



# Colin's story

**Colin has a double-star distinction in IT, he is an avid fan of technology, and loves his iPhone X and gaming consoles. He also loves to prove to the world that his complex disabilities do not stop him from enjoying everything that technology has to offer.**

Aged 24, he was the perfect candidate to help Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust to develop and test a new digital tool designed to support young people through transition into adulthood.

He and his mum, Susan, have worked closely with the trust and developers of the Let Me Show U! (LMSU!) app, basing advice on their own difficult experience of Colin's transition from school to college.

LMSU! is a digital tool that can be used across devices, including desktop computers and as a mobile app. Now nearing the end of its development, it is hoped that it will help to fill what Susan describes as the "big black holes" that appear when a young person is in transition.

IT PUT COLIN ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD - ONLINE HIS DISABILITIES MAKE NO DIFFERENCE TO WHAT HE CAN DO.



“Not being able to speak doesn't mean you have nothing to say.”

## LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD WITH TECHNOLOGY

By assembling important information about the young person, the tool helps to deliver consistency in support and empowers them to have a voice in their future.

Colin explains that the app is his “communication”, a speech alternative that breaks down the barriers to him relaying what he wants and needs.

One way that he plans to use the app is to upload videos showing how he should to be lifted in and out of his wheelchair. A new personal assistant (PA) or physiotherapist could then watch the video on the app, provided that Colin has given them access.

In preparation for the app's launch, Susan has compiled information about Colin, ranging from his medication to his social activities, ready to load on to LMSU!.

She says this process has made her plan for all eventualities, something she believes is useful for a parent with a child approaching transition.

“As a parent of a disabled child, I think you can become a bit complacent that some things are ‘just life’ and you get on with it. Getting ready for LMSU!, we have gone through all aspects of Colin's support; all the things that could happen and every detail that we want those working with him - like his PAs, physios and occupational therapists - to know.

“We went through Colin's transition without having those foundations in place and it meant that when situations arose, those around Colin weren't well placed to deal with them.”

It wasn't just Colin and Susan's experience of transition that made their perspectives so vital in the app's development process.

Colin understands better than most how technology can transform lives. From childhood, he began using a head switch so that he could play with mainstream toys. As he grew older, he used a communication aid and then moved on to a laptop, again powered by his head switch.

When he discovered that the iPhone's IOS7 system could integrate with his head switch technology, life really changed.

Susan explains: “When Colin got his first iPhone he got total control over his life. He started banking online, he was texting his siblings to make dates, he orders us takeaway for our tea! It put Colin on a level playing field - online his disabilities make no difference to what he can do.”

When imagining life now without his technology, Colin says he “couldn't cope”. He's passionate about helping other people with disabilities to explore different types of technology.

Colin volunteers at the William Merrit Disabled Living Centre in Leeds, which provides advice and opportunities to try out equipment. He has also helped to deliver a workshop at his local Apple store on how iPhones can be integrated with assistive technology.

Susan was also an early adopter, having bought a mobile phone when Colin was aged just three. For her, this was the difference between him going to school and not going.

“Sending any child to school is daunting, but when they have disabilities it is so terrifying. What if something happens and the teachers can't reach me? I had to get a phone to know I was contactable, and it gave me a life.”

Colin and Susan have a mantra, which is never to say “I can't do it” but to ask “How can I do it?”.

They believe that the technology like LMSU! has a lot of potential to give more people more opportunities.

“Everyone has very different needs so will use it differently,” says Susan. “For any young person though, it gives them a voice. Some of Colin's friends are non-verbal and I often think they must feel so trapped.

“Not being able to speak doesn't mean you have nothing to say. This technology is a way of making them heard.”