



Changing
Our Lives

Mandy Warner
A force of nature



**No one is too disabled,
or too affected by
mental health difficulties,
to lead an ordinary life**

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A force of nature

An Ordinary Life

Changing Our Lives' work is rooted in the belief that no one is too disabled and no one's mental health is too complex to lead an 'ordinary life'. Whatever our area of work, the drive for people to lead ordinary lives is at the heart of our approach. An ordinary life, first coined by the King's Fund in their seminal report *An Ordinary Life* (Kings Fund 1980), promoted the concept that people with learning disabilities should live in ordinary houses, in ordinary streets, and be part of ordinary communities.

Kings Fund. (1980). *An Ordinary Life: Comprehensive locally based residential services for mentally handicapped people*, London: Kings Fund.

We often take for granted certain things such as having a partner, a good job, or living in our own home. These are ordinary and everyday things that make up our life. Disabled people are often faced with barriers which make these everyday, ordinary things very difficult to achieve. Some of these barriers may be internal, but more often than not society places barriers in the way of individuals. These barriers can be other people's attitudes, a lack of creative thinking or physical barriers.

Mandy's story is one in a series of Ordinary Life books. Each story illustrates that an ordinary life is possible for disabled people if they have the right support and resources to make this happen.

Mandy sharing a
meeting in 2006



"I've known Mandy for just under 20 years. I would best describe her as a force of nature. She's aware of her rights, bright as a button and strives to ensure she is independent and in control of her life. Mandy worked for Changing Our Lives between 2003-2007. She was recognised for her work within the world of learning disabilities both nationally and locally. She's just rejoined our team and has already infused new life and positivity into our work."

Jayne Leeson MBE

CEO, Changing Our Lives

Living in my own home and being independent is really important to me. I like things the way I like them and my home is set up in the way I want it. I wouldn't want to lose that. A long time ago I had to live in different hospitals and I hated it. You are controlled, you can't leave, people give you injections, other people pick on you and staff restrain you - it was awful! Now I am in my own home and have been for many years, I love it because I get more choice and freedom to live my life the way I want to. I've got my flat just the way I want it. I chose all of my own furniture and decor.



"Mandy is a lovely person. She lives life her way. We've had some good times together over the years."

Violet Falconer,
Support Worker,
CareTech

I have a strong relationship with Violet, who is my key worker. I have known Violet since 2012 and over the years she has enabled me to gain control over my day to day life. She knows me well; she knows when I am in a good mood and, like us all, when I am having an off day.

When I clean, I do it with Violet because we are a team. We do most things together like this. If it were up to me, I might not do it at all.

As I don't really like cleaning, Violet taught me to clean to music. Now I only clean to music. I like 80s music, UB40, Duran Duran and Shaking Stevens but Abba is probably one of my all time favourites, especially *Knowing Me, Knowing You*.

I love to dance - you could say I'm the dancing queen!



"Me and Mandy work together as a team. We've done this for years and it works for Mandy."

Violet Falconer, Support Worker, CareTech

I have other staff as well as Violet but I like to have one day a week without staff. This gives me space and complete freedom then to do what I want to do. I made this decision myself as I knew it was what I needed. I also choose which staff I work with and will let people know if I don't want them in my home. Other people decide who they want in their homes, so it's no different for me.

Although I love living independently, I know there are some challenges. I am very sociable and love speaking with all sort of people.



"Mandy loves to talk and to be at the centre of things. She will sing and dance in a coffee shop. I remember we went to Primark in Birmingham once and there was a choir singing. Mandy went straight up to them and started to sing and dance."

Violet Falconer, Support Worker,
CareTech



Being so sociable means sometimes I can be vulnerable. When people ask me to do something, especially if I think they are my friend, I might do what they want. My staff know this about me and so they work with me to make sure I know how to keep myself safe.

I love going out. I usually take the bus or the tram. I either go out on my own or with my staff. I like shopping in Walsall, West Bromwich and Birmingham. West Bromwich is my favourite place to go. I like to treat myself to new clothes. I especially like shopping in Primark and finding a bargain. I also like shopping in Tesco and Iceland.

I've had boyfriends in the past and being in a relationship is important to me, but I also don't want to lose control of being able to make my own decisions. Violet says, "it's Mandy's way, or no way", which I think is right! Taking my time and making my own choices is really important to me and sometimes men can be just too much pressure.

