



Case Study 3

The White Family

“The ideas always came home and we did them as a family”

Background

Cerys White and her partner Steve live in Inverclyde and are foster carers. Since spring 2015 they have been fostering two girls Sasha (5) and Mia (3) who are half-sisters. The girls attend school and nursery respectively and although the process is underway to find them an adoptive home this may take some time. Cerys is a full time foster carer, having previously undertaken this role part-time. She also offers many years' experience of work within a social work setting working with children with additional support needs.

How did the White family get involved in Bookbug?

One of the main issues facing Cerys and Steve when the girls moved in was that neither Sasha or Mia had much in the way of language development. Even Sasha who was four at the time *“might have had twenty words”*. The lack of language affected the way that the girls were able to interact with others and meant that they lacked confidence in social situations.

This meant that whilst attending public Bookbug Sessions was an achievable thing to do, a large group was not the most constructive environment for them to be in as they could be reticent about taking part. In addition the girls displayed signs of attachment issues, and Bookbug activities delivered in a safe environment were seen as *“providing a platform”* to work on that.

Bookbug for the Home was therefore offered on an individual basis in the nursery, delivered by an Early Years Co-ordinator.



Behaviour change

Parents

Cerys says that without being introduced to Bookbug she would have done some songs with the girls but that she *“didn’t know 85% of the ones”* in the Bookbug activities she was introduced to. She has therefore gained new repertoire and also feels that as a result of seeing Bookbug activities demonstrated that she *“brings it to life more”*.

She has been able to begin to use Bookbug activities as a definite time for her and the girls and to use Bookbug activities as a tool to support the way she structures the girls’ care, while also understanding more about the importance of these activities in terms of improved attachment and language development.

In fact, based on this new found experience she is now keen to do Bookbug training herself in order to gain more ideas and confidence in this area, and potentially to then pass on skills to others, notably through support work with adoptive families.

Children

Cerys described that the girls had attachment issues which manifested in different ways. Sasha showed attention-seeking behaviour, was quite anxious and very nervous about physical activities. Meanwhile Mia didn’t look for attention and had become immune to positive and negative comments and even maintaining eye contact was an issue.

There had been a number of benefits for both girls as a result of Bookbug activities.

The songs with physical activities had been a way for Sasha to learn safe physical contact and movement. Meanwhile Mia *“got involved straightaway”* and *“was physically jumping up and down with excitement.”*

Cerys also noted that Sasha’s anxiety meant that she really struggled with regulating her emotions, to the point that she could become physically sick. However the ebb and flow of Bookbug activities where things can go *“faster faster then slower slower”* had really helped with her *“regulation skills”*.

The importance of the songs in developing language also became clear; even if the children don’t have the language to sing the songs they still enjoy taking part as they can *“play around with language”* and can *“do sounds and syllables”* along to the music. They also both developed confidence which enabled them to try new words. The family have a booklet with the songs in it and *“the girls will go and get that.”* The girls have favourite



songs because of the interactive element which each one brings; “Cross Cross” because it’s tactile and “Grand Old Duke of York” with its marching.

A further advantage of specific Bookbug activities was the use of puppets. Cerys feels that being able to focus on these rather than on the child takes the pressure off the child; an activity can be done alongside and not face to face and this takes the focus and the pressure off them. This is particularly important with the girls having difficulty expressing themselves because of their lack of language.

How was Bookbug delivered?

Bookbug was delivered by an Early Years Co-ordinator at the local nursery most weeks over a four month period working with Cerys and Mia. (Sasha was only involved for a short time in these sessions before she started school. But Cerys used the activities she learnt about at home with Sasha.) Some of these sessions also had a focus on Messy Play, and all were delivered in the nursery family room, with a view to the activities then being used in the home. Each week there was different content but with a basic structure of a ‘beginning, middle and end’.

How did the family benefit?

Although these personalised Bookbug Sessions were delivered at nursery, the benefit for the family was that *“the ideas always came home and we did them as a family.”*

Cerys reflects that whilst she had always had books in the house, and might have sung with the girls, Bookbug has given her more variety to choose from and has helped to give these activities a more specific emphasis - a special time – *“the sitting down”*. Cerys uses it as *“a wee treat”*, and she believes that it has become an important form of attachment for the girls with her. It also allows her to promise this important time, for example telling Sasha that she needs ten minutes to get ready but promises that they would then do a Bookbug song together. This appears to give enough reassurance to Sasha that this time with Cerys is coming and she is willing to wait.

Bookbug activities had also been useful for Steve who had no particular experience with children. *“If he’s stuck and can’t think what to do then Bookbug gives something concrete.”* This also works from the girls’ point of view, as they know that they can get these activities which they like and which are important to them from Steve as well as from Cerys.



The activities have also been helpful in establishing routines – for example the fact that Bookbug Sessions have a clear end with a goodbye song has been a very helpful way to conclude the activities, such as at bedtime. Bookbug activities have also proved to be a successful option to keep the girls engaged in situations like in a waiting room where without rhymes or books to focus on they might be “*high as a kite*”.

They have also proved to be good activities which link the girls more positively with other children on playdates, overcoming a lack of confidence in language as all of the children with a range of abilities can enjoy Bookbug activities together.

Summary

This case study highlights the extreme situations that foster carers can face. Cerys and Steve received the girls into their home with just a few hours’ notice and they have been there ever since (for 10 months). They received little advance information and some of it subsequently proved to be incorrect.

The Bookbug activities had become an important way for Cerys to build relationships with both girls as well as the girls gaining important developmental opportunities and learning new ways of interacting.

In terms of the girls’ future and in terms of Bookbug, Cerys was very clear that should they move on to an adoptive situation that they would be “*taking this with them*”. She felt that it would need to be made very clear to any future carer for the girls that Bookbug is something that they love and that is hugely important for them.

Reflecting on the preparation to be a foster carer, Cerys can see that the system assesses carers and does provide some training, but that much of this is theoretical (covering issues such as attachment, safer caring, people involved in a child’s life). She feels that it is presenting what a situation may be like and is giving people the time to think through if they really want to do it.

What she believes is missing however is that “*nobody teaches you, nobody tells you what to do, for example if a child is not even looking at you.*” To some extent there’s an assumption that “*you have the skills*”. She thinks now however that the provision of Bookbug training and Bookbug resources for foster carers would be an extremely valuable addition to the core training offered by Local Authorities to foster carers.