

Changing Futures

— Stoke-on-Trent —

CASE STUDY: Self Advocacy

Jody* has been known to services for many years, due to past traumas she suffers with poor mental health and substance misuse. Since a recent release from prison Jody has been street homeless with on/off periods of sofa surfing. Historically Jody has been aggressive and abusive towards professionals and an incident occurred a number of years ago whilst in prison when Jody learned her child was being adopted. Whilst in segregation a fire was lit in her cell which Jody states was a cry for attention and support. As a result of this a small amount of additional time was added to Jody's sentence, however no conviction of arson was made. Jody has maintained tenancies in the past and she has never been accommodated in a hostel setting. Jody engages well with the services that are engaging with her.

Jody has stated that she would like to have stable accommodation that includes support - or put quite simply a place she can call home. Jody shows a good level of awareness stating she wishes to address her past traumas through long term therapy, seek support to manage her mental wellbeing including addressing her substance use, as well as seeking support to ensure she is in receipt of her correct benefit entitlement. Jody's end goal is to become a peer mentor to use her experience to help others, as well as reconnecting with her family to build a positive future.

Jody is being denied accommodation within the city due to historical behaviors which date back many years. Services have raised concerns around what is believed to be an Arson Conviction, as well as aggressive and chaotic behavior. It has been established that Jody has never been convicted of Arson. When Jody is not properly medicated for her Mental health, by her own admission, her chaotic episodes increase.

Jody's case was presented at the MaRG, the outcome of which was that she would be offered accommodation through a local provider, however concerns were raised by the provider when Jody's risk information came through to them, specifically around the fire and aggressive behaviour previously mentioned. The housing provider stated at a follow up meeting that they would need to see a period of stability before a reassessment could take place. Weekly MDT meetings were initiated with relevant services including the Fire Service and local hostel providers, the aim of which was to temporarily accommodate Jody at a local hostel in order to show that with support Jody is stable. A full package of support from outside agencies would be put in place, including specialist women's workers, a tenancy sustainment worker, drug and alcohol support, and a female recovery worker with lived experience. Following further conversations at regular MDT's professionals involved were informed that Jody could not be accommodated at the hostel as they did not feel they could manage her behavior in a hostel setting, however an appeal could be submitted to the director if we did not agree with this. Collectively within the MDT an appeal letter was drafted and submitted, however this was unsuccessful. This decision was taken back to the MDT and Jody was informed of this outcome. Whilst we all disagreed with the decision, we were all still in agreement that the priority for Jody was stable accommodation.

Throughout this time Jody was engaging with a female recovery worker who has lived experience, the idea being to provide Jody with a positive role model and someone who could advocate for her in MDT meetings, ensuring Jody's voice is heard. Efforts were made to ensure more accommodation providers were in attendance at the next MDT and Jody's recovery worker encouraged Jody to attend also.

The MDT took place with Jody present, at a location where Jody would feel comfortable, and she was able to communicate where she is today, how she is engaging with support and explain her goals and aspirations for the future, to the group.

Jody was able to articulate that supported accommodation is what she needs, explaining that she had not been in any trouble for a significant period of time, as well as showing real insight into the management of her mental wellbeing.

As a result of this interaction a housing provider was suitably convinced (in fact, impressed), and Jody was made an offer of accommodation, so long as a support package is in place.

Outcomes

By attending an MDT meeting in person Jody has found a new confidence to be able to advocate for herself, she is able to identify and articulate what her support needs are, and what she needs to live a fulfilled life.

The outcome of this is that Jody has secured an offer of accommodation and support that previously seemed out of reach.

Jody has also agreed to actively help services update her risk assessment, to be accurate and representative of the person she is today.

Jody's recovery worker continues to meet with her and has helped to find creative ways to occupy her time and remain mentally well, including providing therapeutic colouring books and materials to start writing a diary or a blog.

Learning

- Regular MDT meetings with an agreed agenda and collective decision making - work
- Customers being present at meetings to represent themselves, where appropriate, creates a different dynamic and better outcomes
- Support and insight from lived experience working alongside customers is invaluable
- Meetings to be held face to face (not online)
- Create solutions as a team – collaboration and coordination *“If you can provide this, we'll prove this...”*
- Don't be afraid to challenge decisions, if you feel strongly about something do your best to make it happen

** Customer name has been changed to protect identity.*