep focussed and stay in education.”

School
When specifically asked for his view of why he has ended up in the PRU system, Daniel replied: “I got bored in school. It was shit.”

When asked about his aspirations and hopes for the future, Daniel seemed convinced: “I want to be a Footballer.”

Elaine told Daniel that he still needs qualifications and Daniel was quick to reply: “I already have my Level 1s in English and Maths.”

Daniel has passed his recent exams and is targeted to easily achieve Level 2 by the end of Year 11. However, in school he can come across as arrogant in lessons. He believes he is sufficiently intelligent and doesn’t need to be taught and this is reflected by his disruptive behaviour that can prevent others from learning.

I asked Daniel what or who has helped him and what they did to influence him positively.

“You have. It’s alright this place (the PRU). Do you like how I big it up any time that you have visitors? I like the way you listen and I like that you are interested in my football. How did you know that I scored that goal on Sunday?”

Interventions
Mum is very appreciative and engaged with support services such as the Youth Offending Team, Targeted Youth Support, the Pupil Referral Service and the Attendance and Pupil Support Officer. She shared that her family continues to access counselling – when needed – to help with their grief at losing Daniel’s older brother, David. Joanne acknowledged her appreciation of all that the school is doing to try and help Daniel:

“Thank you for your concern. We all had bereavement counselling soon after David died. We had someone visit our house to provide coping strategies for us all.

Daniel also attended several sessions at Northorpe Hall Child and Family Trust in Mirfield. This was a six week programme with Daniel attending each session talking to a counsellor, who offered support. Since then, Daniel has not received any help, particularly from his previous schools.

During his time at Mirfield Free Grammar, he was placed on a report card, put in detention and in isolation, and was excluded more times than I care to mention for the slightest of infractions. While I do understand the need to gain control of students using these strategic measures, I felt that Daniel's needs required a different approach.
Despite my continual requests for their understanding of his problems, no help was forthcoming. They went through the motions of offering pastoral care, but I do not feel that enough support was offered for his personal needs.

At Castle Hall, I do not think they fully understood or cared about the distress that Daniel has been through and again, offered no support. Both schools did not attempt to support Daniel and could not wait to exclude him, to ensure that he was no longer their problem.

Unfortunately, Daniel has been badly let down by the educational system that is in place to help him. While I do not profess to know all the answers, I do know how difficult it is to maintain a child's interest in learning. During the formative years of the twins, I provided a vast amount of input into their upbringing and had no problems regarding Daniels’ behaviour until after David's death.

I cannot stress enough how brilliant Daniel is at football and I feel he would benefit enormously from an opportunity to showcase his skills in this area, thereby helping him pursue a career in sport. I believe he would work well at something he is so very passionate about.

Sorry for rambling on a bit, but I believe that you have Daniel's best interests at heart and that you are listening to put the right interventions of support in place for him.”

Mum continued: “Daniel always looked up to David. They were very close. I know he is hurting and I think that’s why he’s pressing a self destruct button. The problem for me is that he doesn’t seem to be able to tell what the consequences of his actions are for other people like me, because if he refuses to go to college then it’s me that gets taken to court. He’s in a very selfish minded place at the moment and that’s very hard to watch.”

Both Joanne and Elaine expressed relief that Daniel was getting support around his drug use and they were thankful to school for the referral and for notifying them of his disclosure. A member of staff had advised Daniel in school: “Be careful with taking drugs, they can lead you to a very dark place.” He replied: “I think I already am in a very dark place. I know I need help.” That was the catalyst for Daniel finally beginning to realise his need to accept help.

The main support services that Daniel's mum (Joanne) feels has helped her has been their immediate family and friends.

“When I have just needed people to speak to, the family have all supported us and my GP has been very kind too. But the trouble with services is that people have to fit into their timeframe. At the times when I have needed to speak, the only people who could listen immediately to what I needed were my family and friends. Contrary to common belief, time has not been a great healer for us but somehow we are learning to live with our feelings.”

The Future

There is no doubt that the low attendance and use of drugs are symptoms of the deep hurt
Daniel continues to experience after the loss of his older brother. It is promising that Daniel has acknowledged for himself the need to engage in counselling to support him with his increasing reliance on drugs, as well as to help him identify, for himself, the underlying issues behind his poor attendance, behaviour and attitude.

The family have shared their desire to have a memorial bench and inscription that will be located in a special place so they can all gather to remember David. Joanne believes that this approach might help Daniel on his journey of healing; to be able to confront his loss and find a positive way forward for himself.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light throughout the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via the school.

Summary

‘Duncan’ is a fifteen year-old who attends a PRU. He is currently causing great concern because he frequently runs away from home. His attendance at school is particularly low, partly because of his attitude and behaviour towards authority. At present it stands at 25%.

Duncan has been offered 1:1 support from CRI / The Base because he is engaged in drug taking. It was recently reported that he’d started taking cocaine.

Home and Family

The information in this case study was taken from three meetings; one with Mum (Maureen) and Duncan, another with Duncan on his own during school, and finally a conversation with Dad (Jacob).

It is clear that Duncan comes from a loving family with a strong work ethic. Jacob is an engineer and Maureen works for a security firm. Duncan has an older brother (Daniel) who is 20 and works for the same security firm as his mum.

School

When asked why he has ended up in the PRU system, Duncan laughed:

“Everyone wanted me to be a rugby player but I got tired of doing what everyone else wanted me to do – trying to meet everyone else’s expectations. I just started being with my mates more. That feels easier to me because they just accept me. I don’t feel under pressure by my mates. I just wanted people to notice me more than how good I was at rugby. I felt trapped in a way. Then I began to like it when I got more attention for the times I started getting into trouble than when I played well in sport.”

When asked about his aspirations and hopes for the future, Duncan seemed apathetic and replied: “They’ll just lock me up.”

Duncan has already achieved well by attaining Level 1 in both his English and Mathematics by the end of Year 10. If his attendance, behaviour and attitude can be turned around, it is predicted he is capable of attaining at Level 2 by the end of Year 11.

Unfortunately, when Duncan is in school his apathy about what he believes others think his
future holds for him is reflected by his disruptive behaviour, which disturbs the learning of other students. The consequence of this is that Duncan has to be taught 1:1 in a special area of the school socially removed from the majority of the other students.

On a good day, Duncan will arrive on time with a sense of purpose of what school is about and comply to complete his work. But on most days, Duncan will arrive late, verbally abuse staff and then display his level of personal frustration and unhappiness by ‘voting with his feet’ and walking out of school and not returning for a number of days after.

**Interventions**

I asked Duncan what or who has helped him and what they did to influence him positively.

“My Mum and Dad try to help me and I like him who talks to me from The Base. I like that they never give up on me, but I know that nothing can control me and that I will keep running away and taking drugs and doing stuff until they have to lock me up. It’s what we all do. I’m only young and I think it’s fun. I do sometimes feel bad when I make promises to be in on time, but then I don’t and I just stay out and never go home until the police find me.”

Dad shared: “We self-referred to Social Care when he was thirteen, but I feel that we’ve been let down. At first we had a Family Support Worker, who I think was far too soft with him. Duncan can tell a good story and I think he had all these people wrapped around his finger. He used to just tell them what he thought they wanted to hear and worse than that, none of these workers challenged him.

We’ve had a Social Worker who has been to visit us once and then just said, ‘There’s nothing we can do, can you not chastise him?’ We feel like we’re going mad. We’ve never mistreated him. We just don’t know why this is happening. To be honest, I feel upset. They say things to us like ‘I don’t know how you cope – why don’t you just hand him over to the authorities?’ but I say, ‘eh – he’s my son.’ It’s unbelievable.

It’s like starting from the beginning every time we get another person - a new social worker or a new family support worker knocking at the door to speak about the things that Duncan is becoming involved in.

I know that at his school you all support him and you’re speaking with me now. I know you are trying to help us, but other than that we just feel like everyone is wiping their hands of what is needed to really help Duncan and us as a family.

We’re really worried as well because of the job that his Mum and his brother does. They need to apply for a special security license every three years to keep doing the job that they do and if Duncan gets a criminal record it could be hard for them to get their license renewed and they could both lose their jobs. But Duncan just doesn’t seem to either understand that or care. We are at our wits end.

Our family and friends are good and my work has been really supportive by letting me take
my annual leave at days at a time – when I’ve needed to go out to look for him when he’s
been missing or when I have to go and get him from the police station.”

Maureen has needed to go to the GP to help her through these years and she is extremely
appreciative of that channel of support.

“When I have just needed people to speak to, the family have all supported us and I talk to
my GP who has been very understanding.”

**The Future**

It is clear the behaviour that Duncan exhibits - low attendance and use of drugs - are forms
of escapism from what he felt was an immense pressure to go on and become a
professional rugby player. It feels positive that Duncan has acknowledged he needs to
engage in counselling to support him with his increasing reliance on drugs and he is
meeting with the adviser from The Base.

The family have shared that Duncan needs a new bed and would like to know if the mini-
plan funding could help purchase this. Their hope is that maybe Duncan would want to be
at home (rather than settee hopping) if he had a bed that wasn’t broken.

The family also asked if a contribution could be made towards a new dryer as their last
one broke and the inconvenience of this is adding to what is already a very stressful time
in the lives of the whole family.
Summary
This story is about a woman called Taz, a Muslim woman who has been a victim of Domestic Violence. Taz is receiving ESA benefit due to her depression. The story is told in her own words.

Childhood
Taz grew up in Lancashire in a two bedroom house, which she shared with her six sisters and her parents. Taz grew up in violence and neglect. She witnessed her Mum being 'battered black and blue' by her father. Her father was embarrassed that he had seven daughters and no sons. He never took them out and never showed any affection towards them.

'My Mum told me she got beaten up every time she came home from the hospital with a baby girl as my Father wanted a son'.

Taz and her sisters never had any toys and the clothes they wore were second-hand clothes given to them by their neighbours.

Her first memory of being physically abused was when she was six or seven years old and her Father grabbed her by the arm and threw her across the sofa for making too much noise. Taz said she was so frightened she wet herself.

Taz said she woke up to shouting everyday; her Father was always shouting about something. She had a close relationship with her sisters and they would cuddle up at night in bed and comfort each other.

Taz felt neglected by her Mum because she was depressed and struggling to deal with the situation. Her Mum would not get the police involved as she was concerned that the community would talk about her daughters and say no Father would hit his daughters unless they were bad girls and were not being good Muslim girls.

Taz and her sisters did not go out often and if they did the community would report back to their Father and then it would cause a lot of trouble.

'I disliked the community for spying on me and making comments to my Father if they saw me out, telling him that I had gone out, where I went and comments on how I was dressed'.

'My Mum said we cannot get the police involved because the community will say no Father would hit his daughters without reason and his daughters must be bad'

Taz remembers having suicidal thoughts from the age of 12 and felt she had no reason to live, but also felt she had to be strong for her mum.
School

Taz was very happy at school it was her escape from home. She said the teachers were kind and she enjoyed playing with other children.

When Taz was in her final year at school, she was beaten up really badly by her Father. She had to miss school as she had marks on her face and she could not walk properly.

When she returned to school she could no longer hide what was happening at home and she broke down at school and disclosed to her teacher the situation at home. Taz begged her teacher not to inform Social Services as she was frightened of what would happen and did not want to make the situation worse for herself and her sisters. The school agreed not to contact Social Services and asked how they could help.

It was really important for Taz to do well in her GCSE Exams as she wanted to get a good job when she was older, so she could buy things for her Mum and look after her. All Y11 children were about to finish at school so they could revise at home. Taz had asked if she could revise at school as it was difficult for her to concentrate at home with everything that was going on. The school arranged for her to do this and Taz received Grade A and B’s.

‘My father was not pleased with my results. He said I should have got all A grades’

When Taz looks back now she believes it would have been better that Social Services had got involved and maybe the situation at home would have improved.

‘Maybe my father would have changed knowing Social Services are aware of what was happening at home, and I would not have left home and been on my own’

Interventions

When Taz was eighteen years old, she fled her home as she could not cope any longer. Taz feels she has been punished by her father all her life as he has stopped Taz from having any contact with her mother or sisters.

Police supported Taz to find refuge accommodation but she moved again after a few days as the refuge was too close to home.

Taz was only been in refuge a few weeks before she was offered a tenancy with a Housing Association. She felt this was too fast and she was not prepared. She asked if she could stay longer at the refuge and staff allowed her to stay, but informed her she would end up with rent arrears as she had signed up for the new tenancy. She did not understand what this meant as she had never had responsibility for anything before; she had never even caught a bus or done anything on her own.

The thought of living on her own was frightening. She wanted to return home but believed her father would kill her.

When she eventually moved into her own tenancy she had no furniture, no cooking.
facilities, and no support. The move was in winter and there was no heating. This was a very difficult and lonely time for her and it was not long before she became ill.

‘I felt I had just been dumped by the refuge’

The thought of being in debt worried her and she wanted to clear her rent arrears as quickly as possible. She struggled with managing her money and had very little money for food.

‘I was sometimes eating just a mars bar a day, or cheap bread with cheap beans’.

Taz fainted a few times as she was eating so little.

She made a friend who advised her to contact her housing association and explain how she was living and that she had no furniture. The housing association were very good and a support worker visited her to help her find furniture and carpets.

Taz met somebody and was really happy for a short period, but when she became pregnant her partner left her. This was a very difficult time and she suffered from depression through her pregnancy and after the birth of her son. Taz struggled to bond with her baby at the beginning but received good support from her health visitor.

Taz lived in an area with a large muslim community and she told people she had separated from her husband, as having a child without being married would not be accepted.

Taz was re-housed in a two bed council property and settled in the new area with her son. Her son grew up and went to the local school and she passed her driving test and bought a car after years of saving. Taz worked hard at making her home nice for her son, she wanted him to have a good life and she did not want to be like her parents.

Taz still wanted a relationship with her mother and sisters and missed her family, but her father had stopped them all having any contact with her. Then her Uncle got in contact and said he would talk to Taz’s father about her visiting the family.

Her Uncle said it would take time to rebuild a relationship with her parents and persuaded her to move closer to home and stay with family friends. Taz gave up her tenancy and took her son out of his school. But months passed and there was no contact with her family.

When she challenged her Uncle he became abusive towards her. Taz then left again and came back to Kirklees. She had friends who supported her and she stayed with them. Her son stayed with his grandparents until she could make other arrangements.

‘I decided it would be better for my son to stay with his grandparents, who he has a good relationship with even though he does not see his father often’.

‘I have always hid my problems from my son and never showed my suffering as it is always been important for me that my son has a happy childhood not like mine’

Taz said her son was happy to be back in Kirklees with his friends and near his grandparents again. She believes if she had not protected her son from her problems he may have developed behaviour problems and rebelled when he was older.
‘Being separated from my son was difficult but I went over every day to see him. I managed to get him a place at the local school and his grandparents took him to school in the mornings’.

