

THOMAS' STORY

The benefits of
personalised and
systematic transitions
to and from services



This is

THOMAS

He is 28 years old and loves baking,
watching TV like Doctor Who
and Star Trek, attending Comic
Cons, and collecting memorabilia
from his favourite shows.



Thomas has autism and currently lives in his own apartment within supported living, which he has decorated with all his collectables, like his huge DVD box set collection, many posters, and props.

He loves staying home, giving him time to have some peace and quiet, catch up on himself and enjoy his favourite things.



Thomas moved into his apartment in November 2019.

Moving into this new environment was not easy for Thomas.

This is his story of moving to his new home, and the things he and his family learned along the way. Thomas is telling his story, so people understand the benefits of a slow, systematic transition for some people.



For 24 years, Thomas lived at home on the Wirral with his Mum Mandy, Dad Hugh, older brother Andrew, and younger brother Martin.

Throughout school and college, Thomas was good at art, quizzing, and developed an interest in archery.

He also fell in love with various TV shows and began decorating his bedroom with many collections.



In 2018, Thomas started to think about having his own space to fill with his things and to have some independence to make his own decisions, so with the help of Mum, Dad, Aunty Link and his Social Worker, he began to look **for his own home**.

He also started to save up money ready for the big move!



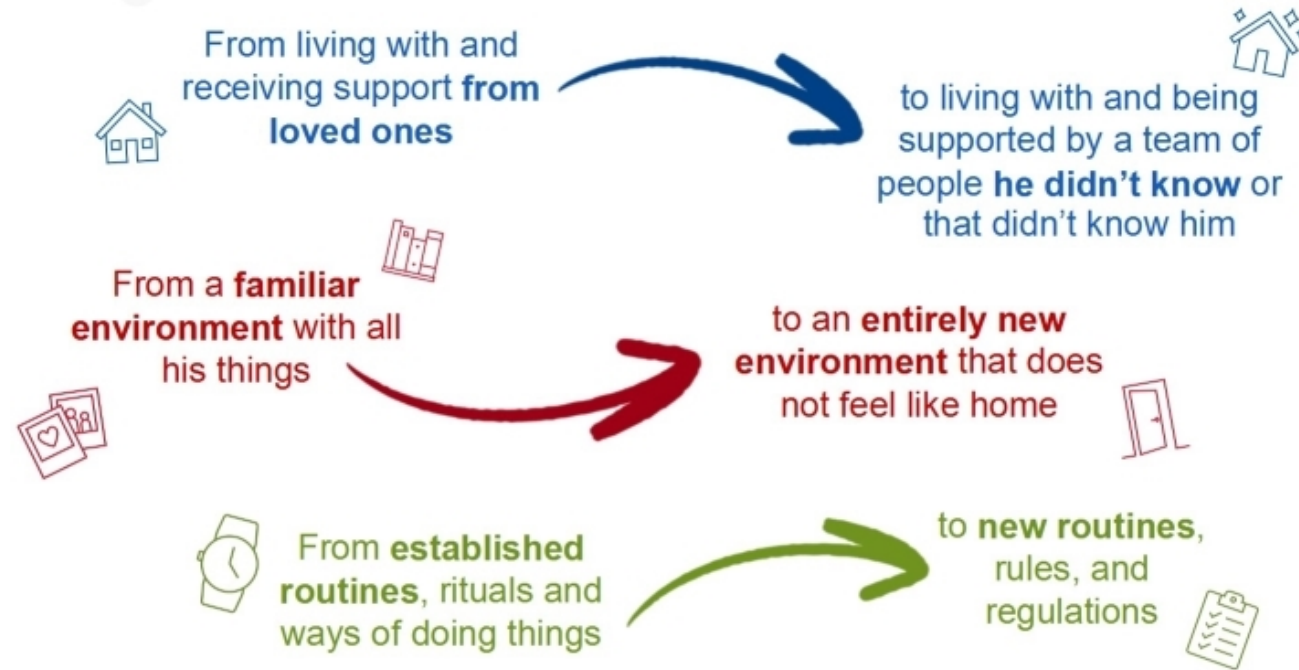


In November 2019, he was thrilled to bits to find out that he got **an apartment** 4 miles from where he grew up.

The apartment block is a lovely converted Victorian house with four apartments, a common room and a staff hub, and staff on site all the time. Thomas was going to receive support once a day, every day between 10am and 5pm.

Much to his delight, Thomas' apartment had two floors and a nice living room to fill with his collections.

As for many people with autism, any changes to Thomas' life and routines need to be done **slowly and systematically** whenever it is possible. The move out of his family home was a massive change, for example:



Thomas and his family were **told it would be just 1 month** before he would move in.

