



Johnathan's Journey

The Orchards, Essex

Supports men with a Learning Disability,
and those who have Complex Needs
and Behaviours

My name is Johnathan. I have a diagnosis of ADHD, anxiety, depression and mild learning disability.

My early life was defined by chaos and difficult relationships with my family. After a schoolteacher got involved, I was admitted into care at age nine. Because of my ADHD, I struggled to find the right placement. I must have been to 20+ placements over the years. At the time, I felt confused and frustrated, which meant that sometimes I acted out. This often resulted in losing placements and moving around a lot. There were times I felt like this cycle could never be broken.

Until I met a wonderful lady who fostered me for over three years and treated me like one of her own children.

After leaving this foster placement as a young adult, I was living in a particularly difficult placement. The place I was in was very run down, it had holes in the wall and many people there were quite aggressive. Scuffles would break out regularly.

The room I had was very small and there wasn't much space to do more than get by day-to-day.

I wasn't allowed to do much outside of staying in my room, as the placement was run mainly by agency staff. Because of that, I never really got the chance to thrive or do the things a young man likes to do.

I was also really far away from my family, which neither they nor I liked.

Ollie, the manager at The Orchards came to visit me in that placement. He saw my situation and how detrimental it was for me and invited me to visit The Orchards as a potential new placement.

To make sure it was the right fit I had a visit to The Orchards to look around and see what it was like - and loved it. I could not wait to move in and have a fresh start.

Initially I was on a 2:1 staff ratio, which was what I was used to and made me feel reassured. But at the Orchards, I was given a lot more independence and freedom than I had ever been allowed before.

It felt amazing that people were willing to take a chance on me and trust me.

My confidence really started to grow the more settled I became, and as my relationships with the team and other residents improved.



I'm only human, so when I did slip up, or if things went wrong, I had a chat with the team. They always spoke to me calmly (and without judgement) about what I could have done differently, and how to do better in the future.

I could really see that the support I was getting, including my care plans, were tailored to me as an individual and I really liked that. Eventually staff support reduced down to 1:1. I have really made the most of as many opportunities as possible that have been put in front of me whilst I've been at The Orchards. Joining things like 'Cygnet's got Talent' show. I was scared to be involved but I wanted to give it a go and really enjoyed it. From there my passion really took off.



Later that year I attended The National Lived Experience Awards as a guest, but a performer dropped out last minute so I was asked if I could perform in their place. No rehearsal or preparation. It was just sprung on me! But I thought 'You can do it - just go up and start singing'. So, I did! It was an incredible experience.

With each milestone I achieve (even the unplanned ones), I feel more hopeful and excited for what I can do in the future. My ADHD means I have a lot of extra energy, but I have learnt to channel that into fun things and activities that help me to grow and become more independent.

I have already completed an Information Technology course at a local college and recently signed up to do another course. I'm also an 'Expert by Experience' for social care which means I advise organisations and services about what they are doing from the point of view of someone who has lived experience.

Looking to the future, I would like to have my own flat. So right now, I am working on skills that will help me, things like budgeting, meal prep and cooking. Practising with the help of the team here, so it'll be easier when I am living independently. I'd also like to continue with my singing, being an Expert by Experience and keep learning new things.

So, watch this space who knows where you'll see me next. Maybe I'll be a manager of a service like the Orchards one day. Whatever happens, I am excited.



"Johnathan is definitely 'the Soul' of the Orchards. He's achieved such a lot since being with us, from releasing restrictions, to finding his confidence to sing out to the rafters in his room and on stage. He hasn't let his troubled past define him and he's now a very happy young man, always on-the-go and looking forward to what his future might hold."
- Service Manager



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