

5) Case Study: Aspirations and outcomes

This case study illustrates how powerful person centred thinking is in redirecting the focus to what the future can look like, instead of what has happened in the past, and replacing fear with hope.

Bernie has been diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum.

Bernie's Story

I have been working as an IS with a family (Bernie and his mum) who were one of the first to apply and go through the whole process in our borough. The following tells how the process developed for them from when we first started working together (prior to an application through to the allocation and securement of his placement in a new school).

When we first met Bernie and his mum, she spoke about how anxious they were about the EHC needs application process, feeling very worried that they “wouldn't be heard or taken seriously” and spoke about their previous experiences of education that had been difficult and led to Bernie being excluded from school. This had left the family feeling “lost and left on their own”. At times Bernie's mum was very tearful and spoke about the impact on her own mental health, which she felt had suffered as a result of trying to look after him. She said they were approaching the EHC application with a sense of trepidation and worry.

Both Bernie and his mum were concerned that they wouldn't be able to “say the right things” and that they would feel intimidated by professionals in meetings.

We worked together to look at what a “good day” might look like. It quickly became clear that Bernie had lots of aspirations and was very clear what he wanted to go into his plan. He was able to identify that he wanted to work with animals and live in the countryside. He also knew what was “important for him” and “to him”.

With some support and explanation of the process from the IS service, both Bernie and his mum's confidence started to grow. We worked together to plan for the meetings to look at aspirations and then outcomes. Despite stating that they felt very nervous before the meetings they were able to talk to a room of professionals. Bernie usually unable to stay in meetings, with support and strategies discussed prior to the meeting (regular breaks, visual aids etc) stayed and described his experiences and aspirations to everyone.

It was commented by the family that having the IS there, had instilled confidence describing how “you help to keep me on track, I worry about forgetting things, getting upset when they talk about my son but having you there really helped to calm me”. The role became about enabling them to find a voice and focusing on aspirations and needs as opposed to difficulties and challenges which they said had pervaded their experience of applying for support before. As a family unit the mother and son were able to negotiate with the LA, commenting and amending the draft plan that they felt did not fully cover his needs or aspirations.

On the day that they found out Bernie had got his desired placement, Bernie's mum contacted me in tears. This time she said that the tears were for different reasons! They had secured their first choice placement outside of London, that allowed Bernie to fulfil his

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aspirations of working with animals and living in the countryside, things that he felt were essential to his mental wellbeing.

In thanking the IS, Bernie's mum commented that she had felt she would not have been able to find a "voice" without us, adding that we had helped her have the confidence to "navigate the process and keep her son at the centre of it".