Taz went to Kirklees Housing but they did not accept homeless duty. She was told there was no police evidence regarding the domestic abuse and that she had made herself intentionally homeless by leaving her previous tenancy. Taz was very upset by their response and felt they did not understand her situation. She felt she was not listened to and this situation made her depression worse. She was homeless and also separated from her son.

‘When you have problems and you ring a service with big hopes, but you get a bad response... it could mean life or death for a person who is at crisis point’

She went to Fusion Housing for support and found them very helpful. They offered to support Taz to appeal Kirklees Housing's decision.

Taz said her GP was also very helpful and supportive. He listened and understood her situation. He was aware of her history of depression and realised how the situation was affecting Taz's health. Taz had been with the same Doctor since she first moved to Kirklees.

‘Thank god I had a Doctor I could talk to. When I was a child I never had anyone to talk to about my feelings. I trust the advice my Doctor gives and he made referrals to a psychologist and counselling for me when my depression was really bad’.

The Doctor informed Taz regarding KABWWA Refuge and gave her the contact details.

‘I did not know about KABWWA Refuge, I'm so glad my Doctor told me and encouraged me to call them’.

Taz contacted the refuge and went into refuge accommodation with her son.

‘I went to the right place at the right time’

She did not take Fusion’s offer as the refuge supported her in making a homeless application to Kirklees Housing.

‘Support at refuge has been really good - I’ve been given time to settle. Staff have listened and there has been no pressure. I don’t feel alone. The staff were encouraging, they gave me the strength to carry on and not to give up’.

‘The staff at the refuge were happy and positive and it made you feel happy as well, It was nice to see familiar faces every day and staff just giving you a smile and asking if you are ok, which makes a big difference when you are feeling low’.

Taz is receiving ESA benefit due to her depression.

Staff at the refuge supported Taz to get re-housed with the council.
The Future

Taz would like support with accessing her furniture that are in a friends garage, if the council cannot help with this or with carpets for her new tenancy.

Since first writing this story, the family have now left the refuge and have been re-housed.

‘My son is really happy that we have a home and I reassured him we won’t be moving again. He is looking forward to having his bedroom decorated. I explained he will need to change school one last time to move to a local school’
Summary
When we recorded this story, ‘Vicky’ was still recovering from the impact of alcohol addiction and was on out-of-work benefits. When she was in the depths of her addiction, her child was removed from her care by social services. She is now rebuilding her life and trying to get back into employment. The story is in her own words.

Home and Family
I have always had a problem with Alcohol. I lost my brother and mother over a few years. This probably triggered it all.

It seemed to gradually creep up over a few years. But then it escalated out of control. I wasn’t really aware of how bad the problem was. My stomach started to swell up, so much it looked like I was heavily pregnant. It also affected my face, black eyes and yellowing skin.

I have become so dependent on alcohol that I needed a few drinks down me to even function every day. Every morning when I took my child to school, parents had to help their children write their name. I remember my child being handed the pen. I couldn’t even hold the pen steady.

I wasn’t aware of this but they must have been observing me at school. I must have looked so bad that one day, the teacher told me to get straight to A&E. I didn’t realise how poorly I was, or how bad the problem was until I got to hospital.

I was aware that I was coughing blood, had nose bleeds and found it hard to eat, but I think I was in denial. My family had tried to talk to me about it regularly but their words didn’t have any effect. If anything, I just pushed them away.

My Mum had also had a problem with alcohol. My family must have been worried about losing a sister as well as their mother and brother. My partner was also a heavy drinker. I felt like I was surrounded by drink but in a comfort zone.

I stopped drinking for eleven weeks. Three weeks of this was because I was in hospital, and then I chose not to return to alcohol.

Then over Christmas I had a relapse. Looking back it wasn’t Christmas that was the problem it was the environment I was in. But I didn’t realise it at the time.

Interventions
In February, my child was removed from me ‘out of an unsuitable environment’, due to concerns of alcohol. I had a mixture of emotions at this time, confusion anger etc.
My social worker advised me to get a solicitor. Things had to change. I felt I had to choose between my child and my partner. I moved out straight away, it was then I realised how serious the problem was.

I found a property of my own within eight weeks. It was important for me to do this, find it myself, and furnish it myself. It made me feel more independent, stronger, taking responsibility for my own life. I was determined and driven by the hope of getting my child back.

Family had always tried to support me but now I had support from alcohol support services, counselling, individual support and group workshops.

I was already having a regular liver function test at the GP. I found these really helpful. The normal count is 58 or lower. My highest was 1681. Even when my child was removed and I stopped drinking straight away it was still at 560. It is now 58; I had fantastic support from my GP.

I had been advised to access support services before but never thought about it, never had the motivation, and was probably in complete denial. This was different now; I had to get my child back. I had undertaken psychological assessments, a social work assessment and a parenting assessment.

I started to take control. I decided to go to various workshops and groups for women, who were also living apart from their children. I had therapeutic sessions to build up my confidence and self esteem and went to counselling. I had my own house for the first time, started to swim, do gardening and take care of the house.

I also started to take care of finances. It was important to do this myself as I hadn’t done this before.

Swimming was a big thing for me; I had not done anything like this for years, never made any time for myself. I now started to take pride in myself and my health.

The important thing to me at this time was the contact twice a week for two hours with my child. I tried to make the most of it by bringing in extra activities that I had prepared. Art and craft things, outdoor play things.

I used to take photos of us at these sessions and we put them into picture books for her to take away to keep us close. This was our link when we were apart. The photos helped create a good link between me and my child and the foster carer. She could use these to talk about contact, or ‘Mummy’s day’ as my child called it.

She used to count the sleeps to Mummy’s Day. She seemed to adapt well to her new situation, even doing well at school and getting an award. I was able to attend this. She was so surprised and happy to see me. She shouted out ‘what are you doing here; it’s not mummy’s day yet’.
The Future

My whole new environment helped me understand for myself the impact and effects that alcohol has on a child. I need to keep this going now. I do fear a relapse and I know I need to have coping strategies in place. I now know what help and support is out there if I need it. I am so grateful for all the help and support I have had through family and professionals.

Seven months later my child is back with me, with ongoing support and supervision. We went on holiday to a family wedding. Words cannot describe the feeling of having full parental responsibility for my child. We are loving our time together. I am positive about our future. Now every day is Mummy’s day.
Summary

‘Ruksana’ is a mother of five children and is originally from Pakistan. Her eldest four children are from her first marriage, which broke down as a result of domestic violence. She suffers from mental health challenges and is on ‘out of work benefits’. One of her daughters has received support to overcome an eating disorder and her son has behaviour issues at school and a problematic attendance record.

Home and Family

Ruksana struggles with the impact from the breakdown of her first marriage. She says she has been ostracised from her community as they don’t believe a marriage should end in divorce. Her Mother still speaks to her but her Father has disowned her from the family.

Ruksana met her second husband and they had a son, who is now two. Her current husband was in the UK on a working visa, which he was able to extend when she gave birth to his son. However, her husband doesn't live with her and is from a different racial background, which has caused more upset with her family.

She says her family “are racist towards black people” and says “it’s not heard of a Pakistani marrying a black person”

Ruksana isn’t in a happy marriage. Her husband lives across the road with another woman. She loves her husband but wishes he would stop his “womanising ways”.

Ruksana’s confidence and mental health has been greatly affected by the isolation and rejection she feels. She says she is left to look after the baby and that she often feels alone.

Currently Ruksana lives with her children and is claiming benefits. She says she gets by on benefits but finds it hard as she feels isolated within the home. She has admitted to herself that she is stuck in a cycle of depression and the more isolated and unsupported she feels, the more unable to cope she is.

She has friends who live in Birmingham but can’t relocate as she feels it will disrupt her children’s education. “My seventeen year old daughter has got into college. It’s so unusual for one of us from where I live to go to that college. I am so proud of her”

She has spoken about her two year plan that keeps her focused on life. She plans to move away in two years time, as her seventeen year old daughter will have finished college by then. She feels that she cannot stay in her situation as “if life continues like this, then it will be bad”.

90
Interventions

“I have found working with women space around identifying an abuser really helpful. I think it should be more publicly known so women can recognise and identify what is happening in their lives.”

Ruksana has also said she is very grateful to her doctor who told her about the importance of mapping her mood, which she also does with the woman centre. She has been doing the mood mapping diary for a few months now.

The doctor also referred Ruksana for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which she has said was so helpful to her in the long run. It helped her think about how she processes information and the emotions linked with that process, and also led to her being referred to an adult psychologist, who made Ruksana feel at ease to share information.

“It almost felt like parenting classes. I don’t force my children into doing anything anymore, I just try and guide them now. I will always be grateful for this help as my relationship with my children is getting stronger now”

“Even though school didn’t pick up on my daughter not eating, a child psychologist who did has worked wonders with my daughter. She wasn’t eating but the appointments went well.” (She did not want to go into detail about why her daughter wasn’t eating.)

School didn’t realise that DV was occurring in the home, even when her daughter wasn’t eating they didn’t notice or think to help.

The home working unit have been a great support to Ruksana in building up her confidence to start thinking about opening her own business. They supported her in looking at a unit she could store her materials in if she started making jewellery to sell.

She has felt valued by this service and started to believe that over time she has the ability to stand on her own two feet and support her children independently.

The Home Office was not sympathetic to her situation and she felt they could have done more to support her. They allowed her first husband to come into the country for an arranged marriage. They had stopped him three times before and she can’t understand why the let him in on the final occasion. She said that one of the workers at the Home Office told her that her Dad was making the right decision for her. She struggled to trust the Home Office and feels that she is trapped as a woman. (This was in relation to an arranged marriage that was not judged as legal as it wasn’t consummated.)

Another agency that Ruksana felt was not useful was a specialist asian refuge. She said;

“The workers were not professional and this put me off. I would rather suffer at home.”

She felt the workers were ‘pushy’ and wanted everything their way. She felt unable to make her own decisions and that she didn’t get any help with housing.

“I also found that the workers took advantage, such as not washing up and leaving us service users to do it for them. I didn’t feel safe staying in this refuge.’ She says her
belongings would go missing and she would have preferred a self contained unit so she had privacy. She felt that it was safer to live at home, despite the domestic violence.

“The mental health ward when I was sectioned was so scary, sometimes you get to breaking point and just need help. Not in a hospital ward that is overwhelming. It made me worse. All I needed was somewhere to recover.”

Because of her mental health, social services became involved.

“From the start I felt that my social worker was against me”

She also added that she felt the social worker didn’t understand her culture and religion and needed to be more aware as it was such a huge part of Ruksana’s life. She felt she wasn’t listened to and that they were on her husband’s side. Ruksana was just dismissed, even though she was the main carer of the child.

Homestart were another agency that Ruksana felt didn’t understand her situation. She says; “It felt like they had an impression of Asian Families.” She feels they need to be more aware of different cultures and have more of an understanding, so that the service is useful to everyone.

School

“My seventeen year-old daughter has always just got on with things, but my fourteen year-old son has struggled more with my mental health. When I am anxious and in bed for days, he finds it hard and this has had an effect on his behaviour.

He has poor attendance due to saying he is either ill, or he completely refuses to attend school. I have found it hard to make him go so on numerous occasions I have had to attend the school regarding his lack of attending or his behaviour when he does attend.

I think my mental health has a part to play in this as he is only fourteen and doesn’t understand my problems. He has to fend for himself sometimes, which is hard for him as I am his Mum. He hates when I am sad and I have struggled more so with my anxiety since he was born, so he hasn’t seen the happier Ruksana. He has had to cope with me feeling depressed and low for many years and has a completely different outlook on school life to his sister. I don’t think he will continue to further education. I think he will leave as soon as he can.”

The Future

I always manage and make sure my kids have everything they need, such as warm clothes and food with a warm bed at night. But I could never take them anywhere to visit family as it is too expensive, so I feel they miss out on family a lot.

I have learnt to cope on the benefits I receive, but it is hard. I want to one day work and earn my own money and support my family myself.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light in the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available.

**Summary**

‘Anna’ is a sixteen year-old currently attending a PRU. She has no siblings and is a young carer, helping her Mum with the daily house needs such as hanging out washing and carrying shopping home. Her Mum was born with only one arm and she relies on Anna. Anna speaks openly at school about the fact that her Mum has a disability. Before attending her PRU, Anna’s attendance was a serious cause for concern at 38%. This has now significantly improved and stands at 77.1%.

**Home and Family**

Anna and her Mum (Jane) were present for this interview. When asked about life in general, likes and dislikes, it quickly became apparent that there are tensions within the mother / daughter relationship.

Anna said: “I don’t like people telling me what to do.”

Jane interrupted: “You better get out there and get a job because I’m not keeping you.”

Anna stroked the cat and replied: “You care more about these cats than me.”

In response to asking who the cats belong to, Jane grinned: “These are mine. They don’t give me any cheek.”

Anna responded: “Yes, but they cost more money with the amount of cat food you buy them.”

The family lives in an area that has many socio-economic challenges. However, their home environment is kept spotless clean and well organised.

Jane admits she has felt guilty over the years because of the work Anna has needed to do to help her keep the house tidy. She admits that there are times when she kept Anna off school because she didn’t feel strong enough to take her.

“Anna was probably very tired a lot of the time because she was doing a lot more around the house than other girls her age, and this could have lead to her inability to focus and spend the time she should have done on her school work.”

Anna explained that she started getting into trouble more in recent years after her Mum and Dad split up.
“I found it hard when my Dad didn’t live with us. He doesn’t live far away like, he just lives on this estate. But anywhere he’d go, I’d go, and that stopped for a long time. Now I call round when I want and he gives me money if I want it. I like my Dad better because all my Mum does is nag.”

Jane responded: “You think I nag because I tell you that you need to get a job instead of thinking you can live by getting money off your Dad.”

School
Jane reflected back to when Anna was a little girl in primary school. She explained that she initially liked going to school, but as she got older and the other children began to realise that her Mum only had one arm, they began to pick on Anna. Jane said that Anna used to get very upset and in the end she moved to a different primary school.

“It seemed to work for a while but then as Anna got older it was like she switched off and I got tired of arguing with her. I did enough of that with her Dad.”

When Anna was asked if she understood why she became disinterested with school at a young age, she shrugged her shoulders:

“I never dressed like the other girls, so I didn’t make many friends. I always just liked climbing. I have always had more boy friends than the girls – I mean a lot of my friends are boys.”

When asked about her aspirations and hopes for the future, Anna seemed completely deflated.

“I’d like to work with disabled people, but I don’t know. I only passed my exams because the tutors at school were patient with me, and you kept all believing in me and that...”

