Participant: T4

Title: How do foster carers and teachers attribute the challenging behaviour of Looked after children?

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Location: School

Interview: CFB (I)

Interviewee: Participant T4 (P)

Age: 32

Sex: Female

Teacher Role and Years: 8

I: can we start off just with maybe err, just to start off with, how long you’ve been a teacher for, you’re experience with looked after children kind of within that capacity and also you’re age if that’s ok.

P: Yeah, so I’m 32 – I had to think then – yeah, 32, so I’ve been teaching for 8 years, erm, and I taught for 3 years at another school and I’ve been at this school for 5 years, so erm, since I’ve been at this school I’ve worked with a lot of looked after children. Our school has quite a high number, so a couple of years ago in year 4, when I taught year 4 I had a few, the children that I taught in year 4 I then taught them in year 5, they followed me up, so I stayed as their key worker for the second year, so I had two girls in my class, one was a twin and her sister was in the other class, and they were in foster care, and then I had one girl in my class as well who was in foster care. She moved up, they both moved up into year 5 with me, when they moved into year 6, cause they’re allowed to choose their key worker, one of them chose somebody else as their key worker, but um, but one of them who’s in year 6, she still has me as her key worker, and she still kinda checks in with me, pretty much on a daily basis because we’ve quite a close bond. In my class at the moment I have one girl who’s looked after as well but she’s not with a foster family, because her, her foster family situation broke down because her behaviour was quite volatile so she’s currently in a foster care home, in [location] and she travels to us every day, I think there’s like seven children in her home so she has like 9 or 10 carers and there’s not really like a stable family relationship so, but yeah, she’s been in my class since January.

I: Yeah, so you’ve had lots of experience then? Yeah, wow, ok. Well, I think for the purpose of, I mean it’s always hard to do, but for this kind of conversation, interview it would be I think useful to identify kinda one child to talk about slightly more so. I mean obviously you can draw on thoughts and experience from all of them, but...and I don’t know if you then have, if there’s one child that stands out as having had slightly more challenging behaviour, that you’d kinda experienced.

P: So, um, the child who’s in year 6 now, erm, she did have very challenging behaviour, um, but now she doesn’t at all, and now she’s absolutely role model student, like, like real role model, top of year 6. And the child who’s in my class now, she did have very volatile challenging behaviour which is settled but we do see elements of it a lot of the time, recurring, but compared to how she was in previous settings its nowhere near as bad. So I don’t know which...

I: I guess, whichever you feel that you have, could best kinda talk about and draw upon your experiences with I guess in conversation.

P: Erm, yeah, I’ll talk about the one who’s in my class now...

I: Which year are we now?

P: So year 4

I: 4, ok, so why don’t we start off then just, if you’re able to just describe this girl to me, just generally, broadly, yeah?

P: So, she’s, she’s actually a really lovely girl, she’s very warm and loving and nurturing, and she’s built really strong bonds with some of the women in our school, and she’s quite like huggy and very sweet, very affectionate, but she has a lot of social problems with other children in the class. Where she wants to have best friends and she wants to have that girly bond with other girls in my class, but she doesn’t quite know how to do it. And that results in sometimes when she falls out with them, it goes from what should be just a normal girly fall out – so a couple of weeks ago it was that we were doing a little maths test, like not a proper maths test, it was literally like two questions, and um, and they had to do it independently, and she turned to her friend next to her and said, and said like, oh will you help me I’m really stuck, and it’s her best friend, and her friend said “no I can’t help you” y’know, “Miss said that you got to do it on your own”. And she then got in a bit of a grump, but where other girls would just get in a grump, she got in a grump and then she shoved her and called her an arsehole. But she’s like this really angelic, sweet, lovely girl and then she’ll call somebody an arsehole or she’ll tell them to ‘F off’, she’ll stick her fingers up at them. She’s used racist language before as well, but even though her best friend is actually Sri Lankan, and a lot of this has come from the home that she’s come from and where she’s imitating that behaviour, but yeah. But she’s actually very sweet. She needs a lot of help in class, but yeah, it’s just sometimes she’ll be really down and then she’ll push people away from her physically and emotionally. She’ll swear at them until they leave her alone, or shove them, if they’re in her way or near her.

