

Moving on from Residential School



In late 2020 we had the opportunity to be part of one young person's journey from residential school to their first home returning to their community only a short distance from family. We knew that to make this a success we needed to listen to what Laura wanted and to move at a pace that made sense to her.

Our Behaviour Support Advisor and Laura's new staff team spent time getting to know her, they described Laura as very affectionate, active – loving the outdoors, with a great sense of humour.

Laura was diagnosed with a Learning Disability and Autism and had limited verbal communication but through our Behaviour Support Advisor spending time with Laura at her school, we understood that Laura would often express herself through her behaviour, such as biting her hand, hitting both herself and others and throwing items of furniture or pulling fixtures off walls often on a daily or weekly basis.

Our Behaviour Support Advisor understood that these behaviours were a way for Laura to express that her world was often overwhelming or confusing, and when Laura did not understand what was happening in her day this would lead to her feeling anxious and worried.

The transition from residential school to a new home of her own, although exciting, would be one of the most significant changes Laura would have to face including living in a new environment, no longer living with other people that she had grown to know, leaving behind a familiar support network to build up a new one and having a new daily routine and community.

In preparation for this, our Behaviour Support Advisor met Laura, her family, and her new staff team regularly to plan and coordinate the move to ensure Laura felt included, in control of decision making and reassured at each step.

It has now been fourteen months since Laura has been in her new home and lots has changed!

Laura has new ways of expressing how she is feeling, and staff have adapted to Laura's world, learning how to communicate, and offering support in ways that make sense to her.

Through introducing visual picture cards that Laura can understand, Laura spends time each morning planning with her staff what she would like to do each day and displaying her new calendar in her home so she can always see what is happening and can change the sequence of her day whenever she chooses. A typical day for Laura includes spending time with her family, going out each day to local community events, shopping and enjoying walks around her community as well as working as a team with her staff to look after her home. When Laura is at home, she enjoys spending time being creative particularly enjoying working with clay and beads whilst learning new skills in using 'Alexa' to request her favourite music.

Laura also spends time with her staff each evening using photographs to see who will be supporting her in the morning, so she feels comforted by knowing who will be around her. If a staff member has not been providing support for a while, a social story is used to help remind Laura who the staff member is and get familiar with them again before they offer support, so Laura has no surprises that are confusing.

Laura is also learning new ways of meeting her needs, asking for a break when feeling overwhelmed so staff can quickly change to soothing and relaxing activities that Laura enjoys. Laura is also gaining fun skills in learning how to cook and help prepare her meals with staff who know how best to adapt activities, so Laura feels confident in participating and achieving new things. This includes Laura having fun with the new skills she is learning including enjoying a regular pizza night.

Laura's ability to control her own environment, learn new skills and realise her potential in a way that makes sense to her means that she no longer has daily occurrences of hitting or biting herself or others to make her needs known. Through providing intensive staff support and monitoring, staff are confident in identifying the early warning signs from Laura that she is becoming anxious or worried and can change their support accordingly, so behaviours of concern are no longer necessary.