Interventions
Jane believes that she could have received a lot more support for Anna when she was in her first primary school. She feels that the failure to deal with the bullying that Anna was tormented with from such a young age had (and continues to have) long lasting negative effects in terms of Anna’s low self-confidence and low aspirations.

“We’ve always had good friends in our neighbours and our family is very close by. That’s where we’ve had our support from, not these social workers or school nurses”

Anna pointed towards the window and announced: “Nan just lives in that house over there behind us. I love my Nan.”

Mum finished by sharing: “There was once a time when the school nurse said Anna was being neglected because, well, she has always been larger than most kids... you can see that for yourself. But that doesn’t mean neglect. And then they raised a CAF. Who needs that interfering support?”
The Future

Anna’s low self-esteem continues to be a challenge, which means that despite having attained Level 1 English and Level 2 in Mathematics, she has opted to study a Foundation level course. At the moment, Anna simply does not believe that she is capable of anything higher.

Jane openly expresses her disappointment in her daughter and frequently threatens her that she won’t be able to financially support Anna if she doesn’t go to college and get a job when she leaves school.

The washing machine has broken down and they find it hard to afford taxis to take them to the launderette to do the washing. This has contributed to higher levels of stress in the house. Jane has asked if the project could fund a new washing machine, as she feels this would immediately help the daily running of the house. This would help to alleviate the heightened stress levels and give them both something positive to focus on.
Where there are clear safeguarding concerns that come to light in the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available via the school.

Summary

‘Jade’ is a sixteen year-old currently attending a PRU. Jade has a younger sister who is doing well at mainstream school and her Mum (Teresa) is heavily pregnant.

Jade’s behaviour and attitude continue to cause concern at school. She frequently verbally abuses staff and attends school intent on causing criminal damage by repeatedly kicking doors and windows.

Jade’s attendance has significantly improved from 46% when she was initially referred into the PRU, to now averaging 71.6%. Jade has a particularly low self-image and struggles with being able to keep her weight down and within a healthier measure.

Home and Family

Jade and her Mum were present for this interview. When asked about life in general, likes and dislikes, Jade giggled and put her head down.

“Horse riding. My Grandad taught me about horses.”

Teresa explained: “Grandad died from cancer three years ago. I know Jade misses him a lot. It’s since then when I noticed her behaviour began to go down hill.”

School

At school, Jade often speaks or shouts about not caring about the fact that she is overweight, but when no other student is around, she will tell staff that she wants to go on a diet.

When asked for her view on why she has ended up in the PRU system, Jade said: “I don’t know. After Grandad died I just started messing about. I’ve got anger management problems.”

When asked about her aspirations and hopes for the future, Jade was full of apathy: “I won’t be anything. I’m not bothered for getting any qualifications.”

Unfortunately this apathy is present in the behaviour that Jade displays at school. Each day she arrives with intent to be disruptive and disturb others from learning. Jade frequently greets staff with verbal abuse each morning.
Interventions

I asked Jade what, or who, has helped her and what they did to influence her positively. “My mates help me. They accept me.” Jade went on to say: “When I’ve had 1:1 teaching that has helped me too because I feel that the teacher believes in me because they are willing to spend that time just with me.”

Her Mum is appreciative of help and has encouraged Jade to remain engaged with support services such as the Youth Offending Team, Targeted Youth Support and school. Jade shared:

“I like my worker from Targeted Youth Support. We do fun things together, like we went bowling last week. I like that kind of time because it makes me feel that I’m important to someone.”

In response to being asked whether or not Jade received counselling to help her talk about her feelings after losing her Grandad, Teresa said that counselling support had never been offered.

Jade added: “I don’t want to talk to anyone about Grandad. I’ve just got my own memories of him and that’s enough.”

The Future

Teresa shared that she has spoken with Jade recently about how she can support her to lose weight. One suggestion is that the mini-plan funding could be used as an incentive over the six week period to help Jade focus on a plan. When she has lost weight, Jade will need new clothes, so they have asked if it is possible for Jade to buy new clothes if she loses weight.

Teresa believes that this approach will ultimately help Jade to begin to feel more confident with herself, by helping to improve her own view of her body image and increase the likelihood that, in September, Jade will be better placed psychologically to engage with the next step in her education.
Summary

‘Lucy’ has been entered for the Listening To Families project due to a change in circumstances recently. She has been told that her son will be returned to her providing she continues to engage with services and seek the help she needs in order to keep herself well and drug free. Lucy has worked incredibly hard to achieve this and she is seeing her son daily. He is currently staying with her sister until he can be returned.

Lucy has worked very hard on producing a story that shows how heroin can change your life but how, with the support of many agencies, you can change your circumstances. She has never stopped being a Mum and she adores her family. She is looking forward to the future and feels that things are looking positive for her and her son.

Home and Family

June the 7th was one of the best days of my life. I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. She was 9lb very healthy, and a bouncing baby girl you could see.

31st July, was also one of the best days of my life, I gave birth to another daughter. She was 8 14lb, another bouncing baby girl.

I loved being a mother; it was the best time of my life. I loved sharing my love with my girls; I never knew how much love I had to give until I had them.

I remember rolling a role of wallpaper across the kitchen floor and using cake tins to put different coloured paint in, then we would dip our hands in and do hand prints across the paper.

Then we would end up giggling and getting really silly, we would do our noses, and feet and elbows. We would end up covered in paint, but it was fun.

I remember every Thursday taking the girls to our local cafe, and getting them milkshake and a cake each. We would sit at the same table every week. It was our table.

I remember taking the girls to the park and playing on the swings and the slides. And then there was the paddling pool. We loved it, splashing about and getting soaked in the sunshine.

I remember watching Teletubbies with them. We used to sing the Teletubbies song wherever we were, even out in public. I still know all the words to this day.

In 1997 my two beautiful girls were taken into care due to drug misuse and violence from my partner. This devastated me; I have never and will never get over it. I realised how much the girls meant to me, but it was too late. They were put up for adoption in 1998.
Sixteen years went by and I suffered every day. Living my life wasn’t easy without my girls. The pain was severe and heart wrenching. Life was empty without my girls. I didn’t feel like a whole person anymore. It was a lonely road.

In 2012 I found out I was pregnant again. Initially I was very happy and excited. It was unbelievable. Then I became very worried and distressed about what social services would do.

I was on drugs; I used the drugs to block out being pregnant. I didn’t believe I would be able to keep my baby, so it was easier to not think about him.

On the 7th of January my new baby was born. He was 8lb 14. Seeing him made everything real. I struggled for a little while but did come off the drugs. I wanted to keep my baby, but it was too late.

This brought all my emotions and memories back from when I lost my girls. It was like time had gone full circle and was repeating itself.

Luckily for me and my baby, my sister stepped in and offered to be his guardian. They have just accepted this, after doing several assessments. I am happy that he is going to my sister and not being adopted.

But it is still extremely painful.

My baby is a bundle of joy; he giggles and squeals when I make funny noises to him. He is very alert and a happy little boy.

I see my baby three times a week. This time together is so precious to me, as he’s my little man. I play with him, feed him and change him. He is a world champion burper he could show all the other babies how it’s done!!!

Unfortunately social services want to lower my contact to once every three weeks. This seems obscene to me. I am his Mum and will always be his Mum. I don’t feel that once a week is too much. However, I have to do as they say.

I have letter contact with my girls and I am hoping this will increase to actual contact as they are now almost nineteen and seventeen.

I have lost a lot over the years, but I am hoping that all three children will come to know and love me, as I know and love them.

Interventions

Since I made my digital story (which is my narrative above) things have dramatically changed.

My baby is now with my sister and the judge said no contact orders were needed, which means we need to prepare for him living with me full-time. Also I have met both my girls. I am so happy and pleased with how my life is becoming whole again.
I would like to say thank you to some services I have been involved with for a long time. WomenCentre, particularly the mothers living apart from their children group. They and especially the Facilitator, have supported me on my long journey to keeping my son in my family and meeting my girls. It was a long hard road but the group has held my hand all the way. 

Also I have been involved with the adoption team in Kirklees, helping future adoptive parents meet birth parents. I have found this inspiring and enlightening. 

As well I would like to say that Lifeline has been a great support to me for more than twenty years. They have always been there, no matter what stage I was at, and have never turned their back on me. 

A service that has not been so good for me was my experiences of social services, I felt they let me down. Social services took a whole year just to get me a contact worker, when time is so precious. I feel this was not acceptable. 

**The Future**

I am doing a Psychology degree this year and I am hoping to get a job from this. I do have worries it will be difficult because of my criminal record, which includes fraud and shoplifting. I hope this doesn’t get in my way as I was in a different place then. 

Like I said I am in a different place in my life now. I am happy independent and secure in the knowledge that me and my three children are a family again.
Summary
‘Zoe’ is a mother with three children, two of them at school. She is claiming out of work benefits.
One of her sons, ‘Lewis’, has had behaviour and attendance issues at school and is now at New Directions College, where his attendance continues to be a cause for concern.
Both Zoe and Lewis have received police cautions; Zoe for street robbery, driving with no insurance, assault and criminal damage, and ‘Lewis’ for taking a vehicle without consent.

Home and Family
Currently myself, ‘Natalie’ and Lewis are living in a two bed house. My other son ‘Nathan’ is living with his Dad until I can find a bigger property.
Lewis is having problems with honesty and rules which is affecting the whole household... Lewis taking the last ten pounds meant that I had to struggle without basics, or borrow money to buy milk and bread. I would do without but I needed to borrow so I could buy basics for the kids.
Lewis behaving like this causes a nasty environment of arguments. It is hard not to shout and he shouts back, and we get no where with it. When I try and talk to him he just shouts trying to get me to shout, which has made me just not want to listen.
I don’t want to give him the attention as it is unfair on the other children that are behaving good. Lewis met his biological father (‘Steve’) last week for the first time ever, which was a bit scary for both of us. I knew what he used to be like when I broke up with him fifteen years ago, when he had beaten me up, and I didn’t want Lewis meeting someone like that or having him in his life.
I had to be strong for the both of us as he has the right to meet him. Regardless of what happened between us, he is his father at the end of the day and Lewis can make his own decision about him.
Me and Lewis are also getting along a lot better now as well. I think this is due to him meeting with Colin and him realising actually what, and how good he does have it at home.
I don’t seem to struggle with money/finances, but with this new law of having to pay towards council tax when you’re on benefits... that’s a real struggle, more now the children are off school for six weeks.
I have the pressure of having to provide for my children - buying new uniforms, day trips out. I don’t want them to go without anything. I want to spoil them so I go without.
I want to work and I keep looking, but with trying to move and all the issues with my son, it is hard to find a job. Also when you have a criminal record it makes you feel like they look at you twice and you don’t get the job. It makes you feel like no one will see you have changed and you want to provide for your kids.

Interventions

Evolve have helped me out a lot, with the probations service combined. They have helped me to become a better person with myself, with help and information about what other services are available to me and help with my family life. Help with me trying to find a new property.

Evolve has supported me with issues I am having. It is nice to have a service that sees me as important, putting me on courses such as a coaching course on anger and how you see others points of views. Courses like that have helped build my confidence, I feel more able to share my emotions and how I am feeling.

Also my daughter Natalie and son Lewis’s school have helped me. They have helped my son by guiding him through times when his behaviour is a problem. They seem to show an interest in why he is behaving the way he is.

They also keep in contact with me when he does not attend and I feel they support me and help me help him. If he misses school they are out looking for him which puts me at ease.

New Directions College has paid more attention to my son and his needs than mainstream schools have previously.

Lewis has so much ambition in life of what he wants to do and become, but I think due to a few changes in life, starting from when he was bulled in his first high school, Lewis has managed to get kicked out from two mainstream high schools. I have managed to get him into a specialist school/college to where he started to settle down.

Then his attendance has become very low. His teachers visit and we talk on the phone when he has not turned up. We are having another meeting after the holidays to sort out a lift for Lewis every morning to get him back in to the routine.

There was a service the police put Lewis into after his caution. It was like a young offender’s officer he met with who didn’t really seem to do... or guide Lewis in the right direction. He didn’t keep up contact, he didn’t give me any follow up information, and I had to chase him for all the information about what was happening with my son. I felt like they just didn’t care.

Also the council and housing association that work through the council, that are not helping people that need rehousing quicker due to this new bidding scheme. One of my sons has to live with his Dad because there is no room at my house. How can I not be seen as a priority when my son is not with his mother and siblings because I have no room to put him in? I am sharing a room with my daughter and Lewis has his own room. I miss my son I want him home. We should be all together and I know he wants to come home.
Also the job centre had me and Natalie sat in there for over an hour and a half. I never received a letter saying that with the new regulations that are in place they can now keep you this long without notification. But if you have appointments with Interserve or other places then you miss them due to this happening.

I have been suffering with depression a lot lately - crying for no reason, not sleeping properly, not talking with people, shutting myself away from the world basically - and when I go to the doctors for help I feel like they don’t want to help me. They just fob me off all the time because they put it down to the implant contraceptive getting used to my system and they tell me to go to a gym or get plenty of exercise. That’s all well and good as I do a lot of walking and bike riding, so the exercise isn’t the problem it’s me and the Doctors not helping me.

The Future

We need to laugh again and start to rebuild our family. It has felt so broken because of circumstances such as one son being away from me at his dad’s and my eldest showing such bad behaviour towards me.

People need to realise that not all people on benefits are on them for the sake of it. We do really struggle to find work in a single parent home and that we do need the right to help and support. My story made me realise that services have come and gone but my kids are my world, I want to provide for them and give them happy memories, I want to treat them and make them feel equal to their friends. I want my kids to be happy and not suffer because of my choices in life and my well being.
NOTICE TO READER:
Where there are safeguarding concerns that come to light in the interview, please know that all necessary referrals / interventions and support have been made available.

Summary
‘Tina’ is 14 year-old currently attending a PRU. Her Father (Joseph) died when she was a toddler. Tina has an older brother (Joel) who no longer lives at home as he has his own place. It is nearly three years since Tina was raped and it was this trauma that caused her behaviour in mainstream school to become disruptive. Before attending this PRU, Tina’s attendance was a cause for concern at 29%. This has significantly improved and now stands at 86%.