I: Ok, and what’s your...when you see those kind of behaviours, either as you said those kind of, figuratively or literally pushing people away kind of, what’s your thinking about why that behaviours occurring?

P: Erm, I mean, from what we’ve heard from her previous home life there was a lot of swearing going on there, and there wasn’t a lot of affection given, I think that she, she wants to heal the bond, she doesn’t know how to do it, and rather than her feel sad in herself, I think a part of her wants to make other people feel sad as well. And she, she finds it really really hard to say sorry – initially – later on she’s full of sorry and she wants to write sorry notes, and she’ll be sobbing her little heart out because she’s so sad about what’s gone wrong, but she, erm, but yeah she, I feel like she she gets to a point where she’s really upset and she’s really angry, and she doesn’t know what to do, and her only solution is, right well I don’t know what to do so I’m just going to break this off completely, because its hurting her too much. Um, I think its kindof like a defensive thing, erm, but she’s normally quite good, we’re normally quite good at being able to bring her back round again.

I: yeah, so how do you manage that then?

P: Well I mean, getting cross with her, is just not ever the way forward, because I think it would scare her, she’s too delicate. So, y’know the language thing, whilst obviously whilst we don’t condone bad language, when a child is emotionally distressed, you kind of have to accept that you are gonna have negative language, and shouting about negative language and things, it just it doesn’t work, so normally I give her a little a bit of space, you know I’ll go over to her, I’ll get another adult, she has an adult that works with her, erm, and I’ll just kind of like sit with her and she normally then starts crying, and usually it’s a case of y’know like “what went wrong?, talk me through what happened” um, y’know “how’s it made you feel?” and “how do you think that’s made your friend feel?” um, we do restorative practice in our school, so we don’t ask them why they did it because why doesn’t matter, it’s the impact that you’re behaviour has had on others, and we just kind of unpick with her, well y’know like, did your reaction to that happening make it worse or did it make it better? And then she realises y’know it made it worse, and now I feel worse and now my friend feels worse and its normally once we get to that point that she realises – oh, I messed up – and I’ve done something wrong, and then she’s ok and she’s ready to...usually she won’t be ready to say sorry straight away, she’ll just be tearful and we’ll move her away, and then we talk to her friend and say “she’s not ready yet to say sorry, but when she’s ready she will” and then we come back to it later, y’know “are you ready to restore it? Are you ready to fix it now?”. But yeah I think, I think, we just, we always make sure that we give her time, because you can’t hurry her if she’s feeling too emotionally distressed, she just needs space. And she needs just to be moved away, until she’s ready to fix it.

I: Yeah, so kind of physical space that kind of I guess helps also give that kind of emotional space as well. How do you find her friends and others around that respond to that notion of “oh she just needs more time”, like do they understand as well or...

P: they do, I think in a lot of classroom settings they wouldn’t, but in my particular classroom setting, as well as her I have a lot of children with mental health problems, um and y’know oppositional defiance disorder, I’ve got a few children with that, I’ve got a few children with autism, so a lot of the children in the class, because of the high SEN need, to be honest, they’re quite used to that, and they understand that some children react to things differently to others, but in other classroom settings where I’ve worked with children with behaviour like that, it’s been difficult and it’s been a case of teaching the children, that you know if somebody is having difficulties with their feelings and difficulties with their emotions, that they need to, that y’know, they need to y’know we teach them right don’t give them eye contact, y’know focus on what the teachers saying, focus on what you’re meant to be doing, because otherwise it could make them feel worse. And so, like some classes don’t get that at first, but I think once we actually teach it explicitly, they kind of learn it. And now, I mean, sometimes with other children – not with her – thank goodness – but with other children I’ve had children throwing tables and things and I’ve been able to say to the class, right ok, everybody line up at the door, and they do and they just stand up like soldiers and they just line up at the door, and they don’t look and they don’t give eye contact and they just go.

