

RACHEL

*From crisis to confidence
with My Life's
Catering & Hospitality Pathway*

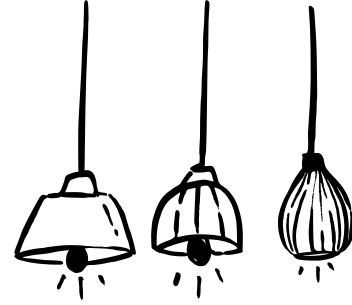
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Stable Door Café
Homemade, feelgood food

Welcome



When we started My Life in 2012, we were a group of families who simply wanted something better for the people we loved who needed some support to live a good life. We wanted our loved ones to have access to meaningful, purposeful opportunities every day, to make an active contribution to their communities and feel included rather than excluded.

My Life was formed, and through our services and expertise our organisation has made a genuine difference to thousands of people's lives across the North West. From horticulture to woodwork, catering to animal care, drama to art, music to fitness, we offer a massive range of meaningful life and work opportunities.

Our CQC-registered care service, My Life Support, meanwhile, has reduced isolation and increased confidence in people. Partly, that's because My Life has always been about giving people a hand-up rather than a hand out, about recognising people's skills, gifts and talents and using them to make a positive difference.

The successes we've enjoyed with people on these person-centred packages of support has encouraged us to model a pathway for people where they can begin a Catering and Hospitality programme based at our popular community cafe, Stable Door. When we say that we serve feel good food, we really do; not only is any income we generate reinvested into the work of My Life, but many of the fresh ingredients are grown by the charity's members on our 84-acre countryside site, or locally sourced within a 20-mile radius.

We have always offered My Life members the opportunity to develop real world catering and hospitality skills with us, offering work experience and apprenticeship opportunities, and our new Catering and Hospitality pathway will formalise and structure the work we do at Stable Door into a meaningful programme.

This Catering and Hospitality programme is a unique, person-centred pathway guided by professionals taking place over a number of days each week depending on the needs of participants. It involves everything from culinary techniques to food safety, housekeeping to service skills.

Whenever a particular programme or course comes to an end, we'd love students to be confident and skilled enough to consider opportunities outside of My Life - with or without our support. They may have gained some qualifications too.

But most of all, they will have developed functional skills and networks which they should be able to transfer to every part of their daily lives. We work in partnership with other cafes, care homes and community establishments in the local area to ensure members get a wide range of experience outside Stable Door too, with our support.

Read Rachel's story and you'll see what a difference our environment can make.



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Rachel's story

When Rachel first came to My Life in 2023 it's fair to say this incredible woman and her family were at something of a crisis point.

With her previous provider no longer willing to offer the kind of safe, secure and predictable environment Rachel needed to thrive, it felt for the family that they had been cast aside, left alone to cater for a gifted woman who needed support to navigate both autism and communication challenges due to her deafness.

As her mother Ann puts it; "It was a traumatic time, just trying to find something that that would work for Rachel."

Indeed, when she first came to My Life, it's fair to say her communication and confidence were at a real low. Activities would only be attempted with a lot of support and guidance.

And yet, because that support and guidance were there, it didn't take long for Rachel to show that she was a quick and skilled learner and team player - she just needed the chance.

The fact that, two years on, Rachel is a confident and important member of My Life's **Stable Door Cafe** team, feels heard and safe, and most of all is happy, is testament to both My Life's commitment to creating a supportive environment and to Rachel's own hard work.

"Honestly," says Lyndsey Heaton, My Life's Catering & Hospitality Manager, **"she is a complete inspiration to everyone here, from other My Life members to our staff and to me. She's proof that if you give people a chance, if you listen to what they need and want, then they can really achieve so much."**



Supporting Rachel through a difficult transition

My Life always say that the people we work with aren't challenging. Rather it's finding a solution to the situation they find themselves in through no fault of their own which is **our** challenge.

In Rachel's case, her deafness, autism and some behaviours were not barriers to her coming to My Life. Instead, we wanted to find the right support for Rachel to help her feel she could make confident contributions to both her day and the community around her.

Initially, that meant trialling a day a week at **My Life Opportunities**, primarily as part of our arts and crafts programme. It didn't quite work for Rachel - she likes to be busy, so being part of group activities wasn't quite engaging her as her family would have liked.

It was at this point **My Life Support** worker Grace Blackshaw spoke with the family and suggested that Rachel explored elements of My Life's Catering and Hospitality pathway at **Stable Door Cafe**, our inclusive, public cafe at **Thompson House Equestrian Centre**.

"Grace was really fantastic," says Ann. "She literally scooped Rachel up and said, 'right, I'll get her in the cafe. She'll love it.' And she did, almost immediately, because Lyndsey really got Rachel; she understood that she needs to be busy, she's quite quick.

"Ok, she doesn't speak, but she can read, she can write, and she picks things up. Give her a recipe to make with supervision and she'll go and do it. As Lyndsey says, she spots jobs!"



