Meeting with Early Shift 8, 4/2/21

ANDREW: eh, about consent and confidentiality, but I’ll just say it again for you. So, although [org] has agreed to this research and stuff like that, it’s important that individual staff members know that they’ve got the right to give and withdraw consent. Or refuse consent, in fact. You know, if you don’t want to take part in it, it’s absolutely fine and you don’t need to explain why or anything like that.

PRU: that’s fine

ANDREW: You can decide to take part, and then you can change your mind. You can always withdraw consent, or you can take part in an interview and maybe not in another part, or another part and not an interview. So it’s really up to you, how much you want to get involved and when. Cause, sometimes, maybe, if I’m up doing the participant observation and you’re having a hard shift, you might think ‘do you know what, I’m not in the mood today’ [both laugh]. Which is fair enough.

PRU: Aye, these kids are a bit unpredictable, so you never know!

ANDREW: Absolutely. The other thing to bear in mind would be confidentiality. So, we’re going to change, we’ll no even say that it’s [org] in outward facing reports. So, we’ll just say ‘a residential school in Scotland’. And then, we’ll change everybody’s names, your names, and the kids names and stuff like that as well. So, nobody will know that it’s [org] nobody will know who it is, but you might recognise each other. So, for example, say I’m quoting a story that Mick told me about a piece of practice, you might think, well I might have changed that name to, I don’t know, Richard or something, but you might be like ‘I know that that’s Mick, because I know Mick really well, and I’ve heard him tell me that story as well’.

MICK: all my jokes!

ANDREW: yeah, all those jokes you’ve heard a thousand times! [laughing] Yeah, so there is, there is that limit to the confidentiality as well [all laughing]. So, are you alright to go ahead on that basis then?

PRU: yes, that’s fine.

ANDREW: is that alright? So, I was wondering today, because, as I’ve been saying to Mick, I’ve been trying to get myself, to get my head around how things work at [org] and what goes on. And one of the themes of the conversation, I’ve been learning a fair bit about the early shift, things that go on on the early shift, the kinda tasks you have to do and things like that. And then, more recently, the back shift, in fact Mick was giving me a good account of the kind of things that happen on the back shift as well. And then, from that, we had various different conversations. So, I wondered if maybe just continuing that theme might be a useful way to go? I’ve still got a few gaps about, erm, sleepovers, weekends and holiday times. So I wondered if you’ve got anything you’d like to say about what that’s like, what’s a sleepover like, what is it like at the weekends, why is that different, school holiday times, things like that?

MICK: well, I suppose a sleepover is just… we basically down tools at 10pm, erm, in terms of like, that’s when we’re off shift. So that’s when we’ll go to be or we might stay up and have a cup of tea and a bite to eat or something like that. But, generally, the kids are…

PRU: bedded in

MICK: settled for their… unless, if there’s any issues, then we’ll stay up until that’s all sorted out. We’ll get paid for doing that – we just put our time in for that. Like, if a child was ill and they were up through the night, we get up and look after them. Again, we just claim for any time we’re up and different things like that. So, when we’re on sleepover, we’ve got buzzers on the doors. So, when a child comes out to go to the toilet, the buzzer will go off. We’ll just stick our head round, ‘are you ok’, ‘yeah, fine’, and that’s it, so…

PRU: we do have one sleeping night, one waking night on campus. So, if there is a child that’s maybe going to be up all night we do have a waking night. There’s always someone awake on the campus.

ANDREW: Is it two members of staff that do that? Have I picked that up right?

PRU: Yeah, uhuh, we do have two members of staff who do, like, seven nights each.

MICK: so, week on, week off

PRU: yeah, so they do seven nights. But there’s usually, like, sessional or that if they want to be off or, there’s always someone will make up their wee shift or whatever.

MICK: and the nightshift will come in, for instance, as Pru said, if someone is awake or, say we got a new child in. You know, we put the waking night in there just to give them reassurance for the first couple of weeks or whatever is needed. Or, if there’s been any child protection issues, the waking night would go to the bungalow just to make sure that, just to keep an eye…

PRU: yeah, it’s flexible which bungalow the waking night stays in. Just now, we’ve got it in my bungalow because we’ve got a child in crisis. So, they have to be checked on, so there’s various reasons why it changes from bungalow to bungalow but, there’s always someone awake…

MICK: [to Pru] can we say what the crisis is?

