



<u>PARENTS NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>CHILDS NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>TIME AT AMBER FAMILY</u>	<u>SETTING</u>
BETH	20	ANNIE	1 day	4 Months	Amber House
TOM	29				

Beth and Tom came to Amber House with their first child Annie. Annie was placed on an Interim Care Order; the Local Authority were worried about Beth's mental health and her ability to parent Annie safely. They were also worried that Beth would not work with them and would be unwilling to work with staff at Amber house.

Beth explained that she had a Social Worker allocated to her when she was a child. She was in foster care when she was 15 and then when she was 17 she moved to a hostel. She says; 'To be fair, I wasn't the easiest of children'. Beth has struggled with her own mental health and self-harm but says that she always felt that the Local Authority were 'judging' her, never supported her and she felt 'let-down' throughout her childhood.

Tom had never had any involvement with the Local Authority and his family had never had a Social Worker. Tom was asked how he felt about having a Social Worker for his baby and being asked to move into Amber House for an assessment? Tom says; 'I felt scared and weird. I didn't know what to think or feel. It was all brand new and not the lifestyle I am used to.'

Beth says that when she was told that she had to come to Amber House, she also felt 'nervous', and added; 'I was angry that I had to come here, and I was defensive when I arrived. When we first looked around, from the outside it reminded me of a foster home. When I walked through the door I felt like a prisoner, like my freedom had been taken away from me. I felt that the CCTV was in my room because Amber didn't trust me. I felt on edge.' Tom says, 'It wasn't what I was expecting as I thought we would be moving into a flat, not a house'.

Beth says that she thought that all the staff would be 'snotty' and described feeling 'paranoid about everything, even the other parents'. Tom says that the first week was 'daunting' and 'weird'. In Beth and Tom's first week, Beth feels like they settled in 'alright' but it still felt 'weird'. Beth said that she can't really remember her first week as it seems so far away. 'I arrived on the Wednesday and met my Key Worker the next day'. Beth said that they were asked if they wanted to go out, but they declined the offer. Beth said that they declined as she knew it was with staff and she didn't want the community looking at her.

Whilst these parents have helped us to write their story and have given permission for it to be shared with you, their names and any identifying information have been changed to protect their identity.

The family were fully supervised when they went out into the community. Beth says that to start with, this was annoying as she was worried that people would look at them. But they made the most of the first few weeks and went to as many groups as she could. She went to Rhyme Time and Tiny Tots; they were also supported to go shopping in the town and to visit local supermarkets. Beth says, 'To be honest, it wasn't that bad in the end. Staff were really relaxed, and I could decide where we were going'.

Tom was in full time employment before his placement commenced and he described how he was able to carry on going to work so he could financially provide for his family. All the family meetings and direct sessions were fitted around his working hours.

Beth says that she has had the opportunity to do lots of other things in placement and loved joining in with the weekly craft group. Beth has made Annie a memory scrap book full of pictures; for example, Annie's first night in a cot and the first time they took her swimming. Beth, Tom and Annie had the opportunity to go to Farmer Teds for a day trip, but they decided not to go because Beth had contact with her younger siblings at her Nan and Grandads house on the same day.

Even though they could have had visitors in placement, Beth and Tom didn't invite anyone to see them. They waited until their midpoint when their supervision was relaxed, and it was agreed that they could visit their family without staff accompanying them.

Beth said that during the first two weeks, she used to spend time in her bedroom in the evening as she was nervous and didn't want to interact with people that were 'watching me'. She went on to say, 'After about two weeks, I became more comfortable and relaxed and spent the evenings in the communal areas, watching films, playing on the Wii, having pamper nights and joining in with the cookery club.'

Beth and Tom described the weekends at Amber House as more 'chilled' and before they could access the community unsupervised, they would go out and about with staff and other parents to the park, arcades and around the town centre, promenade and Marine Lake. When the family were unsupervised they would visit family, take Annie out, go shopping or just 'chill.'

Every week the family had a Key Worker meeting and the progress from that week was discussed. Beth says that at the start of placement, 'I couldn't be bothered with the meetings but after three weeks, I kind of pulled myself and my act together and thought, I have to do this. Obviously, I don't like criticism, but I like how my Key Worker made it all positive, even if I had done something "wrong"; we talked about how to do things differently next time.' Tom described the meeting as, 'fair'. Beth says that her Key Worker would, 'Pull me up about things' and said, 'Obviously I thought she was picking on me at first, but then I built up my trust in her and realised that she was only doing it to help me be a better mum to Annie. I have a good relationship with my Key Worker and conversations got much easier. Once you realise that the staff are only here to help you, it's easier and the weeks fly by. It becomes to feel like your home. Staff are always honest and if there is a problem, they tell you in the meetings.'

Beth has always dreaded big meetings and was worried when her Social Worker was coming to visit her. However, Amber staff always came into the meetings and shared the family's progress with others. The feedback given in these meeting always matched the Key Worker sessions so there were never any big surprises.

Beth says that to start with, 'I was really "snotty" with my Social Worker when she visited, but staff spoke to me about why I behaved like that and we talked about my thoughts and feelings. This helped me to understand my worries more.

I actually apologised to my Social Worker and we get on better now'. Beth says she now feels more confident and has started to develop a good relationship with her Social Worker. During placement, Annie had a diagnosis of hip dysplasia and needed lots of additional health appointments. Beth, Tom and Annie were supported to attend these appointments together. Staff were only ever there as support and Beth and Tom were able to talk to the doctors themselves. Beth described how she would sit with staff before the appointment and put a list of questions together for the Doctor, so she wouldn't forget what she wanted to ask.

Beth and Tom's placement had to be extended by a few weeks, so the Court could consider other assessments and reports before they decided where the family moved on to. When the couple found out about the extension, they said they felt, 'angry and upset' as they had looked forward to the final date of placement that they had been given and then it got changed. They said they were 'fuming'.

As Beth and Tom came to the end of their placement it was agreed by the Court that they could go home together as a family. Beth and Tom were delighted with the outcome. Even though they did not want to come to Amber House at first, they now feel it was a really positive experience for them as a family. Beth described how she has had the chance to 'build up evidence and I have proved to myself and everyone else, that I AM a good mum. I am more confident than before, and I think I'll handle everything that life throws at me'. Tom says that he has, 'Been given good guidance as a first-time dad' and can see that Beth has 'learned to trust more' and 'I feel ready to move on as a family'.

<b>Beth's Advice</b>	Beth says that if she could pass on some advice to new parents, it would be, 'Be honest and open up to staff if you're ever worried. Don't ever lie to staff as they always find out! Work with staff as they're trying to give you a fighting chance to keep your baby. Basically, don't get involved in other parent's domestics as there will be some! If you have a house issue, tell staff not parents. Have banter with staff as you need to have fun whilst you are here, it makes the placement go faster.'
<b>Tom's Advice</b>	'Don't worry and be honest'.

<b>Amber Family's Summary</b>	Beth, Tom and have promised to keep in touch by e-mail and send us lots of pictures of Annie. They plan to come to our annual Birthday BBQ every year!
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## Memories



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