One-to-one chat 1 MARY 12/2/21

ANDREW: ...chatting, and I know I sent you the wee information leaflet and there's a range of information in there. There's probably two things that are really important. I would just point out and they're related: consent and confidentiality. So the consent side of things, as I've been saying to people when I have been meeting them -  although [org] has agreed to this, you've got, you are absolutely entitled to give or withdraw consent as you see fit. It's completely up to you as an individual, so although you've agreed to have a chat with me today, that's fine. You may decide tomorrow. Actually, I'm not happy with that. You can come back to me and say, look, I take my data out and I don't want to be involved and you don't have to explain to me why or anything like that... it's just, ethically, we need to give participants as much power as possible with this kinda stuff

MARY: Yeah, absolutely of course

ANDREW: So actually, the consent requirements for you guys is the same mentality as I would have for the kids in terms of consent so that you, you know, it's it's really up to you.. and you can be involved in some things like this wee chat today and not in other things or in other things, you can pick and choose and I'll often when I'm there, when I'm there, hopefully when I'm there soon. If I'm in a situation I'll always check with folk 'are you alright if I write that down, or make a note of that, just to remind folks I'm doing research and collecting data so

MARY: yeah, of course.

ANDREW: ...that there’s much control as possible... and related to that is confidentiality. So we are the minute I  type it all up, I change your name immediately and we'll no name [org]. So whenever we produce reports it will just be a residential school in Scotland the names will be changed and stuff like that

MARY: right, ok

ANDREW: so nobody say outside of [org] should know anything. The only thing the limits of confidentiality with you guys or know each other really well. So when you look at my report you may recognise something somebody else has said because you know them, they've told you that story as well. So even though I've changed their names, you may know each other, so that's a limitation in confidentiality as well.

MARY: Yes,

ANDREW: Are you alright to go ahead on that basis then?

MARY: Yeah, of course.

ANDREW: So when I was meeting with, the teams I found out quite a lot of information about how things actually work at [org] but I was quite interested to know, you know, we're interested in everyday care and how that comes about and one of the aspects about that that I'm quite interested in is, how workers came to work at [org]?  How did that come about, you know, and how's it been since they since they first started kinda thing? So I wondered if we could start and I'll, I'll keep it strictly to 30 minutes today, but I wondered if we could start, if you could tell me what you were doing before you came to work at [org]and then how you came to be there?

MARY: Yeah, of course. Um. So I did an undergrad degree in psychology and [city] Uni and I graduated in 2019. And I was looking for. I was thinking I was going to educational psychology. So, I was kind of looking for like school experience. But I was interested in like adverse childhood experiences and things which is quite hard to find with no experience. So I applied for the educational support worker role down at the school and I got the job there. Started in August 2019 and I worked there for a year in the schools as an education support worker. Erm, around January, so after doing that for about four months or so, um, I decided to come up here as sessional, because I'm really interested in like trying to see the care side of it. And actually, the more that I was part of [org], I thought that I would probably be better on the care side. So, I applied for sessional, which a few people do down at the school - pick up shifts up the road. So, started that in January and then I was just doing more and more shifts up here and then a full-time position came up in September last year. No August last year sorry. And so I applied for that and then made the move from education support worker to full time care worker here in [bungalow 1]

ANDREW: right.

MARY: So that's just come up for six months now that I’ve been full time here

ANDREW: and how have you been finding it so, since you made that move?

MARY: Yeah, really, really good… erm, like I said, I think it’s just more suited to me as a person. I like that you have more responsibility here. I love the key working role. Like that's really important to me. I like the way the teams work here because, like, it is different from the school. You work with the same four people in the school. Every single day and, and obviously we’re all working it in exactly the same way, trying to encourage the kids with their schoolwork… erm, but up here you kinda have more freedom and choice and everybody is kind of playing to their strengths on the team and making sure there's good dynamics. So, I've really enjoyed that coming up here. I feel like I’m more of my own person…

ANDREW: yeah, that's an interesting thing that’s coming through actually. And just in the way that you talk about that, you talk about the kind of person that you are, and that this has been more suited to. I wondered if you could say about more about that, about what you mean by that and how that looks?

