

Help Through Hardship Crisis Project
The Hope for Wellbeing Project - Case Study
25 November 2016



Ayodele Oni

Ayodele Oni* is a Wandsworth resident who has autism and learning difficulties. He also lives with mental health issues. It is important for Ayodele to pursue a fulfilling life and he tries to go out and socialise, pursue his personal development and develop his knowledge, in order to do this. Ayodele's mental health issues have precluded him from pursuing paid employment.

He attends the Hope for Wellbeing Project's drop-in sessions at Tooting Neighbourhood Centre, which is where he became aware of the Help Through Hardship Crisis Project and following an introduction by Stephen Joseph, agreed to be interviewed to produce this case study to help inform the Hardship Crisis Network's work on improving services for Wandsworth residents facing hardship and crisis.

Ayodele chose to share his current situation related to his housing, his experience of dealing with this situation and its impact on his wellbeing in order to inform the discussions to be held at the Help Through Hardship Crisis' third Network Event, held at Balham Library on 6 December 2016.

Crisis Situation

At the beginning of September 2016, Ayodele received a Section 21 notice to leave the flat he has lived in for 6 years. Ayodele feels comfortable and secure where he lives, and it was very distressing to receive the notice. He had no one to talk to about it, did not know how to access advice about the situation and felt overwhelmed with dealing with this situation on his own. Ayodele called Wandsworth council and looked online to try to find out more information. He found this difficult to do, facing automated phone lines, and that people he spoke to did not understand his difficulties in expressing himself, sometimes ending the phone call when he could not get the words out. Ayodele mentioned that his mental health issues, including social anxiety, means he does not have a social network to help him deal with difficult circumstances, which other people may rely on.

Ayodele tried to adhere to the Section 21 notice, and look for suitable alternative accommodation. However, he faced many challenges in doing so. He found it difficult to deal with private letting agents, and found that many private landlords would not accept DSS tenants. Accommodation that is suitable for Ayodele is limited: he does not feel able to live outside the Tooting Broadway area, and large blocks of flats, or standard temporary accommodation such as B&Bs or hostels would exacerbate his mental health issues and are therefore not feasible. Ayodele was told by the Housing Options service that they would not be able to provide support until a possession order



*Name changed

had been received. Ayodele has been fearful of his ability to find suitable alternative housing before being evicted and felt he was doing everything he could to be proactive in this difficult situation but felt he could not access sufficient support at the time he needed it.

Accessing advice and support

Ayodele noted that he has used his capabilities to try to access advice and support while facing the distressing prospect of losing his home and being unable to find suitable alternative accommodation, and that many other people with mental health issues would be less capable of accessing support. He felt that consideration of his vulnerability as a person living with mental health issues was limited and he was not able to find any reassurance that he would be supported to find suitable alternative accommodation before he became homeless.

Among other organisations, Ayodele has accessed advice and support from the Help Through Hardship Crisis Project and noted the project was able to pay for his travel through its crisis fund to see an adviser at Battersea Library. Citizens Advice Wandsworth was able to provide a supporting letter requesting that the Housing Options service accept an early homelessness application from him and facilitate plans for Adult Social Services to carry out an assessment as well as support his application to a supported housing provider. Ayodele also requested assistance from his MP who also asked the Housing Options service to consider his case before the possession order has been received, which has provided some relief for Ayodele. Ayodele supported the aim of the project to enable people to access advice services more locally, in this case at the Hope for Wellbeing Project drop-in at Tooting Neighbourhood Centre.

Mental Health Issues and Crisis

Ayodele's housing situation has left him facing a crisis. He is continuing to try to access advice and support to resolve the situation so he can move on with his life. He emphasised that people living with mental health issues should be treated as individuals by professionals providing support and that rigid laws, policies and procedures are often particularly challenging for people with mental health issues to deal with. He said while training for professionals in providing services to people with mental health issues could provide improvements, it should not take the place of people being treated as individuals and services being flexible to meet their needs. He also explained that people with mental health issues also have a greater understanding of the challenges other people with mental health issues face, even if their situations are not the same, and their input into service delivery should be sought.

Ayodele also noted the importance of the role of support groups and activities for people living with mental health issues, so that when people are facing crisis situations, they are still supported to participate in activities which take their mind off the difficulties they are facing and help increase their overall wellbeing.



*Name changed