

Relationships Matter

Individual reflection tool:
A residential worker's perspective

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OCTOBER 2016



ABOUT THE RESIDENTIAL WORKER

Vicki is a newly qualified residential worker with six months experience and works at Cambusnethan children house in Wishaw. She works as part of a team of approximately 15 staff; six young people between the ages of 8–18 live in the house at any one time.

USING THE TOOL

Vicki's manager Michael presented the tool to his staff team. To introduce the concept of the tool, the team were encouraged to review and reflect on three questions. Vicki reviewed all of the questions during a quiet shift when the young people she supports were at school.

1 What did you hope the outcomes of using this tool would be?

'I hoped I may gain other points of view which would make me think differently about some aspects of supporting young people.'

Being newly qualified Vicki had not experienced working with a young person as they moved on from a residential setting. To do this Vicki developed different scenarios for each question, asked herself whether she may react differently if different young people were in each scenario, and reflected on why this may be.

2 Were these outcomes achieved?

'Yes, it was so helpful because I haven't seen any young people move on so it was good to think of the different scenarios and how I might respond. It also opened up conversations that might not normally have been at the forefront of my mind with colleagues so I could learn from their perspectives.'

For example, young people have started to look for Vicki and send her friend requests on Facebook. One of the questions in the tool prompted her to think more deeply about how she felt about being in contact with young people she was supporting online. This has led to her having conversations with those young people about her boundaries when connecting with them online, and opened up conversations about their boundaries online too.

This process also made her think about a young man that she currently supports - when he moves on he will likely live with his mum who is a neighbour of hers. One of the questions in the tool has prompted her to think about how she may feel having him as a neighbour, and how she may engage with him in this new setting.

3 What, if anything, did you learn by using this tool?

'When I started to reflect on the cards I realised there are lots of different perspectives. Most situations and outcomes depend hugely on pre-existing relationships with each young person and how comfortable the practitioner is when working with them. I'm aware that I want to keep in contact with some young people who I am very close to, and that other young people still keep in contact with staff that they have known for a long time. I hadn't thought about this before starting to work here, so this opened up my eyes because these things will come up so it is useful to think about.'

For example, Vicki hadn't thought about whether she would invite a young person she had cared for to her home. After reading one of the questions she recognised that her immediate reaction was that it wasn't appropriate. However, after questioning why she reacted this way she decided it might be alright, depending on who it was and why they were visiting her.

Vicki also reported that prior to using the tools she unconsciously thought that relationships boundaries were quite strict [rigid]. However, now she recognises that relationships are really important to young people who are in and leaving care and that 'things are not black and white, there are no right answers'.

4 What needs to happen to enable what you have learned to become part of your practice?

'When they are ready I plan to talk to young people about what will happen when they move on, say that they are always welcome back and we will still keep in touch with them. I would say that anyway, but now I have thought about it more and talked it through with colleagues I will be able to give examples and feel confident in my advice.'

5 What needs to happen so you can be better supported to practice this way?

'I already have a good relationship with my superiors and we are encouraged to ask questions, but I will continue to seek support and guidance from my colleagues.'

6 What actions, if any, have you, your team or your organisation taken to support and enable you to work this way?

'We have organised supervision once every six weeks, so I'll go over my answers to some of the questions if I need to.'



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