

What I like best is having my own front door key

One of the hard things about being visually impaired is feeling as though you always need to rely on other people.

Visually impaired young people have both the desire and the potential to live independently in the local community and Henshaws Community Housing helps people fulfil this goal.

Henshaws Yorkshire provides housing in the local community to over 60 people with a visual impairment and other disabilities in the local region. The houses are all located in pleasant, ordinary, residential areas and range from 3 to 6 bedrooms. Most of our houses provide 24-hour care, given by experienced, fully trained staff, but 3 houses offer a supported living service to tenants.



A range of activities

People who live in community houses are never short of things to do! They are able to access local day services and colleges, as well as pursue a wide range of leisure interests, including, tandem bike riding, sailing and holidays in the UK, Europe and the USA.

Most people who live in community housing attend Henshaws award winning Arts & Crafts Centre in Knaresborough. The Centre aims to provide a fully accessible, vibrant environment in which visually impaired people can learn new skills and express themselves through art and creativity.

At the Centre, service users are able to take advantage of the many workshops - music and drama, pottery, woodwork, papermaking, 3D, jewellery, textiles, funky bags and horticulture. The Centre also has a gallery where exhibitions of artwork by both service users and members of the public are regularly held.

A number of social enterprise initiatives are in place at the Centre, including Handmade at Henshaws where arts and crafts produced on-site are sold in the Centre's shop. A plant nursery is also on-site, selling plants, shrubs and evergreens grown by service users.

The Centre also provides vocational opportunities with both Henshaws college students and community housing residents working and volunteering in the café and gallery area.



Living life to the full

Most people who live in Henshaws community houses are former students at Henshaws College and moved in to a community house after they graduated. This demonstrates the holistic approach Henshaws aims to take, supporting people individually through each stage of their life and in so doing helping to give them a fulfilling life.

The approach is demonstrated perfectly by Debra who has been accessing Henshaws services for the past 17 years.

When Debra lost her sight at the age of 21 she felt lonely and isolated. She explains: "It was a terrifying, devastating experience. Crowds and busy streets terrified me – so I stayed at home. My confidence and motivation hit rock bottom."

Debra initially came to Henshaws College as a student and now lives in one of the community houses, as well as regularly attending workshops at the Arts & Crafts Centre where she often contributes to public art exhibitions.

"The fact that I've stayed with Henshaws says a lot about how great the services are."



Joanne has also been with Henshaws since her college days.

Joanne's story illustrates how having the opportunity to live independently enables young people to work on their self confidence and independence skills. Joanne has lived in community houses since leaving Henshaws College. She has no sight and has recently found the confidence to move from a house with 24-hour care to live in a house where she has her own tenancy. Joanne uses the Arts & Crafts Centre jewellery and textile workshops, attends courses at Harrogate College, goes swimming and is regularly at the gym.

Practical Support and Living Skills Training

Everyone who lives in a community house is given continuing living skills training in the home, covering practical household tasks such as weekly menu planning, shopping and cleaning.

Former student Nick C has lived in 2 community houses since he left College in 1998. Nick has an eye condition known as Retinitis Pigmentosa which is a degeneration of the retina and causes gradual but progressive sight loss. His eye sight has deteriorated rapidly since 2007.

Nick is able to take advantage of Henshaws rehabilitation service which provides him with practical support, advice and training. This enables him to both maintain his independence skills and confidence whilst developing new skills as his sight deteriorates.

“Because my sight is deteriorating I would find it very difficult to maintain the level of independence I’m used to without the help Henshaws give me. They are always on-hand to help me develop new skills and continue to enjoy a good quality of life”.



A strong social network

The social network and support provided to people living in community houses can not be underestimated. Nick M tells his story:

“I love my house. There are 5 other people who live there, 3 men and 2 women, and we’re all really good friends. It’s just such a great place to be. There’s always lots of laughter and joking and one of the things I enjoy most of all is the banter that we have about different football teams!

At night, we spend a lot of time socialising, going to the pub, watching films, listening to music together or going out on different trips. In fact, we do everything that any other group of housemates would do.

One of my biggest achievements, has been learning to use the oven, because until I came to Henshaws I had never cooked for myself. Now I can eat what I want and at whatever time I want.

“Henshaws has also helped me learn how to do the shopping, cleaning, washing and tidying and so as a result, I’ve got my own independence which is really important to me”.



To find out more

If you are interested in finding out more about Henshaws Community Housing or would like to visit the houses please contact Wendy Harrison on 01423 799602 or email her at wendy.harrison@henshaws.ac.uk.

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