I: They get it

P: They learn, yeah they do get it completely, and bless the two little girls who are friends with this looked after child, because sometimes I feel like in a way...

[phone rings]

P: I’m really sorry

I: No, you’re alright

[phone conversation]

P: erm, but yeah, sometime I feel like they’re friends with her almost because they feel sorry for her, and that if it wasn’t for some of her needs and some of her circumstances, they would have reached the end of their tether by now, and they would have cut off the friendship and they would have gone and played with somebody else. But I think that they realise that she’s a bit different to some of the other girls in the class, and so they keep giving her more chances. And it’s really lovely that she has a friendship like that because I think a lot of children are not that patient.

I: No, that does sound really nice actually for her. Ok, so we talked a little bit about some of the kind of social interaction based challenging behaviours, or challenging behaviour that kind of stem from that. What sort of other behaviours would you, or do you get other behaviours not related to the social stuff...

P: most of the stuff is linked to the social friendship things. Um, we’ve had some random things in the playground as well, where she’s got upset and angry and then she’s just randomly gone up to somebody and like punched them in the stomach. Yeah, and that’s happened a couple of times when she first joined our school and I think it was just part of the difficulties of transition, but it hasn’t happened since. In her past school, um, cause she she was attending a school, she got permanently excluded, and then she was out of school for seven months...

I: Gosh, that’s a long time

P: Yeah, until she joined our school in January, and um, and at the last school, we had the teacher was nice enough to drive over to have a meeting with me and our family champion, who deals with looked after children. And she was telling us how at the last school, she would refuse to come to school, she refused to get dressed for school, so they’d have to go and get her and physically like drag her out of the house because she wouldn’t come to school. She’d be spitting at the teachers, throwing things at the teachers, swearing at the teachers, showing a lot of racist behaviour. But this was when she was still with her parents, erm, and going through a difficult time with that, so I think a lot of those challenging behaviours were linked more to the situation she was in, and now that she’s in a more stable environment, we, sort of a lot of them have just kind of faded out to nothing, and they just don’t really present anymore. Which, yeah...

I: What’s your understanding of how, why those, it might sound like a really obvious question, but why those behaviours have changed alongside the change in kind of placement.

P: I’m not sure , I don’t know if it’s just because her problems were dealt with so quickly which meant that when things started to go south at home, I think basically social services were always involved in her life, because with this particular child previous siblings, some of which she doesn’t know about were removed from the families care. So right from birth, right from birth she’s had involvement with social services and she’s constantly had those check-ups so whenever things started to go wrong there was kind of a backup team there. We have other looked after children in the school who have, who their challenging behaviour has not faded out and I think that’s possibly because they’ve been in that situation for longer with no support. Whereas I think yeah with her, she’s kind of had more support from social services than some other looked after children in our school have had.

I: Yeah, that’s an interesting observation actually. Yeah. So that almost the time that they had spent in kind of their home environment with their parents, the length of time they spent there and the amount of support that they had there has impacted how easily...

P: ... she’s transitioned...

I: ...the transition to a different environment has been.

P: Yeah I think so. I mean we’ve had lately, it’s been more sadness from her than anger. And I think a lot of that is just missing her family, because she doesn’t really know what’s gone on, and she doesn’t know what’s happening, she doesn’t know what’s happening in the future, and it’s that uncertainty and she’s presenting it as sadness, but we have had other children in the school who have presented it in other ways. We have a lot of looked after children in our school and they’re like a rainbow of emotions.

I: Yes, yeah, I guess that’s an interesting view for you for me for this conversation that you’ve had I guess so much exposure to

P: a lot...

I: of looked after children and their different...

P: and some that have gone back to their families as well, so not all, so this child in my class, she erm, there was a court case in march, erm and, her parents didn’t attend, so her parents have lost any chance of having her back, so she will, y’know she’ll be fostered, but I think the care home that she’s in now she’ll be there atleast another year until they, before they start looking for a foster family...

I: oh before they *start* looking for a family?

