

Benefits of a Residential Parenting Assessment

Residential parenting assessments provide independent assessments within a safe environment for the child/children and whereby the understanding and knowledge gained is non-comparable to any other setting. This allows for increased confidence in assessment, as both strengths and difficulties can be evidenced alongside changes in abilities and behaviour.

Parents are given opportunities to learn and develop their skills alongside opportunities to reflect and focus on changes that may be needed in order to ensure that they can appropriately care for their child in the future. Furthermore, this occurs whilst they are caring for their child in an environment with safety and supervision measures in place.

There can be a concern that residential parenting assessments do not provide a realistic view of families in the community. The Liliias Graham Trust takes this into consideration and uses a staged approach to assessments, aiming to gradually decrease the level of intensive support appropriately for each situation and the level of risk to the child. For example, parents on placement can spend time in their community in order to be assessed on their ability to prioritise their child's needs.

It is acknowledged that when families return to their communities, some parents will revert back to previous concerning behaviours or relationships with people who may pose a risk to their child. The assessments carried out by The Liliias Graham Trust allow opportunities for parents to demonstrate their determination to avoid such situations.

The level of staff support is usually reduced as the assessment progresses and this provides an opportunity for the parents to demonstrate their abilities without staff prompts or support.

The residential accommodation is based on a typical family home. This means that the parent has to demonstrate their abilities to look after a child within a realistic home environment, with the dangers and hazards that are present in most homes. Additionally, parents are expected to demonstrate their abilities to provide a suitable environment for their child by contributing to the cleanliness and hygiene of the home. We work with parents on their understanding of the concerns and risks to assist them in having the motivation and abilities to succeed. Assessments that continue into the community after the residential assessment further allow opportunities for parents to demonstrate their learning and for this to be tested within an increasingly realistic environment.

There can sometimes be a concern that a family on a residential placement will become reliant on the level of support and that they then return home without this level of support. The Liliias Graham Trust recognises this and our model is designed to minimise these difficulties.

Our approach to assessments is to progress through stages, whereby there is a period of "teaching" and education, backed up by a period of supported learning and practice, followed by a period of unsupported observations. This enables the parent to demonstrate what they have learnt and that they are able to put that learning into practice.

The staged approach has the aim of withdrawing support to families in circumstances where it

is considered safe to do so for the child. During the last few weeks of the assessment, the aim is that the families start to work with our "Outreach" team, whose sole aim is to support the transition from residential to community and help sustain the teaching the parents have learned.

Furthermore, if a family has progressed well in the assessment, we will have discussions with the Local Authority about the assessment ending early and our Outreach team taking over the case. This stage would then be within the family's own home in the community and would allow them to demonstrate that they are leading suitable lifestyles for their child.

For some families, however, decisions about their child's future is not always clear, and there may need to be a period of further assessment and support at the residential facility.

After we have had the initial "Goal Setting" meeting - whereby the Social Work Department and the parent(s) have decided what they hope to achieve in their assessment at The Liliash Graham Trust - we have weekly review meetings with the parent(s), social work department and The Liliash Graham Trust staff, and provided detailed review reports which allow those involved to promptly identify any issues of concern. This also enables everyone involved to consider if the assessment should continue as it is or if the goals of the assessment need to be adjusted.

The Liliash Graham Trust recognises that a residential assessment is a significant financial commitment for Local Authorities but we believe that they often provide long term savings by enabling appropriate decisions to be made about a child's future earlier.

A number of recent research documents have highlighted the importance of early interventions. The Recognition of Adolescent Neglect Review (2011)* found that neglect is most damaging in the early stages of life. The NSPCC has also produced a report highlighting the importance of early intervention to help children get the best possible start in life**. We strive to give parents the best opportunity possible to enable them to successfully care for their child, whilst ensuring that the child's needs are met.

Jane Carter

Head of Service

*Rees, Stein, Hicks and Gorin (2011) <http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/summs/neglected.php>

**NSPCC (2011)

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforprofessionals/underones/allbabiescount/summaryPDFwdf856>