

Selfwood House



Cathy's* story

Sometimes children and young people experience significant crises in their lives which means immediate and urgent action has to be taken to keep them safe.

At Keys Group, we are able to support these young people in our Activity and Intervention services, one of which is Selfwood Cottage. Here, young people are given short-term, intensive specialist support which aims to help them settle back to longer term support or return home.

Part of the success of these services is the approach; children and young people are offered a range of activities to take part in, with the aim of distracting them from their negative thought patterns and behaviours.

We do this by putting together physically challenging programmes, which include outdoor activities such as mountain biking, canoeing, kayaking, abseiling, bouldering, climbing, mountain walking and horse riding, as well as slower paced activities (beach walking, fishing, visiting farms and parks).

On completing the programme, the young people all show improved levels of self-esteem, confidence and positivity. Achieving things they never thought were possible, managing risks and developing new skills gives the young people a sense of hope for the future. Part of helping keep the young people safe is in the structure of their support.

Activity and Intervention services use temporary accommodation close to the activities the young people are taking part in such as cottages, caravans and camping in rural locations. The young people are supported by high staff ratios, and are usually looked after in this way for 90 days.

Selfwood recently supported a young woman at risk of child sexual exploitation in a large city who was living in a children's home after having experienced neglectful parenting. She was regularly going missing from home, wasn't attending school, had lost weight and wasn't looking after herself. Even more concerning, she had become involved in petty crime, was involved in drugs, was being sexually exploited and needed an emergency placement to take her out of harm's way.



She came to us having been groomed to believe that she had to do the things her exploiters were making her do with drugs and sex and she left here knowing her worth and that she has so many opportunities in her life.



When Cathy* arrived at Selfwood she was distraught but the team engaged positively and consistently with her, making sure she was physically safe. Her physical health was assessed and when the team had made sure it was safe to do so, Cathy moved to her first cottage in Wales where she began taking part in a range of different activities nearby.

Every four or five days, Cathy and her team would move to different locations and different activities – helping to keep her both safe and engaged. Supported on a 2:1 basis, the team worked closely with Cathy on the reasons she had been placed in crisis care and around child sexual exploitation.

It became clear to Cathy that she was being exploited by someone she considered to be her boyfriend and, as the team put it, “the penny dropped”. She began to become engaged in education and learning, particularly art and history which were subjects she enjoyed very much.

Manager at Selfwood Cottage, Kim Bell, said: “Part of what we do is ensure the children are learning, even when they don't know they're learning because they're so busy enjoying themselves. What we are really teaching them, as we were in Cathy's case, is that there is much more to life than she was settling for before.

“We needed to boost her self-confidence and awareness and help her realise her worth. For Cathy, the changes came in how she improved her diet and looked after herself better. She was living.

“She was so different when she left us. She went on to do a large number of qualifications and a work placement. She came to us having been groomed to believe that she had to do the things her exploiters were making her do with drugs and sex and she left here knowing her worth and that she has so many opportunities in her life.” Cathy has moved on to a new residential placement and continues to thrive.



Residential