



Twenty-four hours at BUCKETS AND SPADES

It's still dark outside and there's almost no traffic on the roads when the day's specialist care staff come on duty. There are five on duty today, as it's a full house at Buckets and Spades, a short-breaks service in Finchley providing overnight stays and day care for children and young people, and essential respite for their parents.

It's a fresh, purpose-built single-story house that looks like all the other houses in the neighbourhood. Except this is a house that is a home away from home for children with physical and learning disabilities and complex health needs.

The day starts with a handover meeting between the night and day staff. It's timed this early before the children wake up and the day starts in earnest. After the children are woken, there is breakfast to eat, teeth to brush and children to dress before the buses arrive to take them to school.

All is peaceful for five minutes until the doorbell rings. A new child and

his family have come for a visit. James is six, loves books and is a wheelchair user. The allocated care worker shows them around. The big, sunny living-room and dining-room is the first stop on the tour. They all take a look at the bedrooms with their brightly coloured walls and curtains, and the big, especially adapted bathrooms; but James is more interested in the sensory room with its interesting textures and flashing lights. The garden and playroom are big and welcoming too, with tempting outdoor musical instruments to play with.

Buckets and Spades is fully wheelchair accessible, with ceiling track hoists and height-adjustable

beds, with and without sides. The bathrooms are fully equipped to meet the personal care needs of moderate to severely disabled children. But James doesn't need to know any of this. It all looks like a fun and friendly place, and he spots a *Star Wars* duvet on one of the beds. The allocated care worker has lots to do. She must visit James at school to find out what works best for him. She'll need to know everything that allows her to ensure that James is happy and well-cared for while he's at Buckets and Spades. The goal for each child is to have the chance to gain confidence, become more independent and improve their social and communication skills.



With the older children at school, the under-fives come to play for a few hours. There's a huge range of activities where they can explore their environment, learn and have fun. They can have a go in the sandpit, play with water, feel crunchy leaves, and enjoy soft play, arts and crafts, or music and movement.

After the under-fives' play-group, the staff have just enough time to plan the next day's sessions, have meetings, complete the necessary forms and update each child's care plan. As Buckets and Spades provides Ofsted-registered accommodation for children and young people with autism and/or severe communication difficulties; complex health needs, including epilepsy; and children who require tube feeding, nasal gastric feeding or colostomy care; this is an important part of the day.

The older children come back from school. After supper, there's just enough time for one more activity. Tonight everyone's involved in baking a cake. Other nights it may be a session of karaoke or just sitting together in the living room watching an episode of *Eastenders*.

The day ends with bathtime, teeth-brushing and bedtime.

Night night all! ●●●

**Names have been changed to protect identities.*

