

# SpotLight



**As a migrant from Somalia, 24-year-old Ali came to England with his mother.**

**When she passed away, he was forced to 'sofa surf' (sleep on the sofa) at a family friend's house, whilst he pursued his dream of becoming an aerospace engineer. He took the time to tell us his story.**



**Helping those who are homeless**

**Ali** - a resident at **Streets2Homes**

**Q: Now you've found stability at Streets2Homes, what are your aspirations?**

**A:** My aspiration is to go into aerospace engineering, but at the moment I'm working in an admin job to just try and get by.

**Q: Tell us how having a job fits in with Streets2Homes?**

**A:** Streets2Homes encourage you to find work if you are unemployed. I recently got my job via the Kickstart programme from Harlow Council – with help from Streets2Homes.

I work for a local retrofit installation company – offering external wall insulation etc. Initially I was a little reserved as I really want to do aerospace engineering at Uni and I didn't want to be derailed from this. However, my job is linked to building science and civil engineering and it is allowing me to build up some savings for a deposit on a flat.

**Q: Tell us about sofa surfing**

**A:** It's where you sleep on someone's sofa – it's OK for the first couple of weeks, but it's no long-term solution. When I was sofa surfing, I was 23 and I thought this was the best time to develop independence. I went about trying to find somewhere to live. Because I had been at university, I had not built-up savings as all of my money was spent on my education. This meant that it was impossible to afford the deposit for rent, in order to get a foot in the door – it was a problem. I was really fortunate to come across Streets2Homes at that stage of my life. They offered me a place here. Initially I was a bit reserved as I'd never lived with people I didn't know – only with friends or family. Living in a building with strangers started off a bit daunting but I had no reason to worry – I really like it.

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**Ali** - a resident at **Streets2Homes**

**Q: Why should people support Streets2Homes?**

**A:** People should support Streets2Homes – as they help people who have hit rock bottom. When I was homeless, I thought “this is the worst it can get”. We don’t live in a country where being outside 24 hours a day is warm and comfortable. Most of the time it is cold and damp.

It’s a catch 22 when you need to find a place to call home. You want to have the peace of mind not to have to worry about finding somewhere to stay. But you are constantly anxious that you won’t be able to sleep on someone’s sofa in their house for much longer.

You are left in a deeper hole and you just keep digging. Supporting Streets2Homes might be a small step for you, but it will help all of us take a big leap.

**Q: What do you like to do at Streets2Homes?**

**A:** I love to cook here. My speciality is fried chicken and the other residents really like it.

I’ve also been introduced to a whole world of different personalities here. Everyone is like a different book for me to read and understand - that’s exciting and interesting. Even though I’m not a social butterfly, it’s been easy for me to come out of my shell with my fellow residents and the staff.

Everyone is welcoming and puts effort into making sure you feel supported. We have a meeting at least once a week, where you have a conversation with a support worker to gauge how you are getting on. You review your short- and long-term goals. Together, you figure out how to make progress and achieve your goals.

One of my goals was to come out of my shell and talk to people more freely. I have got a lot better – being an only child, I’ve never had to ask for help as it was always just me and my mum.

Streets2Homes have taught me it is OK to ask for help and seek assistance – this has been massive for me.



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**Ali** - a resident at **Streets2Homes**

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[www.streets2homes.co.uk](http://www.streets2homes.co.uk)



**Q: What challenges have you faced?**

**A:** I don't think anyone essentially has an 'easy' life but the challenges in my life per se – I've taken in my stride. I look back on the things I have gone through and think of them as life lessons, not hindrances. On a personal note, I don't have much of a family – just my mum. Sadly, she passed away in 2018, since then it's just been me on my own, trying to figure out how to become an adult and be the person my mother would have wanted me to be.

Life has not been easy for me. I've had to move around quite a bit. I always wanted to be grounded and have somewhere to call home. Initially, when I moved to Harlow, I was living with a family friend – she let me sleep on her sofa. But when she got married, I didn't want to impose on her any longer and last year I stepped away.

Man is not an island and many residents here have mental health issues because they become isolated when they are homeless – isolation can hinder you from being the best person you can be. Just the fact that you have other humans around you here is really refreshing.

**Q: Does Streets2Homes benefit the people of Harlow?**

**A:** Yes definitely. This whole environment with Streets2Homes is conducive to community and productivity. For example, they can help you find work – which is positive for the local economy.

There are other benefits for the community too – it gives the Harlow people who help us a sense of pride and belonging – and this gives all of us an incentive to see ourselves and Streets2Homes succeed.