

WRYM's a family home

Before I came to WRYM you might not have known I even existed. I isolated myself for 3 years after running away at 16. It didn't go as I had planned. Like many guys who come to WRYM, I found I hadn't had a great home life. I needed an escape. I wanted to start my life and, since I was small, I learned from my father that the world is a cruel place, that nobody cares about you, that you're just another person suffering on the planet as an insignificant speck and money is all you need to live happy.

So, when I left at 16, I felt like the whole world was against me. I was still a kid, I felt alienated from my class and peers and even the teachers I went to school with. I felt like I had never been given a chance to be loved, to feel safe and protected. I was jealous of those around me with kind and caring people in their lives. One of the few people I could confide in at that time was my guidance counsellor, and that's how I discovered the Windsor Residence for Young Men. I am trans, so naturally I was nervous. She assured me that they were professional, I would be safe and I would not suffer the way I did at the hands of my family. I still remember the first time I went there, standing on the front steps with a smile on my face while on the inside I was shaking. I was greeted by warm welcoming voices, *"This must be mandatory"* I thought; *"These people are just doing their jobs, they don't care about me."*

I was given warm food, a hot shower and a bed to sleep on. I remember hearing laughter from both the staff and the residents as if they were their own tight-knit little family. For the first time in years I felt... SAFE. I had almost forgotten what that felt like. Fast forward months later and I was part of that family - I could be open and myself without having to worry about a judgement or being hurt. Nobody would scream at me. I felt like I never wanted to leave, but that time had to come eventually. When I moved out by myself for the first time, I fell apart; not because the staff didn't do good enough for me, but I convinced myself that I was ready when I wasn't because I felt like I was inconveniencing them. My old ways of thinking came back and I thought I was a burden, I was taking up air, food and space that someone more in need could use. I stopped going to my apartment. I let my clothes get dirty for months and the food in my fridge started to rot. I tried to kill myself in October of 2016, and I felt like I was back at square one. I let myself go - and even though I was living with an abusive roommate near WRYM, I couldn't bring myself to visit the residence again.

Things went from bad to worse as I moved back into my parents' house so I could finish my high school diploma. I felt like I failed. I tried to drown my thoughts out into the one thing I always had and loved: art. My earliest memories are of me drawing. I didn't need money to enjoy art or appreciate the beauty of the world, something I had learned and taught myself and nobody could take away from me, not even my family. So, 3 years later when my parents started telling me I wouldn't be able to have a career in art, I had had enough. I could make art AND make money doing it, a career that I enjoyed, a dream. The life I had always wanted... but I needed to get out first. *"What would they say if they could see me now? They'd think I'm a loser - I'm an emotional mess."* Self-doubt of coming to WRYM again ran through my head but I had to push it all down. I needed an escape from my prison. Hardly talking to anyone outside, or going outside... I wasn't even allowed to drive. I was trapped.

I'm 20 years old now, and I've returned to WRYM. I talked about my experience with the staff, even one I knew a few years before and nobody was disappointed in me; just like before, all they wanted to do was help. They had taught me life skills, how to clean and cook for myself - how to trust again. I'm only just starting to learn that my past doesn't define me, and I've met all kinds of people here who have gone through their own struggles and are just as strong as I want to be. WRYM is guiding me towards the art career I've always wanted, and I'm getting proper help and therapy for my traumas. Step by step, I'm moving towards a better future, and it's thanks to the generous people that make this home possible. If there is anyone out there who feels just as trapped as I did, I hope they know they can come to WRYM to feel safe and start their life, and that it's okay to ask for help. No matter what, you're not alone. I feel safe in a family again, and that family is not temporary. This time I'll make sure to never forget that love when I move on.