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| Fieldnote Note | 7 | Date | 16/5/21 |
| Locations | Bungalow 2Outing to various places | Weather | Cloudy at first, but became sunny and quite warm |
| Child interactions | [one of the children], Eva, Junior and Brian | Staff Interactions | Helen, Mick, Blane and Sally |
| Times | 9am – 6pm | Total Time in field | 7 hours |

Arrived this morning to a pretty chilled out bungalow – Blane was finishing up having been on the sleepover and left shortly after I arrived. Sally was on, who I hadn’t seen since my informal visit before Christmas, and she told me to help myself to a coffee. Mick was also on in Bungalow 2 with Sally and Helen was the ‘senior on duty’ and so was across different bungalows. Mick was up trying to do something in the office for the first 20 minutes or so.

Dom spends the weekends with his parents, so it was [one of the children], Eva and Junior in the lounge with Sally watching the Minecraft film. Eva was on the couch with Sally and [one of the children] was in a beanbag at the other side of the lounge. Junior was moving around chatting with some chocolate smeared over his face. I took a beanbag and settled myself into the group. There was some fun interaction between the children and Sally who was engaging with them in between asking me questions as well. Junior seemed the more active out of the three children and it transpired that this was an escalating thing as we moved ever closer to 10am when he would be allowed some time on his X-box. In the meantime, both Sally and Mick tried to encourage him to wash the chocolate off his face. He was quite resistant at first and, based on his responses, Sally and Mick questioned whether he was feeling grumpy today. This was denied by Junior. The two members of staff used humour with him, and he eventually gave in but not before “bordering on cheeky” with Sally.

Eva seemed largely engrossed in the film and [one of the children] chatted to me sporadically, asking me if I had pets and what I might be doing today. The general chat suggested that Junior and Eva were going trampolining today with Sally, who was on an app trying to see if she could book a slot. [one of the children] seemed to want to go trampolining, but they were out on activities yesterday and so the plan was that Mick would stay on campus with them today. Sally gave me the remote at one point as Eva was hogging it, but it was quickly taken off me by Junior and then subsequently reacquired by Sally – I wondered what she thought about my lack of conviction at keeping the remote.

A short while later, while Junior and Eva had started to get ready, Sally beckoned me into the playroom to see if I would like to go with her, Eva and Junior to the trampolining, to which I easily agreed. While we were in there she told to be aware that [one of the children] can put inappropriate videos on Youtube – animals hurting each other or having sex and that [one of the children] had recently killed one of the chickens on campus. This conversation had many dimensions. Firstly, it explained why [one of the children] was staying on campus for one-to-one time with Mick. Secondly, Sally implied that if staff move about (such as to put something in the kitchen etc) and I find myself alone in the lounge with [one of the children] that I should be prepared to intervene to stop such videos being played and/or alert staff. Thirdly, the conversation was undertaken in such a way as to ‘bring me in’ to the staff group. I had a lot of mixed emotions about this situation and the topics discussed. I was struggling with the behaviour of hurting animals morally, worried about what that meant for [one of the children] in terms of what was going on for them, and a bit anxious about my role and how I was viewed.

For a time in the lounge when [one of the children] was watching Youtube, I found myself anxiously scanning the titles of the videos for anything untoward. As it turned out, they mainly watched a series of daft TikTok videos, sometimes repeatedly, settling on ones where I maybe laughed at something. As the morning rolled on, I realised that there are still some elements of this job that might be tedious. I heard Junior being upset/angry about something down the hallway and Mick intervening and talking to him. ‘There are ways of asking things that don’t involving kicking and shouting’ – seemed like a nice, calm response and he seemed to be quite effective at this in the sense that Junior calmed quickly.

Shortly after this, Eva was getting her shoes on and her, Junior, me and Sally were off in the car heading first of all to a motor racing track [data redacted for confidentiality]. In the car, Sally interacted with Eva (sitting shotgun in the front) and with Junior (who was behind her with me in the back). The track was not far away and we arrived there relatively quickly. Both of the children seemed to react well to Sally who seemed to me to be clear in her decision-making and quick in explaining those decisions that were disagreed with.

These were super-fast motorbikes that were on the track, and they were loud and noisy as the sped past us once we’d taken up our position to watch. Sally interacted with the children and with me at various times, the noise requiring close proximity to enable any conversation. More chat was had while things changed over and then small snippets of conversation during the times when the bikes were racing.

After a while, we headed back to the car in order to begin the one-hour drive to the trampolining park/centre. Junior was in the back with me again a after a short discussion with Sally, had negotiated access to her mobile phone in order to play a game. In this interaction, the history of relationship between Sally and Junior was evident. There were clear parameters for him being allowed her phone, which he understood and respected. Any game downloaded had to be appropriate for age 7 and under, which I checked for any he wanted to download. Every time he downloaded a game, he had to delete the previous one. He largely amused himself with various games during the journey, occasionally asking me to watch him play or see what he had done. Eva got music on in the front and chatted with Sally and me at various points. We spotted lambs in the field and new forests that had been planted while we discussed a range of topics. Again, Sally seems on it with the children – explains things that need to be explained, is firm when she needs to be firm, uses a lot of soft language and names with them – ‘sweetheart’ etc.