PRU: I don’t know?

MICK: So, for example, a child’s like, threatened suicide.

ANDREW: Really? God, they’re such young children as well. Ok.

MICK: Yeah, they were saying ‘I want to kill myself’. Whether that’s, you know, real or not, we take it very seriously. So, we put in the supports for that including the waking night.

ANDREW: Yeah, oh…

PRU: the waking night will be there and will check on them every 15 minutes. So, there’s, making sure… like, everything is taken out that they can potentially hurt themselves with.. so, eh, they’re just there for the extra support.

ANDREW: I suppose I’m quite, because I’ve been up for a few informal visits before the proper lockdown, I seen the age range and… they’re kinda, they’re fairly young children. Is that, how do you feel about a situation like that? How does that…?

PRU: It’s quite devastating. It’s quite horrible. It’s… it’s… yeah, it’s not nice… and, sometimes, you feel quite helpless, you know?

MICK: It’s to do with the breakdown of the relationship with family. That’s precipitated it, we think, hasn’t it [to Pru]?

PRU: Yeah, yeah and, obviously, COVID and different things, it’s, it’s a difficult time for the wee child, so, it’s…

ANDREW: God, that sounds really, really tough. I’m really sorry to hear that. And, do you, have you, have you guys covered a waking night shift yourself? Is that something you’ve done or have you stayed away from that?

PRU: Yeah, uhuh, yeah… sometimes, maybe if the waking night becomes unwell or that, you have to do that as well. So, that can be a bit challenging if you’ve already been on shift, but, you know, these things happen.

MICK: Even when you’ve not been on shift, staying awake all night is a different story to working during the day.

PRU: My last job was waking night before I came to [org] so, I didn’t manage it very well [laughs]

ANDREW: yeah, it’s been a long time since I did any nightshifts

PRU: Not my cup of tea

MICK: No, nor me. You get to about 4 in the morning and that’s when you start to struggle, you’ve got work to keep busy to keep you going.

ANDREW: yeah, I was just going to say, it’s usually about 3, 4 in the morning it starts to get, you know, you’re like, wow, right, ok, I could really…. So, what about the school holidays, the weekends and that kinda thing? Am I right in saying it’s kinda longer shifts for you through the day and stuff like that?

PRU: Yeah. We usually, you know, our back shifts usually start at 2pm and we go down and pick the kids up from school about 2.30pm. But, on a school holiday or at the weekends, we start at 9 in the morning, so it’s an extra five hours every day. So the summer holidays can be quite, like, can be, like, quite… tiring. But, in some ways, it’s better because you can go out and do things for longer, so...

MICK: Yeah, it’s like having a day with your kids isn’t it? Cause you’re like, you know, you get up in the morning, 9 o’clock, and you’re like ‘right, let’s get planned’. You’re out before lunch and then you’ve got the whole day to go further afield and do exciting things.

ANDREW: And there is that, very outdoors focus at [org] it seems to be. So is that, typically, you would get out of the bungalows if you could, if the kids are willing?

PRU: Yeah… as I say, cause every bungalow has got 5 kids, there’s always, a couple of them at least from each bungalow that want to get out. They don’t want to be together all the time. So, you’re always, if you want, if you would like to take some kids out, there’s always somebody available for to, that will go with you.

MICK: Because, it’s like, we’ll often offer, like, if I’m taking two out with two staff, the ratio is two to one, so I’ve said to here before, to Pru’s bungalow, look, do you want me to take one of yours? So, match up a kid, like, so like, little Serge plays well with Junior, so does he want to come and we’ll do that? And the kids get a change and to do something different – it’ a change of face for them as well, it’s fun.

ANDREW uhuh, and em, what kind of things are you going to do because, are you being contained within [local authority area] due to COVID things?

