

Stuart's Story



Underley Garden

Name:	Stuart
Date of Birth:	April 1997
School start date:	September 2011
Local Authority:	Cumbria
SEA:	Low functioning ASD and associated SLD
Type of Provision:	52 week residential with frequent visits home

Stuart's family reached a point when they realised that the best option for him was to attend a residential school.

His Mum, Susan, admits that her anxieties about the decision were "overwhelming". Today, although she still feels guilty sometimes, she acknowledges that the move was in everyone's best interests In Susan's words:

"Stuart's happy and it means the rest of the family is happy"



Stuart's Story is available on DVD. Please call Underley Garden 01524 271 569 if you would like to receive a copy.

Progress Reports

	Stuart’s Mum – in her own words	School Progress Report
Residential placement	<p>The anxieties I had about sending Stuart to a specialist school were overwhelming because I didn’t want Stuart to go, and I didn’t want anyone else to look after him.</p> <p>But I realised it wasn’t about me, it was about what was best for Stuart. Now I can see his confidence and he’s happy, all those anxieties have faded away and I have every trust in those people who care for Stuart, teach Stuart and look after his well being.</p> <p>You’re not stripped of your responsibilities as a mother: I still have input, and I realise I didn’t need to have all those anxieties at the start, but I suppose that as a mother, it’s natural.</p>	<p>Before Stuart came to Underley Garden, he was at a special school in Barrow.</p> <p>He was in a class of about 15 children and it was the wrong environment for him.</p> <p>Essentially, he was being left to his own devices and when we first met him, we realised why he wasn’t functioning well.</p> <p>He wasn’t happy and the situation was deteriorating. He was being aggressive in class towards staff and other pupils, and he would spend a lot of time in a “de-escalation room” where he made it very clear he wasn’t happy. It was very distressing.</p>
Educational Transition	<p>The initial move to Underley Garden appeared to be easy for Stuart.</p> <p>He settled in really quickly, which surprised me. It was obvious to me that he liked it from the start.</p>	<p>Stuart’s transition was quick because we realised we could improve his education straightaway.</p> <p>At Underley Garden he is in a class with only three or four students, with 1:1 support. It’s a much better environment for Stuart because he’s very sensitive to noise: he’ll put his hands on his ears if he’s distressed.</p> <p>Just changing his environmental factors; noise, number of people, and the hustle and bustle of school life was important for Stuart.</p> <p>Here it’s much quieter, much smaller and a much more settled environment.</p>
Settling into a new home	<p>Stuart had been getting increasingly difficult at home and I knew it was going to happen one day, but it was still difficult to hand him over.</p> <p>The staff are so supportive. They are supportive of Stuart and supportive towards the family. They have got to know him really well and they understand him.</p> <p>Stuart even makes his own bed when he’s at school and picks up his own laundry and puts it in the washing machine. He never used to do that at home!</p>	<p>At home it’s perfectly natural to try to keep everything calm and happy so you don’t even think about trying to teach basic life skills.</p> <p>Here, we try to implement life skills from day one. Pupils respond here because we can let them know what’s expected of them from the outset. So, for example, we’ll expect them to bring their clothes to the washing machine and put them in, but it’s hard sometimes for parents to realise that.</p>
Progress	<p>There is progress in so many areas of his life. His communication has improved and he is signing so well now that occasionally I have to check his phrase book for me to understand what he is asking for!! The other day he was asking me for a sheet of paper: I’ve learnt that one now! Verbally he will say a few words which is progress.</p> <p>His confidence has improved which is lovely to see. I think it has happened because Stuart is managed properly at the Garden School. If we go to our local pub now, Stuart will be happy to go to the bar and wait his turn until the landlord gives him his drink.</p> <p>His anger management has improved, definitely. He seems to know when he’s going to flare up and now he diverts himself away to do something else or just moves away. He’s not perfect but his temper is so much improved when he is at home.</p> <p>Now I can see he’s confident and he’s happy. My anxieties have faded away and I have every trust in those people who care for Stuart, teach Stuart and look after his well being.</p>	<p>Stuart’s progress is huge.</p> <p>His aggressive behaviour used to happen on a daily basis, but it happens infrequently now.</p> <p>He’s much more independent, and does so much more for himself.</p> <p>He now gets himself dressed, and he’s comfortable with more social situations: if he’s gone out for a meal, he’ll go up to the bar and wait patiently to get himself a drink.</p> <p>When we watch him walking around the school site, he’s calm now and appears happy in himself.</p>

Stuart’s Mum – in her own words

Home Visits

Stuart comes home every other weekend and longer in the school holidays. They’re very flexible and they’re happy if we change arrangements, as long as we give enough notice.

It’s what I dreamed of and hoped for but I never really thought it could happen, and it’s happened relatively quickly.

When I pick him up from school, he’s happy, and he is happy when I take him back.

School/ Family liaison

You build up a really good rapport with his teachers and key workers. I phone school often and they are always so kind and tell me what Stuart has been doing that day.

