

Doncaster Council – Written evidence (PSC0077)

Doncaster Family Hubs

Case Study

The family and context

R is a three-year-old little boy who lived with his mum and dad in a deprived area of Doncaster. Mum (J) and dad (D) both grew up in care and had a very unstable childhood, dealing with many different professionals and foster carers throughout their life. Since leaving care, J misused drugs and alcohol which led to crime, prostitution and violent relationships. J has an older daughter from a previous relationship, who was removed at birth. As J grew older, she stopped using drugs, met D and went on to give birth to R who is now 3. Social care services were involved with the family from the birth of R.

Activities and support provided by the Family Hub

Mum started attending sessions at the Family Hub when R was one year old. When they first started attending, it was noticed that mum did not mix with other mums in sessions and did not engage in play activity. Mum didn't encourage R to sit with other children at snack time or sit in a circle at the end of session with all other mums and babies to sing songs. Mum often looked distant and disengaged with what was happening around her and was unresponsive to R.

The key worker in the group started to build a strong professional relationship with J. It was important to build and maintain a strong relationship when supporting the family so that the family felt they could openly discuss any worries and concerns they had in their life. The relationship was developed between the key worker and R through a variety of channels in order to maximise contact. This relationship was developed in contact sessions, regular communication with J by phone calls between sessions and also WhatsApp text messages. Regular attempts were made to further interaction by inviting them to participate in groups.

The family was invited to walks and was encouraged to become more involved in what was happening in the Family Hub. Efforts were made to take J's ideas on board, which made J feel part of something positive and that her contributions were valid and valued, whilst building her self-esteem which in turn helped her to become a more positive and confident parent.

By building a strong relationship, it enabled J to feel she could trust the key worker whilst making it clear that the role as a professional was to listen. This position enabled the key worker to provide supportive advice that helped them through a difficult time whilst facilitating the safeguarding of R. The importance of safeguarding was made clear from the start and everyone was kept aware of the roles and responsibilities.

A significant feature of the Family Hub interaction was the development of basic parenting skills which were role modelled in sessions so that J could take them away with her and use with R at home to benefit their relationship and the progress of R.

This included aspects of feeding, including feeding times, the importance of children eating breakfast, healthy snacks and meals and how giving juice in a bottle is proven to be detrimental to the healthy growth of children's teeth and gums.

Other activities modelled included how to sit and play with baby, read stories, sing action songs and take part in activities that the Family Hub staff introduced in each session. As mum developed new parenting skills, J became more confident around other parents and children and more confident to open up to be open and honest with professionals. J started to disclose how D didn't help her at home with R, D was up all-night gaming and she was left to do everything herself around the home and with R.

D started to smoke cannabis heavily and would do this in the family home around R. This would take up a lot of the family finances and led to deprivations, where J was often without money for basic food and nappies for R. D would often ring J in sessions to complete basic tasks such as topping up an electricity card or going to the shop for him. Having gained her trust, J was able to disclose that D had become verbally abusive, threatening her and that she wanted to end the relationship.

Home visits started in the family home to introduce Bookstart to R. It was noticeable that D never engaged in conversation on any visit. He sat at the P.C gaming whilst mum was encouraged to participate in the activity, looking through the Bookstart pack, being shown how to look at pictures and talk about animals in the books in order to aid language development. D became a barrier when trying to support J and R because of the negativity of his thoughts towards the Family Hub and he tried to influence J not to engage with the Hub. The key worker felt that it was vital to increase the involvement of D with the Family Hub and reduce the impact of his views in J's interactions and explained to D the benefits of the Family Hub, attempting to involve him in R's development.

D eventually came to understand that the Family Hub had the family's interest at heart, could act as a positive influence and is there to encourage them to live a more secure, healthy and happy life. Regular discussions with D were initiated on a one-to-one basis and he came to the realisation that it was not acceptable to smoke cannabis in front of R, understanding now that because R's lungs were not developed enough to inhale the smoke, the smoke could damage other organs in his body. J continued to attend sessions with R at the Family Hub and support continued so that J could make positive changes by following the plan in place from social care. J was supported to find a new home so that R could live a safe happy life away from abuse and from dad smoking cannabis.

J was also further supported once she moved into her new home with advice on financial matters and money management, along with practical help from the food bank and provision of furniture and household items. It was also felt that it was valuable to support J to manage conflict with D.

Outcome

Today R is living a happy life with mum in their home together and continues to attend play sessions in the Family Hub. It is noticeable that the levels of R's social interactions have improved as he now joins in all play activities and has made increasingly positive relationships with children his own age. He enjoys a wider social network, is invited to birthday parties and is part of other playgroups in the local community, benefitting from a more extensive range of activities that would be expected of most three-year-old children. He presents as a happy little boy whose needs are being met by his mum. For her part, mum interacts more readily with professionals, other adults and families and, most importantly, her child as a more confident parent.

D is living in the old family home, has moved on and is in a new relationship. He still has weekly contact with R in the garden with mum present.

Voice of the parent

I have been attending the Family Hub for some time now.

Staff have always been friendly, helpful and reliable. I have made friends in groups that I attended. I have also attended walks in Rossington and at Lakeside.

E and J have supported me with food parcels and clothes for the children. Without that support I would have really struggled and gone under.

I really enjoyed attending the sessions at the church where I learnt stuff to make me a better parent to my children.

I have had lots of support even a gate sorted for the stairs to keep us safe.

E was there throughout and was always available for me to speak to. Times were tough for us and so hard, and when I had nowhere the Family Hub helped us. They really changed my life for the better.

Next steps

R is now accessing three-year-old funding at a local nursery and this will enable mum to consider training and employment. Adult learning courses are re-starting at the Family Hub so this will be addressed as the next step for J to continue her journey.

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