

## Watch the Film

To watch Tony's Mum talking about his life and Tony's progress at Acorn Park, go to youtube and search for:

Leaving Home:  
Tony's Story at Acorn Park School



Lainey Miller is a trustee of the charity Autism Bedfordshire and goes all over the county helping other parents face placing their child in residential care.

<http://www.autismbedfordshire.net/>

"You have to park the guilt because it will crucify you."

## Get in Touch

If you would like to know more about Acorn Park, please contact our Admissions & Parent Liaison Officer Sue Jack

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Acorn Care & Education would like to express its thanks to Tony's family for sharing their experiences to help other families.



"It's beautiful with masses of space and fresh country air: unbelievably fantastic."

TONY'S MUM

"You walk away with a heavy heart but also with a lighter feeling of knowing he's OK: knowing that he's going to be safe and he's going to be well cared for."

"Tony's learned an awful lot from the staff at Acorn Park. They've done really, really well with him and I'm SO pleased."





# Tony's Story

Tony was a clingy baby, who cried incessantly, and when he lost eye contact with his mum at around the time of his first birthday, she knew immediately that Tony was likely to be autistic.

*The cruel irony for his Mum was that she worked with adults with autism: "Tony started to flap his hands and it seemed to calm him. He wasn't walking, he wasn't talking and he was like a tornado. He just crashed through everything and would just cry and cry. I knew he was crying out of frustration because he couldn't communicate."*

*Tony's first statement of needs was made when he was still at nursery school and as well as severe autism, he was diagnosed with ADHD, OCD, Severe Learning Difficulties and displayed challenging behaviour.*

*Family life was typically chaotic - recognisable to any parents who have a child with autism. Disrupted family outings, invitations being politely declined, an abandoned family holiday and constantly disturbed sleep. When Tony reached the age of puberty, the young teenager's behaviour became more difficult to manage.*

*And yet, for all the carefully planned and managed family activities, the watershed moment came at home: caused by an interruption in the home internet connection.*

*"Tony had a really big meltdown and I became seriously, seriously hurt," says Lainey. "I'd hit the brick wall. I was looking after someone 24 hours a day seven days a week, with one to one support. It's intense and it burns you down."*

*Lainey's elder son and daughter - siblings who had sacrificed so much to help support their little brother - spoke up.*

*"They told me that they were tired of seeing me so exhausted. It was very honest of them."*

*It was the lowest point of Lainey's life. The next day she picked up the phone and told the children's disability team: "I can't do it anymore. I need help. Tony needs help. He needs much more help than I can give him. I'm so, so tired. It is the hardest decision any parent will ever make. I've buried both parents I've been through divorce and nothing equates the pain of having to make that decision and say the time has come: he's got to be placed. However once I had made that decision I felt as if a huge weight had been lifted."*

*Tony's first placement broke down through a safeguarding issue, and Lainey removed him immediately.*

*"That's the crux for parents: you want them to be SAFE. Although they may not love him like I do, I expect them to treat him with the same dignity and respect, and I expect them to look after him the way I would. I will accept nothing less."*

*Lainey describes Tony's placement at Acorn Park as "unbelievably fantastic."*

*"The first thing that struck me was the area itself: it's massive...and it's beautiful. There is just masses of space and its just open country air. I walked in and saw the symbols on the walls, saw the PECS boards on the tables; I saw the sensory rooms and I knew without asking that it was very autism specific."*

*Lainey was delighted that the multi-disciplinary team is on site and Tony could immediately access all the specialist therapies he needs. She was equally impressed with the living accommodation for her son.*

*"It is just unbelievably fantastic. I just loved it," she said.*

*Understandably, when she left Tony at Acorn Park for the first time, she had mixed feelings.*

*"You walk away with a heavy heart but also with a lighter feeling of knowing he's OK: knowing that he's going to be safe and he's going to be well cared for."*

*For the family, it was a time to go out together without constant disruption.*

*"It was great to have that liberation. I deliberately pushed aside the guilt because the guilt will crucify you and you need to park it. It was time to give my daughter and my other son quality time."*

*Lainey describes the communication with Acorn Park: "Fantastic: the best I've ever had." She receives phone calls several times a week, as well as emails and photographs of Tony giving her regular updates.*

*"There is a parents' forum and we are asked for our views. It's really important to get parental feedback: you feel involved."*

*Staff bring Tony home to Luton regularly and collect him to take him back to Acorn Park.*

*"Communication is the key," says Lainey. "Openness and transparency between the parent and the care provider to work jointly - because it's all in the best interests of your child. I don't have any worries at all. I can sleep at night."*

*Tony is very much loved and still very much part of our family. In the short time that he's been at Acorn Park his independence skills have really grown. He's become a young man; he's shaving now. He's learned an awful lot from the staff at Acorn Park. They've done really, really well with him and I'm SO pleased."*

*Two years on, Tony has made a successful transition from his original room at Upper Woodlands to House Number One, a detached property at Acorn Park which caters for four older teenagers.*

# Progress Report

"Tony is a happy and settled young man who has made great progress since arriving at Acorn Park in 2013. He likes being in school and is happy to complete his work. Tony has picked up new, personalised strategies quickly. Tony enjoys using the computer and we have developed his learning through educational games which are incorporated into his lessons on a daily basis."

