

COMPLEX NEEDS

Appendix of ethnographic profiles

July 2013

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SARAH

Sarah is a 34 year old black woman living in supported accommodation in central London. She has lived there for almost two years and expects to be there for another year before moving on.

Sarah is welcoming, friendly and open. The strength of her personality shines through and her day is punctuated by visits to her room from other residents, and chatting to staff and residents around the building. Although noticeably less confident outside the home, it is clear she has also struck up friendly relationships with the staff at the local supermarket which she visits daily for “tobacco and tuck”.

She has had a difficult and troubled life from a young age. Sarah’s own mother suffered from mental health problems and so at a relatively young age they were fostered or adopted, but for some reason the placement failed. Sarah and her sister were then placed in a children’s home. She talks of her years in the children’s home as a happy time:

“It was great ... I did Brownies and Guides ... and after Church we always had a big roast lunch on a Sunday.”

The passage of time after childhood is blurry but it is evident that at some point shortly after leaving the children’s home, Sarah became homeless. In order to survive and afford a hostel or B&B for the night, she became a sex worker. During that period, Sarah gave birth to five children, all of whom were taken into care. It is something she clearly finds hard to talk or even think about. Although she has not had contact with any of them for many years she has a photo of one son, aged around 13, in her room. She says he would now be about 21. This photo is clearly one of her most important possessions.

It is unclear when she received her diagnosis of schizophrenia but talks of having been out of hospital for eight years. She describes her condition as “voices out my mouth” which she can’t control, but doesn’t have delusions or hear voices in her head. Initially she talked of her condition being very well controlled and not experiencing the voices like she used to. However, as Sarah became more tired, the voices became more frequent and obvious.

Whilst at home Sarah doesn’t seem to feel embarrassed by the voices. Outside en route to the supermarket the situation is very different and she worries about behaving oddly in public and what the consequences might be.

“It’s embarrassing ... One time I was in Tesco and I just shouted out. I don’t drink but I had to pretend to the security guard ‘he, he, sorry. I’ve just had a bit too much drink’ and then I left.”

To control her condition Sarah takes eight pills a day. They used to make her drowsy so she now takes them all before bed. She now sleeps in until 11 or so most days, but does not attribute this to the pills. Sarah is very vigilant about her medication and “if I felt odd, I would go [to the doctor] straight away ... the main thing is to be well”. Once a month she has a blood test and check-up on a Tuesday and then goes back on the Friday to collect her medication.

Although taking all the pills in the evening has made her less drowsy, Sarah finds extended periods of activity or engagement tiring. Somewhat overweight, she seems quite unfit and walking 10 minutes to the local supermarket is physically draining for her. The lack of fitness is almost certainly compounded by her chain smoking, predominantly roll-ups.

Sarah knows she is unfit but seems resigned to it, feeling she is unable to regain the fitness of her youth and writing off her ability to dance or enjoy most physical activities. As a result of her love of swimming, the staff at the home run a weekly trip to the local pool.

Sarah also appears to have a short attention span. She tends to focus exclusively on one thing at a time, be that eating, watching TV or making a cup of tea. She also appears to enjoy planning a structure around her day, deciding to “make a cup of tea in five minutes” or that “we’ll go to Sainsbury’s at three o’clock”, regularly checking the time.

Although Sarah spends much of her day in her room, this belies the true spirit of her days. She often chats with her friends amongst the other residents and particularly likes a good horror film. She also enjoys girlie activities such as painting her nails and loves shoes, bags, clothes and make-up. Taking care of herself and personal hygiene are important to her. Her favourite shops are Boots and Superdrug and she sometimes goes to a big shopping centre in Wood Green or the markets in Camden. While she loves Boots and Superdrug and the products they sell, Sarah comments that she finds it quite difficult to shop there.

“There’s too much … I like it when I buy clothes and I can look at them and touch them.”

The array of different options appears to bewilder her and the shopping experience is not one of looking, comparing and lingering over different products. Deals and offers are also ignored, meaning the final basket of goods does not represent particularly good value. Generally though, Sarah feels she has enough money to live her life.

Other than the time she spends in her room, out shopping, or swimming, Sarah has a few outside interests. She sometimes joins in with arts activities, though she is not particularly passionate about it, but she loves going on theatre trips when she can.

At some point in the next year, Sarah is expecting to move to a small flat and is excited at the prospect. She intends to have the walls painted the same colour red as her current room and to buy some additional furniture. A dream is also to have a TV in the living room and another one in her bedroom – “A lot of people have a TV in their bedroom, don’t they?”. She is not worried about moving to a new place and having to be more independent and cook for herself as she was used to that in previous places that she lived. She also believes that her transient life means that she is well equipped to deal with regularly moving.

“I had best friends in Camden, a best friend in Kilburn and I’ve got a best friend here. I expect I’ll make new friends there … I like it. I’m used to it. It’s good to meet new people.”

Sarah talks of contact with only three people outside the home. The first and most important to her is her sister – “she’s the clever one” who works in electronics or as an electrician. She is clearly proud of her even though they don’t meet in person very often.

The second person Sarah sees more regularly is her boyfriend who she’s been with for several years. He visits every week on a Friday. However, she talks very little about him, has no photos of him and cannot recall how they met. The only other person Sarah mentions is the brother of someone she was friends with in a previous home. Even though she does not see her friend at the old home, the brother still comes to visit her sometimes.

Finally, although she does not mention it when asked, the staff also talk about Sarah's role in the organisation working as an 'expert by experience' and helping with the interview and training process for new staff. This role fits perfectly with her confidence and openness in dealing with new people when on home turf.

DAVID

David is 39 years old and of Afro-Caribbean origin. Although born in the UK, he moved with his mother and sister at a young age to the Caribbean where he spent his childhood. He later moved to the US and completed High School before obtaining a Degree in Advanced Technology. He keeps his degree certificate and high school transcript safe and shows with pride a letter that all students received from George W. Bush upon graduation.

David is proud of his technological skills and can “fix anything – cars, bikes, planes … and programme computers too”. He has often helped out friends in the past who have been having problems with their cars and this is something he really enjoys.

Whilst living in the US, David had a little girl and he lived with her and her mother until she was about three years old. At this point, it appears that David’s mental health started to deteriorate. He describes how God told him that both the child and her mother had died and been replaced by “demons” and that he could no longer trust them. The loss of his daughter makes him very upset but he can recall times with her that made him very happy.

“I remember once when she had just two little teeth … she bit into my cheek so hard it really hurt but she just held on!”

