

# Staff story

## Jim Hockley

**Project Worker Jim Lockey was able to incorporate his skills and experience as a contemporary artist to his role, helping supported living residents improve their mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic.**



I first joined Sanctuary Supported Living working part-time at a homeless outreach service, before I was asked to go full-time at Dolphin Lodge in Hythe, Kent, which provides accommodation and support for adults with a range of mental health needs.

My background is in arts and education doing project-based work such as making live-art for festivals and creating touring schools' creative arts projects. I have always believed in serving the local community and working with Sanctuary Supported Living's residents was a natural extension of the voluntary work I was already doing. However, joining a service and working full time was a new challenge. When the pandemic hit, we saw museums close, and festivals cancelled, so I was grateful for the opportunity when my other work was no longer possible.

I quickly discovered that life working in a supported living service is more than an in-between job; it is a rich and rewarding environment where you can make a meaningful impact on people's lives. My Project Worker role means supporting residents in practical ways, from managing money, to teaching basic cooking skills; but it also means being a consistent supportive presence, someone in the residents' corner no matter what they're facing.

You don't need to have had a specific background or training to be a Project Worker, but everyone brings their own skills and experiences, to make their role their own. I was able to use my artistic skillset in the role, by establishing and running creative activities such as supporting the residents with designing and making Christmas decorations, making new room numbers for their doors, and creating a mural for the shared hallway, which was inspired by the local landscape and scenery.

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I believe in the power of art to give a voice to inner thoughts that are hard to articulate, as a tool to promote mindfulness, and to help us understand our world. It is that belief I've given my life to, but my work at Dolphin Lodge has proved to me that it's a holistic approach that makes real lasting difference, particularly for people with mental health needs.

Art is great, but if we aren't also giving that practical help – even with the small things - then its impact is reduced. Drawing may help a resident to express their frustration in a healthy and productive way, but to be able to also support that resident to call their GP in a keyworker meeting, maybe a day or a week later, and progress their care; that's where the difference really lies. Everything we do here at Dolphin Lodge – including the art and creative activities - is about ensuring that residents are safe, able to work on their own development and self-confidence, and take meaningful steps towards moving on and living independently.

I believe that the art projects we've completed at the scheme have had a positive impact, not only on the mental health of our residents, but also myself personally as it offered a creative outlet when the pandemic impacted all of us. I was surrounded by supportive colleagues who all encouraged and looked out for each other. They inspired me to find ways to support my own wellbeing outside of work hours, so that I had the energy for work.

As life is cautiously beginning to return to normal, opportunities are opening up again in the arts industry and I am returning to that field. However, my time as a Project Worker has had a huge impact on me, and it's been a privilege to share my creative skills with both the residents and my colleagues. I very much hope to continue collaborating with supported living residents in in the future.