

Imagine the excitement of moving into your new home just before Christmas – imagine being homeless for two years before that happened. That was what happened to George in December 2019, but the story was far from easy.

George first came to the Hope Centre regularly in early 2018 because he had become street homeless. George, from Eastern Europe, had very limited English, no regular income and was not able to pass his habitual residency test. His drinking habit had culminated in him being arrested; he was now on probation. On top of all this he had just been diagnosed with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), his mental health was so low he was now suicidal.

How did we help? Initially as well as the usual help at the Centre of hot meals, showers and laundry we supported him to get a Universal Credit account and make a new application. This was not straight forward and involved much sign language, laughter and a translation app. These applications are not ever swift - the Habitual Residency Test was declined twice. Department of Work & Pensions delays meant George's claim was finally approved and he was signed off sick in November 2018.

It is strange how seemingly little things can be a frustration when you don't speak a language much. We supported George to understand and ensure he got his medication regularly, and to understand when and where probation appointments were, and to have the means to attend.

While we supported his housing application George not only used the Centre regularly, he enjoyed the Winter Night Shelter. Set backs of course happen to all of us at some point, and George was no exception. He had one short spell in prison which frustratingly meant all his claims had to be restarted. Department of Work & Pensions rules meant he was no longer entitled to benefits even though his Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease was so bad that he could not work. Undeterred our staff worked tirelessly supporting and encouraging George to go to a tribunal and apply to the Rugby Borough Council Pathway Housing Scheme. At this point George's life was on hold and it took a lot of time and effort to just keep him motivated. Five months of supporting him and liaising with the court on his behalf and finally getting a Personal Independence Payment claim accepted was a milestone. Through this time George lived in a makeshift shack at the side of a commercial building; his health severally deteriorated.

August 19 saw the much-awaited success with his claim approved and back dated – life could recommence! Although his place had been held on the Pathway Scheme there was just no housing available and on top of that his health had significantly deteriorated. He eventually moved into a B&B; finally, a flat was available. Together with Rugby Borough Council, Hope Centre staff helped George gather all the basic things you need to make a home and he moved in just before Christmas.

George loves his new two-bedroom home and has learnt to budget so he can pay for the extra room and does not have to move again. His health is much improved, and he is now known at the council as a model tenant popular with his neighbours. His drinking is minimal. Since being housed George's visits to the Centre became far less and only when

he specifically needed some help. Because of George's health conditions he is part of the 'shielding' group and is receiving regular food deliveries, plus our staff continue to regularly contact him ensuring he is well and understands both the situation and the guidelines. Finally, this story has the ultimate happy ending even in the challenging COVID days as we helped him to apply for his settlement status just before lockdown and have heard that this has been granted too.