



The Learning Away schools have developed a series of themed resource packs to help other schools plan and deliver **Brilliant Residentials**.

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## INVOLVING FAMILIES: VIGNETTE

The Kellys were a family with complex needs, including adult mental health issues and concerns around the children's behaviour and eating habits. The family was identified as having potential to really benefit from participating in a series of weekend residentials, and were keen to do so. Supported by Sue Fisher, Newall Green's Family Residential Coordinator, the family embarked on a daunting but exciting journey of change.

Newall Green's family residential programme includes three, three-day residentials, and a range of interventions between each residential, aimed at providing specialist support for family members. At the first two residentials, two of the Kelly children, Louise (12) and Daniel (7) attended with Sue and other support workers; at the third, mum and dad Sandy and Dave also attended, along with the youngest family member, Liam (3).

Each residential began with a car journey from south Manchester to the cottage in Derbyshire, stopping along the way to choose and buy the food for the three days. Louise and Daniel were asked to think about what they'd like to eat, and helped to choose healthy ingredients and appropriate quantities; once in the cottage, they were expected to help prepare, serve, eat and clear up meals. Daniel was known to be a very picky eater; over the course of the first two residentials he began to smell the food, pick it up and in due course, eat it with little or no comment. Between residentials, Daniel was helped to address his food worries and by the third residential, his parents expressed their amazement at the change in his approach to mealtimes, which had frequently been a source of conflict and unhappiness.

Louise and Daniel responded well to mutually agreed targets, with Sue agreeing to activity based, post-residential rewards in exchange for 'points' earned through helpful or positive behaviour and carrying out chores with good grace. Between residentials, Louise and her mum enjoyed horse riding together, and Daniel and his dad went to a football match. Activities during the residentials were largely based outdoors and whilst this was unpopular to begin with, at the second and third residential Louise and Daniel both participated enthusiastically, again with little or no complaining. Both children found the Derbyshire countryside utterly compelling and beautiful, and instantly fell in love with the rented cottage and its gardens. At the third residential, they took real delight in showing their parents around and explaining the established routines to them.

The family residentials were made possible by renting a holiday cottage, midweek, for a whole school year. This arrangement allowed children to participate at least twice and parents and carers at least once; the minimum the professional team felt was needed in order to effect permanent change. The transformations within families were supported by professional interventions between each residential such as weekly mentoring meetings with parents and carers, targeted support for the children and opportunities to reflect on progress.



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## How did the residential programme help the Kelly family?

- Louise and Daniel were set clear boundaries and expected to keep to them. Acceptable behaviour was explained, as were age-appropriate bedtime and mealtime routines. Time away from the pressures of their sometimes chaotic family home allowed both children to take a step away from their 'usual' behaviour and 'be' different. They were also able to show their parents what they'd learned.
- Outdoor activities showed the family that each one of them had unique capabilities and that the age of a child is not necessarily a barrier to participation. In particular for the Kellys, the fact that the youngest child couldn't participate in every activity doesn't mean the older children couldn't either.
- Parents Dave and Sandy felt they had 'permission' to play with their children on the residential. For perhaps the first time, they could see their children as independent, capable people and had the example set by Sue and Steve to help them manage their expectations of all three children.
- Professional support and advice, in 'neutral' territory, enabled the family to consider its internal dynamics in a thoughtful way. In time, Daniel's behaviour and eating habits improved and he became able to discuss these without resorting to swearing and kicking. Louise's confidence rocketed and she joined an art group and began speech therapy; she also became a student mentor for other children taking part in the family residentials and returned the cottage in this role.

Whilst Dave and Sandy's marriage did eventually falter, they both recognised they had a responsibility to be fair and firm parents to their children and to treat them with respect in order to gain respect in return. 'Living the lesson' by observing how Sue managed the children during the residential enabled Dave and Sandy to mirror this and learn from the responses they received.

There is no doubt in the minds of the Newall Green team that taking families away, separately and together makes a significant, positive and permanent difference to family dynamics.

A fuller case study of the Kelly family's experience is available [here](#).



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