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| Fieldnote Note | 13 | Date | 07/06/21 |
| Locations | Bungalow 1  Outing | Weather | Hot and sunny weather |
| Child interactions | Dennis, Daniel, Brian, Graham, Jonny | Staff Interactions | Thelma, Mary and Christopher (Philippa briefly) |
| Times | 2pm -7.30 | Total Time in field | 5.5 hours |
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Arrived a little earlier than 2pm at Bungalow 1 today where Thelma and Mary were having their lunch in the kitchen, shortly joined by Christopher as well. There were lots of laughing and wind ups between the staff on today, with Christopher getting some stick for his poor level of cooking skills compared to the others. I was able to join in the chats and heard that they had continued the after-school park outings last week repeating it another twice. However, on the last occasion things went off plan and out of control with Daniel becoming ‘fixated’ on trying to hurt Jonny and then having to be held by two members of staff (Mary and Christopher) leaving the one remaining staff member to try and oversee the other 4 children who promptly exploited/reacted to the situation. Reinforcements had to be called in with a couple of managers coming over to help the staff team out. It sounded like it had been a difficult experience for all involved but, the staff got the children back and settled although Mary had to have a tetanus jag and a hospital check for bites. The staff know these children well and have a good understanding of their personalities and their needs. Even so, situations can sometimes unravel in unpredictable ways.

Philippa came in and the various combinations/activities were discussed: Christopher was scheduled to have some one-to-one time with Jonny after school, Mary was taking Daniel and Graham to a park, and Thelma was staying on campus with Dennis and Brian. I agreed to go with Mary and the two boys today to the park. Christopher headed off earlier to cycle down to the school so that he could cycle back up with some of the boys who had cycled in this morning. Once they had left, I spent about 10 minutes chilling out and then went and sat on the front stoop to watch the children arriving back from school.

Eva waved over to me with her purple stookie still on her arm. The boys from Bungalow 1 arrived and were in and around the front door and in and out of the bungalow as the various preparations were made for the various activities. At one point, I found myself standing at the front door and just listening to the conversations between the children and staff in the various parts of the bungalow (in the kitchen, up at the office) and noting the dynamics between all of these individuals who a) clearly know each other really well and b) care for each other. There were lots of jokes, wind-ups, clarifications, calming, reasoning, and planning parts to the conversations.

Shortly after this me, Mary, Graham and Daniel headed to the car where there was some initial organisation in the car in terms of getting the sat nav working, ensuring seatbelts were on etc. The drive to the part took approximately 25 minutes and, during this time, I engaged mainly with Daniel in the backseat, allowing him access to my wifi so that he could look up the cost of getting his iPad screen fixed. Graham played on his kindle in the front and Mary chatted to both boys and responded to the various questions that arose during the journey.

At the park, Mary commented on how good a mood Daniel was in – the best she’d seen him in for a while. By and large, he and Graham played well together. There were many occasions where Daniel was very caring and kind towards Graham – giving him a head start in races, hugs between them and general joint engagement in activities. This is not to say that there was no needle at all – that did come up from time to time. Mary engages so well with these boys – there’s a lot of in jokes and wind ups with them as well as a fair bit of physical play. She also uses sweet names for the children ‘my lovely’ and the like. We went to see some peacocks that live in the part and both boys quizzed the woman who works at the centre, and she was very patient and kind with them.

After we’d spent some time wandering about the pond, the glass houses, and then the peacocks, we headed up towards the play park so the boys could play before we went back for dinner. After having been denied an ice cream, Graham decided he was too tired to walk and, after some negotiation, the deadlock was broken by me and Mary giving both boys piggyback rides up the hill to the park.