They’ll share everything with me, and they never seem to mind. I was sitting in the garden the other day having a glass of wine with my husband when I suddenly thought ‘I’ve got to see if Stuart’s ok!’

I phoned the school and he’d had a day of activities! He’d probably been far busier than we had been at home, and he’d definitely enjoyed it.

I’ve always been very particular about how he dresses. I still put my two penny worth in because it’s important to me. One day he’d bought a jumper that I didn’t like at all! The staff understood and we ended up having a laugh about it. I don’t want to hurt their feelings - there was nothing wrong with the jumper; it was just not what I’d have bought for him! It’s only a small thing, but it matters to me and I appreciate that the staff listen to me.

I go for regular meetings with the managers and they’ll listen to any worries that I might have. Usually, they’re already aware and are dealing with it.

The managers are always completely on the ball and absolutely everything is addressed.

Impact on Family Life

The impact of Stuart going to Underley Garden School has spread across the whole family.

Everything is so much better.

It means I have more time for his sister now, instead of it being a case of “Wait a minute, I need to do this for Stuart”. That’s been really positive for both of us.

As a family we can go out for a meal and relax. We’ll sit together after the meal and have time to chat and enjoy the conversation. I miss Stuart being with us but I know he’s being looked after properly.

Outcome

Seeing Stuart’s progress at school and seeing how happy it has made him, and the rest of the family, has meant we can all see the light at the end of the tunnel now. I’m very proud of him.

Stuart’s getting a better quality of life. His life is full and he’s really enjoying it.

His signing has improved and he is learning so much that he wouldn’t have done without Underley Garden.

In some areas, they are small steps but in other areas he has made huge steps.

Seeing Stuart’s progress and seeing how happy Underley Garden has made him, and made the rest of the family makes me very proud of him and very happy with what the school has achieved.

Stuart’s happy and it means the rest of the family is happy.

School Progress Report

We always encourage our young people to visit home or for parents to come and visit us if that’s easier because it’s important for us to maintain close family links. We have purpose built accommodation if families want to come and stay with us, but we also provide transport for young people to be able to go home with care staff supporting them on their journeys if required.

It’s essential for families to know that their son or daughter is happy, that they feel safe and that they are well looked after.

It can be quite daunting for a young person to walk into a new school or a care home where they don’t know the young people or the staff so we really work to make the homes reflect a nice friendly atmosphere.

At UGS, the young people live in small groups so that it’s not too intimidating for them

One of the secrets of our success here is the relationship we endeavour to build with the young people, their parents along their social workers .

We do our utmost to keep parents fully informed about what their sons and daughters are doing.

I want our care home to reflect normal family life as much as possible.

We ensure that our children and young people are are happy, that they feel safe and that they are well looked after.

It’s important for their families to know that too.

Every student at Underley Garden has access the National Curriculum which every child is entitled to.

“We interpret the National Curriculum according to each individual’s needs. There will be lots of classroom based activities, but students will also have opportunities to apply their learning in practical ways.

Underley Garden School is also about the social curriculum, such as the friendships that they’re able to make.