MICK: Yeah, we’re doing [local authority area]… in terms of the outdoors. Like, I’m on the maps exploring… I’ve been up [local] hill two weekends ago, up to [another area] done a couple of walks up in [area] in the forest, down the river and stuff. So, just…. Yeah, taking the sleds away. It’s been great. The snow’s a godsend!

PRU: Yeah, I know, it’s been amazing!

MICK: Sledging is fantastic! ‘Sledging wahay’!

PRU: I’ve got two bruises on my butt right enough [laughs]

ANDREW: ahaha – when you’ve flew off the sledge aye? [all laughing]

PRU: Yeah – we’ve got those, erm, they’re no sledges… they’re like scooters! Oh, they’re lethal… have you had a shot on them [to Mick]?

MICK: ohh, oh, and injuries… for adults anyway, maybe not for kids

ANDREW: a risk assessment nightmare? [All laugh, yeah yeah]. And are there things that you think, do you find, in terms of when you’re away engaged in these activities with the kids, do you find that there’s sometimes, you’re able to do the therapeutic-type-work with them because you’re involved in an activity? Does it make it easier? Does it make it tougher?

PRU: I would say yeah… especially if you’re doing a one-to-one activity with the kids. We had one example where, I went to that, oh, what’s that called when you climb the trees?

MICK: ‘Go Ape’

PRU: Go Ape! I went there with one of the kids once and I was petrified. I would say I was really petrified… and I was talking a way through with this wee guy and we got to one stage and I thought ‘I really can’t do this bit, I’m really, really scared’ and, actually, he was giving me therapy! ‘Do you know, just think how proud your husband will be’… and he tells you and, you know, that was, that was good, it was actually really good that I wasn’t always supporting the kids, sometimes the kids are, like, they’re taking on the role for you as well. But, no, you do get a lot of, if you’re doing an individual activity, you do get a lot of time to speak. I’d say more in the car as well. When you drive? It’s a really good time to have a conversation isn’t it [to Mick].

MICK: Yeah, yeah.

ANDREW: And what do you think that’s about, is that because you’re not quite face-to-face, you’re kinda [motions with hands facing forward]

PRU: I think so. You’re kind, I think they feel like it’s just a chat.

MICK: Yeah, the car, it’s not like you’ve captured them in a room to talk to them. It’s, you’re in a car, serving a purpose. It’s doesn’t feel like, you know, we’re here to have a conversation. Whereas in a room – I’m here to have a conversation with you sort of thing. It’s more natural isn’t it? And, I think, going out as well, for me, it’s the relationship-building that you do. Like, you know, when I go out, you know, we’re playing hide-and-seek in the woods… I always take the burner out with me, we make hot chocolate outside, have a wee hot chocolate, and then, you know, we pack the snacks and all that, have lunch… then we go and play in the woods or just play, or, we use the environment to play. You know, like, with wee Serge and Junior, I was like, you know, we were the CIA, setting off nuclear bombs, and just, their imagination, do you know what I mean? It’s just the chance to, like, especially with the wee’r ones, that’s what I love about working with the wee kids is they’re so…

PRU: their imagination is amazing

MICK: in their imagination and the imaginative play… and when their older, you know, the adolescents are like ‘I don’t want to do anything with you’, you know it’s a bit more teenager-ish you know? That’s the joy of working with the younger kids.

PRU: Yeah, the younger kids, yeah, it’s…

MICK: you can have a, I think you can have a, a real influence and positive impact. You know, they’ll still listen to you, you know, as they would listen to an adult, a parent or something like that. So you can have much more impact on them, in shaping their little lives… just for me anyway.

ANDREW: Yeah. It’s interesting that you used that word ‘joy’ there, Mick… and, I suppose I’m quite interested then, is that, there’s something about *you taking part* in their play that’s…

MICK: Well, I’m a big kid! [all laughing]

PRU: oh, he is!

MICK: But that’s where, that’s where the relationship, if you get down to their level with them and get in there with them, you know, that’s what they, you know, they don’t question it, do they [to Pru]?

