

## Homeschooling Program Review

Child's name: Geoff Ree

Age: 13 years

### Background:

We started home educating Geoff after his anxiety skyrocketed 18 months ago. When we began, he was completely disengaged from school and friends. He was lonely, but unable to engage with other people. He was severely distressed, anxious and volatile. Geoff was refusing to get out bed most days.

When he did get up, he rarely left his room other than to eat and use the bathroom, he refused to shower, refused to communicate with family members, and was prone to explosive meltdowns if he was pushed into communicating or any attempt was made to engage him in activities.

The only activity he wanted to engage in or talk about was gaming, and he refused to read any books or engage in learning activities.

### Progress in the last year:

Geoff continues to shut down and retreat when any activity, workshop or even conversation begins to resemble school, school work or school-type interactions.

However, with time and space, Geoff has begun to re-engage with his family, friends and community.

We have concentrated on mental health this year. Geoff agreed at the start of the year to do some yoga and meditation with me every day, but this did not go well. Even this was too overwhelming for him, so he chose to sit and watch YouTube videos of people teaching yoga to begin with. We also downloaded the app "Headspace", which he initially enjoyed, but then found too stressful to use as it was reward-based and this led to a great deal of anxiety. We now use "Smiling Mind" instead, and he says that he finds it helpful to regulate his feelings and not to overreact to circumstances. He has also started doing some yoga in his room with the door closed, and reports it helps him feel calmer and better able to face the day.

Geoff also agreed to go out for a walk with me every day, and we have stuck to this routine ever since. It has provided us with time to bond again, and in the last couple of months we are once again talking about life, and feelings. I have also noticed that his natural curiosity is starting to return, and we sometimes stop to look at birds, trees, or to watch the new units in our street being constructed.

Geoff has also started occasionally playing with his younger siblings. It doesn't always last long, but he will venture outside, and has even run (!) a couple of times, playing tag, which I have not seen him do in at least the last three or four years.

Geoff still has bad days, when he will stay in his room, but we have agreed that he will try to come out and spend half an hour with the family on those days when he is feeling up to it. This is working well. He has also, at the gentle, joking, urging of his younger sister, started showering at least twice a week, which is real progress on where we were a year ago.

Our biggest gains, however, have been in the kitchen. Geoff agreed to cook one meal a week with me, and this has now expanded. He will cook with me every day, and shows a great interest in food and meal preparation. It is another great opportunity to talk about things going on, and he has opened up about several experiences at school that led to his overwhelming anxiety. The interest in cooking has led to excursions to gourmet food stores, and lately to Queen Victoria Market (which was overwhelming, but Geoff proclaimed the best day he had had in a long time). Geoff's interest is lately expanding into watching documentaries such as "Food Inc" and "The Magic Pill", and he is contemplating a visit to the library to borrow some books he thinks will be of interest.

Although he has yet to start drawing again, he has mentioned in passing that he would like to find his old art supplies, so I am hopeful that his love of graphic art will be reignited. I did catch him doodling on a scrap piece of paper his sister had left behind a few days ago, but he quickly scrunched it up and put it in the recycling bin when he noticed me watching. Baby steps....

Overall, this year has seen Geoff reconnect with family, and has seen his anxiety decrease markedly. While gaming continues to be a feature of every day, he is showing an interest in life again, and looking forward to things to come. We are tremendously pleased with his progress.

When and where:

We are working on and supporting Geoff's progress every day, whenever we are with him. We are also making sure he has space and time to decompress regularly throughout the day. While most of our days are spent close to home, we have started to venture out on excursions to the shops, Queen Vic Market and we go for walks.