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| Fieldnote Note | 6 | Date | 11/5/21 |
| Locations | Bungalow 2Bungalow 3Campus | Weather | Cloudy for the first half of the day and then quite sunny from about 3pm onwards – 15/16C |
| Child interactions | [one of the children], Dom, Dennis, Brian and Norman | Staff Interactions | Ronnie, Quin, Helen, Karly, Martha, Millerton, and Pru |
| Times | 1pm – 7.30pm | Total Time in field | 6.5 hours |

Arrived on campus and met Millerton on my way in and was chatting to him at the front for a few minutes before heading into Bungalow 2. The shopping had just been delivered from ASDA and was being put away in a team effort by Helen, Karly and Ronnie. There was some general milling around by various workers. I noticed Dennis running up the skateboard thing (the U bend thing – I don’t know what it’s called) – he was sick last night and it’s a 48-hour thing. I noted how well he looked now, and the staff agreed (he would later tell me, chuffed, that he’d be off again tomorrow as it’s a 48-hour thing and they don’t want it passed around school). I asked about Daniel and found out that he had refused to go to school again today and so they are trying to make it as ‘boring as possible’ for him to see if they can make school more appealing to him.

Florence came over and she was the ‘senior on duty’ today, which is a role that takes the lead on organising what staff will work where and with what children. She had a conversation with Millerton about all the ins and outs of who was in and what children had to be taken to clubs/appointments etc. The idea of taking Dom and [one of the children] out on a cycle was floated but was uncertain as those two children can ‘bounce off each other’ and it can be difficult for both of them to spend time together. Other conversations in the kitchen included a discussion about coming moves for children – Serge is moving to a residential unit nearer to his mother so that contact can be increased. Florence was a bit upset as the panel increased this by an hour per month and she felt that could have been facilitated by them and saved him a move, especially given that he’s settled. That move is coming up very soon. This led on to a discussion about a move being planned for Jonny who ‘basically has no family’ with his grandfather having recently died and his grandmother terminally ill. While it was assessed ‘that his needs could be met elsewhere’ by others within the SW Department, Florence felt it was an economical (cheaper placement) decision rather than a needs-based one and she worried about what it would mean for Jonny who has settled. Everyone in the room, including me, felt worried about this and aggrieved about these types of situations. I got a sense from the staff, and especially from Florence, of a real protectiveness about these children and genuine concern about whether the right decisions were being taken for them.

I went with Florence to attend the short managers meeting at 1.30 in Bungalow 3 where Quin and Philippa were also in attendance. They discussed the different permutations of staff and children in each of the bungalows tonight – ‘Mick will be later in as he thought Barbara was picking him up, when she thought she was only dropping him off later’, ‘Junior is coming here to play with James, we’ll give him his tea here and he can come back after’. It was an interesting discussion where the staff think through the planned interactions between the children and staff for the shift to come. Interestingly, two of the children were asking for more contact with children – they’d had a lot of one-to-one contacts with adults recently and one was quoted as saying ‘I mean, I like you, but you’re not a child’. I’ve had the impression that some of the children really crave adult attention but there are others who want to play with other kids and the staff try to figure this out. They were going to match up Norman (who I haven’t really had a chance to get to know) and Barry, who I had started to make a connection with last year on my visits but haven’t seen since I’ve been back yet. At the end of the meeting, I talked about my plans for the coming week – to come back Sunday on campus and then to arrange to be at the school. This led to a productive discussion on consent, and it turns out that all of the children in Bungalow 1 have consent in place and moves are afoot to get most in Bungalow 3 as well. This means that I can try to get some time in EdTeam2’s class as most children in that would have consent in place as well. I got the feeling that people are really on board with me.

Walking back from Bungalow 3 to Bungalow 2, I had a chat with Quin who was asking about how I was getting on. He has a good grasp of the research as I was saying how much I had enjoyed sitting watching the interaction with Daniel and Dom yesterday and noting how it’s important for the staff to step back where possible and he was reassuring Ronnie the other day who was worried that ‘nothing was going on’ while I was there – ‘Andrew’s here to look at the everyday, and that is a normal day’. So that’s reassuring.