Pathways to progression at Stable Door Cafe

As soon as Rachel started at Stable Door, the team worked hard to find out what she wanted to do. They found out that she loved to bake and prepare food, and liked being given the responsibility of both ticking jobs off a list and knowing what would be expected from her.

“Basically,” says Lyndsey, “it was immediately obvious that she would have a lot to offer.”

Understanding and communicating all this was of course a two-way process. Initially the team used a whiteboard because Rachel can read, and Rachel's Mum was also encouraged to do some informal training about how best to engage with her. Rachel can lip read too, so staff steadily used some more expressive techniques, and they have all learned some sign language.

“And we learned some of that from Rachel herself,” says Lyndsey. “So it's true to say that Rachel has brought a lot to us, too, because we are all much more skilled in non-verbal communication.”

Indeed, Rachel's Mum is encouraging My Life to have more staff with formal qualifications in sign language, something which the organisation is committed to putting in place. In that sense, the relationship with Rachel and her family is more of a partnership than a support-based transaction.



OUTCOME

Communication

Rachel will now share her emotions using signs, movements, written phrases, or pictures, giving her more ways to communicate.

“We thought Rachel seemed a little unsettled but she pointed to ‘happy’ on her emotion pictures, so we knew that she was feeling OK.”

OUTCOME

Responsibility

Rachel has become more independent and proactive. She has started to understand the benefits of staying calm.

“Rachel was very calm and focused after the incident yesterday, very productive, baking and prepping for the week.”

Rachel finds her place in the team

Rachel's quick learning and proactive nature were evident right from the start. Taking on tasks such as filling salt and pepper shakers and wrapping utensils, demonstrating initiative and efficiency as well as all the baking skills, she relatively quickly progressed from one day a week at Stable Door to two, with a further day pencilled in from summer 2024.

She now attends three days a week and on Fridays volunteers with our support.

Everyone was careful about introducing that gradually given Rachel likes a routine. Lyndsey remembers that when she first started, she would go into the back of the kitchen when a dog came into the cafe and get quite upset.

But it just took some regular sessions in what is – after all – an animal friendly cafe – for her to get used to it. “Now, she even strokes my puppy Luna,” says Lyndsey.

And it's the fact that she's gone from being in a session needing 1:1 support to being part of a team making a contribution which made everyone feel this was a pathway Rachel could cope with.

“Her skills are unreal; she is genuinely helping us,” says Lyndsey. “She's got on so well with my younger members of staff and they've learned to work with her. So that feeling that she's part of a team, that she fits in, has become really valuable too.”



OUTCOME

Perseverance

Rachel now shows enthusiasm to complete a range of activities independently.

“Rachel persevered when making a traybake for the first time as this involved folding flour slowly using a figure eight.”

OUTCOME

Confidence

Rachel will now attempt activities that she was previously afraid of.

“Rachel is attempting lots of new tasks - setting up for events, coffee mornings, working in the pop-up café, using the till. She is now happy attending sessions without her mum.”

Daisy is one of those younger members of staff - who has not only been a massive part of Rachel's journey - but has also stepped up to the task herself given she had no previous support experience. Daisy says:

"It's been great working with Rachel and I have learned so much supporting her. And I've learned so much about people over the past year too - how not everyone uses words to speak. It's truly unbelievable how you can understand most things that Rachel wants and needs if you give it time and patience."

"Our relationship has flourished by having the same interests baking and decorating cakes. We have done a few events together - set up for afternoon teas and put together graze boards for the community events - and it's been fantastic."

And the next goal is to get Rachel working in the community with our support but in a different environment where she will be similarly appreciated. Lyndsey says:

"I just know that given the chance she could do it. She can progress even further; this is just the start."



OUTCOME

Building Relationships

Rachel reacts well to interest shown to her by another person.

"Rachel is building relationships with other members - looking at ID badges and signing their names."

OUTCOME

Teamwork

Rachel has become supportive of others and likes to make them feel at ease.

"She helps new staff by showing them where things are. She feels like a valued part of the team because of how much she contributes, and she is highly productive."

Tracked Outcomes

My Life is committed to employing regular reviews and reporting to understand how the people and families we work with and for are using My Life, how they are feeling, where we can improve and where we are performing well.

For those who have been on pathways at Stable Door and Thompson House Equestrian Centre we've been focusing on their communication, confidence, teamwork, responsibility, how they build relationships and perseverance.

In Rachel's case we are thrilled that there have been big improvements in all these measures. She now answers questions using more extended language, will try something again if she has not been successful in a previous attempt, and will listen to others and contribute ideas while starting to lead at appropriate times.

Best of all, she demonstrates total enthusiasm to complete a range of activities independently and is willing to have a go at things, with some support, that are outside her comfort zone.

Presented below are Rachel's tracked outcomes at 6 monthly intervals for the period January 2024 to July 2025.



