



The Compass Coach
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Tracey is a volunteer for Children Heard and Seen. Below is her own experience and reflections on mentoring an 11-year-old boy impacted by parental imprisonment.

Introducing 'A'

'A' is an 11-year-old boy who is supported by Children Heard and Seen. Despite the challenges he has faced, A is a kind, funny, and thoughtful child. He has a cheeky side that brings joy to those around him, he is also shy and uncertain when meeting new people.

He tends to brush aside incidents that make him feel sad and finds it difficult to express his emotions openly. He is eager to please and has a desire to connect with others.

January Our first interaction was filled with nerves on both sides, but a game of hide-and-seek at the park quickly broke the ice. By the end of the day, the mentoring journey was well underway.

February A visit to the library started with hesitation, but it didn't take long for 'A' to realise that libraries aren't as intimidating as they seem. Poster-making, creative discussions, and a little exploration transformed uncertainty into enthusiasm.

Later in the month, we visited Moss End Garden Centre, where A" encountered birds of prey, reptiles, and fish. The unexpected star of the day? A Snowy Owl that completely captivated him. If an owl appreciation club exists, he'd be its newest member. He overcame initial hesitation, asked great questions of the staff, and showed a keen interest in learning. This is also where he started to develop a bravery around talking to people, the couple at the table next to us, a child and asking a staff member if he could handle a reptile.

A trip to Windsor Great Park rounded out February. We walked along the Long Walk up to the statue, spotting a Green Woodpecker up close along the way. 'A' then embarked on an impromptu exploration, leading to a hilarious moment when his trainer ended up soaked in mud as he attempted to hop across the terrain. We laughed about how this is exactly how memories are made. After a lot of determined searching, we came across a herd of deer, and Alex was so excited that he carefully crept up to capture photos—he got some brilliant shots!

March was packed with meaningful experiences and great conversations. A visit to Five Guys sparked enthusiastic discussions about books and stories, with plenty of fries to keep the energy going.

One particular adventure saw us taking my mother-in-law's dog for a long walk—two and a half hours of exploration. We had such a great time that 'A's Aunt and my wife jokingly scolded me for being late! 'A' impressed me by remembering all the tree names I had taught him, climbing trees for the first time, and watching aeroplanes and helicopters at Blackbushe Airport over a well-earned bacon sandwich.

There were plenty of laughs along the way. One memorable moment involved a tree branch—'A' bounced me up and down while I sat on the trunk, which was unexpectedly hilarious. He also enthusiastically smacked some dead trees, which led to an important conversation about why living ones were off-limits.

A particularly sweet moment came when he held the café door open for a family—a small gesture but one that showed thoughtfulness. Hide-and-seek at the park led to even more tree climbing, but the real highlight was his problem-solving skills. He found a stick trapped in a ditch surrounded by brambles and nettles and was about to give up until I asked, "What if it was a bar of gold?" That shifted his mindset—he studied different angles, found a plank of wood to cover the brambles, and retrieved the stick with a well-thought-out strategy. When I asked him what he had learnt he said "Try different things, ask for help, and don't give up."

Reflections on Mentoring

I am so pleased that I chose to volunteer with Children Heard and Seen for the weekend back in August, which ultimately led to mentoring 'A'. This experience has been incredibly humbling and fulfilling. I feel so privileged to be a part of 'A's journey—we have so much fun, we laugh endlessly, and we're developing a truly special, trusting friendship.

This journey isn't just about mentoring 'A'; it's also about the connections that have formed along the way. I have joined his Aunt on a wonderful journey, and I consider her a friend too.

Every step of this journey has reinforced what mentoring is all about—not just guidance, but mutual learning, shared laughter, and moments that stay with you long after the day ends.

If you would like to become a volunteer mentor for Children Heard and Seen, please do get in touch at info@childrenheardandseen.co.uk