

Case Study 4



family care associates

Michael arrived at the home in February 2004 having lived in a respite home for a number of years due to difficulties in identifying a suitable long-term placement. Possibly due to the inevitable lack of stability that this type of resource offers, Michael who is described as being on the autistic spectrum, had become withdrawn and at times challenging both to the staff team and to other young people resident in the home. During the latter part of 2003 Michael had been suspended from his school because of the difficulties that his behaviour presented and he returned once the school were able to provide further strategies to enable Michael to resume his education.

On his arrival at Links Avenue, despite concerns that the move could unsettle him further, Michael appeared to relax, his sleeping pattern quickly improved and he exhibited little of the challenging behaviour that had been described. Because Michael was sharing the house with only one other young person who he already knew, it seemed that the space and routine of the new home enabled Michael to enjoy more of a balance in choosing to spend time on his own and engaging one to one time with members of the staff team who were quick to respond to how Michael expressed his preferences. Through effective daily communication with the school the staff team were able to quickly build up means of communicating with Michael, who is unable to verbal language and it is thought that this reduced the frustration that he had previously felt and his moods could be identified and reacted to appropriately.

Once the staff team realised that there were times that Michael would respond positively to their presence they quickly used these opportunities to engage Michael in activities outside the home such as walks or outings in the car and it became routine for Michael to enjoy increasing time out in the local area and before long the trips became more stimulating and rewarding for all those involved. Within six months Michael was able to cope with sitting in a café or a restaurant although his lack of patience would mean that the staff members would need to plan ahead and identify places that were not too busy or crowded. However, over time Michael became more tolerant of these situations and seemed to enjoy these outings more and more and the staff team became confident in Michael's ability to cope with new experiences and introduced different activities such as swimming and ten-pin bowling.

The positive changes in Michael's home life were reflected in school and he began to relax in the classroom and present fewer difficulties for the teaching staff. Time spent with his family whom he saw twice a week became more enjoyable and there appeared to be an overall improvement in Michael's quality of life. The consistent approach of the staff team and their ability to react appropriately to Michael's needs meant that there was increasing confidence from both parties and Michael became a rewarding young person to be with. Michael became adept at communicating simple wishes such as putting on his shoes if he wanted to go out and he became more able to experience places such as busy shops and restaurants. Those that have known Michael over the years have been surprised at the social level that he is now able to manage and the speed that he is able to learn new skills. During the home's annual holiday Michael has enjoyed activities such as discos, boat trips and visits to zoos; at home Michael regularly attends a gym club and a youth club and at school he has added the use of the climbing wall to his list of activities. Trains and especially buses are now a popular way for Michael to travel and he regularly uses them with a member of staff to go to different places or even just to travel into the town centre for a coffee.

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Over the four years that Michael has spent at Links Avenue he has attended annual events such as the Local Authority's Awards ceremonies, he has taken part in school plays and pageants as well as holidaying in Wales and the Lake District. Michael has left behind his description of having challenging behaviour and enjoys the benefits of being able to try any new experience. Michael is looking forward to adulthood without needing a specialist placement and providing that he is stimulated and respected it is hoped that Michael will enjoy a fulfilling adult life far from the prospects that were identified for him four years ago. During the time that we have lived with Michael we have tried to understand his moods and behaviour and to be creative in meeting his needs. In return Michael has rewarded us with humour and enthusiasm for taking part in everyday life and in enjoying new challenges, it is hoped that this will be the pattern for the next chapter in his life.