PRU: Yeah, they just take you in

MICK: And that’s why I came, when I came to work at [org], one of the things I loved, was the outdoor environment. You know, how you could go out and build dams, climb trees, play in the woods but…

PRU: that’s no for me [laughs]

ANDREW: I’m desperate to go, come and do participant observation and go ‘tubing’, I’ve heard about tubing so [all laughing] I love all of that stuff as well, so I’m desperate to get involved with all of that. Yeah, just, and I’m wondering then, whether you think, you know… you getting involved in *their* life and what *they’re* interested in and their play and I’m wondering, do you think that gives them a message about themselves then?

PRU: I think it builds up their confidence doesn’t it? It lets them show, obviously, they’ve been let down by adults before so it’s good to have that relationship and let them see that they can bond with people. You know, that not everyone is going to be, you know, abusive or nasty to them or, you know, that there’s people out there willing to give them the time and the love that they deserve.

MICK: that’s probably it – it’s the time and it’s the love. Whether you’re outdoors or at a play park, trampolining, you know, you’re giving them time and attention, and engaging them in something that they would like to do. You know, we’re limited at the moment but, a lot of those other things, like trampolining, or parks, and scooter parks and stuff, you’re taking them, organising that, letting them, and then they’re showing you tricks like ‘did you see that?’ and you’re like ‘Yeah – that was amazing! Well done’ and all that. You know, just, encouraging them, as you would with your own children. So, that’s where you’ve got to come at it, in my opinion…

PRU: I think you’ve also got to put some personal experiences, share some of your personal experiences with the kids to allow them to become involved with you. You know, like, I always, I’ve got a thing about them falling back and hurting their heads and things. And I share with them why I’ve got that. You know, and they do then come and give you a cuddle and, ‘I’m really sorry, I’ll try not to…’ You know, my younger brother fell and banged his head and, sadly, passed away and when they’re on their chairs, swinging and things, I’ll say ‘Please, please don’t do that… and you understand why I don’t like it?’ And they’ll ‘Oh, I’m sorry’ and they’ll come and they’ll give you a wee cuddle.

ANDREW: You know, that a really interesting, cause you know, that goes back to the thing you said before there when you were at the, the, the Go Ape thing Pru. About, you know, about receiving care from children actually and that, potentially being important for them and for their development and how they feel – that they are able to do that, that they are willing to do that, that they want to provide care for you as well… is that fair?

PRU: We’ve actually got a lot of really caring children haven’t we? [Mick Yeah] We’ve, you know, and I, maybe not everyone’s preference, but I like them to show us affection and care as well because, it’s showing that they can maybe grow into adults that are going to care and look after people… because there’s quite a lot of our kids where we do so much care for them, they don’t know how to do it for other people. So, it’s good to let them have their own wee bit of free spirit and be able to do that back to you.

MICK: And it also comes in line with things like, you know, teaching them manners. You know, getting them to ‘can you get me a cup of juice’, ‘what was that? Get me a cup of juice… please’ oh, yeah, that’s it. You know, little tiny things like that… and then they do it. You know, and they feel listened to I think.

PRU: I had, like, one occasion when one wee girl came to us… she’d maybe been with us two or three months and I had a supervised contact – with her social worker there as well – in a play area in [city]… and when she came and sat down for her meal with her mum and her brothers and things, she said ‘can I have some ketchup please?’ And her social worker as like ‘oh my god! I cannot believe that, in two months, you have managed to get to do that’ because, before that, she would have had the ketchup up and down the walls. So it was good that he was able to acknowledge, you know, just these wee silly things – saying please for the ketchup…

MICK: You’re modelling all the time; do you know what I mean? It’s like, when they say something, I say ‘listen, I don’t talk to you like that, I always say please to you, I always say thank you and I’m just looking for that back’. So, you’re, you’ve got to set the example first. That’s vital because, if you don’t, they will come after you. They’ll nail you down for it – ‘you don’t’… you know and then you’re buggered!