Both boys headed into the park and played together and separately with other children on the various chutes and swings etc. I took the opportunity to chat to Mary about her experience last week and commented on the bruising that was visible to her arms. She went into some detail about the incident and talked about how stressful it was because it was in a public place and she and Christopher had to ‘safe hold’ Daniel while some of the teenagers and members of the public commented or filmed them saying things like ‘that’s child abuse’. Understandably, this makes her feel really bad and she is wary of wearing a lanyard or saying ‘we’re his carers’ because a lot of the children don’t like to be labelled/stigmatised in relation to their care situation. She noted that she feels worse for Daniel than she thinks he feels – because he is on the autistic spectrum, he gets very fixated on something and doesn’t really take in the extraneous details and so doesn’t seem to bother about the fact there was an audience etc. I asked her about the processes (professional and personal) for dealing with any feelings/thoughts etc that come up after such an incident. She discussed the formal debrief session, which she felt was useful but could sometimes feel a ‘bit blamey’ in the sense of ‘what could you have done differently etc’. While she understands the need to learn from incidents, she did think that sometimes situations cannot be predicted and that a random conversion of events/interactions can sometimes produce situations. On the personal side of things, she has been reflecting on how she felt towards Jonny, who was the one really winding up Daniel and inflaming the situation. She felt quite upset about Jonny as he could see she was being hurt by Daniel but continued to act like that and, so, she’s had to work that through. She’s also had to explain to her partner that it’s not the children’s ‘fault’ or deliberate – him being understandably worried by the fact she’s had quite a serious bite wound to her leg. A few minutes after this conversation, Mary is talking about how much she loves this job and I commented that this must speak to how much she gets from this job that such serious incidents don’t dent her enthusiasm. She agrees and then has to go and give the boys a time check so that they can start to think about leaving soon (preparation).

I watch her interact with both the boys from a distance and the positive responses of each to the other is clear in the body language and tone of voice – encouraging, supportive, fun, etc.

Daniel was in the front for the ride back given that Graham had been so on the way out. I’m not sure, but I get the sense that Mary was attempting to get through the journey and get back home before Daniel’s behaviour became problematic – he was saying he was hungry and looking for hand gel and various other things and she kept pointing out – ‘only 12 minutes and we’ll be back’, ‘look only 6 minutes to go’. It seemed to me that this was a way of helping him to manage his feelings and know what was happening.

Back at campus, it seemed that dinner was waiting for us because Brian and Dennis approached quickly on their bikes and were in the bungalow by the time we got out of the car – I assume they had been told that dinner would be out when we got back. Hands were washed, including mine, and then me, Brian, Mary, Graham, Daniel, Christopher and Dennis were at the table enjoying a lovely meal (Italian meatballs with spaghetti and garlic bread) that Thelma had prepared for us. Jonny seemed to be getting his bath and had maybe eaten already – I got a sense he was being ‘manged’ a bit differently for whatever reason. There was some good chat around the table, and, in many ways, it was not unlike what one would expect around a family dinner table with children of these age – lots of side conversations and sudden changes in subject.

I was sitting next to Brian and across from Graham. There’s no denying that Graham enjoys his food and is a messy eater – he had pasta sauce everywhere in a short space of time! Interestingly, Brian was commenting on how he had managed to get pasta sauce above his eye but the way in which he does this almost seems parent-like; he was taking on or emulating the adults that he lives with. It reminded me of him explaining how Daniel gets fixated on things to me last week - he does this in such a way as to be parent or staff like. As the oldest boy in the bungalow (13), this is perhaps unsurprising. Mary had mentioned today how he had tried to help with the incident last week, but they can’t allow him to ‘put hands’ on other children. Maybe he’s at that stage of development where he wants to be older, or seen as older, to have a different position within the group.

After dinner, there was some lovely interaction between Mary and Thelma and Dennis in the front room. Thelma had agreed to take Dennis and Brian to the local tennis courts as they had played really well together that day. In getting the car keys from Mary to give to Thelma, Dennis had to tell Mary how much he loved her (at her insistence) ‘a thousand, no a million’ came the response. Keys were handed over, ‘I was being sarcastic’ then, quickly, ‘no I wasn’t’ before he gave the keys to Thelma and ran back for more hugs with Mary. Lots of physical contact.

After Thelma, Dennis and Brian left, I was tidying up the kitchen when Jonny asked if I could ‘spend some time with him’. After checking it was ok with Christopher, I went to Jonny’s room where he was playing Minecraft on his Xbox. In total, I was in the room for about 1hour and 10 minutes and for the overwhelming majority of this time, he was just doing his own thing on the game. This was interspersed with some comments about what he was doing in the game and some interactions we had about music. He made a wee comment about his gran and also a wee one about his mum – nothing major. I was reflecting in the moment that when he said ‘spend time with me’, it seemed enough for me just to sit there and watch what he was doing. I also had the revelation that I could maybe get him to build his version of the residential unit in the game – bit he does/doesn’t like, bits he’d change/improve etc.

Thelma couldn’t believe I was still there. I expressed that I learned a little something about Minecraft tonight before making my goodbyes – Graham was hugged at his request.