Home and Family
Tina and her Mum (Fran) live in an area that has many socio-economic challenges. They were both present for this interview. When asked about life in general; likes and dislikes, it quickly became apparent that there is a deeply loving bond between Fran and Tina – although Tina was initially very quiet and reserved.
Fran opened up the response by sharing that Tina enjoys cooking.
“Yes, and we haven’t been able to do any for ages.” Added Tina.
Fran explained: “Our fridge broke over the summer and the microwave has blown up.” Fran started to cry. When composed she shared: “I’m on my way to the CAB now after this meeting with you to try and get some help because this new bedroom tax is causing us a lot of trouble. It’s because her older brother, Joel has moved into his own flat and that’s why they think we’ve got an extra bedroom, but he does still come home for a few nights during the week. I just haven’t been able to afford to get another fridge or microwave and the way we manage is that I now just buy the basics of what we need, when we need them to try to stop anything going off.”
When asked if there was any other family members who could help the family, Fran explained that she’s been a single parent since Tina’s Dad (Joseph) died when she was three. I asked Tina, ‘Do you miss your Dad?’ Before Tina could answer, her Mum answered for her:
“No she doesn’t she was too young to remember him.”
Tina was nodding her head but she was also crying.
Fran continued: “Well you’ve never spoken to me about feeling like that. I thought it hadn’t affected you because you’ve just got on with life and been so good and well behaved. I knew it had affected your brother because he used to be so outgoing and then it got like he wouldn’t talk to anyone and he’s still a bit odd now like – he prefers his own company most of the time.”

Tina then added a bit more to the initial question about likes and dislikes.

“I don’t like people judging me wrong.”

School

Fran reflected back to before Tina was raped.

“You were always such a happy girl.”

Tina sat sobbing with her head down.

Fran continued: “You always loved school when you were in primary school and you were always bringing friends home for tea and then it was when you started secondary school that it all started.”

The paperwork that was attached to Tina’s referral to the PRU made no reference to any significant traumatic event having taken place. This was explained to Fran and Tina and they both looked knowingly at each other.

Fran was crying as she asked Tina:

“Will I tell her?”

Tina shrugged her shoulders and quietly spoke: “I’m not bothered.”

Fran explained that Tina’s behaviour at her old mainstream school only started deteriorating after she had been raped on a New Year’s night. Fran explained that on the morning of the court case the man killed himself and that it was during and after the preparations of the trial that Tina’s character at school changed.

Interventions

Unfortunately Fran and Tina feel like they have been badly let down. They believe that Tina should have received a lot more support before the point when her last school decided to refer her to a specialist provision.

Tina spoke: “No-one gave me the chance to talk. No-one cared or listened to me.”

Fran added: “All they saw – I mean her Head of Year – was the poor attitude. She just was not interested in the reason or the link with Tina’s emotional well-being.”

When asked if the family accessed any counselling support after the death of Joseph, Fran admitted that the GP did offer it but that she didn’t think it would do any good.
“I just thought then that he was gone and that was it and no amount of talking to anyone was going to change what had happened. I know Joel did have one of his teachers that he trusted and could talk to but Tina hasn’t ever shown me any reason to think that she needs help to come to terms with Joseph’s death, but now I can see that maybe she does.”

The Future
Fran suggested:

“I think it would also help her to have someone to speak to about what that man did because during the preparations for the court case, the police said that she wasn’t allowed to speak to anyone in case they influenced what evidence she’d give. But then when he killed himself, Tina was like just forgotten by the police and no-one followed her up to see that she was ok or to offer someone to speak to properly to help her move on from what happened.”

Both Fran and Tina were assured that if Tina wanted to see the school counsellor, she could do so and both agreed that this would be a good way forward.

When asked about her aspirations and hopes for the future, Tina expressed an absolute conviction / desire that she should be back in mainstream school.

“I'm not really bad. I don't deserve to be in a PRU. I want to go back into a mainstream school and make friends there and get my GCSEs. I'm not saying that I don't like it here, it's just that I think it's unfair that no-one tried to understand my behaviour before they kicked me out. They judged me wrong and now I'm paying the price by not being allowed in a mainstream school.”

As Tina is only in Year 10, it was also communicated clearly that the circumstances around Tina’s referral could be reconsidered to see if she could return to a mainstream school.

Tina and Fran talked about how important they were to each other and how they enjoy doing things together.
Summary
‘Carly’ has been identified as suitable for this project as she is a single mum of three using services for help with substance misuse and she is also claiming out of work benefits.

Carly has daily struggles which she faces on her own whilst still running a house and looking after a small baby and two daughters of school age.

She is making magnificent progress with her medication reduction for her substance misuse and has been receiving support from Lifeline for a number of years. With her own drive and motivation, and help from her support worker, she has moved away from street drug use and is involved in a successful reduction plan on methadone.

The father of Carly’s children / ex partner has been involved with crime for a number of years which has been a very large strain on the family unit, leaving Carly to manage alone with the three children. Carly explained to me how her children are the most important part of her life and the focus of her recovery. She has some support from her mum who takes her shopping and helps around the house on occasions.

Home and Family
As a single mum of three, Carly faces day to day challenges.

“I find it hard but rewarding. I have a young baby who of course needs my undivided attention on a daily basis. I have a young daughter of seven who is very bright and an eldest of fifteen, who is a typical teenager and is very challenging. But I am lucky to have a very close bond with her.

I find it impossible to divide my time with them equally as I have a young baby who needs my attention 24/7. I would like to make the time for my daughters away from the house which is why this project is a step in the right direction for us as a family; it is allowing me to have the special time we need.

I also find it financially difficult and do need some support with things. I am on benefits but they obviously don’t cover things such as storage space and carpets.

Interventions
I then asked Carly if she could talk to me about services and her experiences with them good and bad.

She told me how Lifeline has always given her good support and she said that if you co-operate with them they co-operate with you. They have been encouraging with her recovery and are always offering her alternative options in treatment.
Carly told me how she had an excellent relationship with her key worker. She said he is understanding and caring and that everybody who she has spoken to who has come in contact with him loves him to bits. She says that his qualities as a person make him a good key worker. She told me how he is someone she can trust and does not push her to do things that she is not ready to do in recovery. He has a good awareness of a clients right time to make a change. He is very flexible and does his best to accommodate her needs.

I asked Carly to explain to me what it is about the way they work that you have found most helpful. She explained that he isn’t pushy and cares about what she has to say. Other key workers are not always as flexible or as understanding, so may struggle to understand a clients perspective in the same way. “You can see that he has a passion for his job which makes you trust a person.”

I then asked Carly if she could think of the most helpful intervention or piece of work that she has been involved in with her recovery. Her prescription and good rapport with her key worker have been the most beneficial and have pushed her to get where she is today. Her children are what remind her everyday of the healthy happy life she chooses to live now. She said she has also grown out of drug use. She sees people that she knew from the days of being a drug user, who are still living the same lives and doing the same things to get money to support their habits. Carly says this makes her feel unhappy for them and she feels sorry for them. It also reminds her of where she does not want to be.

Hospital
Carly wanted to express her upset to me around issues she had faced with Doctors and the hospital in Halifax.

In her words..

“When my son was seven months old I noticed he had a rash on his legs and they looked very red and swollen. I panicked immediately and decided to ring the non-emergency helpline where I was advised to go to the Hospital. So I had to arrange transport to Halifax Hospital as they didn’t have a paediatrician at Huddersfield.

After I explained about the rash my son had on his legs he had to have some more tests done which included a blood test which was really scary for me to watch.

It ended up to be not as serious as I had thought. I talked to one of the doctors who asked me if I had any other children, and after telling him ‘Yes, two others’, he then made a comment saying that I was an “out of practice mum”.

At the time I did feel that he was right and yeah indeed I was a fair few years since having a baby around, but I will say that it has knocked my confidence, to where I always think twice before I get on the phone to the hospital over something my children have got.

I know myself that I am a worried mum and do probably panic a bit but now whenever my
baby is poorly I always question myself before I ring to get help because I have been previously judged and made out to make a fuss.”

**Police**

Carly has had a few dealings with the Police in the past, all involving the father of her children but not her herself directly. She has felt let down and tormented by the Police and the way that they deal with situations which have occurred over the years.

She went on to tell me how the Police had been looking for her children's father and turned up at her house. They were shouting and threatening towards her and demanded that she open the door immediately otherwise they would knock it down. Carly had never ignored there requests in the past to open the door and had always been very co-operative in previous situations. She therefore felt the Policeman in question was ‘very judging and threatening’ in his manner. She felt as though she was made out to be a criminal by the way she was being spoken to and felt very intimidated.

I asked Carly to think of a way that the situation could have been dealt with differently. She felt that four Police were too many and that they could have asked her politely to open the door as she never had any intention of ignoring it in the first place.

On another occasion the police were again in search of her children’s father and had a warrant to search the house. About ten to twelve police officers ransacked the house in a very disturbing and upsetting fashion. They took over her house and made a mess of every room. Carly had requested they took care when searching her property as she health visitors due later that day. They took no notice and continued to search the property in a very disruptive way, leaving Carly extremely upset and feeling that her home had been violated.

Carly went on to tell me how she understands that the Police have a job to do. But when they are involving people like herself which have no part in the crimes being investigated it should be done with more respect and non-judgmentally.

Carly’s past experiences with the Police have left her feeling scared and extremely anxious about leaving her home. She is worried that when she is out the Police may revisit her home in search of her children’s father and they may break the door down as previously threatened. He does not live with her but she feels that the Police would do it anyway. She suffers from anxiety and panic attacks when away from her home for too long and feels this is a result of having such extreme threats made about her home.

**The Future**

Carly explained to me how she wishes she could spend some more time doing fun things out of the house as a family, but this is impossible with the little money they have and the priority’s of running a house come first.
Carly told me how she would like to redecorate her girl’s bedroom but this was impossible to do on benefits.

We then discussed how the Listening to Families Project could support her with some of the things she needs and we went on to make a plan.

The carpet in her daughter’s bedroom was in very poor condition and was in desperate need of a new one so Carly and I looked into pricing up a new one once we measured the area. She also had very little storage space for the children’s clothes and toys, no lamp shade for the ceiling light and her daughters had asked for a chair so they could do their homework in their bedroom comfortably.

Carly had previously mentioning she wanted to spend some family time out of the house, so I suggested the project help her to organise a trip out. Carly then made plans to visit the local cinema and the family had a takeaway at home on their return.
Summary
‘Jaid’ is still recovering from drug addiction having used ‘party’ drugs when she was a teenager before going on to heroin. She has a young baby and her family are currently supported by out of work benefits. When she was using drugs, she stole from her work place to pay for her addiction and she is now finding it difficult to get back into work.

Home and Family
“Born and bred in Huddersfield. I’ve got a brother who is two years younger than me. I lived in the same house all my childhood. Mum and Dad still live in the house. I had a really, really stable upbringing. No problems. Just a really nice upbringing.

I don’t know why I went off the rails so badly cos normally it can happen by not been brought up badly. I went to a good Junior School and a good High School. I was just a proper little goodie too shoes you know what I mean. I wasn’t the brightest of kids but I always behaved myself.

We never had a car, we were just a normal working class family. My Mum and Dad both worked, but didn’t have amazing jobs or anything.

My Mum has two sisters and has daughters and they all live in Leeds. I’m really close to them two. Her other sister has two daughters and they live over the hill from Huddersfield, so we used to see them all the time. At Christmas we use to all get together and have a family Christmas.

Mum was fairly soft but Dad was a bit strict. If we had been naughty he would chase us round the house and give us a clip round the bum. But if my Mum was gonna smack me I would just laugh. But you would remember a hit from your Dad and not want it again.

This lad I was hanging with used to nick sweets and stuff and he said come to town and do it. So I did. I got arrested in Woolworths and taken to Huddersfield Police station got interviewed. My Dad had to come and sit in with me at the interview. So my Dad fell out with me and he has never talked to me since. To this day. He has never talked to me.

I’d be walking up the street in the morning to school and he would be walking home from the nightshift and he would just blank me, like I was a total stranger in the street. And I had that from 13 years old. I’m not bothered now; it was a long time ago and I have dealt with it. It’s just really hard on my mother ‘cos she is in the middle.

I haven’t really grown up with dad. He has been there and provided for me but I haven’t had any love or attention from him since 13 so by the time I got to 19 and was out partying and stuff it was getting harder and harder living with him.

I can’t fault my upbringing and I feel really tight on my Mother because of what’s happened
and what I’ve put her through. I bet she is thinking … “Well what have I done?” And she has done nothing. I want to be able to bring my daughter up the way my Mum brought me up and the best I can. I was stable. I wasn’t moving around. I don’t want that for my kid. I want to stay here till schooling and hopefully try to find somewhere a bit better and a better school. I want a good school.”

I did my GCSE’s. I was never brainy at all. I was always a ‘trier’ and always wanted to do well, but I was always in the lower groups because I wasn’t clever, so then I was in with all the bad kids. So it wasn’t a good experience for me really because I could never get anything done, ‘cos there were always idiots in my groups. But I did my GCSE’s. I got 2 C’s a D and E’s and F.

I had had a paper round since I was about 14 and I was now 16/17 and I use to do the paper round to get about £7 a week. I would go in town with my mate and we would be able to get really drunk. I did that for ages. It got to the point where it wasn’t enough money and I wanted to go out more so I left college. I had been doing a life saving certificate to be a life guard, which is what I wanted to do at that time.

I got a job and I was on £4000 a year about £100 a week. I was living with mum and dad and the money was all mine. So I started going out partying every Thursday Friday Saturday and Sunday. I got a part time job as well working down at the stadium. I don’t know how I did it back then but I seemed to have so much energy back then. So I would be working all week and out Thursday, Friday Saturday and Sunday nights and still be getting up for work every day. I use to get absolutely hammered and get home on so little money.

I never got in trouble with police or drugs, but I did meet a lot of boys and slept with a lot of boys. It was me and my best mate went through school together and we were out clubbing all the time. Then she started seeing this older lad. I started seeing a lad who was in the year above me and we started going out as a foursome. But my mate’s boyfriend, ‘cos he was that bit older, he introduced pills and stuff to us. I think we were in beach Babylon and I think that’s when I took my first E.

**Addiction**

It wasn’t until me and my boyfriend split up that I started using drugs again. We had been together from 16 years to 18 years and the night we split up I had already got a night out planned. I was upset and we were at the back of the coach absolutely hammered on the way down. A lad on the coach had some pills and so I was just like, sod it, and we took pills that night had an amazing time and I think that’s what started me off on the party drugs.

People used to go stupid, off their rocker, taking anything. There was a lot of GHB and Ketamine and Base Amphetamine. I used to be obsessed with that stuff.

When I was 21 I met a lad and that’s when my life turned upside down because he was
the guy that introduced me to Heroin. So we started seeing each other and then that’s when I got a job in Leeds in a solicitors. That’s what started a good career for me. Me and him became closer and he had been honest with me from the start and he told me that he used to use Heroin. I was kind of in awe of him and what he was doing. I just let him do what he was doing ‘cos he was like cooler than me and he was from Leeds and I wasn’t.