They were told that Thomas **would receive 10 hours of support to aid his transition** to his new home. There were a lot of changes for Thomas to get used to in this short time.

His 10 hours of transition support were split into two five-hour days.

On these days, Thomas went to see the apartment, meet the staff, have lunch, and begin personalising the apartment



While this time was somewhat useful, **it was not long enough** to allow Thomas and the staff to properly adjust, plan ahead and customise the environment.

So, while the lead-up to Christmas was nice, decorating his house with a Christmas tree, the novelty quickly wore off and **Thomas' mood dropped** in the new year.



He became distressed and worried, and struggled to live with other people.

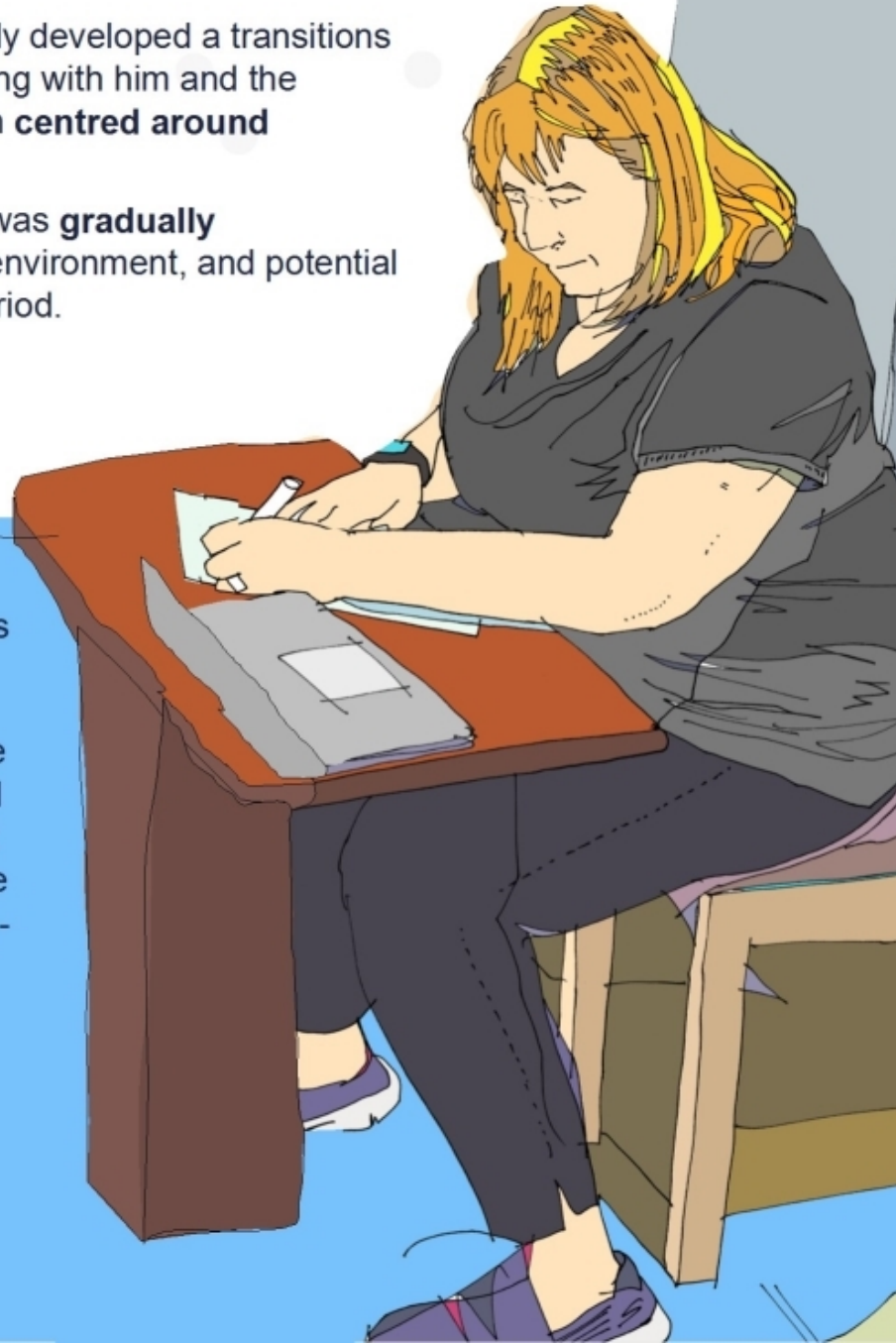
His distress worsened with the pandemic, and so his mum decided to move him **back into the family home** after just 3 months.

