

MY community not THE community

Scot is in his early 40s and lives with his mum and dad about a 20 minute drive away from his nearest town. The local authority has provided two groups for Scot to enjoy each week, a Friday club and 'Face It' for people with learning disabilities. He has been going to these groups in town for many years. His mum and dad have to drive him and pick him up because there are no public transport options from his house.

Scot had been told he is going to start being charged for these groups. He and his parents were very upset about this. They already spend money getting him there and back and they feel it's deeply unfair and unaffordable. However, they feel that there is no other choice than to keep attending because there are no other options on offer. Scot attends the nearest community option for people with learning disabilities.

Other than the two groups, Scot spends time in his room at home. He is an avid film buff and has a large collection of DVDs and BluRays. He is passionate about watching tennis – Andy Murray is top in his view, but Nadal is a close second. He sometimes goes out with his mum and dad, but life mostly revolves around his room and his twice weekly outings to the groups.

Scot's social worker asked a Local Area Coordinator (Rob) to visit the family to see if there was anything else that could be done.

During the first meeting Scot stayed quiet while his Mum and Dad spoke. They were extremely worried about Scot's future and had very strong views about what was good for Scot (groups) and what was bad for him (spending so much time in his room and eating a lot of chocolate). Rob listened really carefully to what Scot's mum and dad were feeling, because they are his parents and Scot clearly thinks the world of them. Having a good relationship with Scot means having a good relationship with his mum and dad.

Mum in particular was very distressed. Their whole lives are geared around looking after Scot and as they get older, they are scared for his future. They felt like the stress of looking after Scot was getting too much for them. Even when he had his groups, they were tied to drop off and pick up times and didn't feel that they ever had much of a break. Whilst Scot is rarely any trouble, nonetheless they were beginning to feel overwhelmed by their caring role.

Scot was happy to meet Rob the following day for a coffee – just the two of them.

During coffee, Scot didn't have any great epiphanies about what he wanted from his life. He wasn't particularly forthcoming about things he might like to try. He likes an easy life. He likes to keep things happy at home. Rob suggested that the best next step was to try a couple of things and see if Scot liked them. Rob described it as a "kind of try it all and see what works" approach. He knows that it can be positively overwhelming to be asked what

bit of your life you want to change. And if you don't get out and about much, you simply don't know what to ask for.

So, Rob and Scot agreed to try a range of things out and see what worked for him.

Scot knew that it was important for him to be active. Rob knew people who had started a local walking group. It wasn't for any particular group of people, but it was warm, small and welcoming – which is important for Scot who has autism and can be self-conscious about his looks. They went along one Monday. Scot was nervous and a bit anxious – he happily took a back seat and enjoyed Rob and the others chatting away. Eventually the conversation turned to tennis – and Scot was off! One of the other members is a keen fan and they soon chatted away.

Very quickly Scot began going to the group on his own – he didn't need Rob. He doesn't need a lift there or back, because the magic of Local Area Coordination is not that it's in THE community, it's in YOUR community. Scot worked out that he could manage the short walk there and back on his own.

Next, Rob and Scot dropped in on a local group run by adults with a learning disability. It included a people with a range of disabilities, some of whom were there with their carers. Scot was happy to stay for a while, but he didn't feel like he fitted in. He tried it for three weeks but found the environment a bit too overwhelming, so they agreed that one wasn't for him.

No judgment – a placement did not 'breakdown'. There was no 'challenging behaviour'. Instead – Scot tried something out and decided not to go back.

He found a very happy place at a coffee morning held in the local pub. Thanks to his close connections in the neighbourhood, Rob knew the woman who started it up. Originally it was a place for women otherwise stuck at home to meet up and socialise. He knew that they had recently opened it up for men too. Scot turned up and has never looked back. His friendships there have resulted in trips to the cinema with like-minded film buffs and he has made many good friends. He also took part in fundraising on their Macmillan coffee morning.

And Scot can make his own way there and his own way back. Because it's HIS community. Not THE community.

Scot also enjoys coming along to a local pop-up café. Actually, the whole family enjoys coming along to that.

Interestingly – even though Scot can get to and from all his new activities under his own steam, his mum and dad often drop him off at the coffee morning and the pop up café and will stay awhile. Mum in particular has also made new friends and connections.

Things changed so much for mum that she started opening up to Rob. There was some trauma which she was struggling to deal with as she got older. She talked, and Rob listened. At the time she wasn't ready to link up with anyone who could help so Rob just listened. But soon she started dropping in on the one stop shop herself and there she made use of legal advice, support with her mental health and she even started a falls prevention dance class.

Rob regularly bumps into Scot out and about or at the coffee morning. There's no need for Scot to become part of a caseload – now he's part of his community. He will always be connected to Rob because they are both connected to his community. It's a long term, golden thread.