At some point after this he returned to the Caribbean and was later unable to go back to America. The subsequent sequence of events is unclear but David regularly received messages from God and was given a “mission” which led him to the UK. It is not quite clear how or why, but he seems to equate this with “doing anything for my daughter”. Upon arrival in London he was homeless and spent six days on the streets before eventually he made it to Buckingham Palace and told the policemen there that he had been sent by God to speak to the Queen. This led to his hospitalisation and subsequent diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Upon discharge, David moved into a residential facility in central London. Although he does not like the fact that the medical team and support staff do not believe him and think he has schizophrenia, he says he is not bothered by it as he knows the diagnosis is rubbish. He now has a fortnightly blood test and takes his medication regularly. He is happy to take his medication as requested if it keeps him out of hospital, as he believes it has no effect.

Despite his unconventional beliefs, in most respects upon meeting David he appears to be an intelligent, friendly, outgoing and funny person. One of his main passions is health and fitness. When he was in hospital he took part in various sports events and Olympic sports days, regularly winning. Since being discharged, he has joined the local gym. He tries to go five days a week and spends an hour each time working out and using all the machines. He also talks about helping other guys in the gym if he can see them doing exercises incorrectly.

“I want to build my arm muscles up a bit and tone my chest … but I don’t want to get too big. That’s not a good look … like that guy over there. I think he needs to buy a bra!”

As a result of his interest in working out, it is being arranged for him to undertake a gym instructor’s coaching course. He is hoping to start it in the next week or so and it should take around five weeks to obtain the qualification. He is excited about the opportunity and hopes it will lead to work.

Other than going to the gym, David takes a keen interest in other sports, particularly basketball, American football and soccer. He has just purchased a basketball and hopes to go out to shoot some hoops with some of the staff at the centre. He also expressed some interest in being able to play full games on a casual basis but is reluctant to join a team as his focus is on his mission and gaining employment.

In the meantime, David has just secured a part-time job as an usher at one of the West End theatres. The opportunity arose after he took part in a theatre production organised between the residential centre and the theatre. After the show he was invited to interview and got the job. He will be working approximately two nights a week as a front of house usher checking tickets.

David is delighted to have the job. A big perk of the job is that he will be able to watch the shows on the nights he works and this is something he is really looking forward to. In preparation for the job, he has purchased a new uniform in Primark, which he thinks they will refund the cost of, and has been reading the information they sent in advance. He is also looking forward to meeting new people and earning some money for himself.

At the moment, he lives on just “a loan” of £30 a week. He thinks that there is some confusion and delay over both his benefits and freedom pass so he is hoping that eventually he will have more money, even though his needs are minimal.

“I don’t need much money. It’s the root of all evil. Just enough to get by.”

Other than this, David mainly fills his days going out and about or listening to music in his room. He is a particular fan of chilled reggae music and has a small CD player. At present he doesn’t have a TV in his room but he is hoping to save enough money to be able to get one soon. An early riser, he often wakes at around 6am for a cup of tea, before going back to bed until breakfast time and then listening to some reggae music.

Although he did some art in hospital and enjoys drawing, he does not want to join an art group. He says art “takes too long” but can’t explain why this is or why he lacks the time. Although he does not want to create art, in hospital he did develop a love of museums. They were taken on regular outings to London’s free museums and David is particularly passionate about the National Portrait Gallery.

“When I first saw some of the pictures in there my jaw dropped … when you look at some of them they look real”

David has been to the National Portrait Gallery several times now, both before and since being discharged. Once he wanted to go to one of the special exhibitions but didn’t have £12 for the entrance fee. However, he got chatting to the person at the entrance and when he told her he was staying at the hospital, she checked in a book, asked him to sign something, and let him in free. He is really pleased that free entrance was available to him.

He has also been to many of the other museums such as the Wallace Collection and the Natural History Museum. He’d like to go to the “National Air Force museum” to see the World War aeroplanes but he is unsure where it is – he has just heard that there is such a museum. David is very interested in history generally and has borrowed historical books from the local library. However, the disconnect between the books and the reality in which he lives seems to be a struggle and he talks about not liking “the modern stuff” and lots of it being wrong or too focused on the bad stuff that happened in the past.

BRADLEY

Bradley is currently in transition. He is preparing to move from 24-hour supported accommodation into a new place run by the charity, Mind, which provides a much lower level of support.

For Bradley this is a clear step in the right direction. His ultimate goal is to have his own place; to live independently and be able to work. However, moving from a familiar environment where he is happy and comfortable leaves Bradley feeling a mixture of anticipation and apprehension for the move.

He has been living at the residence in Harrow Road for the past two years. He was moved here following a short stay in prison. While inside he was diagnosed with a mental health condition and following his release, was housed here by the prison probation.

While he is at the residence, he will mostly stay in his room. He doesn't mix much with the other residents, aside from the odd film night. Here a few residents will get together and watch a DVD in the evening, often action films. Once, a group from Harrow Road went to the cinema with his support worker, which he really enjoyed. Bradley is aware of Time Credits, and if he earned credits he would like to use them to go to the cinema.

He is, however, close to the staff, particularly his support worker Ben. Bradley has struggled with drinking in the past, and Ben is a real support who helps to "*keep me in check with my drinking*". Once a week he also attends a support group at DWP for people with alcohol problems.

Bradley has a plain room with a single bed, and some simple cooking facilities. He has a television and an old computer. The computer was given to him by one of his brothers, but it is password protected and missing a mouse, meaning it goes unused. He would like to be able to use it. Recently he did a computer course, where he learnt email, and is now keen to do more.

Whilst in his room Bradley spends most of his time watching television which he enjoys. He follows most sport, and also cooking shows, especially the Hairy Bikers as they show food from all around Britain. There is currently no TV aerial in his new room, and he is clear that he will not move until this is sorted. Being able to watch television during the day is very important for Bradley.

Bradley tends to cook chicken at home, and every couple of weeks he will get the bus to Iceland to stock up on meat. Previously, he would have walked. However Bradley's heart has been giving him problems recently. He has had a few spells where he has blacked out. He's not sure what's causing this but it may be related to the medication he takes. He has been advised to not do any exercise which will raise his heart beat too far. This has also put an end to gym sessions which he and Ben, his support worker, used to attend.

Most afternoons he will spend a few hours visiting his niece who lives a short bus ride away. He enjoys spending time there, and she is the only family that Bradley has in London. Again he really values her support in helping to control how much he drinks. She will often cook for him, though she is a vegetarian so it is always vegetables! Sometimes he also sees her two daughters who are 13 and 18, though often they are at school.

Bradley's mother lives in the United States. Bradley has visited previously but currently this is not an option. Whilst he was in prison someone stole his passport and three people tried to use his details fraudulently. His attempts to obtain a new passport have been rejected. In the meantime he relies on Skype at his niece's house to talk to his mother.

Outside of London Bradley has a lot of family. He has many siblings, all of whom live in Milton Keynes. Bradley grew up in Paddington, but in the 1980s he moved to Milton Keynes with his family. Bradley wasn't a fan of the area. He prefers the "*hustle and bustle*" of London, and comments that in Milton Keynes they don't have proper pavements, and public transport is poor. His siblings visit when they can – often they will go to the West End to have a meal.