P: yeah, because, once they go into a care home, they like them to be there for two years before they try and transition them back into a family because the previous family didn’t work. I think she was a bit of special case because her behaviour was that volatile - at the time, when we heard that she was joining our school we were a bit like, “oh my god, what is coming our way”. It’s difficult because we try really hard with our looked after children and as a result we’re doing really really well with them. In fact, next week at the education awards we’ve been put forward to win the award for looking after looked after children.

I: Oh wow

P: Yeah, its next Wednesday

I: Gosh that’s incredible

P: So we’re hoping we’ll win! But, yeah, so, but the problem with that is that the local authority then hears that this school are really good with looked after children, so they recommend you so we get them from all over. So, the girl in my class travels all the way from [location], because we get recommended.

I: Yeah, I was going to ask actually yeah where that increased number of looked after children came from whether it was just the demographic of the area...

P: We never used to have this many no

I: ... or whether they are liked shipped in almost

P: No, they are, they are literally like, I mean the demographic of our school means that we, we do have a lot of children where social services are involved and we have a lot of safeguarding needs and in some cases like we have one family in the school at the moment with lots of children in our school in different year groups, and some who were previously in our school but have grown up now. I think there’s like 8 of them all together. But they’ve gone, they went into foster care last year for about 9 months and then they’ve come back out of it, and that’s been difficult. Erm, so we have some children like that and then yeah we also have some children from other local authorities, from [location], from [location] from all over coming here.

I: So what is it about this school, this environment that you think does work so well, what is it that you do, I guess how is your management of or support of looked after children different that makes you guys so good?

P: I don’t know. We have just won, we’ve just got our gold mark for the SMSC award

I: oh ok, what’s that?

P: It’s like mental health social mental health, like our teaching of PSHE basically and how we incorporate like mental health and well-being into our whole curriculum. We do a lot of nurture stuff, we have a family champion who is just brilliant. And she, when a looked after child is joining our school we do a full transition programme, where they’re not initially in class six hours a day, so the girl in my class when she started in January she initially started on a timetable of one hour a day and it wasn’t in class, and it was a planned PSHE thing where she’d come in and she’d work on – so we have roots which are our behaviour system, we have like a tree in every classroom and it stands for like, it spells out an acronym which is like our school values. And it’s a whole like, being part of our family tree, we use the word family a lot when we’re talking about our school and we try and make our school into a family for the children so that if they don’t have a solid family then we’re saying well your part of our family now, we’re your family, we’ll look after you. We’re here for you and we do a lot of work on that and building relationships. We do like restorative circles after lunch with like children of all year groups, we question children about their well-being twice a day, we just do a lot of work on mental health and wellbeing in our school. It’s like the absolute core to everything that we do. And I think as a result, children who didn’t y’know, fit in in other schools can thrive, I think also we have quite high tolerance levels. I think a lot of schools when they get children presenting difficult behaviours, because we also have really high SEN here, again because we do it well, so everybody sends their SEN children here. But yeah and we have quite high tolerance, where other schools will not take in children if they have challenging behaviour, or like, will permanently exclude children who are swearing who are showing aggressive and violent behaviours. We just, we don’t, we will find a way wherever we can, as long as we can keep that child safe and keep other children safe, then they can come to our school, and yes that means that we have to have personalised provision for some of our children. Some of the children don’t spend the whole day in the classroom, they’re out of the classroom or they have their own learning environment. Some of them have their own tailored curriculums, and so, whatever, but they’re presenting in their behaviours that they can fit in and they’re not gonna be like the weirdest kid in school, because we have so many of them!

I: They’re not the one child that’s got that...

P: Its quite usual to like see children like walking past the corridor wearing like reindeer antlers and a wedding dress over their, because its just like, that’s what that child likes to do sometimes.

I: Yeah, oh ok, that sounds really lovely

P: Yeah, we just kind of accept it.

I: That sounds really nice, I wish more schools were like that. I want to take you back if that’s ok, to your, what you were saying about the timetable with kind of the introduction of looked after children...

