



Open Learn: Learning Space Case Study

K315_1: Becoming a social work practitioner

Case study 3: Sarah and John

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

John is a social worker who 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 contemporary conversation takes place some time after the initial interviews had been recorded. Each of them have been given the opportunity to watch clips from the original recordings and are interviewed about their responses to those clips.

Interviewer

What did it feel like seeing yourself at 14?

Sarah

It was really upsetting actually ... to see myself like that ... in that state. Because I look back then and I think, "Oh my God, what have I done to myself?" It's just so bad.

Sarah responds to clips of John explaining the opinion that she should be put into care for her own protection.

Sarah

I don't think I was listening to him at all. I just couldn't concentrate there anyway. I didn't have any drugs, and I was just up ... as well as upset with the questions, he was asking me ... with no drugs in my system, I just wanted to go.

Interviewer

Do you think he was being open and honest with you ... about what was happening?

Sarah

Yeah, I do. Yeah, and I did respect him for that, you know. Yeah, I did. I do think he was being very honest. And that was good of him to do that really, because it opens up me, and it gives me a different ... it gives me more trust in him.



Sarah (contd.)

You know, it wasn't like he was hiding anything, or didn't get out what he really wanted to say. Whether I ... that's what I like about John ... whether I liked it or not, he said it. You know, the way he puts things across to me and makes me think, you know, it makes me pause ... you know, for a second to make me think about it. And not many people can do that.

The interviewer now turns to Karen for her responses to Karen's behaviour at the time of the original recording.

Interviewer

Do you think that Sarah was listening to John?

Karen

No. No, I think she wanted to laugh.

Interviewer

So was Sarah saying what she thought John wanted to hear?

Karen

Yeah, she ... yeah. He knew he was going to get that from Sarah, because she wouldn't have got anything positive ... because they've never done anything, or give her, or shown her anything positive for her trust them.

She was still a little girl, but the front, you know, it was ... she was in a dangerous situation down there. And it was ... it was a horrible time.

John now comments on Sarah's comments on going into care, which were made during the original recording.

Interviewer

What was that time like?

John

That was hard, it was, because I can remember that scene. And I think, right at the end, I kind of felt I was bordering on some personal feelings.

Interviewer

Do you think she was listening to you?

John

Yeah, she was ... because, right at the end, I, you know, I can remember sort of vividly how I felt, and how she reacted when I asked her the question.

And I think she sort of ... she went quiet. I think, at that time, she was thinking.



John (contd.)

I can't remember exactly how we came to be at that spot at that particular time, but it was a case of, each time you saw her, you had to sort of grab that opportunity to try and talk to her, and try to get through to her ... and we were ... we were sort of having discussions as to whether or not to have her secured on welfare grounds. And ... and I needed to, sort of, have that discussion with her.

So, you know, I was ... I was always apprehensive and sort of nervous about her reaction in the sense that, you know. She may have got sort of violent with me, but she didn't. As you can see from the clip, you know, she was quite angry at the thought of people were trying to lock her up.

I kind of felt, wow, you know, we're probably doing the wrong thing here. And because of her anguish, she ... she was ... you know ... I sort of think, "Well, shall we just try and keep working with her, or shall we sort of take decisive action?" I was genuinely worried for her safety. And you know, each day I sort of get into work, I'm kind of thinking, "I hope I haven't got that phone call to say something serious has happened to Sarah".

She was almost like a runaway train at that time, and it felt like nothing could have stopped her. And, although I wasn't sort of happy within myself in terms of the plan for locking her up ... taking her liberties and so on ... it got to the point where we was ... there was ... what else could we have done? It was a difficult period for me. I went home some evenings and had a couple of drinks.

You always look for the good. And I think I felt she had it in her to change. Those things that I said to her during that clip ... I think they just kind of ... it just flowed. It just flowed. I felt, I ... at that point, I think I felt like her dad. You know, I felt like I'm her dad, she's my daughter, and I'm extremely worried about her. And I needed to say those things to her. And I also felt that I was touching on some personal issues for her and how she felt. At that point, I knew I needed to stop. So that's why I didn't actually push that conversation any further.

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