Bradley's routine will likely stay very similar when he moves into his new accommodation. The key differences will be new staff, and a slightly shorter bus journey to visit his niece each day.

Previously Bradley worked as a truck driver, which he loved – "*there's no boss, you're in charge*". He would like to work again, but is currently on incapacity benefit – "*I've got a bad heart, I wouldn't pass the medical.*"

Failing this, he would like to become a support worker for people with mental health problems – "*I know what it's like to be in that situation*".

Bradley is a member of the 'Experts by Experience' programme for Look Ahead who run his accommodation. He will be able to continue his involvement in his new accommodation and this is very important to him. The group of experts is responsible for interviewing new staff members, and assessing the quality of different services within the organisation. The group is called on as and when they are needed. When interviewing, Bradley looks for staff who are "*personable and outspoken*".

Bradley is obviously proud of his work with the group, and has recently been nominated for an award for his efforts. He is very much looking forward to the ceremony. He also believes that his involvement through the Experts by Experience programme may enable him to later qualify as a support worker.

Bradley's immediate future is mapped out with his imminent move to a lower level accommodation. Despite some apprehension, he is hopeful that this will take him one step further towards his goal, to have his own place; be living independently and be able to work.

ANDREW

Andrew is in his 60s and lives in a mental health residential home for men in North London. For much of the last decade Andrew has been flitting between hospital, homelessness – sometimes rough sleeping, sometimes in hostels – and prison. During one stay in prison, officers noticed he was acting strangely so took him to the prison hospital where he was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. Alcohol has also played a big part in Andrew's life, particularly when he was on the streets.

Andrew is passionate about music and regularly attends music therapy sessions – “*the top point of the week*”. He loves playing the keyboard, enjoying the freedom of improvising and the opportunity to interact with others through music. Andrew first started attending the music therapy sessions during a year-long stay in a psychiatric unit. He would love to play music much more. He is eagerly anticipating the arrival of the keyboard in his bedroom which will allow him another activity apart from watching television. He has heard of another music session which he may be able to attend but is a little vague on the details or how he will access this.

Andrew is supported by a volunteer. Melvin spends time travelling with Andrew to music therapy each week. “*Well I thought if he knows Mehin is there waiting at 9 each Friday he would be much more likely to go and to be regular with it*”. The plan has worked. Now each Friday the two will travel together, and Melvin will sit and wait for an hour during Andrew's session before coming home together, often via a coffee shop.

Other than the music therapy sessions, Andrew finds his days tend to be quite regular and repetitive. Mostly he is at home, in his room, watching daytime television – “*you know the same old shows, I like Fraser, but it all gets a bit boring*”. He eats ready meals, normally a chicken curry from the Co-op. A good day for him is a sunny day, so that he can go and sit in the nearby park though even then he will often get bored quickly and come home again.

Recently Melvin organised a trip for Andrew and himself to go to the Tower of London. He paid for this using time credits earned for formal volunteering within the organisation that supports Andrew. Andrew talks a lot about this day – “*I didn't want to come home!*”. Melvin reflects, smiling – “*I wouldn't have spent those Time Credits on anything else... He [Andrew] forgot about his mental health or any problems that day. He just kept saying 'lets go here... then here... then here!'*”

Andrew is keen to do more – “*anything to get me out the house*” he reflects. However, there is some confusion over his benefits and how Andrew can access his money. He worries about “*lacking the means to do more*”.

Andrew has now been at his current home for around two months. Staff comment that he has made brilliant progress so far. He doesn't describe himself as happy there but is quite settled, and resigned to the fact –“*It's home so I've got to make the best of it*”.

Within the home Andrew is assigned a support worker. The two do not always see eye-to-eye on what pressing priorities are. Andrew is keen to sort out his Oyster freedom pass which has been rejected, meaning he has to spend a lot on transport. He doesn't feel his support worker prioritises this, commenting that, “*she seems more worried about the state of my*

room and personal hygiene”. However, generally he has a good relationship with the staff within the facility.

Andrew comments that he doesn’t have a huge amount of contact with other people who live at Harrow Road – “*they seem like a good bunch but people do their own thing*”. However, he has clearly established himself as the go-to person for a cup of tea or roll-up, with a relatively regular stream of people to his door. Andrew chuckles about this in a slightly resigned way, but there is an unmistakeable hint of pride in his voice.

Some of the immediate people in Andrew’s life – particularly Melvin and staff at Harrow Road – are very important to Andrew. However, undoubtedly the most important people to him are his family. He has three siblings, two ex-wives and three children. He did not see very much of his eldest two children growing up, but was much more involved in the life of his youngest daughter.

He would love to see his family again, particularly his children. He tries to make contact through writing letters – “*I write. That’s all I can do.*” One of his ex-wives wrote to inform him a year or so ago that his daughter had written him a letter but the letter never reached Andrew. Aside from this he doesn’t hear back. He knows loosely what his children are doing, and that they’re okay, and he is quite resigned to this –“*They’re doing their own thing, but I would love to see them again.*”

A few years ago he went to visit his brother in Bournemouth where he grew up. “*He’s more steady than me. He’s hard working, he doesn’t drink or smoke...*” His brother told him “*I’m a very busy man, you can’t just turn up unannounced*”. Andrew ended up sleeping in a tent in his back garden and hasn’t seen him since.

Thinking to the future, once the weather improves Andrew and Melvin are planning more outings. Andrew reflects it’s important for him to have company for these trips – “*It’s better to do things with someone*”. Andrew plans to remain where he is for the foreseeable future – “*there’s nothing else on the horizon*”.

NICOLA

Nicola lives in a fisherman's cottage a stone's throw from the beach in Kent. Her cottage is cosy and decorated with family photos, amidst the hustle and bustle of a family home. Nicola lives here with her husband Hasan, 20 odd years her junior, who moved to the UK from Bangladesh a few years ago. Also Pickles, the much loved and smelly family dog.

Sofia, Poppy and Amy –Nicola's children – are currently living with a foster family. This follows a recent breakdown where Nicola mixed various prescription drugs and alcohol before arriving to collect her daughters from school. The school phoned the police: Nicola was arrested, and her daughters taken into care. Unsurprisingly, she is devastated. "*It's been seven weeks, and it feels like forever. If it turns into seven months, I know it will feel like seven years.*"

Her daughters are being cared for under a section-20 agreement. This stands as a voluntary agreement between Nicola and social services; technically she could ask for them back at any time. However, this is not the first time that she has had involvement with social services, and the local authority are now threatening to apply to take the girls into permanent care. "*It's one thing after another... It's hard to shake off social services, you'll always be the first suspect.*" In light of this worry Nicola is adamant that she must be fully better before she has her children back.

Nicola suffers from bi-polar, and although undiagnosed for much of her adulthood, she can now recognise she had these symptoms since adolescence. When she was younger she used to use these traits to her advantage – excelling in sales in the city, competing in sailing to a national level. Alongside this achievement, and enjoyment of the euphoric times, however, sat a string of abusive relationships, and a problematic relationship with alcohol.