P:... transitioning in...

I: yeah transitioning in and all of that, and I guess you’re understanding of why that’s something that’s needed for looked after children and how it benefits them, I guess.

P: yeah, I mean, we don’t do it exclusively for looked after children, we do it for children with SEN needs as well, just any kind of personal needs where they’re joining our school. And I think the main reason we do it is because joining a class with 29 new faces, can be quite overwhelming and especially when these children are asking them questions wanting to, y’know “come and sit with me, be my best friend”, sometimes it takes that pressure off, and with some children the way we’ve done it is its almost been like, y’know we need to teach you how to be part of our family and then you can join your class family and it’s almost like they need to earn it by showing that “oh we’ll I’ve learnt now about the roots and I’ve learnt about the school values” and by the time they actually then go and join their class properly, they’re desperate too. And they really want to learn, so we go from having children who, just in their last schools just would not go into class, would not do their work, would not do their learning, and then suddenly because they’re working with our family champion or another adult and they’re working in the library and they’re doing nice posters about values, and then we invite, maybe two children from the class to go and do that with them, to go and play, maybe a team building game, y’know maybe they’ll play like monopoly together or something like that, so they start to build those relationships, then we, as we add in more hours we might add in a playtime, where they go and have playtime with the children, and then they might come in for one lesson a day and that slow transition in, by the time their full-time, they’re absolutely desperate to be full-time they’re like “I want to join the class now, please can I go into the class today, I want to, I want to see my friends again”, and by the time they come in, the children have seen them several times, so it’s no big deal, because well they’ve already been to our school for the last five weeks, and then they’re just they’re accepted and they’re just like one of the pack. It’s kind of a bit more easing them in slowly rather than throwing them in at the deep end. And especially when like they’ve maybe had time out of school, they can find it more tiring as well.

I: Yes, yeah, because I guess, well the example that you just gave earlier, 7 months for a year 4 child is a really long time.

P: It’s a really long time...she was having tutoring at home, but when she joined us, she would y’know, the other children could write half a page in a English lesson, she could barely get a sentence down because she just works, not because she’s refusing to do it or anything like that, just because that’s how long it took her.

I: Yeah. Oh bless her, yeah it is hard, when you’ve been out of the education system for a while. Ok, could I ask you to think, this could be any child really, but a particular, not isolated is the wrong term, but a particular challenging behavioural incident, so not necessarily a pattern, but just like one kind of particular incident that you can think of that we can talk about in more detail like what kind of happened, and what your thoughts were about it. And that sort of thing.

P: Ok, ooh, let me think of one. There’s been lots of the years. Ok, yeah, erm, so the girl in year 6, she’s when she was in year 4 and she was presenting some challenging behaviours, and it would start with hiding under the table, and then if that didn’t kind of garner attention then she would make noises hiding under the table. On one particular occasion it was because she’d had a fall out with a friend in the playground and she’d, I think she’d gone out onto the playground and she’d basically got in an argument with this girl and she’d just basically punched her in the face. And then she’d run back into the classroom, hid under the table, and kind of didn’t really know what to do, y’know not really being able to open up about it or anything, not being able to tell us what had happened, what had led up to it, it was just a random kind of occurrence. But yeah, that’s kind of one that comes to mind.

I: Yeah, so when she was I guess, you were saying like under the table and maybe making noises, like what was your thinking about that behaviour when it was happening?

P: erm, at the time, she was hiding under the table a lot, and sometimes she was very sociable but sometimes she just wanted to be alone. It got to the point where it was happening so regularly, that I went to Ikea and I bought her a desk. Because I didn’t have her own space in the classroom for her to have, so I was like, she needs her own desk so I bought her a cheap desk from Ikea and that was her space and usually she would sit with other children, but sometimes she would want to sit at her desk and she wanted her back to everybody, and I think the going under the table thing – because she would pull chairs in as well, I think it was her feeling unwanted and unsafe, I think it was mostly that, sometimes because she went under the regularly when she felt unsafe, she kind of started to pick up on that when she did that, other children in the class where “oh are you ok? are you alright?” and so sometimes she would then use it for attention. But it was usually quite easy to tell the difference, because of, you could usually, you could read her emotions like a book. She wasn’t very subtle.

