



Children's services at Ashram

Saroj, Children and Families Team Leader at Ashram, spends a lot of her working week at Jyoti, the refuge for women and children who have suffered domestic violence. Jyoti Ashram provides a specific children's service, with specialist staff members. So many children suffer domestic violence firsthand. Those who escape violence themselves will often witness the suffering of their mother. Such experiences can leave a child traumatised and in need of services that will build their self-esteem and confidence.

Children's expression of trauma can be displayed through bedwetting, anger, self-harm and various mental health issues; additionally their development at school and their ability to socialise with peers can be seriously impaired. Therefore it's understandable that Ashram works to provide a safe and supportive environment: it operates a no-smacking policy. It seeks to enable children's development through play-centred learning, and Jyoti's welcome pack includes toys, books and puzzles. Activities on offer include pottery sessions, bike riding, badge making and bowling. Creativity is encouraged and children have written amazing poem about Jyoti. As one young poet wrote, "Jyoti Ashram is fun as fun could be/I enjoy it but to prove it if only you could see".

Jyoti has a counselling service for children and young people aged from 5-19. The counsellor assesses children individually, offering therapeutic counselling and play. She is accompanied by a children's worker, who liaises with the parent's support worker as well as a children's development worker who is responsible for building needs assessment.

Ashram helps children through providing an all-encompassing service. There is emotional and educational support that caters for a wide range of ages. The language skills of Ashram's staff mean the service is well-placed to accommodate the fact that 57% of children speak Urdu (almost three-quarters of children referred are of Pakistani backgrounds, although some of course speak English).

Ashram continues to build its external and internal partnerships in order to offer exciting opportunities for children and young people. Internally, children may be referred to the Bend it Like Birmingham Project if they want to play sport, for example. In the future Ashram wants to develop links with pregnancy outreach workers, Barnado's, social services and children's homes.

It will also explore other models of children's services, and will strive to meet additional needs of children relating to, for example, forced marriage and

teenage pregnancy. Partnerships with educational establishments, from nurseries to sixth form colleges, are also on the horizon.

It is heartening to know that Ashram provides such an excellent service for these children, who are on the one hand so vulnerable, and on the other hand have so much potential. Thanks to Saroj and the rest of the team, children can dare to dream. As the aforementioned poet wrote, "this is not the end."