

Jason's Journey Home

Jason came to live at Lutherwood Children's Mental Health Centre because he was struggling to cope with mental health problems. As with most teenagers who arrive at Lutherwood for treatment, life had completely fallen apart for him. At a young age, he was repeatedly emotionally abused and rejected by his family, ultimately, abandoned by his mother after his father left the family. He was isolated and angry, experimented with drugs, and had a violent temper. His grandmother tried her best to support him but was unable to cope with his increasing distress and hostility. Jason had spent time in custody and had reached the point where he felt he had little reason to live. Even after arriving at Lutherwood for treatment, change did not come easily or quickly. Several times the police had to be called to intervene when, during angry outbursts, Jason threatened to harm himself and others.



There was little that Jason took an interest in. He hid behind his long dark hair and his hoodie, remaining isolated and distant. It appeared that video games provided his only source of relief from the torment of negative thoughts and feelings that flooded his days. This obsession continued to lead to aggression toward himself and others as staff attempted to structure his day to include school, after-school programs, or time with peers. These outbursts resulted in another stint in custody with no access to video games or the Internet. Upon returning to Lutherwood, Jason remained on a program of no media access.

When the decision was made to reintroduce media sources to Jason, staff began by using Upopolis during his counseling sessions. Jason could sit with his clinician and work on safety plans and coping strategies, searching Upopolis' online medical content for information about the issues he was dealing with (for example, post-traumatic symptoms, anger management, coping strategies, attachment). It was not as easy go, since Jason often experienced memories of his past and the feelings associated with his previous dependence on technology.

At first the changes in Jason were subtle. Little by little, he became more engaged in the activities around him. He started to respond to direction and participate in activities more cheerfully. One day, the staff noticed a significant physical change in Jason – his hair was cut short and his face was visible. He was no longer hiding. As Jason continued to utilize the secure, controlled online access offered via Upopolis, and with the ongoing support of his clinician and the staff, he began to better tolerate and enjoy the use of technology, versus using it as a distraction from painful feelings.

In the fall of 2011, Jason began using Upopolis to email his grandmother. This contact increased and she began to send Jason "gifts" attached to her messages. By Christmas, Jason had started to visit his grandmother at home for longer periods of time. By late spring, he was able to be discharged back into her care.

There were many interventions that helped move Jason to a place where he could cut his hair and remove the hoodie, build a relationship with staff and regain pride in who he was and what he could offer the world. It was Upopolis that enabled Jason to rebuild his relationship with his grandmother and return home.

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