I: yeah yeah oh ok. And how do you think your understanding of where that behaviour was coming from, impacted on your decision of how like you managed it. So, I guess in your case, as you just described with this one you went and got her her own space, and her own table, how much of that was because of your understanding of her as a looked after child and her experiences versus if that had been any nother child in the class.

P: I think if it had been any other child in the class, I think I would have done the same thing, but I think it would have been harder to understand why, because I think when you’ve got children who, I probably would have been wanting to y’know wanting to meet with parents, try and unpick what’s going on, why are they behaving this way, whereas when you know the past of a child and you know what’s gone on in their life, and you know what trauma they’ve gone through, its, I don’t know maybe it’s just because I’ve been teaching a few years now, and so I get used to those, I can see it in a child, and I can see when they have a need and whether that need is like safety or whatever, and so it’s just my natural response to respond to that. But it’s very rare that you tend to see those kinds of behaviours with children who are not at least involved in the social services system. And if they weren’t already involved, I’d be talking to the parents and I would be having some safeguarding concerns about why they’re showing those behaviours.

I: That makes sense. Yeah ok. Erm, I’m just trying to think if there’s anything else I want to ask before we wrap up...

P: ... anything you want to unpick? I know

I: yeah, the thing that I’ve found hardest with starting to do interviews, is because my other day job is doing like consultation as a trainee educational psychologist where you are trying to unpick and delve whereas this is more like, interview and just explore and conversation. Erm...

P: I could tell you about, there’s a child in year 6 the one who went into foster care and out of it, and the behaviours he’s shown from that, have been really interesting. So, I could tell you about him...

I: I mean I’m aware that, I think we’ve already been going for half an hour, and that’s roughly how long I said we would go for, so I don’t want to take up any more of your time...

P: Don’t worry, its fine.

I: Yeah, ok that would be really interesting then, and then we can wrap up after that.

P: Ok, so basically, this child, so he’s got lots of siblings, he and the family, we’re actually quite close to the family as a school in that y’know we chat to mum a lot on the playground, have a good relationship with mum, y’know, we’ve really, we’ve built strong relationships with that family. The family situation started to break down, the older, one of the older siblings had gone into foster care, that was because of his own behaviour, it was dangerous, and so it was deemed that he would be safer in a foster family, because he was like harming animals and making fires and things in the neighbourhood, and he wasn’t allowed to live with his siblings – so he went into foster care. He was gonna come back out of foster care, mum had some problems with drugs, so did dad then – he’s the biological dad of half the kids – then the mum and the dad split up, so mum got back into the drugs and the dad left but was coming back frequently, and there was domestic violence going on, so basically all of the children went into care. Because there was so many of them they had to go to different foster families and they got split up, so prior to this happening, throughout this child’s life, he is adorable I love him to bits and he’s such a sensitive lovely boy and he loves drawing and he loves colouring and he loves football, but, he did not like learning. Maths, ok, but anything to do with reading or writing he would say “this is boring, this is boring, this is boring” he would sometimes, so I taught him in year 2 and in year 3 and then he was in the class next door when I taught in year 4 and year 5. So I’ve worked very closely with him, and he would sometimes just absolutely refuse to do what you say, and he would run out into the playground, doesn’t matter what the weather. And nothing you say or do, you can’t get him in. and like he’s, I don’t think he’s ever in the time he’s been in this school hurt another child, never, but he would trash things, he would cause like damage to objects, but he would never hurt another person. He’d swear at them! A lot! But he would never hurt another person. So y’know we just kinda had to accept that. We got him play therapy, he goes to play therapy every week and that started to work and the play therapist said yep, he’s not been given the chance to play at home. At home when we did home visits, he had no toys, he had no books, he had nothing to do, so he was bored at home, and then he comes to school and he’s told to do work - he wants to play. So we were like, we need to let him play. So when he went into foster care, he went to a foster family that were just the loveliest family and they were reading with him every day...one day he came in after the weekend, this was just after he’d gone into foster care, and he was absolutely beaming from ear to ear because he went to the woods. This was when he was in year 5. He’d never been to the woods before and he was just amazed. They bought him new trainers, they bought him a coat that was suitable for the weather, because he’d always had this thin ragged old thing that was a bit small. They bought him like, and y‘know it was like a proper nice coat like a brand named one, which he’d never had and like Nike trainers, and he’s always been like one of the cool kids, but I think he always felt a bit down, so when he went into the foster care, his entire attitude changed. He went from a child, so always, he’s quite small for his age – I think he’s a little malnourished - he was a child who always looked at his feet when he’s walking around. You say like hi to him in the corridor and he’s like “hi” [in low mood tone of voice]. Suddenly, he’s holding his head up high and he’s smiling all of the time, literally ear to ear all day every day. Like he’s listening in every lesson, he managed to go on our residential least year and we had not a single incident, he was just loving it. He went out and played football in the sun with his friends, he was like going to the park at the weekend, they got him a bike they taught him how to ride a bike. He went to Spain in the holidays and had a lovely time and it was amazing, and whilst all that was happening, mum, bless her, got her act together, she cleaned up the house, she got her job back, she got off the drugs, she gained a load of weight which made her look amazing, because previously she’d been really skinny. And yeah, and like she looked like a proper mum now, and so of course they want [child’s name], sorry I don’t wanna say names