MARY: Yeah, well, I think that like I’m really playful… and I just love having fun with the kids. Like, I'm 23, so I still see myself as quite young and the kids definitely see me as still quite young. And there is opportunities for play at the school. But I kinda feel like I was so much better at that kind of thing, like playing with them and encouraging them… And actually, it was probably down to personal interest as well - that education wasn't something that I was really interested in. So, although I liked helping them with it and that, you do get a good sense of achievement when they’re achieving… erm, I just felt like my relationships were better with the kids when I was playing with them and when we were, like they have an activity day one day a week at the school. And I felt like those were things I was having the best fun with children, building the best relationships with them. And so, I think being up here I’m more suited to that.

ANDREW: Yeah, you know it's, and it’s interesting because I was thinking, you know you, your background, obviously a degree in psychology will have given you a certain set of knowledge and whatever else; but it sounds, the way you describe that, 'cause you were interested in educational psychology, you applied for the educational job, but actually through the experience you’ve, you’ve maybe found stuff out about yourself and what you’re into?

MARY: Yeah

ANDREW: could you say anything about that interaction between your, your previous, past…

MARY: Yeah, absolutely. I think um, one thing that's really important for me is, I had no experience of this kind of residential setting... And, actually, I was really quite naïve. And blindsided about you know anything really for looked after children. Even when I came for my interview here, I don't think I was entirely clear on actually what the setup was… erm, and I just think since then just my interests and everything have changed. Like, I'm so passionate about helping these children and I just see their potential and really want to invest in that. And I think that was a switch for me is and I think you realize as well. So obviously the, the education that children have here is very limited and you start to realize actually it's not all about just what they can attain academically, you know we’re building up skill sets and life skills here. And again, that’s another thing that yes, school is important and it's great that there are learning how to read and write and things, but actually they do just as much learning up at the bungalows and on campus with us, and learning from us, as they do at school. So that really changed my interest. I also met one of the, a few of the kids’ educational psychologist at school, and although I thought it was great work they were doing, I did I notice how little time they spend with the children… and I also noticed how well the children can act up for their educational psychologist, so putting on a great face and sitting perfectly still in class and doing what they’ve been asked and then like they were barely off the grounds of school and then we're seeing the true picture of them and their their true behaviours. I am, and I thought, you know, that’s a shame, because actually, that's not the fault of the educational psychologist. But, now they’re away to write up a report that's actually not painting a true picture of the child. So yeah, I think now, definitely I'm more interested in investing in a career in residential care.

ANDREW: Because of the opportunity to do therapeutic work? That's what that sounds like to me like you, there's more opportunity for, for therapeutic work as you see it certainly? Yeah?

MARY: absolutely

ANDREW: it’s an interesting trajectory through then, and really does strike some key points for me, you know, and for the project - we're interested in everyday care and what makes it therapeutic and I suppose your story’s one of these things that highlight it, it’s not in an hours appointment with a psychologist. Actually, it’s all the other stuff that's going on. You know, at school and in the residential. That whole thing that’s combined to potentially provide a therapeutic environment. I wonder if you could tell, I’ll take you back again a bit, to when you first started then, in education and then potentially in the residential as well about how the induction looked and how you were brought into the fold at [org]. How do you become a worker at [org], you know? And how does that work?

