



Case Study: self-neglect

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 - **Live Well Swindon**

Maggie: I'm on top of things. I'm organising a house swap and moving to Oxford. I've seen a lovely house that will make all the difference to me. I love my job and I am good at it. I love my dogs. Without them I would never have coped. I can't keep on top of things. Nothing changes. I know my life is chaotic but I am so good at hiding it, I start to believe my own lies. I had a really traumatic break up in Swindon, if I could leave here I would be better. I feel so angry. I can't stand my landlord – things have broken down there and things are getting worse with my son. He says I should take the dogs out but I can't because I have tennis elbow and they yank the lead. I'm buying things I don't need because I want things to look better, make my house look nice and live a nicer life. But I know I can't change. I have no motivation. When my boiler broke I stopped washing myself. I'm not going to ask for help – they will take my dogs away.

What do we see and hear?

Maggie functions effectively in her work and pretends that life is going well to the outside world. Her home is in a poor state and her lifestyle is chaotic. She has three large dogs who don't get walked and either use the house or garden as their toilet. Relationship with landlord is failing. Neighbours complain and are anxious that Maggie's house will catch fire. Maggie has aspirations for a different life but is not motivated to make changes, other than buying large items that would make her home or garden look more impressive to passers by. These never make it to their place in her home or garden. She has developed the ability to show that things are going well, even when they aren't. Her walkways are cluttered and where we see carpet, it is covered in peat that was delivered for the garden – but never made it out of the house. Maggie walks around in her pyjamas and barefoot, her feet are dirty, Maggie has no hot water and is not motivated to manage her personal hygiene. She is at risk of eviction but believes that she can organise a house swap and escape.

Maggie needs to find the right support to improve her mental health and manage her anger which is having a destructive impact on her relationships.



Meet Maggie


Connection

Texts were exchanged before Adele met Maggie on the doorstep – no pressure to go inside.

After some rapport was built up –Maggie let Adele look through the window.

Adele was curious but never judgemental.

Adele gave Maggie time and space to use her own words to describe her situation



I'm not "attached" to the stuff I buy, I just want a different life, and buying stuff feels like a way to achieve that.

Action

Initial objective – Safety, clear walkways throughout property, remove peat to discourage dogs from fouling in house, liaise with housing agency/landlord to arrange boiler repair. This was completed largely by Live Well Navigators but with an approach that encouraged Maggie to participate in the activity, which she did. Maggie has also engaged with a counselling service to talk through her emotional issues.

Next steps

Baby steps for Maggie to get her property into a condition where it would be suitable for a house swap. This will require regular, non judgmental visits where Maggie is supported to co-produce a plan for change, and is regularly supported to achieve her objectives. We can also look for signs of Maggie slipping into habits where she abandons self care and address these as and when needed. We will also explore options for Maggie's dogs (volunteer dog walker for example) to improve their quality of life.

Relationship

Adele came to understand how Maggie was operating. She has a pretend life where everything is great, her house is full of lovely things, she is confident, a successful home based worker for a local authority in London. By slowly building trust and being tenacious but non judgemental, whilst taking things at Maggie's pace, Adele was allowed to see this with her own eyes as Maggie shared her truth. As the trust grew – Adele was able to share this trusting relationship with other team members.

Sandie: I grew up in London just after the war. Everything was still being rationed so “waste not want not” and “make do and mend” were sayings that were instilled in me from an early age. My mum kept everything. I have lost so many people that were important to me my best friend – she was wonderful, we lived together, my mum, so many others have gone, there is no one left. I don’t trust people who say they want to help, I don’t want people coming into my home. I don’t see what the problem is – I am managing ok. I don’t see that I am causing any problems at all. I hate the idea of landfill – it really frightens me so I do keep a bit of plastic in the flat. My intention is to rinse it out and pop it into the recycling, but my mobility isn’t what it was, so it does tend to mount up a bit. I can’t pay for someone to come in here and help me, even if I could afford it I would be too ashamed. If I feel lonely I can go to the lounge and chat to people.

How Sandie came to our attention.

Sandie was referred to us as she would not answer her door to Social Workers. No one really knew the extent of the hoarding but she was upsetting neighbours at the sheltered accommodation where she lived because she kept setting off her fire alarm and they noticed an unpleasant smell coming from her property.

What do we see and hear?

Sandie wasn’t aware of a problem and wasn’t keen to let us into her home. Sandie is motivated by her aspirations to protect the planet. Sandie feels alone and bereft. Sandie shakes uncontrollably and may have an undiagnosed health condition. Sandie cannot make steps towards change on her own because she feels shame. Having control over her own space and her possessions are important to her, but the items that are causing her home to be less safe and functional are not items that she is emotionally attached to. She does place significance on the appropriate disposal of items.



Meet Sandie

Connection

Adele asked the warden how she might meet Sandie after failed attempts to make contact. Sandie does her laundry every Tuesday, so Adele placed herself in the laundry room on that day to initiate a conversation. Sandie shared her story with Adele. When the laundry was finished Adele offered to carry it back to her flat. Adele asked Sandie if she could pop her head around the door of the flat – just to be sure that it was safe. She emphasised that there was no judgement. Adele then asked if she could pop in. She told Sandie that at any moment– she could ask Adele to leave. Sandie let Adele in. The floor, bathroom, bedroom and kitchen are covered in have used plastic bottles of milk. Adele can smell the sour milk. The bath/shower is full of toilet rolls and it would not be possible for Sandie to shower. Sandie buys more food than she needs and there are bags of rotton food around the home.



I don't think I can trust people. The people I loved and trusted are gone.

Action

Support Sandie to clear some of the floor space to reduce the risk of falls and ensure safe passage through the flat. Clear the bathroom so that Sandie can wash and maintain her personal hygiene. Organise for the Fire service (Safe and Well) to visit and install smoke detectors. Build rapport with Sandie to establish a relationship between her and the Navigators. Regular visits and practical support, honouring the importance Sandie places on recycling.

Next steps

Sandie is ready for her home environment to change, but not quite ready to change her habits to achieve this and her mobility creates another barrier. We continue to visit Sandie to ensure her walkways are clear and can look at alternatives to her current shopping habits e.g. milk/shopping deliveries. We will also look to support Sandie to engage with other professionals to ensure that her care needs are met.



Contact details-

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Our referral form can be found here: [Live Well Swindon Hub referral form | Swindon Borough Council](#)