



Open Learn: Learning Space Case Study

K315_1: Becoming a social work practitioner

Case study 1: What to do about Sarah

For this series of case studies, we have adapted transcripts of conversations and interviews recorded for the K315 Open University course.

John gave up a job as a panel beater to become a social worker four years prior to the recording. He then took over the case of fourteen year old Sarah, who became involved with social services two years earlier, when her mother found herself unable to cope.

This conversation takes place between John and Sarah. Sarah's mother Karen also contributes to this conversation. An interviewer was also present.

John

From a social worker's point of view it's quite worrying because I think, you know, if anything was to happen to Sarah while she's in the care of Social Services ... if anything was to happen to her, you know, we would be the first people that the finger would be pointed at.

Sarah

You know I feel more like grown up - I feel a grown ups age - like I know what I am doing. But every teenager does so that's normal.

Interviewer

But not every teenager lives the sort of life that you've led, where you're out and away from home a lot and going off and doing your own thing.

Sarah

Yeah - that's true but I like doing my own thing. I like having my own freedom.

Freedom to Sarah means regularly disappearing from the children's home, where her mother has agreed she should live. John decided to meet Sarah at her mother's house. Sarah's mother, Karen was present during this conversation.

John

So - I've not seen you for about a week. You still working?

Sarah

For two days a week.

John

Doing what?



Sarah

Lickin' Chicken.

John

I spoke to the manager and he says he has never heard of you, right? And you have since said, right, that you have not been working in Lickin' Chicken. You've been selling drugs.

Sarah

What - the manager?

John

No. You've said that.

Sarah

Oh. Skunk.

John

Yeah - is that right?

Sarah

The drug - skunk.

John

Is that right?

Sarah

Yeah.

John

So tell me then, right, when you agreed to go into this placement, you agreed to stay there during the week, go to school ...

Sarah

I have stayed there during the week ...

John

Right ... hold on a sec ... and visit your mum at weekends, okay? So far you've done none of those things. You're out there. You're selling drugs, okay? You're quite possibly taking drugs.

Sarah

No ...

John

Right? You're hanging out with a guy who is old enough to be your father. You've been spending nights with him and I don't know in whose beds or separate beds I don't know okay? You know what you've been doing right and you know that what you have been doing isn't right. Am I right or am I wrong?



Sarah

Right.

John

Sorry?

Sarah

Right.

John

Right. So, what do you think we should do then? How can we pull you away from them?

Sarah

I don't have sex, right. When I do have sex it will be when I am sixteen, with him, right? It doesn't matter ...

Karen

Have you had sex with him?

Sarah

No. Mum, would you mind your own business when I am talking please? And I am just going to say he's innocent, and I am not going to let an innocent man get into trouble for nothing, because that is just so horrible to do that. It's just like you. You are ...

Karen

So there's got to be something wrong with you Sarah, to protect a man like that.

Sarah

I am talking.

John

If you are not prepared to co-operate with us, right, then you know, unfortunately there are other steps that we can take. How can we make things work for you?

Sarah

I don't know. Just get off my back. I don't want ... I don't want ... I don't even like Social Services really. I don't even want them really in my life. I don't need them.

John

Okay. So ...

Sarah

The only part I reckon I need them is for college ... for what I want to do.



- John**
Right, so if we left you alone right ... if I was to walk out of this room now and say Sarah, that's it?
- Sarah**
You will still check back on me like to see what I am doing.
- John**
Oh. So ...
- Sarah**
Just to check, like ... leave me alone, but check and have a record of me ... of how I am getting on ... to see if you could reckon I could manage.
- John**
Oh. So ...
- Sarah**
Not just all by myself.
- John**
So we should walk away, right? Come back and see you whenever, and just make a note of what you've been up to? And, if we've got concerns about what you've been doing?
- Sarah**
Then you have the rights, yeah, if you've got concerns.
- John**
Right. Well I've got news for you, right? It is I've got a string of concerns about what's been going on in your life.

**This case study has been adapted from recordings made for the
OU course DVD for K315 'Critical Social Work Practice'
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