MARY: Um, yes. So when I started at the school and I was given a two week induction, the first 2days were in-service days in so we focused on like meeting the team, finding out their stories, how long they'd been at [org], and what their backgrounds were. Erm, and then, um, so there's me and another education support worker that worked at the same time and we were kinda, linked up with two members that had been there for a long time and that we would be working in the classes. And so the lady I was with was [name]. Erm, and she kind of was like a sort of mentor role? But unintentionally. She was just teaching me the way that she does things and she's very therapeutic in a way that she works and I would say she's a huge part of the way that I developed my own practice and approach. Um, so we we read like the children's files and things. But there was a lot of emphasis on, you know you get to know the children and actually sometimes it can be useful to meet the children and go back to their files erm… before painting a picture before you already know them kind of. So, and then later it was just kind of like, all hands-on deck, part of the class, and the children were really, really good. They’re like, well, you've seen it yourself when they come, they’re interested and curious to get to know you. Erm, and it was the same kind of thing. So one of the children, he's quite confident and they gave him a role as kinda showing me how things work and that was really good in building our relationship. He’s definitely one of the first children that… I probably built a positive relationship with. There was also another young boy who, he started at the same time as me, so we were starting to school together and I was in his class. So we were kinda like figuring out the ropes together, which was really good. Erm, and then, yeah, we just had our opportunities for training with others, our safehold training, lots of child protection and [og’s] policies. Then… um, trying to think, obviously we had our probation period, which was six months. We had regular supervision throughout that. I do think that it's the kinda place that you have to come in and experience like. Like I said, when I came for the interview, even when I left and had accepted the job, I don’t think I entirely knew exactly what it was I was coming for… and even the, the managers and the people that led the interview - they were quite clear on - It's not really something you can explain on paper, how it goes here. It can be so different every day, so you can have to be in it to experience it and it was also stressed that ‘it's completely OK if this isn't for you’. But no, I just absolutely love that since day one, which is really good and then actually I was only here about a month when I was interested in coming up to the bungalows and doing shifts up here as well. But I thought, I'd better give myself some time to settle into my role as an educator support worker. So then I had to do like an interview to become sessional up here as well. Erm so. I had a sort of induction for coming here as sessional, which was good cause I got to meet all the other managers and things - be introduced to other people’s roles, up at the bungalows at, which actually you realise as well. You're not completely aware of everything that happens in the the care side when you're in the education team, and.. I really liked being that person as well, that I could be here for the kids in their homes. But I was also there at school and I was a bit worried about how that would work for my relationships for the children. Cause, you know, if they’ve had a difficult day at school or something, you don’t want to be carrying that on from the day at home or… But actually, for me personally, it worked really well and it was also nice to have a link between both teams. Because there is like there is definitely the education team and the care team, and there's not really much interaction between the two. So it was nice to kind of be a link between both.

ANDREW: Good… there's a couple of things I mean, I'm really interested in everything you've got to say about that, and about how things work, but obviously I know we’ve got limited time; but hopefully you'll speak to me again, and hopefully I'll see in you in the flesh.

MARY: of course!

ANDREW: There is certainly two things within that, you were talking about, and that really, I don’t know, just sound like… One of them is learning from the children. I mean, learning your job from the children? Because, often in organisations we think about you know, our managers tell us how the policies work, and somebody mentors us or whatever else. But I'm just interested in this, how instrumental are the children in terms of you learning how to do that job?

MARY: Yeah, I mean, I think they’re hugely instrumental in the whole process, like, obviously every child here has different needs. Um, and I think it's, it's good to read their file and find out, you know, maybe what’s their triggers; what's their background; their histories and.. but, I think the children help you understand what works for them and, actually what, what I quickly learned here is… Like, I think I've got quite a versatile approach because what works for me with one child may not work with another child, and I think it took a while for me to learn… well, actually. ‘How can I help you’? So, observing how the children were around other members of staff and, um, like, I like to think that I observed all that and picked, you know, bits of peoples practice and approaches that I thought, well I think that could work for me and I tried that. I am like so there's a lot of children that... are very, like they seek a lot of comfort and reassurance, so I can be really, really nurturing with them. But then there's some of the other children who, like, you know, they benefit more from like a kind of a partnership rather than… some of them look for a parenting role they do, and then other people look for you to be, like, ‘I want you to be my friend and yeah, you can help me but only kinda on my terms’. And that's completely OK. I think that’s… Like for me, that's what makes it therapeutic. If you take, obviously, you know we work with the DDP and like, PACE attitudes and, I think, just always be accepting of what *their* needs are. And then you know, kinda like, letting them lead it to an extent - what do they need from us and what can we provide for them?

ANDREW: Did you find that straightforward? Is that, I suppose, as an adult who's been socialized in our society, we have particular views about what children are, who children are with then needs, and what roles they take… is that? Did you find it quite easy just to adapt to that? Or was it about your process you had to go through?