ANDREW: yeah, you know, there’s a fair bit about that in the literature around that, for kids. You know, not thinking about them as, you know, small people who *receive* care but, actually, as social actors who give care to adults and maybe their peers and things like that as well. There was quite a nice example when I visited the school actually. There was a wee boy, I don’t think he’s in the residential, but there was just a bit where he was helping another wee guy… I was just chatting to them while they were playing basketball but, it was really, really lovely actually, just to listen to how he was being so supportive and encouraging to this other wee boy. I don’t know why I was surprised by that but, I guess I was surprised by that they might provide care for each other… is that something that you see on a… [yeah yeah] I know that they wind each other up and they press each other’s buttons… but

MICK: Yeah, but you’re right. There’s other times when… I’ll give you an example. Two of the girls in my bungalow don’t get on particularly well. I had them out the other night and I had another boy out with them as well and, it was two staff three kids. It started off with the lassie winding the other two up and then, it turned out at the end of the day, it was the boy annoying them. And the two girls teamed up against him and it was ‘leave her alone’ and ‘I’ll protect you’ and, do you know what I mean? Just like ordinary kids. My thinking on it is, you need to let some of that stuff… you need to let kids figure out for themselves… stuff. They need to do it through their play and reactions and, sometimes, you don’t let it go to far, but you allow them to have that space without stepping in and fixing it all the time. Or looking to them, so their looking to you to fix it, but you know, ‘you need to sort it out with her, it’s not me, you need to speak to her… or him’. Trying to get them to figure that out cause that’s essential life skills. That’s how children learn isn’t it?

PRU: Yep. I think there is an awful lot, in [org], we do protect the children. Maybe more than like an everyday school, or everyday life? I mean, we will intervene if the kids start fighting and things. Whereas, if they were out in a playpark there would not be an adult there to protect that. So, there’s maybe a wee bit unrealistic play goes on for them… because they know that they can be that bolshy cause they know that an adult is going to step in.

MICK and I’ll also say sometimes, exactly what Pru was saying there, I’ll say ‘listen, you’re only saying that to her cause I’m here. If I wasn’t here you wouldn’t be saying that’. You know, just to make the point, to get them to think and try and yeah…

ANDREW: Yeah, it’s interesting cause there is a fair amount coming out now, in recent practice, in social work, in these areas, where we might have been a bit risk averse at times? That we’re not prepared to take any risks and, actually, that might shut down opportunities yeah? So, you might have had a risk assessment that kiboshed your sledging trip because, you know, what if somebody breaks an arm, or what if somebody gets hurt, or… and you know, you think, if we lived our lives like that we, well, we wouldn’t live our lives would we?

MICK: Yeah, cause, we’ll, like, we let kids climb trees. You know, it’s like ‘oh no, chop all those branches off, don’t let them get up there’ and stuff. And sometimes, we had one tree with a little platform at the bottom, which is broken now. But, when they were, they would run away up this tree and be like ‘ah ha’ and like vickies [two fingers up] from up there and I’m like ‘that’s find, we know where you are’ [laughs] ‘stay there, you’ll get cold before I need to come to get you’… and they’re like alright, ok, this isn’t really having any effect.

PRU: it’s not funny anymore if they’re letting me do it [laughs]

ANDREW: Yeah, only if it’s having an effect on you?

MICK: Yeah, annoying you.

ANDREW: Yeah, good. And, any other particular activities that you’ve been involved in recently? I mean, the sledging is obviously there, that you’ve thought ‘oh, that was really good – this is working well’ or that you really enjoyed?

MICK: Well, I go outdoors, pretty much every night. And I take the fire, the gas burner, and get the hot chocolate and stuff, the water, the marshmallows. We’ll go for a walk, we’ll find something to do… Playing, over at [area] they’ve got this rope that’s been coursed through the trees. It’s got obstacles. So, I took them up there, they were blind folded and had to find their way around the rope blindfolded. One didn’t want to do it, two really did. There was a little bit of cheating went on, which was alright. But, they had to go through tyres, under nets and different things. So, it’s all that sensory stuff and, then, after that, we’ve done the activity, sit down, hot chocolate, marshmallows. Have a bit of fun. Come back. Look at the stars in the sky, lie on your back, look at the stars or something like that.. erm.. I would just use the environment to create, just see opportunities in that and, or, you know, sometimes I’ll take out the knives with me and we’ll do a little bit of whittling or, make a proper little fire. You know, and they get to use the flint and steel to light the fire. Erm, just activities that build confidence and self-esteem that are… ‘god it’s dangerous’ ‘he’s letting me play with a knife’ or ‘I’m making fire here’ you know? You know you go to [city council] care home and there’s no way on God’s good earth [laughs] that that would ever, ever, ever happen for the next 20 years probably, they’re that far behind. But, I digress.

