

The Shires

Ben's parents Nick & Louise Haslam talk about why The Shires is right for their son



Ben Haslam was diagnosed with autism when he was 18 months old. His autism is severe, and his parents Nick and Louise became aware that as he grew up they weren't going to be able to cope with him at home. He arrived at The Shires in May 2011 and has made so much progress that the family is hoping that he'll move to Millfield, the adult residential provision.

Louise: It was a really hard decision because a lot of people think that you're failing as parents, but its actually about getting the best possible outcome for your child. We wouldn't have survived if we had kept him at home: we'd have given up and gone under.

He had severe challenging behaviour: it wasn't just the autism, it was his behaviour. He was punching us, kicking us, pulling out our hair. We were beaten down emotionally and physically we couldn't have done it any longer.

At The Shires they don't think about what the child can't do, which a lot of other places focus on. At The Shires they always focus on what the children can do and try it, and see if they can. They never just assume that Ben can't do something and it makes a big difference.

Nick: The staff are very experienced. They know what they're doing, and it's hard to

put it any other way.

We have had instances where Ben has come home for a weekend and something has gone wrong – for whatever reason and they are straight in to help. We've had to call them and even when Ben's not at The Shires, the staff are still on call for us. They're always there for us. Nothing seems to be too much trouble for them, I think that's the critical thing.

Louise: For us it brings peace of mind. We know they can handle any situation and we don't worry about him any more. Before The Shires, in another placement, we worried about him every single day.

We know that whatever he brings on that day, they will cope with it.

We've got peace of mind now he's at The Shires and we never had that before.

Nick: It's not just about the one person at the top, you can see it through the whole range of staff. It comes back to the fact that they know what they're doing for this particular range of children.

Louise: Whatever needs to be done for Ben, it's done. They just get on and do it.

Ben has progressed and now I can ask him to do little things. It might not mean much to other people but little things like i'll ask him: "Ben can you go and put this in the bin please" and he'll go and do it. It's just amazing!

Now he'll get out of the car with us if we go somewhere new. That's progress for him.

He always used to drink from a lidded beaker and now he drinks from a proper cup. Using a knife and fork is progress for him.

There's loads of progress. He's even started shaving now and that's progress too because that's a really big thing in his life.

We know he is in the right place. You get lots of photographs back from The Shires. We know he's doing all the fun stuff on activities as well as all the educational stuff too.

We know he's having a really good time. The Shires has changed his life, it's changed our life and although he can't tell us we KNOW that he's happy.



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