



**Changing
Our Lives**

**Stephen Green
Seize the day!**



**No one is too disabled,
or too affected by
mental health difficulties,
to lead an ordinary life**

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An Ordinary Life

Changing Our Lives' work is rooted in the belief that no one is too disabled and no one's mental health is too complex to lead an 'ordinary life'. Whatever our area of work, the drive for people to lead ordinary lives is at the heart of our approach. An ordinary life, first coined by the King's Fund in their seminal report *An Ordinary Life* (Kings Fund 1980), promoted the concept that people with learning disabilities should live in ordinary houses, in ordinary streets, and be part of ordinary communities.

Kings Fund. (1980). *An Ordinary Life: Comprehensive locally based residential services for mentally handicapped people*, London: Kings Fund.

We often take for granted certain things such as having a partner, a good job, or living in our own home. These are ordinary and everyday things that make up our life. Disabled people are often faced with barriers which make these everyday, ordinary things very difficult to achieve. Some of these barriers may be internal, but more often than not society places barriers in the way of individuals. These barriers can be other people's attitudes, a lack of creative thinking or physical barriers.

Stephen's story is one in a series of Ordinary Life books. Each story illustrates that an ordinary life is possible for disabled people if they have the right support and resources to make this happen.



For as long as I can remember, I've lived with mom in our flat. Then in late 2020 mom became ill and she had to move out. This was a bit of a shock at first but now I've got used to it, living by myself is great. It's something I always wanted for myself. I wanted to be my own man but it was difficult years ago because people used to think that if you have a learning disability or Down's Syndrome, it wasn't possible. My life proves that it is possible!

You only have one life and I believe you should use it.

My own home

Years ago, when I was supported by Lynn Roberts in the day centre, she helped me get my name on the tenancy for the flat I lived in with mom. In one of our regular meetings Lynn asked mom if she wanted some support, I could go on a short break. Mom said that as long as she was alive she wanted me with her and that if anything happened to her, she would like me to stay living in the flat with all of my things around me. Lynn spoke to a social worker and although it was difficult to put a second name on a tenancy at the time, people pushed for this to happen for me. I never thought at the time how important this might be but looking back now mom has gone into a residential home, if my name was not on the tenancy I would have had to move out when mom moved out. That's an awful thing to think about. Fortunately it didn't happen and I am very happy in my own home.





"I think it's brilliant that all of the work we did years ago is now paying off. Stephen is now at a point in this life where he is transforming himself. He's 55 now and taking the step to live independently at this age has been the making of him."

Lynn Roberts, Assistant Disability Day Opportunities Manager, Sandwell MBC Day Services

Moving towards independence

A few months before mom was ill, I met Dawn Garbett, the Health Facilitation Lead in the local health team (Promoting Access to Mainstream Health Services), when she came to check up on my health. Dawn saw that my mom was getting older and struggling to cope with some things, so she referred my mom to social services for a care package. Dawn also brought lots of other people in, including John Read who was a support worker from the same team where Dawn works. He came to see me three times a week and helped me become more independent. I really enjoyed being with John – we were a bit cheeky together!

“Stephen is a lovely man. He’s the type of chap you’d like living near you. Before I started working with Stephen, I used to see him at a local sports centre and he would always say hello. Then when I started to work with him, I thought I know you from the centre. When I first stated to work with him, he was quite timid to be honest. But as he became more independent, he’s grown into his own man, He used to say to me, ‘This is my life now!’ He never really saw me as a worker when I visited. He used to say, ‘I’ve got my mate John coming around’. I used to take Wagon Wheels and we’d have a chat.”

John Read, Support Worker, PAMHS (Promoting Access to Mainstream Health Services), Sandwell Learning Disability Community Specialist Health Services



'Stephen is a real cheeky chap! I support him to do things around the flat. We do synchronised hoovering. Doing jobs together like this really encourages Stephen and after the job is done he gets a real sense of achievement. He calls me a slave driver! I'm really proud of what he's achieving in his life.'