He asked if I wanted some but I was like, no, it’s alright. He was saying go on but I kept saying no its fine. My career was doing really well I was really enjoying the solicitors and was doing really well. I was getting really into it and learning loads. My friends found out that he was using heroin cos I told them. But I told them ‘cos I thought it was a cool thing. I don’t know why?

It was like 4 o’clock in the morning and I hadn’t managed to sleep well I had had too much amphetamine and I had a couple of hours and I was meant to get up. I was getting into a right state. He was like look if you have a couple of these lines it will chill you out and get you to sleep honestly honestly. I know it’s pathetic but then I did give in that morning. And I did like it.

So it got to the point where our relationship was based around heroin. I wouldn’t ever want him to come over if he didn’t have heroin. We decided to move in together. I didn’t think anything was wrong. I didn’t understand habits and I was only doing it on a weekend. I was really naive with that drug and as I was just using on a weekend so it didn’t affect me physically. I don’t know if it was affecting him. I think there were times during the beginning of the relationship that he was getting bad on it, but as I wasn’t there I didn’t really know. He started borrowing money off me before we moved in and he ended up owing me £25,000.

I had a credit card and I had maxed that out ‘cos of the drugs and he was getting me to get loans. It was so easy back then to get a loan. I would go to the bank on a morning and would have like £10,000 by tea time. And I did this in a few places. That’s why I ended up in £25,000 of debt. I couldn’t cope with it. I had all this debt.

My Mum and family didn’t know anything about any of this stuff. It got to the point where I couldn’t live there any more. I eventually found my feet and got another job at a solicitors firm. I stayed there for about four years. It was a good wage and I was really happy there. They let me go to Crown Court and sit behind the barristers and take notes. Meanwhile I had got myself on the council list in Leeds ‘cos I wanted to move back to Leeds with my boyfriend . But because I had got myself into debt I got myself on a debt management program. They had consolidated all my debts and I was just making the one payment to them. Things were getting more manageable.

I had got off the drugs a lot ‘cos I was living at home. I wasn’t using through the week just on a weekend. I don’t know how I did it all really. I don’t think I had an addiction and looking back I don’t know how I dare do it. I’d be scared to death now to do that at my Mum’s now.
I got this house offer within six months of living at my Mums house. I said to my boyfriend the only way you are going to move in with me now is that you need to get a job. Cos I am not having it, I wanted to do the flat up and it was mine. I was quite independent at that point.

I did it up. I bought stuff each month for it. I did all my own wooden flooring and my boyfriend helped. When I went to the flat he would score and we would be sat on the wooden floor tooting heroin and painting and stuff. So I was still only seeing him when we were on drugs. That's when things just spiralled out of control. That's when I became a heroin addict really. We were just doing heroin that's all we did. We knew nothing different. It was scary to not have heroin together. So that was it. That was my crazy lifestyle, I got on heroin full time. Needed it full time. We were probably scoring between £60 and £80 a day between us and Crack was included in that.

I was working at the solicitors office. Dressed in a suit through day sitting with the barrister or a drug addict client understanding exactly what they were talking about. Sweating really badly by 3pm because I needed to get home and use Heroin. My boyfriend had actually got a job in a department store and then Top Man in Leeds in the suit department. No idea how he got that!

He was bringing in a decent wage, I was bringing in a decent wage. But it was literally gone. It was all being spent on drugs. Then he moved onto work in the Halifax Bank as a team leader. He was bringing in some good money. We were both living in this crazy life, like a Jekyll and Hyde, where we would go to work and be heroin addicts.

I had got quite bad at this point and we just couldn’t always get the money for heroin. I started stealing from work. I started stealing out of peoples purses. Anybody’s. I used to take £20 - £30 and it was well known and well documented that there was a thief in the building and they got security cameras and stuff. But nobody ever knew it was me.

After a few months of injecting I decided to call it quits. He was getting really bad and getting a big horrible abscess on his arm. I would come home from work to a bloodbath in the bathroom. Where there would be pins all over the bath. Blood all over the wall, blood dripping down his arm, blood all over his feet, and he would be getting more frustrated ‘cos he couldn’t find a vein. I couldn’t cope with that. I went to the park and called Leeds addiction unit and spoke to them. They got us in for an appointment.

The thing we were scared about was the time that it would take to get on a prescription. It was like how are we going to deal with this. They were going to tell us to stop taking gear and how is it all going to work. That's what we were fearful of. That's why you never pick up the phone before. I rung them up, got myself an appointment and got home and told my boyfriend, and he was like, ‘Oh, I need an appointment now as well’. So I got him an appointment and we went up to Leeds addiction unit.
It worked a bit different over in Leeds to here. It was some kind of shared care thing over there. I used to have to go see my councillor and he was really helpful he was sound. I’d then go to the doctors to get my prescription. I was on about 60mls of methadone I think. My life started getting better. I started to be able to control things and live kind of normally. Obviously I had to go to Boots everyday but I could go on a my dinner hour.

Then I saw my boyfriend hugging and kissing another girl. I stormed down when this girl had gone and confronted him, but he said I was just giving her a hug. Anyway, he said we were going to have to split up. So I packed a bag with my clothes and just had to leave one weekend. On the Friday he told me. So the Friday night I called my mum and I told her all about been a heroin addict for eight years and I needed to come home. Three weeks later I met another boy who I’m with now.

I started to learn to adapt to being on my methadone and my methadone only. I was still at Leeds addiction unit and I didn’t have a choice of not using. I never learned how to score. Step by step I kept dropping on my methadone. My new boyfriend helped me through getting off methadone. He was really good really understanding and if it wasn’t for him I probably wouldn’t have got off methadone. I got off methadone for eight months clean.

We did some party drugs, pills and stuff. But that was it. My boyfriend had not used heroin but he did dabble with crack. He did have dealer numbers in his phone. So sometimes we would do crack. I learned how to take crack and not need Heroin afterwards. Where crack is, heroin is. Eight months into me being clean my boyfriend came out and said he wanted to try heroin. I was like NO, no, no. But we did. I was petrified. I didn’t want to but he had heard so much about it. Not good obviously, and I had told him all sorts of stories, but we did it.

There was a drought of heroin and we were having to go to Leeds to score and it was rubbish quality. So we came in at a really bad point. I would say we did it for about 5 or 6 months before I came to Lifeline and I knew I had to. I was starting to steal in my new job.

I stole a mobile phone. A works phone and sold it on the market for £10 for a bag of heroin. But this is how sophisticated I was, I called my Mum from the phone so the police looked into the phone records and found the number on my record as a contact. So the police arrested me at work. They wanted to search my house. I told them the phone had been sold but they still wanted to search the house. We had a grow of cannabis plants in the cellar. We had a grow ‘cos we were bad on the gear and it was to bring money in. So it was through the landlord. The police found the grow. I obviously didn’t go back to work then. I admitted the theft and I got a caution for it. I got sacked and then I was up in Bradford crown court for the cannabis plants. I managed to find a reception job after the caution, but they saw the article in the paper about the Crown Court case and I got sacked again. So that was my last job. That was Jan 2012.

So we got to Lifeline and it was really quick getting a prescription. I think we started again on about 60mls. We have got it down now so my boyfriend is on 23ml and I’m on 27ml. I would be lower if it were not for the pregnancy. I want to keep reducing and do it a couple
of ml regularly. But you soon get off it.

Nobody needs to know ‘cos we are sorting it out. If it wasn’t for this baby I wouldn’t have been this strong. I would have done it, but this baby has made me stronger. I was already in that mind set. But this baby has really helped me. It sounds bad ‘cos it’s not fair for my baby to have to suffer the first moments of its life. It’s all down to me and it’s not a nice feeling but…

I will never go back now though. That’s it. I want to get back into work. I’ve only ever been out of work for the last year. I want to work. I want my kids to see that we work. It’s hard ‘cos I have a criminal record now. It’s not the cannabis so much, it’s the theft from employees. Who is going to employ someone with theft from employee on their record? It was only a mobile phone, but still. Would you want to employ me? That life was one big whirlwind. I don’t know how I did it. I have wasted years. I have wasted eight years of my life when I could have been living.

**Interventions**

The places that have really helped me have been Leeds Addiction Unit, Lifeline Kirklees and Swans group.

Leeds addiction unit was there when I needed them the most. I had no idea what to expect and never been in a service like that before. I was scared and nervous and didn’t know what to expect. They were really friendly and helpful. The worker that I had to see was really helpful and made me feel at ease and that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

When I came to Lifeline I had more of an idea what to expect and it was a bit easier asking for help. Even though I never thought I would have to do it again! I was made to feel welcome and supported and the first person I saw was so nice and helpful and put me at ease straight away. I get on really well with my key worker and have learnt a lot and had a lot of support.

When I was given probation I had to attend a group at Evolve. I hated this group it was horrible. I did not have anything in common with anyone who was there and I never said a word in the group. It was full of young girls and I didn’t feel comfortable or at ease. I didn’t feel welcome and I clashed with one of the workers. I felt she was picking on me.

When I became pregnant I was very reluctant to go to the Swans group. I had hated the Evolve group so much and was dreading going to Swans. I thought ‘what do I need to be around other pregnant women for? But when I got there it was very different. There was a worker there from Lifeline who I knew, so I saw a familiar face and felt at ease.

The midwife was there and there were a few other women. They were all friendly and open about there past. Some had been in violent relationships, some had used drugs, and it was really good being able to talk and listen to their stories. I made a really good friend
there and she is my best friend. We are there to support each other. I have my baby and she has hers and it is all about growing and the future now.

I learnt so much at Swans. It was good to have all the information there and having a check each week from the midwife. I felt a lot calmer as a mum because I knew I had support. It was in a Children’s Centre as well and it has made me know what is available at Children’s Centres for me. I feel I can walk in and access new groups now. I want to enrol in the baby massage group at my local Children’s Centre so that will help me get to know new people and new friends.

**The Future**

I really want to go back to work. I feel I want to work as I always have. This is the longest time I have been out of work. I don’t know who will employ me though with my criminal record. I want to get a computer to start doing some courses online. This will help make me look better when I go for jobs. At least it will help make it look like I have changed and am not the person I use to be. I am looking forward to the future and I know I am going to be the best Mum I can be. It will be hard at times but I am determined to make my daughter’s life better than mine. She won’t go through what I have been through.
Summary

‘Aisha’ experienced domestic violence and was forced to flee with her children. She entered a refuge and eventually moved to a new home. The children did not attend school during this period. The family currently live on out of work benefits but she hopes to get work soon.

Home and Family

Aisha was a very independent women living in Pakistan with her three children. She had a good job, house and a car. While having a full time job she also managed to take care of her children. Her children attended a good school in the area. Aisha's husband lived in England with his brother. Her husband would often come to visit Aisha and the children.

Aisha and the children wanted to live as a family together therefore Aisha decided to leave her job and move to the UK to live with her husband. After coming to the UK Aisha’s life changed dramatically. Aisha went from being independent to being very dependant which was a big change for Aisha and the children.

Aisha’s husband was very controlling and became physically violent. Aisha was not given any money and was beaten up. This domestic violence was driven by Aisha’s brother in law who escalated the arguments and would tell Aisha’s husband what to do and Aisha’s husband would listen to his brother. Aisha’s brother in law and husband were both violent towards Aisha and her children.

Aisha suffered the abuse for a few months and then her husband suddenly decided to go to Pakistan. He got married in Pakistan and did not come back. Aisha still had hopes that the marriage could be saved, however Aisha and the children were suffering. Aisha was left with her children with no money. She was still being controlled by her abusive brother in law. Aisha thought about leaving but she did not know what to do. Aisha’s eldest son encouraged his mum to get some help and he talked about telling his teachers. Aisha then decided to tell the teachers what has happened to them.

After disclosing the abuse, teachers from a school in Bradford helped Aisha flee and move into a refuge in Huddersfield. Aisha talks about how the teachers from her children’s primary and secondary schools were very helpful.
School

While the children moved from Bradford to Huddersfield, the children were out of school for a month which had an effect on the children because they were missing out on their education. Aisha has now moved into her own tenancy where again her children have missed out on another month of school because Aisha has moved into a different town.

Aisha believes that all school should have spare school places available for children who move into the area, especially when they have to move into a new area under similar circumstances to Aisha’s circumstances. If there were spare places at school then children would not miss out on their education.

Also by going to school, it gives children a routine which they can follow which can help them gain stability after moving. Taking these matters into consideration and the importance school has in a child’s life, Aisha believes that children should be taken into schools at a faster pace as this would benefit the child.

While living in Huddersfield, Aisha’s two eldest children were attending secondary school. One of her sons had a disagreement with another pupil. The school dealt with this really well and Aisha was pleased with how it was dealt with.

Interventions

On one occasion, before Aisha’s husband kicked Aisha out with her children. Aisha did not know what to do or where to go. Aisha went to a place for ‘homeless’ people and she did not get any help. She went to the police too but she did not get any help, so she had to go to her sisters. Aisha was told the reason why she did not get help was because she has no status in the UK.

This was the only time when Aisha felt that she was not helped out. This created a barrier for Aisha. She felt she would not be helped because of her immigration status, as she was in the UK on a spousal visa and did not have leave to remain in the UK.

The Future

Aisha is now in her own tenancy with her three children. She has now gained her independence back, however she is currently on benefits but desperately wants to find work.

Aisha wants to use her seventeen years of skills that she has gained from her previous job in Pakistan to be applied in her new job. Aisha has been using accessing immigration courses as immigration is her field of work.

As well as looking at a career in immigration, Aisha also wants to gain a UK driving licence and go on a course to become an interpreter. The immigration courses and interpreter
courses are quite expensive and the job centre would not pay for Aisha to go on these courses.

Aisha paid for immigration and an interpreting course herself. Although Aisha has years of experience in the immigration field, she wants to refresh her knowledge and gain new up-to-date qualifications to help her get a job in this field. An interpreter job is her second choice of her career. Aisha believes it is important to drive as this would be a key thing she needs especially when she will be working.

Aisha’s children are very encouraging towards their mum gaining training and getting back into work. As Aisha’s children were growing up, they were used to seeing their mum working and driving and living a better quality of life than now. Therefore Aisha’s children see the potential in their mum.

Aisha has now moved into Dewsbury which is closer to her family. The reason for moving in to this area was because she has family in this area. Aisha spends most of her time with her children and her sister. Aisha is happy in this area because she has support from her family. Aisha talks about the benefits of having family in the local area.

However the neighbourhood in which Aisha has some problems. The local children can often cause problems. The local children throw things into her garden, such as rubbish. Children and teenagers gather in an empty field behind Aisha’s house. Aisha wishes that people would not gather in that field as it can be very disturbing. Aisha wishes the council would do something in that empty field to prevent people from gathering there.