We arrived early at our destination and Sally went with Eva in to sign the disclaimer forms etc. in the place and then came back out. We located a nearby Greggs and headed there to get a sausage roll and kill some time until it was our ‘slot’ (2.30pm). Back at the trampoline centre, once tickets and special non-slip socks had been obtained both of the kids and I went into the hall – which was a huge soft play/trampoline paradise for children. Junior was a bit reluctant to get on the trampolines at first as we had gone in a bit early, and he seemed sure we would get rumbled and thrown out. Eva was off! I managed to encourage Junior to get onto some of the equipment eventually having first jumped about on the trampolines myself. After a short while, he started to explore and go on various bits of equipment. I spent about half an hour in there watching him and Eva play – sometimes with/near each other, sometimes apart. Eventually, I decided to go out and spend some time chatting with Sally – not least because it was very hot in the hall, and I felt like I stuck out a bit like a sore thumb.

Outside, Sally and I were standing with the bags, coats etc in the foyer area as there were no seats available in the canteen bit. I mentioned Junior’s initial reluctance and she told me a bit about the children’s’ background and some of the struggles they have and continue to have at times. Sally is a [type of worker], and she has worked at the organisation for around [an amount of] years [redacted for confidentiality]. She told me (when I asked) that she did like the job but she didn’t think she could do it fulltime as she thought she might burnout with the intensity of it. She felt things should be ‘firmer’ with the children and that they should be making more of a concerted effort at teaching them life skills that will help them in later life such as about money. She felt that [one of the children] should have proper therapy and we discussed the worrisome nature of her recent behaviour towards animals. Overall, I got the impression that Sally has strong views about how children should be cared for that are based mainly on her own experiences as a parent: ‘I tend to judge it on the basis that, if my boys wouldn’t get away with it, then neither should these children’. This was not just about problematic behaviour but also about over-protectiveness – ‘you have to let children climb trees and take risks’.

As we stood there and talked about different things, one or other of the children would periodically appear for a drink of juice. A staff member from the centre advised us they had opened up one of the rooms used for parties as the canteen was full and that we could get a seat in there. We took the stuff in there and then Sally waited about in the foyer for about 20 minutes or so until Eva arrived and then brought her round and showed her where we were going to be sitting. She asked Eva to find Junior and let him know that we had moved so he would know where to find us. After she had gone to get a coffee, Sally and I chatted about a range of things including Covid, our own childhood experiences, and the nature of the work at the organisation. I get the overall impression of Sally as a kind of ‘no nonsense’ woman. I wasn’t always personally comfortable with some of her positions on things, but the children seem to respond well to her – consistent and predictable approach again? About 20 minutes later again, Junior arrived in the room with a staff member from the centre and Eva trailing behind. Apparently, he had been waiting in the foyer and got a fright when we were not there. Eva said she had been unable to find him when she went back in, although maybe she forgot to say to him altogether? I felt a bit flustered and guilty about this situation as did Sally who apologised to Junior and made eye contact with me in a way as to communicate ‘oh no’. When I thought about it, it struck me as a situation that may be quite typical for any family but there was an added edge to this because it’s *not* family, it’s *work*. Sally was very good with Junior and reassured him that she would ‘never leave him there’ and that he ‘should know that she would never leave him, or Eva’. He calmed quickly but continued to ‘milk’ Sally’s guilt (her words) and she made a joke about this with him as we went out to the car.

On the way back, Eva was with me in the back and Junior got to go in the front and to play a game on Sally’s phone. Eva and I compared scars on our hands and arms in the back and saw who could move their fingers in the weirdest ways – she definitely won.

Shortly before we arrived back on Campus, Sally received a call from Helen who relayed some issue with picking up Simone and Sally agreed to deal with this situation once she had dropped Eva and Junior off.

Mick asked if I was having tea with them and I decided yes as Helen had made steak pie. Tea was pretty quiet – Junior and Eva ate hardly anything. [one of the children] told us that they had been chopping/cutting wood and doing some bushcraft with Mick while we had been away. We talked about the motorbikes and trampolining. The kids went off to sort out their baths. I managed to have a bit of chat with Helen while helping her in the kitchen, advising that I was going to the school tomorrow. She noted how she felt the school and the residential are ‘very different’ and, interestingly, that she felt ‘sorry for’ the school because they are trying to do something and it is quite difficult. I noted my surprise and told her about my impression that they can at least compare themselves to mainstream/other education while the residential staff have a trickier time comparing themselves to ‘home’ or to ‘parents’ and asked whether this made things more difficult to define. She said that they do try to make it homely for the children and that it used to be much more institutional – she thinks it has definitely changes for the better. She noted that when she first started, she adapted to the ‘institutional ways’ because ‘when you’re a new member of staff, you adapt… otherwise you’re seen as a trouble maker’.

I had a quick chat with Mick also and then headed off while the children were getting their baths.