I wasn’t quite sure what to do with myself after this as staff had gone in different directions, so I thought I’d take the opportunity to go to my car and vape quickly before any children came back from school. I noticed a few of the staff heading out in different cars to pick up their respective children. As I walked back, I noticed Quin and Ronnie milling about at the front chatting to each other and to Dennis who was also going about with his NERF gun (that fires wee polystyrene bullets). On seeing this, I thought I would hang about here too to try and see how the children arrive and to see more of them so that they know that I’m about. I mentioned this to Quin when I was chatting to him and he told me he does this as well as it helps get the staff off on time to pick the children up and also he can see how the children are when they return – what kind of day they’ve had etc. As we chatted with each other and interacted with Dennis who was engaging us in discussions about how far he could fire the bullets from his gun, how high etc. Quin engaged him really well and seemed to have a good relationship with him, patient, explaining things, pretty chilled out over all and it was clear that Dennis was seeking him out for this interaction. Soon after, Ronnie appeared, and Quin left with him to attend to something while Dennis engaged with Andy – Andy used to work in the residential about 10 years ago but no longer does. However, he has stayed on in a caretaker role, looking after the campus and buildings etc.

Dennis was pressuring Andy to mount his clock to the wall in his room while Andy was trying to deal with the tradesmen who were on campus fitting new carpets and doing some other work in the bungalows. He was very patient and engaging with Dennis and shortly went into the bungalow with him along with his drill to complete the works demanded by Dennis. They arrived out a few minutes later where Andy let Dennis drill a few screws into a raised bed (for plants) outside the bungalow. He kept him under close supervision and chatted to him about the type of work he does etc and how he could go on to work with tools when he’s older if he ‘sticks in at school’. Dennis looked to me like he was loving this activity and was reassuring Andy that he well knew how to use a drill already.

Andy noticed me taking notes and came over and chatted to me for a while and I explained what I was doing and asked him a bit about his background etc. We talked about the ‘toughness’ of this work and he lamented service cuts (when I mentioned I used to work in addictions). Some of the children started to arrive back including Eva who was going to do some planned piece of work with Karly (supervised by Ronnie), which was part of Karly’s placement I think and involved some treats for Eva who was suitably excited. [one of the children] arrived back as well and headed up to Bungalow 2. I hadn’t seen Junior as he arrived back in a car that went further up the road so didn’t pass me on his way back. Millerton was down at the school to pick up Dom but hadn’t arrived back yet.

Having positioned myself outside, I wasn’t quite sure where everyone had gone so wandered about the campus a bit and saw Helen and Norman feeding the chickens and ducks with another worker I hadn’t met (Mave). As Helen came back towards Bungalow 2 the chickens and ducks followed her as she said ‘come on girls’. I followed her through the small archwayed path to Bungalow 2 where [one of the children] was running about and trying to get the chickens to chase her. Ronnie was there also and I think he was the adult that was with [one of the children]. We had what felt like a slightly awkward conversation about growing fruit and I had a sense that maybe something else was going on and Ronnie was filling in for someone on the supervisory role. [One of the children] asked me to take them to play on the climbing frame on another part of the campus and I reminded them that I’m not the ‘right sort’ of adult. I followed them and Ronnie round to the climbing frame, which again felt a little awkward but I’m keen to try and maintain my distinction as a ‘non-worker adult’. I’m happy to play with the children but I am wary of supervising them on my own.

Not long on the climbing frame, [one of the children] asked if I would go on the trampoline with them and, after checking this was ok with Ronnie, spent a bit of time bouncing and tumbling around on the trampoline, which was exhausting! (but lots of fun actually – both of us were laughing a lot during this activity). Helen swapped over with Ronnie and gave me an out ‘are you needing a wee rest Andrew’ and I came out. I think our laughing had attracted the attention of Norman who came over and developed an interest in the trampoline and he and [one of the children] played on that – initially together and then taking turns trying to do somersaults. Me and Mave watched them, and they were keen to have our attention when. Martha arrived out of the back door of Bungalow 3 and joined us. Once [one of the children] was out, they started questioning where Millerton (and Dom) were as the bike ride had been mentioned and they were keen to go. [data removed as consent could not be established] As we moved down towards the front of Bungalow 1, Barry was heading up the other side with some other and waved over and shouted hello to me and I waved back – he was heading up to Bungalow 3 for his play date with Norman where I think they had some cooking/baking planned.

[Data removed as consent could not be established] We agreed to go back to the trampoline where Martha managed to convince [one of the children] to try various tricks and exercises on the trampoline, which were working as a distraction. The big trampoline, as it turns out, is right near the kitchen of Bungalow 3.