Because of the pandemic, the apartment was kept for Thomas even though he was living with his family again. So, when lockdown lifted and life began to return to normal, Thomas and his family had an opportunity **to plan a slow and systematic transition** that gave plenty of time for everyone – especially Thomas – to adjust.

In August 2020, Mum Mandy developed a transitions package for Thomas, working with him and the support staff to make a plan **centred around Thomas** and his needs.

With these plans, Thomas was **gradually introduced** to the people, environment, and potential routines over an 8-week period.

The amount of time Thomas spent in his apartment increased every week. In week 1 made a few daytime visits, and in week 2 he had an overnight stay. This built up to Thomas living full-time in his apartment by week 5 - **three weeks ahead of schedule.**



Importantly, **Thomas felt in control** of this entire process. He could choose the days he wanted to visit, sleep overnight, and activities and days out he wanted to do with staff.



Activities included long walks with lots of chatting, swimming and working on the allotment.

Because his transition was spread out and filled with activities, Thomas got to know the staff well, and vice versa, familiarise himself with and customise his space and know his routine.

Thomas is now living **very happily** on his own in his apartment.

The best part is he has developed many **new skills** over the last four years. Among other things, he now does his own cooking, food and clothes shopping, laundry, bedding, and cleaning up. He has also learned to budget his money, using a prepaid card as well as cash.

Like most people, Thomas sometimes feels unsure, frustrated, or anxious about some things about his apartment. Despite this, is coping well in his apartment with improved confidence and quality of life.



Thomas and his family credit the **slow and systematic transition plan** – designed by Mum Mandy – with enabling Thomas to **successfully make the move to his apartment.**



Thomas continues to add to his memorabilia collections, making his house even more of a home.

He is **taking more control over his life**, recently joining the interview panel for any new support staff, become a public speaker with the Oliver McGowan training, and doing a cooking course so he can find a new job in a bakery.



In the longer term, he looks forward to being in a relationship, and wants to own his own home one day, so he will have even more space to customise and make his own!



THOMAS'

Top Tips



From their journey, Thomas and his family learned several lessons that they wish to share to help others. Thomas' plan was developed independent of Adult Social Care and speaks to the benefits of early planning and effective collaboration between the young person, families and service providers to enable the young person to achieve their goals.

These **top tips** are aimed at professionals and councils, as well as families looking to support loved ones:

- 1 Allow 5-8 weeks for the transition**
This gave Thomas flexibility, choice and control, and because he was in control, he took control, and his family and staff followed his lead.
- 2 Adopt truly person-centred planning**
Be willing to be creative, have courage and avoid formulas.
- 3 Set clear goals for each week**
Thomas decided what he wanted to do week-by-week, such as buy a lamp or bedding and decorate the space.

(continued overleaf)





4

Communicate which staff will be around

This doesn't have to be all the details of the rota, just names of who should be around on what days.

5

Support and appreciate the value of the family, friends and carers

Ensure they have sufficient information and know what to expect from transition. Consider offering voluntary training for parent/carers on letting go of the individual.

6

Offer information on things to do before moving in

Include a checklist, such as contact the Department of Work and Pensions.

7

Offer support on a financial assessment well in advance

Include information on disability related expenditure, positive risk taking and means testing and ensure this occurs before even looking at housing options.

8

Help individuals take control of their home and life

Develop maintenance skills and teaching people to Video Call (e.g., Facetime) family and friends for example.

9

Have an option for staff can be contacted

So, if plans change and families/friends can't get hold of the individual themselves, any message is still delivered to avoid sudden, unexpected change. Thomas and his family provided staff with a mobile for this purpose.

A note from Jean Stephens

Assistant Director | Adult Social Care | Wirral Council



We thank Thomas and Mum Mandy for taking the time to share their story with us – they are a really inspirational family.

Their story demonstrates how people can benefit from good planning towards a slow and systematic transition, and this will help us with our goals moving forward.

We appreciate that not everyone's circumstances are the same, and Thomas' Story highlights that planning care and support around each individual can lead to greater outcomes. After all, Thomas fully moved into his apartment 3 weeks ahead of schedule!

Undoubtedly, these benefits are not exclusive to housing transitions and doing things slowly and systematically would be beneficial during any transition to and from services.

Person-centred planning is not a new idea, and while Thomas made the move to his own apartment at 24-years-old, we know from other places that planning earlier gives individuals the best chance to achieve their personal goals.

We, along with our partners, are committed to taking onboard the lessons of Thomas' Story by looking to ensure services offer slow and systematic, person-centred transitions that are planned at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

signed,





We would like to thank Thomas and Mandy
for sharing their story.

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with Facilitate Consultancy

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