Housing with support: the options for autistic adults

Introduction

Some autistic people don’t have needs that require help with accommodation or input from social services. This article will focus on those adults who have both accommodation and support needs and explore some of the options.

Housing with support options for autistic people are thankfully much more varied these days than they were in the past. It is too costly for most people to fund their own support package so most people will require a needs assessment (sometimes called a community care assessment) by social services. This determines what needs the local authority will agree to meet and what support package can be put in place.

Some autistic adults live at home with family throughout much of their adult life with a care and support package from social services. Some adults will be assessed by social services as eligible for supported living where accommodation and a support package are provided, others may need residential care. Whatever the setting, support packages these days should be person-centred and individual to the person’s needs.

Many people pay a financial contribution towards their care, this amount is determined by a financial assessment. The local authority is required to allow the person a certain amount to live on or set a smaller amount as a personal allowance if the person is in residential care.

Many people prefer a tailored package that they and/or their family have contributed to designing. Personal budgets, where the person is allocated an amount of money by social services according to their eligible needs and they then help design their own support package, make this more of a realistic possibility.

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Supported Living

This option is a very popular current model of accommodation with support. The person has their own tenancy unlike in residential care. A person pays rent (usually covered by their housing benefit) and has their own home and the security that comes with having tenant’s rights.

It is common for supported living to be a flat or house share where the person has their own bedroom and shares the other facilities with other people with additional needs placed by social services. Support workers/personal assistants then either visit to meet the needs agreed on the person’s care and support plan or personal assistants may be based at the property on a 24 hour basis.

Supported living can also be a private flat with 1:1 live in support if the person’s needs warrant this. For example a person may have very challenging behaviour that would put other tenants at risk. If someone owns their own home, ‘supported living’ can still be provided via a support package.

Residential Care

Some people feel that residential care is more secure than supported living. There is often a fixed staff team which many people like. However a manager of a residential care home can serve notice on a resident if they feel it’s necessary.

Something that surprises many people is that the person’s benefits are put towards paying for their care, aside from the Disability Living Allowance mobility component and a weekly personal allowance. The personal allowance is £24.90 in England (2015). This means that many young people struggle to pay for extra activities or interests that aren’t covered on their support plan.

Living with family with a support package in place

For some people, living at home with family works well as long as there is adequate support in place. This might be a day centre, going to college or a personal assistant to take the person to activities they enjoy or to learn life skills that will help make the person more independent. It is important that family carers get breaks. A carers assessment (or joint assessment of the carer’s needs with the person they care for) should be an important part of working out if the carer is willing and able to provide as much support as they currently are and if they need more support and breaks.

Personal budgets mean that often the person can employ someone as personal assistant. This can be through an agency or could be a friend or a family member not living with the person (in special circumstances it may be someone living with the person).

Other options

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Options such as Shared Lives schemes have become popular in many areas recently. Shared Lives involves a person with additional needs being placed by social services with a vetted shared lives carer in the carer’s home. Read more about Shared Lives

Keyring is another option for some people with lower level needs. This scheme involves 9 people with additional needs living in their own properties as tenants. The 10th residence is occupied by a support worker who gives a certain number of hours support to each tenant weekly to enable them to live independently. Read more about Keyring

What’s important?

The important things to focus on when working to develop a support package with someone with autism is what outcomes they would like to achieve, what’s important to them on an everyday basis and to consider the views of other family members who are involved in supporting the person.

It can be easy to assume, sometimes wrongly, that because someone has autism they will or won’t like certain things or environments.

Being aware of factors such as sensory issues, the possible need for advocacy and reasonable adjustments in the assessment and supporting planning process can make the process a happier and more useful process for everyone.