

Case study six: Rob Green

Rob Green is a 29 year old single man, referred to the Supporting People Team in a rural area by a Housing Department, for possible support through Local Area Coordination (LAC). Rob had been employed as a supervisor with an outdoor activities organisation that specialised in providing experiences for adults with learning difficulties. As part of his employment package, he received accommodation, meals and all clothing necessary to carry out his role, for example waterproof jackets, footwear etc.

Following a change in behaviour where he appeared anxious and agitated, he had been asked by his manager if he had any issues he wished to discuss. Rob had immediately disclosed that he was having money problems and following a series of bad decisions, had gotten into significant debt with a payday loan company, who were now threatening court. During a lengthy conversation, his manager had apparently accused him of being the culprit of a recent theft of the office petty cash box, which Rob strenuously denied, resulting in a physical altercation between the two. Rob had immediately offered his resignation, and had apparently apologised profusely for his behaviour to his manager who had stated that if he left the premises immediately, he would not press charges.

Rob had left the establishment with only £15 cash, a mobile phone with very little credit and a few personal possessions in a rucksack; however, he was allowed to keep the waterproof clothing and footwear. He was now jobless, homeless and had no immediate means to support him. He had presented at the local Job Centre, to register to claim for Job Seekers Allowance, but Rob stated he was advised that he needed an address for correspondence. Rob then approached the local Housing Department but was informed that as he had voluntarily left his job with tied accommodation he was effectively classed as 'intentionally homeless' and as did not meet the criteria to be classed as vulnerable, i.e. no significant mental health issues, no substance dependency, not a prison leaver, etc. they were unable to offer emergency accommodation. They encouraged him to complete the appropriate forms to be placed on the housing list, and offered lists of private landlords, however all required deposits and references, both of which Rob did not have.

Rob complied with their requirements and kept calling into the housing office regularly, but due to the combination of his circumstances felt he had no option other than to sleep rough, with an occasional night on a friend's sofa. It had now been 8 weeks since leaving his employment.

Carol was the LAC allocated to Rob's case. She arranged to meet him in a quiet area of the local library, where Rob was spending most of his days keeping warm. On arrival, Carol recognised an obviously fit young man, who from a distance appeared reasonably presented, however, when she shook his hand and sat next to him, there was the sad smell of damp unwashed clothing and poor personal care. Rob explained his situation, during which he became embarrassed, distressed and clearly despondent.

As part of the Adult Social Care team, the LACs were using a bespoke 'Quality of Life' questionnaire with their service users, asking simple questions about how safe they felt, how they felt their nutrition was being managed, how they were managing personal care etc. It became quickly evident that Rob was desperately struggling with personal care and keeping his clothing clean. He informed Carol that he felt the library staff were talking about how he smelled - he stated he identified it from their body language. He was obviously struggling for money, and when asked how his JSA claim was progressing, Rob admitted he had "given up" as he had no correspondence address, and was now

acquiring a little money each day by begging, however as it was a very small town, the police kept moving him on. During the discussion, Rob kept repeating "How has it come to this?".

Rob informed Carol he had no relatives locally, and his friends were all at the outdoor activity centre. He stated that some of them had helped him with cash or a sofa initially, but he felt they were all now subtly keeping him at arm's length, because one of his friend's wives had stated he was 'making the house smell'. Rob stated he could see no light at the end of the tunnel, and admitted he had thought about suicide.

Homelessness is a complex issue, with no two cases the same. As a LAC Carol recognised her role was to encourage and empower Rob to work out his situation for himself, and not for her to 'rescue' him, however, she felt that without some immediate input, his situation could easily spiral rapidly downwards.

Carol asked Rob to consider each of his responses to the Quality of Life questionnaire, and identify which were most important to him, and what realistic outcome he would like to see from them.

Rob shared he wanted to feel clean, feel safe, have regular food and get his dignity back. He felt once this happened he would feel motivated to 'sort himself out' in terms of accommodation and a future job. During discussion with Rob regarding his finances, he shared he still had a bank account as his wages had been paid in directly. Carol asked if had received his final salary and P60 from his previous employer, to which Rob stated he had felt so ashamed at the circumstances leading to him resigning from his post, he hadn't contacted them about his final payment, and now he had no credit on his phone. Carol offered Rob her phone and encouraged Rob to contact his previous employer. Carol gave Rob privacy, and after a few minutes, he informed her that his previous manager had agreed to pay him for his last week at work and would make the bank transfer that day. Carol informed Rob that in terms of an accommodation address for his JSA, he could ask for the actual Job Centre to be his postal address and again encouraged him to push for this, informing him that this was his right to do so.

In terms of his personal care and clothing, Carol recognised his current level of cleanliness was a significant issue for a man who is normally well presented. She suggested to him, that once his agreed pay had entered his bank account that day, he use a few pounds to buy a simple basic change of clothes from a charity shop. She further suggested that before changing into them, to go the local swimming pool - not to swim but and use the hot showers, and following that take all his clothing to the local launderette for a wash/dry which usually cost about £5. Carol was also able to advise Rob that each morning, a well-known High Street bakers offered free sandwiches, pies and cakes that were damaged in transit, to street homeless people, which would at least give him a start for the day.

Over a coffee, Carol spent time listening to Rob, offering further advice about the root cause of his circumstances i.e. his growing debt, and how he should approach his debtors and agree a plan. After a period of time, it was evident he was feeling slightly more positive about his circumstances. Rob thanked Carol and stated he would let her know how he progressed.

Carol had not had further contact with Rob, however, one afternoon when walking down the street, she heard someone call her name and recognised immediately it was Rob in a much healthier state than when she last saw him. Without thinking, he hugged her and said 'thank you'. Rob apologised for both hugging her and for not being in touch but it

transpired he had followed her advice, literally, and after collecting clothes from the charity shop, showering at the pool and laundering his own clothes, and getting a breakfast from the High Street baker's he felt 'normal-ish' again, and had contacted a friend who offered him a sofa for a week. He had used the week productively and managed to secure backdated JSA, had contacted his debtors and agreed a manageable repayment plan. However, the most significant event was a successful interview for a post as a kitchen assistant in a large hotel which came with accommodation. Rob had managed to get his previous employer to agree a simple reference which contained only basic information, but sufficient for his new employer. Rob stated he was going to work hard to 'keep his head down' and look to a future when he might be able to return to an outdoor activity career.