

# Changing Futures

— Stoke-on-Trent —

## Case Study: The Importance of Trust

### Background

Ruby\* is a young lady in her 30's who suffered a head injury as a child, has a history of substance use, and was living in supported housing following an abusive/controlling relationship prior to Changing Futures involvement. Whilst in supported housing Ruby continued to be exploited and controlled by other residents financially and physically, and her substance use continued. Due to Ruby's physical health needs and her children, Adult Social Care were already involved at this stage.

Ruby stated that she would like her own tenancy as she has never had her own place, previously having only stayed with her parents or partners. Ruby's long term goal is to be able to have her children come and stay with her in her own home. Ruby wants to be abstinent from drugs and to engage with the support she needs to achieve these things. In the long term Ruby would like to volunteer working with disabled or elderly people in the hope this may develop into a job.

### Key presenting issues:

- Suitable tenancy is needed
- Support with substance use is needed

### Additional needs:

Ruby hasn't had a very good experience with services and therefore struggles to trust them. She states that she feels she doesn't have control/autonomy of her own life. For example she is on an appointeeship and cannot seem to come to the right arrangement with the professionals overseeing this, and professionals have contacted her family unnecessarily, believing this is the right thing to do, but this has caused friction between Ruby and her family.

## What we did

Ruby's service coordinator worked with her to address her tenancy needs. Initially Ruby had to move to a different property, albeit with the same housing provider, due to being financially exploited by other residents and encouraged to use drugs. A member of support staff was also found to be behaving inappropriately towards Ruby and so this was reported. Changing Futures made a referral for a tenancy that would be Ruby's own, that still came with support provision. Ruby's recovery community coordinator went with her to the interview and Ruby was successful, so she has now moved in there. The service coordinator referred to the local drug and alcohol service who agreed to support Ruby, on her initial appointment they suggested Ruby attend a women's group at the service which her recovery community coordinator supported her to attend, to build confidence and to provide assurance. Ruby is now engaging with this support well.

As Ruby's recovery community coordinator Jo has lived experience of similar issues, she quickly developed a trusting relationship with Ruby. Ruby stated she feels comfortable saying how she really feels to Jo. Jo is working with Ruby to move towards her long term goal of voluntary work and has been able to advocate with other professionals involved in relation to her appointeeship and the contact from professionals with Ruby's family. Ruby has expressed gratitude for this explaining that having the support of Jo makes her feel more comfortable when engaging with professionals and that it helps her get her point across, where previously she felt the need to go along with what was being suggested for her. When Ruby got her new accommodation Jo helped her think about the things she might need to get set up and helped her budget to get what she needed. Jo also has taken Ruby out for lunch on a number of occasions and has supported to engage with Expert Citizens where she has used her lived experience to take part in a research project. Jo continues to meet with Ruby weekly and is exploring Rubys social interests as well as looking into training opportunities to help Ruby move towards her goals.

## Outcome for customer

Ruby continues to maintain her new accommodation, and to engage with the drug and alcohol service. Ruby has remained abstinent from using drugs for roughly three months now and is having regular contact with her family, including her children twice a week. Ruby has used public transport on her own to go to her appointments and to go food shopping, which is a massive achievement as she did not feel comfortable doing this at all before.

Without Changing Futures involvement it is likely that Ruby would still be in the accommodation where she was being exploited. Ruby would likely still be using drugs and not accessing support from services.

## Learning

Trust and confidence in service providers is a key factor when a person considers whether to access a service. If a person has no confidence in a service they may simply decide never to approach them in the first place. Equally if a person has a negative experience from a service this may put them off from any further engagement, even if the need for support remains or has increased. In this case the customer had a negative experience from the first support service they had ever accessed in the form of a staff member behaving inappropriately towards them, in addition to exploitation from other customers using the service. The customer stated to their recovery community coordinator that they thought that the experience they had was 'normal' in the absence of anything to compare it to. The lack of confidence and trust in Ruby's case was further compounded by the difficulties she experienced with the professionals tasked with helping manage her finances in the form of an appointeeship and the contact with her family, which in both cases was perceived as being too intrusive, even though these actions were well intentioned.

The time that Ruby's recovery community coordinator was able to give to her, focusing on the things Ruby wanted to focus on, such as shopping for her new accommodation and social activities enabled her to build trust and rapport with Ruby. Through this relationship Ruby was enabled to see that what she had experienced was not normal, nor what she should expect from services. Through supporting Ruby to attend appointments, Jo was able to advocate and vocalise Rubys wishes, and demonstrate to Ruby that her opinion matters, and that when done correctly services will be receptive to this. As a result Ruby has continued to engage with the support she needs and it is likely that in time she will develop the confidence to express her own wishes and concerns to professionals, where before Ruby felt obliged to go along with what was suggested for her.

Although the inappropriate behavior Ruby experienced from staff was identified and dealt with swiftly, this unfortunately is not the first time we have heard of such things happening within services, and only serves to remind us of the importance of both implementing appropriate checks and balances when recruiting, and ongoing oversight and supervision from seniors, as well as providing clear pathways for peers to be able to raise concerns as they arise.

\* Customer name has been changed to protect identity.