



A Parent's Story

Lynn Elder's son had attended Sandelford School since the age of four and in June of 2012 was ready to leave. Not knowing what lay ahead for her son's future Lynn was very anxious and worried.

Lynn says, "If I'm honest my worry really started at the beginning of Andrew's last year at school, however I tried to put it to the back of my mind and not think about it. My anxiety grew nearer the end of the term and by the time June came I was despairing."

Andrew's social worker came to see him and assessed Andrew as meeting the criteria to access the NHSCT's Day Opportunities Programme.

The Day Opportunities Programme was set up for people with Learning Disabilities following recommendations in the Equal Lives Report and the Northern Trust's "Widening Choice and Day Opportunity Strategy" for the modernisation and reform of Day Services. The programme covers four areas of opportunity: recreational, vocational, volunteering and further education. The Day Opportunities Co-ordinator works with individuals and their families to tailor the programme to individual needs and aspirations.

Lynn's anxiety grew as she did not know much about the Day Opportunities Programme. Lynn says, "I have been so used to Sandelford being Andrew's safe place, his own little bubble, I just wanted to protect him from the rest of the world, that I worked myself into such a state that during the Sandelford Transition Evening, instead of getting the information about the Day Opportunities Programme, I sat in front of a stranger and burst into tears! That stranger was Day Opportunities Co-ordinator Sallyann Connor who lessened my anxiety by telling me a story of another parent who had went through the same emotions the previous year and about how well her son was now doing on the Day Opportunities Programme. I felt then that I was not alone, although I was still worried for my son. I felt more content to listen to what was on offer for Andrew.

Sallyann, came out to see Andrew and myself and devised a weekly package of activities with Andrew. He now attends Alternative Angles in Coleraine three days a week where he learns the skills of work and an Essential Skills course in Computers, Literacy and Numeracy at Focus on Family, Coleraine. Sallyann devised a plan to give to the people supporting Andrew to enable them to help him and this lessened my worry again as I knew everything was being done to keep Andrew safe.

The next hurdle I had to overcome was the first day Andrew travelled by train from our house in Portrush to his opportunity in Coleraine. Even though Sallyann had come out and planned his journey with Andrew and included me in the planning I was still worried about him. Will he get off at the right stop? Will he be able to manage to pay for his ticket all right? Sallyann planned to meet Andrew at the train station in Coleraine to ensure he got to Alternative



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Angles safely. I must have texted Sallyann every five minutes during this time and she was very patient with me.

By the third time Andrew did this journey the only feeling I had as I watched him walk out the front door of our house was pride. I was so proud of what he had accomplished in such a short period of time. Since then I have watched Andrew's confidence and self-esteem grow. He is doing things I never thought I'd let him do, and it's all thanks to all the staff who work closely with Andrew at Alternative Angles and Sallyann who has made the transition from school, both for Andrew and myself so much easier".

Andrew says, "I had a big fear of leaving school and not knowing what was ahead of me. After Sallyann came to see me the first time she explained what the Day Opportunities Programme was offering me. I felt good as everything was worked around me and what I wanted and needed. I am very busy, I have my courses at Focus On Family and I attend Alternative Angles. I have been recently assessed by the staff at Alternative Angles as being ready to move onto "The Progression To Employment Service". It is my dream that I get full time paid employment and I have just taken another step forward in achieving my dream".