



FARNEY CLOSE SCHOOL

The Residential Experience

What is the aim for the residential care at Farney Close?

Farney Close aims for the residential care of a group of young people to be a stimulating and rewarding experience for the adults that care for them.

How is this achieved?

Before looking at how this may be achieved we need to acknowledge that the way we think about young people forms our set of values - these being defined as "attitudes translated into actions". This is a vitally important point, as what we think shapes what we say and do.

What do we base this on?

The following list presents a set of values which underpin our work - forming a base for our work and providing discussion points for considering its development.

1. That any form of social work with young people should focus on their experience and should aim to restore emotional health in ways that is true to their understanding of the world.
2. That young people should be helped to mature in physical and emotional safety, with as much access to the ordinary processes of everyday life as it possible for them. This can be called Growth.
3. Young people will not grow in "care" if those who look after them are not also developing as individuals and professionals.
4. Growth is achieved when, commensurate with age, decisions are shared between adults and young people as much as possible. Growth

will be stifled when adults' confusions are imposed on young people, with unclear or conflicting resolutions.

5. Professional workers own their own practice and are accountable for it. Similarly, they are responsible for their own professional growth. Good social work practice must take this into account and incorporate a developmental element. Without it practitioners become stuck and young people cannot grow.
6. Successful social work with young people in "care" always depends on the efforts of a group of adults. That group or team, can only work effectively together if the unique contribution that each brings to the task is :- a) identified b) given equal worth. Openness leads to growth, hidden agendas lead to suspicion.
7. If we accept that the above is true, it follows that the work of this group of adults is interactive in nature. They must be prepared to be influenced by each other's views, opinions and values in the belief that this will enhance the quality of decision making and hence the eventual outcome.

Our value base provides a way of expressing our thoughts and beliefs about work. Taking these concepts, a stage further we will structure them into the "aims and objectives" of our work - statements regarding the direction we want to pursue.

What are the aims and objectives of Residential Care at Farney Close?

The aims and objectives are:

- ◇ To create an atmosphere of stability and trust between adults and young people which overcomes "them and us" attitudes.
- ◇ To accept each young person as he/she is and the reality they bring with them.
- ◇ To create a living environment where young people can make rational decisions about themselves, however small these decisions may be.
- ◇ To create an atmosphere where growth is the norm, acknowledging that growth is not possible without risk.

- ◇ For adults to acknowledge their unique position of trust and responsibility, responding in a professional way.
- ◇ To do for each young person what is understood to be right, based on our agreed values and these aims and objectives, even when this may be uncomfortable for the adults and young people involved.

The above are theoretical concepts, providing an overall framework for residential practice. Moving on, we can translate our values, aims and objectives into the everyday life of the house.

What is the residential experience like on a daily basis?

Within the context of daily living, the adults must face up to detailed examination of the quality of their conversations with young people. Each human exchange, including body language, leaves a residue, which can be either positive or negative experience - having the potential to aggravate existing situations and problems or to lessen prevalent tensions.

Accepting this as true, our responsibility, when communicating with young people, is enormous. Unfortunately, all too often, our exchanges can reinforce anxieties, frustrations and bad feelings. It is important to recognise that the structure provided by the daily routine necessary for life, underpin the boundaries and structures, need to be a successful adult. In reflection of this, we endeavour to make critical times of the day a more positive experience.

Getting up each morning.

It is probably true that the way in which our day starts will influence our mood for sometime thereafter. For those in our care this may have increased significance as they are living in a somewhat false situation; the people they love, if any, and who love them, if any, are miles away and unavailable. The average day involves contact with many people - not all of whom are friendly towards them. For young people with a generally insecure background, the day ahead may be viewed with uncertainty and thus lead to reinforced feels of insecurity.

Creating a warm and caring environment starts with the way the young people are woken. Adults need to have a great respect for young people and can demonstrate this by awakening them gently, with sensitivity and then allowing them privacy whilst they go about their morning routine. Some will be more reluctant than others in getting up and we need to be aware of

the possible reasons - some, not all, of which are mentioned above. It is necessary to have due regard to set time limits (e.g. breakfast, school) but an awareness of the emotional health of the child concerned is vital.

