



# Underley Garden

## Young Person Case Study – Occupational Therapy

Young person: 'H'

Age: 15

**Case Study Focus:** Facilitate occupational therapy sessions with an Ayres Sensory Integration approach, working on arousal levels and problem solving.

### Background:

H is a 52-week residential student who joined us in June this year and he attends Orchard School. H struggles to regulate his arousal levels and is frequently in 'high gear'. This results in behaviours such as running around the school, trying to run in and out of bungalows, trying to climb the walls, taking property e.g. ipads that don't belong to him, winding other young people up by saying 'silly' things. Clearly this impacts on his ability to learn and engage in class activities.

### Intervention:

The Lead Therapy Practitioner, Jen Heath, who is a qualified Ayres Sensory Integration (ASI) Practitioner chose to use an Ayres Sensory Integration approach with H as his behaviours are due to sensory integration difficulties and ASI includes ways of assessing sensory integration difficulties, understanding, describing and making links between how a person integrates sensory information, and how this impacts on the person's participation in everyday life. ASI involves active, individually-tailored, sensory-motor activities contextualised in play (Schaaf, 2018) and ASI at Underley takes place in the newly opened Sensory Integration Space at Holly Trees. H's occupational therapist (OT) is currently training to become an ASI practitioner so is being supervised and mentored by Jen Heath to carry out the sessions with H.



## Underley Garden

Every Monday morning the OT carries out a one-hour session with H and his TA in the Sensory Integration Space at Holly Trees. ASI is child led and in keeping with this, H sets his own plan for the next session (using visuals) and the therapist then skilfully uses the activities that H chooses to work on his goals. At the end of the session, once H is in a 'just right' state of arousal and can focus, the OT works with H on the Alert Programme which is a table top activity that simplifies complex neurobiological theory to help young people understand the importance of self-regulation in daily routines. Whilst the Alert Programme materials are very simple, in order to make the content even more accessible and meaningful to H, the OT has adapted them to make them dog related as H's passion is dogs. At the end of the school day, the occupational therapist checks with school staff how H's arousal levels have been throughout the day and 4 out of 5 times H is able to remain in a just right state of arousal for most or all of the rest of the day and engage in learning.

### Example session:

The OT meets H and his TA at Orchard School with Willow the dog. H was previously running off around Holy Trees and the responsibility of having Willow to walk means he has never run off when he has had the dog. It also ties in with another of his goals which is around dog care activities as he would like a career in his area. H walks the dog to the ASI room and he starts with 5 minutes to jump in the ball pit which is what he usually likes to do on entering the room. The OT asks H "what gear are you in?" - part of the Alert Programme and one of his goals, is being able to recognise his arousal levels throughout the day. H replies "high gear, very high, up here" and points to the ceiling. H's plan from last week is rope ladder, purple swing and hammock swing with weighted blanket and vibrating pillow. The OT recognises that H is in a very high gear and decides to encourage H into the hammock swing as soon as possible. The OT draws H's attention to the plan he wrote last week and suggests he uses the ladder to climb into the hammock swing. Having to climb the ladder provides H with



## Underley Garden

proprioceptive input and this is a calming activity. Lying in the hammock swing provides H with deep tactile pressure from the lycra and linear vestibular input. Both of these types of sensation are known for providing calming and organising input for the nervous system. Following OT sensory assessment, the OT is aware that weighted therapy and vibration is also calming for H so the OT offers H a weighted blanket and vibrating pillow in the swing. The OT turns off the lights and puts on calming music – also strategies identified following OT sensory assessment. Within 5-10 minutes H stops talking and within 15-20 minutes the OT notices him yawning. The OT then asks whether H is ready to get out and asks him what gear he is in. He replies “low gear” and gets out the swing. The OT draws his attention to his plan and then encourages him to help her carry the heavy purple swing over to the suspension point as this heavy work activity is organising for the brain. H climbs into the purple swing and asks for the door to be zipped up. H agrees to being pushed and the OT pushes H back and forth and this provides linear vestibular input. H gets out the swing and the OT suggests the Alert Programme activity. The OT provides H with photos of people who look angry, excited, bored and deep in concentration and asks him to sort them to the red paper – high gear, green paper – just right and blue paper – low gear. H and the OT discuss the photos whilst he is sorting them. H is able to identify a time when he was really angry and is even able to explain how after the incident he went into low gear and then how he eventually was just right again. H concentrates well at the table for 15 minutes. H then makes a plan for next week using the visuals and walks Willow back to school. The OT asks H what gear he is in and he replies “just right”.

### Conclusion:

The ASI sessions are not only beneficial to H whilst he is in the session but the effects can last the full day. Furthermore, H and his staff are learning strategies they can use at school with him. The OT has provided a weighted blanket, vibrating pillow and weighted jacket for use at



# Underley Garden

school and school staff report this is all having a positive impact. Research shows that ASI programmes can lead to lasting and lifelong changes.

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