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Planning for independent living in the community: tips for improving the chance of success

Setting up a community living placement for an adult with autism can be a time-consuming and costly process for service providers and families. When placements and plans fail, however, it is the adult with autism who pays the greatest costs. Placement failure can lead to depression, unwillingness to try again, exacerbation of medical problems, and in some cases homelessness.

Becoming “at home.”

Successful community living involves more than simply finding an affordable housing unit or a place in a group home. There is a process of finding a personal place in the community, and this is where people on the autism spectrum may need extra support.

You may find it productive to create a map with the person you are working with. This will result in a visual depiction of their current world, which you can work with to find additional services that may be needed, identify resources that could broaden their range of daily occupations, incorporate extra travel planning, and so on. This step is especially important if the placement is not in a familiar area.

Adults may need support to check out new places, ranging from finding a welcoming café in the neighbourhood to getting involved in a club that’s aligned with one of their interests or hobbies. Finding a new GP and dentist is a must.

Tip: *Some autistic adults will need more regular support, including with practical matters. You also need to make sure the person is receiving all of the benefits they are entitled to, and that social services have completed an adult care assessment and created a support plan that meets their needs.*

Access to resources.

For adults who like to use computers, you may want to work together to create a folder of key bookmarks in their Web browser, with accounts set up and log-in details safely stored for their

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housing provider, utility companies, GP surgery, dentist, DWP, council, police and so on. You may wish to add to this a selection of carefully checked, potentially helpful Web sites: for example, a good YouTube tutorial on how to sort out a clogged drain.

All of these resources can also be provided in a printed book with photos.

Tip: *A basic First Aid book, a simple cookbook, and a basic DIY handbook would all be excellent housewarming gifts for an able adult moving into independent community living.*

One of the most important resources for any adult is knowing who to call or ask for help with various sorts of problems, and who to share daily thoughts, worries and issues with. Any practical or technical steps you can take to help an adult maintain communication will go far in meeting this need, whether it's helping them programme numbers and addresses into a new phone, helping them learn to use tools like Skype or Snapchat, or making a schedule for when to call parents, siblings and friends.

Follow-up help.

Everything can seem to be fine in the first months, but adults can deteriorate quickly if their daily routine falls apart, key support is lost, or they run into problems with neighbours. Ensure that for at least the first year there is some regular active support. For those in council or housing association homes, there is likely to be a housing support team that can be part of the solution. However, these teams vary in their understanding of autism, so specialist support—and most importantly, the continuing presence in their lives of family members and friends—is often needed.