Jack case study

* Name: Jack
* Age: 14 years 10 months
* Nationality: white Irish

Jack was born in Ireland. Before his birth his father left to work in England. When Jack was 18 months old his mother joined her husband (Jack’s father), leaving Jack with his grandmother and step-grandfather. Jack was close to his grandmother. He kept in touch with his parents sporadically, spending time with them during school holidays on two occasions. When Jack was nine years old, his grandmother died suddenly of a heart attack and he moved to England to live with his parents and younger siblings on a permanent basis.

Though Jack was achieving well at school in Ireland, he found it very hard to settle into primary school here and his behaviour was extremely difficult both at home and at school. Having always been a very good at maths and science in particular, above average in terms of grades, he is now significantly behind for his age.

His parents think he may have been mistreated by his step-grandfather, who is now dead. He was temporarily excluded from primary school on several occasions because of his behaviour. When he was in Year 6 he said his father had beaten him with a belt, and this was confirmed. For a year he was the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

Jack’s behaviour problems continued into secondary school. When Jack was 11 his friend was badly beaten up and had to stay in hospital for several weeks. Jack truanted every day (he says he was visiting his friend) and was extremely distressed when his friend’s parents moved to another city. His attendance and behaviour worsened and is now very poor, he doesn’t obey school rules and he can’t concentrate in class. He ran away from home a few times. Jack is aggressive, has been temporarily excluded several times and is now facing permanent exclusion having destroyed school property in a display of violence following an altercation with a teacher.

He had been isolated from his peers since his friend moved away, but in the past 12 months has become quite closely associated with a group of older boys and men. These peers are known to be engaging in criminal behaviour – with some of the older men linked to drug-dealing and gang activity. Jack has started offending – robbery (money and mobile phones, mainly,) and possession of drugs (cannabis). Jack says he only steals from “posh people and shops” and adults because he doesn’t want to “rob off someone who can’t afford it”.

Jack’s parents find it very difficult to understand his behaviour. They feel guilty about having left him in Ireland and ashamed that their son has been involved in criminal behaviour. Relationships in the house became so difficult that 4 weeks ago Jack’s father requested that Jack move out because he feared he would assault his son again. Jack moved out of the family home to stay with his aunt (mother’s half-sister) some distance away from Jack’s parents’ home. This is an informal arrangement. Jack’s mother says that she’s “not close” to her half-sister and indications are that Jack will not be able to stay with his aunt long-term. He has run away again on 2 occasions in the first 3 weeks, both times overnight, and was found by police intoxicated at a flat rented by one of his friends on the second occasion.

His parents are missing him but find it hard to visit because they feel so ashamed that someone else is caring for their child. They speak to Jack on his mobile and text him on a daily basis. Jack doesn’t want to talk much, but he has said to an attendance officer that came to explain the exclusion process that he is “better off out of school” as the other students “wind him up”. He says he “only smashed the cupboard door in because it was that or punch the teacher”.

Jack’s aunt reports that if Jack runs away again she will “kick him out”. In the past week she says Jack has been “staying out of trouble”. He hasn’t wanted to go out and spends lots of time in his room on his computer. His aunt expresses anger towards Jack’s parents because they have not contributed financially despite having said they would do so. Jack is not in school.