

## How true home-from-home care can help to support family life

### Introduction

Mark's challenging behaviour had become increasingly difficult for his parents to manage at home. However, they were understandably fearful that no party, other than themselves, would be able to understand Mark, or show him the affection he needed. When he eventually moved to Sunfield, they were soon reassured that not only was Mark comfortable and well cared for – he was thriving, and the positive effects of his home-from-home care were also reflected in the time he spent with his family.

### Background

Mark came to Sunfield in 2006 at the age of 10 years old, on a 52 week care and education placement with integrated psychology and therapy. He had been diagnosed with severe Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and also had a range of health needs that would require further exploration. In addition, he needed support in developing self-help skills. It was decided that he would benefit from a range of input from Speech and Language Therapy, Play Therapy, Music Therapy and Occupational Therapy, as well as input from Psychology, in measuring and redirecting his needs in a positive way.

### The Journey

When he started at Sunfield, Mark was a challenging boy who climbed inappropriately and was unaware of danger. He was aggressive to siblings and visitors, and was unable to be taken out into the community. Mark was also obsessive and ritualistic, with a tendency to self-harm. In addition, he only ate an extremely limited diet, and was incontinent, with toileting issues.

Mark settled into his personalised room in a welcoming house at Sunfield, and began regular individualised on-site therapy sessions. As always, the team around Mark integrated these techniques into his care and education for maximum effect. Schedules, incorporating his favourite fictional character, were also used to provide structure and routine. He accepted these well and the negative behaviours, such as hitting out, screaming and self-harming, were dramatically reduced. Although he still required constant supervision for his own safety, Mark began to follow his daily routines well, with increasing independence. The team also worked with Mark to identify calming tools and activities for use on occasions of extreme anxiety.

His family made the most of Sunfield's family centre and visited Mark weekly. They were soon able to notice a difference in Mark – from the highly disturbed behaviour on arrival, to a really content young man. Mark's parents felt able to express their views and hopes for Mark, and trust that these would be heard. They developed strong relationships with staff, whom they now trusted to support and understand their son. The family's anxieties began to decrease. This was further aided by Mark's increasing independence skills, such as being able to go to the toilet himself and choose a range of foods when family ate together. His sisters began to feel safer around him, more involved with him, and finally able to enjoy his company. His family have even had the confidence to take Mark off-site on trips out.

### The Conclusion

Mark is now a happy young man, who can access a range of physical activities and interests - both off site and on site, including listening to music, arts and crafts, exercise, bowling, swimming, shopping and visits to the cinema and youth club. He enjoys Wii games and will share this with other peers - often laughing out loud while involved. He also likes gardening and walks across the site and in the surrounding countryside. He eats a wider range of foods and even enjoys eating meals out. He is able to use the toilet independently and there has been a major reduction in self-injury. Perhaps the most wonderful observation is that his family are thrilled to see that Mark is now such a content young man.