

Michelle Story

Michelle is a young person who came into AXIS with her boyfriend, whilst here she asked if we would be able to help her. We did an assessment which took several days to complete due to her anxiety issues surrounding some of her problems. Following the completion of Michelle's assessment, we felt that some counsellor support may help with her mental health issues and with making sense of everything that was going on in her life at the time, Michelle agreed that she would appreciate this support and started weekly sessions with the counsellor. Michelle holds a tenancy with Community Housing but was sofa surfing at the time with her boyfriend, due to a court order and bail conditions preventing her from entering her property, this was following a dispute with neighbours over the Christmas period. This dispute was being dealt with by the Police and Michelle was awaiting a court trial date to determine the outcome.

Michelle explained that due to ongoing incidents, including the most recent, her three children had been removed from her care and placed into long-term foster care with the possibility of adoption if the circumstances didn't improve. Michelle had regular contact with her children at a local contact centre, two of her children were with her ex-partner and the youngest one was with her current boyfriend. Michelle was working with her solicitor and Children's Services to try to get back on track and regain the care of her children. Michelle had several debts including council tax, rent arrears and utility bills. She also admitted to smoking cannabis daily, she explained that it took the pain away from a recent accident she had been involved in, where she had been knocked down by a bus and she explained it also numbed her feelings of loss where her children were concerned.

Michelle was unemployed at the time of us beginning support, she felt she was unable to work due to her mental health and the circumstances that she was in at the time. With our support she engaged well with the Job Centre and we managed to get her income sorted as there were issues with sanctions and repayments. With this back in place, Michelle could move forward with getting her finances back on track and start setting up repayment plans for the arrears she had unfortunately built up.

Following the court trial, it was deemed that Michelle could return to her property, but this wasn't something she wanted to do straight away due to the risk of further issues being caused with her neighbour. With our encouragement

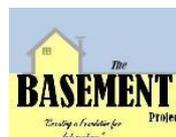


and advice, Michelle started moving back in gradually; staying between her house and her mom's, until eventually the issues seemed to resolve themselves and she felt more comfortable to stay there.

Due to a lot of Michelle' issues revolving around her housing and debts, we got in contact with the Community Housing team in order to try and resolve some of these issues and advocate on behalf of her; she was on the verge of being evicted, due to the rent and council tax arrears. Through several meetings we were able to come to an agreement; Michelle' arrears were cleared, and she was supported by ourselves and members of the housing team to apply for support with housing costs going forward.

As, Michelle' children had been removed, the housing team were also looking to downsize her as it was felt she may struggle to sustain this long-term due to her incurring bedroom tax arrears, as housing would not cover this as the children were not staying at the property. Michelle didn't want to give up her property with the hope of being able to get the children back in the future and began decorating the house, a room at a time. Through further meetings and discussions, it was agreed that she would be able to stay at the property as long as she kept up to date with her rent and bedroom tax payments, Michelle also had to make sure all repairs were fixed and the rubbish that had built up in the garden at the property had to be removed as this was another of the reasons why she faced eviction. Through lots of encouragement and engagement Michelle stuck to these agreements and completed the given tasks in the timeframe proposed, so when the property check was carried out, the improvements were clear.

Up until this point, we had not had much involvement with Children's Services as there hadn't been a need for us to become involved so late in the proceedings and Michelle seemed under the impression that her children would be returning to her care imminently. However, the longer we worked with her, the more she would share with us and we became more involved through telephone conversations and meetings in order to help clarify exactly what was going on. The outcome was not at all what Michelle was expecting; her youngest was put forward for adoption and her older children were to remain in long-term foster care with the potential for them to also go forward for adoption if they felt this arrangement would be more beneficial for the children, depending on Michelle' actions and choices going forward.



Michelle seemed to be struggling with the situation that was unavailing in front of her and we discussed getting her some support in order to understand and talk through this with a professional who understands. Together we researched support for adoption processes, this was something Michelle would be able to access in her own time and when it suited her.

With the decision about Michelle' children out of her hands, we took this opportunity to work with her and focus on improving her life, her motivation and confidence. We supported her by looking at ways she could make positive changes to have better outcomes. She had spoken to us a few times about wanting to get into work and look towards the future. We felt that this would be a good time to introduce her to a service that could focus solely on exactly this and introduced her to Vestia, Building Better Opportunities. The initial meeting went well and from then on Michelle arranged to have weekly meetings with the worker, focusing on being work ready in order to get into employment. Michelle also agreed to accepting specialist support from Swanswell to help with her cannabis use.

With each of the areas that we were supporting, improving for Michelle, we made the decision to exit.