MARY: I think like the, the playfulness aspect of it I found quite easy. Erm… I think I did get a shock when I first came here because, like I said, I had no experience of this whatsoever, um. I think… especially at the school you know academically, I got a bit of a shock because the children who were nine and 10 struggled to write their names, or they can't read, and I really had to quickly adapt to that and realize, like… and that's just coming from probably my own background and upbringing. I think it does take a lot to switch from, what they chronologically should be able to do and, actually, maybe what they developmentally are able to do… but I wouldn’t say I found it difficult, it was just something that I had to be conscious of for a while and, again, letting the children show me what they're capable of rather than you know, putting unrealistic expectations in place. Yeah, but I think, I think being young as well does help. Like, sometimes I think that I can maybe appear a bit more relatable to the children and, you know, and like. I find it quite easy to engage them in humour and playfulness, and I think that's been really good in building relationships with them so that I can be there, to then work through the things that need to be worked through with them. I mean for me I always say to the kids, you know, I want to be that fun person for you, and I want us to have all these lovely positive times. But, when it really matters, I need you to be able to listen to me and respond to me. So that's kinda the way that I’ve went about things, probably from the from the start.

ANDREW: hmm, good, and the other element of that, that was interested in in terms of what you were talking about the kids kinda looking after you, starting school together at the same time or getting shown… It sounded to me like these children, were caring for you actually?

MARY: Yeah yeah yeah

ANDREW: is that something that you experience quite regularly at [org] do you…?

MARY: Yeah, I hadn't really… like, there was a perfect example of that in the summer, my Gran had passed away and so, I was off school for a couple of days, just at the start of summer, I was off school and, for one day actually… And then when I came in, the kids knew… erm, and I had said to the, the adults that I worked with, I said ‘You know it's OK, just. To let them know’… um, why I was off and, when I came back to school next day. Like you know, I felt able and fine to be at work, but I was still a bit upset and one of the boys in that - the boy who started on the same day as me - we had went to yoga together as part of their school activity. And he had said to me, like ‘I'm so sorry that your Gran died, and I'm sad that you're sad’. And it made me cry cause I was like, how lovely and he was like wiping my tears away and he was like ‘I don't like it that you’re sad. But maybe your Gran is in a better place now’ and I was absolutely blown away because I thought, actually, what he's doing… He's DDPing me like, and it made me think you know, what like, not to sound big headed, but what a credit to the work that we're doing, because actually he's picking up on that and he's able to use those skills like, especially the, you know, I'm sorry that you feel like that. I'm sorry this happened to you. That's almost scripted. What we would speak, to say to the children, and it was really genuine as well. And I also thought it was credit to the relationship that had built with that child, cause he genuinely did care how I felt. It was really, really lovely, yeah. But even like, a lot of time, like sometimes you’ll come in, the kids are like, they’ll ask about your family, your pets like. I think it's nice because we are able to. You know, we do tell them a lot about ourselves and, obviously whatever you’re comfortable with. But we, we do paint a picture of you know, what’s typical… of like us as adults and what our families are like. Even just yesterday I was speaking to a young person about you know his experience before he got here. He speaks a lot about wanting to go back to his old place, but actually that wasn’t very successful for him. Erm and he kinda said, you know, you don’t… You just don't get it. You don't get what it's like to be here. You've never been in care and you wouldn't know how this feels. And I says, I completely understand why you would feel like that. I said that, that must be hard for you to think that all these adults are here to support you and actually they don't know what it’s like to be you. ‘Can I tell you why I work here?’ and he’s like, yeah, so I had to explain to him that although, you know, I've come from a family who have looked after me and um kept me safe and things. And so I was explaining that and I said, I know that may be difficult for you to hear and he interrupted me right away and said, ‘no, I'm glad that you had that and that's good that you had that’. So, you know, they are very caring. Erm, and I think as well, it is little things like that that that show the therapeutic work that we are doing is, is sinking in with them. I think that even if they don't realize it. They are very caring and give us back what we give them.

ANDREW: Yeah, that sounds really, really lovely actually and must make a real difference to you as a worker as well when things like that happen.

MARY: Yeah, yeah it does.

ANDREW: The other thing I wanted to just ask you briefly before we finish was, you'd mentioned supervision. So that’s something I don't know that much about at [org] about how supervision works? I wonder if you could you explain that to me in terms of how that works?

