

The Fragile X Society

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My Week by Andrew

I go to Yeovil college.

I catch the number 30 bus to Chard and then catch the bus to Yeovil.

Mondays I do work experience at the Manor Hotel. I am down the stairs in the main kitchen. I help them out down there. I do the fruit salads. Monday evenings I do art.

Tuesdays I'm in college all day doing Kitchen Portering. It's mainly cooking. I wear the catering gear.

Wednesdays is football all day for me. I see the canteen gang - I did work experience in the canteen. We've all got nicknames off the Two Smoking Barrels film. I'm Bad Boy Vinnie Jones, Sue's Gloria, the boss is Tan.

Thursdays I'm in college doing Kitchen Portering again. It's good.

Fridays is easy - I just go to lessons all day. At lunchtime I pop into the main gym for just half an hour. I do the hand weights.

On Saturdays I go to the club, play pool, and have a pint.

In the holidays I get the train from Axminster to Waterloo – mum meets me.

I pop down to the cinema.

I pop down to the Leather Bottle Fridays to see my mates.

I pop in to HMV for videos and cds mostly.

"Mum" adds...

And now, what was intended to be a few explanatory words from "mum" which have turned out a bit longer!

Andrew is 20 and lives in Somerset during term time with Fiz in her home, which is described as a 'small care home', with two other lads also in their twenties. Andrew then comes home to us in Essex during the holidays when he does all his "popping down" as he puts it, with his family!

We are very thrilled that Andrew now travels on the train up to Waterloo on his own - quite an achievement we think, and something I never thought he would ever be able to do when I remember the overactive, 'do first think later', 'no sense of danger' child of yesteryear! We don't do 'changes' though - that is changes on trains - wouldn't want you running away with your imaginations! Recently when Andrew was returning to Somerset we discovered only moments before his train was about to leave that "all passengers on this train will change at Basingstoke". But 'we' don't do changes at Basingstoke, I thought. Oh heck, am I going to be going to Basingstoke I wondered? But no. Help was at hand - in fact many hands went up in the carriage when having garnered up my courage and with only minutes to go before the train would leave the station I made a brief announcement along the lines of "My son is used to going to Axminster

but has never had to change trains before. Would someone see him off the train at Basingstoke and on to the connection?" My voice got higher and higher with anxiety. And then amidst all the hands that went up, one young man not much older than Andrew stepped forward, and relief spread over Andrew's face! Mine too!

Andrew also mentions his kitchen portering course, which is in fact, wait for it — perhaps sit down even - NVQ Level 1 Kitchen Portering! When Andrew's tutors suggested that Andrew might be accepted on this course we felt as though he had been offered a place at Oxford! I can't tell you how amazing this is for a chap who, though he began school in mainstream, by juniors was attending a school for moderate learning disabilities, at 16 went to residential college for students with learning difficulties, and at 18 started at the supported learning school at Yeovil College (which has been marvellous). All their project courses include work experience, which actually happens on day one of the September term, which I know isn't always the case at many FE colleges. Amongst many other activities, Yeovil College also offer annual holidays for their students and Andrew will be going off for the second time to Spain for a week in May - flying Bristol to Malaga, dining out every night - and all for only £300! I wouldn't mind a week in Spain for £300 and all he apparently will need is £70 pocket money to cover meals out and beers!

I am writing all this because I so much want to encourage parents never to put a ceiling on what our youngsters can achieve. Andrew has truly amazed us in what he has achieved and I know now that there is still probably a lot of achieving still in him. Just like the rest of us, our children go on learning throughout their lives. Hand on heart Andrew was a typical fragile X child - a no sleeping, 100 mile an hour child, shortest attention span, always pushing mum to the limit, not speaking before five, and still all over his college reports are the words "slow down Andrew"!

Truly Andrew is having a ball. I'm convinced he thinks the world is his oyster. He wants to grab life, will have a go at everything, and is described by his tutors as a keen, interested, well motivated, conscientious student - I can't believe it's my boy! Well not the same one that was exhausting, exasperating and demanding - 24 hours a day.

He is off with a team from the college to Dartmoor this Friday to sleep in a tent, and then walk the following day with the Army over 20k of the Ten Tors. And when his sister and father see him come in at the end of the course, Elwin, Andrew's tutor, will still be calling "Slow down Andrew"!!!! I know because I was there when he came in from the same hike two years ago!

That's my boy! Love him to bits! Oh and I've not told you about his wonderful sense of humour - but then you know about that don't you!

Lynne

Membership of the Fragile X Society is free to fragile X families and carers living in the UK. The Society also welcomes as associate members those with a professional interest in fragile X and families living outside the UK join as overseas members.

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The Fragile X Society is a registered charity no 1003981.