Getting ready for school.

The formal school day is an area over which residential workers have little direct control, though we do have some influence, such as, ensuring that young people are correctly dressed in smart, clean and tidy uniform, and of presentable appearance. Initially, the aspects on which we can work every day are those of encouragement, showing interest and listening to young people's complaints, fears and hopes - offering help if needed. Our influence of the school day is a long-term issue, being best served if we listen carefully to what the young people say and how they feel. How we respond is important too, as although there may be controversy as to how close "school" and "home" should be, we must recognise that school forms a large percentage of our young people's week and we cannot pretend it has nothing to do with us - it is to do with them, therefore it is very much to do with us.

After the school day has ended.

Obviously, many of the preceding comments apply here, and again, our task is to actively listen to our young people, offering explanations and help with reading, writing, and homework. Showing a clear and detailed interest in their day makes it clear that education is important, that they are important and that their views are consistently sought.

Leisure time.

Leisure time presents difficulties as our controls are at the mercy of so many conflicting priorities. It is important, however, that we recognise the need for the young people to enjoy the present. All the time they are with us, they are viewed as "cases" constantly being reviewed, assessed, "treated" - regarded as different. Our young people see and know what their friends and families are doing "at home" and what they would be doing. We can help overcome their feelings that they are not part of this wider world by allowing activities to take place away from the school and with other organisations. If we constantly encourage a stimulating and creative use of leisure time, young people will not only enjoy themselves but learn things too.

It is worthwhile spending a lot of time discussing between ourselves and with the young people, how available leisure time can be used. The benefits of tackling this area in a concerned and inclusive way may provide pleasant surprises for all concerned.

Bedtimes

As with rising, going to bed can be critical - even disastrous if badly handled. Bed, the dark and long and quiet hours, can be a frightening experience for many young people. For those who have suffered abuse, the bedroom can hold specific fears, which can take a long time to overcome. It is vital that bed and going to sleep is experienced as a secure, safe and pleasurable activity. Adults can aid this process by providing as much individual attention as is possible or is wanted by the people themselves. Going to bed, in general terms, needs to be a period of winding down, "quietness" and for space to be available for young people to talk about anything at all. By making that time available, we cannot predict how they will use it but we will constantly be receiving the message that they are worth listening to.

Summary

Much of what has been stated concerns our thinking about the job and ways of enhancing what we do, in a manner that reflects the residential social work responsibility. It could be that we find some items irrelevant to specific houses, whilst some will be essential to all. If we keep those acknowledged as essential to the front of our minds in forming policy, managing the group, in making decisions and in working with individual young people, then there is greater likelihood that they will not merely survive but thrive - this may be the major difference between caring for people and working with them

What is the task of the Residential Social Care Worker?

The task is to:

- * encourage age-related independence;
- * foster appropriate dependence;
- * promote interdependence;
- * offer understanding of the complexities of living in a group;
- * work purposefully and in depth on the problem areas that brought about to residential care;
- * identify good experiences in the earlier life of a resident and build on these;
- * compensate for the lack of good earlier experiences;

- * lessen intra-personal conflicts, or help someone cope with them;
- * work with the young people in reducing the level of their impulsive behaviour;
- * respond with tolerance to the day-to-day crises presented by the individuals or groups within the home or school;
- * demonstrate an understanding of behaviour and the underlying causes of anxiety and distress;
- * provide a backcloth for normal development;
- * keep alive the concept of normality;
- * develop trust and the ability to be trusted, for example with money, by being truthful and honest, and in the management of time;
- * help residents use money with forethought;
- * create opportunities for young people to demonstrate responsible behaviour;
- * enable young people to enjoy the present;
- * make the residential setting a base for other activities;
- * facilitate the growth of personal relationships;
- * acknowledge the residents as sexual beings;
- * present, in the case of young people, the best possible models of adulthood;
- * help young people prepare for the future.