

Sharon was 10 years of age when she was first referred to Pear Tree. Her mother had just recently ran away from her abusive father and Sharon, along with her sister and younger brother, moved from hostel to hostel. During a brief spell in respite care with foster parents, Sharon attacked her carer with a knife. During this time Sharon and her sister suffered horrific abuse at the hands of their father. He subsequently was arrested and later received a custodial sentence for the rape and buggery of his two daughters.

Sharon came into our care, as a result of our assessment, following these incidents with foster carers. The aforesaid assessment was extremely difficult to undertake as Sharon would not sit still for any more than a few seconds, and was totally unable to answer any questions at all. She appeared to bounce off anybody that she came into contact with. Sharon was admitted on an emergency basis later that day, after we had found that the home in which she was living was undergoing redecoration. The decorating contractors were unable to carry out their duties because of the behaviour of the other children. Sharon was covered in paint and it had to be removed, using neat turps, by the residential staff at the home. Subsequently Sharon had several rashes on her arms. She had also, in the 24hrs that she had been in the home, fallen out of the first floor bedroom window, as a result of inadequate supervision.

Within Sharon's room, we found the walls covered in graffiti, a damaged wardrobe, also covered in graffiti, paint splashed all over the bedroom and a single mattress on the floor in the corner of the bedroom, this room also had no carpet.

This was in fact a local authority facility; Sharon was admitted immediately to Pear Tree.

Within days of being admitted Sharon's mother began to visit and try to over rule the home, in terms of the quality of care that was being offered, undermining the carers and trying to take control, of the running of the house, and of Sharon's life in particular.

Sharon was with us for quite some time, however we quickly started to see patterns in her behaviour. She would become settled and then round about the time she would have contact with her mother, she would become greatly unsettled. Due to the difficulties described above, it was decided that contact should take place with her mother on a six weekly supervised contact session, back in her neighbouring area rather than her mother causing disruption in the home in which Sharon was living. It slowly became apparent that whilst firm boundaries were placed around contacts Sharon was still continuing to be distressed at these times. Sharon began to forge relationships with her current carers and eventually during a traumatic period disclosed how her mother on a regular basis physically abused her sister and younger brother as well as herself. This was much more than parental chastisement, and incurred full beatings with various objects including a leather belt. Sharon described how it was upsetting that she saw her mother regularly, during the contact sessions, wearing the same belt; she felt it was deliberately designed to intimidate her during the visit.

The reason for this disclosure was that she was concerned and scared for her remaining brother and sister, who were still living with their mother. After a great amount of deliberation and consultation with various agencies, the local authority decided that the younger brother should be taken into care and he was in fact removed into care and placed in another Pear Tree home.

Sharon settled and remained settled for some time. Her elder sister was also experiencing difficulties at home, with her mother, and eventually left to be cared for by foster parents, leaving mother at home without any children.

When Sharon was about twelve and a half years of age she discovered that her mother had become pregnant and again we began to see difficulties. Sharon became angry with her current carers and constantly sought physical conflict with the other children that she was living with.

Sharon carried on seeing her mother on a six weekly basis and one day asked why it was she was only allowed to see her six weekly, but her younger brother was allowed to see her fortnightly. When it was explained to Sharon that it was because she continued to display unhappiness around meeting times, she became frustrated and eventually we were able to determine that it was not that she wanted to see her mother, but she was concerned that her brother was seeing their mother too often and that he should have the same protection that she had.

Eventually, with great emotion, Sharon one day described how she had become so frustrated and upset because her mother was pregnant and, having had three children removed from her into care, she was quite convinced that the 4th would eventually be removed also, although commenting that it was quite safe as long as he was still a baby. Sharon then went on to describe how her mother had been the main perpetrator of the sexual abuse within the home that her father had in fact been the scapegoat. Although serving a prison sentence, he was the main carer for the household. Although suffering sexual abuse from her father, Sharon thought he was the most kind and caring, whilst her mother was the most dangerous and hurtful. She described how she had been told to report on her father due to the fact that her mother had decided to use him as a scapegoat. Despite displaying mitigating circumstances regarding her father, she described how both her mother and her father were involved in horrific acts against her and other children, how they witnessed the family dog being shot in front of them and being told if they ever spoke about the abuse the same thing would happen to them. She described being tied to beds and abused and also being made to abuse other children who were also tied up, describing how her mother would take her hand and force her to penetrate other children, thereby making her 'one of them'. Clearly this was a most traumatic time for Sharon and plenty of reassurance was given. Contact was stopped altogether with all of the children on a temporary basis. However it was ultimately decided after police video interviews and numerous conferences that no further action was to be taken against her mother.

Sharon continued to display great fear and anxiety around her mother and requested that she be moved to a house where her mother would not know her whereabouts and she was fortunate enough for this to be able to happen. However despite great efforts made by all, her mother was eventually able to find the whereabouts of this home and made Sharon aware of this.

The anxiety over this was too great for Sharon and eventually she ran away from Pear Tree to the hands of her mother, claiming everything she had ever said had been a lie. Although Sharon was subject to a care order and still only thirteen years old the authorities decided that they were not in a position to impose a return to Pear Tree and left her in foster care within the same community as her mother, where she could continue to have regular access to her mother.

At the age of 14 Sharon became pregnant and the baby was later adopted.

The elements that made Sharon's time at Pear Tree positive were that we were able to carve some memories for her. She had a number of really good holidays and she enjoyed

positive relationships for a while but sadly to say most of Sharon's difficulties were due to the fact we were unable to protect her from her past. This was not as a result of any failing on our part; from our point of view it just simply was not possible. Her relationship with her parents particularly her mother was so powerful although its foundation was built on fear, that their influence could not be contained. Sadly to say we have had a number of young people whose time at Pear Tree has not been as positive as we would have liked and who in every case the breakdown of the placement has been directly attributed to outside influences.