

Finding our own way home

A ‘big conversation’

2020

Organised by Learning Disability England (LDE) and the Housing Learning & Improvement Network (Housing LIN)

Introduction

LDE and the Housing LIN organised a face to face event in Milton Keynes in January 2020. This was followed by two 'virtual events in August 2020. Attendees included people with lived experience, family carers, advocates, housing providers, care providers, local authority commissioners and other organisations with an interest in housing and people with learning disabilities.

The purpose of these events was to explore and better understand:

- The current experiences of people with learning disabilities in relation to getting the housing they want and need.
- What is working well for people currently.
- What is getting in the way of people getting the home they need and want.
- What are some of the possible solutions?

Background

People who attended the three events described what is happening at the moment about people getting a home they need and want. We have summarised these experiences.

The choice of housing is limited for many people:

- Living on a low income means many people have a lot less choice about the type of area or places where they can live.
- Universal Credit has made it harder for some people to get or keep the kind of home that works best for them.
- Having access to good information about different housing options and having access to advocacy helps people understand their housing rights.

People's experiences of getting the home they need can be very different depending on:

- Where a person lives.
- If a person is 'eligible' for social care funding.

- If a person has advocate who can help them to speak up about what type of housing they need.

A lot of people said that when organisations that are responsible for housing, social care and health services work together and **with** people with learning disabilities and their families, this can make a big (positive) difference to helping people to get the home they want.

Decisions about access to housing often get made not based on what people want or need

- Sometimes decisions about where to live get made for people or they are 'placed' in accommodation.
- People with learning disabilities often do not get to decide who they live with or who supports them.
- Decisions about housing and support often get made separately and leave people with fewer choice or a harder system to work through.
- Where there is no local planning about the housing people need, there is often limited choice about where people can live.

There is not a single type of housing that will work for everyone

- Some people need and want to live on their own or with a partner.
- For some people, living in a small block of flats with other people with disabilities suits them
- Some people want to live with friends or others in a house where they share the facilities such as the kitchen and lounge.
- People want to be able to change where they live and who they live with as their life changes.

Findings – what is working well at the moment

- There are now more people in their own home and 'supported living' and fewer people living in residential care.
- A growing number of people are getting access to housing with more security of tenure.
- The Home Ownership for people with Long term Disabilities (HOLD) scheme is very positive and it has been life changing for some people.

- Where there is a well thought out and researched plan in place that involves the person, their family and their supporters, people are more often getting the housing they need and want.
- Where Councils have done research about people's housing requirements and have a plan or 'strategy' to provide more housing options, this seems to be helping more people to get a home.
- When people are informed and know about their choices, rights and options this is important in helping people to get a home.
- Social media is making it easier for people with learning disabilities and families to share information about what works, what doesn't and what's possible.

Findings – what is getting in the way of people getting the home they need and want?

- There are still a lot of people who are having difficulties trying to leave 'assessment and treatment units' to move into a home of their own.
- There is a 'postcode lottery': it seems to be much easier to get housing in some areas compared to others.
- There are issues about mental capacity and people having a tenancy; sometimes unnecessary bureaucratic processes hold up people being able to have a tenancy.
- Timescales are a big issue; it can take a very long time from a person starting to plan where they want to live to getting the keys to the front door of a new home.
- Private investment in housing for people with learning disabilities can be a problem because often the risks are shared by everyone except the private investor.
- People are often offered a home in an existing property, such as a 'shared house' which may not be suitable for them, often with people they don't know.
- There is a lack of clear and accessible information about different types of housing - people often don't have a full picture of what is available which leads to limited choices.
- There is a view that some professionals don't listen properly to people about where and how they want to live and think they know best what people need.

- The lack of housing supply generally in many areas and the lack of affordable housing are a major barrier to people getting the housing they want.
- It can be very difficult to find out about and to get the necessary welfare benefits that people need to have access to the housing they want; rules about Housing Benefit and the housing element within Universal Credit are complex and confusing.
- In some areas there is a reliance on a small number of housing associations and private housing developers/landlords who may not be interested in developing housing for people with learning disabilities.
- Some councils still focus on 'placements' instead of person-centred planning and helping people to get a home.
- There is often not an acceptance that people with learning disabilities may want to move over the course of their life, as their circumstances change, like everyone else does.
- For people who want to find or build their own housing, it often seems like there is a lot of 'red tape' that gets in the way of doing something bespoke.

Findings – what are some of the possible solutions

- There needs to be a quicker and less bureaucratic way of using grant funding from NHS England to develop housing for people who need to leave an assessment and treatment unit.
- There are some specialist housing associations where a person can hold a tenancy without needing to have a (Court of Protection) appointed deputy; this approach should be promoted to general housing providers.
- Getting a home should start with and be based on person centred planning; this is an opportunity for people, their families, housing providers, social workers etc. to come together and plan how to help a person get the home they want and need: 'needs led housing development rather than build and fill'.
- There needs to be comprehensive information about different housing options, how to access them, how to pay for them etc, that is designed to be accessible to people, their families and carers.

This information should be available in Easy Read format and in paper and online versions.

- There should be a 'national standard' about what housing rights and options people with learning disabilities are entitled to. Local councils should have to meet this standard.
- Advocacy should be available for people who don't have family to support them to exercise their housing rights.
- There needs to be acceptance amongst professionals and housing providers that people with learning disabilities may want to move home at different times during their life just like other people choose to do.
- It should be possible for people to have a home close to their families and other supporters; this helps to build on local connections and 'natural' support.
- Recognising that living on your own or just moving to a new house can be daunting, there should be more support initially (if required) that can reduce as people develop more confidence and skills.
- There need to be a much more flexible capital funding system for housing associations to use to develop housing which enables them to get more grant from the Government and be more flexible in the rents that they charge.
- Councils need to have money to pay for the support that people need to live independently that is in addition to the money that pays for personal care (for people who need that as well as support)
- There needs to be more examples of how people with learning disabilities have got a home they need and want to share with other people and their families, so they can learn from this experience if they wish.
- The HOLD programme should be made available to a larger number of people.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations

To view other resources on housing for people with a learning disability or autism featured by the Housing LIN, visit our dedicated webpage at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingLearningDisabilities/>

About Learning Disability England

Learning Disability England exists to make life better for and with people with Learning Disabilities and their families.

We are a membership organisation that brings together people with learning disabilities, family members, paid supporters and organisation to make sure:

- What is important to people with Learning Disabilities is heard and understood.

- There is a change in behaviour in service design and delivery that builds on rights.
- Demonstrate co-production and real collaborative working making a difference.
- We live our values and model the change we want.

You can find out about our current work and membership on line here