



Kim Collins

Kim was born in 1961 and it was quickly recognised that she had a Severe Learning Disability, a diagnosis that has impacted our family for nearly 60 years.

Schooling was difficult, as there were very little placements available for her condition, but eventually a special autistic unit in Essex came to the rescue and she was taken there by bus every day until she was 21.

We then found a place for her at a training college in Wales run by MENCAP called Pengwern Hall. They found accommodating Kim difficult, but she stayed on for just over a year, after which they told us that her disability was too challenging, and we searched for a place that would accept her.

The most forward-thinking educationalist at the time was Stanley Segal who had written a book entitled 'no child is uneducable'. He was instrumental in developing the law as it relates to Learning Disability in the 1970s and 1980s and then moved on to take over at Ravenswood village making it the most progressive and forward-thinking care facility at that time.

Happily, he accepted Kim into the Village in 1983. The village had a school, a college and day care which was extraordinary as it ran as a full-time provision for all the residents. The homes within the village were based on a family model, similar to Camphill Villages where each home had a married couple plus staff, some lived in the homes, and some lived in Crowthorne or nearby. Lunches were available in the village hall where the residents could meet their friends and regular events were organised in the village to which the local community and families of the residents were invited. The annual Ravenswood fair was particularly successful and raised significant funds for the village. (Some of the photos attached below are of Kim at the fair with friends and family)

Within the village environment Kim flourished and despite her challenging behaviour, the village community where everyone knew everyone else, allowed her a high degree of freedom. Over time, changes in Kim's behaviour, picked up by the staff at the village, led to a diagnosis of Bi-polar disorder alongside her severe learning disability. Over several years the Ravenswood team together with other healthcare professionals were able to moderate her bi-polar disorder and therefore some of her behaviour by taking a Lithium based medicine. Unfortunately, long term treatment with Lithium is toxic to the kidneys and eventually she had to stop this medication. The resulting return to extremely challenging behaviour presented difficulties for the staff that were managed fantastically by moving Kim to more appropriate accommodation within the village, something only a village community has the capacity to achieve. Kim and one other resident moved into a flat (Pardes), which is attached to one of the village houses (The Orchard). Alongside this the staff kept incredibly detailed records of many aspects of Kim's cyclic manic – depressive behaviour whilst trialling different mood stabilizing drugs and associated care provision. After several years the collaboration of input from healthcare professionals, various drug regimens and living in Pardes made it possible to control the extremes of Kim's behaviour. Again, this dedicated work over many years has only been possible in a village environment with committed care staff who remain for many years and even when they move on to another role in the village are willing, able and keen to engage with Kim whenever they see her.

When experiencing manic episodes Kim has an uncontrollable need to roam, usually running without stopping for long periods of time. The Village, with its large grounds has allowed that to happen in a safe and secure environment without her being a danger to herself or others. In contrast if Kim wishes to go out into the general community she always needs 2 members of staff to accompany her whereas in the Village she only needs one person with her.

Over the years Kim has been able to make use of the many facilities that Ravenswood has offered. She enjoys swimming and the pool at the Village gives her the freedom to participate in something that is not possible in the general community (attempts to go swimming in pools outside the village were made but because of the possibility of incontinence and erratic behaviour she was banned).

Kim enjoys the horses that are stabled in the village and for a time went on a weekly horse and carriage ride around the village even being able to hold the reins under supervision. Again, an amazing facility that would not be possible in a general community setting.

There is no doubt that the semi-rural environment Kim lives in has given her a life she would never have had in a flat or house in the general urban community. It gives her the greatest freedom possible based on her ability whilst still allowing her to participate in local community activities in the company of 2 members of staff. Kim has her own Motability car to facilitate this which enables her to come to London and visit family and with her advocates (of which she has two who visit her every 8 days or so) to go out to the local pub where she is well known. Kim also accesses other local attractions and parks for long walks.

Over the nearly forty years that Kim has been at the Village there have been annual reviews of her personal plan where Kim, her family, her advocates, her care staff and representatives of her funding authority have met up to ensure that her needs are being met. There has never been any suggestion from any professional involved in these reviews that the Village is not the most appropriate place for Kim to live. In addition there have been many medical reviews both in the Village and with the local community General Practitioner to ensure that Kim is receiving the best medication to manage her conditions.

The Village, as a home for Kim, is where we believe she can live her best life possible. It has been a lifeline for her parents, brother, sister-in-law and wider family because it has allowed us all to have peace of mind knowing that Kim is being cared for in an environment where she is professionally looked after and, most importantly, where she is safe and happy both now and in the future. Ravenswood like other village and group communities provides a way of life that is just not possible in the wider community, it is an incredibly unique and special environment that has made all the difference to the residents and their families for many years past and we hope, many years to come.

Maurice Collins (Father)

Paul Collins (Brother)

Images of Kim taken at one of the annual Ravenswood fairs in the 1990's





Various images of Kim enjoying time in her flat at Ravenswood, having lunch at a local Pub, and on trips out to local woodlands and a garden centre



More photos of Kim celebrating her birthday at the village with friends and family.



Kim having a birthday party and BBQ in the garden of her flat surrounded by friends and family