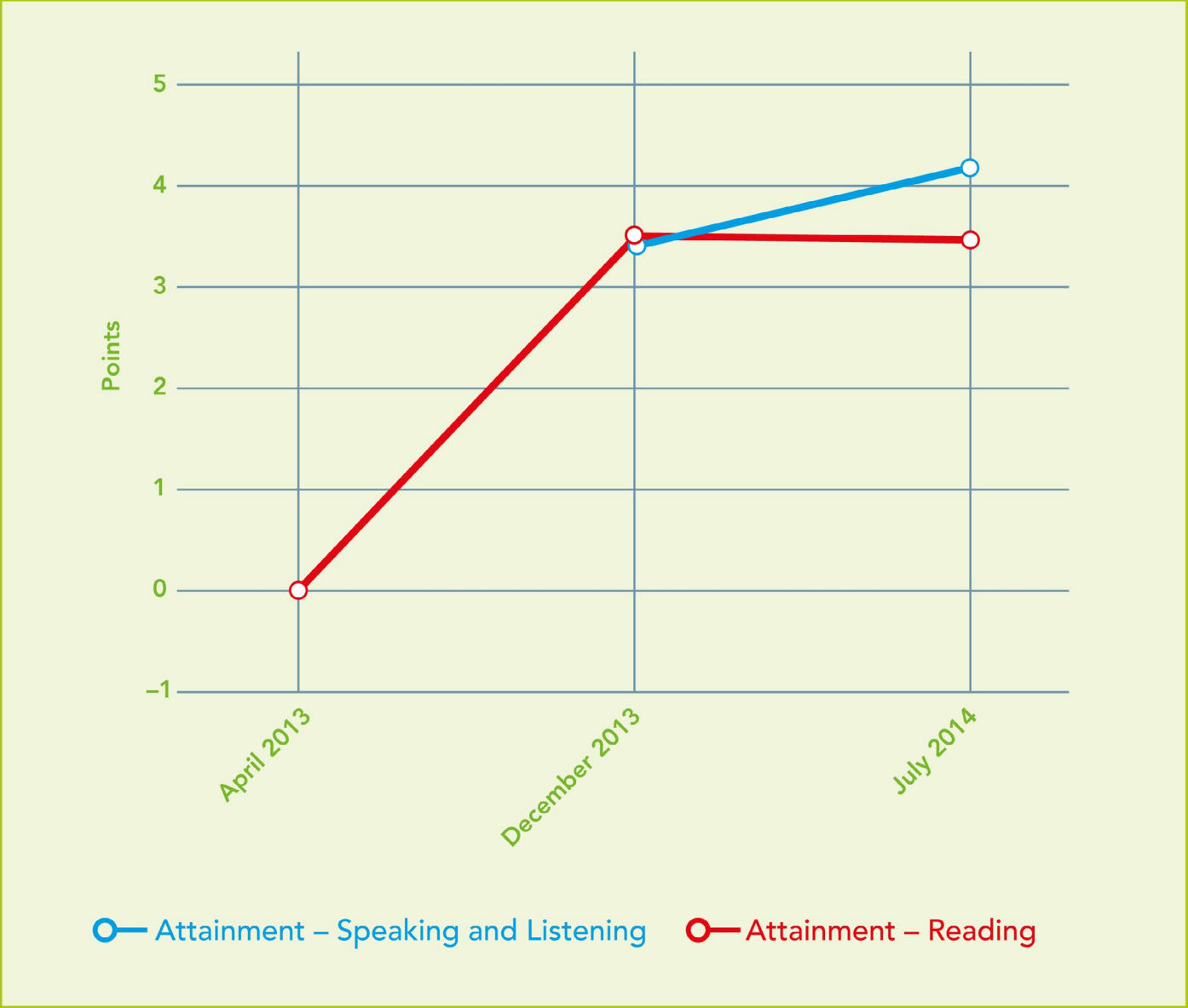
It’s also about steps towards independence, and thinking about what they’re going to be doing in life after school.

One of the most gratifying things about working at Underley Garden is seeing the pleasure from parents when they come to visit and they see for themselves how successful their young people have been.

School Progress

	2011	2014
Behaviour	<p>Stuart had severe problems and refused to be in a classroom. He would destroy chairs, tables and other objects.</p> <p>He struggled to engage with tasks and would become distressed, aggressive, and destructive.</p> <p>Stuart would engage in activities that involved singing, but would be very upset when they ended.</p>	<p>Stuart has made remarkable improvements at Underley. He is happy in a classroom environment, and will engage in work at his desk using a TEACCH system.</p> <p>He enjoys practical activities such as cooking and gardening, and is able to behave responsibly during class trips to supermarkets and cafes.</p> <p>Improvements in communication skills have led to calm behaviour and allowed him to access new activities and join in with his class.</p> <p>He is now able to take part in music classes which he loves, and calmly move to another activity when it is finished.</p>
Communication	<p>Stuart's skills were extremely limited with little use or understanding of PECS.</p> <p>Makaton signing use was low, and used only to make simple requests, such as "please"</p> <p>He struggled to follow verbal commands, and used almost no spoken language.</p> <p>His extreme behaviour tended to stem from poor communication around needing the toilet, or being thirsty/hungry.</p>	<p>Stuart uses PECS to make requests for activities and food, and recognise feelings. He is able to categories symbols into different groups.</p> <p>He uses Makaton signing for a variety of requests such as different food, programmes he would like to watch, and activities.</p> <p>He also signs to express feelings such as "sad", "happy" and "angry", as well as using and understanding the sign for "friends".</p> <p>He is able to follow simple verbal instructions, and is also able to use an increasing amount of single words for conversing with staff, as well as being able to recognise some written words, including his name.</p>
Independence	<p>Stuart needed constant staff support to complete any task.</p> <p>He would become destructive if left alone to eat.</p> <p>He required constant 1:1 staffing to help him eat and dress, and encourage him to go to the toilet.</p> <p>Stuart would only engage if approached by staff, and even this he found very difficult.</p>	<p>Stuart is able to wash and dress himself, and is able to make a cup of tea completely independently.</p> <p>He follows instructions well, and will sit at his desk and complete work on his own, gaining rewards for 4 or more pieces of work at a time, with little to no staff support.</p> <p>He is able to access symbols and choose the food he wants, as well as sitting quietly and eating, then clear his plate away independently.</p> <p>Stuart is becoming increasingly independent with his use of aided communication, and will often instigate interaction with staff.</p>

Core Subject Progress Graph



The improvement in Stuart’s level of independence is quite outstanding.

The strategies that have been introduced are based on detailed assessments from our Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapist and have resulted in a highly personalised programme.

We continue to monitor Stuart’s progress and support the education team to develop activities that meet his needs specifically.

The activities provided for Stuart are rich and varied and have an increasing emphasis on life skills and community experience. He has really expanded his interests and most importantly his ability to communicate with those around him. **Head of Education**