Due to the problems Aisha is having with the local children, she keeps her own children indoors most of the time so that they do not get involved in a conflict or pick up on any negative behaviour.

Things that make Aisha’s life hard are the fact that she does not have a job and a car. Aisha compares her life to when she was in Pakistan. Pakistan is the best place Aisha has lived in. After coming to the UK, Aisha was not happy, but now since she has left her husband and has moved into her own tenancy she is much happier. The only thing that could make her happier now is making sure her children get a good education and that Aisha gets herself a good job so she can support her children.
Summary

‘Kathy’ is working to overcome addiction to alcohol and has a criminal record. She has accessed a wide range of support services. She was a victim of domestic violence and hate crime and also experiences depression, which has led to her attempting suicide. She has two daughters.

Home and Family

Since leaving the Women’s Aid Refuge in 2010 I have been on a roller coaster, and involved with some horrible people. At a time when I needed help and support the most, I felt lost and isolated. I moved to a council property through the Choose and Move Bidding Agency in March 2010 and that was it – I was left to get on with things. No support. Got mixed up with the wrong kind of people, then came the drinking to cope. I needed help.

I went to see my GP and fortunately he was very understanding. He said I needed extra help and support and he put me in touch with On Track. I started to attend weekly sessions, but unfortunately some of the people that attended the groups there were forced into it by Probation or Courts etc, and so they had not made the decision for themselves to heal and get over their addictions. I felt lost and alone.

In August 2010 my keys were stolen to my house and my house was burgled. I had had my drinks spiked and when I got home in the early hours of the morning I found my house trashed, my stereo stolen along with laptop. I needed help from the Police but I had no phone so went out to ask for a neighbour’s assistance.

The Police were called and attended at my property. However, they decided that they did not believe I had ever owned a laptop and had not been burgled, because what they saw in front of them was a drunk women. They did not appreciate I was terrified and I had come from domestic violence.

They said they believed I actually liked to live with my house in a state and perhaps I had thrown coffee at my own walls, and I had put worms on my own kitchen floor, opened all my cupboards, draws etc and poured salt over my kitchen work tops, that I had broken photo frames and trashed my bedroom!!!! They said that I was just drunk and they were not interested in me.

I begged them not to leave me alone. I was a victim of a crime. I took drastic action and stood in front of the police van to stop them from leaving, but they insisted I move. I was desperate and held on to the windscreen wiper. That led to me being CS gassed and collapsing on the floor where I was man-handled by the Police Officers. Another Police van was called and I was arrested and charged with drunk and disorderly behaviour and spent the night in the Police cells!!
I had to go through the ordeal of going to the Magistrates Court, and was given unconditional bail. What on earth was happening to me, why wasn't anyone listening to me?

I took an overdose but fortunately a friend phoned me whilst I was taking the tablets. She realised that my speech was funny. She phoned for an ambulance and the Police had to break my front door down. I was already on the floor, and was taken to the hospital.

My mum and sister came to A & E but they didn’t bring my daughters. Unfortunately, I do not have a good relationship at all with my mum. She told hospital staff that I should be sectioned.

I was laying on the hospital bed when my mum whispered to me, “I bet you have just done that for attention”. The following day I saw someone from the hospital who asked me if I would try to do that again. I said no because of my children, but I was so lost and alone. I was sent home and given CMHT numbers to ring in an emergency if I felt suicidal again.

The following week, the Police and ambulance crew had to break in again, because I had gone into shock. A state of paralysis, my counsellor has explained to me that because of the PTSD, and triggers my mind was not able to cope with everything and it had shut my body down.

I remember being able to hear the Police and ambulance people, and they were saying things like, “Come on silly girl”, “Why are you wasting our time? We have better things to do than come out to you”.

A couple of weeks later I was on a night out in town, and my purse was stolen. I knew the guy who had stolen my purse and an argument started between us. I had hardly any money to survive and I couldn’t believe this man had robbed me. Outside the pub, he punched me in the face. I was shocked and shaken and tried to defend myself, I began shouting at him.

The Police were called and I couldn’t calm down. I told them what had happened. They said I was drunk and shouting and carrying on and if I didn’t shut up I would be arrested! I was the victim of crime yet again and I was the one who was being told to shut up. I ended up getting arrested for being drunk and disorderly in a public place and again was taken to the Police cells and spent the night in custody.

I had to go to Court yet again. How could this be happening to me?? Now I had a criminal record.

I was still trying to attend weekly counselling sessions with KRASSAK, which I had started whilst I was in the Womens Refuge in 2009. I had been trying to come to terms with the DV I had suffered and the rape I had gone through, and now had this over my head too. I just needed someone to help me, to support me, to look after me, to care for me, to guide me, to tell me what to do.
Kathy found herself in an abusive relationship with a drugs dealer and was forced into criminal activity.

Fortunately one of the Police Officers was so caring and she listened to what I had been going through. She said she would make sure I was safe. They said no charges would be brought against me.

**Interventions**

They said I was now under the care of the Safeguarding Unit. They would make sure I was safe. That night I received telephone calls from him and threats to kill me. He was arrested again for breach of bail conditions.

I obtained an injunction. That meant I had to go back to Huddersfield where he lived and I was known to go to Court. I was in a real state. I had started to suffer from severe anxiety and panic attacks.

I was really surprised I was not offered any support from anywhere following this horrendous attack. If it hadn't been for the support of my friend, ‘Sarah’, I don't know what would have happened to me. She got some support for me from Horton Housing. I was visited at home and had an assessment and the woman said she would be my support worker. At last someone was listening to me.

I now had no GP to support me as I was classed as homeless so I could not register with the doctors surgery in the area that I had moved to. I had had to drop out of On Track in Huddersfield, for fear of my safety.

My worker at Horton Housing took me to the drop in centre in Dewsbury to try and get me some medical assistance, because she was aware that I had a lot of medical issues - high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, the list goes on. The drop in centre couldn't help me because they didn't have access to my medical records (they were still at my previous surgery in Huddersfield). I wasn't able to get the records transferred anywhere because I wasn't registered with a new GP. I was stuck.

I started self-harming to try and cope, and my drinking increased. I was suffering night tremors and started to hallucinate. I was not sleeping properly and my nights and days were mingling into one.

I was informed by the Police that unfortunately when answering bail, someone at Court had given out my new address! I was moved into a hotel overnight whilst the Police arranged for a panic alarm to be installed at the property. I was taken back to the property the following day.

My relationship with my friend Sarah evolved and we became a couple in March 2012. Unfortunately people and neighbours on the Estate where we lived were homophobic and we began to experience hate crime. Windows put through, youths surrounding me, verbal insults, stones thrown at our windows, fireworks being thrown into the garden, the garden
bit set on fire, damage to garden property the list goes on.
I was extremely frightened and we both felt very isolated.

The Estate Managers became involved as a result of neighbours complaints about me and Sarah. We explained about the hate crime we were experiencing and then came yet another battle. I felt they didn’t believe us and sided with the neighbours. They actually told us to stop acting so gay and stay inside, and lock our doors and windows. It was horrendous.

We made a joint application to move because of the fact I was no longer safe at that property, also because of the hate crime. It was all affecting my health and wellbeing. I was classed as homeless and given Band B priority. What followed on from that was us being blocked from bidding as I was accused of being anti-social by the neighbours. This was my defending myself. How could I make my daughters feel able to stay with me if we couldn’t get a new home?

I asked for evidence of my alleged anti-social behaviour. This has never been forthcoming. I was never given a diary or anything to help me with the hate crime that I was experiencing.

Through the hate crime reporting, we had a visit from a Hate Crime Liaison Officer. She said she thought that both myself and Sarah could really benefit from support from the WomensCentre Huddersfield, who runs the Sisters Shout Group which supports and helps Lesbian Bisexual Women, as part of the LGBT Community. She said that she was actually going to be going to one of the groups to give a talk and said she would be happy to support me and Sarah in going, and offered to take us as she knew that going into Huddersfield was extremely difficult for me.

We went along to the Sisters Shout Group, and the worker was so supportive. She listened to both of us. She said that she was also there for us and that any hate crime incidents we should report to her and she would pass on to the relevant bodies.

I took an overdose as I could not cope. I was taken by ambulance to the hospital. I was referred to Folly Hall and I now had a CPN and Psychiatrist working with me. I have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety and Panic Attacks.

I got referred to Pathways Mental Health Services. They were very encouraging and supportive. Through Pathways, I was referred to St Anne’s and got a support worker who I see fortnightly and she is there to take me out and give Sarah a break from her caring responsibilities looking after me. Sarah has now at last got a support worker through St Anne’s/Coast to help carers who are looking after people with mental health problems and alcohol misuse.

Pathways suggested I go back to On Track for help and support. Pathways liaised with my CPN and a worker at Pathways became my Care Co-ordinator. I started at On Track. My support worker took me there because I had now developed such a fear of going out anywhere on my own. I was terrified of being attacked by my ex-boyfriend and now the
other neighbours on the Estate. I am terrified of most men now because of such horrible past experiences. However one of the male workers at On Track is very supportive and I am slowly now starting to see that not all men will attack me.

I got referred back into KRASSAK for counselling to try and help me deal with the physical, emotional and sexual abuse I have suffered. I now see someone every Wednesday. There was quite a long waiting time following the initial assessment in November 2012 by KRASSAK. Initially I was only offered 10 sessions but this has been increased to 20.

I started to have one to one sessions at WomensCentre to deal with my issues around my personal space and boundaries. They identified that I had complex mental health issues and that I needed extra help and support for my wellbeing.

The CPN discharged me from services because she said that psychiatric services will not get involved with anyone who is using alcohol and said I needed to reduce that greatly before they would help. I was using the alcohol to deal with the mental health issues, kind of self-medicating. I felt like I was going crazy.

Pathways knew about the problems we were having around our tenancy and made a referral to Kirklees Mental Health Services. I was visited at home by a male and female worker together and an assessment was carried out. I was asked if it was okay that the man become my Key Worker. I said that I was not very comfortable having a man come into my home and it was agreed that the woman would be my Key Worker – they were both very understanding about this and completely understood and listened to why I felt that way.

Unfortunately, because of funding, I had to lose the support of my worker at Horton Housing if I was to have support from Kirklees Mental Health Services. I was really upset about this because I had developed a good positive relationship with the worker at Horton Housing and built up trust with her. She had been seeing me weekly. During her time working with me and Sarah, she had dealt with post, any telephone calls that needed doing. She had taken me to GP appointments. She had taken me to see the CAB in Huddersfield who had been trying to help me with benefits. She had been able to help me get my furniture out of my property in Huddersfield. She had been really helpful and supportive. I was really sorry to lose her.

My support worker from Kirklees Mental Health Services comes to see me weekly at home. She has been dealing with all the tenancy issues. She arranged a meeting with KNH to try and deal with the fact we had been blocked from bidding for a new house.

Following the meeting, we decided to get legal advice. Our lawyer said that the main objective was to get us moved off that estate.
It transpired that Sarah and I needed to make a back dated joint ESA claim. Although we had informed the Council in March 2012 that we were a couple and that we had completed a joint application, it had come to light that the different departments of Kirklees do not communicate information. In November 2012, my worker helped us complete a back dated ESA claim. She took over dealing with the problems with rent and housing benefit.

I was advised by our lawyer to do the first stage of the complaint procedure to Kirklees. I did this and also sent copy letters to all the agencies involved with me to ensure that they were aware of what was going on.

A meeting was arranged at our home with someone from Kirklees Council who deals with anti-social behaviour. He completed a risk assessment of both myself and Sarah and identified that we needed to be moved as soon as possible. He also confirmed that at least eight hate crime incidents had been reported. He said that the block should be lifted and he would speak to housing about that.

We then were able to bid, but the first property had been put on Choose n Move with incorrect details. We were then put forward by Housing for a property in Cleckheaton. Fortunately we went to see the property before we accepted and it was surrounded by Police vans. The Police said they would not want to live in a place like that. It would have been jumping out of the frying pan into the fire for us two.

We informed housing we wanted to withdraw from that property. We then bid on another as we were desperate to get away from our estate. We didn’t match the age criteria. We then got told we had been accepted on some new build flats in Heckmondwike. We were then not able to bid on any other properties and had to wait for them to be finished.

We waited. Six weeks past by. We kept chasing and so did my worker. I then received a phone call from someone at Housing saying we should never have been offered one of those flats. She couldn’t tell me why but said we didn’t match the criteria. I was so upset.

When we put the joint application in back in March we were told we had Band B. We were advised by our estate officers that we should start packing as we would be moving fast. We had been living in dreadful bare conditions from March 2012.

During this time, Kirklees have now said Sarah owes overpaid housing benefit of over £4000 and that I owe housing benefit of over £4000, even though I was never on the tenancy. DWP now say we need to pay back overpayment until 2020 and are deducting £50 per fortnight from our benefits.

In March 2013, I ended up being arrested for not getting assaulted! It had been snowing badly. I had fallen over and Sarah was helping me up. Unfortunately a passerby thought she saw something else. She reported to the Police I had been attacked by a man.

The Police came out and stopped me on my way home. I was asked by a female PC if I had been attacked. I was confused I didn’t know what she was talking about. She was
quite aggressive in her manner towards me. I said I was going home I was wet from the snow and from falling. She was in my face and said I couldn’t go. I explained I had issues around my personal space and boundaries and tried to remember what I had been working on with WomensCentre around boundaries.

The PC said she didn’t believe me that I hadn’t been attacked. I explained I’d fallen and my girlfriend had helped me up. My anxiety levels were rising and I was panicking. Sarah asked them to back off from me. What ensued was that I was CS gassed, put on the floor then handcuffed. I had no idea what was happening or why. This led to me staying in the cells over night!

I was charged the following morning with drunk and disorderly behaviour. I went to court in July and the matter was adjourned. Yet another battle for me to face. Evolve is supporting me with this.

Finally, and thankfully, a Jephson Housing Association property came onto the Choose n Move site. We bid and got accepted. We signed up and moved in on the 22nd May! Repairs were done straight away. The property is of an extremely high standard. The neighbours are friendly. It’s a quiet cul de sac and we have not experienced any hate crime at all since moving off the old estate.

The Future

So now it’s July 2013, me and Sarah got engaged last Friday when she proposed down on one knee in front of about 50 people where we had been doing the LAB Project course in Huddersfield for the last two weeks. How different my life is now. I am now living in a flat and our landlords, Jephson Housing Association, are fantastic.

Myself and Sarah took part in the Freedom Project course run via Womenscentre for vulnerable women in June 2013, and both gained Certificates.

The services I am currently still working with are: KRASSAK, PATHWAYS, KIRKLEES MENTAL HEALTH TENANCY SUPPORT, ON TRACK, ST ANNES, WOMENSCENTRE, KIRKLEES LEISURE SCHEME, EVOLVE, QAMAR SOLICITORS, RAMSDEN SOLICITORS.

