

At Excelcare, we provide personalised and person-centred care to bring out the best in everyone we care for, and we strive to ensure they are fulfilled to live a happy life, with our support and care. We reinforce personal choice and ensure there are a wide variety of activities, events and one to one activities people can take part in, but more importantly, enabling and encouraging independence.

Unfortunately for some individuals, freedom of choice has not always been so easy; growing up in a completely different era, certain views and pastimes were not so openly accepted or supported.

One of these ideologies is that of gender fluidity. This was a contested matter that was frowned upon in the early to mid-20th century and often diagnosed as an 'illness'.

Fortunately, in today's society, gender fluidity is supported and widely accepted as something we should encourage and promote to ensure everyone can express themselves in whichever way they feel.

In this case study, we take a glance into the life of Michael, who lives at Okeley Care Home. Michael sometimes lives as a lady called Michelle, and shared with us some of the struggles they have faced up until the present day.

Michael was born in 1939, sometimes he can be quiet and shy but when relaxed, has a cheeky sense of humour and is softly spoken. He enjoys spending time observing those around him but welcomes one-to-one conversations with those who show an interest in him.

As a young man growing up in the 1950s and 60s, Michael always felt he was different from other people. He knew that he liked women, but also that he was attracted to men as well. At times, this made Michael feel quite confused, as society was different in these times and having feelings towards the same sex wasn't something many people spoke about.

Michael dated women and men throughout his life, but learnt that as much as he enjoyed female company, he was often interested in their clothing and makeup. Picking out an outfit for a woman was exciting to him and he often felt like he was 'living his dream through someone else'.

After some time, Michael started to dress in feminine clothing in private. He soon found himself being more comfortable wearing dresses, wigs and perfume. He admired women for their scent, demeanour and characteristics. This is when Michelle was 'born'.

Michael unfortunately had to keep this side of his life a secret, as in the 1950s it was a crime and, if found out, a person could be taken for 'treatment' to change one's sexual orientation or desires.

In 1972, Michael was referred to a doctor for advice, who diagnosed him with Schizophrenia – a mental health condition that may cause someone to hear voices that aren't real or cause 'confused thinking'. This is a diagnosis that Michael and the people around him still question to this day.

Michael felt isolated after this diagnosis and was left to deal with his 'confused thinking' by himself. But in Michael's head, he knew who he was, his likes and dislikes as both Michael and Michelle.

From 1980 to 2018, Michael lived in a flat with his partner – in a comfortable relationship that allowed him to present both his gender preferences. The bedroom was set up to Michelle’s preferences, which included cuddly toys and soft colours, with the wardrobes predominantly filled with feminine clothes and perfumes.

Michael enjoyed this period of his life, but after his health began to decline in 2018, he moved into Okeley Care Home, with the help of Essex County Council.

When Michael arrived, he came with only male clothing and there was no indication of Michelle being a part of his life.

He was often quiet and enjoyed time to himself. He was encouraged to take part in activities with the other residents but would often decline and opt for an afternoon watching television.

Michael didn’t welcome help with personal care – he liked having his hair shoulder length and declined assistance with shaving. When he was offered a hair wash and blow dry though, Michael would accept and have his hair styled into a ponytail.

In November 2020, Michael was moved to a different suite at the home, where he would benefit from a change in schedule and more dedicated support. Within just one week, Michael showed more signs of being happier there; smiling and interacting with others more during mealtimes.

On this suite, the team were supported by a Senior Carer and the Home Manager to have a conversation with Michael and ask some questions about Michelle. Michael’s face immediately lit up. He was excited that someone had remembered this important part of himself without judging or dismaying his preferences. He then began to ‘tell all’.

Michael expressed his desire to wear feminine clothes. He said he felt beautiful, loved and free. The team responded positively and said it is something they would completely support him to do, which made him quite emotional, as no one, aside from his partner, had ever acknowledged and supported this side of him before. As he left the room, he gave a sincere thank you to everyone present.

After this conversation, Michael was supported with some online shopping so he could pick out some items that he liked. This included women’s clothes, shoes, jewellery, undergarments and accessories were then presented to Michael when they arrived. The joy and excitement in his face made the team feel young and it was delightful to see him looking so happy!



Michelle – Resident of Okeley Care Home

Michael was excited to try these clothes on and once again, become Michelle. Dressed in his new attire, Michelle walked around the home with confidence and ready to be a part of the community at Okeley.

Michelle was beaming with joy and began accepting help with her personal care, which included shaving her legs, getting her hair washed and styled, and asking the team to make her feel 'pretty'.

The other people living at Okeley also support Michael and Michelle as part of their family, welcoming them to activities and social sessions.

Above all else, we are proud that Michael can live in freedom, without judgement or prejudice – simply being who he wants to be with support from the people around him.