Since her crisis Nicola has been attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) several times a week. She now describes herself as a recovering alcoholic, and has been sober for five weeks. Nicola closely links her binges with tough moments in her past. For example the sudden death of her (adoptive) father, the death of her adoptive mother following a struggle with Alzheimer's, and tracking down her birth mother to be informed she was the "*devil's spawn*" and born following a rape. Nicola points out many people with young children have family to turn to at such times, to provide support or look after children. She was not this lucky.

Nicola is devastated by the loss of her children, and is fully focused on getting her daughters back. Coupled with her devastation are the pressing practicalities that need sorting, a key one being if and how her benefits will be affected. Money is tight.

Nicola has few close friends. She doesn't trust them. Previous 'friends' have flagged concerns around her drinking to social services behind her back, and many people voiced disapproval around her marriage to Hasan, both ageism and racism, Nicola feels. Since recognising and purposefully tackling her problems head on, Nicola has found her social circles rapidly diminishing – "*When I was eccentric, and a bit of a drinker I got invited to parties. I was fun, but as soon as I'm a recovering alcoholic with bi-polar no-one wants to know. But I prefer me this way.*" As a result, perhaps the peer support at Alcoholics Anonymous is invaluable to Nicola, and she is quickly building up rapport within this group.

Nicola feels this sense of judgment comes not only from friends, but too often those with a duty to support her. She perceives a big part of this is lack of understanding around mental

health problems – “*With mental health, the minute you feel you’re being judged you want to fall back into the crack that you crawled out of*”. She cites her current social worker in particular – “*It’s not helpful, she’s aggressive … She has this idea that threatening is going to be productive*”. The social worker also provides the face to the vast local authority, who Nicola has found highly bureaucratic and frustrating to deal with.

Partly as a result of her bi-polar, but mostly her current situation, Nicola has up days and down days. On the down days she will simply cry. Every morning though begins with a walk on the beach with Pickles, which is “*a good flush out*”. She is familiar with many of the other dog walkers, commenting – “*it’s good, they don’t ask personal questions. It’s just how are you, and all about the dogs*”.

She is trying hard to find the right balance of keeping herself busy, whilst leaving time for self reflection and recovery. She has an off-peak gym membership and will often visit during the day. The cottage is also very much a work in progress. Nicola loves to root through local junk shops and furniture emporiums to find hidden gems for their home. She’s in the process of redecorating the girls’ rooms as a surprise for when they return home. Nicola knows only too well from previous experience that if she doesn’t take time to recover fully after a break down she will likely relapse at some point in the future. She is acutely aware that she cannot afford any further encounters with social services if she wants to keep her daughters.

Having a sense of purpose is crucial for Nicola. She feels that the lack of this led to her most recent breakdown, partly as Hasan was out the country for some time in Bangladesh visiting sick relatives. For some, she comments – “*having children is enough, that’s all people need, that gives them their sense of purpose. For me it’s not, I’m not content all day while they’re at school and out the house*”.

In the long term Nicola envisages this sense of purpose will be met by employment, but she doesn’t feel ready for this in the short term. In the meanwhile she is very keen to put her personal experiences to good use and has recently signed up to a peer-support scheme within Look Ahead. “*There’s no-one in a better place to help you than someone who knows what it’s like.*” She is also interested in learning more about computers.

Getting her daughters back is the absolute priority for Nicola. A great worry for her is that the foster home her daughters are staying in is laughter-less. Another is that her children are being taken on lots of trips and days out – to see castles or to the zoo – which she simply cannot afford to do as the norm. These things are only treats, and she doesn’t want her daughters’ expectations to be altered.

If she had the money she would love to go sailing with her daughters. She used to sail regularly when she was younger. “*I miss it desperately … It cleaned my mind. People would become dots on the horizon, the feeling was absolutely fantastic.*” She wants her daughters to have these same opportunities she did growing up. Another is to be able to play the piano, as her adoptive mother used to be a piano teacher.

However, she cannot think too far ahead at the moment. When asked what she is most looking forward to doing when her daughters return, she simply answers: “*I just want to smell them, to hold them, to have Amy on my lap. They’re being washed with different bubble bath, and dressed in different clothes… they don’t look or smell like my girls.*”

JOHN

John is a 53 year old man who lives with his parents in a small village in Wiltshire. He has lived there for most of his life, after his family moved there from London when he was a small child. He has a good sense of humour, is cheeky and affectionate.

John has had learning disabilities from birth. He appears to have a relatively high level of comprehension but struggles to articulate what he wants to say and his verbal expression is limited. Throughout the day, John can be seen laughing with his friends, shaking his head in mock exasperation when one of them does something he finds silly, and responding to questions such as “How old are you?” with “21” and a twinkle in his eye.

Both his parents are now in their early 70s. His mother has osteoarthritis which often makes it very difficult for her to walk, but his father is relatively fit. The other most important resident in the household is the family dog, Dusty. John and Dusty are clearly close and have a relationship of mutual adoration. John does not usually take Dusty on the long walks that she needs, but he enjoys playing with her and stroking her.

John is very close to his family and in particular talks a lot about his sister, expressing a desire for them all to live together again. She is married and also has three children from her first marriage. John also talks often about his nieces and nephew, Charlotte, Abigail and James. Abigail also has learning difficulties and lives in a residential facility in Somerset where she is training to work in catering.

John’s parents are adamant that he should be able to do everything possible and encourage him to try to do new things and take on responsibilities. His mother says that she has felt this way from birth and was angry when the health visitor at the time suggested that John went into residential care and that the family “*move on and have another child as soon as possible*”. His mother contrasts the opportunities open to her granddaughter with those available to John when he was young, and is glad that things are very different now.

At the present time this wish to ensure he achieves as much as possible means that John has a number of “*duties*” at home. He “*owns the Dyson ... no-one else can touch it*” and is also responsible for loading the dishwasher after evening meals and laying the table for breakfast. As he has to take a packed lunch every day when he goes to the day centre, he makes this himself. It typically comprises a sandwich – “*he is very careful not to cut himself*” – a cup-a-soup, some crisps, yoghurt and some fruit. In addition, he often helps out with other chores around the house and garden, and enjoys helping prepare dinner.

At home, John has his own room which overlooks the garden and is painted bright yellow with a cheerful orange and yellow border. The room contains many items related to his main passion in life – cars, and particularly racing cars. There are several large pictures on the wall reflecting this passion, including a large canvas of an F1 car. John never misses a Formula 1 race or the qualifying sessions and is “*transfixed*” by it. He knows the race results and likes to discuss it with friends and staff at the day centre he attends.

However, F1 is not his only passion and he loves all types of car. His room contains several hundred copies of car magazines. His room also has a large collection of model cars which he keeps on his window sills and in a drawer under his bed.

