

# RESIDENT STORY



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I have a personality, not just a disability.

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Alison Notman, Local Service Manager:  
“Michael has been with us at Sanctuary Supported Living’s service in New Milton since 1993. He lives with a severe learning disability and autistic traits. During the Coronavirus pandemic there was news of a 175% increase in the number of unexpected deaths in people with learning disabilities. This is his lockdown story.

My name is Michael and sometimes I feel lonely; it can be a bit scary. How do you feel about people like me? Do you think we are all the same and should be treated in the same way?

I don’t do change. Before lockdown, I liked to do the same thing each week – every Thursday I would go to the shops and buy a can of pop, a cake and a magazine, and come home with chips to share with my friends. I love sharing. I wanted to do the same things, at the same time, and got very upset when things were different.

I love penguins and have lots of toys arranged on my bed. I didn’t like it when Marie (Michael’s key worker) or other staff moved them to change my bedding, I wanted them all to be back in their proper places quickly.

Then one day, I wanted to go out like I

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always did, but Alison told me I couldn't. She said people were becoming ill and we all had to stay at home. I felt sad, confused and very worried – why couldn't I do what I wanted to do, what I'd always done, the things that made me feel safe and happy?

I am a very friendly and caring person; when I see people who are close to me I like to hug or touch them, but now I couldn't do that either. It made me feel very sad.

Then Alison remembered how much I loved penguins. She talked to me about the film 'Madagascar' and how the penguins in the movie all said 'Just smile and wave'. She said that that's what I should do – when I see someone I love, I should pretend to be a penguin and smile and wave at them, rather than trying to hug them.

I thought this was great! I started smiling and waving at everyone I saw and really enjoyed it – I thought it was very funny. It made me laugh a lot and all the staff said how nice that was.

Now, lots of the other residents have got involved too. We made a penguin from cardboard and named him 'Smiley' because he's happy all the time. He's got a girlfriend called 'Wavy' and I helped to paint her – I didn't mind at all when I got covered in

paint and that would have really bothered me before.

I've even been getting my toy penguins involved and putting them outside, in the living room, all sorts of places. We're all really having a fantastic time with Smiley and Wavy and everyone is taking part in ways they like. I'm doing lots of painting and drawing which I didn't used to enjoy, and others are singing and making videos. We've had lots of celebrations for the penguins too. They even got married!

For others like me who usually go out and about, we've had a pop-up café and parties in the garden. Some people prefer not to join in as much and that's okay too, I still give them a smile and a wave.

I thought it would be really hard, and at first it was, but Smiley and Wavy made staying at home fun. Even though everyone who lives here is different, Alison and the others always seem to know what we need.

Earlier I said I don't do change; well, now I do. Because the team know me so well, I have really enjoyed staying at home, even though I never thought I would. I have a personality, not just a disability.

