



Artwork by Lara MacGillivray, Growing2gether Youth Advisory Board member

CASE STUDIES SERIES

Nicky

Nicky was identified by the Guidance team as someone who would benefit from a new and innovative experience which might give her a forum for re-engaging and believing in herself again. Nicky was not interacting well with her peers and her 'social anxiety' was reducing her ability to engage with school work. Her demeanour was head down, little eye contact and very shy and withdrawn. In the classroom she does her work but shows no real engagement with a topic and the staff report that she is 'behind' in her studies and at risk of failing.

Nicky is the eldest of a family of 6, appears to be the major carer, taking responsibility for her younger siblings. Additionally, living in a remote village about 15 miles from the school means that there is little or no opportunities for her to do other extra curricular activities. There is a very limited bus service; which is known to be a difficulty for social engagement in the Highland, The school had tried various ways to involve her in activities but with no success.



Nicky's mother suffers from depression and has a long history of drug taking and her father travels, working away most of the time. There are relatives in the village who call in from time to time but it would seem that the opportunities for social interaction are very limited.

Nicky is small, thin with blonde greasy hair covering her face in 'curtains'. On Growing2gether's first session her head was bowed and she had little or no eye contact. When she spoke it was barely audible and if asked to speak up, she would redden and shift her position in her chair and then usually reply monosyllabically.

In the Induction session held in school, she appeared very uncomfortable throughout and I did wonder if she would return the following week. I was surprised and delighted to see her as we set off walking up to the Primary School. I walked beside her and told her a little about what to expect. Just as we arrived at the Primary School, she told me that two of her brothers came to this school.

The first day, she stood above the children and looked a bit frozen to the spot, visibly uncomfortable and stressed. But when asked to set up the tables for snack by the nursery staff, she followed their instructions and as she went about this, she seemed to relax a little. It was very clear that she was used to tidying up and clearing away, so I suggested to the nursery staff that they give her 'jobs' to do each week as this might ease her into her role as a mentor more gently.

In the group, she would say very little but around week 5, one of the other young people who was working with her in a pair, told her that she was very pretty and that she should tie her hair back; especially around children as they couldn't see her face. It was a wonderful surprise when the following week she arrived with clean hair brushed and a little back off her face. At check-in time, everyone commented on how good she looked. I think this was a turning point.

In the nursery, she got on really well with one of the staff, who took her under her wing and asked her to sit next to a little girl at snack time. Similar to Nicky, the small child was new to the nursery and had no friends. Still looking a bit awkward as she sat next to the girl, Nicky did smile at her. In her diary that week she wrote about being 'asked to do something very important'. Another turning point. Sometimes the smallest intervention can make a remarkable difference and it had clearly touched Nicky.

Nicky came every week and began to sit next to 'the new little girl' at snack and at story time and as this little girl settled into nursery life, she would seek Nicky out each week. One week the child took Nicky by the hand to play in the kitchen corner. Nicky went willingly and her diary that day was much fuller as she described what they had done together.

I think that as Nicky did more and participated more in the nursery, she had more to share in our check-in after the nursery. She began to speak just a little at the check-ins. All the other group members listened carefully as she talked about the little girl and how she thought the child was and really needed her support. The week that we asked the young people to notice what qualities, strengths and skills they saw in each other, other group members gave Nicky a lot of genuine and positive feedback. She began to smile a little more and join in more. The biggest difference was that she started chatting, really chatting to the nursery staff!

Overall, Growing2gether proved to be a very positive experience and at the end she said to the group very audibly that “she had not known what to say to people but that she found out that anyone can feel that way and that she was not alone”. More recently, her guidance teacher spoke to me to say that there was a noticeable difference in her confidence generally and she had said she would like to sign up for the art club. We are delighted when the programme has such a strong impact and we see the young person re-engage with not only their education, but also with their community.