

## MIDDLESBROUGH, July 2016

### INTERVIEW WITH PARENT OF JACOB

#### 1 FAMILY DETAILS:

Jacob, 6, lives with his mother, Tina, a single parent, and 3 older sisters aged 8, 9 and 11. Tina has been an office worker until recently but was not working at the time of the interview.

#### 2. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND CLIMATE:

After serious incidents of domestic violence when Jacob was a baby, his father was imprisoned and access to Jacob was very restricted. Now there is a restraining order which means that there is no contact with any of the children. Tina has no immediate or extended family at all but describes the relationship between herself and her 4 children as 'very close'.

#### 3. CHILD CHARACTERISTICS:

Jacob is described as confident, imaginative, resilient, a good listener, organised, very talkative and very keen to please. He is not shy and will chat easily with people, and loves to ask questions. His levels of social competence are good and he shows empathy to his sisters and peers. Most of the time he is fairly easy-going and calm but is prone to tantrums if things do not go his way; "*He doesn't get his own way, he kicks a fit. (...) then he can be a very petulant, spoilt little boy*". He likes to be busy, loves building with Lego, doing puzzles and other problem-solving activities. Above all, he loves reading, as does the whole family. Jacob, and all 3 sisters read to their mum every night. Tina gave an example of Jacob's storytelling and giving

his own version of the story of the Three Little Pigs. "*He uses his imagination a lot (...). He likes to add things*". He also loves physical experiences; walking, bike riding and generally being outdoors. He has recently shown a huge interest in kickboxing and wrestling, entirely from his own initiative (his mother discourages wrestling but allows kickboxing lessons).

Jacob is clear that he wants to be a builder and build a nice house for his mum. He intends to have his own business with his 3 sisters working for him. "*He does think he needs special treatment because he's the only boy (...) he thinks he has to have preferential treatment (...). He has to have the last biscuit because he's the boy.*"

#### 4. HOME EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES:

Tina describes herself as 'a very confident parent'. "(...) *I just get on with it. I just want him to be the best he can be, so I just support him in everything he does. (...) I do the opposite of everything the social workers did (when she was in care as a child). There has to be discipline, and there's an amount of discipline and I think that's a good skill(...). There's no negotiation. They know the rules and if they break them(...) they pay the forfeit*". An example of such a forfeit would be Jacob having his tablet taken away for misdemeanours.

The family engage in dialogue each night after school and spending time reading is an important part of their routine. When asked why all the 4 children have done well at school, Tina attributes their success to encouragement: "*I'd always make time to read and talk, to learn and teach. You can learn off little kids as well, yourself.*" They also spend time together on hill-walking, going on nature walks backpacking, map reading and orienteering. Jacob and the other children will often suggest places

to go to visit and they will take a picnic and "*see where we end up*".

#### 5. PRE-SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES:

Between birth and three, Jacob did not attend pre-school and spent the time with his mother who was not working at the time. She explains that she did not want to have him in someone else's care: "*I sound like a selfish mam. I've done it with all my children. I've wanted to be their main carer. At that age, they soak up so much information and so I wanted to be the mam to give them that information. I wanted to be the one that sat with him, played with him, read with him, taught him*". She feels justified in her decision because all are top of their classes. There was some involvement with SureStart but was not comfortable in her interaction with other parents.

Jacob started pre-school at 3 – Tina says she was the one who cried when she left him there; Jacob was fine after a week or so. He did exceptionally well and was the first child in nursery to be able to write his own name. There were frustrations because

he always wanted to have a book with him rather than other activities on offer. "*Sticking and gluing and making stuff.... I really don't get nursery because it's literally just a playground isn't it? (...) I think nursery is pointless apart from them socialising with other kids..... It's an absolute waste of time... He didn't learn anything apart from what he learned at home!*" Tina felt that she had higher expectations than his teachers at that time and her experiences of pre-school all seem to be entirely negative.

The move to year 1 however was very positive and Tina is delighted with his progress: "*He has got challenges, he's got set stuff to do... He is doing very well across the board - brilliant at Maths, though not as confident as he is with English, but still great at it*".

When asked about Jacob's success both in EYFS and in Year 1, Tina puts it down to support and stimulation from both school and home: "*You've got to keep their little minds ticking over. He's always eager to learn, he always want to learn more.*"