

A day in the life of an EP....Dr Gillian Shotton

House of Lords visit

Waking up at five am is not necessarily my first choice, but I didn't mind too much because of the excitement of going to the House of Lords! I travelled down with Eileen Gray (Manager of Thorndale children's home) and Anne Bell (Shift coordinator at Thorndale). We had been invited to attend a talk by Colin Maginn, co-writer and founder (alongside Dr Sean Cameron) of the Pillars of Parenting model that we have used in the children's homes in Northumberland over the past five years.



Colin and Sean now have quantitative evidence that the Pillars of Parenting model improves outcomes for looked after young people. The talk was organised by the Institute for Recovery from Childhood Trauma, an organisation that seeks to draw together information about childhood trauma and publicise it in a bid to influence policy and improve practice in this area.

Colin gave an excellent account of the history of children's homes and care for young people. He also outlined the research into the pillars of parenting model which has recently been published in the British Journal of Social Work (Cameron and Das, 2019).

The Pillars of Parenting model is rooted in psychological research and theory, it has been designed to enable and empower foster carers, adoptive parents and residential carers to acquire a deeper understanding of their children's needs and to provide these young people with the informed support required to help them to lead more fulfilling lives.

The research Colin outlined examines the impact of implementing the Pillars of Parenting model over three years. It involved fifty-three children and young people and their carers in local-authority children's homes on two UK areas (Northern and Southern England). Significant improvements in both behavioural and affective measures were observed following implementation of the model with these young people. The results show that the Pillars of Parenting model can achieve positive outcomes for previously maltreated young people in children's homes. This is very much in line with what we have found in the children's homes in Northumberland. Since implementing the Pillars of Parenting model, carers have a greater depth of understanding of the young people's needs and are more confident in the decisions they make in their care of the young people. Improved outcomes have been seen in terms of the young people's presentation and relationships.

During the talk, Lords and professionals interjected at various points with queries and comments. The presentation was also disrupted frequently by the sounding of the division bell. This bell is used to signal that a vote is occurring and that members of the House of Commons or House of Lords have eight minutes to get to their chosen Division lobby to vote for or against a resolution. It was fascinating to see this process in action but difficult, I thought, for anyone delivering a talk. Afterwards I asked Colin how he had managed this disruption. He said that he had actually found it helpful as it had given him time to think and compose himself at various points.

It was an inspiring day and felt like such a privilege to be there and gain some insight into the workings of the House of Lords and the House of Commons. It was encouraging to find that relevant psychological research was being communicated to those who have the potential to influence policy in the UK and that Northumberland is leading the way using evidence based practice in their children's homes to great effect.