John's interest in cars has clearly been fuelled by sharing the passion with his father. In the garage, his father has five vintage cars, including one that is 100 years old. He and John often go out in the cars and sometimes attend rallies together, with John sitting in the back.

During the week, John attends the nearest day centre. He is collected and returned home by minibus. He enjoys his time at the club and takes part in a range of activities including sports, zumba, tai chi, baking, sewing, crafts, music, rambling and a friendship group. The friendship group meets at the local liberal club and plays activities such as skittles or bingo, or simply spends time chatting and drinking tea or coffee.

One of his favourite activities, however, is the History Club. This is a small group of men who go on regular outings to places of interest. Ostensibly this is related to history but has recently included Cadbury World. They have visited lots of castles, London in the run up to the Olympics, and places in the countryside. It is led by one of the male staff members and the group seems to have lots of fun.

Whilst at club, John met his girlfriend, Pam, who is more able than him. They sit together during lunch and John's parents say that they have met for dinner once or twice.

John also clearly has good relationships with the staff at the centre and is excited about the fact that two of the team are about to have a baby. John's parents are positive about the experiences offered by the centre but lament the lack of opportunities for meaningful work.

“A long time ago they used to do some light manufacturing ... He only earned a couple of pounds a week but he was very proud to come home with the money he earned ... then health and safety, and the minimum wage came along and it all stopped. Some people thought it was slave labour but we didn’t ... he enjoyed it.”

Later on, the day centre used to collect used aluminium, clean and press it into blocks. The blocks were sold and the funds used to raise money for their activities.

John has recently started earning Time Credits at the centre for cleaning up after baking. He seems to like the responsibility and earns the credits in five-minute blocks. He also voluntarily does the washing up at each session and puts away the equipment. His parents see the Time Credits scheme as a way of giving him at least some recognition for the work he does and think that is more important than whether or not he actually spends the credits.

On a Wednesday evening, John also attends a social club. He comes home after the day centre and then a taxi collects him later on to go to the club. It is more informal and less structured than the day centre, but many people John knows attend both. His parents are glad that there is transport available to take him to the club, particularly in the winter, as his father no longer likes to drive at night. John mostly spends other evenings and weekends at home with his family.

Last Christmas, John was given an ipad by his parents. He loves it and they hope it is also beneficial for his hand-eye coordination. John's nephew and brother-in-law downloaded several apps for him and have made sure that he can't accidentally accrue large bills by buying in-game credits. He can play the same game for extended periods of time.

Once a month, John goes to a local home for respite care. He typically goes there on a Tuesday night and then comes home again on a Friday night as usual. It gives both John and his parents a break and he likes spending time there. He doesn't always stay with the same group but there are only four people there at any one time. He is often there with his friend Chris, who also attends the day centre.

CLAIRe

Claire is bubbly and talkative, often more intent on telling people about her morning's activities than eating her lunch – to the dismay of her support workers. She has recently celebrated her 27th birthday and deftly manoeuvres herself around in her manual wheelchair. She is a big and bright personality, widely recognised as a great chatterbox.

Claire is a regular at the local day centre for adults with learning disabilities in Lewisham. Over the last few weeks she has been making a teapot in her pottery class and it is nearly finished. She attends three days a week and is very active within the centre. She takes part in User Forum Meetings, where users of the service come together to discuss how effectively it is running. She also helps to create the Newsletter, which is published to share news within the centre, and loves taking photographs. She also prepares her routine to Twist and Shout for Dare2Dream, the centre's much anticipated annual show which takes place at a local theatre. Staff comment there has been a general shift within the centre to running activities which have an employment theme, or are associated with developing life skills.

Claire loves special events at the centre, such as a tea party for a friend who will no longer be able to attend as she is moving house. There is cake, presents and music. Lots of people are up and dancing. Claire is desperate to hear some Indian music, and dances away to the tunes. She shrieks with laughter as the staff spin her around in her wheelchair.

As with most of the day centre customers, Claire is picked up and dropped off each morning by the community bus. Claire is not confident travelling by taxi with her wheelchair, and so relies heavily on the bus.

Claire spends a lot of time preoccupied with the various drivers on her bus. Specifically, she spends a lot of time worrying that her favourite drivers are going to leave. During the day she makes various comments about the different drivers, worrying "*I don't want to drive him away*". At one point a support worker at the centre reassures her they haven't heard news of anyone leaving. This delights Claire – "*brilliant news!*"

The staff at the centre comment that Claire often takes an instant liking or disliking to certain people. Once she has made this decision she rarely changes her mind. She is very strong willed, and has lashed out before at people she doesn't like.

Jasmine, one of the support workers, is a clear favourite though. Jasmine laughs – "*I'm not her support worker, but she always asks me to be!*"

Claire lives at home with her mother a short drive from the centre. When she is at home she likes to watch TV. She especially likes Formula One, and is a big Lewis Hamilton fan. She also loves music and likes listening to the Script.

While at home she also receives support as part of her care package. Every Monday a befriendee will visit for a couple of hours. They will often go out and about, and Claire's mother will sometimes join them too. She also has some support from carers, which often goes towards Claire's personal care. Claire comments that she often has lots of different carers and she doesn't like this.

Claire's mother is obviously protective of Claire, and worries about her getting over-tired. She comments that it is often when Claire is tired that she will become stressed, and lash out at people, or become overly anxious.

Once a year she will attend respite care, which she loves. It runs during the summer and there are various sports, activities and competition during the days.

Claire has lots and lots of ideas about things she would like to do in the future. She would like to do more outside of the centre, regularly suggesting a walk during the day. However, her desire for spontaneity is often met with a negative response due to health and safety or risk assessments. Claire finds this wearisome.

Claire's impulsive nature shines through during the day. At different points she decides wholeheartedly that she wants to switch her days at the centre, she wants to start a sign language course, she wants to change day centres altogether, she wants to stop attending the User Forum Meetings, she wants to change her care package, she wants to go bowling, she wants to move house ... The list continues.

Her support workers comment this is normal for Claire. She is inclined to change her mind a lot, and often at short notice – partly this is related to anxiety. This makes planning activities in advance with Claire quite difficult.

However, things that remain fairly consistent in terms of her ambitions are a desire to get out of the centre more – whether that is to do more in the local area, to take photographs or to simply have a walk. Another constant is swimming. Claire loves swimming. When she was younger she used to swim a lot with her school. However, her weight is now flagged up as a health and safety issue for getting into and out of the water. This means she is unable to go. This creates a vicious circle. Claire attends two exercise classes a week, and staff encourage her to push herself where she can. But there is no escaping that exercise is hard for Claire and what she is able to do physically and from within a wheelchair is very limited.

Claire tells me that this issue of how she can do more outside the centre was discussed at her recent social care review meeting. This is secondhand news to Claire, however, who decided on the day that she was not willing to miss her usual activities and refused to join the discussion. This meant the social care review took place with her mother and the social worker instead.

