

## **Kiri's story: Healing Together helps young people become their own best friend**



Kiri (not her real name) is 12 and was part of the Healing Together programme. She seemed to be bright, chatty and outgoing and at every opportunity she would talk about her mum and her younger sister.

She also talked about school more than others in the group and gave the impression that she was good at everything at home and at school. However during the course of a two hour session, it became clear that she was quite anxious and was looking for some sort of recognition.

Healing Together is a group that meets after school one night a week for two hours in the Birmingham area. It is led by a clinical psychologist and may also include an assistant psychologist and /or a volunteer. The group has a maximum of eight children and they are all a similar age so one group is for 11 to 13 year olds, the other is for young people aged 13 to 15. There are plans to start a new group for 9 to 11-year-olds.

In fact, once Kiri relaxed and stopped trying too hard she had a lot to offer. She was really good at art and craft activities and suggested that the group members should make rafts from lolly sticks and straws.

This was a great activity! The children chose brightly coloured sticks and stuck them together using glue or Sellotape. One member used a plain stick and cut out triangles of paper to make a flag. They chose what to put on their raft which could represent what mattered to them or just be an attractive little figure that had caught their eye.

Because it was an assembly activity rather than something where the children had to start from scratch, it worked well. Everyone could do it regardless of artistic ability or

confidence and Kiri in particular talked about why she had chosen what was to go on the raft. Animals are important to her and she likes to make things look pretty. At the end of the session the children filled a sink with water and sailed their rafts. It was so successful that Healing Together plans to use this activity with all groups.

Kiri's mum is not living with her dad – that is one of the conditions of a place on the Healing Together programme. Where abuse or domestic violence has occurred, whether physical or emotional, the child has to be living away from the abuser. The aim is to build their confidence, discover what triggers their emotional responses such as fear, anger, anxiety and, with professional help, to find ways of dealing with those feelings in a positive and effective way. In short, it helps them to become their own best friend.

Kiri has come a long way. Her mother feels that the sessions have helped her let her feelings out: 'It's helped my daughter put things into words, to label her feelings so she is no longer bottling things up. She is now able to write things down, when this previously felt too real. We will write things down, screw the paper up and throw it in the bin to let it go.'

*Healing Together - nurturing children & young people affected by domestic abuse*

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