When people get to know me, they realise how competitive I am. To be honest, I like the praise and I like it when people cheer me on. Sport plays a big role in my life. I've been swimming and doing athletics since I was a child and I also play bowls and tennis. I've been involved in the Special Olympics for about 30 years. I've made a lot of friends through sport. I train for swimming and athletics every week and I have missed this during the pandemic.

I've competed all over the country. I've been to London, Stoke-on-Trent, Redditch, Birmingham, Halesowen, Dudley, Isle of White, Stafford, Scotland, Sheffield, Leicester, Wolverhampton, and Worcester to name a few!

Out of all of the sports swimming is my real passion. I'd like to go back to London to swim in the 50m pool. I've swam for the West Midlands and for Sandwell. Most of my medals are for swimming. My favourite medals are from the anniversary games and the national games as I trained very hard for these and it feels like a great achievement. When we were talking about this book, I was asked why I don't put my medals on display. I said that if we looked at all of my medals, this book would go on forever and that if I displayed my medals on the wall, the wall would collapse.



Mandy with a selection of her medals!

Holidays are also an important part of my life. I have been to the Isle of White, Blackpool, Devon, Cornwall, Minehead, Jersey and Guernsey. I've been to the travel agent with Violet recently to get some quotes for my next holiday.

I am close to my brother, Mark, who lives in Brighton. We speak each week on the phone and I visit him once a year. I also have two nieces and two nephews. Before lockdown, my niece would meet up with me at Nando's. I've missed seeing my family during lockdown.



"In July of 2022, Mandy celebrates her 50th Birthday: plans for a celebration are already unfolding, Mandy knows what she wants and who she wants to celebrate with. Who would have thought nearly 47 years ago, when she moved in to become part of our family, that she would have achieved so much. Mandy lives independently with support from CareTech, the support is outstanding, enabling her to make positive choices and have an excellent quality of life. Violet, her main support, facilitates Mandy's choices; when they are ambitious, Violet's support enables Mandy to be aspirational in her desires, wants, and wishes.

Mandy is a sports fanatic, spending much of her time with Special Olympics. She swims for Sandwell and the West Midlands, representing the latter in the National Games. Medals galore of all colours - many of which are golds - are to be found in her flat. She says 'taking part' is what counts, but we know she wants to be on the podium and she always, without exception, gives her all.

Mandy has a wide circle of friends in her sporting family: she appreciates their support and encouragement, but is herself a great source of encouragement. She has developed confidence over her years of independent living and she enjoys her independence and freedom. As a family, we are immensely proud of Mandy."

Mark (Eldest Brother)

Looking back...



I've done a lot in my life. I was in college for several years and then went to the Employment Preparation Unit - I did packing, computers, cooking and catering. I went on to work in retail and I had a job at Beatties in Dudley. Although it's difficult today for people with learning disabilities to get jobs, in those days it was almost impossible.

Between 2003-2007, I worked for Changing Our Lives:



2003

I was chair person of Sandwell's Learning Disability Partnership Board. After the launch of the White Paper, Valuing People in 2001 which said that people with learning disabilities should have equal rights and be included in the community, Partnership Boards were set up in each area.

2003 - 2004

I was elected to the National Forum of People with Learning Difficulties. This forum was made up of elected people with learning disabilities from all over England. I represented the West Midlands region, with Michael

I was also elected Chair Person of Sandwell People First (the previous name used by Changing Our Lives). I was a charitable trustee at this time and had support from other trustees to make decisions on behalf of the organisation.





2004

In January 2004, I was part of the Social Services Inspectorate (now Care Quality Commission) team that went into Walsall Council. I was one of the first people with learning disabilities in England to be part of a team inspecting a council.

In 2004, I also went to Parliament in Westminster to learn more about how it ran so I could help develop the Learning Disability People's Parliament in Sandwell. I worked as an MP in the Parliament for several years after that.



2005 - 2007

I worked with a team of people with learning disabilities, Nigel Smith, Steven Ellis and Margaret Wyre with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (not Care Quality Commission) to find out if adults with learning disabilities across 45 homes in Birmingham were living good lives. This pilot project was also taking part in 8 other areas of the country, with wider groups of disabled people, and was the start of the Expert by Experience programme.



Looking forward, I'm in such a good place now, and I want to make sure my life stays this good. Speaking up for the rights of people with learning disabilities is really important to me, so I will be doing more of this. I'm not sure what other things will be in my future, but that's what life's about - the adventure!



Changing Our Lives

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