

How day placements at Sunfield are transforming lives

Introduction

As is often the case with children attending Sunfield, previous attempts had been made to support Steven in the community but his self-confidence and attitude towards school had gradually declined. This case study illustrates how Steven began to thrive when he received appropriate support, which came in the form of a day placement at Sunfield.

Background

Steven had endured a range of negative experiences, including bullying, before he came to Sunfield, which had left a lasting impression on his confidence. He viewed himself as 'the naughty boy' and was self-conscious and anxious about attending school. Sunfield Assessment and Outreach Service (SAOS) began to work with Steven's family and local authority, on a temporary basis, to support him in his current school until a placement became available at another school. However, the more Steven became involved in Sunfield, the more it became apparent that Sunfield was the right place to support Steven on a more permanent basis.

The Journey

Steven started attending Sunfield for just half a day per week, which was gradually increased over time. He was extremely anxious about how a new school would 'look' but he began to relax within the environment created by the SAOS team, which included his own individual learning space with the opportunity to interact with staff and peers at Sunfield, at his own pace.

A range of different strategies were used to support Steven's anxieties and concerns. His classroom, for example, was set up in the form of an office, where he had his own work desk, choice table, etc, and his work was presented as 'college work', because Steven felt that 'school work' was for children and he was a young man. His work system was a set of folders with numbers; Steven had a list of the order and would tick off each number as he completed his work. He also had his own pencil case, stationery and books, which gave him ownership of his 'stuff'.

He was encouraged to express his emotions through a 'talk time' book, in which he could write his thoughts, concerns, worries and happy thoughts and, if he chose to, at scheduled times in the day, he could share these with staff. He could also use colour to express his emotions; choosing red when he felt calm and purple when he was anxious or upset. The system worked well and soon Steven could articulate how he was feeling - for example, "I'm feeling a little bit purple now". This provided his team at Sunfield, and his family, with a vital platform to further explore how he felt, and introduce appropriate coping strategies.

The strategy of creating an individual learning space for Steven, with access to shared areas such a lounge and kitchen, proved to be highly successful, allowing Steven time and space to develop his confidence and self-esteem around his peers. He was soon joining in group activities. Steven began to achieve well, and was justifiably proud of his achievement certificates; making a scrap book to show his father, whom he hadn't seen for some time, so he could talk about the positive things in his life.

The Conclusion

As his confidence grew, Steven wanted to spend more and more time at Sunfield – remarkably, for a boy who had once been so fearful of school, he often didn't want to leave Sunfield at the end of the school day. His placement was therefore gradually increased to full time, with some respite care. This made a huge difference to his life and to that of his family who still struggled to find consistent, appropriate support for the days when Steven was not at Sunfield. However, by working with Sunfield, his family were soon able to more confidently manage any anxieties Steven had about life outside Sunfield, and more effectively support him during the time he spent at home.