Rachel's future

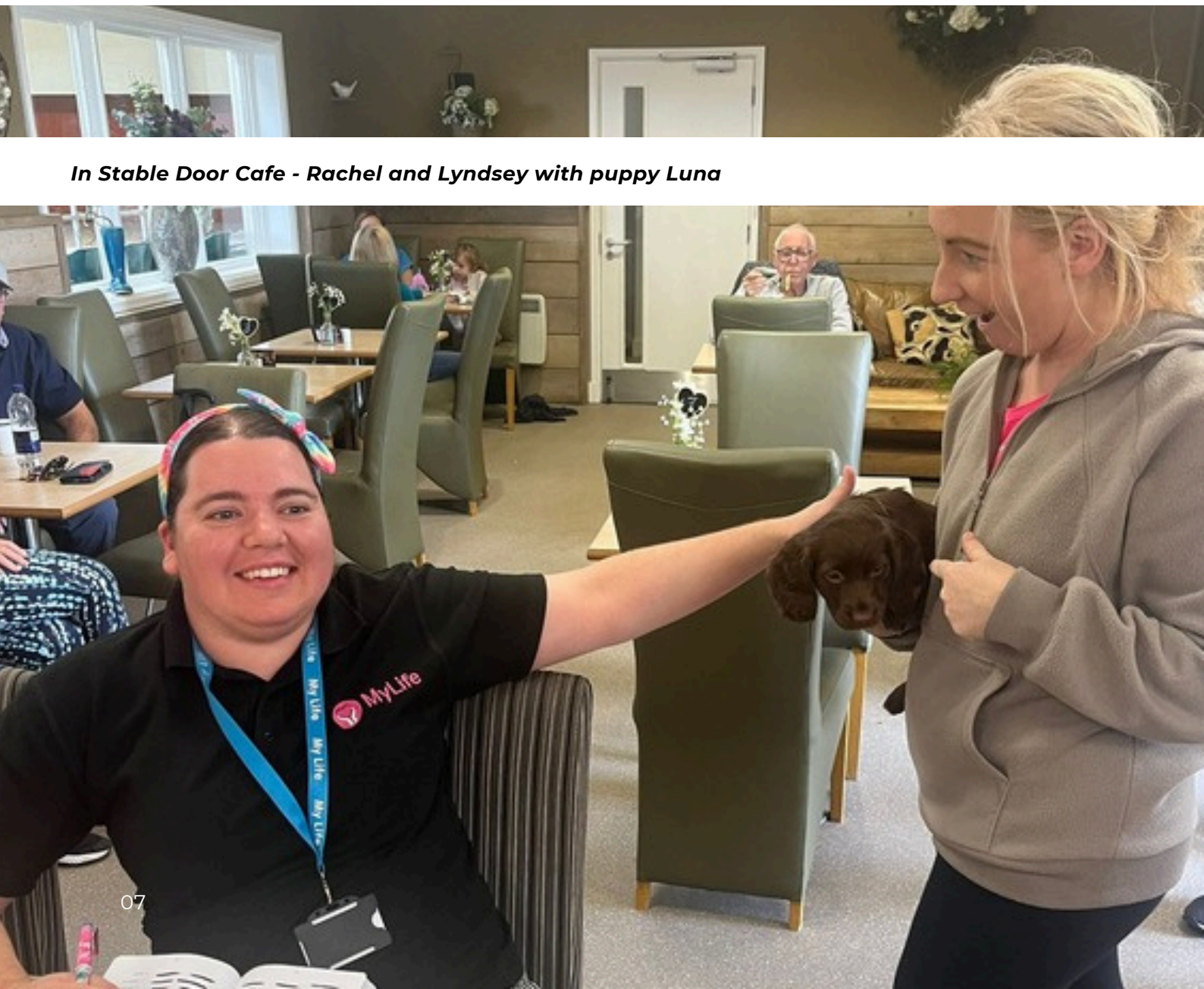
Rachel has always been quite confident in herself and what she wants to do, but it's been the separation from her mother that has been an issue in the past. "We are still her lifeline," says Rachel's Mum. **"My Life has had a really positive effect in that way as we can now leave her at Stable Door knowing that she is enjoying it and is safe. I just wish the days were longer at My Life for her!"**

And to that end, we are now looking into extending her days for a later pick up from September – and in the long term exploring staying in My Life's chalets overnight to develop her independent living skills.

"She works so hard at Stable Door - it's in her psyche to be busy - and she loves to help so I know she really feels like this is a purposeful job with a meaning."

What such incredible progression could mean in the future is more days working in a safe, supported environment, or even independent living with support - of the kind that My Life Support provides. Those discussions are for another day, but the fact that they can now be approached at all is evidence of how far Rachel and her family have come in the past 18 months.

In Stable Door Cafe - Rachel and Lyndsey with puppy Luna





"She doesn't like change, of course," says Rachel's Mum. "But she's in an environment now where she's appreciated, is contributing and is happy. The impact on her has been massive."

And on the family too; we are all hopeful that we can extend Rachel's days still further to give her parents the free time they need as well.

Because this is not just a story of someone being cared for. It's actually about the impact Rachel has had on others through a personalised approach that has really worked.

"There is something special about having the opportunity to work with someone like Rachel," says Lyndsey. "She sees the world and interacts with it differently. And by understanding that, we've grown as people alongside Rachel."



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