



Artwork by Lara MacGillivray, Growing2gether Youth Advisory Board member

## CASE STUDIES SERIES

# Susan

From the start Susan said that she enjoyed coming to Growing2gether and looked forward to seeing the children. She seemed a little removed from everyone in the group and did not speak up very much, appearing timid and quiet. It seemed strange that everyone else was in school uniform but she came in her own clothes each week. I learned that she was on a reduced timetable.

In the nursery her gentle manner and ability to chat easily to the children meant that the children quickly felt at home around her and before long she would have a group gathering around her every week. She was much more chatty with the children than among her peers. When I had the chance to talk to her alone on the way to the nursery, she was a little shy at first but as after 5 weeks she began to chat freely mostly about her dog and her younger 4 year old sister but said little more about herself.



Susan joined in all the activities of our group time a little unsure of who to pair with in pair work so would hang back until one of the other young people approached her. In a smaller group she would join in discussions and voice her opinions but did not like speaking up in front of the bigger group.

One week she appeared upset and quieter than usual so I asked her if she would be willing to have time with me on our own during nursery time. She said she did not feel ready to go to nursery so I sat with her awhile. When the others left she began to sob quietly and appeared very distressed.

She eventually told me about what was troubling her. Her mum was a single parent and they had moved to this area about a year earlier, leaving friends and family behind. The father of her little sister had been very abusive. Susan had witnessed physical violence towards her mother and she told me that they left in a hurry to a women's refuge.

They moved a couple more times and when Susan went to a new school she began to be bullied very badly, but at the time did not tell her mum as she did not want to upset her. The bullying got really bad and she refused to go to school saying she did not feel well. Her mum and her went through a very difficult time and they ended up arguing every day. She was afraid that her mum was going to throw her out. When she did go to school the bullying continued ... it was a group of girls. She told me that it was physical too. When her mum did find out, she decided to move her to a new school, telling the staff about what had happened at the last school. She was put on a reduced timetable as she would have sudden bouts of anxiety when she just wanted to go home and would walk out.

All this led up to Susan sharing how frightened she was and that she thought the bullying was about to start all over again at this school; she had made some good friends and then suddenly the day before they had refused to speak to her and she did not know what she had done. Again she felt she could not tell her mum. That day was a big turning point as immediately after the session she went to talk to Guidance and the next week she spoke out to the group about how she gets anxious.

The group were really supportive with others talking about their anxieties both at school and at home. Susan listened attentively to the others sharing their anxieties and was both surprised and comforted. She continued to attend regularly and towards the end began initiating conversations with her classmates and clearly had grown in confidence. She told the group that she feels she can be more open with everyone and her and her mum were getting on really well.

She told the group on the last day, *"I finally feel like I am OK as a person, I always thought everyone else was better than me but being in this group has helped me to try different things."*