She is now looking forward to what can change as a result of the meeting.

ROBERT

Robert, or Junior as his mother calls him, is in his forties and lives with his mother and one of his younger sisters in Lewisham. Robert has complex learning disabilities which emerged when he was around nine months old.

His learning disabilities have a significant impact on his functioning – communication can be difficult, he tends to shuffle a lot, and he is prone to falling and seizures. His mother reflects – “*he is very slow, and he needs a lot of prompting*”. But his personality shines through strongly. He is a very affectionate, caring and sensitive man. He takes time to greet nearly every person that walks into a room he is in, and often introduces me to people also.

Robert lives at home with his mother and one of his sisters. Robert’s father left the family as he found Robert’s situation very hard to deal with. The absence of his father has left Celia very aware of the lack of men in her son’s life. So wherever possible she requests male support workers to help even out this balance. Robert knows his father has gone, sometimes he will get upset and cry about this. However he doesn’t seem to fully understand his father’s absence, at times suggests he has died.

Many of Celia’s family (siblings and other children) now live abroad – she grew up in South America, and several of the family have moved back to this part of the world. They regularly Skype, but rarely see one another.

Celia is, perhaps unsurprisingly, extremely protective of Robert. His doctor told her that Robert has the mental age of a three-year old. She refers to this comment several times, telling me she must remember he is a child trapped inside an adult’s body. He does not travel unaccompanied – “*he would just walk straight past the house*”. Even at home, she walks up the stairs behind him to prevent him falling over.

This protectiveness often shows when new activities are suggested. Celia has many questions. How would he fit in? What would he be doing? Will it be warm enough (Robert’s seizures are often triggered by him being cold)? He might not tell you if he was feeling unwell, etc. This hesitation is especially true if there have been instances in the past where Robert has fallen. However, she does recognise “*I have to let go at some point*”.

Robert has regular meetings with his social worker to review his activities and support levels. Robert contributes to the conversation sporadically but much of his attention is focused on drawing intricate wobbly lines all over a sheet of paper. Occasionally however, he focuses intently and comments on the discussions, for example about computer training. At other times his conversation is less coherent. Practically, despite the best efforts of the social worker, much of the conversation happens between Robert’s mother and herself.

Robert now spends four days a week at a local day centre. An extra day is added during his social care review to incorporate a gardening project. Since moving down from North London a few years ago, Robert has attended two centres. The first did not work out, though it is unclear why and seems a bit of taboo subject.

Robert appears happy and settled at the centre, and his mother is happy that since attending Robert has not yet had a seizure. He is a very sociable member of the centre and takes great pride in his relationships with others. He greets people affectionately as they enter a room.

There is a woman at the centre who he calls his girlfriend, yet it is unclear if those affections are returned.

Robert will often vote with his feet. He tends to float between the assigned activities at the centre according to his mood. One afternoon is spent flower arranging. Many of the customers use real flowers for a small charge. However, Robert's mother does not like real flowers in the house, and so Robert makes an arrangement with artificial flowers. He engages with the activity slowly but surely, carefully considering which flowers he would like to add. At times his support workers intervene, swopping around his flowers within the basket.

Robert arrives home and proudly passes over his flower arrangement to his mother. She swiftly passes the wicker basket back to him – to allow others at the centre to re-use the flowers. The house is immaculate, and Celia holds very high standards for her own and Robert's appearance.

Robert is often quite tired when he arrives home but if it is a nice day they will sometimes wander across the road to visit the park. Celia is careful to not be out after dark though, as she worries for their safety. This fear partly stems from her own experience of being mugged. They rarely leave the house once it is dark.

A few days a week, carers will visit to help Robert wash. Celia comments that he is often very tired when he comes home and will sometimes have dozed off before they arrive. However, he will be up several times during the night to go the toilet. Celia finds this routine exhausting, but there is little she can do to change it. For a while she gave Robert less water but was then informed by the doctor Robert was not hydrated enough.

At the weekends Robert often watches television and enjoys listening to music. He enjoys watching sport on the television, and also things that make him laugh – Harry Hill's TV burp is a firm favourite. Celia comments that “*he knows the characters on Coronation Street better than me!*”, but will often get quite upset if there is an argument on the show.

Celia will try to make sure they leave the house, though this is harder in the cold weather. They might go for fish and chips, or sometimes they will take a ride on the bus or train. They rarely travel at peak times however, as someone once shouted at her and Robert when they perceived he was staring at them. It was simply his natural expression. Celia talks fondly of friends in North London. She doesn't seem to have the same network of friends in South London and seeing old friends is now much harder given the distance.

Robert finds it difficult to articulate what he would like to do in the future, and tends to talk enthusiastically about anything suggested to him.

His mother puts all of her energy into caring for him, and she has little capacity to do more than she already does. However, she recalls other activities from his old day centre he used to enjoy that he doesn't get a chance to do anymore. Swimming, horses, and day trips to the beach are all things that Robert has really enjoyed in the past but no longer gets to do.

For Robert, it would be essential that these things happened through care providers, or the day centre as a structured group activity.

TOM

Tom is an incredibly energetic and sociable young man. Despite it sometimes being a little hard to understand his speech, he is easy going and happy to talk away to most people.

On paper, Tom has a complex diagnosis with a wide range of conditions affecting his functioning: Fragile X syndrome, autism, severe learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder and hyperactivity, cerebral palsy and spastic diplegia. The reality of his life though finds him living his days to the full, for example as a member of the winning team during a lively game of Boccia at a local, dynamic hub for adults with learning disabilities in an outer London suburb.

Tom can be found with his mind half on the game, and half with the group of support workers who sit and chat at the edge while the others play. He shouts from one to the other, waiting for their attention to tell them “*you smell!*”, a comment which is often returned to him. From Tom, this is a true sign of affection and that he is relaxed and happy. Tom is supported by Julie, who has been spending time with Tom for the last eight months or so as an outreach support worker. Coincidentally his father is also with the group, as he is a support worker for another individual.

Routine is very important to Tom. He has an excellent memory for the details of his week’s schedule. Much of his conversation centres around this, often talking very fast and repetitively – which outreach worker he will spend time with tomorrow, what time they will arrive, what time he will go shopping in the morning, which bus he will get to his activities etc.

At the age of 23, Tom has recently moved out of his family home where he lived with his father into supported accommodation.

He has now been living in his new flat for three weeks. It is a pristine and bright one-bedroomed flat. Tom is obviously very proud of it and it already feels like home. The window sill and surfaces are decorated with photos of his family, and a collection of welcome to your new home cards. On his fridge are detailed his busy routines – with activities planned through his outreach every weekday. He also likes to help with tasks such as vacuuming, washing, and helping with the cooking.

