



## **Our Son J's story**

He is an adult with a learning disability who is now 33.

When J wanted to leave home a few years ago we spent some time talking to him to make sure that we understood what kind of life he would like.

J had been going to a day centre at Furlong Close in Rowde near Devizes one day a week since he left college. He has friends there and expressed an interest in potentially living at the site. We investigated this but found that there was no room there but we were able, with the help of a housing association, to get him his own bungalow in Rowde.

He moved in about 4 and a half years ago, and originally he was going to be supported by Home Farm Trust who were running Furlong Close. He was going to live independently around the corner but they would provide his carers and he would go to the day centre 3 days a week.

Unfortunately at the last minute HFT were not able to provide his support but we then found another local company who could.

J continued to go round to Furlong Close three days a week for the day centre. He loved feeling part of Furlong Close and called them "his family". He also joined in with many of their social activities.

The combination of moving all of Furlong Close onto supported living and the closure of the day centre has left J's plans for his life in a mess.

Now J is increasingly saying to us that he is lonely at Rowde and turning back to us to support him.

J is very sociable and he enjoyed being part of a bigger group. At that time he had an independent life and did not feel lonely.

## **Parent's Story**

Like probably a number of people J is an only child and he has no other relatives nearby. Like many parents we are concerned about his life beyond us now we are ageing.

We have felt for a long time that when councils say "choice" what they actually mean is that the person can choose what they like as long as they choose from the options that the council offers to them.

There is presumably someone somewhere who has decided what number of people living together is OK. Above this number the idea suddenly becomes inappropriate!

The opportunity to live in a larger group, if that's what the person wishes, seems to be one that is no longer an option.

We haven't got much experience of the campus model apart from what we have seen at Rowde. However after talking to our son (luckily he can express himself fairly well) and also from seeing some worrying examples of shared houses with supported living in the community, our instincts are that there is a lot to like about a larger community for someone like J both in terms of his happiness, and also in terms of his welfare and the accountability of the staff.

Older people are encouraged to live together (with people that are like themselves) but the learning disabled are being forced to live in small groups out in a community of people who are very different from them. Whether the council will admit it or not, it is not easy for one side to join with the other. This has been made worse by the council cutting back on places where they can socialize together outside the home i.e. the day centres.

In J's situation we are now struggling to fill up his life. Sometimes the only options seem to be to get a carer to take him out shopping or for a meal in a pub. He can never go out by himself into the normal community, and one of the small bits of independence that he enjoyed was walking round to Furlong Close and back. He also loved feeling a part of the community round there and it only seems fair to allow them the option of "having a community".

Whilst J is in his own home we get to have a lot of influence over things (but also a lot of responsibility!), But we always have a growing dread of what will happen as we can't look after him anymore.

All the recent changes have shaken him a lot and he seems to have lost some of his confidence. He turns back to us much more than he did before and that seems to be a backward step in trying to make him independent of us.