The kitchen door opened and Norman, in full striped apron asked if we would like something to eat and took our orders. Before we knew it, Barry was serving us pancakes with syrup! There followed a lovely wee interaction between Barry and Norman (and Mave) who were in the kitchen with the door open and [one of the children], Martha and me who were sitting on a bench. The boys seemed to be enjoying their cooking/baking activity immensely and relishing being able to provide food for us. They were super charming and cute in their aprons and the lovely polite interaction between them and [one of the children] was nice to see and be a part of. I ended up with a bowl of pasta and tomatoes from Norman.

Millerton arrived back and detailed some hold up at the school with Dom and a short while later, him, [one of the children], Dom and I were getting into the big SUV with two bikes on top and two fixed to the back. Philippa was out the back of Bungalow 1 playing with a football with Dennis, the sun was shining. It took about 40 minutes to get to the place we were going to start our cycle and it’s fair to say that it can get a bit tense between [one of the children] and Dom – a lot of small stuff, bickering, arguing over nothing etc (Dom in the front having won the coin toss and elected for front on the way there rather than the way back). While this can be typical behaviour for 10/11yos who live together, there’s an edge to it, a tension, where even I am already aware that it has the potential to get more serious. Millerton is really good at managing it – firm at times but also distracting, moving them on to other topics etc. It did feel like a ‘normal’ parenting situation, or certainly a parenting situation with which I am familiar. ‘Right, you two, will I turn around and go back? Is that what we have to do to solve this?’ The bickering continued in ebbs and flows, rising and falling, never becoming anything worrisome in itself but still with that rise and fall of tension within me – I wondered how easy it was to be ‘therapeutic’ (whatever that means) when you experience this kind of tension regularly in your working day.

Once at the canal, we embarked on what would turn out to be a 14-mile cycle – 7 miles out and 7 miles back with a couple of breaks for water etc each way. When Millerton mentioned the cycle, he thought it could work as the two children are never really next to each other and we worked it so that one of us was between them and instinctively managed the pace and the separation between us. It’s fair to say that there were flash points between the two children throughout and also with Dom being a bit cheeky to passers-by and things but, overall, I got the sense that this went relatively smoothly especially for this combination of children. Millerton was quick to point out various wildlife – Coots nesting, Cormorants diving, ducks with their ducklings etc. The children were interested in this – perhaps [one of the children] more so than Dom – and certainly me more so than the children! I thought it was a great activity. Physical exercise, interacting with people, seeing wildlife and nature, discussing old boats, the locks etc.

On the way back, [one of the children] was trying to keep a good pace but Dom, not wishing to relinquish pole position, swerved left to right in front to stop anyone passing him and slowing everyone down at the same time. I felt myself slightly frustrated for [one of the children] as I suspected they may be able to beat him in a flat race but was being denied the opportunity by what I felt was unfair play – the children often talk about fairness and it’s come up in how some of the staff discuss interactions with and between the children and how they manage this and here I was experiencing this feeling of things not being fair for a child. I managed to pass Dom and cycled hard and he peddled away to keep up and chat to me – gave me a bit of cheek and took opportunities to say swear words, which doesn’t really bother me and [one of the children] got some space to cycle while I did this. Millerton eventually managed to wangle it so that they got past and they managed to build up a healthy lead. Dom expressed his unhappiness at this traitorous behaviour by Millerton once he had given up trying to catch up with [one of the children].

Back at the car, the bickering and arguing over essentially nothing continued while I tried to help Millerton get the bikes back into their various racks. Dom insisted on sitting directly behind [one of the children] rather than behind Millerton as had been the reverse case on the way there. Millerton did try to get him to move as he suspected he would try to provoke [one of the children] from this position. It was a similar situation on the way back as the way there only this time Dom was in the back and took the opportunity to grab and touch me repeatedly – I’ve been getting better at being able to discourage him from doing this as he has a general disregard for personal space. It got a bit tense towards the end of the journey with Dom shrieking every time we went through any traffic lights – thankfully they were few and far between. We generally stayed quiet and did not react with only Millerton intervening with stern words from time to time if it was getting a bit much.

Back at the campus, the children ran up to the bungalow to get their tea and Millerton high-fived me ‘we made it’! The tension is real. I gather my things and said goodbye to the children and staff.