The flat is in a newly-built, supported accommodation complex specifically for people with learning disabilities. It is not yet full, and once full, there will be 12 customers living there. Tom is already a firm favourite. They hold a regular coffee morning in the lounge and Ben, Tom’s support worker, jokes that everyone wants to spend time with Tom!

Within the home individuals are assigned support workers. Ben helps Tom with various domestic tasks, including laundry, hoovering, cooking, helping him keep track of his money etc. The two have a good relationship (Tom regularly tells Ben he stinks) and Tom obviously sees Ben as a support figure, often deferring back to him for reassurance during our conversation.

Julie, who provides outreach support for Tom, has also been helping him through the transition. She has been very conscious to give Tom some consistency during the move. For the last few months they have been visiting the home for coffee mornings. Here, Julie would deliberately take a step back or remove herself from the situation, to allow Tom to develop relationships rather than deferring back to her.

This move signals a much greater level of independence for Tom. For close family this will inevitably mean some letting go. Tom's support worker recalls a recent time when Tom became very keen to travel by bus. He would talk about this a lot, and so they made plans for Tom to get the bus. As outreach support they have a duty to support Tom to do what he wishes. His father, however, was very concerned, having had a very bad experience with Tom on public transport before. The trip went ahead. It was a real success, she laughs, "*he absolutely loved it!*". She reflects it was an interesting revelation for Tom's father that Tom, at times, could be a very different person depending on who he was around.

Whilst at home, Tom enjoys watching DVDs. He has a good collection, including several box sets of Friends, Monk and a few children's compilation including firm favourite, The Hoobs. Tom eagerly loads up the DVD player with the Hoobs DVD and repeatedly watches the opening theme tune, before rewinding back to the beginning. This happens over and over again, Tom never lets it play for more than a few seconds before rewinding. After this he does the same with Friends, before switching back to the Hoobs again.

He also loves listening to music, particularly through his prized blue headphones. During conversations he will sometimes put the headphones on, without music playing and enjoys wearing them. He is excited about taking the bus tomorrow as it means he gets to listen to his iPod – Abba and Mamma Mia are his favourites.

Tom doesn't go out on his own – “*I think he is too inquisitive*” comments Ben.

However, five days a week Tom receives outreach support through a private agency, which his Dad pays for. Incidentally, his dad is also a support worker, and so often the two see each other in the day during activities. Mostly Tom is very active. He attends multi-sports sessions a few times a week at various leisure centres, including keep fit, boccia and line dancing.

Sometimes the outreach workers will arrange a specific activity, for example clients will gather together and all go bowling. In the past they have been to the beach.

His weekends are generally spent with either his mother or his father.

For Tom, the current situation is very much the shaping of a new norm for him. The home has offered him a much greater level of independence, a chance to form new relationships, live away from home, and grow in his ability to look after himself.

MARY-LYNN

Mary-Lynn is a 38-year old woman who lives in with her mother and older brother in a small town in Wiltshire. She is the youngest of seven children, with just one older sister and the rest brothers. Kevin is the middle child and in his mid-late 40s. Her father has passed away. Most of Mary-Lynn's other siblings and their families live within a 30-mile radius and she sees the most local ones regularly. She is also particularly attached to twin nephews.

When Mary-Lynn was eight months old she had encephalitis. This resulted in brain damage which left her with a severe learning disability. While Mary-Lynn understands most day-to-day conversations and questions, her ability to understand more complex concepts is very limited. She has quite severe communication problems, with a very limited vocabulary – typically only the names for objects and not full sentences or grammatically constructed. She also pronounces most words in a unique way which mean that when someone new meets her, they are likely to need to have her key words explained/ ‘translated’ for them at the start.

In addition to her learning disability and communication problems, Mary-Lynn has problems with her balance and coordination which mean she often falls over. As a result she has lots of small cuts and bruises on her body, particularly on her hands and knees. Her family say that this usually happens when she is out and about with the day centre rather than in the home. Although they mostly do not appear to be severe or particularly painful, Mary-Lynn often points out the bruises to people and touches them a lot.

The urge to protect her means that her mother and brother are very careful about letting Mary-Lynn get into situations where she could potentially hurt herself at home. For example, Kevin always follows Mary-Lynn up the stairs to make sure she doesn't trip or fall, and doesn't let her stand alone at the landing window at the top of the stairs to wave goodbye to guests. This seems to have led to some tension in the family, with one of the other siblings suggesting that they are over-protective. However, Kevin says “*I live with her and I know her best ... and it's not safe for her to stand there*”.

Mary-Lynn clearly has her mother and brother at the centre of her universe and she will try to talk about them at every available opportunity. She also tends to repeat herself regularly – for example, “*my brother Kervin lent me his camera*” (indicated through a combination of key words and gesture). When seeing Mary-Lynn and her mother and brother together, it is immediately evident that the nature of the relationship is two-way and that she is as important to them as they are to her.

The inter-dependency of their relationship is highlighted by the feelings of her brother and mother about Mary-Lynn going to respite care once a month. Whilst they recognise that it is good for all of them to have a break, they comment:

“*It's so quiet without her here ... you come in and don't know what to do with yourself*”.

Mary-Lynn attends a day centre five days a week where she participates in a range of activities including skittles, classical music, photo-art, communication, cooking, sewing, reading and sensory relaxation. She particularly loves classical music and her favourite artist is Andre Riu. At home she has many classical CDs which she likes listening to.

Mary-Lynn really enjoys the outings from the day centre and highlights have been a spa day, a trip to the pantomime, and an upcoming trip to the zoo. The zoo is particularly exciting as Mary-Lynn loves animals.

“She always comes home and tells us all about what she’s been doing … she’s very proud to bring home the things she’s made in sewing and everything. I think she’s making a cushion for her cousin at the moment.”

Mary-Lynn also recently joined the new photo-art club at the day centre and she really enjoys it. The group recently went on a trip to a nearby animal farm centre which is specially designed to be accessible to people with learning disabilities. Mary-Lynn had a fantastic time and particularly enjoyed seeing the baby rabbits, donkeys, owl and pigs.

Owls are Mary-Lynn’s favourite animal and she is passionate about them. In her home she has a huge range of animal ornaments, toys, and cushions etc. For a while the family had rabbits and goldfish as pets, which she loved, but these have died and she no longer has any animals to help care for.

At home Mary-Lynn sits down when she first gets back from the centre and spends time flicking through a large binder of animal magazines and articles. She does this with a cup of tea and ‘Deal or No Deal’ on as well. Tea is her favourite drink and she drinks many cups a day! Her family are uncertain whether or not she can actually read but she enjoys sitting and looking through picture books and magazines like OK and Hello.

“She’s totally silent when she’s looking at the magazines and it has to be OK or Hello … I used to buy her ‘Pick me up’ but that wasn’t good enough!”

