

Case study 2

Family N comprised of a mother and her 5 children, with their ages ranging from 16yrs to 5yrs.

They had lived at the same address for a number of years and their relationship with their neighbours had deteriorated to such a stage that it was completely beyond repair.

There was an allegation and counter allegation made by both family N and their next door neighbour on an almost daily basis.

Further to this, the children's father was estranged and had had no contact with his family for over a year, the mother suffered from mental health issues, the 2 eldest children were school refusers and the family were facing eviction due to rent arrears in the region of £2,500. Mother was also reliant on benefits. As a consequence of the children not attending school, Ms N had received a court summons and faced the very real threat of a custodial sentence. Due to the father being estranged and having no contact with his children, Ms N had to make provision to have her children taken into temporary care as there was no extended family that could take care of them.

The house was very dirty (I had bugs crawling across me on my first home visit) and was full of clutter. The furniture was also shabby, the beds were broken and there were no carpets downstairs in the house.

The first piece of work was to establish exactly how and why the rent account was so far in arrears and to address this. It transpired that during one of Ms N's bouts of depression, she had failed to respond to the local authority's request for additional information and as such her housing benefit had been suspended. Ms N had a desire to move away from the family next door however she was unable to do so due to her rent arrears.

Together, we composed an appeal letter and submitted it to the local authority. This appeal was successful and as such, Ms N had her housing benefit account credited with approximately £3,000.

While this housing benefit appeal was being considered, I attended court with Ms N regarding her children's non-attendance at school and presented a case to the judge as to why she should not be imprisoned. Fortunately, this presentation was successful and rather than a custodial sentence, she was given a 6 month conditional discharge.

There was also a warrant out for Ms N's arrest for non payment of fines for an unrelated matter. I spoke with the court and provided them with medical evidence I obtained from her

GP detailing her mental health issues and managed to get the warrant lifted and the fine cancelled.

I contacted a local charity and managed to source funding for both new carpets for the house and also new beds and bedding for the children.

In relation to the non attendance of the 2 eldest children, I spent time discussing with them the real reasons behind their non attendance. With the eldest girl, it transpired that she too was suffering from mild depression which had been brought on by the lack of contact with her father and also the pressure of sitting her GCSE's.

Working in partnership with the school, we organised some counselling sessions for her as well as organising some additional support to ensure she was able to achieve her projected exam results.

With the boy, his non attendance was for a number of underlying reasons. He felt isolated at the school he was at as many of his friends had attended a different secondary school. The school he was attending was quite a distance from his home and the family had originally chosen that particular school as at the time the father was present and was able to drive the child to school, however when the father moved out of the family home the boy was forced to take a number of buses. He had also begun to demonstrate signs of anger, again around the lack of interest from his father. This had led to a number of exclusions for him and he felt that he had earned himself a reputation that he would be unable to get rid of.

It was decided that a fresh start at a school closer to home would be beneficial to him so, with the schools inclusion officer, we approached his local school and were successful in placing him there.

Both children's attendance improved dramatically and the girl has now moved from to school to a full time college place.

Lastly, as the rent arrears had been cleared up, the family was able to move to a new home, enabling them to have a fresh start without the ongoing conflict with the neighbour.

The work with this family lasted approximately 14 months and at the end of the intervention, they had moved to a new home, the rent account was in credit, all children were in full time education and Ms N had returned to work.