

Postlands House



Matilda's* story



Since leaving Eastern Europe and arriving in the UK, Matilda and her family faced a series of challenges. Her parents were trafficked and forced to work around the clock just to pay their rent. Over time, this took its toll and her parents turned to drugs to help them cope with their exhaustion.

For Matilda and her younger sister, life became unsettled and unpredictable. At 13 her attendance at school was declining and she was being left in charge of her little sister when her parents were at work, which was now most of the time. Men were also starting to visit the house on a regular basis and she was at high risk of child sexual exploitation.

Things went from bad to worse – Matilda frequently went missing and wasn't attending school. She became friendly with a girl who had already been exploited, started going to visit older men with her and became addicted to heroin. Her vulnerability and safety was becoming a real concern and so Matilda was placed into care.

After a short placement that broke down, she arrived at Postlands House aged 14, where she received a warm welcome and a feeling of people caring about her for the first time in years. However, when she arrived she was in very poor health, malnourished with a skin condition and her hair was falling out. She struggled to open up to anyone or trust anyone and spoke hardly any English, so communicating with others was very difficult.

However, with specialist support from the team at Postlands House and her key worker Sarah, within a few weeks Matilda started to build her confidence and she discovered that she enjoyed being cared for, cooked for, listened to and generally nurtured. Structures and consistent boundaries were quickly put in place for Matilda, and she responded to these in a positive way, regarding them as a sign that the staff truly cared about her wellbeing.

Matilda was still not in education when she arrived at Postlands so her carers fought to get her back into the school she had previously attended when she arrived in England, to provide her with some continuity and familiarity in her education. Her English improved as a result and her attendance dramatically improved.

Three months after arriving at Postlands, Matilda had built positive, strong relationships with staff and the other young people living there. Her strength of character and sense of humour was beginning to show and it became clear that she wanted to achieve and had ambitions in life.

According to the Manager at Postlands House, "We realised that she loved spending time talking to the staff and would often sit in the office chatting away and making us all laugh. Like a flower, she started to open up, as she started to trust the people around her and felt like she had a supporting, caring family around her for the first time since arriving in the UK."

As the home manager, I had to be the one to say no, be firm and take action, when needed. Matilda completely understood this and saw me as the safe person – mum and dad rolled into one."

E clearly knew right from wrong and had good morals in addition to her strength of character. This helped her fit back into school and have a clear vision of what she wanted.

At this time her little sister was taken into foster care with the intention of being adopted, as her parents could not keep her safe. Her father was imprisoned then deported and her mother went missing.

Despite being desperately worried about her family, Matilda continued to thrive at Postlands. At age 16 she was now in a relationship, her teachers regarded her highly, she achieved in all her GCSEs, and was attempting to rebuild family ties with her auntie who lived in the area. She attended her school prom and looked amazing – like a completely different person from when she arrived at the home. Full of life, confidence and brimming with love.

But soon after this she received another blow when her mother went missing. With the help of the staff team, they were able to track her down and locate her in a derelict building used by addicts. She was in very poor health, but working in conjunction with the local council were able to get her into a homeless shelter with rehabilitation for her drug addiction.

At age 17, Matilda had an opportunity to move on from Postlands House and live independently. She fiercely protested about leaving the home and made a formal complaint, but staff knew it was the right thing and that she was ready for the next stage in her life's journey. She now lives with another person in a flat not far from the home and staff still visit regularly to see how she is getting on. She chose to move out of the home on New Year's Eve – In her words, "new year, new start!"

Her confidence has grown beyond all expectations and she has achieved so much in her life since arriving at Postlands House – she has completed a nursery placement and is currently completing a Health and Social Care Level 2 course. She ultimately wants to be a social worker with an aim of transforming other young people's lives and drawing on her own personal journey and discovery of love, care and belonging. In her own words, "Postlands are my family, they have given me the environment and love I needed to achieve my life goals."

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