



Liam's Story

I was referred to LINK as a teenager with problems 'fitting in' and interacting with others. I was self-harming, school had fallen apart and I was heading in a bad direction. Little did I know that I was about to meet a shining supernova called Jane, who played a big part in the years that would follow and indeed still helps me now, 6 tough years later.

I was matched with a befriender who was young and with whom I could easily relate. He provided me with an outlet who was not an authority, a family member or required to be there. He was just a guy who had gone through his own experiences. He gave me a chance to get a break from my problems and talk about them freely. Being with him gave me a regular break from the cage that I felt I was trapped in.

My befriender was a very outdoorsy person who encouraged me to get out and about. At the time I was very introverted and spent most of my day in my bedroom so the change to getting out and about in his company was ideal for me. Sometimes we would go to Tentsmuir and go for a walk or drive his remote control buggy, other times we would just go for a drive. I never felt the need to go to events or attractions; his company was what gave me that respite. The best moment we had was sitting by the harbour in Anstruther with fish and chips, just chatting about random things. My befriender didn't care what I had done, what was wrong with me or how alien I felt - he just spoke to me like a human being.

My relationship with my befriender and the impact it had on me inspired me to become a befriender myself. The first person that I met was a young man whose experiences seemed to cause him the same sense of isolation that I had, so I felt that I could relate to him, like my befriender before me I tried to keep things outdoors and relaxed.

My second match was a young man who had some history that matched aspects of my own and so again I felt that I could relate easily to him. He also seemed very lost in the world and was going down a bad path. My intentions were not to tell him 'This is wrong' or 'You shouldn't be doing that', I simply tried to be somebody that he could be honest with. I made it clear to him that unless I felt he was in danger everything that he said to me was confidential and slowly but surely, he began to open-up. In response, I gave him honest advice though I was careful to never make it sound like I was telling him what to do. I tried my best to help him see the consequences of where he was going.

In my time with LINK as both befriender and befriender I attended a few social events. These were great as I was able catch up with people that I had met previously and could see the progress that they, and myself, had made years later.

Since then I have gained a degree in biomedical science. In the summer of 2017, before starting my 4th year I completed an internship carrying out some research on cancer immunotherapies CRUK The Beatson Institute, Glasgow. I have since completed a further internship with CRUK at The Babraham Institute, Cambridge and am now studying for a PhD at The University of Glasgow. Once that is complete hopefully I'll win four Nobel prizes for my work in cancer immunology research, although I guess I would settle for one. Or would I? I think that my experiences with LINK, in conjunction with the other help that I was lucky enough to receive as a teenager, has made me a stronger person and honestly, why restrict myself to one? I feel like I could do anything!