



Artwork by Cameron Macphail, Growing2gether Youth Advisory Board member

## CASE STUDIES SERIES

### Tim

This 14-year old young man has Asperger Syndrome and finds many elements of school life very challenging. He has auditory sensitivity which means that certain classroom environments are quite uncomfortable for him. He also struggles with peer relationships and feels socially isolated. Very recently, in our group, Tim berated himself for 'not achieving as much as his fellow S3 pupils currently were'. The extent of his social discomfort led to serious consideration of home schooling in S2, but the school was happy to negotiate a reduced timetable which meant he was able to remain in mainstream education.

Tim is a very articulate and intelligent young man who has a high level of self awareness regarding his perceived difficulties; it was noticeable at check- ins that his vocabulary for describing his own emotional state was limited and his response tended to be fairly consistent. Considering the above information and joining as the only male in the group, he courageously took on an immense challenge.



At the start I had some concerns over his ability to get down to the children's level and truly integrate into the nursery. He was a little hesitant about doing this, so I ensured that I was in the vicinity should he need me and to reassure myself that I would know everything was as it should be. In the group there were some activities involving the sharing of feelings that he was not comfortable with but he was willing to share actual experiences and he was always a sensitive listener.

In Tim, we have principally seen a huge increase in his feelings of self worth; which has come from him successfully engaging in the nursery and with the small children. It has been a joy to witness his progress and to hear him express the self knowledge he has gained, regarding his experiences by the end of the programme.

He showed much more confidence to interact with groups of children by the end. For many weeks no other children would approach him, but when Tim was able to relax more, he became a bit of a magnet for some children and in particular a couple of boys. To begin, he experienced 'a sensory shock' in the room but he overcame the resultant anxiety and found a way to proceed. Almost immediately, the gentle and well-suited child he was asked to mentor warmed to Tim's gentle approach and this definitely helped Tim.

Tim was aware of my tendency to 'hover' and was able to politely decline help when he knew that he was coping. After the first two or three sessions in nursery when I did play alongside Tim and his child, I was able to relax and appreciate that he wanted to find his own way. I admire him for the way he has approached the challenge which he now acknowledges he wasn't sure that he would manage.

His confidence in his ability to form friendship bonds with peers in the group and to interact with the nursery staff is another major area where change has occurred. I have also observed the comfortable relationship he has enjoyed developing with the male facilitator with whom he was able to share some heart to heart discussions.

Everyone noticed all of these improvements. The nursery staff had never remarked on his initial hesitancy but were full of praise and recognition of the above in their end of programme report. Their clever and instinctive matching of Tim with a child whose first language was not English meant that Tim could make good use of his own love of language and assist the child to acquire more vocabulary and confidence.

In the final group session Tim volunteered to be coached about how Growing2gether had impacted him, which was brave and very revealing and honest. I was struck by his realisation that he had been 'made to feel a certain way about himself'; a judgement he is now able to step aside from and reject as truth. I feel certain that this knowledge will sustain him

through the next stage of his school path. His parental return mentions their pleasure that he managed to complete the 17-week programme.

Tim's Guidance teacher reports that in these past few months when Growing2gether was running he has had very little need to interact with Tim in order to support him.

From Tim:

*"I feel that I have changed immensely and from my interaction with the child I mentored I realise that non verbal communication is just as important as verbal.*

*I used to be disgusted by children but now I like them.*

*I have learned that I am patient and more kind than I have been made out to be.*

*I have enjoyed the social aspect the most ... I want to use these skills to make people happy."*