



Artwork by Lara MacGillivray, Growing2gether Youth Advisory Board member

CASE STUDIES SERIES

Gillian

When Gillian started with the Growing2gether group I was instantly struck by the strength of the protective wall she had built around herself. School staff had mentioned to us that this girl seems to hardly ever smile, struggles with school but would really very much rather stay at home; has few friends and interactions with people and shows no interest in her own future.

At the start of the group Gillian kept herself very much to herself. When directly asked, she only gave one-word answers and never gave eye contact at all. She would sit hunched in her seat, head down staring at the table. The other group participants never reached out nor interacted with her.

After the Introductory session we headed to the Primary School for the first time. She decided to join a Primary class instead of the nursery and was introduced to the class teacher. She remained quiet and observed most of the time and



needed a lot of support from the facilitators to get involved. She was incredibly shy and self-conscious about any move she made. I wasn't at all sure that she would decide to continue with the programme.

But she did! It took about 4-5 weeks until Gillian started feeling more comfortable in the primary school classroom. The teacher was fabulously patient and gave her a variety of task to do, until she realised that Gillian was most comfortable with 1:1 work. With time, she felt increasingly confident to communicate with both the teacher, the children and her fellow participants.

Around week 6 Gillian began to bond with one particular child, who struggled at times in class with the tasks. They both saw something in each other and from then on, they were inseparable for the whole hour and a half. The teacher noticed a huge difference both in Gillian's confidence and in the child's behaviour when she was around. Gillian was talking freely to the children and the teacher and her help in the classroom was very much appreciated.

Parallel to this we noticed a difference in Gillian during our group time. Whilst not being part of either of the peer groups in the cohort, she started joining in discussions and making excellent contributions. The others started including her in their conversations and plans for the next class and more interactions started to develop. Her posture has changed and we also got to experience the lovely sense of humour she has. Gillian also finished her portfolio work with enthusiasm and great detail, showing obvious interest in her work.

A great triumph occurred when Gillian decided to organise further work experience in the community for herself. The difference in her confidence shows in her posture and her ability to take the initiative to make things happen.

In her own words: *"I really enjoyed it. I've become more confident and calm with working with other people and working with children. I'm more aware of what's going on around me and more focused on what I'm wanting to do in the future of my career choice. I've a strong opinion on what I'm wanting to do in the future".*