We have both just completed the LAB Project in Huddersfield and gained certificates. Sarah has signed up to do two courses in security to try and get back into work, thanks to the LAB tutors giving her motivation and encouragement.

I am hoping to do a Creative Writing course and I am seeing a worker from Kirklees on Friday at my home to discuss this and other possible personal development courses. I have also started volunteering on the administration side of things at WomensCentre and hope to do a Mental Health long-distance learning course in September.

We still have all the pressures of dealing with DWP, and Housing Benefit and rent arrears and my worker has been advised by Kirklees Rent Assist that they cannot help any more.
They cannot follow our accounts or what has happened with the arrears or why they have occurred or the time periods.

Rent Assist suggested we go to Fusion for advice, which we did on Monday. They are confused and told us we need to go to the CAB for help and advice. We feel like we are being pushed from pillar to post and cannot get answers. In the meantime we are experiencing financial hardship.

It's so hard trying to remain positive and overcoming so many bad experiences with all the extra pressures and we would be lost without the services supporting us, which I have mentioned above. They have been positive and helpful.

I am so grateful to the services that have come into my life and been supportive. Sarah's family have been supportive and Sarah's mum has had to come to our aide numerous times to lend us money and to help us set up our new home. My faith in God has helped to keep me strong. I can't let my family suffer anymore, and through working with agencies I have realised the importance of making a home for my family.

We applied for a Community Care Grant, but because of the delays in us being able to move we missed the deadline. We cannot get legal aid for help regarding housing because the government has taken that away. Because of the backlog at Housing Benefit, the rent wasn’t paid to Jephson and we were yet again in arrears. Hopefully this has now been rectified.

I am also now doing an Anger Management Course, which takes place each Monday via S2R. I was referred on this by On Track. I will be doing further confidence building and personal development courses to help me heal and move on with my life.

My goal is to help other women in crisis through no fault of their own. I want my children to be proud of me and feel that their mother is gaining the support she now needs. I want them to feel like their home is safe and will no longer be effected by narrow-minded people that have made our lives hell.
Summary

'Afra' had an arranged marriage in Pakistan which is now in the process of ending. She has suffered depression and attempted suicide on several occasions. The family was referred for support to help her take care of the children. After an initial positive outcome from a CAF plan, there were further concerns over the welfare of the children. DV incidents resulted in Afra making a decision to leave her husband and she is now in a refuge with her two children.

Home

The family was initially referred to Action For Children (family support service) by the health visitor to support Afra with the eldest child's bedtime routine. Family circumstances at the time describe Afra as being low in mood and feeling depressed. She was receiving support from the crisis team and was on medication for her depression. Afra had attempted suicide on several occasions, taking overdose on paracetamols.

Afra said that her husband had a girlfriend in Pakistan and always told her he did not love her as he was in love with somebody else. Afra has stated that she continued to remain in her marital situation due to cultural and family pressures.

Afra describes her family as supportive but said she feels that it also led to a lot of arguments as her parents never wanted the community to find out there was problems in her marriage. Afra did not have any friends in the area and felt lonely and isolated and she was not allowed to socialise with her cousins due to an element of control by her parents.

Afra and her husband constantly argued about finances, looking after the children, daily chores, and each other's families. Also there had been several domestic violence incidents between both parents, both physical and verbal. Afra called the police several times but never took the next step to seek legal advice about removing her husband from the family home due to family pressures.

Support

Family support encouraged Afra to access services at the children's centre and referred Afra to Support To Recovery for anger management. Afra has said that her arguments started at this point with her husband as he was not spending any time with her as he was working nights and that he was not able to understand her mental illness.
Afra received support via CAF plan from the family support health visitor. Family support ensured Afra attended her health appointments and ensured that the children’s needs were met.

In October 2012 the family support case was re-opened. The referral was from duty and assessment following a referral from West Yorkshire police regarding a domestic violence incident between the children’s parents. The incident is one of several which have been both physical and verbal. A section 17 child in need assessment was completed and after the initial meeting it de-escalated to a CAF.

Afra and her husband engaged with the CAF plan that focused on behaviour management, impact of domestic violence, routines and boundaries, health eating; however there were very little changes made. School reported concerns about the child’s emotional well-being as he became very protective of his mum. Also concerns around neglect as the eldest child needed emergency dentist treatment on 2 separate occasions. Nursery found the youngest child to be very quiet and seemed very unhappy. Afra and her husband were made aware of these concerns and ensured that the child was taken to their health appointments and visited the dentist for routine checks.

In May this year, Afra was adamant that she no longer wanted to be in a relationship with her husband as they continued to argue about finances, the children and the daily chores. Afra discussed with family support about her options and also with a solicitor. On the day that Afra left an argument had taken place with her husband about a phone call. He tried to get the mobile off Afra. Afra was held down on the sofa but managed to escape and ran to her mum’s house.

**Future**

Afra made the decision to leave with both children; family support contacted the domestic violence team. Afra and both children were taken safely to a refuge. Afra said she kept going for the sake of her children. She has grown in confidence and is now able to take the children out on her own.

Afra stayed in the relationship due to family and cultural pressures but towards the end she felt she had enough and could see the impact that it was having on the children. Also Afra wanted to leave as she wanted the opportunity to study and go to work. This was not possible as her husband did not allow her to work or study and also her family wanted her to stay at home with both children. Afra is looking forward to the future and appears very optimistic.

Family support informed MAST meeting professionals (health visitor, School SENCO, nursery and CAF team) that Afra and children had left and were now in a safe place.
Summary

‘Uzma’ has three children and has sought asylum in the UK. She has suffered from depression and previously felt suicidal. The disruptions to normal family life led to school attendance issues for her daughter. The family are supported by out of work benefits.

Home and Family

Have your children ever had low school attendance?

Yes. My daughter who is now sixteen refused to start school in September 2011 when we came to Huddersfield. She was so upset that we were moved to Huddersfield from Birmingham, where she has been since the age of ten and had started going to school from year 5 to the end of year 9. She could not, to this day, come to terms of losing her friends and coming to a completely new place to start all over.

But with the support from the GP surgery, she got into school and has ever been punctual. And I can say both of them now have been 100% in attendance.

At the moment it is very stressful for me and at one point I gave up and just wanted to die. I don’t want to tell my daughter and my little son what the situation is because I just can’t bear to see them upset.

But with the support of the staff at the women centre I am still alive. They always make me see some hope in my life. We as a family are struggling emotionally on what is going to happen next. We are in the process of putting in a new claim to the UKBA with the support of different organisations.

My daughter is to start college in September and we don’t even know where to start. My last son is going to year 4, and my eldest son is still being supported by DASH and staying with his host family. My daughter says to one of my friends that she feels sorry for him sitting at home and he cannot do anything with his life. All he does is volunteer in the kitchen at the mission cafe in Huddersfield. He cannot do any study at college, except we pay and we cannot afford it.

I struggle with money every day. Sometimes we live on bread and milk and one main meal in the evening. All we have is £136 every week for everything. It used to be £148 and when my daughter turned 16 they cut it by £13 a week.

I don’t know what to do but to struggle and accept it. Every time there is a school trip I don’t sleep at night, I keep budgeting and think what to cut out on food to be able to pay for the trips. We all need credit on phone to be able to at least text each other but I have to borrow around for some of those things. Every weekend I have £1.40 left on me for bus pass on Monday morning.
My little son is always crying to go to Madrassah, as we are Muslims and the area we live now is all Muslims. When he plays out with the children and at 5pm they all go to Madrassah, he will come home and ask why he cannot go as well. I tried to register him and its £10 every week, which I cannot afford.

It is hard not being able to give him the same as what other children have. To see him cry upsets me as my children are my everything.

Interventions

Since I came to Huddersfield, the first service that has supported me is the WomenCentre. I never knew anywhere in Huddersfield when I came in August 2011 except Clare House. When I got in the WomenCentre through Clare house, I found the staff very nice and welcoming. I then started to come on a regular basis on Fridays to Women Together and Women In Exile.

I remember in December 2011 I had a real hard time with my asylum claim and the UKBA was coming to visit my house. I thought my family was going to be removed and if it was not for the support of the WomenCentre I would have committed suicide.

Myself and my family get practical support from WomenCentre; food, clothes gifts of any kind, even if I buy anything for my son (who is eight), the first thing he asks is, ‘Is it from the WomenCentre?’ He even tells all his friends that my mum works at the WomenCentre, which is happening now because I, from the love of the staff, have been asked to volunteer, which I am now doing.

I have attended a lot of meetings and workshops and done a lot of small courses and gain certificates through the WomenCentre, in spite of my situation, for which I will ever be thankful and grateful. I have recently completed a level two certificate in Understanding Mental Health through the women centre. They all love respect and sympathise with my situation and are doing everything they can in their capacity to support us. THANK YOU.

Through the women centre I got introduced to DASH. I was so desperate and helpless when my son was destitute and not allowed to stay with us when our asylum claim was refused. From there he was introduced to DASH, and up to this date he is supported by DASH in accommodation and travel ticket and many more. Not only him but they whole family is loved by everyone connected to DASH and we all get maximum support of every kind. He is now part of the host family which call him part of their family.

Through the WomenCentre I got introduced to the Town of Sanctuary and Sanctuary Supper, which I am now an active member and part of the steering group. I made a lot of friends from the group which I can call some as personal friends. Town of Sanctuary gave a lot of support to me and my family and we have been involved with all the activities that they do. Everybody in this group have support us to the maximum. I went to conferences
with people of the Town of Sanctuary and even been invited to represent the group at this year’s Mayor’s party together with the treasurer. I feel very privilege to be part of it.

I also did a course for the NCT, National Childbirth Trust, through the Town of Sanctuary. I complete the training got my certificate and am now a fully fledged volunteer in Huddersfield supporting fellow asylum seeking mums, and I attend so many workshops and events for them as well.

Through the women centre I also got introduced to the CAB in Huddersfield and with the support and trust from the Manager I am now volunteering for the CAB in Huddersfield as well.

We received a lot of support from the GP surgery at the white house in Huddersfield as well.

I owe my life to the WomenCentre and I can say I call some people my sister and I do love them as sisters.

**What services have not been useful for you?**

The children services or social services and the schools. They did not want to be involved in the asylum claim, even though they all know the situation around the family. We have no family support worker or anything like that - if there is any? And I do struggle with things related to school or the children. I received no help as far as the children are concerned.

**The Future**

I could see from telling my story that my children have suffered because of the asylum system. They have left friends behind and school attendance has been low because of moves. I want to give my children the world, and I want my children to have what other children have in this country. I just want to be equal and not feel the struggle anymore.

I would like my children to have a laptop computer so my daughter can do her school work. I want my children to be able to carry out their homework and project work at home like other children.

I also would like the children to have a TV at home. I think it would be good for my younger son for educational purposes but also for us as a family to spend time together watching Al-Jazeera news and things from my culture that I still want my children to experience and relate to.
Summary

‘Elizabeth’ has learning difficulties and is on out of work benefits. She is a single parent but her boys have been taken into care by social services. (Although she is not currently looking after her children, we decided to include Elizabeth in the LTF project because of her passionate belief in her right to be allowed to be a mother to her children and because we felt there may be lessons to learn from her experience of service providers).

Home and Family

“I had my children removed from my care because the courts and social workers believed I was incapable of caring for them after my eldest got burnt by accident with a kettle. I felt my disabilities had led to this decision and that I never stood a chance.

My children were supposedly going to be adopted, but this never happened and I wasn’t informed. I am now having contact with my boys again. But I want to improve my life, I have decided while doing this work that I want to improve my reading and writing so I can help my boys when we have contact.

I have no job I haven’t got my boys with me and I need to start doing something for me that will help me one day get a job so I can strengthen my chance of getting my boys back.

This is where I am today, I just need to get on with life, get a job and be happy that my children are settled and happy, and that I still get to see them. I hope to one day be returned with my children. I love the time I spend with them at contact. I am always going to be their mum; I want to be better for them so they can be happy too.

I am on benefits but regularly go to the job centre. The problem I have is filling out the forms as I can’t write very well or read what they are asking of me. This has made getting a job difficult but I am determined to get a job.

I am starting to look at Maths and English courses to improve my chances. I would be happy with a packing job as long as it meant I had earned my money myself. I do struggle to budget. I find it all too much sometimes but Evolve are helping me with this.”

Although Elizabeth’s circumstances are not straight forward, she has demonstrated commitment in engaging with services to support her case. She still regards herself as a mother, which she is. She sees her boys and talks about them often to update professionals on how they are growing up.

She was glad they weren’t adopted as this gave her an opportunity to show she could change. She has worked hard on this narrative piece to show how difficult the past few years have been. She craves for family life and has felt very lost without her children.

However she is trying to remain positive about the future and what it holds for her family.
Interventions

Elizabeth has felt let down by social care because no preventative measures were taken to support her in keeping her children. In interviews with Elizabeth, she has often stated that social services took her children without trying to support her in keeping her children with her. She felt that no advice or plans were put in place to keep the family together and that she was judged as a bad parent because she herself has learning needs.

From these powerful statements, Elizabeth has highlighted an area of learning for the Listening To Families project; could services do more to support mothers like Elizabeth so that families can stay together.

“Evolve have helped me in having contact with my children, they read letters for me and ring people if I don’t understand. WomenCentre don’t judge me, they listen, and also help me feel okay about being apart from my children.

The mothers’ group has helped me see that there is support out there for mothers living apart from their children. The group gave me comfort and it was nice to realise I wasn’t alone. People in the group helped me understand what avenues I could take legally and also who I should speak to about seeing my boys again once I found out they weren’t adopted.

The Job Centre have been patient with me and helped me fill out forms and look for jobs. Hopefully I will get one. It is through the job centre that I found out about doing a English and Maths course to improve my skills, I am so lucky to have lovely staff there as I wouldn’t have a clue.

My social worker decided I couldn’t look after my children, this made me feel bad as they said it was because I had learning difficulties, but I had brought my boys up by myself before this happened.

I felt that my social worker didn’t help me keep my children; they just decided I wasn’t a good mum without telling me what to change. I felt alone and like I was useless. Why did my social worker not help me? Why did she not help me be a better mum? I know I struggled but I loved my boys. I felt like my social worker didn’t think I could be a good mum because of my own difficulties and that made me angry.

My mum and I had to go to family court; we all had to give evidence of what had happened. I didn’t like court. I felt pushed, nervous and they asked so many questions it frightened me. My dad and solicitor were my only support.

The court wanted to know how he got burnt. I was telling them that my mum was looking after him and I was out with the youngest child. I kept telling them my mum would never hurt them. No one listened; they didn’t believe it was an accident.

