



Say 'hello' to ... Mary

A Pastoral Care Case Study

REGISTERED CHARITY 516184

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When Mary first came to our attention she had just been sexually assaulted, her teachers didn't expect her to get anywhere in life and her mother was dealing drugs out of their home. Mary is now studying psychology in college and hopes to work with children and young people. So what made the difference?

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Mary is a girl who I have worked with for a number of years. The first time I met her was when she had made a disclosure to her deputy year leader in year 9. She initially told her year leader that she had been sexually assaulted. I was asked to go and sit in with them as the discussion progressed and also as her year leader had teaching commitments. As Mary talked openly about things it became clear that drugs were also being dealt from her home. At this point social services were contacted and a discussion set up. We felt it right to get Mary out of her home as this was not the best place for her to be, but didn't want to alert the family to the information we had about drug dealing until the police could investigate. After discussions with police, social services and parents Mary was placed with her Grandmother while the police investigated both the rape allegations and the drug dealing.

That evening I ended up at the rape suite in the local police station with Mary and her mother. This was a difficult experience for everyone concerned. Providing support for Mary's mother who was in real need at that time but also knowing about the situation she was putting her daughter in by dealing drugs from the house was hard to do, but meeting an individual's needs at that time regardless is key to the work of a pastoral support worker. I then provided support the day the police went into her home to search for drugs. Whilst all this was going on I spent upwards of 5 hours a week with Mary—seeing her every day, giving her time out and a safe place to express her feelings. Having no fixed timetable allows a great level of freedom to meet pupils needs and apportion time as is needed.

Following this I worked with Mary on a regular basis, having one to one sessions and doing pairs work. During this time Mary was living her life as if she didn't care, staying out with guys in their cars till the early hours. One time she even said that she had to look after a gun for someone until the police had searched his house. These aren't really the average things a 14-year-old girl gets up to, but for her in her world these are everyday.

During our sessions Mary would discuss the things she was involved in and the daily struggles she had. We would then talk though these issues and try to come up with other options and lifestyle choices. We also looked at different coping strategies for the things in her life that were not going to change or were beyond her control at the current time. She would generally leave the session with a more positive outlook stating that she was going to make changes but most weeks Mary would return telling the same kinds of stories and we'd talk about making changes and she would leave aiming to make those changes.

Increasingly as year 10 and 11 went on I saw less of Mary, her attendance fell and she dropped subjects. She was still surrounded by drug culture and was struggling to complete coursework or make it in for lessons and would often not attend lessons but roam with other students. Mary would still pop in to see me, but the sessions became less focused with Mary only wanting to talk and the only guidance she wanted was about who she should date or which place she should hang out that evening. Mary came in a few times to see me before her exams

and we chatted a bit about the future, she wasn't sure what she wanted to do, but it was nice to hear her say she wanted to be in a job where she could help young people.

Seeing Mary in these situations I was unsure if she would ever fulfil her dreams. When talking with colleagues no one thought that she would be able to escape the situation she was in, and would in fact end up making wrong lifestyle choices making her personal situation worse.

Having just finished a one to one session I was, as always, shifting a pile of papers round my office when Mary turned up at my door. She said she thought she would pop in to see me as she had finished college early. That was the first surprise that she had gone to college. She said that she was re-sitting her key exams as well as taking psychology. She went on to tell me that she was now a model student and would spend time at lunch in the resource centre, and was ahead with all her course work. Mary was in a really good place work wise considering where she was 6 months ago. It was good to see that she was in a position where she wanted to change and provide herself with new opportunities. Mary also talked out her boyfriend who she had been seeing for a long time and how he was good for her as he motivated her, he was a bit older and a lot less reckless than her previous boyfriends.

Mary was still living at home, continuing to grow up around the drug culture, petty crime and the 'gang culture' of other family members, but she was starting to discover that she could make her own choices and be her own person in all of this. The key is that as with any change Mary needs to stay focused and accept that there will be ups and downs, but not to give up when the hard times come but to drive forward with a sense of satisfaction and pride at how far she has come.

Case Study Notes:

Mary's story is true, just her name has been changed in accordance with our confidentiality policy. The case study was written by one of our pastoral care specialists.

The Pastoral Care Specialist:

The Pastoral Care Specialist at Mary's school is based there full-time, offering one-to-one support and peer group sessions to those young people who are suffering abuse, neglect, bullying, are bereaved or have low self-esteem.

Schools Outreach:

Schools Outreach provides pastoral care specialists to UK schools as well as short training courses and a consultancy service.

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