

Kenny's story

in Control is grateful to Kenny for sharing this story

After years of being moved from one institution to the other Ken is now able to organise his life in a place of his own.

How Kenny moved from an institution 200 miles away to his own flat.

Ken is thrilled. In July at last, he moved out of the institution. He moved there six months ago after spending three years at another institution in Devon. It was supposed to be a temporary stay. Ken's friend and advocate, Tony, describes how he moved to the institution until a place in Essex, his home county, could be found.

They had known each other for many years. Ken was going to move into his own flat in 2002 but, the day before he was due to go there, the staff at the assessment unit he was living in had been instructed not to work with him. So Tony and Ken stayed together in the flat for a week before moving to the establishment in Devon as this was the only place the social worker could find for Ken.

It would seem that Kenny has had a life of being moved around without having any control over where or when he went. Ken is now forty three. He has been in just about every hospital in East Anglia. He had his first experience of the long stay hospital system when he was 15. He also says he was kept in hospital on a section under the Mental Health Act. It is true that Ken has lost his temper with staff in the hospitals he has lived in. But in all the years that Tony has known him, he has never done anything like that outside the hospital.

Whilst he was living in Devon, Ken said he was not allowed to go to the toilet alone. He had to ask for toilet paper and wasn't allowed things like razors, batteries, bottles and beakers at night. 'If I was dry I could not get a drink', he says.

The light switch to his room was outside the door, but staff said that Ken could turn it on or off whenever he liked! Nor could Ken go out with out an escort. It would seem that going out was a rare event. When he needed new clothes for his move to Essex, a staff member went to buy them for him as there were not enough staff to take him. His care at the institution cost almost £3000 per week. To stay in the Savoy Hotel for a week costs £2800!

Ken's mood becomes sad when he describes the 'Odd's Room'. It was really the observation room, but Ken misheard it and thought you went there when you were behaving 'odd'. This, he explains, is where he had to go if he had a disagreement with staff. It is an empty room with one chair in it. Most people who had to endure these circumstances would probably be inclined to lose their temper.

It was Tony who came up with the idea of Ken being part of the in Control project, with a view to moving to supported living and a place of his own. Everyone they spoke to said that this was a great idea. But where would the £3000 a week come from for Ken to move into his own place? Anxiety amongst staff mounted. They had never done this before. It would all take time to sort out. Meantime, Kenny was desperately unhappy where he was living. He longed to move to Essex.

So it was decided to do a half-way plan. When Ken was on holiday in a cottage with Tony in Essex, he invited Nicola for a cup of tea. Nicola is a social worker. She read the report about Ken but couldn't match what she had read with the person she saw in front of her. She was undeterred by the report and started looking for somewhere suitable in Essex. This is how Ken came to be where he is now – in his flat, able to organise his life as he chooses.