Sharon Swainson, Support Worker, Charter Care

I also had some support from the Occupational Therapist who helped me with cooking and other jobs around the house. As mom was struggling and then became quite ill as she had a stroke, my case was kept open so the health team could keep an eye on me.

"Stephen deserves the life he has. We are so proud of him. He used to tell us, 'I've cut the apron strings'. He has exceeded everything we hoped for. He's flourished and become a new man. He's got to be proud of himself as it was a hard situation to be in but he did really well."

Dawn Garbett, Health Facilitation Lead - PAMHS (Promoting Access to Mainstream Health Services), Sandwell Learning Disability Community Specialist Health Services

When mom was ill and had to move out to a residential home, social services agreed for a care agency to pop in to support me four times a day, first thing in the morning, lunchtime, tea time and on the evening before I go to bed. I really appreciate people coming in throughout the day and I've got to know some of them well.

I also get support from an outreach service run by Sandwell Council Day Services twice a week. Andy, Linda and H are working with me so I can be as independent as possible in my life. They support me to get my shopping, do jobs around the flat such as hoovering, dusting, cleaning and cooking. They are also supporting me to develop my confidence by traveling to local places.



"When we first started to work with Stephen, he was lacking confidence and nervous about going out the front door. We started short walks to the local town and the park and gradually he became more confident. Now he's going further afield shopping, for a meal and to the gym. Stephen is a real gentleman. He'll always help someone if they need it. He's also a real trier and does not give up."

Linda Duffy, Support Worker, Sandwell MBC Day Services



“Stephen deserves to live his own life. He’s such a great man and an inspiration to everyone.”

Michael Bott, Disability
Coordinator, Sandwell MBC
Day Services

“Stephen has started to take the initiative in a way in which he wouldn’t have done in the past, as his mom tended to do lots of things for him. Now he will call me if he needs anything. He’s changed his hair style recently. This is something he would have never done in the past.”

Lynn Roberts, Assistant disability Day Opportunities Manager, Sandwell MBC Day Services

Family and friends

My cousin Beverley pops in to see me often. She only lives up the road from me which is good because I know family are near by.

I know my neighbours well and we chat when I see them. I also have lots of friends who I've known for years from the day centre. I'm currently learning to use Zoom to stay in contact with them. I now have a laptop, tablet and phone and I'm quite good at using new technology. I really like getting latte coffees on Ebay!



"Stephen is best described as having a wicked sense of humour. He's a good lad; friendly and really sociable. He loves his mom dearly and though she is not at home with him now, he comes to visit her and sits with her and holds her hand. It was his mom who made sure he could live in the flat if anything happened to her."

Beverley, Stephen's cousin

My rights

Since young I have always been aware of my rights in one way or another. When I was in school I remember a time when I got into trouble for something I didn't do and corporal punishment was still allowed. As a result I am left with a strong sense of right and wrong as I was punished for something I didn't do and remember that to this day. There have been other times when I felt I wasn't listened to or overlooked which is why understanding my rights and telling my story is really important to me.



I was part of Changing Our Lives when the charity first started in 2002. They were called People First in the beginning. It was really great, I really enjoyed it! We talked about our rights a lot, but now I not only talk about my rights - I live them.

I know I have a right to live in my own home and I live in my own home.

I know I have a right to choose what I do in my own home and in my life. I make choices everyday, such as what I am going to buy when I go shopping. I don't do anything unless I really want to.

I know I have a right to choose who comes into my home and everyday I choose who I let in. These people are either staff who support me, friends or my family. I have told the agency that support me 4 times a day that I want to know who is coming in and they have made me a list.

I know I have a right to have a job and I have had jobs in the past. I've worked in Safeways years ago now, in the library and in Langley Housing Office.

I know I have to get married. I just need to find the right woman, but I'm working on it!



As I said recently, "Seize the day!" I am living the dream, like in the Elvis song. My dream is to be my own man and now I am.

My attitude and way of getting by is always to think well you've got to laugh otherwise you just cry, so I always pick myself back up and get back out there doing what I want to do. I want other people to find their place in the world and make sure that they are listened to, respected and make their own choices about how they live.



Changing Our Lives

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