MARY: Yeah, of course well, since I've been full time here so that six months, I have had supervision roughly every 6 to 8 weeks. It's been a really positive experience for me. It starts like just kind of checking-in. So, it's usually your team manager who would do your supervision. And it starts with just checking on how you're getting on, how you feel, you’re fitting in as part of the team, any areas or concern or whatever. We usually speak about… Like, I would speak about my key child - if I feel that and there's anything that we need to be put in place for him, or how I feel he's progressing. We speak about any, you know, professional meetings or anything that's being planned or has taken place since the last supervision, or will take place before the next one. Erm, any training opportunities that would we’d be interested then… Erm... Yeah, just really, I’m trying to think if there’s anything else that we would speak about in supervision…. [someone else in the room says personal development] Like areas of personal development, which is a really good, it’s also a really good space to say ‘I’ve got this idea’… and but we also have our team meetings every two weeks, which are helpful for that as well. But it's quite good if it's maybe something you want to run by your manager before suggesting to the team and there’s a lot of room for that here I would say… or certainly my experience has been in this team that you know your opinions and thoughts and ideas are really valid and appreciated. So, it gives a good space for that and then also if there’s anything that maybe you're concerned about in like about your practice or your approach, and just checking in to make sure that what you're doing is right. It’s really good.

ANDREW: Do they use the, is DDP model used and replicated in supervision? I'm not sure if it, cause I know, obviously I’ve read some of the literature on DDP and some of the organizations you know they put it in place right through?

MARY: Yeah yeah. I would say I would say it definitely is. I think that we do all try to treat each other with a DDP attitude as well or approach and... certainly our managers make sure to check in on us and like… DDP is... Sometimes you don't even realize that you're using it. So like if we've had a difficult shift like the Manager will check in with us and ‘that it's been a really hard shift for you. How are you feeling?’ or ‘how do you feel that could have gone better’ or ‘is there anything that we could have supported you with’ and whatever. So there definitely is a high level of support there.

ANDREW: Good. Listen, we're getting towards the end of our time and I know how precious your time is, especially when you're doing the early shift. You’ve got tasks, you’ve got you’ll probably have your report to write and whatever else?

MARY: Yes

ANDREW: Thanks, that's really, really interesting for me. There’s loads of stuff in there that I’m really interested in and I’ll follow up, hopefully with you and the other workers as well.

MARY: Yeah, of course

ANDREW: Just to check if there are any questions that you have. You wanted to ask me about anything, anything at all?

MARY: No, I’d spoken to Quin last week, and I told him that I was going to be speaking with you and he was just saying you how interesting the project is and it's a shame that you're not able to be here as much as what you would like. Yeah, but it’s good. It's good to be able to do this.

ANDREW: Yeah it is, so as I suppose the other thing I could ask you while I’m on… cause I’m, I'm waiting to find out about the consent for the kids, but I'm thinking maybe putting together a video diary task. Maybe the kids could do themselves, but I'm just not sure. You know, I've not been there that much. I've been asking workers when I’ve been meeting them. Another worker said, oh maybe a video diary thing would work quite well cause they like using technology and stuff like that. Yeah, I was thinking of doing a thing, you know, like either a typical day in the life, or an introduction you [org] from their perspective and they could use either video or photographs. Or they could make an art project or draw drawing or whatever they thought, you know it gives him something, if I get the consent. It's just so that I can try and involve them at this stage as well,

MARY: yeah, of course. I definitely think there would be interested in that

ANDREW: once I get the consent sorted with Quin, maybe email the workers that I’ve been chatting to here, about maybe some ideas and pick your brains a bit about how to go about it to try and make it a successful and hopefully, depending on how things go, I’ll be able to get up back up there soon. Because for me as a as an ethnographer, usually I would be, I would know that about you because I’d happened to be on a shift with you.

MARY: Yeah

ANDREW: chatting to you - why do you do this? How long have you been here? Oh, da da da

MARY: yeah of course

ANDREW: just had to adapt it basically because of the lockdown. Stirling Uni is like, no absolutely no way you can go in unless you’re a keyworker. So that’s why it's been like this… Listen, thank you so much. I really, really appreciate your time today and I'll be back in touch with you at some point no doubt

MARY: perfect. Yeah, thanks very much for that.

ANDREW: OK, take care.

MARY: See you later, bye.