



<u>PARENTS NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>CHILDS NAME</u>	<u>AGE ON ARRIVAL AT AMBER</u>	<u>TIME AT AMBER FAMILY</u>	<u>SETTING</u>
Sarah	31	Nicholas	5 days	12 weeks	Amber Lodge
Mark	59				

Sarah and Mark were referred to Amber Family and began their placement with Nicholas who was 5 days old when they arrived. Nicholas was subject to an interim care order.

The Local Authority placed the family at Amber due to historical concerns relating to Mark; poor mental health, 30 years social care involvement, anger issues and domestic violence. They were also worried about Sarah's ability to keep her son safe, due to previous children being removed from her care. Sarah also has a learning difficulty. Both Sarah and Mark felt they had been 'let down' by professionals in the past, so they were 'anxious' to start a placement where they were being watched 24 hours a day 7 days a week and would be observed on CCTV whilst in their bedroom. Mark says, 'All I can say, is that I had no idea what to expect, but I was not feeling good about it'. Mark wanted to 'do it' for Nicholas but admits that he struggled to come to terms with it at first.

When Sarah first came to Amber Lodge, she describes it as being a 'worrying day' and says she 'didn't know what I could or couldn't do'. Mark recalls walking in for the first and not knowing 'how to be' with people; he states, 'I just wanted the whole thing to be over'. Mark feels he came in on 'the defensive' because he thought Amber staff were 'all out to get me and take our baby away from us'. Mark remembers being told by his Social Worker that the placement was only for 4 weeks, until the court hearing. However, this was never the case and he was told by his Key Worker that it would be a 12-week placement. Mark was told this on his first day, when he had no relationship with any staff and didn't know anything about the assessment. Mark says, 'that was it then, I felt myself close to breaking point'. Mark reflects and realises that from day one, Amber staff were honest with him, and no matter how much it may upset them, the truth was 'always shared'.

Whilst in their first couple of weeks at placement, Mark remembers it not taking long to settle into life at Amber Lodge. Mark says it was 'weird at first' because of how relaxed he felt in the communal areas and mixing with other families, which he never thought he would have done. Sarah says she spoke to two other mums on her first day but then sat in her room whilst Mark went to the shop with staff and she says she remembers wishing she was at home. As time went on, Sarah says that each day she got more confident and felt more comfortable being in the house.

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.

Life at Amber Lodge is described as 'happy' and 'lovely' by Sarah. She feels that she was fully supported every day by staff and if she was ever unsure, she always felt she could ask. Mark says the same and recalls many times when documents came through from the Local Authority that they did not understand, and staff members always had the time to sit down and go through things with the couple. Mark says, 'nothing was ever too much trouble'. Sarah was also referred to an advocate by her Key Worker whilst in placement, and she feels this was beneficial for her. Sarah says that at all previous meetings she would be 'talked over' and 'not listened to', however, since being at Amber, Sarah feels she has had more input into decisions made about Nicholas' care and felt that she could speak up if she didn't agree with something. Sarah says she has grown in confidence.

During their placement, there were often times when there would be opportunity to do craft activities, attend parent and baby groups as well as getting out into the community to do some shopping and walks to the beach/pier. Up until week six, Mark and Sarah were fully supervised whilst in the community with Nicholas. However, due to the family doing so well, this was reviewed at mid-point in their placement, and it was a recommendation in their midpoint report that they should be given unlimited time out unsupervised in the community. Both Mark and Sarah agreed that this was the 'turning point' in their assessment, as it was being recognised that they were doing all the right things and they were looking after Nicholas with little staff support. Mark and Sarah went on regular trips out as a family, independently and even sometimes with other parents in the house and they say it was always nice to go into the community and do things like a 'normal family'.

The family had weekly meetings with their Key Worker. Sarah says she was never worried about these, because she knew that even if something was going to be brought up as a 'worry', it was always the truth and it gave the couple an opportunity to work on any problems or ask for support if they needed it. Mark feels that both parents had a good relationship with all staff and commented, 'they just want the best for all of the families'.

At week 11, Sarah and Mark received their final assessment and the recommendation was for them to move back to the family home with Nicholas in their care. Sarah describes her feelings as 'excited, shocked and emotional'. Mark remembers feeling hopeful about their appearance in court the next day and 'couldn't quite believe it'.

The family left Amber Lodge together in their twelfth week and returned to their family home. Nicholas was made subject to a care order with monthly visits from the Social Worker and they made links with a family support worker at their local children's centre. Sarah and Mark reflected on their time at Amber and state it was 'the best path we could have taken'. Initially, it was not what the parents wanted to do, but they are both glad that they have had the opportunity to go on a journey full of support.

Mark says he is now satisfied that he has finally proved to everyone, that he and Sarah CAN be good parents to Nicholas and look after him safely.

Mum's Advice

'Don't worry about anything, and work with the staff. They are all really nice and want to help you, even if you think sometimes they are being harsh, they only will ever tell you the truth. Don't get involved with other people's problems because it is not worth it, concentrate on your own family and time will fly. Do all the craft

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	activities that are offered to you because they are lots of fun and you can keep them as memories forever’.
Dad's Advice	‘Listen to the staff, because they are there to help. I learned to trust whilst at Amber Lodge, as I didn't trust anyone before. Stick to the rules and you can't go wrong, when your time is up you probably won't want to go home. We now have our baby boy with us at home and I cried when I was told I could keep him, it was a long time coming but we got there eventually. I can't believe it is all over, and I can now get on with my day to day life and be happy. It was all thanks to this lot (Amber)!!

Amber Family's Summary	Sarah and Mark have come such a long way and we as a service are very proud of them – we keep in touch and it was lovely to visit the family in September 2018, three months after the family moved on from Amber Lodge. They have promised to come to our annual BBQ next year and keep in touch.
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