



Press Release

Immediate Release

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'They Gave Him His Life Back': Family Praises Support From Stevenage Service

After years of crisis, overmedication, and misunderstanding, Umar has found stability, health, independence, and happiness thanks to support from the team at Walkern Lodge in Stevenage.

At Walkern Lodge, a Cygnet Social Care service on Walkern Road, Stevenage, Umar's hopes and dreams for better health, independence, joy and dignity are becoming reality every day.

When Umar, who has severe autism and complex needs, arrived at Cygnet Social Care's Walkern Lodge in Stevenage in January 2022, his life had been marked by repeated moves, unsuitable environments, and health problems that left him fragile both physically and emotionally.

He had been on heavy medication that caused bloating and oily skin and he was struggling with diabetes. He endured seizures which led to frequent hospital visits.

His brother, Saddique, explains: "Those years were so painful. Umar was constantly unwell, in and out of hospital, heavily medicated, and misunderstood. His behaviours were seen as aggression when really, they were his way of coping. I often felt helpless. As his brother, it broke my heart to see him unsettled, bloated, unwell, and always in crisis. I worried endlessly about his future."

The move to Walkern Lodge was not easy at first. Like many people with autism, Umar found change unsettling, and he was slow to trust. But the Cygnet Social Care team were patient and they spent time learning who Umar truly was, his routines, his rituals, his personality, and his faith.

Saddique said: "What impressed me most was how they took things at his pace. They didn't rush him. They decorated his room to make it feel like home, encouraged him to get a radio so he could enjoy music, and, most importantly, they respected his beliefs. Jamil, the service manager, supported him with prayer and took him to the mosque. These familiar touches gave him comfort and dignity. For the first time, he felt understood."

One of Umar's family's biggest hopes was that his health could improve. With support from Cygnet Social Care, that dream became reality.

Through careful diet management and consistent support, Umar's diabetes has been completely reversed. His medication has been significantly reduced and he no longer needs PRN medication. His skin has cleared, the bloating has gone, and he is visibly healthier and more comfortable in himself.

"The change in his health is nothing short of a miracle," said Saddique. "From being bloated and unwell, he now looks strong and settled. Reducing his medication and reversing his diabetes has given him his life back. It's something I never thought I would see."

Another hope for Umar was that he might become more independent. When he first arrived, he needed a 3:1 staff ratio, already a big step down from the 7:1 support he once required at a previous placement. Today, he thrives with just two staff during the day and one at night.

"To think of how much staff he needed before, and how much more independent he is now, is unbelievable," added Saddique. "That progress shows the dedication of the Walkern Lodge team, and it gives me real hope for his future."

Umar now takes an active role in his daily life. He chooses his own clothes, and staff help him with dressing. He is supported to take care of his personal hygiene, bringing him greater dignity and a sense of pride, especially before visits with his brother, which they both look forward to.

"These may sound like small things, but for Umar they are huge. It gives him dignity and pride in himself and for me, it's wonderful to see him making his own choices."

One of the biggest dreams Umar's family held was simply for him to be happy and to have activities that brought him joy instead of living in constant crisis.

At Walkern Lodge, those dreams have been realised. The team reintroduced him to horse riding, something he had first enjoyed at school. He still loves it, and it gives him confidence and a sense of freedom. He enjoys long walks, which keep him healthy and calm, and drives in the minibus, which allow him to see new places while feeling secure.

Saddique said: "Before Walkern Lodge, I never imagined he could enjoy these things again. Now he has a life full of activity, joy, and peace. He has routine, he has comfort, and most importantly, he has happiness."

Faith is also an important part of his life. Being supported to attend the mosque and pray has given him a sense of belonging and peace.

"This has meant so much to Umar and to me," Saddique explained. "His faith is part of who he is, and seeing the team respect and support that has been a dream come true."

"For years, Umar's behaviours had been misunderstood. But at Walkern Lodge, the staff recognised that his rituals and repetitive behaviours were part of his autism, not aggression.

"That understanding has made all the difference. Where others saw aggression, Walkern Lodge saw ritual and communication. They knew the right calming words,

they respected his routines, and they showed patience. That respect has changed everything.

“Most importantly, Umar is happy, settled, and confident. He finally has a safe, stable place he can call home. The progress he has made is more than I ever thought possible.

“I am so grateful to Jamil and the whole team at Walkern Lodge. They didn't give up when things were hard. They showed patience, commitment, and compassion. For me, it is a pleasure to work with them to give my brother the best care. I never imagined Umar could progress this much, but Walkern Lodge has shown what is possible with the right care and dedication.

Walkern Lodge has given Umar the dignity, independence, and joy that I had always hoped for him. I truly believe they have given Umar the best chance for a happy and dignified life. They have made our family's dream come true.”

Umar's journey is being shared as part of Cygnet Social Care's Hopes and Dreams campaign, which shines a light on the incredible progress individuals can make when given the right support, patience, and understanding. The campaign celebrates stories like Umar's - where dignity, independence, and joy become possible - and shows how specialist care helps people and their families turn long-held hopes into everyday realities.