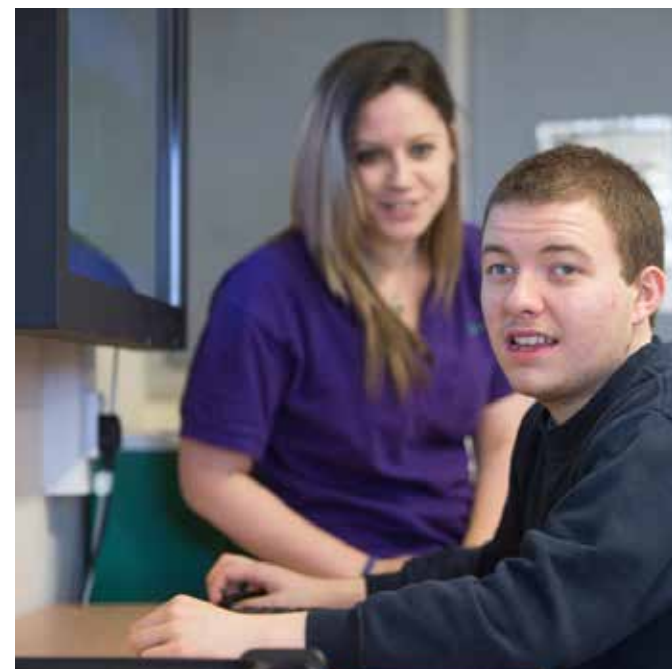
**Jennifer Gill, Headteacher**

	April 2015
<b>Individual Strategies</b>	We have introduced Tony to several different strategies to support him and Tony picks these up quickly. Tony now uses visual schedules throughout the day, with symbols he can access. His 'now and next board' helps him understand what is happening. Tony is able to move symbols appropriately on the board. This gives him a visual prompt to start the next planned activity.
<b>Community Learning</b>	Tony enjoys being out in the community and different aspects of his educational learning have been applied in community settings. As well as learning how to buy a drink and chocolate at the local post office, Tony takes part in a weekly trip to Thetford Forest and is continuing to develop his money skills at the cafe there.
<b>Education</b>	Tony has made considerable progress in all school subjects over the last two years. He is working at the P scales level and his greatest progress has been in self-help.
<b>Out of School Activities</b>	As well as his community learning activities, Tony enjoys weekly swimming sessions. He can swim several lengths of the pool, interacting with staff. He also enjoys using different water toys. Tony also goes horse riding, he can walk and trot on a pony.

"Tony has settled very well into his new larger room at 'House Number One' with his key workers and three other residents. Like many teenage boys, he'd spend all day on his iPad if we allowed him to! We're encouraging him to take part in house activities and projects.

Tony has embraced this and now happily sets the table for tea every evening with place mats, cutlery and glasses for everyone in the house."

**Melissa Mathews, Registered Manager**



The Onsite Multi Disciplinary Therapy Team at Acorn Park uses an individual range of strategies with each pupil

Tony has accessed



**Speech Therapy**



**Nurses on site**



**Occupational Therapy**



**Psychiatrist**



**Psychotherapy**



**Foot Health Practitioner**



**Music Therapy**



**Physiotherapist**



**Psychology**



**Activity Coordinator**



**Nutritionist**

"Tony has successfully engaged in a wide and varied range of activities off site, which reflect his range of current interests. He attends a monthly disco, and will join a youth club shortly. He is accessing the wider community more.

He has made a lot of progress with his choice making skills using PECS and visual supports and although he's a pizza lover, he has been willing to try new foods and flavours.

Tony is gaining independence in home-based tasks, including tidying/washing up after cooking without relying on any prompts from an adult.

He enjoys music therapy.

Tony has forged positive bonds with the nurses and now happily attends health checks in the medical room. He has also had timely reviews with the psychiatrist which have proved extremely beneficial and a change of medication has had a very positive effect on him."

**Scot Greathead, Deputy Principal**