



C4WS HOMELESS PROJECT

A Place To Call Home

Sam's Story



Home From Home

I was staying at the shelter for a few weeks before Home From Home was suggested by my caseworker. It was worrying because my friends were moving on and often because of their circumstances, their next steps weren't necessarily permanent. So it was worrying to see. There was uncertainty around me.

So it was suggested that I'd go to Home From Home. My caseworker set up an introductory meeting where I met Andrew and Lucy (my hosts) together at the office to speak about Home From Home. I'd met Andrew before because he was one of the volunteers. I felt okay, I was a bit nervy because it was out of my comfort zone – moving into someone's house who I didn't know, so I didn't know what to expect. It was nice meeting them, we all got on so we decided to go ahead with the placement.

So a week later, I moved in. I went up there with Sam (my Welfare Worker). We had a cup of coffee and a chat. We did the guest agreement together and it was straightforward. Basic stuff about the placement. It was weird at first, I felt a bit out of place. At the time, their goddaughter was staying as well. The first day I was there, she came back from work and she knew stuff about me so that was nice. On the first evening, we had dinner together, and then we sat and had a chat, read the papers and our books.

It took a few days to settle in. After that, I didn't feel out of place, and I never felt like I didn't want to be there. It was a relief that I had accommodation. When I stayed at the shelter, I had to leave at 8.30am and then I was left to my own devices in the day, wandering around London until I could go back into the shelter. So it was nice staying at Andrew and Lucy's because I didn't have to leave during the day. It was more stable.

For me to get my own accommodation, I had to get a passport. I had lost my documentation right before I went to the shelter – my passport had been nicked. And without ID, I wasn't even accepted by backpackers and I wasn't able to find work. So I had to get another passport, but because I didn't have an address, I didn't have anywhere for the passport to be sent to, even if I did have money.

C4WS helped me with this. When I was staying in my Home From Home placement, I was waiting for the passport to arrive at the C4WS offices. It took a month or two for me to get my passport. Once I had that, I was able

to look at places. I was referred to a charity called Hope World Wide. I took the first place I was offered and I am still there now - 2 and a bit years on.

Home From Home is a lifeline. It's a safety net. It's nice meeting people, nice people. It was nice being in that secure and stable environment. Good food as well. My hosts were really funny, great sense of humour.

For me, the weirdest thing was that one day I was sleeping on a church floor in the shelter, and a few days after, I'm socialising and having an evening meal with high profile civil servants. It was bonkers, a crazy scenario.

One thing I would say for people who have a spare room and are considering hosting is never judge a book by its cover. Everyone goes through bad periods in their life. There's a bad stigma about people who are homeless – that they are raging drug addicts and alcoholics. That's not the case. The friends I made in the shelter were lovely. Genuinely nice people. One time, one of the guests went to the church and played the piano, they were so talented and it was amazing – so never judge a book by its cover.

Often when people find themselves homeless, it's down to circumstances... finances, or in my case no ID. In fact, a few people were homeless and stuck being homeless because they had problems with their ID. It's not a simple fix. Or a quick fix. Home From Home gave me time and support to do the things I needed to do to get into my own home.

The whole period of staying in the shelter, and in Home From Home wasn't a dark time. It was chaotic but it was comforting as well – being around good people that you're used to and who want to help. I still come back and help out at C4WS. I like them. It's an amazing grassroots charity that does the work on the ground and Home From Home is a project that actually does the work.