I: No that’s alright it will be anonymised

P: but yeah, they wanted him to go back to his family. So he’s gone back to his family now, but now he’s gone back to the volatile behaviours. And we’re seeing again, the looking at the floor. It’s really hard, because it’s almost like he’s been given this glimpse of this life, where people go on holiday, and people have new clothes and people have a clean home...

I: ... you’re given experiences...

P: Yes, and he’s had all that and he was really torn because I think like, he really wants to be with his mum, and he’s back with his older siblings as well, because obviously when he was with the foster family he was only with the younger ones, who are like foundation and year 2, and he’s year 6.

I: So quite a gap

P: Yeah little baby ones, and he wants to be with his teenage siblings. So, they’re all back together again and he likes that, and he’s back in the local area because he was on the other side of [place name] but travelling to our school still. But now he’s suddenly finding it really hard, and what he’s also finding hard is that he’s about to go to secondary school, and so he’s just, yesterday, he hit a girl on the playground, during a football match, he then ran away, he refused to go in at lunchtime when he wasn’t meant to be out there, and we’re like we can’t physically force him, so we just monitored him and checked that he was ok. But yeah, he hit the girl with the football by the way, not actually hit her, but yeah he kicked the football at her, and he’s he’s never shown those kind of behaviours before. Then he went into, we managed him into the deputy heads office, so that the other children in his class were safe, because he was really raging, and he absolutely trashed it. He emptied every filing cabinet, and poured it all over the floor, he threw a brand new £5000 server across the room – he didn’t break it, luckily – he was like knocking pictures off the wall, like he completely trashed this room, and he’s never shown anything that bad before. And we’re certain it’s because he knows that he’s leaving us, and we’re his only stability at the moment. It’s really hard. But yeah so he’s quite interesting because we’ve seen him go in, and go out, I think he was in care for about 9 10 months.

I: I guess it’s quite a long time, I guess a relatively long time isn’t it?

P: Yeah it is.

I: Yeah, and how do you, I guess obviously he was moved into the deputy heads office, like how was that manged ongoing, was he just destroying the office...

P: we let him rage, he was safe, and like honestly we’ve had my room was completely, he also tore a display board off the wall.

I: Oh the actual board?