ANDREW: Yeah, so it’s that sense of adventure? About being out, to get out, to be adventurous, to try things, to try new things, yeah?

MICK: It’s like, at the moment, walking up hills in the snow… Do you know what I mean? And it gets thicker the nearer you get to the top and I know Millerton does that as well, you know. And, rolling down the hills, you know, having snowball fights – out the front of the bungalows, they built two big, like, big piles of snow, and they would have two team throwing snowballs and ducking down behind the barriers..

ANDREW: barricades! That reminds me of my own childhood. Climbing trees and building barricades and building dens and stuff like that. Great, listen, I’m not going to take up any more of your time. I know how precious it is, particularly when you’re on the early shift – you’ve got load of things to do. Just to see if there’s anything you wanted to check with me, or ask, or clarify, or anything at all?

MICK: when are you likely to be back?

ANDREW: I don’t know… it looks like the schools might be phasing back in towards the end of this month. So, I’m hopeful. Particularly because, Stirling Uni have put Social Work students with yourself, erm, but they’ve been categorised as key workers, whereas I don’t fall into that category. So that why I’ve been kinda blocked but, with the different procedures and things that are in place, that we could do to try and make it as safe as it possibly can be, I’m hoping that maybe in March there might be some movement, hopefully.

MICK: when does your, sort of work complete then? How long have you got left?

ANDREW: So, we were scheduled in, I think the fieldwork was, should’ve been finished by June, July this year and then I would be in a period of analysis, and then I would be coming back to meet the staff, to meet the kids, to talk about what we think we’ve found. So that you can say, oh well, that sounds like something that’s right… hmm, I’m not so sure about that and whatever else – so to try and get your feedback.

MICK: so, if you come back in March, you’ll still have a few months here then?

ANDREW: yeah, yeah, and the thing I’m hoping… so, I’ve met you before Mick, in the bungalow, and now I’ve chatted to you online. So, you’d like to think and hope that folk are starting to get to know me a wee bit and it makes it a wee bit easier when I eventually do arrive in. I’m having a wee think about, actually, maybe I could pick your brains just really quickly? I’ve been trying to think, I was wanting to, I’ve been thinking of an activity for the kids to do… not to be online with me but, something that they could do a kinda, like a kind of diary, or a typical day in the life of me at [org]… they could do art, they could do photographs, they could make something, they could do a video diary, or a photo diary… I was trying to think of something but I’m just wondering whether you think if they’d be up for that? Do they do artsy things, do they make things?

PRU: it depends which child. Some of them do. I think.. yeah, a video diary – I think they’d quite like that – if they were doing it on their wee kindles or tablets or something and then they could transfer it… I think they would quite like to do something like that.

ANDREW: they might be into, cause I could even do a wee example of my own… like a typical day for me and then they could see that and maybe that would help, they only thing I’m a bit worried about is consent and confidentiality, so I just need to check consent is in place for all the kids and stuff like that – cause, maybe the person videoing has consent but the video someone else who hasn’t – so I need to think that through a wee bit but it’s good to know that it might be possible… but, yeah, hopefully, I’ll have a few months up there anyway and we’ll rejig the participant observation because it was going to be participant observation, then some reflective conversations, interviews with staff, with children… and then more participant observation and then more interviews was the original schedule… so, I might, condense some of the participant observation. Just come up, get involved in activities, get out

MICK: come out in the bush, get some hot chocolate

ANDREW: yeah, get sledging, get some whittling done! [all laughing] Good, listen, thanks very much for your time again, I really appreciate ok?

PRU/MICK: No bother, not a problem

ANDREW: Take care, bye.