



HAF Summer 2023 – Case Study

Name of Organisation: Heart 4 Refugees CIC

Date of provision: Summer 23

Intro:

We support refugees and asylum seekers with well-being and practical support. Most of the children we support have had a very disrupted childhood. They have spent time in refugee camps, experienced war, lost parents or siblings and many have crossed the channel on small boats. Many of the children we support have also spent a lot of time out of school and are trying to settle in a country far away from home and the life they had before. We support children from around 13 different countries and 8 different languages.

Issue:

NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED

Mohammed is 15 and from Syria. He arrived with his mum, two sisters and younger brother in January 2017 on the resettlement scheme. His family suffered immense trauma in Syria and only left when they had no choice - their home was bombed and their dad was killed. Mohammed is one of six children but because his two older siblings were above the age of 18 and married, they were not permitted to travel on the Resettlement Scheme. The family miss their dad and their siblings terribly. They have also suffered complex PTSD from all the trauma they have suffered. They live in poverty and have really felt the impact of the cost of living crisis. Mum is unable to work due to having three children registered disabled.

Mohammed also has Scoliosis and is registered disabled. He had not received any treatment in Syria or the refugee camp in Lebanon so when he arrived, he was bent over and in pain. He struggled to engage in any physical activity and suffered with poor mental health. Two years ago, Mohammed underwent a huge operation to straighten his spine. He was in hospital for 6 months and although the transformation was remarkable it was yet another trauma to endure. He had to wear a head brace which was nailed into his head for 3 months which was incredibly uncomfortable and restrictive. The operation was successful and Mohammed returned home like a different boy.

Mohammed's mum and older sister (who is also registered disabled) volunteer for us and run our community kitchen. Mohammed comes with his mum whenever he is off school and this summer attended every holiday club we ran. His family have never had a holiday or even a night away from home other than staying in hospital, and so our holiday club was crucial for his family and many others we support.

He is incredibly shy but this summer we have seen a new, much more confident Mohammed. We have known him for three years and he has always found it very difficult to communicate socially. However, this summer he confided in a member of staff that he

was the target of online bullying. Our staff member made a referral to our safeguarding team, and as a result, the decision was made to inform the police. Our team felt this was a hate crime due to his disability and should be dealt with within the law. The police took over and the perpetrators were dealt with. Most importantly, the bullying stopped. Mohammed has had a difficult time, but during the summer he thrived in our club. He built fires and cooked food, climbed trees, played football and volleyball, and flew kites on the beach, which he told us he had never done before. He also made friends with a couple of teenage boys and his face literally came alive as he allowed himself to let go and enjoy himself without anxiety getting in the way. The fact that he also felt able to confide in us about the bullying was enormous progress, something we could never have imagined. He told our staff member he only feels happy at home and at our centre.

Barriers overcome:

Communication, trust, confidence, self esteem

Impact:

- Mohammed has made new friends. He does not have friends out of school and because of the family financial situation, he rarely goes out
- Confidence building – he felt able to disclose the awful bullying. (We read the messages and the bullying was the cruellest we had ever seen) He also built his confidence in physical exercise and joined in as much as the other children
- Improved physical exercise – Mohammed does no physical activity as he cannot afford to join clubs.
- Improved social/communication skills. Due to previous trauma Mohammed found it difficult to look anyone in the eye but this summer, he engaged far more than we've ever seen.
- Mohammed was happy to help clear up and set up. He also helped in the garden to harvest some of the vegetables that we used for lunch

5 top tips for other providers:

- Have some sessions with smaller numbers so you can build relationships with the children
- Explain to the children that you can help with any issues they may be struggling with and can talk in confidence to a member of the team
- Get outside!
- Provide iced water only and just put a load of fruit in – ours loved it
- Use a forestry school as a provider – they are wonderful and tick all the HAF boxes.