Outside of the day centre, Mary-Lynn does not attend any social clubs or organised activities. She spends most of her time at home or out and about with her family. They are not particularly well off and do not have a car so their ability to go far is constrained by transport options or they are reliant on a sibling taking them out in their car. Mary-Lynn likes to watch all the soaps and play board games with her family. Her room is also full of toys and various treasures. She has a large collection of soft toys, including many owls and some meerkats, as well as some dolls and crates full of beanies.

Mary-Lynn used to go horse-riding outside of the day centre and her family say that this was an activity she really loved. However, the funding was withdrawn so she is no longer able to go, although she would like to do so. Swimming (through the day centre) is another activity she is no longer able to enjoy as she is always waiting for cuts and bruises to heal, particularly one on her knee which is very persistent.

Mary-Lynn appears to have a very clear routine at home that starts when she wakes at 5am. At that time both her mother and brother also get up to settle her downstairs with a mug of tea and a nature DVD. She also has some responsibilities such as making her bed, helping do the washing up, and sometimes vacuuming. They are also in the process of redesigning the garden and are planning on making Mary-Lynn a small flower bed that she can tend. Mary-Lynn goes to bed around 9pm each night but apparently does not sleep until she has heard the neighbour come home at around 11-11.30pm.

Mary-Lynn is given £200 a month of her benefits money to spend as she pleases on things like DVDs, CDs, and trips etc. Her mother keeps the rest of the money to put towards her clothes and other expenses. Mary-Lynn does not have a good grasp of money and needs support to buy things such as coffee on days out. Kevin also comments that “*she always wants coins, not paper money*”, and would take the coins even if they were of less value than the notes!

JOSIE

Josie is a 26-year old woman who lives in supported accommodation in North West London. Josie was born with Downs Syndrome and grew up in London with her mother, step-father and sister. Her sister is just a couple of years younger than her.

Although she now lives close to her mother and grandmother, Josie lived in Somerset and Dorset for a while in her early 20s. She attended college there but the relationship turned abusive. The events were hugely stressful both for Josie and her family. Eventually she was able to return home to her family but unfortunately, at the end of last year, her mother had a breakdown and suffered a period of depression – “*I found her and saved her*”.

Her mother recovered but Josie has been living in the supported accommodation since March this year. Despite the difficulties she has faced, Josie is a highly motivated and determined individual who likes to fill her days with a range of activities – “*I’m not going to let him affect me now ... I want to make the most of it*”.

In many respects, Josie is relatively able. She has basic to moderate numeracy and literacy skills and a good level of comprehension. Her verbal communication skills are also relatively good. However, she also has physical disabilities and uses a walker when she goes out and about, although she does not need it when in her flat.

Josie requires support with many everyday tasks such as showering, shopping, and cooking, as well as support with the daily administration of life – planning activities, filling forms, and budgeting. On Fridays and weekends, her core support hours are supplemented with longer periods when staff take her shopping, help with cleaning and also support her to participate in leisure activities. Josie likes living in her flat and the sociable environment –“*I like it ... I like the communal areas ... I like my friends*”.

Her flat opens onto the communal garden area and she has planted a few flowers in a small border and also has a rose plant in a tub. Whilst she enjoys her independence, Josie is a naturally messy girl and finds domestic chores a drag. She has a good sense of humour about it and laughs at herself.

“I hate washing up ... I didn’t get a star yesterday because my room wasn’t clean enough. I wanted a star ... [then tidying her room and finding clothes on the bed] ... what am I like?! I slept with the clothes on my bed ... no wonder it was hot and I had to keep moving the sheet!”

Josie also has support with cooking and her doctor has advised her to lose weight so she is now trying to eat more healthily. Once a week she sits down with her key worker to create a menu plan for the following week. The schedule is then pinned on her fridge. She and her key worker then shop together to buy all the food she needs.

Despite having moved out of home, she still sees her family often, and often talks with her mother on the phone. Josie is a very “girly” girl and particularly likes fashion. She has a large wardrobe of clothes and loves shopping in places like New Look and River Island. Her favourite colour is purple and as well as having clothes in the colour, she also has other touches of purple around: accessories and other items such as her bedding and hairdryer.

Her mobile is an important possession for her – “*It’s a new one*”. She particularly likes the media applications. “*I take lots of photos ... it’s my hobby ... I know how to use YouTube and Facebook ... you have to be careful ... I’m friends with my family but people I don’t know, I block.*”

For four days a week, Josie attends the local college to participate in Adult Learning classes. She loves attending college and has been going for two years. She takes a range of courses and is currently working on the college newspaper. She is developing her key skills as well as taking part in courses such as photography, arts and crafts. Josie believes that she can’t return next year but her key worker says it is simply a case of re-enrolling her on the classes she wishes to take. In addition, Josie attends social clubs two evenings a week.

With such a wide range of activities, transport is an issue. Josie’s key worker is trying to encourage her to use the bus more frequently but she is very nervous about taking the bus alone. When possible she uses Dial-A-Ride which offers free transport but is not particularly reliable. She therefore uses a lot of taxis to get to college but these are expensive and is another reason why staff are keen for her to use more public transport.

In her free time, Josie loves her soaps and also watches a lot of films, mainly comedies, Disney movies, rom-coms, and musicals. Most weeks she will go to the cinema on a Friday or Saturday with a member of staff. Another passion is swimming and Josie goes at least once a week, sometimes more during college holidays. This is good for her mobility and she has recently joined a special Saturday swimming club for people with disabilities.

Josie and her key worker have a fantastic relationship characterised by lots of giggles and chat. They work together and think about what activities Josie might like to do in her free time. A diary in the flat records all her appointments and upcoming events.

The other most significant person in Josie’s life is her boyfriend, Andrew. They met at an evening social club in 2010 and have been together ever since. He is partially sighted alongside his learning disability and is several years older than her. “*He looks after me ... we like to have a kiss and a cuddle.*”

Apart from meeting at the social club every week, they do not get to spend much time together as Andrew does not attend the same college as her. However, during half-terms and holidays, they both attend the same programme of activities and enjoy the extra contact.

Josie is very much in love and they speak on the phone every day. She confesses that one day she’d like to marry Andrew but there is no rush – “*We want to take it slowly*”. Josie and Andrew have never been on a proper date due to the logistical challenges involved. Upon hearing this, her key worker offers to liaise with Andrew’s key worker to arrange a meal out at a local restaurant. Josie thinks this a great idea and wants to go “*somewhere posh*”. They finally settle on a local Indian restaurant as a good choice.

Josie has lots of hopes and aspirations for the future. She likes to be busy and is worried about not being able to return to college. It has recently been arranged for her to start a volunteering placement in the offices of the local disability association. She will be working there two hours a week. Josie is really looking forward to this and will be working in the reception area answering phones, photocopying and filing, etc.

Whilst Josie is looking forward to the new experience and responsibility of the volunteer work, she does not yet feel ready to take on paid employment. As with her relationship, she says “*I want to take it slowly*”. She does expect that in the future she will be able to get at least a part-time job, but is currently only focused on the volunteer placement.