

Benjamin's Story

Benjamin Marks is a typical 17-year-old, who likes music, football, and just chilling out with his friends. He is the eldest of four children, and has three younger sisters who all adore their big brother.

Like all teenagers, Benjamin is facing an exciting, if daunting, journey into adulthood, which will undoubtedly present many challenges along the way. However, unlike most of his peers, he will be totally reliant on others, particularly his parents, David and Erica, to guide him on the right path. This is because he was born with a devastating brain injury which left him with a severe disability, and in need of round-the-clock care.



Planning for Benjamin's future won't be an easy task, as his parents experience the bureaucratic pain of endless questions, form filling, and hours on-hold in telephone queues in their quest to give him the best possible chances in life. Yet they won't have to make the important decisions about his education, living arrangements and finances alone, because they know they will always be able to rely on Norwood's support. This has been the case since the day he was born, and will continue to be so when they are no longer around.

In the dark days that followed Benjamin's traumatic birth, David and Erica were barely surviving as they struggled to cope with their new reality. Thankfully, their GP referred them to Norwood and, in doing so, threw them the vital lifeline they needed.

After a few months, Erica joined Norwood's Rainbow Group for mothers of children with special needs, based at the Kennedy Leigh Children & Family Centre in Hendon.

The Rainbow Group offers women like Erica a unique opportunity to share their experiences, and work together with a trained facilitator to find solutions to some of the emotional and practical problems they encounter. While she attended these life-saving sessions, Norwood's dedicated staff and volunteers would care for Benjamin and other children in the next room.

But Erica and Benjamin weren't the only ones who were able to take advantage of the lifeline which Norwood provided. Members of the Marks family were soon regulars at the Fathers' Group, the Grandparents' Group and, as his three sisters grew up, the Siblings' Group.

David and Erica were also offered a designated Norwood Social Worker early on, to help them navigate a seemingly impenetrable maze of officialdom to secure the wider services their son needed and deserved.

By the time Benjamin was 18-months-old, he started staying at Buckets & Spades Lodge, which is Norwood's short break service in Finchley. Buckets & Spades continues to give his parents the opportunity to take a much-needed break from their daily routine, and the chance to spend time with their three daughters.

During these periods, they are safe in the knowledge that Benjamin is being given the same love, stimulation and 24-hour support that he receives at home. While at Buckets & Spades, he enjoys taking part in a range of activities and outings, together with his peers.

Benjamin also enjoys his time at Unity, Norwood's recreational service at the Kennedy Leigh Children & Family Centre. He attends the Unity school holiday play scheme, where he is able to take part in a range of creative and sporting activities, including music, art and football. At the Centre, he uses facilities like the sensory room and specially-adapted playground, and is taken on trips into and around London. He has also attended a residential holiday run by Unity.

When Benjamin reaches the age of 18 he will become too old for Buckets & Spades and Unity and he will make the difficult transition from children's to adult services. However, he will still be able to rely on Norwood's support.

Now, and over the next few years, a designated Transition Social Worker will work together with the Marks family, giving them the clear, practical advice they need to plan Benjamin's future and explore the possibilities which will help him achieve his full potential. They can also be confident that Norwood will continue to develop the services and infrastructure to care for him in the most appropriate way.

Whatever life has in store for Benjamin, Norwood will always be there for him every step of the way.