



Artwork by Cameron Macphail, Growing2gether Youth Advisory Board member

CASE STUDIES SERIES

Milly

The school was very keen for Milly to join Growing2gether; in S2 Milly was “getting into trouble and unable to focus or engage with school work”. On meeting Milly she was chatty, smiling, asked questions and generally interested in what the programme was about. *“I’m just glad to get out of lessons ... I hate school!”* So she was honest too. At the start she was quiet in the group except for talking over other people. When asked what she thought about a subject, she would shrug her shoulders and say she didn’t know. She teamed up with another group member. She said, *“It is too hard to sit still, all we are doing is having craic.”*

In the first 5 sessions Milly was full of energy and disruptive. In her journal she wrote *“I didn’t like it at first. I didn’t want to tell people about my life.”* And in the group she said, *“Social workers are always trying to get me to talk about things. They tell me what I have to do all the time. I really hate social workers. I don’t want to think about some things ... it makes me feel bad.”*



Milly loved the nursery experience and the children loved her. She was full of fun, kind, patient and empathic. She has a natural warmth so the children would involve her in their play and show Milly their delight by big displays of affection; hugs, smiles, high fives. The staff really liked Milly and valued her presence, praising her each week. *"Those two boys were getting into a bit of a fight. You sorted them out Milly. What did you say to them ... that was great."*

Sharing her experiences of the children with the others, she became more and more willing to talk and at the same time began to join in with all the activities and discussions. One week one of the others in the group 'told her story' about when she was young and looking after her sister when both parents would be sleeping as they were drug addicts. It was raw and shocking.

Milly's eyes filled up with tears and then she spoke. *"You should not have been treated like that ... it is terrible. When I have children, I will never let something like that happen. I know what you went through. I don't like talking about it but my mum is an alcoholic ...my dad too. I love them but they could not look after me properly. A child needs to be given food and have a normal life. I live with a foster carer now ... I am not going to drink or do drugs. I will have a drink on an occasion like a wedding but that's all"*. We all sat so still listening to Milly and then the others responded to her in very loving ways.

This was a real turning point for Milly. In our group learning time. She would suddenly say "I am doing that side talking again, aren't I?" Her interest in all the other group members changed and she began to listen and respond. She contributed to group discussion, no longer afraid to share her ideas.

Milly is getting into trouble a lot at home and at school. *"I am being real bad, I took some money from my carer and I am in trouble"*, she tells the group with a big grin but she refers to it off and on through the day and it is clear it is troubling her. *"I am just bad."* There are older young people in this group and they listen and respond without judgement.

Milly said the other day *"One of my teachers told me that I can't focus for more than 10 minutes ... well she is wrong isn't she? I think I am changing 'cos I am enjoying doing this work."*

We have been completing the Growing2gether portfolios and her motivation to achieve the qualification has unleashed a young person who last week focused for 2 and a half hours and did not take the school break. She was working beside a facilitator with whom she has built a strong trusting relationship.