Social worker and courts made the decision that my children were going to be adopted. I
was upset and angry; I walked out, cried and felt frustrated as I thought I would never see them again. I felt like no one believed me, I knew they only wanted my children safe but I would never hurt my boys. I felt as alone after this and as useless as a person.

I got pregnant. I was firstly excited, but then I was worried in case they took it off me. I was seven weeks pregnant when I lost my baby. I was confused why I lost it and I thought it might be because I had been worrying, but I will never know. If I had of had it, I would of been assessed by social worker at 20 weeks to see if I could have kept it. This is something I will always worry about if I get pregnant.

My children were not adopted as I was made to believe so I am now having contact with them again, with the hopes that one day I can get my children back. I am still their mother, I miss them every day.

The Future

Elizabeth has benefitted from talking about her troubles as a single mother. She has felt judged and let down by social services and she is fighting to get her her children back. She is a focused woman who wants to learn to read and write so she can help her children when she has contact and then, hopefully, on a permanent basis in the future.

During the process of interviews and writing the narrative piece, it became apparent that Elizabeth has poor literacy skills. This is something she feels, with support, could be something she could change, which would mean more opportunities for gaining a job.

She has applied for a course in English and Maths, and from this work has realised that in order to move forward she needs to address areas which she has ignored due to embarrassment and fear of failure.
Summary

‘Jess’ has a criminal record and the family are supported by out of work benefits. Her court case put the family unit under strain and almost destroyed her relationship with her husband and daughter.

Home and Family

We had a comfortable lifestyle - two cars a caravan and one holiday a year abroad. On numerous occasions I sat back and looked at my life, my daughter, husband and the luxuries. I knew it would all end, but how would it stop and when I just didn’t know.

I was sacked from my employment then arrested two weeks later. In total I had stolen £253,000. I was shocked when I was told the total. I still carried on as normal. I didn’t tell my family until the night before I was due in Court. I got another job and buried my head in the sand.

The worst day of my life was telling my daughter. I had no choice as I was on the front page of the Examiner. She had set off to school. I collected her and told her and showed her the paper.

She hated me and phoned her granddad wanting to go straight there. She stayed there for two days. We didn’t talk about it much as a family, as I think everyone was cross and in shock.

My daughter didn’t want to go to school once the story had been printed in the paper. She had some time off as she felt worried about going to school and what her friends would say. We tried to encourage her to go which she did over time, but this did affect her attendance.

I had been told by the arresting officer I would face jail, but you hope not. The crime I had committed must result in a prison sentence. After my second appearance we were given eight weeks before my next appearance as it had to be passed to Crown Court. It was all new to myself and my family going to court and how slow the process is, but it did give me more time with my daughter.

I was unemployed and found every day a struggle as I was used to working in a fast and high pressure job.

I was sentenced to do seven months in prison and do four months on tag home detention on curfew. The first two months flew in prison. I got a job in Max Speilman and got myself into G wing, which was a more open wing.
The first few weeks I felt relieved it was all over now. I got regular visits and letters from my family and friends. I missed my daughter so much; this was my punishment. I got myself into regular routine and joined the gym. The time passed very quickly.

My POCA eventually got sorted August 2012 and we will have to sell our family home. Hopefully this will be sorted May 2013. This will give my ex-employer some of the money back.

Whilst in prison I worked at Max Speilman. They have a scheme where once you leave prison you are guaranteed 12 weeks work and if there are any vacancies after this you will be employed permanently. I am so grateful to Max Speilman for giving me a chance. I have a job I enjoy and I work with lots of super colleagues. If it wasn’t for this chance, I am unsure where I would be now.

There has been a huge strain on our finances due to my actions. We had a POCA, which meant that I had to repay the money back to my employer. We had to sell our house and if it wasn’t for my parents we would have been homeless.

Because of what I did all our processions were taken away from us. One item in particular that upset my daughter was her laptop. They wouldn’t believe she had saved her pocket money and bought it for herself. We eventually proved she had bought it and they returned it broken (this is all recorded on file). She was so upset and I felt so guilty that I couldn’t afford to buy her another.

**Interventions**

It took me about four weeks to contact Evolve, but when I did I wished I had done it sooner. I hadn’t really spoken to anyone about what was happening and the effects on me and my family. I was given appointments to come to Evolve fortnightly for one-to-ones. I was also given the opportunity to go to drop-ins and also different classes on building confidence and counselling.

The support was so comforting and appreciated. I had got very low. Support was given through all my court appearances to me and my family. I finally got sentenced 30.09.11, nine months from my first court appearance. I got sentenced to 2 years and also a POCA.

I go to Evolve still to do my probation, initially once a week but now once a month. The support given is very appreciated. They help with accommodation, employment, and family life. It’s good knowing you can go any Wednesday to a relaxed atmosphere to ask for help or just to chat.

I felt lonely and ashamed of my crime and you know you will be judged by anyone you tell, but Evolve do give you encouragement and support to help you.
Max Speilman have also been a great support to me. They gave me the opportunity of a job when no one else would. I began in prison as a volunteer and then carried on as a volunteer on my release, which has led to me working for them now. The reason I am grateful is because they made me feel like I was worth employing and could build trust again.

I felt so low and lost when I had lost my job and even when volunteering the scheme and

**What services have not been useful for you?**

Changing solicitors at the last minute of my court date and finding out by letter was confusing, I felt it put added pressure on me, and I needed some continuity which I didn’t feel they understood. However I am thankful to the solicitor for recommending me to Evolve.

We signed up to Choose and Move when we realised we had to sell our house. We informed them we had sold it and needed to be supported as we had a daughter and were effectively going to be homeless. They never responded and eventually we had to move into my parents until we had found somewhere.

They eventually sent a letter out a month after we had to move out of our house offering the three of us a one bed flat. I was so annoyed. For all they knew we had been homeless for a month, and a one bed flat for a family with a teenage daughter was just not good enough. Even now I feel let down by them. They didn’t care about us, we were just a number, a nobody to them.

**The Future**

Jess hopes that by working hard she will be able to repay the money she owes and also support her daughter in leading a relatively normal life.
Summary

‘Marianne’ suffers from mental health problems and was a victim of domestic violence. She fled to a refuge with her son. The family has a CAF in place to support her son.

Home and Family

“I had to leave. I didn’t know how I was going to leave or where I was going to go to. It had been on my mind for a while. We’d been for counselling with Relate. I said to him, in front of my son, ‘You’re getting more and more abusive.’ And he said, he knew.

I used to be submissive. But when I started to speak out, there would be consequences. He would bully me, and if I didn’t give in, he would bully my son. My choice was for him to bully me.

He’d punish me and make me go out in dirty clothes. He took money that I earned from work. He controlled what we ate and he made me eat food that had gone off. It made me ill. He controlled what I ate in front of my son. He used to tell me I was too fat in front of my son. He had full control of my money. He controlled where I went, what I wore. Somehow he was able to brainwash me and my son, manipulate me.

I didn’t realise this at the time. Problems in my past had affected my mental well-being and self esteem. I had suffered post traumatic stress disorder due to incidents in my past and he exploited that.

It would have been so simple for him just to leave, or let me leave, but he would never do that and he kept on telling me he would never go.

I used to turn to family for help. But they would shut the door on me sometimes. Sometimes, they would let me stay there. My family didn’t understand. They still don’t. He tried to manipulate them too. In the end, they said they would help me buy him out of the house. But he said there was no way he would leave.

I was the one that had to leave. I left with my son. I left and went to a refuge but he found us. I decided I needed to leave the area for the safety of me and my son, but he found us then too.

A Court battle began; he firstly wanted contact then full custody of my son. Due to him having a job, he got custody. Because I was in a refuge they felt the home environment was safer for my son.

I have my son now though, most of the time, as his dad finds him too much hard work. However he still controls the situation. I have learnt to live with it for the sake of my son. However I am in the process of getting joint custody, as even though he legally won I am the one who my son stays with, so it makes sense for me to have some financial support.
as his dad never buys him anything. I have to struggle to buy him school shoes that fit.

My son is growing up. I worry he is going down the wrong path. I worry he is going to be like his Dad. When we are together, he tries to control me. I worry that he needs to know how to treat women in his life. I worry that he won’t learn to have respect for people. I try to teach these things to my son when we are together. He takes this as criticism.

But if I don’t do it, he will never learn acceptable behaviour and attitudes. The older he gets, the harder it gets.

Due to being in a refuge, my son’s attendance did suffer, also his behaviour at school led to a CAF needing to be carried out. He carried so much anger about me and his Dad and would sometimes refuse to go to school. He scared me so I sometimes just let him get his own way.

He is getting better, but his behaviour still sometimes scares me as he has outbursts of anger and it makes me feel frightened. Teachers are working well with me to improve his behaviour, but it’s a long road and I know it won’t happen over night.

Due to my mental health issues I have not been able to work. However with the support of WomenCentre I have slowly began to rebuild my life. My new partner has also supported me and I eventually had the confidence to go to an agency that would help me find a job. I now have a part-time job that keeps me busy and helps me stay focused on something; however I still have times when I struggle to go to work with my anxiety problems.

**Interventions**

Once Marianne had left the abusive situation she was supported by various agencies.

“I left to go to a refuge for women subjected to domestic violence. The refuge was the first place I felt safe but my son struggled with the decision and so did my family. The staff was supportive but we couldn’t stay there long because my husband found us.

The best support that worked for me has come from the WomenCentre; groups for women dealing with domestic violence and abuse. They listen, understand, they empathise, without judging.

I am now being part of a book being created for other mothers that have experienced being separated from their children. By sharing I feel that I am taking control of my situation. The group leader has supported me in meetings around my mental health and also with issues with my son at school. I wouldn’t have had the confidence to do some of the things, such as be a part of the CAF, without the centre’s support.

I have found that agencies that listen and make you feel valued help you grow as a person. I have needed much support dealing with my mental health and have found that
not being believed is one of the most difficult experiences I have faced. The agencies that have supported me have listened, have let me speak and have made me feel like I am worth listening to, this has helped me realise that I can take control of my mental health issues and, with the right help, support my son.

*What services have not been helpful?*

CAFCASS made me feel like I was incapable of looking after my child. They made the wrong decision, letting him go with his Dad, and you can see some of his Dad’s behaviours starting to be displayed in him. They said they wouldn’t judge me but they used my mental health against me.

The CAFCASS official said she had lots of experience with domestic violence. But she couldn’t see what he had been doing to me. She spent half an hour with him and decided he wasn’t abusive.

Also one social worker said to me, “You need to get your mental health sorted out”! They had listened to my ex.

*The Future*

We are waiting to see the Family Intervention Team now. CAFCASS saw my son’s problems as typical child development, part of growing up. I hope now that the Family Intervention Team sees beyond that and understand some of my fears for him.

I hope the Family Intervention Team will help support my son. But this will need his Dad’s co-operation. I’ve worked with so many different people and put my trust in them. But I’ve built my hopes up only to be let down.

The school in which my son attends has also not been very supportive. They didn’t want me to have a CAF, but the CAF team disagreed. The group leader in the Mothers’ group had to help me in pushing for it to happen. I felt let down and, once again, felt like they didn’t value what I had to say about my son’s behaviour.

There’s no ending to this story.

It won’t change. Nothing will change.

Because who is going to change it?

Who is going to listen and not judge me and my son?

Past issues come back to haunt me, still affect my life now.

My abuse as a child, my mental breakdown.
Summary

‘Lilly’ has a mental health illness, problems with alcohol use, and is currently supporting herself and her son on an ESA. There are issues around her child’s school attendance and she recently received an ASBO.

Home and Family

“I was thrown out of my last home because of my mental illness. I was always arguing with my ex-boyfriend and I ended up getting an ASBO. I was currently homeless until a few week ago when I found a private rented house and me and my son moved in on 30th August.

Before I found this house my son was staying at my parents along with me while I finished my curfew (electronic tag). When I had it taken off I would stay with friends sofa surfing and go and see my son everyday at my parents. I would stay over at my mum’s a few nights a week but had to sleep on the sofa as it is only a two bed house.

I am currently taking fluoxetine 20mg, diazepam 2mg and zopiclone 7.5 mg and I have to go and see the doctor every two weeks.

My child’s school attendance is low because of me not being there every morning while I’ve been homeless, and he hasn’t got out of bed on time, or he would have a late night the night before, or he would just get up and cry and kick off with me, saying he doesn’t want to go. But now that I’ve found a house for us, and when we are settled in properly, his attendance will definitely improve as I know school is important and he needs a routine.

I do find it hard paying bills and stuff but for the past few months I have been homeless so haven’t really had to worry about that. But now that I’ve got my own house I’m feeling very anxious about been on my own, sorting and paying bills.

I’m in debt with the council for damages to my last property and have an outstanding bill with water, which comes straight out of my ESA. I want a fresh start and to pay my debts but I also want to provide a comfortable home for my son, with a bed to sleep in and the security of knowing we won’t be moving around anymore.

I want my son to be proud of me that I am sorting my life out. I am just looking to the future and saving every penny I have for our new start in our new home.”
Interventions

“Evolve have helped me out a lot. My doctor was going to refer me to a psychiatrist again, but I told him I was joining a women’s group at Evolve. He said we could see how it went and if I still felt I needed to go to the psychiatrist then he would refer me straight away.

But by doing the Evolve women’s group every week, and speaking about my problems instead of holding them all in, he hasn’t needed to refer me.

I was taking 3 diazepam a day but now I am only on 1 a day and I’m beginning to get my life back on track slowly but surely, thanks to my probation worker and the people at Evolve.

Through Evolve helping me it has made me feel that there is people out there that do care and want to help you and you don’t have to get in to trouble just to get noticed. It has made the relationship between me and my son 100% better and I can be more of a mum now than I’ve ever been.

I think that if I wouldn’t have got any help I would of either ended up in jail or losing my son, or both, and I’m so glad that hasn’t happened.

What services have not been useful for you?

My probation worker referred me to a housing organisation as I was homeless and since then I’ve had one appointment with them just to fill in some paper work and they said they would keep in touch but I haven’t had one phone call or letter off them.

This really annoyed me because I told them that I really wanted to have a home for me and my son. I told them I could, or would, have ended up re-offending, or just carry on turning to alcohol instead... if I was to stay homeless. And that would not have been fair on my son. I rang them loads of times and kept going into their office and still got no reply from anyone.

I felt like they didn’t care what happened to me, and didn’t value me as a person who needed help.

The Future

I realise how much not only I have been through but also my son. I want a fresh start together and I need to think of things he likes and spend more time with him.

I also realise that his behaviour is a factor of his life and that by spending time with him we can build on our relationship and the mother and child bond. I don’t have much money but I would like to do something that makes his life better and something we could do together.