P: Yeah, that’s not the first time that’s happened with a child this year. Yeah, to be honest, we do get incidents like that where children trash rooms, but the thing is, if they’re safe and they’re not hurting anybody else and they’re not at risk you can’t...we’d rather they take their anger out on physical objects than people. But err, we wait until they calm and then afterwards they have to help us clear it up. So in one case, a child who trashed my room a few weeks ago, he was made to return after school – he went home with his mum to calm down and he was told that you need to come back this evening once you’ve calmed down, you need to clear it up, and his mum brought him back about 4 o’clock and it took him an hour and a half to clear up what he’d done, because he took every book off the shelf in the library, threw it all over the floor, and trashed my room. He turned all the tables upside down, and he barricaded himself in the room with all the tables infront of the doors and then he turned the chairs upside down, so they were the legs were like spikes pointing at the door. Yeah, that was interesting, but yeah we just let him. I mean what can you do, you can’t physically, it would be dangerous to physically stop him, he’s a very slight little thing as well. So he can’t do that much damage, apart from the server.

I: Yeah ok, thank you for sharing that example as well, that’s really helpful. Can we, we’ll wrap up now, but what I like to do is wrap up with just asking you to pick out a particularly positive kind of memory of one of the looked after children that you’ve worked with or, yeah just something...

P: that’ll be my year 6 girl! Well, when she joined I was told that this little girl, she’d been put into foster care because she’d been sexually abused by her father, she’d gone into foster care and then she’d been sexually abused in foster care by her sibling, her older sibling, yeah so then they had to be separated and she got moved again, and then she was showing really volatile behaviours, some of them quite sexualised and some of them involving faeces - the throwing of [laughs]. Yeah, so you can imagine what I was picturing, so when she arrived in my class, this delicate little thing who hid under tables and growled at me and swore sometimes, like I ended up building a really close bond with her that’s lasted since. So she’s now, she’s really come out of her shell. She’s the most sassy little confident girl, you’ll ever met. She’s gonna be, she was the lead last year in one of our productions, and she’s going to be the lead this year as well. And she just is absolutely this little ray of sunshine. Every adult in the school adores her, because she’s just so chatty and confident. She has a lot of worries, and sometimes a lot of her worries are inappropriate, she worries about things that are linked to sex, about boyfriends, and, but she’s quite open with talking to the adults about it. Which helps because we can then deal with it in an appropriate way and mange it but obviously its difficult with the other children. But yeah, she’s just, she leaves in six weeks to go to secondary school and she’s just one that I am absolutely just going to miss so much.

I: Oh that’s really nice...

P: I know, she’s so sweet. I adore that kid.

I: well its lovely that I guess, even when you’re not always the class teacher for some of these children that you do get to maintain those bonds throughout the years.

P: She still pops in almost every day before she goes into her classroom. She’ll like just give me a hug and like chat to me, and at the moment they’re learning about – they’re doing sex ed in year six, and her teacher is a man, so she keeps coming to me with like all her questions that she’s too embarrassed to ask him, so she’ll come and talk to me about thigs and girly things and about bras and all sorts. She’s just, yeah I think she just, everybody in the school will miss her. I think they’ll miss all of them to be honest, but she was just one that will always stick out.

I: And I guess when there’s always, when there’s that, I guess before a child comes to school when there’s almost that expectation set up of ooh this could be really really challenging and really horrendous and then to see the journey through as well, it kind of further accentuates the positiveness.

P: Yeah, she’s just a little success story, and she’s so bright as well, and she’s one where sometimes when you work with these children you think, what are they going to be doing when they’re 18, where are they going to be are they going to have a home are they gonna y’know be educated and have a good job. And she’s one where we can say now, yeah, she’s gonna be fine. She’ll be ok. So that’s nice.

I: oh, what a lovely note to end on. Thank you. Was there anything else that you wanted to share in particular, or any other thoughts that had popped up as we’ve been talking or...

P: No, not really, I’m quite passionate about the looked after children thing, because I’ve worked with so many and my sister works with older ones as well. She works, she was a police officer, she works with adults transitioning from foster care to independence.

I: Oh ok, yeah, which is really vital role.

P: Really hard. Yeah, half of her job is getting trains to different various parts of the country to fetch them because they’ve run away.

I: gosh, yeah, I bet. Well thank you very much.