

Marion Langford - Our Experience of Helping Tom into a Supported World.

- The first big decision we all have to make is what support our child needs for their education. With help from educational psychologists we trust the joint decisions made and we for the first time have to hand over our most treasured possession knowing that no-one can look after them like we can.
- We somehow survive this decision and the years roll on and we skip through endless reviews, appointments, in lots of cases surgery and life-long medication and before we know it we have to think about a placement after school years are over. For us all this is another rollercoaster of funding applications and fear of making the right or wrong decision. We can discuss this decision with our other children about their own future but ultimately, we are making this decision for our special children, as most do not have the capacity to make these important decisions alone. Given that we have made the right decision they then move on to a more adult environment i.e. college, further education, to encourage and support independence.
- For us and I'm sure most of you the idea of them actually leaving home in our heads is still a very long way off.
- This is not the case. We have to continue making these decisions and hope we make the right ones. First and foremost, our gut feeling is that we don't want to let them go at all.
- Tom went on to Derwen college it was clear that he was able to have a life which involved his friends from school and make new ones. Again, we were sure this phase would put off the pressure of that " what is next" decision once college is over.
- What became very clear throughout numerous reviews was that it was primarily our decision what the future held for Tom. After him successfully enjoying 4 years as a residential student we were very aware of some of his peers leaving college and the facilities they had open to them. Mostly left to availability due to Housing associations purchasing properties and social workers working tirelessly to attempt to place as many young people as they can in the most suitable settings. But you really have to know what you want for them so that you can help the transition go as smoothly as possible.
- At the end of Toms 4th year we became aware of a new facility only a few miles away from us which would when fully occupied would accommodate 9 young people with learning disabilities with a communal area to allow them to share evenings if they so choose. This was something very exciting for us as Tom is a very fun loving young man and the thought of his time ending at Derwen and just coming home to (boring Mum & Dad) his room and when I have time to take him swimming or disco to try and keep him involved with his friends. We went to see this new property which is a new build/ barn conversion with a private landlord. This looked like the ideal place for Tom to be happy in his own home with support.
- At that point we had to decide what to do as Tom had one further year to complete at college we made a brave decision to bring him home and continue the rest of his year as a part time student as we didn't want to risk not getting a place in this ideal venue.

- At this time we were talking to others whose youngster was also nearing the time for major decisions to be made and realised that most seemed to be leaving it until the very last minute to face the long road ahead to get it right.
- In the time Tom came home, which turned out to be a year, we got to know him as the adult he had become and what his needs were then not the youngster he was when he went to college.
- We also felt very strongly that all the time at college would have been largely wasted if we didn't help him to live his own life. I went on to research what skills Tom had learned and how he could use them. We want to see him settled in his life and enjoy it with him so we can know that he is happy and content. He attends a day centre 3 days a week which I went to see what they could offer Tom. He cooks on Monday, does Art and crafts plays snooker. Tuesdays attends Zumba classes, helps in the day centre kitchen and does Meta4 dance in the evening. Wednesdays he works at the Falconry centre and attends a disco once a fortnight on Wednesday evenings. Thursday, Dragonfly project and Sharks. Fridays is fun day or trips out from his day centre then he looks forward to his weekends just like the rest of us. He comes home for all family occasions and Christmas etc and is always happy to return to his home.
- This doesn't just happen, you as parents have to know what you want and make it happen. Get out there and find what's right for your young person. **THEY DESERVE IT**